

# Millennials' Career Expectations: Exploring Attitudes and Individual Differences in Croatia

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**Abstract**—Generation Y individuals or Millennials are known for their unique views, work values and motivational needs which implies that, in order to attract and retain those individuals, activities in the area of career management should be given special attention by HRM managers. After a theoretical background on Millennials' life and work attitudes, an empirical research on career preferences of Millennials in Croatia was described. Empirical research was conducted among 249 members of generation Y. The data analysis revealed that respondents generally perceive promotion opportunities as the most important career aspect; however, job security and work-life balance are almost as important. Furthermore, it was shown that Generation Y is not necessarily a homogenous group. More precisely, women assign greater importance than men to work-life balance and job security. Therefore, HRM managers should adapt career planning activities not only with respect to generational preferences, but individual characteristics as well.

**Keywords**—Career, individual differences, millennials, work values.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE present workforce is diversified in terms of generation, culture and values so literature indicates that motivational factors vary across employees and over time [1]. The youngest generation of employees, the generation Y, now poses the biggest challenge for employers [2]. While there has been debate in the literature regarding the range of dates to define Generation Y [3], this paper, similar to others defines Generation Y as those individuals born between 1980 and 2000 [4].

Changing demographic profiles and emerging social norms [5] are changing the way Gen Y approach work and careers [6]. Organisations and professional bodies need to respond to these changes through implementation of appropriate HR policies within supportive organisational cultures if they are to attract and retain young professionals [6]. As retention of Generation Y workforce has been identified as one of the most challenges organizations are facing today, it has become clear that career development might be one of the crucial retention

factors [5].

The first millennial university graduates entered the workforce in Croatia in the summer of 2003. They will continue to do so, in large numbers, until around 2022. Namely, Generation Y represents 24,05% of total population in Croatia, and is the second largest generation after Baby Boomers [7]. Thus, it is important for organisations in Croatia, as it is in any other country, to understand Generation Y and develop HRM practices and processes appropriate for them [8].

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Practitioners and consultants state that the *different generations need to be managed differently* [9]. There is some evidence that Generation Y is different from other generations [10], although we acknowledge that there are also differing views stating that considerable generational differences in the workplace do not exist [11].

Most often the starting point when analysing Millennials is the presumption that they appreciate more intrinsic than extrinsic motivators [8]. According to this view, *money is a lesser motivator*, whereas *opportunities for career growth and advancement, as well as a fulfilled balanced life*, are greater motivators for Generation Y employees [12].

We find very interesting that *permanent job and job security* have been found to be motivators in French setting [9], as well as the fact that Generation Y placed greater importance to organizational security than generation X [10]. Both findings contradict general presumption that Millennials easily change job positions [13]. If Gen Y employees feel that they have mastered their job, they would quickly move on to other companies [14]. These employees change their careers more than six times in their life [5]. This depicts that they would not remain in a particular organisation for a longer period of time [5].

Millennial focus their energy more on their private lives and moving from organisation to organisation is not a problem for them. As such, they see a *work-life balance* as being important and tend to be very wary of sacrificing large parts of their private lives for the sake of work [8], [13], [15]. While employees of all generations desire this work-life balance, Generation Y may have the confidence and conviction to demand it from their employers [15]. It was shown that Millennials view *one year of employment as long term* [3]. However, Millennials do have the capacity to be loyal, particularly in organizations that continue to provide individual attention and a supportive, family-like environment [15].

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It is important to emphasize that, in spite of generation Y's birth span of 20 years, it is still in most cases regarded as a *homogenous group*. Only few researchers have argued that Generation Y does not necessarily form a homogeneous group in relation to their work preferences [9], [13], [16]. Work values do change as workers grow older [1] and given the numerous changes experienced in the period of 20 years, we also assume that it is possible that all members of this generation do not form a homogenous group, which we will investigate in our research.

Because the *transition from college to the world of work* is a major life change for many college students, during which they face the complex demands of the economy (of a challenging, highly competitive job market; and of an increasingly diverse population and work-force) [17], we were interested in finding out how young students perceive their future in terms of career management. *It is important to gain a clearer understanding of student career expectations and perceptions*, and the influence these have on career choice [16]. Building on the previously mentioned research results, we were particularly interested in analysing Millennials' attitudes towards career in terms of perception of importance they assign to different career aspects as well as their expectations regarding different career elements.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Instrument

