

## Malaysian Gen Y's Work Behaviours and Attitudes towards Job Retention and Career Advancement

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### ABSTRACT

Gen Y behaviours in the workplace have been much written about based on observations and studies in Western settings but little is known about Gen Y in Asian work contexts, particularly in the context of employee retention and turnover. This study examined Malaysian polytechnic graduates' work behaviours and attitudes towards job retention and career advancement. Through a questionnaire survey of 195 polytechnic graduates, the study showed that the polytechnic graduates are a homogeneous group. There were no significant differences in the work behaviours and attitudes of female and male polytechnic graduates. No significant differences were found for ethnic groups. They frequently sought guidance and feedback on their work, needed project deadline extensions, worked in groups, and expected positive comments on their work performance. The results showed that monetary incentives is the main motivating factor for them to stay at their current job, work hard and not change jobs. A collegial workplace with a good supervisor and enjoyable work with flexible work hours play some role in employee retention where Gen Y is concerned. However, the prestige and convenient location of a company cannot retain them in their present or future job. A majority of them expected to be promoted within two years of service and every two to three years. The findings suggest that a fast-track promotion and an attractive salary are critical factors in the attempt to understand the connection between Gen Y's work behaviours and career advancement expectations in the context of employee retention and turnover.

#### Keywords:

Generation Y, work behaviour, attitudes,  
job retention, career advancement

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## 1. Introduction

With the entry of Gen Y into the workplace in the past one and a half decade, there is now a multi-generational workforce with Gen X and Baby Boomers managing or working alongside Gen Y. This paper uses the age categorisation as follows: Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964, aged 54-72), Gen X (born 1965-1979, aged 39-53), and Gen Y (born 1980-2000, aged 18-38) [1-4]. The generational

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cohorts are brought up differently, experience different major events in their lifetime, and bring with them different expectations and approaches to work which leads to conflicts in the workplace.

Changes in the society since the World War II have led to the emergence of new behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and values towards work. As an example, the different generational cohorts have different experiences of what it means to have a job. Baby Boomers usually stay in one job until their retirement. Baby Boomers have been said to work to live, Gen X lives to work, and Gen Y values a work-life balance with flexi-hours [6]. On work behaviours, the Baby Boomers and Gen X take work home whereas Gen Y stop work at five to have a social and family life. A work behaviour that is new to Gen Y is their need for constant and immediate feedback, compared to the Baby Boomers and Gen X who are used to functioning on their work to complete work assignments [6,7]. Gen Y is motivated by frequent informal feedback [8]. In fact, checkpoints are important to monitor work in progress to ensure project completion for Gen Y [9,11]. The value placed on organisational achievement is best seen by comparing the Baby Boomers and Gen Y. Baby Boomers compete to rise through the ranks and receive recognition for their achievement but Gen Y does not compete with the same enthusiasm because they grew up “in an environment where everyone won a medal for participation, and thus everyone was a winner” [10]. Gen Y values work that are interesting, offer them opportunities for learning and self-improvement, and has a clearly defined career path [9, 11]. They need to be recognised through awards, certificates for a job well done, or bonuses [6] but such recognition may not be forthcoming.

The unmet work aspirations of Gen Y have resulted in a high employee turnover [13]. As an example, a large proportion of young Malaysians quit their first job within a year, revealed in a recent survey involving more than 700 fresh graduates and employers [13]. Elsewhere Gen Y is also known to quit their jobs in the first two years in search of quicker growth opportunities and a better salary [15]. The high staff turnover affects the productivity of organisations and cost in training new employees. Researchers have suggested that managers alter their management style to deal with Gen Y employees such as spending more time to guide them and having open communication – in the hope that this would reduce employee turnover [12] – but empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy was not provided.

By far, Gen Y is still a little understood generation as far as their work behaviours and attitudes are concerned, particularly in their attitudes towards job retention and career advancement. What is known about Gen Y’s general work habits has been mainly from the mass media and academic publications produced in the western context, but few studies have been conducted on Gen Y in Asia [16,17]. It is only a conjecture that Gen Y in Malaysia is similar to Gen Y as described in the literature. The existing studies on Gen Y are mostly on consumer behaviour and marketing [18-20]. Therefore, it is important to study Gen Y’s career expectations so that organisational structure and policies can accommodate their work culture. The findings will also enable institutions of higher education to better prepare students for the workplace.

