



Generation Y as Hospitality Employees: Framing a Research Agenda

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This article considers the impact of the new generation of employees entering the hospitality workforce and the changes in management paradigms that will be required to successfully recruit, select, train and motivate Generation Y (Gen Y) to achieve the goals of the organisation, given the strategic importance of human resource management in creating competitive and sustainable service organizations. This article also analyses the current state of thinking on Gen Y's work-related values, attitudes and behaviours and reviews the research that has been conducted to date on Gen Y in the workplace. A discussion is provided on how these values and attitudes will potentially interact with prevailing hospitality management paradigms, before presenting a research framework that depicts the potential relationships between the key variables and identified themes. Following this, six propositions are presented regarding Gen Y's work-related values and attitudes in relation to hospitality employment. The article concludes with an outline of the intended direction for future research.

Keywords: Generation Y, hospitality workforce, HR management

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing the hospitality industry is its inherent reliance on people to fulfil the industry's basic functions (e.g., greeting guests, serving guests). The predominance of transactions in hospitality involve either direct or indirect employee–customer interactions, described by service management academics as the simultaneous production and consumption of services (e.g., Berry, 1995). It is the quality of these inseparable transactions, as perceived by the customer (Sachdev & Verma, 2002), that will give a hospitality business an edge over its competitors and ultimately make or break the success of that business (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). Managers, then, must maintain steadfast attention beyond the challenges of not only managing individuals in the workplace (e.g., Grönroos, 2000) but also on the continuing importance of all human resource functions (e.g., attracting, selecting, training, motivating and rewarding).

Hospitality operators around the world concur on this issue — human resource concerns are consistently listed as the number one item of concern for hotel and restaurant operators (Enz, 2004; Enz, 2001). The study of human resource management (HRM) in hospitality is so crucial and specific to the industry that some argue that it warrants its own line of inquiry and sphere of academic

journals separate to generic HRM theory (Lucas & Deery, 2004). A service organisation's human resources are its potential for competitive advantage. According to the resource-based view (RBV) of gaining competitive advantage, differences in firm profitability are often due to the capabilities that are internal to a firm — including expertise, systems, and knowledge (Voola, Carlson, & West, 2004). Apart from the relatively rare scenario of a natural-resource monopoly, the intangible resources of a firm, particularly its human resources, internal functions and processes, are more likely to produce a real competitive advantage — because engaged and committed employees who render quality services are difficult for competitors to emulate (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu, & Kochar, 2001).

Another strategic approach used in gaining competitive advantage comes through a 'service orientation'. Such an 'orientation' can be thought of as a strategic response and a distinctive way of implementing the firm's marketing concept, competing by means of outstanding service to enhance competitive advantage and customer value. There is mounting interest in the service orientation concept — both conceptually and empirically — as it appears to be one defining factor in the creation of superior customer value (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006). A service orientation only exists if it is perceived by the employee. This point is particularly salient in service businesses where face-to-face service encounters take place regularly, as it is the perceptions of employees as to the extent to which the firm's leaders practise service excellence that most influence the quality of customer interactions.

Gaining competitive advantage via the RBV or service orientation strategies seems an easier-said-than-done

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proposition. This is particularly the case in an industry that is so people-intensive, lacking in career path options and beset by high employee turnover. A fundamental paradox of the industry is that the people directly interacting with customers on a regular basis are the ones being paid the least. Hospitality enterprises have traditionally relied on large pools of young labour to fill their frontline staffing requirements (Magd, 2003). That being the case, in this day and age, it will most likely be the so-named 'Generation Y' (Gen Y) who are out there serving hospitality's customers.

Commentary on Gen Y has become increasingly common in news and media in recent years (see, e.g., Fleming, 2006), on topics ranging from not moving out of home (Jenkins, 2008), to retirement saving patterns (Pitt, 2008) to eating and dining preferences (Palmer, 2008) to name just a few. Gen Y refers to people who were born between the years of (approximately) 1979 and 1994 (Martin, 2005; Loughlin & Barling, 2001). As employees, it is widely noted that Gen Y's work-related characteristics and attitudes are radically different to those of previous generations entering the workforce (McGuire, Todnem By & Hutchings, 2007) and are incongruent with conventional thinking on how new entrants to the labour force should think and act (Glass, 2007; Martin, 2005; Morton, 2002). As 'radical' as Gen Y's attitudes may or may not be, these attitudes are nonetheless fundamental in determining the service orientation of a hospitality organisation and should, therefore, be given serious consideration.