A questionnaire that was designed for the purpose of conducting empirical research consisted of several closed-ended questions about different pay modalities as well as various nonmaterial motivation strategies (mostly related to career development and work-life balance), for which respondents were asked to assign importance using Likert 5-point scale (1 = not important at all, 5 = most important). Other questions included different questions about career expectations that were exclusively closed-ended (e.g. whether respondents would sacrifice spare time for career advancement). Questionnaire also consisted of background questions that were used to describe respondents' independent characteristics and were either closed-ended (e.g., sex, students' status, previous knowledge on motivation management, etc.) or open-ended (e.g. year of birth, years of working experience, etc.). Before the questionnaires were distributed to students they were tested by several student assistants that were asked to read the draft of the questionnaire and give their suggestions to make the final version more understandable to second year students. The estimated time for fulfilling the questionnaire was approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

#### B. Sample

The first step in designing our research was to select participants for the empirical research. As this empirical research is part of a larger project that aims at covering entire period ascribed to Generation Y individuals (namely, individuals born from 1980 till 2000), as well as comparing Generation Y pay preferences to their predecessors

(generation X), the first step of data collection included gathering data from the second year students that attended a course "Organization" at University of Zagreb – Faculty of Economics and Business Zagreb at the undergraduate level of Bachelor of Business program in autumn semester. Furthermore, as some assign pay preferences to national culture setting and value patterns [18], so this research reveals reward preferences among Croatian students who share specific cultural characteristics.

#### C. Data Collection and Analysis

As for the following phase of empirical research, students were asked to voluntarily fulfil the questionnaire in written form as a part of the topic that was discussed during the lectures. Questionnaires were distributed to students in 10 out of 20 groups of seminars at the second year of Bachelor of Business program. At the end of the collection phase a total of 249 students fulfilled the questionnaires, which makes a proportion of 31,80% of all second year students. As the data collection phase was concluded a statistical analysis of the primary data with SPSS 18.0 followed. The independent characteristics of the respondents are given in a summary table – Table I.

TABLE I  
 INDEPENDENT CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Independent characteristics	Distribution
Sex	M – 41.10% F – 59.90%
Age	1993 or older – 5.5% 1994 – 8.5% 1995 – 65.20% 1996 – 20.60%
Student status with regard to employment	With permanent, temporary or occasional employment – 27.10% Without permanent, temporary or occasional employment – 72.90%
Approximate number of years of working experience	Zero or less than one year – 74.40% One year – 13.20% Two years – 7.30% Three or more years – 4.9%
Approximate number of different employers	Zero employers – 54.10% One employer – 18.90% Two employers – 12.8% Three employers – 8.6% Four or more employers – 5.6%
Type of education in motivation management	Knowledge gained at university in a course or as a special topic in the course – 18.90% Knowledge gained outside university or via self-initiated learning – 18.10% No formal education gained on the topic at hand – 63.00%

As it can be seen from Table I, 60% of the sample is comprised of female students which corresponds to the general structure of student population at University of Zagreb – Faculty of Economics and Business. The majority of respondents were born in either 1995 (65.20%) or 1996 (20.60%) which is in line with the general rule of Croatian population that enters university level education at the age of 18 or 19. As for the student status regarding work experience, only 27.10% of respondents stated that they had permanent, temporary or occasional jobs. As for the number of years

working, 3/4 of respondents had either zero or less than a year of working experience which is line with the previously examined characteristic. Additionally, students reported working for one employer in 18.90% of cases, while additional 27.00% reported working for more than two employers. Finally, we were interested in exploring source of knowledge on the topic at hand, if any, where the results revealed that 37% of students had some sort of knowledge on motivation management (gained either at university or outside university and by self-initiated learning), while the majority of them (63%) had no previous knowledge on motivation management.

After analysing students' independent characteristics, we were interested in exploring their perception of importance of different pay structure elements, as well as different nonmaterial motivation strategies. Additionally, we aimed at investigating differences in assigning importance to aforementioned motivation strategies with regard to respondents' independent characteristics, such as sex, student status and previous knowledge on motivation management. The results are shown in the next section.

#### IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Respondents were asked to assign importance to different aspects of career and work environment. Results are shown in Table II.

TABLE II  
 IMPORTANCE OF CAREER ASPECTS ASSIGNED BY GENERATION Y RESPONDENTS

Career aspect	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
Expatriate assignments	3,79	4,00	4,00	,98
Promotion opportunities	4,73	5,00	5,00	,56
(Elaborated) Career plan	3,83	4,00	4,00	,83
Interesting job	4,58	5,00	5,00	,69
Job security	4,48	5,00	5,00	,73
Work-life balance	4,47	5,00	5,00	,72

The analysis of the primary data collected among students revealed that out of six different career aspects, respondents assign most importance to promotion opportunities ( $\bar{x} = 4.73$ ,  $\sigma = 0.56$ ), interesting job ( $\bar{x} = 4.58$ ,  $\sigma = 0.69$ ), and almost identical importance to both job security ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ,  $\sigma = 0.73$ ) and work-life balance ( $\bar{x} = 4.47$ ,  $\sigma = 0.71$ ). It appears that elaborated career plan does not generate as equal perception of importance ( $\bar{x} = 3.83$ ,  $\sigma = 0.83$ ), neither do expatriate assignments ( $\bar{x} = 3.79$ ,  $\sigma = 0.98$ ). As some variables show greater variability we were interested in exploring differences in preferences towards different pay elements with regard to respondents' characteristics. The summary table of various statistical analyses is shown in Table III.

