

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Understanding the new Middle-East workforce: Employment expectations of Generation Y professionals in Saudi Arabia

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The Saudi Arabia population demographics heralded the coming of the Big Crew Change with the retirement of Generation X workers and the entry of a large Generation Y (Gen Y) segment. However, little is known about Gen Y professionals in the Middle-East since research on Gen Y had largely been conducted outside the region. This study examined the life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y engineering and business professionals in Saudi Arabia. A sample was obtained from a major company in Dhahran. The participants surveyed were Gen Y engineering and business professionals and mainly male Saudis. The Schwartz Value Inventory and Twenge et al.'s (2010) motivational model were used to measure the importance of life values and work preferences respectively. The results showed that Saudi Gen Y regarded Security, Tradition, Conformity, Universalism, and Benevolence as most important life values. To attain these life goals, respondents were most motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic work motivators. Consistent with findings, the Gen Y respondents provided suggestions for the effective recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals based on their need for intrinsic and extrinsic work motivators.

**Keywords:** generational differences, human resource management, Saudi Arabia, motivations.

## INTRODUCTION

Companies worldwide are facing the 'Big Crew Change' in their workforce with the retirement of the *Baby Boomers* (born 1946-1964) and the entry of the *Generation Y* (born 1980-1999). With a large and growing petroleum industry, the Middle-East needs talented human resources such as engineers, scientists and business professionals. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, continuity of the workforce in many industrial sectors depends on the successful recruitment, integration and retention of this new group of Generation Y (Gen Y). However, little is known about Gen Y in Saudi Arabia since research on Gen Y had largely been conducted

outside the region.

This study aims to examine the life priorities and work motivators of Gen Y professionals in Saudi Arabia, particularly those in the fields of engineering and business, because the entry of this young, large and relatively unresearched group of professionals into the country's workforce poses a challenge to organizations in terms of understanding their work motivations, strengths and aptitudes.

Findings from this study would provide greater insight into what motivates Gen Y professionals in life and work that could help organizations in the Middle-East attract, engage and retain this young generation. This study also offers human resource managers specific recommendations for effective recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals who play a vital role in the economic growth of Middle-East nations and are central to this region's future.

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**Table 1.** Four Main Generational Cohorts (Rajan, 2007, p.2)

Generational cohort	Born
Traditionalist	1925-1945
Baby Boomer	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1979
Generation Y	1980-1999

## Literature Review

### Generational cohorts: Definitions and characteristics

A *generation* is a cohort of individuals grouped by its age demographic, and shares the historical and social experiences, behavior and beliefs that are common to that time (Cole et al., 2002). There are four generally accepted generational groups labelled the *Traditionalists*, *Baby Boomers*, *Generation X* and *Generation Y* (Table 1). A generation is more than a collection of individuals in the same age range. Each cohort is bound by shared experiences, which include critical social, historical or life events, common icons (such as people, places, or things) of that time, that shape the generation's values, attitudes, and behavior (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Kupperschmidt, 1998).

In the United States, the Gen Y's formative years (from the mid-1990s) were marked by economic prosperity, technological advances, violence on personal and national scales, political controversies and awakenings. These events contributed to the formation of Gen Y traits such as being *impatient sociable*, *team-oriented*, *IT savvy* and *open-minded* (Borges et al., 2006; Forrester and Arjomandi, 2009; Kandlbinder, 2010; Oblinger, 2003). More specifically, Gen Y at work has been characterized as *respectful of authority*, *demanding of immediate supervisors*, *needing constant feedback and credit* for work performance, and *valuing learning and professional development above money* (Tulgan, 2009).

However, life-influencing social, economic and historical events differ over time and by geography. The same generational cohort from culturally and religiously distinct geographical regions may have different experiences that uniquely shape their life and work motivations. Hence, findings from literature contextualized in North American and other 'Westernized' societies, may not necessarily apply to the Middle-East region and Saudi Arabia in particular.

This study focuses on Saudi Arabia, which is the largest country in the Arab Middle-East, the historical origin of Islam and a major crude oil producer to the world. Erickson and Bevins (2011) examined the traits of four generational cohorts in Brazil, China, Germany, India, Russia, United States, United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia. While Gen Ys in the eight countries share the trait

of being *digital natives*, the Saudi Gen Y was different in several aspects: *religiously conservative*, *strong national identity*, *mistrustful of institutions*.

The traits of conservatism and strong national identity could be traced to key events in the Kingdom including the establishment of the Saudi basic law of governance in 1992 by King Fahd, which declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy and governed on the basis of Islamic law (Shari'a). Also, Saudis could legally access the Internet only in 1999 (Al-Subaihi, 2008) hence their mistrust of institutions could be due to ready access to more information sources other than official channels.

Most existing research had examined Gen Y as students. As more Gen Y individuals enter the workforce, recent research had focused on inter-generational differences in values and attitudes, and implications of the workplace generation gap (D'Amato and Herzfeldt, 2008; Hewlett et al., 2009). The impetus for such research stems from concerns over generational shifts discussed below.

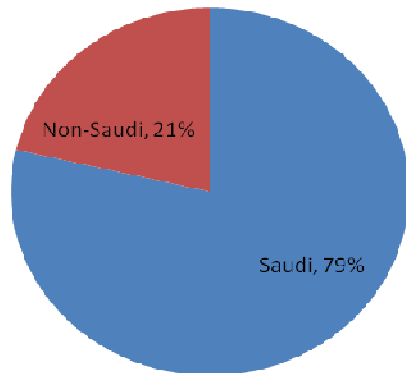
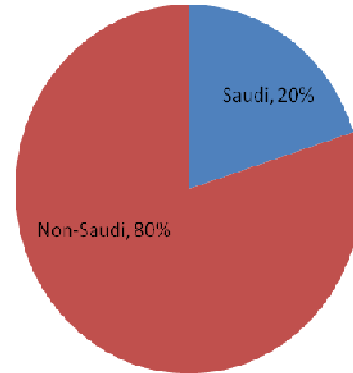
### The Big Crew Change: Generational shifts in the US and Saudi workforce

The *Big Crew Change* refers to the departure of the oldest generation of employees in an organization/industry and the influx of the next generation. The term is commonly used in the oil/gas industry to describe the retirement of the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) and the handover of leadership to the newest entrants into the workforce - Gen Y - born from 1980-1999 (Rousset et al., 2011).