As an example of the relevance of this topic (in an Australian context), Gen Y currently makes up 19% of the total Australian population (McCrindle, 2008), 22% of the total workforce and nearly a third (30%) of Australia's hospitality employees (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007). And those figures will grow dramatically in the next decade — by 2020, Gen Y will comprise 42% of the total Australian workforce (McCrindle, 2008), so logically, the impact on hospitality will be acute. Determining how best to alter prevailing employment strategies to match the motivational, training and development needs of Gen Y employees would appear to be the human resources challenge for the hospitality industry of the future.

The timing of Gen Y's entrance is combined with the rise of tourism as the world's largest and fastest growing industry (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001), accounting for 10% of global employment (Baum, 2002) and with demand increasing exponentially (WTO, 2000). Concomitantly, demand for hospitality employees is increasing alarmingly, and it is becoming apparent across all industries that demand for employees is going to outstrip supply (Bishop, 1999). As the populations of all developed nations age, there are fewer young employees to go around. The Baby Boomers, the largest generation in the current workforce (Sutton Bell & Narz, 2007), are starting to retire. Levels of new entrants to the workforce have been falling in industrial countries around the globe for some years now, as birth rates continue to drop (Magd, 2003). In Australia in recent years, the working age population has increased by 170,000 people per year. This figure is set to reduce significantly; for the entire decade of the 2020s, the

labour force will grow by only 125,000 (Bishop, 1999). Although the current world economic crisis (as at November 2008) is likely to alter this imbalance to some extent, there is every reason to believe that the overall trend of decreased labour supply with long-term demand will persist, particularly in the hospitality industry. Anecdotal evidence from industry practitioners suggests that although the economy is slowing rapidly, hospitality organisations are still chronically understaffed and having trouble sourcing quality employees.

Given changing employee demographics and attitudes, supply-demand imbalances in the workforce, as well as ever-growing demand for hospitality businesses, it would appear that new paradigms for understanding employee values, attitudes, and behaviours are needed if hospitality organisations are to sustain a competitive advantage through service. This article aims to provide the impetus for an informed and useful discourse on these issues, their impact on the industry and possible approaches for creating new paradigms. In order to do so, we first provide a detailed appraisal of the state of thinking on Gen Y employees and their new set of work-related attitudes, including a review of the academic literature that has investigated Gen Y as an employee. From there, we will consider how these newly emerging attitudes and work values are likely to interact with the contemporary hospitality workplace and the prevalent employment conditions therein. This review will allow us to develop a framework for understanding the relationships between key variables such as Gen Y's work-related values, attitudes and behaviours and a hospitality organisation's internal parameters, HRM strategies, and organisational outcomes. The framework will serve as a guide for a future research agenda and will allow us to propose several statements about Gen Y employees that can later be rigorously tested using empirical methods. In essence, this article represents the starting point of an ongoing research agenda that ultimately aims to indicate and guide human resources practices that hospitality organisations can adopt to improve the recruitment, selection, training, motivation and retention of Gen Y employees.

Generation Y

A generation is defined as 'an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location and significant life events at critical developmental stages, divided by 5 [to] 7 years in the first wave, core group and last wave' (Kupperschmidt, 2000). A generation, then, is a cohort of people that share similar social or historical experiences, which affect the way members view and interpret the world, and these interpretations have a relatively stable effect on their lives (Westerman & Yamamura, 2006). The shared experiences will have an influence on how a cohort member feels towards authority and organisations, what their work-related values are, and how a person would act to satisfy their values and desires (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000). Each generation will continue to redefine the organisational environment and how business operations are conducted (Xiao & O'Neill, 2008), as managers assert their own influence on the

training of future leaders, creating implications for an organisation's culture, ethics and human resources policies and procedures (Westerman & Yamamura 2006). In support of the notion of generations strongly influencing organisational parameters, a longitudinal study conducted by Smola and Sutton (2002) found that work values are more influenced by generational experiences than by age or maturity.

While there is an abundance of studies that concentrate on the differences between the two generations that currently dominate the management levels of organisations, the Baby Boomers and Generation X, empirically supported research into Generation Y has been somewhat limited to this point. Though there is always debate over the actual age ranges of specific generations (see Smola & Sutton, 2002, for a detailed discussion), it is generally agreed that Gen Y refers to those born between the years 1979 and 1994 (Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Yan, 2003). Naturally, some of this generation are still in school, but the oldest members, the 'first wave' (Paul, 2001, p. 45) born between 1979 and 1985, are already actively participating in the workplace, and the 'second wave' (Paul 2001, p. 45) born after 1986 are now beginning to enter the workplace on a more full-time basis. As this generation ages more, further study will reveal if there are any significant differences between the behaviours, values and attitudes of the two waves.

