

# Analyzing Generation Y Workforce Motivation

*Ian N. Barford ■ Patrick T. Hester*



# Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved*  
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>MAR 2011</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Analyzing Generation Y Workforce Motivation</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
		5b. GRANT NUMBER	
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
		5e. TASK NUMBER	
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Defense Acquisition University, Defense AT&amp;L, 9820 Belvoir Road, Fort Belvoir, VA, 22060-5565</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>			
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES			
14. ABSTRACT			
15. SUBJECT TERMS			
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>	<b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>
			18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>5</b>
			19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON



R

esearchers, supervisors, and human resource professionals have long struggled with perfecting management strategies for employees, made more difficult by the presence of distinct personalities of the three most prevalent working generations, namely the Baby Boomers (born between the years 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979), and Generation Y (born between 1980 and 2000).

# A heightened government retirement of the Baby Boomers is almost certain in the next several years, which will leave employment gaps that Generation X and Y must fill. Retention of the newly hired Generation Y workforce—those born between 1980 and 2000—is critical to the preservation and existence of the civilian government workforce.

A heightened government retirement of the Baby Boomers is almost certain in the next several years, which will leave employment gaps that Generation X and Y must fill. Today, 60 percent of all federal employees (all of whom are Baby Boomers) are eligible to retire, and the Office of Personnel Management expects about 40 percent to do so in the next 5–8 years. Retention of the newly hired Generation Y workforce is critical to the preservation and existence of the civilian government workforce.

The authors surveyed 18 government workers, comprising six each of Generation Y, Generation X, and the Baby Boomers' Generation, regarding five motivational factors according to importance and level of happiness. The survey was designed to provide insight on the overall average job satisfaction of each respondent (how happy each respondent is with their job compared to the average of all respondents); the overall average job satisfaction of each generation (how happy each generation is with their jobs compared to the average of all generations); normalized average importance for each generation (how each generation values the five motivational factors converted to a single scale); average level of happiness for each generation (how each generation is satisfied with their current jobs based on the five motivational factors); the overall average utility (how all generations combined express value and satisfaction for each of the five motivational factors); and average attribute utility for each generation (how each generation expresses value and satisfaction for each of the five motivational factors). The research questions that this study seeks to answer follow.

## Research Questions

Using the previous research on generational life events coupled with work values and attitudes, the following three research questions were generated for analysis in this study:

- Does Generation Y assign different levels of importance to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers?
- Does Generation Y assign different levels of happiness to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers; and which of these factors is ranked the highest across generations?

- Does Generation Y's average attribute utility of the five motivational factors differ from Generation X and Baby Boomers?

## Method

### Participants

Government workers, six in each of the three age groups categorized by Generation X, Generation Y, and Baby Boomers, who work at Naval Sea Systems Command, Virginia Beach Detachment, were selected at random by the detachment security manager. All 18 respondents were given an unsealed envelope that included a cover letter and an identical three-page survey. All participants were asked to voluntarily complete the anonymous survey and return the envelope sealed to ensure confidentiality. Twelve respondents were male (67 percent), and six were female (33 percent).

The mean age of the survey respondents was 36.56 (standard deviation = 11.08). Deeper examination into respondent demographics shows 13 people (72 percent) had completed either a bachelor's or master's degree.

### Materials and Procedure

The motivational factor survey was arranged with six demographic questions, one motivational factors' ranking question, and one level of happiness question for a total of eight questions. The demographic set (questions 1–6) consisted of: age, gender, job classification (either management or nonmanagement), occupational category (government-designated categories based on the type of job a person has), highest education completed, and pay plan.

The motivational factors ranking (question 7) presented the five motivational factors and asked the respondent to rank them according to importance. Each factor was given a bounded definition unique to working within a government context. Factor 1 (responsibilities) was defined as the value given to all responsibilities inside the office and while on government travel. Factor 2 (compensation) was defined as the value of the total government compensation package, which includes salary, pension, retirement plan, annual bonuses, cost of living increases, etc. Factor 3 (work environment) was defined as the value given to the job location, people work-

ing in the location, and physical work environment. Factor 4 (advancement potential) was defined as the value given to a career path clearly defined for advancement. Factor 5 (free time) was defined as the value given to the amount of free time away from work. Free time is allocated by the following means: compressed work schedule, accrued sick days, accrued annual days off, and the number of holidays given.