In the US, Gen Y would be the largest single demographic group, followed by the Baby Boomers and Gen X by 2015 (Table 2). This demographic distribution has implications for the workforce. The Baby Boomers currently comprise more than half the US workforce with many occupying managerial positions (Rajan, 2007). Gen X comprised the smallest segment sandwiched between the oldest and youngest generations. When the Baby Boomers retire, there would not be enough Gen X workers to fill the gap left by the Boomers (Perkins et al., 2007). Furthermore, as Gen Y workers gradually enter the workforce, they are projected to outnumber Gen X, hence, the emergence of the *Big Crew Change*.

**Table 2.** Generations as % of US Population, 2015 (US Consumer Demographics, 2011)

Cohort	Born	Age in 2015	Population (000s)	% Population in 2015
Matures	Prior to 1946	70+	31,169,269	9.7%
Baby Boom	1946-1964	51-69	73,970,380	22.9%
Generation X	1965-1980	35-50	66,155,427	20.5%
Generation Y	1981-2000	15-34	86,105,837	26.7%

**Figure 1.** Saudi Arabia: Total Population by Nationality, July 2011 estimate (CIA-The World Factbook, 2011)**Figure 2.** Saudi Arabia Labor Force by Nationality, 2010 (CIA-The World Factbook, 2011)

Although the US demographic trend may be generalized to other developed countries, it may not be exactly the case for the 79-year old Kingdom. Saudi Arabia's population growth and fertility rates are consistent with global trends but its booming economy and dependence on a large non-national labor force led to a different picture of the *Big Crew Change*. The 2011 population of Saudi Arabia was estimated to be 26,131,703 with Saudi nationals comprising the majority at 20,555,627 and Non-Saudis or expatriates making up the remaining 5,576,076 (Figure 1). However, pattern is reversed for the 2010 labor force demographic (Figure 2). From a total 2010 labor force of 7,337,000, expatriate workers formed the majority (5,869,600) while Saudi nationals were the minority at 1,467,400 (CIA-The World Factbook, 2011).

Although data specifically on Saudi Arabia labor force distributed by generation is not available, an examination of the country's population, distributed by generation for 2006, 2011 and 2015 (projected), reveals similarities and differences from the US demographics (Tables 2, 3).

By 2015, in Saudi Arabia,

- Gen Y would be the largest single demographic group (50%), similar to the US (26.7%)
- Baby Boomers would be the smallest generation (9%, exclude Traditionalists), but the US Boomers would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest cohort (22.9%)

- Gen X would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest group (20%), but the US Gen X would be the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest cohort (20.5%)
- Gen Z born after 2000 (18%) would almost equal the size of Gen X (20%)

The variation from the US demographics could be explained by the following:

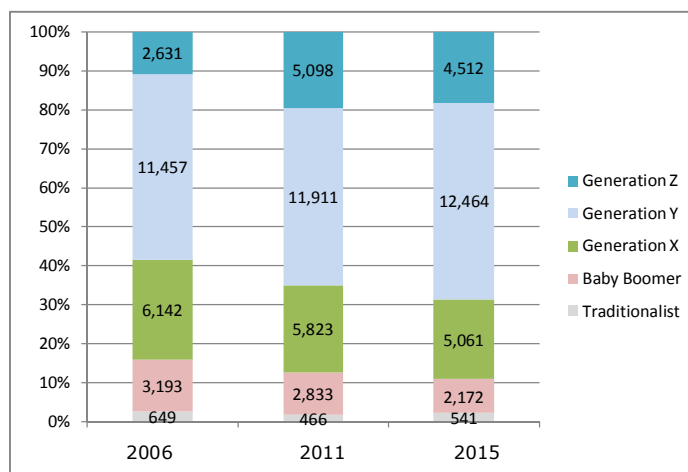
- the country's young 79 year history, hence the very small Traditionalist and Baby Boomer cohorts.
- the predominance of an expatriate workforce meant that the population is naturally skewed towards young individuals in their prime working age (Gen X/Y in their 20s-40s) and would likely remain so with the upcoming Gen Z who would be of legal work age (18 years) by 2018.

*To what extent would Saudi Arabia be affected by the Big Crew Change?* By 2015, Baby Boomers would comprise 9% of the population compared to Gen X (20%), while Gen Y would dominate at 50% (Figure 3). When extrapolated to the workforce population, the retirement of Baby Boomers in Saudi Arabia would have a smaller impact than the retirement of Gen X in terms of worker replacement numbers, knowledge transfer and retention. Therefore, the Kingdom is likely to experience a delayed Big Crew Change phenomenon where the impact of a large number of Saudi Gen X retiring would be equivalent to the US Boomers leaving the workplace. Hence there is a critical need to understand what

**Table 3.** Population Distribution by Generation, Saudi Arabia, 2006-2015 (US Census Bureau, 2010)

Generation cohort	Born	2006*	2011*	2015*	AV % of population
Traditionalist	1925-1945	649 3%	466 2%	541 2%	2%
Baby Boomer	1946-1964	3,193 13%	2,833 11%	2,172 9%	11%
Generation X	1965-1979	6,142 26%	5,823 22%	5,061 20%	23%
Generation Y	1980-1999	11,457 48%	11,911 46%	12,464 50%	48%
Generation Z	from 2000	2,631 11%	5,098 20%	4,512 18%	16%
Total Population		24,072	26,131	24,750	100%

\*Note: Population in millions; both gender



**Figure 3.** Population Distribution by Generation, Saudi Arabia, 2006-2015 (US Census Bureau, 2010)

motivates Saudi Gen Y in life and work to successfully recruit, integrate and retain this incoming generation. The findings of several studies on Gen Y are reviewed next.