The largest generation since the Baby Boomers (Sutton Bell & Narz, 2007), Gen Y children have grown up in relative affluence, with global economic prosperity and low unemployment throughout their lives. Although money has never been a major concern, they have lived in an uncertain world, a world with terrorism and major environmental shocks, connected 24/7 to the events of the world through the advances in information technology (Eisner, 2005). Multi-tasking is a habit, where 30 hours of content can be crammed into a 7-hour period (Millwood, 2007). This creates a low tolerance for boredom and Gen Y can be very selective in the way they receive information — the more interactive it is, the more it will 'pull' them towards it (Goman, 2006; Knight, 2000). It is argued that as a result of being raised in noncompetitive environments that place importance on participation over finishing first, Gen Y are used to being praised for their efforts rather than their results (Hill, 2002). More involvement in family decisions than previous generations (Eisner, 2005) and living at home for longer after finishing school (Szamosi, 2006) has supposedly made Gen Y used to feeling included and having their opinion listened to. It appears that family time is more important to Gen Y than previous generations, and this is demonstrated by the results of a study in the United States that show that only 12% to 13% of Gen Y are work-centric (placing greater importance on work than family) and 50% are family-centric, compared with 22% of baby boomers being work-centric and only 41% being family-centric (Families & Work Institute, 2002).

The question then arises of how the social, technical and political environment in which Gen Y has grown up has affected their work-related values, attitudes and

behaviours. Relatively consistent observations abound in magazines, newspapers and trade journals of all descriptions. The Gen Y employee is described as more demanding than new employees have ever been before and they are unafraid of expressing their opinions (Earle, 2003; Knight 2000). With a low tolerance for boredom, Gen Y thrives on new challenges and expects to be shown respect and given responsibility from early on in their employment (Glass, 2007; Martin, 2005). This new generation is extremely technologically literate, self-reliant, independent and looking for instant rewards, where long-term means 12 months (Martin, 2005; Paul, 2001). They are looking to make a contribution to something worthwhile, to have their input recognised from the start, and are not willing to put in years of service in order to gain any significant reward from their employer (Martin, 2005). In the workplace, they seek constant feedback, even on a daily basis (Glass, 2007; Martin, 2005). On the whole, they dislike menial and repetitive work and seek new challenges regularly (Saba, 2006; Martin, 2005).

On the surface, these descriptions of Gen Y seem useful and reliable, especially when based against one's own observations and experiences with the youth of today. However, on closer inspection the views professed above do not hold up to academic scrutiny as they are for the most part based on the subjective opinions of authors from older generations. Therefore, it is necessary to thoroughly review the academic literature on Gen Y to discover the empirical basis for any of these commonly used descriptions and characteristics. In this regard, there are three main literature streams emerging concerning Gen Y: the marketing perspective, the education and training perspective, and the human resources perspective. From a marketing vantage, Gen Y is considered as a consumer, and emerging topics relate to brands and corporate responsibility (Yan, 2003), expenditure patterns (Norum, 2003), and the Internet as a marketing medium (Peattie 2007). The education/training perspective places Gen Y as a student and considers such angles as transfer of training (Rodriguez & Gregory, 2005), and learning styles (Manuel, 2000). The human resources perspective also includes various strands, which will each now be examined in more detail.

In one human resources line of enquiry, empirical research concerning Gen Y has focused on the career expectations of Gen Y students after graduation. A qualitative study of Gen Y's experiences and perceptions of careers in hospitality management conducted in the United Kingdom found that there is potential for conflict between Gen Y's described work-related preferences, attitudes and expectations and the reality of the contemporary hospitality industry (Barron et al., 2007). In another study based in the United Kingdom, Broadbridge et al. (2007) surveyed Gen Y students' expectations of retail employment and found that their major expectation was to enjoy their job, combined with concerns for fairness, tolerance and equity in the workplace. Szamosi (2006) found similar results when researching Gen Y students' expectations of employment with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in that they wanted to work for

caring and sensitive SMEs that are environmentally concerned. These students also expected tangible and intangible rewards, empowerment, respect, workplace involvement, concern for employee welfare and supportive management.