The study surveyed Malaysian Gen Y’s work behaviours and attitudes towards job retention and career advancement among polytechnic graduates. The rest of this paper outlines the method of the study, results, discussion, conclusion and implications for stakeholders.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Respondents**

The respondents of the study were 195 polytechnic graduates from Penang, Malaysia, namely, Politeknik Balik Pulau, Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Mu’adzam Shah and Politeknik Seberang Perai. The percentages of female and male respondents were balanced (53.8% female; 46.2% male). There

were more Malays among the respondents (78.0%) compared to other ethnic groups (5.6% Chinese; 15.6% Indian), somewhat reflective of the ethnic composition in Malaysia where the Malay is the majority group. The respondents were aged 22 to 32 years old, with 73.33% of the respondents being recent polytechnic graduates aged 22 and 23 years old and in their first year of work.

The respondents obtained their current jobs mostly through personal contact (44.62%) and job advertisements (50.77%). A small percentage of respondents secured the present jobs through career fairs (3.58%), walk-in interviews (0.51%) and one was working in his family business (0.51%). As most of the respondents graduated with Information Technology and Engineering diplomas, most of them were working as IT support executive and programmers, and assistant engineers. Some of them were from commerce diploma programmes (accountancy, business management, Islamic banking, logistics and supply chain management), and held jobs such as nannies, beauty advisors, teachers, and management trainees – some of which do not seem to be relevant to their qualifications.

## *2.2 Instrument*

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire on work behaviours and attitudes towards job retention and turnover. The first section of the questionnaire on work behaviours was adapted [15,16]. Their studies were on polytechnic students about to graduate and therefore the questions had the words “I expect ...” but for the present study, these words were not used because the study was on polytechnic graduates who were already working at the time of the study. Twelve questions were posed comprising six pairs of questions: one was worded to focus on the employer as the subject of the sentence (e.g., My employer gives me feedback on my work in progress) and the other was worded to focus on the respondent as the subject (e.g., I finish my work before asking my employer for feedback). The pairs of questions were designed to study a particular aspect of their work behaviours from two sides of a coin. Question 1 was matched with Question 12 and so on but the pairs of questions are placed together in the results section for ease of interpretation (Table 1).

The second section in the questionnaire was on attitudes towards job retention and turnover, considering that Gen Y is not known for job loyalty. Respondents were given a list of nine possible factors (Tables 2-3) and two questions were asked to find out the factors that retain them in their current job and motivate them to work hard. For the third question on factors that attract them to change their job, eight possible factors were provided (Table 4) and there were slight differences compared to the earlier two questions because job retention and turnover factors are different.

The third section of the questionnaire was on attitudes towards career advancement. The respondents were asked to write down the number of years in the entry level position before they move up their career, and how often they expect to get promoted. These two questions were designed to crosscheck their responses.

Demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity of the respondents were elicited in the questionnaire. The respondents were also asked to write down their current job at the time of the survey.

## *2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

The survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to the respondents when they attended their convocation at their respective polytechnics. Questionnaires were distributed to 227 polytechnic graduates at Politeknik Balik Pulau (60), Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Mu’adzam Shah (50), Politeknik Seberang Perai (107), and via email communication (10). The 10 who were contacted

via email were those who did not come for the convocation ceremony. Altogether 195 responded to the survey, giving a return rate of 86%. The questionnaire data were keyed in, and frequencies and percentages were computed.

For the analysis of the results on work behaviours, mean scores and standard deviations were computed from the respondents' responses (0 for never, 1 for sometimes, 2 for frequently, 3 for all the time). Further, to determine if there were gender differences in the work behaviours of the polytechnic graduates, the results were reverse coded for four items so that higher scores reflect work behaviours expected of Gen Y based on the literature. The four items were: I work at night and weekends to finish off projects to meet the deadline; I work on my own in my job; I finish my work before asking my employer for feedback; and I am scolded sometimes for badly done work. A total score for the 12 items on work behaviours was calculated. The data were further analysed by running two-tailed t-tests to determine if gender and ethnicity influenced work behaviours. For ethnicity, in the questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate whether they were Malay, Chinese, Indigenous or Indian but in the analysis they were grouped into Malay and non-Malay respondents because of the small number of the latter (43 or 22.05% of 195 respondents).