### Studies on Generation Y: Concepts and instruments

Munusamy et al. (2010) studied value differences between academicians from three generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y in private Malaysian universities. It used the *Rokeach Value Scale* (RVS) to measure *terminal* and *instrumental* values. Mujtaba et al. (2010) examined generational differences in terminal and instrumental values held by Thai respondents from the same three generations. It also used the RVS and re-analyzed the data with the *Schwartz Value Inventory* (SVI). Similarly, Greenwood et al. (2008) used RVS to

examine differences in values of US respondents from the same three generations. The RVS and SVI are explained later in this section.

Treuren and Anderson (2010) examined employment expectations of Australian university students. Unlike the other studies that used RVS, it measured employment expectations as factors such as *high salary*, *travel opportunities*, *work-life balance*. Finally, Shatat et al. (2010) focused on employment expectations of Gen Y engineers in the United Arab Emirates. It measured importance of employment expectations as factors such as *clarity of objectives*, *performance-based recognition*, and *compensation*.

Values are “desirable states, objects, goals, or behaviors, transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and to choose among alternative modes of behavior” (Schwartz, 1992 in

**Table 4.** Important Terminal/Life Values: Common Results from Literature

RV Scale (Munusamy et al., 2010)	RV Scale (Mujtaba et al., 2010)	RV Scale (Greenwood et al., 2008)	SV Inventory (Mujtaba et al., 2010)
<b>Terminal value</b>	<b>Terminal value</b>	<b>Terminal value</b>	<b>Life value</b>
Family Security	Family security	Family security	Security
Health	Health	Health	Benevolence
Inner harmony	True friendship	Freedom	Self-direction
National security	Freedom	True Friendship	Hedonism

**Table 5.** Important Instrumental Values/Work Preferences: Common Results from Literature

RV Scale (Munusamy et al., 2010)	RV Scale (Mujtaba et al., 2010)	RV Scale (Greenwood et al., 2008)	Employee expectations (Shatat et al., 2010)	Employee expectations (Treuren and Anderson, 2010)
<b>Instrumental value</b>	<b>Instrumental value</b>	<b>Instrumental value</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Factors</b>
Responsible	Responsible	Honest	Clarity of objectives and goals	Job satisfaction and interest
Courageous	Broadminded	Responsible	Opportunities for development and learning	High salary
Capable	Honest	Loving	Work-life balance	Ongoing training and development
Independent	Self-control	Independent	Commitment to employee's needs	Work-life balance

Busacca et al., 2010, p.3). The *Rokeach Value Scale* (RVS) measures perceptions of terminal and instrumental values ranked by importance (Rokeach, 1968). *Terminal values* are “end-states of existence or the ultimate modes of living idealized by respondents” while *instrumental values* are “modes of conduct that respondents see as socially desirable in achieving their terminal values” (Mujtaba et al., 2010, p.40). In other words, terminal values are goals individuals would like to achieve in their lifetime and indicate their life priorities. However, instrumental/work values are preferable modes of behavior, or means of achieving terminal values. Hence, the RVS could show what Gen Y wants from life and the work behaviors preferred (instrumental values held) to achieve these life goals.

The *Schwartz Value Inventory* (SVI) measures an individual's assessment of the importance of 10 life values grouped into four dimensions (Schwartz, 1994):

- *focus on self* or self enhancement (values: achievement, power, hedonism)
- *focus on non-self* or self-transcendence (values: universalism, benevolence)
- *seeking stability* or conservation (values: security, tradition, conformity)
- *seeking change* or openness to change (values: stimulation, self-direction, hedonism)

The SVI is based on Schwartz's (1994) values theory that defines 10 life values according to their underlying motivation. The theory assumes that individuals differ in the importance placed on values; values are a basis for judging appropriate behavior and provide a sense of the future goals individuals would like to achieve. Findings on from the studies using these instruments are summarized next.

#### **Generation Y studies: Findings on life priorities and work preferences**

Table 4 summarizes the main findings on Gen Y life priorities from the literature sorted by importance. There were small differences between terminal values regarded as important by Gen Y although two different scales were used on samples of different nationalities. The most common important terminal values or life priorities were: *Family security*, *Health*, and values associated with caring for others (*Inner harmony*, *True friendship*, *Benevolence*).

Although life goals may not differ much between the studies, the means used to achieve these goals show greater differences (Table 5). The most common important instrumental values (as employee behavior,

values or expectations) were: being *Responsible*; having *Opportunities for training and development*; maintaining a *Work-life balance*.

## Work motivational theories

*Motivation* refers to the forces acting on or within an individual to initiate or direct behaviour (Gibson et al., 2006). In the workplace, motivation is used to describe the internal and external factors affecting employee productivity. As the scope of this study includes obtaining suggestions for recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals, two major motivational theories underlying human behavior are explained next.

Maslow's (1943) classic theory of motivation grouped human needs into five categories: *Physiological, Safety and Security, Belongingness, Esteem, Self-actualization*. The theory assumes that people attempt to satisfy the lower-level basic needs (Physiological) before higher-level needs (Self-actualization). However, the theory had been criticized for its simplistic assumption of a rigid hierarchical order in needs satisfaction and failure to account for simultaneous gratification of related needs from various levels.

Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory explains motivation in the workplace context. Since this study focuses on work preferences of Gen Y, Herzberg's theory is particularly relevant since it reflects the distinct things that people want from their jobs. Herzberg's theory states that an employee's overall job satisfaction is affected by extrinsic and intrinsic factors or conditions. *Extrinsic* factors include salary, status, work environment. The presence of these factors does not necessarily motivate a person in his job, but their absence would result in dissatisfaction. Hence, extrinsic factors are also known as dissatisfiers or hygiene factors. *Intrinsic* factors or satisfiers include feelings of achievement, responsibility, and recognition. Their absence may not result in dissatisfaction but their presence would increase employee motivation.

