

The determinants of work position among Gen X: a case of UiTM graduates

Rohani Mohd^{*}, Nazlinda Abdullah, Adibah Shuib, Nor Irvoni Ishar,
Hasyimah Abdul Rahim, Shereen Noranee

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

The purpose of this preliminary research is to identify corporate talents' positioning of the UiTM graduates especially the Generation X, within the industries. At the same time, there is also the need to ascertain the factors that contributed to the success of the UiTM Generation X graduates. Majority of the research which have been conducted on the graduates involved the employability rate. However, none has been carried out in identifying the graduates' career accomplishment. The sample of this research consisted of 191 UiTM graduates who are born between 1965 until 1985 (known as the Generation X). The responses were obtained via an online survey sent to random groups in UiTM emails. In addition, Facebook was also used as a medium in disseminating the survey forms to random individuals whom has connections with the Generation X alumni. Rasch Measurement Model was employed by using the software WINSTEP 3.72.3, to measure the reliability and validity of the instrument. SPSS version 21 was used to answer the research objective of the study. The result has produced a fair person reliability at +0.66 while the Cronbach Alpha reliability value was at 0.72 and an excellent item reliability of 0.99. In terms of career positioning, 60% of the Generation- falls within the middle management position. This reflects the success of the Gen-X where most of them were able to obtain posts like lecturers, engineers and managers. As for the factors which contributed to the success of the alumni, it was found that involvement in clubs, soft skills and orientation towards religion play important roles in determining the career position of GenX. These findings validate past research and demonstrate that the pattern continues into the present. Surprisingly, it was found that academic achievement, hard skills and personality traits hardly had any influence on the career positions of the Gen-X. It was also discovered that the success of the Gen-X could be due to other factors which is beyond the horizon of this research. Therefore, it was recommended that students should be encouraged to be actively involved in clubs. This must be balanced with religious values exposure so that they know the limit of their involvement.

Keywords: career positioning, success factors, Gen-X, Rasch Model

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +6013-206-9766;
E-mail address: rohani191@salam.uitm.edu.my

1. Introduction

UiTM started out as RIDA (Rural & Industrial Development Authority) Training Centre in 1956 and continued to provide external professional training courses until 1965. In 1965 the name of RIDA was changed to MARA College where it became an essential training unit under MARA Training Division. MARA College became Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM) in 1967. From then on, ITM flourished with the addition of more programmes including diploma and degree courses. These additions were in line with the rapid development of the educational system and the increasing demand of skilled workers. Graduates from ITM were increasingly sought after due to their ability and skills obtained during their educational years studying in ITM. These graduates were placed in various industries and government sectors. Majority of them are successful in their own line of profession. This could be seen from the immense development which Malaysia has gone through especially during the late 80s and 90s. With the increasing number of UiTM graduates, it is very difficult to keep track of these graduates. They are located all over Malaysia and most probably, some are providing their services overseas. So far, there is no reliable means of identifying and locating these successful graduates of Generation X who are largely responsible for the vast progress seen in Malaysia. Except for appearing on the media network, there is no way of tracing these graduates success. In addition, these graduates will be able to relate their experiences in achieving their success by informing the factors which lead them to their triumph.

So, this research has taken the initiative to begin a preliminary research into locating these Generation X graduates and hence provide some resourceful information with regards to the success of these graduates. The information collected will enable UiTM to compare the factors leading to success with those owned by the current set of students. These factors need to be implemented within the curriculum of courses within UiTM so that the current set of students should be able to benefit from these courses and become motivated, successful young entrepreneurs.

1.1. Problem statement

There have not been any study which focuses on the career positioning of UiTM graduates particularly the Gen-X. Even though it might not be an easy task but this research might just be the beginning of more future research into locating and identifying the whereabouts of these UiTM graduates whom have contributed a great deal in the industries. In addition, there has not been a large empirical work to ascertain the success factors of these Gen-X. Although it makes sense to think that academic achievements, activeness during their university's years, skills and certain personality traits do influence the success of an individual, we do not know whether these are indeed true and whether there are other factors which could influence the relationship.