Next, for the three items on the respondents' attitudes towards job retention and turnover, the percentages of respondents selecting a particular factor as the most important and the second important factor their responses were used to rank the factors from one to nine (nine factors provided in the questionnaire), shown in Tables 2 to 4.

As for attitudes towards career advancement, means and cumulative percentages were calculated for the number of years in the entry level position before they expect to move up their career, and how often they expect to get promoted. After that, two-tailed t-tests were run to determine if gender and ethnicity influenced their attitudes towards career advancement. As the questionnaire item on expected frequency of promotion was given as a range of years (never, once a year, once in 2-3 years, once in 4-5 years, once in 6-7 years, once in 8-9 years, once in 10-15 years), these were recoded as numbers reflecting the average in the range of years (0, 1, 2.5, 4.5, 6.5, 8.5, 12.5 respectively) for the t-tests.

### 3. Results

This section presents the results on the polytechnic graduates' work behaviours and their expectations of career advancement.

#### 3.1 Polytechnic Graduates' Work Behaviours

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents' reports on six aspects of work behaviours. Generally very few respondents chose the "never" and "sometimes" options (score of 0 and 1 respectively) and a large proportion of respondents chose the "frequently" and "all the time" options (score of 2 and 3 respectively). The results showed that the employers guided the respondents in their job, gave them feedback and leeway in deadlines.

The results showed that the employers provided the respondents with constant guidance in their work (Item 1, mean of 2.19) but they reported some ability to work independently (Item 2, mean of 2.10). Their educational training gave them the foundational knowledge and skills for their job but work-specific skills had to be learnt on the job with their employers' guidance.

Further evidence of their employers' constant guidance can be seen in the responses to another four items. The respondents reported that their employers frequently gave them feedback on their work in progress (Item 9, mean of 2.23). In comparison, fewer of them waited until they completed

their work before seeking feedback (Item 10, mean of 2.05). The respondents were used to seeking immediate feedback on their work. In fact, this behaviour was encouraged by their employers who were generally not critical when providing the guidance. Most of the respondents felt that their employers frequently gave positive comments on their work (Item 11, mean of 2.41) and they were hardly scolded for badly done work (Item 12, mean of 1.27). This can be interpreted to mean that the respondents were doing things right but it can also mean that the employers knew that positive reinforcement worked better than negative reinforcement.

**Table 1**  
Frequencies and percentages of polytechnic graduates' work behaviours (N=195)

Items	Aspects of work behaviours	Never "0"	Sometimes "1"	Frequently "2"	All the time "3"	Mean score	SD
1.	My employer guides me to do my job.	8 (4.10%)	24 (12.31%)	86 (44.10%)	77 (39.49%)	2.19	0.806
2.	I used what I have learnt at polytechnic to do my job.	13 (6.67%)	34 (17.44%)	69 (35.38%)	79 (40.51%)	2.10	0.885
3.	My employer gives me more time if I cannot finish a project on time.	12 (6.16%)	42 (21.54%)	79 (40.51%)	62 (31.79%)	1.98	0.870
4.	I work at night and weekends to finish off projects to meet the deadline.	39 (20%)	53 (27.18%)	61 (31.28%)	42 (21.54%)	1.54	0.945
5.	My employer asks me to work in groups.	10 (5.13%)	34 (17.44%)	76 (38.97%)	75 (38.46%)	2.11	0.819
6.	I work on my own in my job.	17 (8.72%)	35 (17.95%)	70 (35.90%)	73 (37.43%)	2.02	0.715
7.	My employer asks me to lead my colleagues in my work.	20 (10.26%)	48 (24.62%)	75 (38.45%)	52 (26.67%)	1.82	1.002
8.	I am a team member in my job.	11 (5.64%)	26 (13.33%)	72 (36.93%)	86 (44.10%)	2.19	0.836
9.	My employer gives me feedback on my work in progress.	9 (4.62%)	21 (10.77%)	82 (42.05%)	83 (42.56%)	2.23	0.875
10.	I finish my work before asking my employer for feedback.	11 (5.64%)	30 (15.38%)	92 (47.19%)	62 (31.79%)	2.05	0.952
11.	My employer gives positive comments on my work.	4 (2.05%)	14 (7.18%)	75 (38.46%)	102 (52.31%)	2.41	1.041
12.	I am scolded sometimes for badly done work.	54 (27.69%)	58 (29.74%)	59 (30.26%)	24 (12.31%)	1.27	0.917

