

GenY workers want their cake and to eat it too

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Managing the young generation of workers - sometimes called GenY, GenMe, or Millennials - is a hot topic, covered in the popular press and discussed in numerous books and seminars. However, most of these discussions are based on perceptions and anecdote rather than hard data, partially because no one had established that GenY differed in work values from previous generations.

Until now. Using a large nationally [representative sample](#) of young people surveyed since 1976, an article in the *Journal of Management* (published by SAGE) compared the work values of GenY (born in the late 1980s) to those of GenX (born in the 1970s) and Boomers (born in the 1950s) at the same age. This unique design using data from the past and present allowed the authors to identify differences due to generation and not to age or career stage.

Striking differences emerged for valuing leisure. GenY was much more likely than previous generations to say they wanted a job with an easy pace and lots of vacation time, and less likely to want to work overtime. They also saw work as less central to their lives and were more likely to agree that "work is just making a living." At the same time, they placed more importance on salary and status. In other words, the younger generation wants to have their cake (big salaries) and eat it too (work-life balance).

Press accounts often mention that GenY wants to help others and have a positive impact on society, but the study found no differences in

preferences for jobs that helped others or were worthwhile to society - GenX'ers and Boomers embraced such values just as much when they were young. GenY supposedly want interesting and fulfilling jobs where they can make friends, but analyses showed that GenY actually values these things less than previous generations.

These findings have practical implications for recruiting and retaining the young generation. Programs allowing employees to volunteer to help others during work hours or that emphasize social good will be no more successful now than in the past.

"Company programs focusing on work-life balance, relaxation, and leisure, however, fit GenY's values well," writes lead author Jean M. Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University and author of the book [Generation Me](#). "With more and more GenY'ers entering the workplace, these findings provide implications for the recruitment and management of the emerging workforce."

More information: The JOM article "Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing" is available for free for a limited time at jom.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/0149206309352246v1

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