The theory's main assumption is that hygiene factors must be present in a job to ensure that employees are not dissatisfied before intrinsic motivators could be used to stimulate performance. Herzberg's theory holds certain implications for human resource managers who must provide both extrinsic factors to avoid employee dissatisfaction and intrinsic motivators to create employee job satisfaction. Herzberg's distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic factors forms the basis for understanding Twenge et al.'s (2010) model used to examine work preferences in this study,

In summary, the Saudi Arabia population demographics herald the coming of the Big Crew Change with the retirement of Gen X and the entry of a large Gen Y segment that needs to be further understood in order to effectively recruit, motivate and integrate this new

generation into the nation's workforce. Studies on Gen Y motivators provided some insight but were not based on the context of Saudi Arabia and the different characteristic traits of the Saudi Gen Y meant limited generalizability of these findings. Given these gaps in knowledge, there is a need for this study to further our understanding of the life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y professionals in Saudi Arabia.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Survey methods

This study used the following survey methods: self-administered paper-based surveys; telephone and online (video conferencing) interviews. The combined use of methods is justified by two main constraints: *geographical location* of participants and *social/cultural norms* of the country. The participants were located in Dhahran while the research team was based in Abu Dhabi (UAE). Hence, phone and online interviews were most feasible methods for directly interacting with participants. As the study included male and female participants and the interviewers were all male, self-administered paper-based surveys were used to observe the country's social/cultural norms regarding mixed gender interactions. Hence, female participants who were not comfortable with being interviewed could complete the printed questionnaires instead.

### Sampling: Source and size justification

This study obtained a purposive sample of engineering and business administrative professionals (n=29), employed by a major company in Saudi Arabia, born between 1980-1990, both genders, and mainly Saudi nationals (96%). This sample source was selected due to several reasons. Engineering and business administrative professionals were selected because the service (71.9%) and industry (21.4%) sectors have the largest workforce (CIA-The World Factbook, 2011, estimate 2005). Although Gen Y encompasses people born 1980-1999, those born after 1991 would be too young to have started a career. The increasing career opportunities for women meant that females likely to have a larger role in the Saudi Arabia workforce. Finally, since Saudis form only 20% of the workforce, understanding what motivates them could contribute to the success of the Kingdom's Saudization policy that aims to encourage employment of Saudi nationals (Wynbrandt, 2010).

The sample size was 29 respondents due to limited access to potential participants and the pilot study research design. As the research team was based in Abu Dhabi, a collaborator was used to negotiate for access to a major company in Saudi Arabia. The collaborator

**Table 6.** Final Survey and Interview Dataset Sizes

Stage 1 – Survey dataset	Stage 2- Interview dataset
18 returns; 2 discarded (no consent signature) Final survey dataset size = 16 usable returns	Final interview dataset size = 11 usable interviews

**Table 7.** Organization of Questionnaires

	Questions	Questionnaire A	Questionnaire B-1	Questionnaire B-2
<b>Part A</b>	Q.1-Q.9	Demographics	Demographics	-
	Q.10	Life priorities	Life priorities	
<b>Part B</b>	Q.11-Q.12	Reasons for most and least important choices		Reasons for most and least important choices
	Q.13-Q.15	Work preferences	Work preferences	
<b>Part C</b>	Q.16-Q.17	Reasons for most and least important choices		Reasons for most and least important choices
	Q.18-Q.20	Strategies for recruitment and retention		Strategies for recruitment and retention
<b>Part D</b>			-	

identified potential respondents from the company, distributed questionnaires, collected and returned the completed questionnaires to the team. This is a preliminary study conducted before the main research to assess the feasibility of this research area, test the new instruments, and identify possible deficiencies in the study's protocols that can provide valuable insights for future research.

### Data collection stages and procedures

Data collection was done in two stages, with different instruments - Stage 1: survey administration; Stage 2: interview administration. The *pre-data collection* activities were the recruitment and identification of participants; initial contact with interview participants to confirm interview mode and time; training sessions for research team on video conferencing software (AdobeConnect Pro 8) and interview protocol. The *data collection* procedures included obtaining participant consent and recording of interviews. *Post-data collection* procedures involved verifying that consent forms were signed and confirmation of final dataset sizes (Table 6).

### Instruments and analyses

A *survey questionnaire* (Survey Questionnaire A) and an *interview questionnaire* (Interview Questionnaire B-1, B-

2) were used. While the Questionnaires A and B-1 were self-administered paper-based surveys (i.e. participants complete the printed questionnaires on their own), B-2 was administered via telephone or online face-to-face interviews depending on the participants' preference. Both questionnaires were used since any instrument has both strengths and weaknesses. For instance, clarity of language and expression had to be ensured in self-administered surveys. In this case, terms used in the questionnaires such as 'work ethic' (مبادى), 'recruitment' (توظيف) and 'retention' (إبقاء) were translated into Arabic for greater clarity.

Phone and online interviews (using Questionnaire B-2) were used to follow up and elicit elaborations on responses provided in Questionnaire B-1 that had been completed earlier by participants. The effects of interviewer presence were reduced by an interview protocol. Moreover, the mixed-methods design adopted enabled method triangulation. When the same questions were asked in both self-administered surveys and interviews, it compensated for the weaknesses inherent in the use of any single method, thereby enhancing the validity of the results.

The questionnaires had four parts: demographics, life priorities, work preferences, and suggestions on strategies for recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals (Table 7). The questions (closed and open-ended) provided quantitative and qualitative data that were statistically and interpretively analyzed respectively. The results are presented as descriptive statistics,

**Table 8.** Measures for Life Priorities Construct

<b>Life Priorities</b>		
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Personal Values*</b>	<b>Measures as survey questions**</b>
Self enhancement ( <i>focus on self</i> )	Power	a) Being successful in a high-paying career or profession
	Achievement	e) Having lots of free time to relax or do things you want to do
Self-transcendence ( <i>focus on non-self</i> )	Hedonism (Q.5a, e, f)	f) Being famous or having social recognition
	Universalism, Benevolence (Q.5c, d, g)	c) Living a very religious life d) Being a good parent g) Helping other people who are in need
Conservation ( <i>seeking stability</i> )	Security, Tradition, Conformity (Q.5b, c, d, i)	b) Having a successful marriage c) Living a very religious life d) Being a good parent i) Owning your own home
	Openness to change ( <i>seeking change</i> )	Stimulation, Self-direction, Hedonism (Q.5e, h, j)

\*Certain options may overlap values and dimensions. For example, choice of option *c. living a very religious life*, may imply valuing *Benevolence* or *Tradition*.

