Generation Y & the Zap'ers

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Generation Y denote people born between 1980 and 1995 – i.e. people in 2012 between the ages 17 through 32. According to assistant professor at Ramapo College of New Jersey, Kathryn Yeaton, this generation is characterized by being more focused on moral issues, they value cooperation and networks, they are more focused on education, they have higher self-esteem and are more confident, and they are better at multitasking than any previous generation. A common characteristic is that approximately one third of them has grown up in single parent families and throughout their childhood and adolescence they have been have exposed to and utilized the computer, smart phones, tablets, the internet, social media etc. According to Yeaton this generation is also more focused on performance, but simultaneously also less loyal toward the organization they are working for.

The Not Quite So Loyal Generation

Whether this description of generation Y tells the whole story is debatable. There are a lot of individual differences, and everyone who has been or is recruiting and managing generation Y all have their own perceptions and experiences which cannot be separated from their own sets of values and approaches to life. My statistics from our new recruiting and pre-selection concept – Garuda JobMatchProfile – shows us that during a 10 years career run a large proportion of generation y employees will stay with the same company for no more than 2 years. Yeaton's statement that they constitute a less loyal generation is thus corroborated. If they dislike or find their job assignments to be tedious, not contributing to personal development, or lacking in meaning (to themselves) they will simply turn it down and go somewhere else. Perhaps this attitude will change for the younger part of generation Y though. For the last 3-4 years they have found themselves in a labor market under much harder duress with a lot less open positions to choose from, and it is quite easy to imagine that the younger part of the generation, whom entered the work force from 2005 onwards, is different from the older part joining in the late 90'ies.

The Zap'ers

Those who joined the workforce late and in the middle of the previous decade, I call the zap'ers. But is this division of generation Y into to two groups, which is based in my personal experience, correct? And if it is, which consequences would this have for the optimum way of managing and leading the Z-group? Are they to be handled and motivated in a different way than earlier generations?

Y & Z – 2 different generations

In order to get closer to a valid answer to this question I have reviewed the personality profiles of the younger generations, which have been conducted by Garuda and the many companies that use our analysis and tools for developmental or recruitment purposes. I chose everybody aged 30 years and less from 1995 to 2000 and compared their profiles with all of those who were the same age from 2008 to 2012. For the current purposes I shall name them generation Y & Z respectively, and each group is represented by 2500 persons. The main differences in group constitution are a slight majority of males in the Y-group and a higher level of education on average in the Z-group.

The result of this comparison show that the Z-group to a larger extend asks for more well-defined rules and demarcations of their job and tasks and the same time finds that "it is important to attend to and control all details" than the Y-group (27% of the Y's against 45% of the Z's agree to this statement). Whereas 74% of the Y's agree that they "want considerable influence on decisions", the share of the Z-group has fallen to 52%. Concerning self-confidence we find that 64% of those between 20 and 30 years of age in the late nineties agree to the statement "I do not lose confidence due to other people's criticism". Of those who were/are between 20 and 30 years of age between 2008 and 2012 the portion has dropped to 41%. Add to those numbers that 31% of the Y's agrees to the statement "I do not like situations where other people tell me what to do" – and this numbers has dropped to 12% for the Z-group. Finally, 61% of the Y-group disagree with the statement "I easily get nervous if others criticize me" while the number for the Z-group has dropped to 47%.

The individual statements represent and are part of determining a group's or a person's score on different personality characteristics and traits. The statements mentioned above reflect certain personality traits and a statistical analysis shows a non-coincidental difference between the scores of the two groups. The Z-group – or the Zap'ers – has higher scores on the need for structure and order, higher scores on the need for details, lower scores on the need for influence, and lower scores on self-confidence, need for liberties and mental toughness.

Optimum style of leadership for the Z-generation

If you appraise the Z-group's average profile as if it was the profile of a specific individual (e.g. the profile of an employee), and if you from this appraisal should infer something about appropriate and optimum style of leadership, the answer would be as follows:

Make sure there is a clear understanding and agreement on what needs to be done, and within which confines and rules the tasks need to be solved – and to what extent are they allowed to take initiatives on their own. You will need to accept that there might time spent on details, which are not particularly important to the solution of the task at first. An example of such excessive detailing could be that the Zap'er seeks out and collects far more information on the subject than is needed, and therefore time and resources are spend on investigating things that are unimportant per-

taining the solution of the task but are interesting to the individual itself.

You will have to pay attention to the fact that self-confidence and robustness of personality might not be as deeply rooted as it may seem on a cursory look. You will need to substitute criticism (even the kind you see as being constructive and positive) with dialogue – try to get behind the veil and try to understand how seemingly contrary reactions might curtains covering insecurity. Generation Z should be led in a kind manner within given, well-defined, and accepted boundaries. The Z generation demands great liberties but at the same time it is asking for gentle guidance in the right direction.

Be careful. They are more fragile than they let on.

Appendix

A comparison of answering patterns and scores on the personality traits that differentiate the two groups the most.

	95-20	08-12	Diff.
Statements on Rules & Order. Score Y: 1,6. Z: 3,2. Diff. +1,6	Agree	Agree	
Prefer flexibility to rigid systems and rules	60,85	46,96	13,89
Think that rigid systems are inhibiting and restricting initiative	35,12	22,82	13,30
Statements on Details. Score Y: 3,9. Z: 5,4 = Diff. +1,5			
Thinks that is is important to have every detail under control	27,41	44,74	17,33
Have no problem passing on assignments heavy on details to others	32,53	18,67	13,86
Statements on Influence. Score Y: 5,6. Z: 3,8 = Diff. -1,8			
Wants significant influence on decisions	74,08	51,94	22,14
Prefer to be told very clearly what to do	19,35	38,45	19,10
Wants to influence others in the decision making process	54,64	37,48	17,16
Statements on Self-confidence. Score Y: 9,3. Z: 7,0 = Diff. -2,3			
Do not lose confidence because other people are criticizing me	64,20	41,29	22,91
Statements on the Need for Freedom. Score Y: 3,0. Z: 1,5 = Diff. -1,5			
Do not like situations where others are telling me what to do	31,26	12,38	18,88
Think that independence and self-reliance are important to me	65,38	55,19	10,19
Statements on Mental Toughness. Score Y: 3,8. Z 1,6 = Diff. -2,2			
Try as much as possible to avoid people who has been unpleasant towards me	22,52	45,30	22,78
	Disagree	Disagree	
Get nervous easily when others criticize me	60,72	46,96	13,76
Do not get upset or depressed if others criticize me	19,26	32,85	13,59