In a similar vein to studying graduate expectations, organisational attributes that attract Gen Y graduates was the subject of a detailed study by Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007). The research team found that the most sought after organisational attributes by Gen Y graduates included heavy investment in training and development of employees, care about employees as individuals, variety in daily work, freedom to work on one's own initiative and scope for creativity in one's work. The authors note the absence of attributes such as benefits, job security and solitude from their top-20 list of desired attributes, and contrast these results with those of an earlier meta-analytic study involving previous generations. From this it can be surmised that there are noticeable differences between the qualities Gen Y seek from their employers and the qualities older generations are seeking.

Another human resource line of enquiry into Gen Y is the study of work-related attitudes and behaviours Gen Y have formed based on their actual, albeit limited, work experiences. One argument is that early work experiences have a formative effect on future attitudes towards work, and that 'poor quality' employment early on leads to less opportunities for developing skills and learning, which in turn engenders low levels of motivation, increased cynicism and lower work values (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). In a conceptual review, Loughlin and Barling (2001) caution against promising conditions to young workers that are not obtainable, as findings in the food-service industry illustrate that it is not so much the low pay of actual work that alienates young workers, rather the poor behaviour of management towards them.

The ideas posited by Loughlin and Barling (2001) are supported by the empirical work of other researchers. Eisner (2005) investigated the perceptions from work experiences of Gen Y students in a US college and found that overall, Gen Y's perceptions of management competence was very low, and this was significantly related to job satisfaction. Eisner poses the question of whether increasing job satisfaction will increase perceptions of manager's competence or whether a manager first needs to be perceived as competent for job satisfaction to be achieved. This is a particularly pertinent question from a service management perspective, where the perceptions of front-line employees as to their leaders' service excellence practices determine the extent to which employees engage in the delivery of service excellence (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006).

Perhaps of most relevance to this article, two recent studies have been conducted that concern Gen Y as an employee in the hospitality and tourism industries. In the first study, Cairncross and Buultjens (2007) conducted a series of focus groups with Australian hospitality and tourism managers to examine employer views and attitudes towards Gen Y workers. The findings indicated that the majority of employers believed Gen Y's expectations of their employment were at odds with their employers'

views and were therefore of significant concern to hospitality and tourism organisations. In the second hospitality-specific study, Gursoy, Maier and Chi (2008) examined the differences in work values between the three most prevalent generations in the modern hospitality workforce: Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y. Based on focus group data, the researchers revealed work-related attitudes and characteristics that define each generation as well as each generation's perceptions of the other generations, as employees and as managers. Gen Y was found to be collaborative in nature, emphasising teamwork and expecting to be recognised and respected for their input. These studies, while both insightful and informative, are limited by their use of qualitative data. The first study considered only the views of Gen Y's managers and not Gen Y themselves, and the second study concentrated more on the interactions between, and views of, Baby Boomer and Gen X managers than on the attitudes and perceptions of the Gen Y cohort.

Although somewhat limited in its scope and its ability to be generalised, research thus far indicates that there are considerable differences between the work-related expectations, values, attitudes and behaviours of Gen Y and previous generations. When explained in the context of Gen Y's upbringing, these expectations are not surprising. However, from the viewpoint of a traditional workplace, hospitality or otherwise, these behaviours, values and attitudes are a significant departure from what is usually expected of new employees. In times of high unemployment, perhaps any industry could expect Gen Y to endure the conditions without choice. A questionable strategy regardless, the fact remains that hospitality employment opportunities are far from scarce in this era of increasing demand and tightening labour supply. This could be disputed in some countries that are worse hit by the current financial crisis, but anecdotal evidence from the Australian hospitality industry suggests that demand will still continue to exceed supply. In order to develop service-oriented organisations that can sustain an inimitable advantage over competitors, hospitality organisations will need to implement human resource strategies that work in synergy with the expectations and values of Gen Y workers.

Hospitality Employment and Generation Y

It is important to give consideration to the current state of affairs in hospitality employment in light of the emergent characteristics of the latest generation of workforce entrants. In particular, how appealing is the typical hospitality job likely to be to the potential Gen Y candidate? Common themes uncovered in the academic research conducted thus far suggest Gen Y employees expect fairness, tolerance and equity (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Gursoy et al., 2008), involvement in the workplace (Gursoy et al., 2008; Szamosi, 2006), concern for employee welfare (Gursoy et al., 2008; Szamosi, 2006; Terjesen et al., 2007) and opportunities for training, development and work variety (Gursoy et al., 2008; Terjesen et al., 2007). The results of one of the few hospitality specific studies relating to Gen Y are not very encouraging: Barron et al. (2007) found discrepancies between the work-related preferences

and expectations of Gen Y hospitality students and the reality of work in the hospitality industry.