\*\*Q.5 To what extent are the following goals in life important to you personally on a scale of 5 (One of the Most Important) -1 (Don't Know)?

**Table 9.** Measures for Work Preferences Construct

<b>Work Preferences</b>	
<b>Motivational dimensions</b>	<b>Measures as survey questions*</b>
Extrinsic (Q.15a)	a) Having a job with high salary, status and chances for promotion
Intrinsic (Q.15b)	b) Having a job where I can learn new skills and be creative
Leisure (Q.15c)	c) Having a job that leaves a lot of time for other things in my life
Social/Affiliation (Q.15d)	d) Having a job where I can meet a lot of people
Altruistic (Q.15e)	e) Having a job where I can help society directly

\*Q.15 To what extent are the following aspects about your job important to you personally on a scale of 5-1(One of the Most Important) -1 (Don't Know)?

graphical representations, accompanied by appropriate quotes to more accurately reflect the participants' meanings.

### Constructs and measures

In this study, the construct *life priorities* is defined as the guiding principles in life by which individuals assess the importance of 10 personal values combined into four

inter-related and interacting groups (Schwartz, 1994; Bilsky and Jehn, 2002; Spini, 2003). The *Schwartz Value Inventory* (SVI) was adapted to measure an individual's assessment of the importance of 10 life priorities on four dimensions. Table 8 provides an overview of the construct and questions that constitute the operationalized measures of the construct.

*Work preferences* refer to the work beliefs, motivators that influence employee behaviors (Dose, 1997). Table 9 provides an overview of the construct and questions that



measures the construct. Twenge et al.'s (2010) model was used to measure the importance of work preferences on five motivational dimensions (pp.6-9):

- *Extrinsic work motivators* are tangible rewards such as income, promotion opportunities, and status that motivate individuals to work.

- *Intrinsic work motivators* are intangible rewards that reflect an inherent interest in the work leading to being motivated to work for its own sake.

- *Leisure work motivators* are rewards that enable a work-life balance such as flexible work hours, freedom from supervision.

- *Social/Affiliation work motivators* are emotional rewards that satisfy the need to be connected to others such as interpersonal relationships in work teams.

- *Altruistic work motivators* are intangible rewards that satisfy the need to help others and contribute to society.

These measures assume that work preferences are the means by which priorities in life could be achieved. In other words, individuals who hold *Self-transcendence* (focus on non-self) as the most important life priority are likely to also regard the values of *Universalism* and *Benevolence* as very important. Hence, they would be motivated by *altruistic* work motivators such as *having a job that helps society*. The analyses of the data obtained were guided by these measures.

### Ethical issues

Research ethics is the application of fundamental and moral principles of respect for autonomy, beneficence, and justice in doing research (Holloway and Wheeler, 1995). In this study, the ethical issues of confidentiality, informed consent and participant protection were relevant. *Confidentiality* was ensured by deleting compromising details and replacing actual names with codes/pseudonyms in data processing and publication. *Informed consent* was handled by a cover letter and informed consent form that were read, understood and signed by participants prior to taking part in the project. The documents contained details on the topic being researched, explained why the research was conducted and what was expected of the participants. Furthermore, participants were assured that they could withdraw consent at any time, without penalty. *Participant protection* was handled by stating in the informed consent form that, if desired, participants would receive information on the outcomes of the project so as to avoid any misinterpretation of their views.

## RESULTS

### Profile of Gen Y respondents

The respondents were mainly male, single and Saudi nationals in their late 20s (26-30 years). They were all employed by a major company in Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), holding the positions of engineers/business administrators, and most had higher education degrees (bachelor's and master's degrees). Consistent with the late 20s age range, most respondents had more than three years' work experience. Moreover, the respondents had mainly held fewer than two jobs and for most (59%) their current job was their first position. Regarding income and home ownership, nearly all had an average monthly income of below USD 5,333. Given their single marital status, it was not surprising that most do not own their own homes yet and were living with their parents, relatives or spouse.

### Gen Y: Life priorities findings

Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of a set of 10 personal life values, which were each represented by a statement (Table 8), on a 5-point attitudinal scale (*One of the Most Important [5] - Not Important [2], Don't Know [1]*). Additionally, they were asked to explain why the values chosen were considered most or least important.

The *most important* dimensions in life to Gen Y respondents were

- *conservation*: valuing Security, Tradition, Conformity (52.8%)

- *self-transcendence*: valuing Universalism, Benevolence (36.7%)

The *least important* dimension in life was

- *openness to change*: valuing Stimulation, Self-direction, Hedonism (18.5%).

While the quantitative results showed the most important priorities in life, interpretive analysis of the qualitative answers revealed main themes in respondents' reasons for their choices. The themes are illustrated with quotes to more accurately represent the meanings attached to participants' answers. The quotes are presented with original orthographic forms and language retained.

For the dimension of *conservation* (seeking stability), respondents explained that *having a successful marriage* was one of the most important priorities in life in order to achieve *emotional stability*:

"[having a successful marriage] it is where I would like my life to get to in order to be happy, having stability and a family environment" (Respondent #11).

Moreover, *being a good parent* was another most important life priority to attain *long-term personal and national goals*:

"I extremely believe, to develop a nation you need to start from the youngest generation and to do so you need to have an excellent educated parents" (Respondent #22).

"being a role model for your children and prepare them for the world and the challenges in it" (Respondent #3).

*Self-transcendence* (focus on non-self) was the second most important life dimension. Respondents explained that *helping other people who are in need* and *living a very religious life* were inter-related important life priorities because each value reinforces the other. In other words, helping others *fulfills religious obligations* as well as *provides meaning and purpose to doing work*:

"helping people who are in need is part of having a religious life, this gives me a motivation for working" (Respondent #6). However, for the dimension of *openness to change* (seeking change), the specific life priorities: *having a varied and exciting life, lots of free time to relax, and being independent*, were not regarded as important. Respondents mainly interpreted these statements as meaning the pursuit of aimless leisure in life:

"it depends on how people look at varied and exciting, (basically) it is an entertainment part other than challenges in your life" (Respondent #3).