To prepare students for the work, they are often asked to work in groups to develop problem solving, leadership, communication and negotiation skills. The respondents reported that their employer frequently asked them to work in groups (Item 5, mean of 2.11), relatively more than individual work (Item 6, mean of 2.02). In the polytechnic, similar to what happens in colleges and universities, leadership skills are often stressed. In entry level positions, the respondents were more likely to work in groups led by senior colleagues. The respondents reported that they were frequently team members in their jobs (Item 8, mean of 2.19) but did not frequently lead their colleagues in their work (Item 7, mean of 1.82). This is to be expected as almost three-quarters of the respondents had only worked for six months, the longest being one year. In entry level positions, it is more likely for them to be team members rather than team leaders.

One aspect of working life which the respondents might not expect is the need to comply with deadlines. This pair of items is the only two where the mean scores are both below 2 ("frequently"). It is clear that the respondents did not go all out to meet work deadlines (Item 4, mean score of 1.54). A large proportion of them hardly worked at night and weekends to finish off projects to meet deadlines. They did not subscribe to the thinking that working hard means working long hours. In view of this, it is not surprising that the employers frequently extended deadlines if they could not finish a project on time (Item 3, mean of 1.98). Gen Y does not believe that they have to work long hours as their due as they value a work-personal life balance. This is in contrast to Gen X and the Baby Boomers who work overtime or sacrifice personal time to meet work deadlines. These differences in work habits lead to conflicts and lower productivity in the workplace.

Further analysis of the data was performed by running a two-tailed t-test to determine if gender and ethnicity influenced work behaviours. The t-test results showed that there were no significant differences in the total scores for work behaviours of female ( $M=19.276$ ,  $SD=3.121$ ) and male respondents ( $M=19.156$ ,  $SD=3.228$ );  $t(193)=0.793$ ,  $p>0.05$ . The critical value  $t$  for rejection of the null hypothesis is 1.646 at 95% confidence level at degrees of freedom of 193. Although the mean total score shows that the male polytechnic graduates reflected more of the Gen Y characteristics described in the literature than the female graduates, the differences were not significant. Similarly, the t-test results showed that there were no significant differences in the total scores for work behaviours of Malay ( $M=19.243$ ,  $SD=3.137$ ) and non-Malay respondents ( $M=19.140$ ,  $SD=3.289$ );  $t(193)=0.856$ ,  $p>0.05$ . Although the mean total score shows that the non-Malay polytechnic graduates reflected more of the Gen Y characteristics described in the literature than the Malay graduates, the differences were not significant. The results suggest that gender and ethnicity do not have an effect on the work behaviours of the polytechnic graduates. They are a homogeneous group in exhibiting typical Gen Y work behaviour.

### *3.2 Polytechnic Graduates' Attitudes towards Job Retention*

This section reports results on the respondents' attitudes towards job retention and turnover. The questionnaire provided a list of nine factors and the respondents were asked to select the most important and the second important factor that motivated them to stay at their current job and to work hard. They were also asked to indicate the factors that would motivate them to change their job. The factors were ranked from 1 to 9 based on the percentage of respondents who chose a particular factor as the most or second important factor, with 1 for the largest percentage and 9 for the smallest percentage.

Table 2 showed that the most important factor motivating the respondents to stay at their current job was the need to earn money (22.05%), followed by a good pay (15.38%), good supervisors (15.38%) and colleagues (11.79%) (Table 2). Apart from these factors, each of the other five factors



was chosen by less than 10% of the respondents. The monetary factor was stronger motivator than a collegial workplace. Company characteristics such as prestige and convenient location cannot retain the respondents at the current job (ranked 8 and 9 respectively).