The level of happiness (question 8) consisted of each respondent ranking the level of happiness in their current position using each of the five motivational factors.

### **Motivational Factor Rankings**

Motivational factor rankings were determined by each respondent in their survey. Each respondent was given a maximum of 100 points to distribute among each of the five motivational factors. The more points the participant gave to a particular factor, the more they valued that factor.

### **Level of Happiness Rankings**

Level of happiness rankings were determined by each respondent in their survey. Each respondent was asked to rank the five motivational factors based on their current position. The format chosen was a 10-point Likert scale (1 = being extremely dissatisfied and 10 = being extremely satisfied).

### **Procedure**

The detachment's security manager handed each respondent an open envelope, with a cover letter and an identical survey. Participants were notified in writing that their completion of the survey indicated their consent to participate in this study. Respondents were told if they had any questions regarding the survey to direct them to the security manager. The surveys were not traceable to the survey respondent, and the deadline to finish was 1 week. Once completed, the surveys were to be placed back in the envelope, sealed, and returned to the detachment security manager. The security manager collected all 18 surveys, and they were returned to the primary author.

### **Results**

Analysis focused on respondents' values for importance and level of happiness for each of the five motivational factors. For initial data reduction and ease of calculation, respondents' ages were grouped together by their generation, as defined earlier in this article.

**Question No. 1.** *Does Generation Y assign different levels of importance to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers?*

To determine whether Generation Y assigns different levels of importance, the data were analyzed using a two-tailed hypothesis test at a 0.10 significance level. Generation Y results were compared to Generation X, and then Baby Boomers for a total of 10 tests. Of those 10, five were statistically significant and therefore reported. Generation Y views responsibilities as much less important than Generation X and Baby Boom-

ers and least important of all the motivational factors. These results are statistically significant. Generation Y ranked compensation as less important than did Generation X and Baby Boomers. This was expected, but only the comparison between Generation Y and Baby Boomers is statistically significant. Generation Y ranked advancement potential higher than Generation X and Baby Boomers. Again, the results between Generation Y and Baby Boomers are statistically significant. Generation Y ranked free time higher than Generation X and Baby Boomers. This time the results between Generation Y and X are statistically significant.

**Question No. 2.** *Does Generation Y assign different levels of happiness to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers, and which of these factors is ranked the highest across generations?*

The data were analyzed using a two-tailed hypothesis test at a 0.10 significance level. Generation Y results were compared to Generation X, and then Baby Boomers for a total of 10 tests. Of those 10, two were statistically significant and therefore reported. Generation Y is satisfied with its current advancement potential in the government more than Generation X and Baby Boomers. However, only the results between Generation Y and X are statistically significant. These results show that Generation Y is very satisfied with its current advancement potential within the federal government. Generation Y is currently satisfied with its current free time more than Generation X and Baby Boomers. Again, the results between Generation Y and X are only statistically significant. These results show that Generation Y is very satisfied with its current free time within the federal government. Results of all three generations' motivational factors were averaged from the average attribute utility for each generation. Compensation was the highest, with advancement potential being the lowest motivational factor.

**Question No. 3.** *Does Generation Y's average attribute utility of the five motivational factors differ from Generation X and Baby Boomers?*

The data were analyzed using a two-tailed hypothesis test at a 0.10 significance level. Generation Y results were compared to Generation X, then Baby Boomers for a total of 10 tests. Of those 10, four were statistically significant and therefore only reported. Generation Y's average attribute utility for compensation was less than Baby Boomers, which was statistically significant, but slightly more than Generation X, which was not significant. Generation Y's average attribute utility for advancement potential was much higher than both Generation X and Baby Boomers. Both results were statistically significant. Generation Y's average attribute utility for free time was also higher for Generation X and Baby Boomers, although the comparison to Generation X was only statistically significant.