Based on this interpretation, respondents explained their *preference for more productive use of leisure time*:

"I do not need a lot of time to relax I prefer being productive" (Respondent #21).

"I enjoy doing voluntary work, I am a member of several non-profit societies so having time during the week will help to do the voluntary work" (Respondent #1).

## Gen Y: Work preferences findings

To examine work preferences, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of five work motivational dimensions: *Extrinsic*, *Intrinsic*, *Leisure*, *Social/Affiliation*, and *Altruistic* based on Twenge et al.'s model (Table 9). Each dimension was represented by a statement, on the same 5-point attitudinal scale. Also, respondents were asked explain why the dimensions chosen were most or least important.

The most important work motivational dimensions to Gen Y respondents were

- *Intrinsic*: Having a job where I can learn new skills and be creative (70.4%)
- *Extrinsic*: Having a job with high salary, status and chances for promotion (37%)

The least important work motivational dimensions to the respondents were equally

- *Leisure*: Having a job that leaves a lot of time for other things in my life (22.2%).

- *Altruistic*: Having a job where I can help society directly (22.2%).

Several themes emerged from analyzing the reasons for respondents' choices. The *intrinsic* motivator was one of the most important work dimensions because *having a job where I can learn new skills and be creative* satisfies the need for professional self-improvement and career development:

"Because it is what you can take with you when going to other places" (Respondent #10)

"Learning new tricks enables me to do even the same tasks differently and minimize boredom" (Respondent #4)

Although respondents also regarded the *extrinsic* motivator as most important, it was interesting to note that the tangible rewards associated with *having a job with high salary, status and chances for promotion* were not desired for their own sake or to meet egocentric needs but as a means to achieve some form of greater good:

"A job with high salary will help me in other aspects of my life like helping others and continuing my education" (Respondent #3)

In contrast, both *leisure* and *altruistic* work motivators were not valued as important. Since most respondents did not regard *having lots of free time to relax* as an important life goal, it was not surprising that they also did not want to pursue *a job that leaves a lot of time for other things in my life*. Consistent with earlier stated preference for a more productive use of free time, the respondents explained that they find their jobs to be inherently interesting:

"In my job I can find time to do interesting things, it all goes to the employee time management" (Respondent #1)

"A job that leaves a lot of time for other things does not matter to me" (Respondent #6)

Even though *helping other people who are in need* (self-transcendence) was one of the most important life goals, respondents did not necessarily want *a job where I can help society directly*. This could be due to their interpretation of the statement as having a full-time job in social or community work. Hence, respondents explained that they were not motivated by careers in social work since they already had established professional identities in engineering or business:

"As a professional it is not a priority and involving in voluntary work can be in free time" (Respondent #2)

In summary, the Gen Y respondents regarded *conservation* (seeking stability) and *self-transcendence* (focus on non-self) as the most important life priorities. To achieve these life goals, they were most motivated by work that offered *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* rewards. The

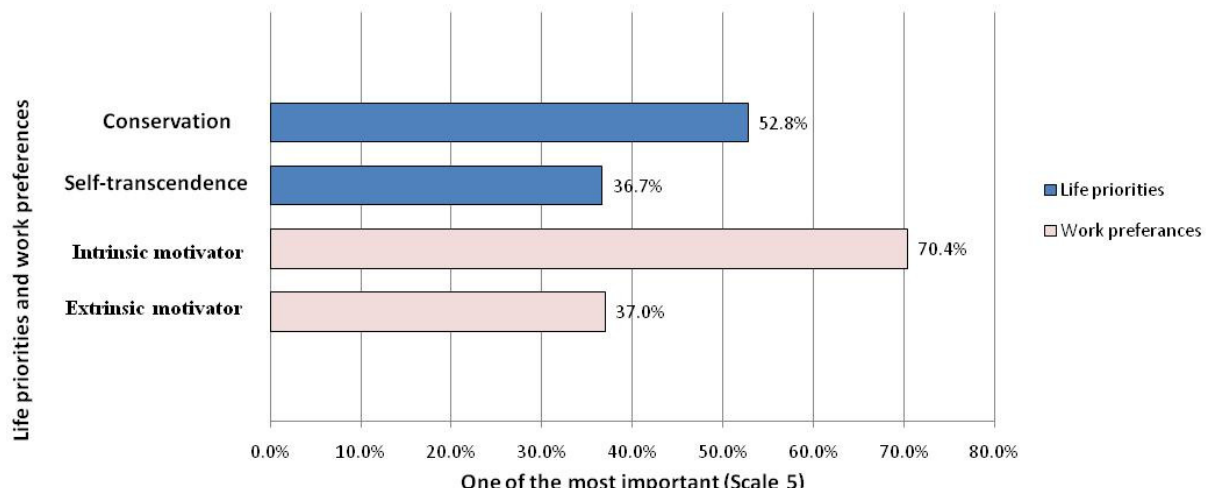


Figure 4. Conservation/Self-Transcendence Life Dimensions and Intrinsic/Extrinsic Work Motivators

next section discusses the results and states the conclusions drawn from the findings.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Consistency of findings with theoretical assumptions

Based on the *Schwartz Value Inventory* and Twenge et al.'s (2010) work motivational model, the following assumptions were held in this study: (a) individuals value 10 basic priorities in life and their work preferences indicate the means by which they choose to achieve these life goals; (b) there would be a correspondence between choices made for life priorities and work preferences. In other words, individuals who regard the *Self-enhancement* dimension as most important in life would value highly *power*, *achievement*, and *hedonism*. In order to attain self-enhancement, they prefer work that offer *extrinsic* motivators (high salary, promotion) that provide tangible rewards towards that goal.

The results of this study showed that *conservation* (seeking stability) and *self-transcendence* (focus on non-self) were the Gen Y respondents' most important dimensions in life (Figure 4). Moreover, they were most motivated by work that offered *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* rewards. Hence, these findings were consistent with the stated assumptions.