This study seeks to identify the career positioning of the working Gen-X graduates and ascertain the factors which lead them to success. Since Gen-X plays an important role in the development of Malaysia during the 80's and 90's, knowing their position in industries and their success elements is quite important. As an increasing number of students are enrolling in UiTM to further their study each year, this research is quite critical in providing the necessary inputs for better UiTM graduates.

2. Literature Review

As stated earlier, this preliminary research aims at identifying corporate talents' positioning of the UiTM graduates, specifically the Generation X. Thus, it is fundamental to understand the term generation,

who are considered as the Generation X and how do they relate to those born in the past 70 years. By taking time to understand what defines the Generation X, their common characteristics, traits or personalities, and also their social, economics and academic background, it might be useful to understand what motivations, expectations, values, goals, habit and culture that they have which placed them at where they are now and in what position, career wise.

2.1 Generations and their differences

Generation is defined as people that are grouped within a certain range of ages, location they live, and significant life events they experienced at critical developmental stages (Wan Yusoff & Kian, 2013). Generation X, are individuals who were born between 1965 and 1980 (Coupland, 1991; Bradford and Rains, 1992; Howe and Strauss, 1993). Generation X is also known as “Baby Busters” (Roberts & Manolis, 2000) or the “post-peak Boomers”, those born after the long steady decline of Baby Boomer birth rates. The Baby Boomer Generation are those who were born within the years from 1946 to 1964 (Trower, 2009). Meanwhile, the Silent Generation or Traditionalists include those who were born prior to Baby Boomers, which is between 1928 to 1945. Generation Y (also known as the Echo Boomers, Generation “Why?” or the Millennials) concerns with those born in 1981 – 2000 (after the Generation X era) and Generation Z (also known as Zeds or Digital Natives) refers to those born from 2001 to present (Biber et al., 2013).

Generational differences have been important subject for many academic researches for years. These differences are associated with age-bound demographic, shaped and defined by same times and social generational markers that include many things such as common beliefs, popular cultures, local values, politics, wars, discoveries, education system, shared life experiences or events that have impacts on each of the generation groups. Thus, each generation has its own unique combination of experiences and characteristics, developed different expertise and has different prospective as well as perspectives. In terms of career, each generation has its own set of expectations, needs, values and working styles. According to Howe and Strauss (2007), Silent Generation are supposed to be traditional, unadventurous, loyal and hardworking while Kopperschmidt (2000) describes the Baby Boomers as socially more mature, workaholics, easy to please, prefer face-to-face communication instead of using electronic devices to communicate and believers of lifetime employment. Meanwhile, Generation X, whose parents are Baby Boomers, are very independent and self-reliant as a result from having dual-income parents (Howe & Strauss, 2007). In addition, Generation Y are generally highly confident, educated, technology savvy, team-work oriented, and ambitious (Lee & Tay, 2012) whereas Generation Z, where the oldest in this group are still teenagers, spends more time in-doors, less physically active, and more obese compared to previous generations (Smith et al., 2005).

2.2 Characteristics of Generation X

According to Tay (2015), significant life events (historical, economic, and social influences) in Malaysia that affected the Malaysian Generation X (Gen X) during 1965 to 1980 include Indonesian confrontation, separation of Singapore, May 13 of 1969, new economic policy, industrialization and beginning of computer usage. Global events that might have influenced the Gen X in Malaysia include the fall of Soviet Union, women liberation, birth of computer or internet, AIDS, look East policy and mergers and acquisition (Lee & Tay, 2012). The philosophy often held by Gen X is reactive and work to live (Dries et. al, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000). Table 1 summarizes characteristics and work attitudes that might be common to Gen X.