As it is, employment in the hospitality industry has a mixed image. There is an outward perception of glamour, presumably from the proximity to the 'high life', which is contrasted with notions of servitude and inferiority (Riley et al., 2002). Many studies have been conducted to explore perceptions of working life in the industry, such as Wood's (1997) analysis of employment in hotels and catering, which revealed a list of negative themes that were quite common in the industry, including long and antisocial hours, low levels of pay, low status and high staff turnover. Other studies of employment in the hospitality industry have confirmed these themes found by Wood and have also added issues of excessive job demands such as emotional labour, lack of training and dysfunctional customer behaviour (Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006; Karatepe et al., 2003).

In a study of undergraduate tourism students working in the tourism industry, Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) found that more than half the students undertook the course with inadequate information about careers and working conditions in the industry, and that once students had experienced work in the industry, unmet expectations tended to cement their unfavourable perception of the industry. These findings support the earlier work of Barron and Maxwell (1993), who found that direct experience with the hospitality industry had a negative effect on students' perceptions of employment in the industry, and as an unfortunate result, many hospitality and tourism graduates do not join the industry upon graduation. A study on turnover in Hong Kong hotels, found that most turnover occurs in the first few months of employment (Lam, Lo & Chan, 2002), suggesting that it is extremely important to deliver on the expectations on new employees in order for them to feel satisfied with their new jobs.

The results of some studies call into question whether a career in hospitality can offer the opportunities for training and development desired by Gen Y candidates. In the first place, hospitality employment is generally not being viewed as a valid career (Macaulay & Woods, 1989; Choy, 1995). Studies have shown that, typically, up to 64% of a hotel's employees are engaged in operational and unskilled positions, which signifies that promotional opportunities are limited relative to the amount of employees that may desire them (Riley, 1991, as cited in Cheng & Brown, 1998). An Australian study supports these statistics, finding that 70% of occupations in the tourism industry require only low-level skills, compared with 39% across all industries combined (Industry Commission, 1996). Finding ways to motivate Gen Y employees and constantly offer them new challenges and extra responsibility is therefore a major challenge to be addressed.

Training provided by hospitality enterprises is often wasted when employees leave to work in other industries, which is an obvious deterrent to investing more than the bare minimum in training. The industry is a large employer with high levels of turnover, so demand for training does not match the supply (Gee, 1997).

Standardisation of hospitality training courses within a structured vocational and education system has eluded most countries, so jobs are usually casual and tend to be filled by transient employees who are waiting for jobs to become available in other labour markets, or are studying for a career in another industry (Finegold et al., 2000). Although this approach to recruitment and training has traditionally kept costs low for the industry, its effectiveness in attracting, motivating and retaining Gen Y employees is highly questionable.

The hospitality industry is characterised by high mobility as it is relatively easy for workers to find a similar job with another establishment. This will suit Gen Y, but not necessarily to the benefit of individual operators, as they are likely to compare employers and employment conditions and seek out better opportunities (Streeter, 2007). Already, turnover in the industry is almost accepted as inevitable. The turnover culture identified in the UK and Australian hospitality industry by Deery (2002) found some rates as high as 300% per annum. In a series of studies, high turnover in the industry has been attributed to work-family conflicts, as a result of the poor working conditions and constant emotional labour from customer contact (Karatepe & Kilie, 2007; Karatepe & Baddar, 2006). While older generations may be more resigned to the detrimental effects on family life (Xiao & O'Neill, 2008), the negative impact on Gen Y's desired quality of life, and therefore their work-related attitudes, is likely to be more intense.

In a profile of housekeeping workers, Hunter Powell & Watson (2006) identified the autonomy of the worker as a key success factor and observed that staff were required to work with 'independence and initiative' (p. 302). This sounds encouraging from a Gen Y perspective, as there could be opportunities for early empowerment and responsibility in a housekeeping job. Unfortunately, the housekeeping example could be a somewhat unique one. This 'initiative' finding largely conflicts with the observation of some authors that management styles in hospitality organisations are, in the main, autocratic (Haynes & Fryer, 2000). It also contrasts with the findings of a review of skills training in the hospitality sector, where Baum (2002) commented on the contradiction between employers wanting to find employees who follow directions well, and then expecting them to display initiative when on the job. Gen Y may be motivated by the ability to demonstrate initiative, but may not be so motivated by the constant requirement to follow directions and do as the manager says, without question or input.