**Table 2**

Frequencies, percentages and rank of factors motivating polytechnic graduates to stay at their current job (N=195)

What most motivates you to <b>stay</b> at your current job?	Most important factor		Second important factor	
	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank
Need to earn money	43 (22.05%)	1	21 (10.77%)	4
Good pay	30 (15.38%)	2	30 (15.38%)	3
Supervisor	30 (15.38%)	2	2 (1.03%)	9
Colleagues	23 (11.79%)	4	7 (3.59%)	8
Atmosphere	19 (9.74%)	5	17 (8.72%)	5
Flexible work hours	18 (9.24%)	6	32 (16.41%)	2
Enjoyable work	15 (7.69%)	7	64 (32.82%)	1
Prestige of company	10 (5.14%)	8	8 (4.10%)	7
Convenient location of company	7 (3.59%)	9	14 (7.18%)	6

These results were confirmed by the results on the second most important factor that motivated the respondents to stay at their current job. Table 2 shows that the monetary factor (need to earn money, a good pay) were ranked fourth and third in importance respectively. In comparison, a collegial workplace (supervisor and colleagues) had the lowest ranking (ranked 9 and 8 respectively). This is surprising because a collegial workplace had the second to fourth rank as the most important factor motivating the respondents to stay at their current job but it dropped to the lowest ranking as the second most important factor. A good supervisor is one who treats them as equals and with respect [21]. A good leader to Gen Y is also one who listens to them, and treats them with respect [5]. As a whole, the results point to monetary considerations as being of far greater consequence than a collegial workplace in reducing staff turnover where Gen Y employees are concerned.

Another interesting finding emerged from the respondents' choice of the second most important factor on job retention. Table 2 shows that enjoyable work (32.82%) and flexible work hours (16.41%) were very important to almost half of the respondents surveyed, ranked 1 and 2 respectively. The respondents need to enjoy the work and possibly find it meaningful, and they are not confined by rigid office hours in carrying out their responsibilities. These results support the value placed by Gen Y on work life balance. If they can enjoy the work, it becomes part of their personal endeavour instead of a task done for an organisation to earn a salary.

Putting the results on the most and second most important factors together, it can be concluded that staff turnover can be reduced with a good salary and a conducive work environment which includes collegial relationships, enjoyable work and flexible work hours. The Gen Y respondents need a good salary to pay for their basic necessities which may include accommodation, and transport and telecommunication costs, as well as maintain their lifestyle of eating out and trendy fashion.

Next, the results are described for factors motivating the respondents to work hard in their job. Table 3 shows that the need to earn money was the most important factor; they work hard out of necessity. If the salary is good, this was an additional motivating factor for them to be diligent in their work. A good pay was ranked fourth in importance by 12.31% of the respondents. The monetary factor is definitely a stronger factor than a collegial workplace (good supervisors and colleagues which were ranked second and third respectively). Taken together, the results suggest that the respondents would work hard if they were paid well and this is augmented by a collegial workplace.

Again, similar to the results on factors on job retention, company characteristics (prestige and convenient location) are of little importance in motivating the respondents to work hard.

**Table 3**

Frequencies, percentages and rank of factors motivating polytechnic graduates to work hard in their job (N=195)

What motivates you to <b>work hard</b> in your job?	Most important factor		2 <sup>nd</sup> important factor	
	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank
Need to earn money	52 (26.67%)	1	24 (12.31%)	4
Supervisor	34 (17.44%)	2	10 (5.13%)	8
Colleagues	25 (12.82%)	3	22 (11.28%)	5
Good pay	24 (12.31%)	4	28 (14.36%)	3
Enjoyable work	18 (9.22%)	5	49 (25.13%)	1
Atmosphere	17 (8.72%)	6	14 (7.18%)	6
Flexible work hours	12 (6.15%)	7	30 (15.38%)	2
Prestige of company	9 (4.62%)	8	11 (5.64%)	7
Convenient location of company	4 (2.05%)	9	7 (3.59%)	9

As for the second most important factor, enjoyable work (25.13%) topped the list, followed by flexible work hours (15.38%), a good pay (14.36%), the need to earn money (12.31%), and colleagues (11.28%). When it comes to the second most important factor, the nature of the work plays a more important role in motivating the respondents to work hard than a collegial workplace – similar to the results on the factors that would keep them at their current job. Enjoyable work for Gen Y can mean working together with colleagues in group projects and having the opportunity to try different work portfolios. The job rotation makes their work more enjoyable and enables them to develop skills for their career growth. A work structure with flexible work hours that allows work-life balance would also make the work enjoyable. For Gen Y, life is not all about work, and they find it restrictive to keep to strict office hours. Since most of the work nowadays is done on computers, they may sacrifice their personal time and continue working at home – if they feel that their work contributes to the organisation and they are recognised for it by their supervisors.

