

APC FORUM: DRIVING COMPETITIVE STRATEGY THROUGH THOUGHT LEADERSHIP¹

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CIOS LEARN ABOUT GENERATION Y

Most Advanced Practices Council (APC) members, older than their Generation X staff, now want to understand their Generation Y staff, especially those born in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. These employees bring expectations and behaviors to work that can change organizations in very significant ways. Having grown up with the Internet, mobile devices, texting instead of dialing, Google and Facebook, they are incredibly sophisticated technologically. Do they have significantly different expectations for the use of the latest technology at work? They are also known as the “Trophy Generation,” a term that reflects the trend in competitive sports, as well as many other aspects of life, where mere participation is frequently enough for a reward. Do Trophy Generation employees have too high expectations from the workplace? Studies predict that Generation Y will switch jobs frequently, holding far more than Generation X due to their great expectations. What are the implications of frequent job switching for organizational investments in their skills at work?

APC members were eager to explore how best to engage, motivate and leverage the talents and expectations of their Generation Y IT staff as well as to meet the needs and expectations of Generation Y employees throughout their firms. Capitalizing on the Atlanta meeting location, Rick Watson, APC’s research director and professor at the University of Georgia’s Terry College of Business, invited several current undergraduate students and one recent graduate to participate in a panel so that APC members could better understand their mindsets.

The panelists were quite consistent in the factors that motivate them to accept a job offer and stay at the job. A good work environment, consisting of a welcoming culture, face-to-face community, the opportunity to do interesting work and gain meaningful and diverse experience, training programs, mentorship programs, ability to get feedback, and work/life balance were their key motivators. They didn’t seem to care how many hours they were expected to work as long as they weren’t expected to work at home. The ability to separate the different parts of their lives was paramount. Many did not want to follow their parents’ example of working long hours with no separation between work and home lives. They were not eager to travel extensively because it would interfere with building relationships in their workplace. Interestingly, salary was never mentioned.

All the students were either employed (the graduate) or had had internship experiences in organizations. They described the challenges they faced as new employees or interns adjusting to their workplaces and expressed appreciation for the mentors and peers who helped them in the transition. Co-workers and managers who demonstrated trust, were available to answer questions, and cared about their well-being were greatly appreciated.

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¹ The Advanced Practices Council (APC) is an exclusive Society for Information Management forum for senior IT executives who value directing and applying pragmatic research, exploring emerging IT issues in depth, and learning different, global perspectives with colleagues in other industries. Madeline Weiss is the APC Director and Richard Watson is the APC Research Director. This article was prepared with the assistance of Heather Smith, APC Research Associate.

APC members wondered whether organizational technology standardization would be viewed as a constraint to these Generation Y technology natives. It didn't seem to be. Although they want a voice in determining standards, they accept that there will be standards and recognize the risks of not following them. Panelists accepted that they would have separate cell phones and laptops for home (their choice of technology) and work (the organization's choice). In fact, panelists liked the idea of keeping their personal information and business separate and therefore private. Carrying separate devices was a disadvantage, but not a serious one. And switching back and forth between PCs and Macs was not at all a concern.

Some of the conclusions from the very engaging dialogue with Generation Y representatives were:

- Challenge your Generation Y staff. They want to learn from multiple diverse assignments under managers who show that they care and give feedback often. They're looking for growth, development, and a career path.
- Foster their peer relationship-building through teamwork and informal events. Arrange work spaces that facilitate interactions with peers.
- Expect them to work long hours on meaningful and challenging work, but also respect their desire to have separate home lives.
- Ask for their input. They expect to contribute their ideas and suggestions for improvements.