Given that hospitality employment is described as menial and low-skilled (Wood, 1997), with potential for work-family conflict (Karatepe & Kilie, 2007), employment strategies that concentrate on cost reduction and numerical flexibility (Knox & Wood, 2005), and a resulting management style that is generally autocratic with poor communication (Haynes & Fryer, 2000), the prevalent conditions in the industry appear to be at odds with the desired working environment of the new entrants to the labour pool. Despite being listed by hospitality managers around the globe as the most pressing concern,

current human resource practices in the hotel industry undervalue the employee and thereby engender low levels of commitment to the job and to the organisation (Maxwell & Quail, 2002). In the service industry that is hospitality, it is time to give serious consideration to the specific human resource strategies and practices needed to attract, recruit, train, retain and motivate Gen Y to deliver on the exceptional levels of service necessary for organisations to be competitive in a globalised market. To do this, it is first necessary to rigorously investigate the relationships between factors such as Gen Y's work-related values, attitudes and behaviours and the internal processes and strategies of hospitality organisations. To this end, the last section of this article introduces a framework to guide future research in this area.

Framing a Gen Y Research Agenda

So far this article has highlighted the acute impact the entry of Gen Y to the hospitality workforce is likely to have on the industry into the future. With demand increasing and labour supply dwindling, the emergent characteristics and expectations of the newest generation of workers have been thrown into stark relief. It would appear that prevalent conditions in the industry will be inadequate in providing the working environment necessary to inspire and motivate a Gen Y employee to excel at service delivery. The scant research that has been conducted to date is for the most part qualitative in nature, and consequently the results cannot be generalised. To address this gap in academic knowledge, we now propose a research framework (see Figure 1) that links the key themes and variables that have been identified and demonstrates how the relationships between the variables might be empirically tested. After an explanation and brief discussion about the proposed framework, we will highlight some of the key relationships we plan to initially test, by presenting a series of propositions based on our review of the literature.

The framework involves multiple variables that have the potential to interact with each other in a variety of ways. The basic premise of the model is that external influences will have an effect on Gen Y's work values, which will then influence Gen Y's work attitudes, and in turn, the behaviours that Gen Y engages in at work. Ultimately, the outcomes that the employing organisation achieves are affected by Gen Y's work behaviours. Interacting with Gen Y's work-related values and attitudes are the HRM strategies implemented by the organisation, which are influenced by internal parameters of the organisation, such as vision, mission, values, culture, and service orientation, amongst others. The organisational parameters and HRM strategies have an ability to attract potential Gen Y employees, if these are in alignment with Gen Y's work values. The dynamic interaction between Gen Y's work values and attitudes and the HRM strategies of the organisation will influence Gen Y's work behaviours with a resulting impact on organisational outcomes such as profitability, turnover, market share, customer retention, reputation as an employer and competitive advantage, to name a few.

The relationships outlined in this framework require rigorous academic testing. The framework is extensive, and as such, lends itself to a multitude of potential research endeavours and research methods. Qualitative research (e.g., focus groups, various types of interviews such as structured, unstructured or converging) could be used to identify the existence of specific Gen Y work values, and how these work values might align with various potential HRM strategies. A quantitative method (e.g., survey with statistical testing and analysis) could be used to investigate either individual or multiple HRM strategies in relation to Gen Y work attitudes, and then how this impacts on aspects of Gen Y's work behaviour. To take the testing of the framework further, organisational outcomes could be investigated in relation to the HRM strategies that have engendered various work-related behaviours. Longitudinal research would shed light on the stability of Gen Y work values over time. As a starting point, we will now outline a series of propositions that have become apparent as a result of the literature review. These propositions will guide our continuing research agenda, although they are not intended to be an exhaustive investigation of all the potential relationships depicted in the framework.

First, we are interested in to what extent the alleged values, attitudes and behaviours of Gen Y hold true. We might find that some of the characteristics identified in the literature may be, at least to some extent, rhetorical and self-fulfilling. One of the big unknowns is this question: How much of the idiosyncratic characteristics of Gen Y employees are in fact influenced or driven by what Gen Y employees hear in the press, in the literature, and from each other? Hence, do they really differ as much as the rhetoric suggests? To that extent, our first proposition is as follows.

Proposition 1: Many Gen Y descriptors are merely myths, stereotypes or transitory states. The limited academic research that has tested Gen Y work values and expectations has been relatively consistent in its finding that Gen Y is seeking a workplace where they feel involved (Gursoy et al., 2008; Szamosi, 2006) and where they feel cared for as an individual (Gursoy et al., 2008; Szamosi, 2006; Terjesen et al., 2007). These organisational attributes resonate with that of a family environment, something that has been found to be of importance to Gen Y (Families & Work Institute, 2002). Family members rely on each other and make commitments to each other that should not be easily broken — if Gen Y perceives this of their organisation they are likely to reciprocate. Conversely, if the Gen Y employee does not feel valued, involved and cared about, they are unlikely to feel any commitment to the organization. With this in mind, we offer a second proposition.