Next, results on the respondents' attitudes towards employee turnover are reported. Table 4 shows that the respondents would consider leaving their present job for a well-paying job (44.10%). These two topped the list of the most important factors they would consider to change to a new job. Since a good salary is already very important for them to stay at their current job and to work hard, it is not surprising that they would find a well-paying stable job somewhere else very attractive. The results on the second most important factor they would consider in changing a job give an indication of what an attractive job offer is the respondents. An attractive job is also one which has good benefits (rank 1), stability (rank 2), opportunities for career growth (rank 3) and flexible work hours (rank 4). The respondents would not change jobs because of the prestige and convenient location of the new company (the bottom two ranks in Table 4). These results suggest that the respondents may leave big established corporations with a good reputation to work for a small company which can offer them a well-paying stable job with good benefits, opportunities for career growth and flexible work hours. In fact, their work experience in the established company might be a good credential for them to seek more favourable jobs and advance in their career.



**Table 4**

Frequencies, percentages and rank of factors considered by polytechnic graduates when changing their job (N=195)

If you consider <b>changing your job</b> , which two are the most important to you?	Most important factor		2 <sup>nd</sup> important factor	
	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank	Number and percentage of respondents	Rank
1. Good pay	86 (44.10%)	1	12 (6.15%)	6
2. Stable job	31 (15.90%)	2	46 (23.59%)	2
3. Opportunities for career growth	14 (7.18%)	4	39 (20.00%)	3
4. Benefits	13 (6.67%)	5	47 (34.11%)	1
5. Flexible work hours	12 (6.15%)	6	21 (10.77%)	4
6. Convenient location of company	10 (5.13%)	8	13 (6.67%)	5
7. Meaningful work	18 (9.23%)	3	9 (4.62%)	7
8. Prestige of company	11 (5.64%)	7	7 (3.59%)	8

### 3.3 Polytechnic Graduates' Attitudes towards Career Advancement

This section describes the results on the respondents' attitudes towards career advancement. In the questionnaire, they were also asked how many years they expected to work before they were promoted, and how frequently they expected to be promoted. Table 5 shows that 70.26% of the respondents expected to be promoted within two years of working in an entry level position in their company. Almost all (98.47%) the polytechnic graduates expected to be promoted within five years of working in the company. The results indicate that the polytechnic graduates expected their work or contribution to the company to be recognised and acknowledged through either a salary raise or an upward move in the company. In fact, more than one third of them (36.92%) expected a promotion within one year of service in the company. Since they have these expectations, they are likely to change jobs if promotion prospects are slim. If their seniors in the company have little opportunities for career growth and are stagnant in the career, they may be on an active lookout for another job with a competitive salary and benefits.

**Table 5**

Number of respondents and number of years in entry level positions before promotion (N=195)

Number of years in entry level position	Number of years	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0.5	1	0.51	0.51
1	71	36.41	36.92
1.5	2	1.03	37.95
2	63	32.31	70.26
3	34	17.44	87.70
4	8	4.10	91.80
5	13	6.67	98.47
6	0	0	98.47
7	1	0.51	98.98
8	0	0	98.98
9	1	0.51	99.49
10	1	0.51	100.00

Further analysis of the data was performed by running a two-tailed t-test to determine if gender and ethnicity influenced their expectations on the number of years they would spend in entry level

positions before promotion. The t-test results showed that there were no significant differences in the number of years the female ( $M=2.057$ ,  $SD=1.405$ ) and male respondents ( $M=2.343$ ,  $SD=1.405$ ) expected to work in entry level positions before they were promoted;  $t(193)=0.162$ ,  $p>0.05$ . Another set of t-test results was run to find out the influence of ethnicity. The results showed that there were no significant differences in frequency of promotion expected by Malay ( $M=2.166$ ,  $SD=1.417$ ) and non-Malay respondents ( $M=2.267$ ,  $SD=1.391$ );  $t(193)=0.677$ ,  $p>0.05$ . Although the mean scores show that the female and Malay respondents expected promotions in a shorter period of time, the differences were not significant and the polytechnic graduates can be considered a homogeneous group in their expectations on the number of years in entry level positions before being promoted.