To further explain, since respondents seek *stability* in life domains such as family (successful marriage, good parent, home ownership) and spirituality (very religious life), it was not surprising to find that *extrinsic* motivators, which provide tangible means (high salary, status, promotion) to attain stability in life, were also most desired. Moreover, respondents also value *universalism* and *benevolence* to reach better self-understanding and gain personal meaning in life, so the importance placed

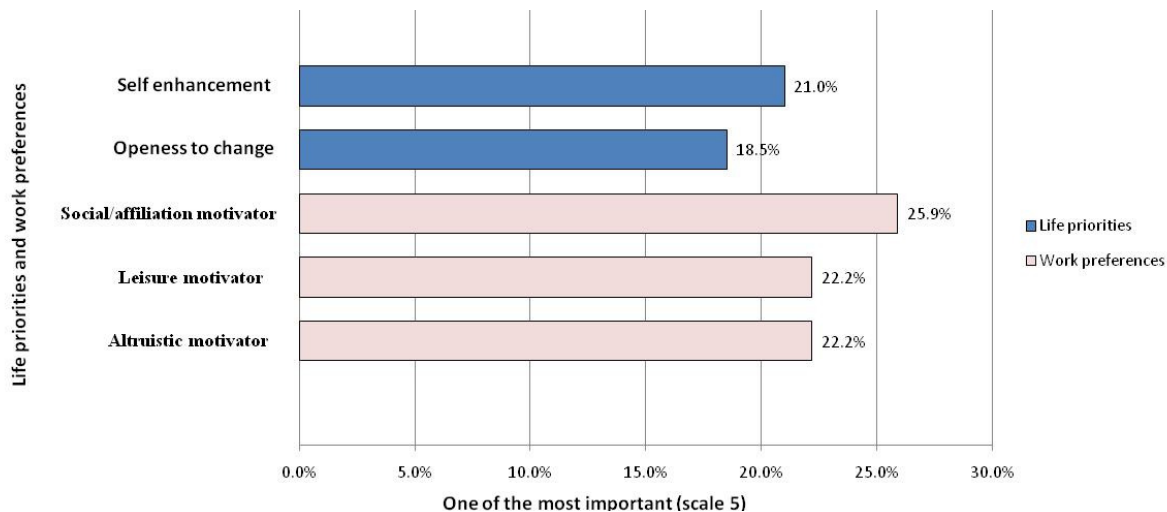
on *intrinsic* work motivator was consistent with the life priority.

In contrast, the respondents considered *self-enhancement* (focus on self) and *openness to change* (seeking change) as less important life dimensions (Figure 5). Consistent with the study's assumptions, *social* and *leisure* motivators were also less desired in work. Since *self-enhancement* and *openness to change* were less important life dimensions, seeking *power*, *achievement*, *hedonism*, *stimulation*, *self-direction* were also not as vital. Hence, it was not surprising to find that *social* and *leisure* work motivators were less desired. Respondents explained that they preferred a more productive use of free time and found inherent satisfaction from the challenging work that they do.

However, given the importance placed on the *self-transcendence* life dimension, it was surprising that the *altruistic* work motivator was not equally important. This could be explained by the respondents' established professional identities in engineering/business and their interpretation of the altruistic work motivator statement as having a full-time job in social work.

### Consistency of life priorities findings with literature

It was initially argued that the life priorities found in studies reviewed may have limited generalizability since the research were not contextualized in Saudi Arabia and Saudi Gen Y were differentially characterized by mainly being more religiously conservative and mistrustful of authority than those in other countries. Table 10 compares the life priorities results from this study and Mujtaba et al. (2010) that both used the SVI. Interestingly, results from this study were almost identical to Mujtaba et al. (2010) that sampled Thai respondents. When two different instruments (RVS, SVI) were used to



**Figure 5.** Self-Enhancement/Openness to Change Life Dimensions and Social/Leisure/Altruistic Work Motivators

**Table 10.** Important Life Values: Comparison of Results with Mujtaba et al. (2010)

SV Inventory (Mujtaba et al., 2010)	SV Inventory (This study)
Life value	Life value
Security (Conservation)	Conservation
Benevolence (Self-transcendence)	Self-transcendence
Self-direction (Openness to change)	Self enhancement
Hedonism (Self enhancement)	Openness to change

**Table 11.** Common Important Life Values: Comparison of Results with Literature

<b>RV Scale</b> (Munusamy et al., 2010)	Terminal value	Family Security
<b>RV Scale</b> (Mujtaba et al., 2010)	Terminal value	Family security
<b>RV Scale</b> (Greenwood et al., 2008)	Terminal value	Family security
<b>SV Inventory</b> (Mujtaba et al., 2010)	Life value	Security
<b>SV Inventory</b> (This study)	Life value	Conservation (seeking stability/security)

measure the life priority construct on samples from a range of countries, *family security/security* was found to be the common most important life priority (Table 11). Similarly, the Saudi sample also considered *seeking stability* as most important. Therefore, it could be concluded that the study’s findings reinforced Schwartz’s (1994; 2003) theory that the four life dimensions and 10 basic life priorities are reflective of the core values recognized in all cultures around the world.

**Consistency of work preferences findings with literature**

Table 12 compares the results on work preferences with findings from the literature. The *intrinsic* motivator was the most common important work preference. Consistent with the Australian and UAE samples, the Saudi Gen Y were most motivated by jobs that are interesting and challenging, offer variety and professional training

**Table 12.** Important Work Preferences: Comparison of Results with Literatur

<b>Employee expectations</b> (Treuren and Anderson, 2010)	<b>Employee expectations</b> (Shatat et al., 2010)	<b>Work preferences</b> (This study)
<b>Intrinsic</b> Job satisfaction and interest On-going training and development	<b>Intrinsic</b> Opportunities for development and learning Clarity of objectives and goals Commitment to employee's needs	<b>Intrinsic</b> Opportunities for learning new skills and creativity
<b>Extrinsic</b> High salary	-	<b>Extrinsic</b> High salary, status, chances for promotion
-	-	<b>Social/Affiliation</b> Opportunities to meet a lot of people
<b>Leisure</b> Work-life balance	-	<b>Leisure</b> Work-life balance
-	-	<b>Altruistic</b> Opportunities to help society directly

designed to help employees reach their full potential.