Proposition 2: Gen Y employees' organisational commitment will be directly related to the level of commitment they perceive the organisation has in them personally. School-leavers and job seekers nowadays have relatively abundant choices in terms of job selection and career direction. Within the hospitality

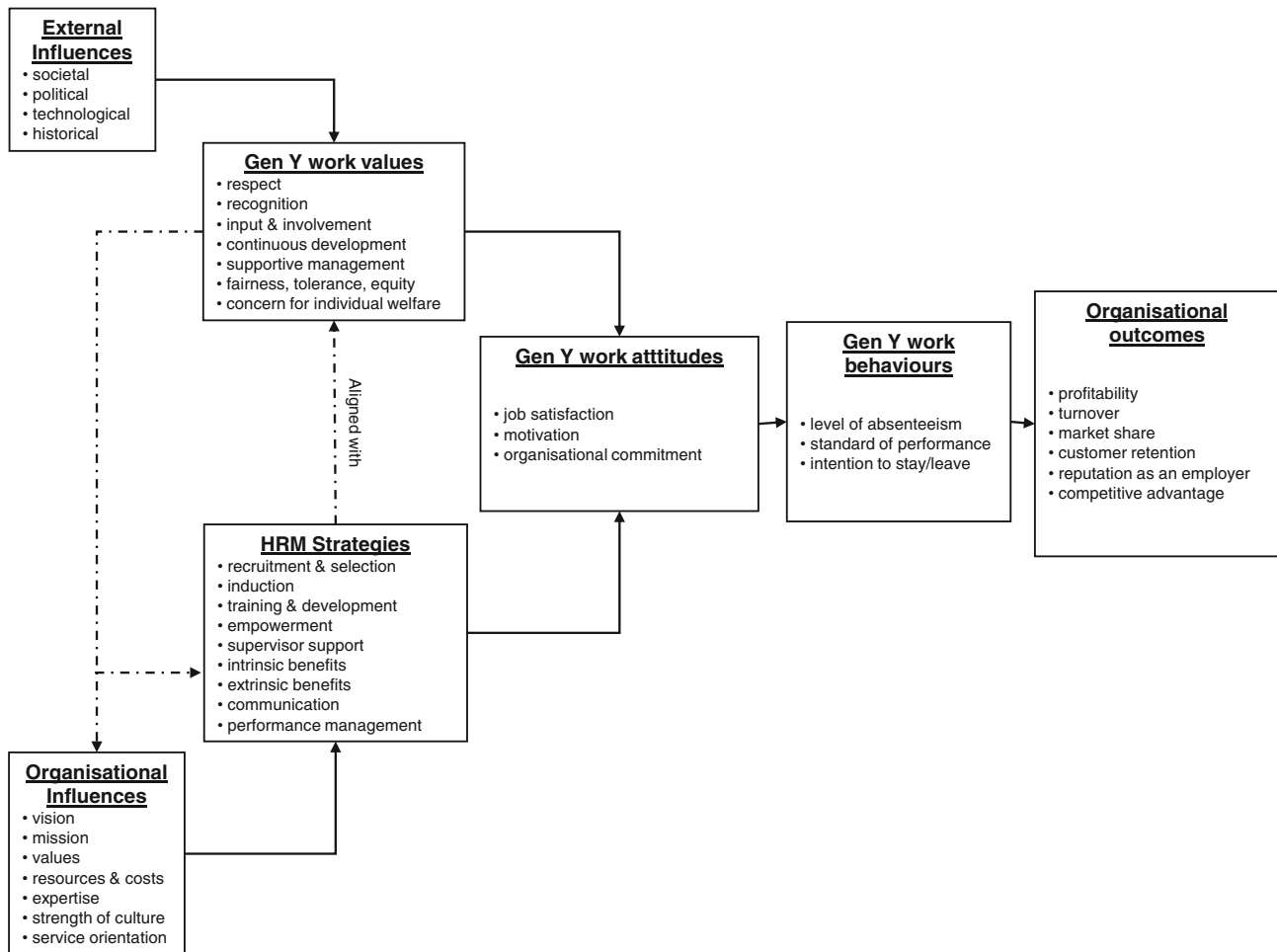


Figure 1

A Gen Y research framework.