These results are confirmed by results on expectations on the frequency of promotion. Table 6 shows that 88.20% of 195 respondents expected a promotion within two to three years. In fact, 36.41% expected a promotion once per year. Similar t-test results were obtained on the absence of significant differences between the gender and ethnic groups on the number of years to their next promotion. The t-test results showed that there were no significant differences between the female respondents ( $M=2.033$ ,  $SD=1.405$ ) and the male respondents ( $M=2.161$ ,  $SD=1.284$ ) in their expectations on the number of years before their next promotion;  $t(193)=0.46$ ,  $p>0.05$ . On the influence of ethnicity, the t-test results showed that there were no significant differences in frequency of promotion expected by Malay ( $M=2.079$ ,  $SD=1.167$ ) and non-Malay respondents ( $M=2.140$ ,  $SD=1.300$ );  $t(193)=0.786$ ,  $p>0.05$ . Although the mean scores show that the female and Malay respondents expected to wait a shorter time for their next promotion, the differences were not significant.

**Table 6**  
Frequency of promotion expected by polytechnic graduates (N=195)

Expectation to be promoted	Number	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Once a year	71	36.41	36.41
Once in 2-3 years	101	51.79	88.20
Once in 4-5 years	13	6.67	94.87
Once in 6-7 years	4	2.05	96.92
Once in 8-9 years	0	0	96.92
Once in 10-15 years	0	0	96.92
Never	5	2.57	99.49
Others (own business)	1	0.51	100.00

#### 4. Discussion

Two findings are worthy of a discussion. Firstly, the study showed that Malaysian Gen Y, represented by the polytechnic graduates, is similar to Gen Y in western settings in their work behaviours and attitudes in their need for frequent feedback [5-9,11,15]. Gen Y's reliance on employer feedback has consequences which go beyond mismatch of work habits with Gen X and the Baby Boomers. Dependence on supervisors for guidance may lead to Gen Y not developing critical thinking and the ability to work independently to solve problems at work [21]. They are not used to dissecting their decision making process to solve problems. Reliance on feedback may be the result of their home upbringing and instructional practices at educational institutions. Gen Y grows up with helicopter parents who closely guide what they do through affirmation and praises [22,23], to the extent that they need "parent-style coaches" at the workplace [24]. Lecturers at educational institutions nurture the instant feedback expectations by providing feedback on drafts of work in progress. In another ten years, Gen Y will have advanced to managerial positions and will manage their counterparts. While it is difficult to predict the future, the results of the present study throws

doubt on whether Gen Y would be able to shift from expecting feedback to giving feedback. In addition, a study on business students in an American university showed that high performers may not apply critical thinking in their evaluation of peers in order not to disrupt group relationships while low performers aggressively defend their ego, but generally strong performance may not be recognised by peers [25]. Their findings also point out that it is Gen Y needs to have the mental strength to take negative feedback [25]. With research findings and industry feedback reported in mass media articles concurring on Gen Y's dependence on feedback, it is time for educational institutions to wean college and university students off their reliance on affirmative feedback so that they can develop critical thinking and independence, and be better prepared for work.