Table 1. Characteristics of Gen X

1. Work smart (Gursoy, et al., 2008).	7. Knowledge repositories of the organizations (Bersin, 2008).
2. Work-life balance jobs (Glass 2007; Gursoy, et al., 2008).	8. Value communication (Perrine, 2009; Schachter, 2009).
3. Self-reliant (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).	9. More loyal to religion (Schwadel, 2011).
4. Individualistic, value prompt recognition and reward, and materialistic (Dries et. al, 2000; Zemke et al, 2000).	10. Independent and to have a say on issues (Cole, Lucas, & Smith, 2002).
5. Skeptical and pragmatic, and value leadership by competence (Cordeniz, 2002).	11. Team work (Childs & Kipnis, 2004).
6. Mobile - not afraid to job hop (Altimier, 2006).	12. Dominance, vigilance, value privacy, open to change and self-reliance (Borges, Manuel, Elam, & Jones, 2006).

Gen X work smart., i.e., they are efficient problem solvers, but where possible, they prefer not to take additional work (Gursoy, et al., 2008) but they opted for jobs that allow them to balance between their work and family activities (work-life balance) even though it may be lower paid (Glass 2007; Gursoy, et al., 2008). Gen X are self reliant (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008) and according to Dries et. al, (2000) and Zemke et al, (2000), they are individualistic and expect to be rewarded and appreciated upon accomplishing certain organisational goals (value-prompt recognition and reward), aside from being materialistic. Cordeniz (2002) describes Gen X as skeptical about their future as compared to the Baby Boomers Dries and pragmatic, and value leadership by competence. However, they are not afraid to job hop for greater pays but stay longer in organization that offer interesting jobs, flexible work schedules and opportunities for internal promotion (Altimier, 2006). Gen X grew up during the information age and they own personal computers (Dries et al. 2008, Howe & Strauss 2007). In many company nowadays, Gen X are considered as the knowledge repositories of organizations, one of the building blocks of organizations' competitive advantage and also the backbone of the organization when the Baby Boomers retire (Bersin, 2008). Thus, retaining the Gen X is important for company's sustainability and high performance.

In addition, Gen X value communication as they believe it enables true exchange of ideas, and ensures that messages are heard and understood aside from facilitating participation (Perrine, 2009; Schachter, 2009). According to the sociologist Philip Schwadel (Schwadel, 2011), Gen X are more loyal and likely to adhere to their religion as compared to their Baby Boomer predecessors. Gen X are also said to be independent other than expects and often demands to have a say on issues that may affect their lives (Cole, Lucas, & Smith, 2002). Similar to Gen Y, Gen X seek comfort and tend to have more respect for those who share their own values, therefore this easily presents an opportunity for team work or group.

Assignments (Childs & Kipnis, 2004). Finally, Borges, Manuel, Elam, and Jones, (2006) found that Gen X are dominance because of their preference to take care of their own needs first, vigilance due to their skeptical nature, value privacy, open to change because of their early adoption of technology, and self-reliance for their independence. Gen X has some characteristics or traits that influence the type of occupation chosen, type of employers selected, how they carried out their jobs and what position they likely hold when climbing up their career ladder. Gen X characteristics include having a sense of belonging, ability to learn new things, autonomy, entrepreneurship, flexibility, feedback and short term rewards aside from being skeptical of the status quo and hierarchical relationship and expect managers to earn respect rather than gain respect by virtue of title (Tulgan, 2004). According to Twenge, Campbell,

Hoffman and Lance (2010), more research in the industry shows that both Gen X seek higher education and this makes it necessary for dual-income households. This also increases their demand and desire for extrinsic rewards. Gen X was also found to have high, unrealistic expectations for their starting salary when they join the workforce out of university and this could be cause for concern for organizations (Burke, 1994).

