

Chapter 21

What Makes Them Stay and Go?

Best Practices for Engaging Gen Y Female Professionals in the Critical Arabian Gulf Petroleum Industry

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ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) petroleum industry harnesses resources to produce hydrocarbon products in a cost-effective manner. Besides developing new technologies, companies need technical professionals knowledgeable in materials science and engineering for ensuring integrity of critical production facilities and corrosion management. Companies also need non-technical operations personnel to support production and business activities. Their recruitment efforts transpire in a multi-generational labour market complicated by under-utilization of Generation/Gen Y females. This chapter presents findings from a recent study that investigated gender differences in life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y in UAE petroleum industry. In the study, 150 professionals were surveyed on their views of life priorities and work preferences. The findings in this chapter show that Conservation and Self-transcendence were most important life dimensions with intrinsic and extrinsic work motivators most valued. Changes in the importance of specific motivators, by each gender, in recruitment were found compared with retention. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations for recruitment and retention that would help personnel managers develop initiatives that cater to the specific requirements of each gender.

INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) petroleum industry harnesses all possible resources to produce hydrocarbon products in a cost-effective manner and meet consumer expectations. In this endeavour, companies in the energy sector strive

to develop new exploration/production technologies and processes. Besides technological advancements, companies need technical professionals knowledgeable in materials science and engineering for ensuring the integrity of critical production facilities and corrosion management that ultimately impact operating costs and busi-

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ness competitiveness. Non-technical operations personnel are also essential to support production of valuable petrochemical products and other business activities. However, companies face the challenge of having to secure the most talented professionals in a highly competitive labour market resulting from the big crew change phenomenon which refers to the retirement of the older workers and the entry of the younger Generation (Gen) Y (born 1980-1999) into the country's workforce.

The UAE labour force, particularly in the petroleum industry, is male dominated but corporations have recently awakened to the potential of an untapped human capital source – young women professionals. However, the successful encouragement of female participation in the workforce requires energy companies to understand what motivates them in their spheres of life and work, so as to re-orientate existing corporate policies towards the needs of women professionals. Yet, there is a scarcity of research on Gen Y in the UAE or studies that examined career issues vital to female Gen Y professionals in the important oil-rich Arabian Gulf region. This chapter reported a recent project that investigated gender differences in the life priorities and work preferences of Gen Y professionals in the UAE petroleum industry. The findings highlighted the personal career concerns of female engineering and administrative professionals that are important for personnel managers to understand when developing recruitment and retention policies that would attract the young workforce to the critical energy industry and help sustain the nation's economic growth.

BACKGROUND

Generations and Characteristic Traits

The *generation* construct was originally introduced by Karl Mannheim (1952) for analyzing social stratification in sociology. Eyerman and

Turner (1998) defined generation as “a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time” (p.93). In other words, each cohort is bound not only by birth dates but also by shared experiences, which include critical social, historical or life events, common icons (such as people, places, or things) of that period in time, that shape the generation's values, attitudes, and behavior (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Morton, 2002). Subsequent research on generations adopted the key aspects in the construct such as cohort (group), time (birth years), and collective memory (life experiences). The study reported in this chapter utilizes the definition of *generation* as a cohort of individuals grouped by its age, and shares the historical and social experiences, behavior and beliefs that are common to that time (Kupperschmidt, 2001).

A generation is more than a collection of individuals who belong to the same age range. “Each generation's attitudes and values are different from those of previous generations ... they are markedly influenced by their generation's times” (Kupperschmidt, 1998, p.36). For instance, in the United States of America (US), the Baby Boomers' early experiences of political and social turmoil (the Vietnam War, Watergate, the civil rights movement) shaped their later workplace attitudes as being independent thinkers with a healthy disrespect for authority (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). In contrast, the US Gen X's experiences of economic recessions and widespread job layoffs in the 1990s resulted in an attitude of skepticism towards lifetime employment.

The Gen Y's formative years (in mid-1990s) were marked by economic prosperity (a booming US stock market, low unemployment rates), technological advances (spectacular growth of the IT industry, development of the Internet, new online communication and social networking technologies); violence on personal and national

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