Secondly, the study identified fast-track promotion and attractive salary as crucial factors in employee retention and turnover. Gen Y believes that they are entitled to promotions [21]. Gen Y is eager to undertake responsibility early in their career but this is often interpreted as a display of arrogance by Gen X and the Baby Boomers who have to work hard for their promotion and wait for it to happen [21]. Gen Y employees also believe that they are ready to work towards ambitious goals and can contribute to the success of the company. To them "short-term achievement equals long-term success" and they do not focus on the process by which the goals are achieved [21]. As Gen Y employees are known for overrating their own capability, they often do not realise the complexity of the process and the tenacity that are needed to achieve their goals. They overrate their service in the organisation and expect to be rewarded with promotions and salary increments at least once every two years. When these expectations are not met, they leave the organisation. As dollars and cents is often the bottom-line of companies, it is not easy for the company management to come to an understanding of Gen Y's sense of entitlement towards their career advancement. This is an area which will remain contentious between company management and Gen Y employees. The present study did not focus on whether they believed they earned the promotion or whether it is an entitlement for the time spent in the company. Further investigation along this line will lead to a better understanding of turnover, job retention and career advancement involving Gen Y.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study showed that polytechnic graduates in Malaysia are similar to Gen Y in Western settings in their work behaviours and attitudes towards job retention and career advancement. The polytechnic graduates in this study relied on frequent and immediate feedback to perform their work, and they needed constant guidance from their supervisors. They also valued a work life balance seen in the frequent deadline extensions given to them when they could not finish projects on time. This is because most of them do not work overtime or take work home. As the polytechnic graduates were mostly in their first year of work, they were in entry-level positions and they were group members more often than group leaders. Another finding of this study is that the polytechnic graduates expected a fast track promotion. A majority of the polytechnic graduates expected to stay in an entry-level position for up to three years, and they also expected to be promoted every two to three years. Without a possible promotion in sight, they leave for another company which can offer them a well-paying stable job with good benefits, opportunities for career growth and flexible work hours. There needs to be a clearly defined career path for them to stay at their present job and company, and to find meaning in their work. The most important factors motivating the polytechnic graduates to stay at their present job and to work hard are the need for money and enjoyable work. The prestige of the company or its convenient location is not an attractive factor to retain them. However, a collegial work environment can make work enjoyable and reduce staff turnover, a point which should be noted by companies which cannot offer a competitive salary.

The findings uncovered an attitude which needs further investigation: Gen Y feels that they are entitled to promotions for their service in the organisation, perhaps regardless of the level of work performance because they are accustomed to receiving awards for participation when they were growing up. Admittedly, the findings are somewhat limited by the absence of a definite theory to explain the connection between work behaviours and career expectations as most of the research have been on characterising the Gen Y and generational differences in the workplace. However, the present findings suggest constructs that are pertinent in understanding Gen Y work behaviour and attitudes which can lead to the formulation of a more definitive framework in future.

From this study, three implications of the findings can be drawn for industry-university initiatives to bring out the potential of Gen Y in the workplace. Firstly, an aspect of working life that educational institutions have rightly prepared their students for is group work. Work is usually a combination of individual assignments and teamwork [26]. In entry-level positions, the polytechnic graduates did not have much opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills that have been inculcated in educational institutions. However, what is more pertinent is perhaps not leadership skills but how to be effective team members because a wayward team member can hamper the progress and performance of a team. If a team member submits work that is not up to mark, either other team members or their supervisor has to rectify their omissions and, in the process, slow down the group progress. This is an area that educational institutions should look into so that students entering the workforce are better prepared to play their part either as team members for optimal work outcomes. The leadership training – which must include the component of follower training – needs to be goal-oriented to be effective on Gen Y. Gen Y is so goal-oriented that they can only perform well if they can see the end goal of lessons and assignments [21]. They also need to be given explicit directions of what is expected of them, and guidelines on how they will be evaluated as well as the consequences for not following rules. The consequences of poor teamwork on work quality, staff productivity and company earnings which eventually affect staff bonus need to be made explicit.

Secondly, a good remuneration motivates Gen Y to stay at their current job, work hard, and not change jobs. It must be borne in mind that Gen Y feel that they are entitled to promotions. Thus, if companies cannot offer an attractive salary, the results suggest that if they can provide a well-defined career path and recognition of the employees' work performance they may stay and work hard at their current job. Examples of non-monetary recognition of ability to meet key performance indicators are days and hours off in addition to their annual leave, award certificates, and even verbal praises which do not have financial implications.

Thirdly, Gen Y's expectations of a fast-track promotion have also been observed elsewhere [27] and cannot be ignored. Employers need to adjust their career advancement structure so that noticeable climbs in the career ladder can be seen by their employees. For example, a multinational corporation Ernst and Young has recently implemented a hierarchical structure that breaks down the senior and manager scales into three levels each so that career advancements can be seen more clearly. The junior scale has also been broken down into two levels; whether this is effective in staff retention remains to be seen. Staff turnover should be avoided or reduced because of detrimental effects on the company in terms of staff morale and productivity. In addition, the time and effort invested in training the staff to perform to the requirements of the job positions are lost when they move on to another company, and more time and effort need to be spent on training new recruits.

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