However, as stated by Howe and Strauss (2000), there was a rapid inflation of living expenses during this time. Based on Jorgensen (2003), Gen X considers autonomy and independence as important values, prefer open communication, seek and find reasons behind events, do not believe in official payments, believe in the balance between life and work, seek a shared goal (especially inspired by visions of business places) and are willing to assume the leader role at their workplace. In addition, an online survey conducted by Ernst and Young (June 2013) reveals that Gen X was viewed as the generation best equipped to manage in current economic conditions as well as in 2020. It is also found that members and managers of the Gen X displayed each of the survey's positive characteristics, i.e., both the management skills as well as the characteristics of each generation, as compared to Baby Boomers and Gen Y.

2.3 Rasch Model

Rasch Measurement Model is a model which looks at the probability of the correct response to an item and it can be portrayed in the following equation (Wright & Mok, 2004):

$$P(\theta) = \frac{e^{\beta_n - \delta_i}}{1 + e^{\beta_n - \delta_i}}$$

where e is the Euler's number = 2.7183

β_n = person's ability

δ_i = item difficulty

Rasch enables the transformation of ordinal data into ratio data by the utilization of a ruler of "probability of event" using logit (log-odd-unit) scale. For example, a student who obtained 99% in a test is ranked as a capable student. This also means that his/her probability of endorsing the item as a ratio of 99 to 1. Based on this explanation, the probabilistic ruler represents the probabilistic line diagram which is converted into the logit scale ruler via logarithmic calculation. The Rasch Measurement Model is based on two fundamental expectations (Greene & Frantom, 2002):

- A person who is more capable has a greater likelihood of endorsing all the items given but the less capable person can only endorse a few items correctly.
- An easier item is more likely to be endorsed by all persons but the most difficult item is unlikely to be endorsed by all.

Rasch Model takes the responses given by respondents and creates a relationship with the items operationalizing a certain trait. The Rasch model assumes that the item difficulty is the attribute that is influencing the person responses while the person ability is the attribute that is influencing the item difficulty estimates (Linacre, 1999). In other words, this means that a person's ability is very much closely related to the level of difficulty of an item. The scale of measurement used in Rasch, called logit (log odd unit) is an equal interval scale converted from the logarithm of the probability of an event idimensional. A person who has the same ability logit scale as the item's difficulty level is assumed to have a 50:50 chance of endorsing the item. In other words, Rasch estimates the item difficulty as the 50% probability of a student of a given ability endorsing that particular item. With the item mean set at zero

logit, items which are above average (greater than zero logit) are recognized as more difficult items while those below average (less than zero logit) are seen as easier items.

Since Rasch takes into account the relationship between the person's capability and item difficulty, it is desirable to look at the person fit as well as the item fit. A Person fit implies that the respondent could be identified as being able to provide correct response or wrong response to a certain item of a difficulty level. An irregular or erratic response which does not display the pattern of a correct response could be a sign of a misfit. Similarly, an item fit refers to an index which implies the functionality of the item. A misfitting item means that the item is not really testing on the desired latent trait. Having a misfitting item in a test/questionnaire could lead to the likelihood of having an instrument which is non-unidimensional.

3. Methods

A cross-sectioned correlational research design was used to examine the relationships between the academic achievement, involvement in university's activities, hard and soft skills, personality traits, rreligion orientations with the position of the Gen-X. The descriptive nature of the research enables the relationship between these factors and the position of the Gen-X to be identified. In addition, this information assist in ascertaining the success factors of the Gen-X. This research involves the UiTM Generation X graduates who were born from 1965 to 1985. Hence, the 191 respondents are those from all over Malaysia. The target population of this study was the alumni of UiTM born between the years 1965 until 1985, also known as the Generation X.