industry alone there are ample opportunities for job mobility. Gen Y has grown up in relative affluence, connected to the world through technology, with no regard for times of high unemployment and as yet, no mortgage and family responsibilities. Maslow (1970) indicated a hierarchy of needs, from physiological needs, through safety, social, self-esteem to self-actualisation needs. It could be contended that, for the time being, Gen Y has largely fulfilled all their lower level needs and are seeking self-actualisation. As committed as a Gen Y employee might be to an organisation, its vision, mission and values, opportunities that provide greater self-actualisation elsewhere could well attract Gen Y regardless of organisational commitment. From this we posit the third proposition.

Proposition 3: For Gen Y, organisational commitment and retention will have a less significant relationship in comparison to previous generational groups. Research into Gen Y's preferred organisational attributes found that the ten most desired attributes were intrinsic benefits of working for the organization, rather than extrinsic benefits — a high starting salary ranked only at 16th (Terjesen et al., 2007). Building on the previous

notion of self-actualisation, it would stand to reason that Gen Y will derive more satisfaction from job attributes and organisational environments that challenge them to improve themselves. The results of studies that have found Gen Y are looking for fun, involvement as well as training and development (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Gursoy et al., 2008; Szamosi, 2006; Terjesen et al., 2007) lend further support to this notion. This reasoning guides our fourth proposition.

Proposition 4: Gen Y's job satisfaction will be derived from intrinsic factors, where the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility for a variety of work tasks and meaningful projects with proper support, training and development opportunities will be of high importance. The expectations of Gen Y with regard to training, development, involvement and empowerment require a certain degree of skilled supervision on the part of Gen Y's managers. Research in the hospitality industry by Karatepe et al. (2007) found that perceived supervisor support is related to employee job satisfaction. It is argued that the nurturing and supportive environments in which Gen Y have been raised

will predispose them to performing best in similar environments at work (Hill, 2002). Unfortunately, increasing demands on return on investment have largely signified using fewer employees to do more work and the resulting demands on a manager's time make staff supervision a complicated task (Tulgan, 2004). With these ideas in mind, we propose a fifth proposition.

Proposition 5: Gen Y's perception of supervisor support will directly influence their job satisfaction.

There are characteristics of hospitality employment that will be of appeal to many of the Gen Y cohort. Opportunities for work variety and career diversity abound, and the ability to earn money while travelling will hold perennial appeal. Looking deeper, the global hospitality industry is characterised by small networks that create lasting ties across time and distance (Batey & Woodbridge, 2007). The social connections and opportunities that hospitality employment can provide is an area that could be of key appeal to Gen Y, who see electronic collaboration as a matter of course (Gursoy et al., 2008). Social software on the Internet is changing the way hotel companies engage their customers (Dwivedi et al., 2007), so it stands to reason that similar practices might be engaged to communicate with potential and incumbent Gen Y employees. With this in mind, we present our final proposition.

Proposition 6: Hospitality organisations can improve their appeal to potential Gen Y employees and communicate better with existing employees by harnessing Gen Y's innate habit of social networking.

Driven by the research framework and subsequent propositions, we have mapped a research program, which will use a number of data collection and analysis approaches. At the time of writing this paper a series of focus groups is underway, aiming to assess similarities and differences in perceptions across Gen Y employees, non-Gen Y employees and hospitality employers, with the aim of identifying common themes and distinctions between Gen Y and non-Gen Y employees. From this exploratory phase, we then plan a more quantitative approach, using the information gleaned from focus groups to guide the creation of a survey instrument that will be distributed across large groups of hospitality employees from all generations in a range of industry sectors in order to gauge attitudes and opinions along a range of relevant dimensions related to the above six propositions. Statistical analysis of the data collected will allow us to further investigate the above six propositions. Insight gained from this research program will be used to inform appropriate human resource strategies that are aligned with Gen Y work values.

We acknowledge that this article represents merely a starting point — but one which is necessary during the early stages of such a research endeavour. We suggest that the proposed research, and other research that may result from the introduction of our framework, will provide great benefit to industry, as more practical and informed information and advice would be welcomed and presumably useful in managing hospitality businesses that are so reliant on young (read Gen Y) employees. In order to sustain a competitive advantage through service, the need

to understand the newest employees in the hospitality industry is glaringly obvious. This article is one attempt to encourage further research, knowledge, discourse and insights that will ultimately guide the service-oriented human resource strategies necessary for hospitality organisations of the future to be successful.

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