While extrinsic rewards have an important place in employee expectations of organizations, respondents in this study and the literature considered *extrinsic* work motivators to be less important than intrinsic motivators. Although Gen Y from economically struggling countries (Brazil, Russia, Germany) or developing countries (China) shared the common trait of being materialistic (Erickson and Bevins, 2011), Saudi Gen Y grew up in times of social and economic stability. The oil-based economy funded Saudi Arabia's extensive social welfare and benefits programs while the Saudization policy guaranteed employment for all Saudis (Long and Maisel, 2010). Hence, as explained by the respondents, material rewards were desired for achieving greater good and professional development.

In conclusion, this study found that *Security, Tradition, Conformity, Universalism, and Benevolence* were most important life priorities to the Saudi Gen Y. To attain these life goals, they were most motivated by work that offered *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* rewards. Guided by a better understanding of the Saudi Gen Y life priorities and work preferences, the next section presents recommendations for the effective recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals, explains the limitations of this study and offers future research directions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for recruitment and retentions of Gen Y professionals

In the surveys and interviews, respondents were asked to suggest strategies that employers could adopt for recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals. As shown in Table 13, the main themes that emerged from the suggestions were largely consistent with the findings that the respondents were most motivated by *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* work motivators. Hence, this study offers the following recommendations to organizations and human resource managers for the effective recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals.

Three common themes emerged from the suggestions for *recruitment and retention*:

1. *provide recognition and acknowledgement of good work done* since "[Gen Y] want managers who know who they are, know what they are doing, are highly engaged with them, provide guidance ... and keep close track of their successes" (Tulgan, 2009, p.13). Hence, credit given for good work done would reinforce Gen Y employees' inherent interest in their work.

2. *offer professional training programs* so that Gen Y employees would feel that they are learning new skills

**Table 13.** Most Important Work Motivators and Themes for Recruitment and Retention

Work Motivators	Themes in suggestions	
	Recruitment	Retention
<b>Intrinsic</b>	Recognition and acknowledgement Opportunities for learning and professional development Involvement in decision-making Transparency and clear directions	Recognition and acknowledgement Opportunities for learning and professional development Overseas job postings Creative space and independence Challenging work
<b>Extrinsic</b>	Higher salaries and better incentives	Higher salaries and long term benefits
<b>Social/ Affiliation</b>	None provided	Building social ties within organizational departments and larger community

and benefiting from working in the company. Moreover, employees may regard their important life goal of seeking stability as achievable when they feel that the organization is investing in their career development.

In tandem with opportunities to learn and grow professionally, respondents were particularly motivated to continue working in the company if given the *opportunity to work overseas for 1-2 years*. The positive response to this intrinsic work motivator is due to the chance for further career development through exposure to different professional practices and exchange of expert knowledge and international experiences.

3. *offer competitive salaries and benefits* so that future/current employees would feel financially secure hence enabling them to fulfill their most important life priority of seeking stability and meeting their need for extrinsic work motivators.

#### **Additionally, for recruitment**

- *involve Gen Y employees in decision-making processes* since they are more likely to challenge employers' missions, policies, and decisions (Tulgan, 2009). This would fulfill their need for transparency and clear directions at work.

#### **Additionally, for retention**

- *allow creative space and less direct supervision* so that Gen Y employees would have opportunities to bear greater responsibilities, learn independently and prove themselves. Hence, this would fulfill their need for interesting and challenging work that provide intrinsic satisfaction.

#### **Limitations of study and future research directions**

To further understand and manage the incoming large young Gen Y workforce, this qualitative study specifically examined the life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y professionals in Saudi Arabia. Certain characteristics inherent in the design of this research resulted in the following main limitations. The *first limitation* concerns the qualitative methodological design of this small-scale pilot study. While the findings are not claimed to be generalizable to wider populations, the implications for managerial practices may be extrapolated to similar contexts.

The *second limitation* concerns the sample source from a large company in Saudi Arabia that adopts a highly selective recruitment strategy. This study acknowledges that the sample may not reflect the typical Gen Y cohort and the findings present a restricted account of the participants who were probably the *crème de la crème* in their professions. These limitations do not detract from the value of the findings as they indicate several avenues for future research.

Since this study had shown the feasibility of this research area, its protocols and validity of the instruments, future researchers could expand on this preliminary study. For instance, a more varied sample source that included other occupational types from more companies would capture a more representative Gen Y cohort. Also, a follow-up study could be broader in scope and examine the personal characteristic traits of Gen Y to develop a richer and fuller picture of the cohort. Finally, given Saudi Arabia's gender segregation policy, it would be particularly interesting to conduct a comparative study on work motivators of male and female Gen Y. As more Saudi females enter the Kingdom's workforce, results from such a study could unveil different patterns in work

preferences between genders that could inform better managerial practices in Saudi Arabia.

### Summary of study

The Saudi Arabia population demographics heralded the coming of the Big Crew Change with the retirement of Gen X workers and the entry of a large Gen Y segment. However, little is known about Gen Y in the Middle-East. This study examined the life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y engineering and business professionals in Saudi Arabia in order to further understand their motivations, strengths and aptitudes that could guide organizations in forming strategies to effectively recruit, retain and integrate this new generation into the nation's workforce. The Saudi Gen Y was found to regard *Security, Tradition, Conformity, Universalism, and Benevolence* as most important values in life. To attain these life priorities, they were most motivated by *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* work motivators. Consistent with findings on work motivators, respondents suggested that organizations could effectively recruit and retain them by adopting strategies based on their needs for intrinsic and extrinsic work motivators.

In conclusion, this research had contributed to existing knowledge on Gen Y, extended previous studies regarding Gen Y at work and increased understanding of Gen Y professionals particularly in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, recommendations for the effective recruitment and retention of Gen Y professionals were provided to help organizations manage this young generation who are central to the future of the Middle-East region.

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