The results of the non-parametric tests revealed several of statistically significant differences in assigning importance to various transactional rewards. More specifically, it was shown that "sex" implies greater differences, such that women generally assign more importance to job security ( $p = 0.001$ ) and work-life balance ( $p = 0.002$ ) than men. Additionally, it was shown that employment status did not generate any

differences, while previous knowledge on motivation management revealed a statistically significant difference with regard to promotion opportunities ( $p = 0.036$ ). Those students that gained knowledge outside the university or by self-initiated learning assigned more importance to promotion opportunities. As work life-balance was assigned with especially high grade, and since many authors cite this particular aspect of work and career to be crucial to Gen Y employees we wanted to additionally investigate this aspect. Respondents were asked whether they would spare time and time spent with family for career advancement.

TABLE III  
 STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT CAREER ASPECTS

Independent characteristic	Statistically significant differences	Statistical test
Sex	Job security Work-life balance	Mann-Whitney test
Knowledge on motivation management	Promotion opportunities	Kruskal-Wallis test

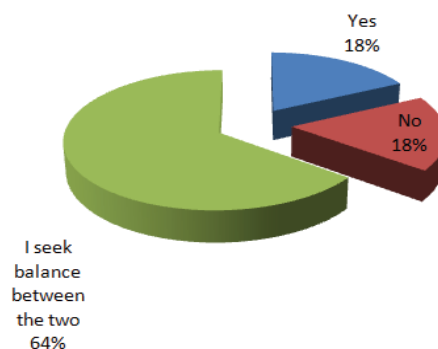


Fig. 1 Would you sacrifice spare time and time spent with family for career advancement?

As it can be seen from Fig. 1, approximately the same number of respondents clearly stated that either would or would not sacrifice their spare time and time spent with family for career advancement (18% in both cases). The rest of them (64%) are seeking balance between the work and life, while additional analysis through Fisher exact test ( $p = 0.000$ ) revealed that the majority of balance seekers, as well as those that would not make sacrifices for career advancement were woman.

TABLE IV  
 NUMBER OF YEARS EXPECTED BY GENERATION Y RESPONDENTS TO OCCUPY ONE POSITION IN A CAREER

Number of years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than a year	4	1.6	1.6	1.6
1 to 2 years	56	22.5	22.8	24.4
3 to 5 years	58	23.3	23.6	48.0
More than 6 years	14	5.6	5.7	53.7
An entire career in one organization	21	8.4	8.5	62.2
I do not know/ I cannot assess	93	37.3	37.8	100.0
Total	246	98.8	100.0	

Finally, we were interested in Gen Y respondents' perception of the time they expect to occupy one position in their career. The results are shown in Table IV.

As it could have been expected, almost 38% of students was not able to assess or did not know the answer. The majority of those who answered the question assessed that 1 to 2 years (22.8%) or 3 to 5 years (23.6%) would be the expected time of occupying one career position. Interestingly, only 8.5% expects to spent their entire career in one organization only. Conclusion based on research results are given in the following section.

#### V.CONCLUSION

Millennials are believed to be special in terms of their life and work values, which most often need to be aligned in order for them to feel accomplished. It was thus important to investigate the perceptions of different career aspects and expectations, especially in young students that will soon enter the workforce. As our research results revealed, most of respondents perceive promotion opportunities as the most important career aspect, however, job security and work-life balance are almost as important. It seems that the youngest generation is not ready to sacrifice their spare time for advancement in career, which is especially pronounced in the case of women.

Managers and employers that are hiring either students or those that are about to graduate from college should take into consideration implications of these results. More precisely, as this generation highly favours balance between work and life, flexible work arrangements might be an efficient way to think of job design. In term of hiring an in order to attract these individuals, it would be advisable to highlight the benefits that would be offered to employees (e.g. security benefits).

As our research has certain limitations, major one being the fact that it was limited to second year students, it is recommended for future research to investigate the perceptions of higher year students, as well as those individuals that are already at the job market. It would also allow researchers to see if perceptions of Millennials are changing as new experiences are gained.

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