### **Discussion**

This analysis aimed to investigate if Generation Y assigns differing levels of workplace motivation and happiness than



**The government can be in the forefront of understanding and retaining the Generation Y workforce by conducting research, validating results based on proven mathematical techniques, and slowly changing the retention landscape with these results.**

Generation X and Baby Boomers in a federal government context. Three research questions were developed based on the literature review: (1) Does Generation Y assign different levels of importance to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers? (2) Does Generation Y assign different levels of happiness to the five motivational factors than Generation X and Baby Boomers? and (3) Does Generation Y's average attribute utility of the five motivational factors differ from Generation X and Baby Boomers?

The results of the first research question would be a tentative yes. Generation Y has a statistically significant difference in four of the five motivational factors pertaining to level of importance. This shows Generation Y does have varying levels of importance for four of the five motivational factors when compared with Generation X and Baby Boomers.

The low values Generation Y attributes to the responsibilities' motivational factor are of intense concern. One possible explanation may be that the government is not providing enough responsibilities to fully engage Generation Y. Another possible explanation may be that Generation Y is not happy with their current responsibilities, and this has impacted their responses to what motivates them.

Generation Y ranks compensation as the highest motivational factor—but not by much—over the other factors. The importance ranks much less for Baby Boomers, and this response is expected. The reason is the Baby Boomers are nearing retirement age and are trying to reach their maximum earning potential, which dictates the amount they will receive from their pension. Overall, Generation Y places a much higher importance on advancement potential and free time than the other generations.

The answer to Question No. 2 is a cautious yes. Even though two of the 10 possible combinations are statistically significant (advancement potential and free time), they do provide

some insight. Additionally, the two highest importance levels over the other generations are advancement potential and free time, which corresponds with the level of happiness calculations. Not only does Generation Y regard advancement potential and free time as very important, but they are content with their levels of both motivational factors.

The results of Question No. 3 are also a tentative yes. Advancement potential and free time are emerging as the most diverse attributes compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. Based on the literature, Generation Y proactively plans its professional development and expects to achieve it within the federal government. The majority of Generation Y research is done on the work/life balance factor. Research points to members of this new generation aspiring to attain this balance in their everyday lives. The results presented here promote this same idea.

### Conclusions

Questions may be raised about the sample size, concise question set, and significance level used. A much larger sample size and more extensive survey are needed to gain an in-depth understanding of this generation. The authors plan to expand the participant pool in the near future to include a statistically significant number of respondents. The expectation is that the survey and results (although limited due to small sample size) described in this article, coupled with the literature review, will begin to unveil what Generation Y expects from a long and prosperous career in federal civilian service. This can help management in aligning corporate incentives to motivate Generation Y workers not only by compensation, but by the other motivational factors.

The federal government's workforce climate is shifting, and conducting internal studies allows management to be more aware and able to adapt to emerging situations. This study provides the initial basis for conducting more detailed studies specific to the federal government. The government can be in the forefront of understanding and retaining Generation Y by conducting research, validating results based on proven mathematical techniques, and slowly changing the retention landscape with these results. By motivating Generation Y using the outlined factors, governmental managers can tailor retention plans specific to this generation to ensure a sustainable workforce for the future.

---

**Barford** is an electrical engineer for Naval Sea Systems Command in Virginia Beach, Va. He is pursuing a Ph.D. in Engineering Management at Old Dominion University and is Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act-certified in systems planning, research, development, and engineering (Level III); test and evaluation (Level III); and program management (Level I). **Hester** is an assistant professor of engineering management and systems engineering at Old Dominion University. He received a Ph.D. in Risk and Reliability Engineering from Vanderbilt University, was a graduate student researcher in the Security Systems Analysis Department at Sandia National Laboratories, and a project engineer at National Steel and Shipbuilding Company. The authors welcome questions and comments. Contact them at [ian.barford@navy.mil](mailto:ian.barford@navy.mil) or [ptheester@odu.edu](mailto:ptheester@odu.edu).