This group comprised graduates from all levels of studies, namely, certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, post-graduate diploma, professional, master's degree and doctor of philosophy. According to the graduate Tracer study conducted every year by UiTM, the alumni are situated all over Malaysia. Hence the most appropriate sampling technique for this study is random sampling. The groups of Gen-X were identified via different resources. The official email of UiTM was used as a mean of locating the alumni. The link to the survey was emailed to random groups of UiTM and this link was shared between the groups to various other groups. The social media like the Facebook was also used as a medium in disseminating the survey forms to random individuals whom have connections with the Generation X alumni. In addition, the telephone application, Whatsapp, was also utilized in sending the survey links to random groups of UiTM Gen-X. The link to the online survey was shared among the Gen - X and a total of 191 respondents were obtained.

3.1 Data Collection

An online survey was developed specifically to collect data from the Gen-X. Google document was utilized in designing and editing the survey to ensure secure delivery and online submission. The link to the survey was sent to random groups of UiTM alumni via official emails and social media. Responses were automatically saved in a spreadsheet where researchers can gain accessed and view. These responses were then converted to Excel files for analysis process.

3.2 The design of the online survey questionnaire

The survey was developed by adopting and adapted from several established questionnaires (Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1970 ; Raiya, 2008) which investigates the positioning of the Generation-X within the industries. It also attempts to identify the factors that contributed to the success of these graduates. The

variables involved in this research are career position (DV), academic level, age, personality traits, hard and soft skills, religious orientation and activity level within ITM years. The survey consists of three parts: Part A, B and C. Part A consist of six multiple choice items relating to the demographic profile of the respondents. It includes information on gender, age, religion, marital status, place of birth and state of residence. Meanwhile, the nine items in part B relates to the information on career positioning of the graduates. The respondents were asked about their academic qualification, working status, occupational sector, company, current and previous position and their range of monthly salary. Finally, Part C deals with information relating to the success factors of the graduates. This section gathered information regarding the graduates' academic achievement, their level of activeness in UiTM's co-curricular activities (five items), their hard and soft skills (six items), their personality traits (sixteen items) and their religious orientation (eight items). Majority of the items in part C, are utilizing the 6 likert scales range.

3.3 Data Analysis

There are three stages of data analysis. The first stage of analysis is a descriptive analysis on the demographic profiles of the respondents and the factors relating to career positioning. The second stage is to determine the goodness fit of data which involves identifying the normality of data, reliability test, autocorrelation test, multicollinearity test, factor analysis and mahalonobis distance. Once the data are identified as fit, then only the third analysis (hypothesis testing) was conducted. The third analysis involves hypothesis testing which answer the research objectives of the study. For the first objective, a simple frequency count was conducted. The respondents were divided into categories depending on their position held within the industry. Multiple regression is employed to answer the second research objective, while the test of moderation is an added value testing.

4. Analysis and Results

Majority (46%) of the respondents are within the age range of 30-34 years, while about 40% are between 35 to 44 years of age. There are about 13% of the Gen-X whom are within the golden age (45 to 53 years old). A large number of respondents (49%) have a master degree while 28% of them have a bachelor degree. Only 1% of the respondents are with pre-diploma background while the rest of the respondent (8% and 14%) are PhD and Diploma holders respectively. In terms of academic achievement, approximately half of the respondents (53%) graduated with second-upper ranking. Only 20% fall within the first class ranking while about 24% are within the second upper class. Very few (3%) are within the third class ranking. 82% of the Generation – X graduates are professionally qualified while the rest (18%) are not. Majority of them (97.4%) are employed by various sectors such as public, statutory bodies, multinational, local private companies and Government Link Companies (GLC) while only a small number of them are self employed. About 56.5% (108) respondents have a monthly income between RM3000 – RM6999 while only six (6) graduates earned about RM15K and above. These six graduates holds top management of the companies they worked for, either as Chief Executive Officer or Professor within the university.

The first objective of this research was to identify the corporate talents' positioning of the UiTM graduates especially the Generation X within the industries. In order to this, the 191 respondents were divided into categories which fit their post the best. Hence, the following table represents the Gen-X ranking within the industries.

Table 2: The rankings amongst the Gen-X (in %)

Top management	Middle management	Executive	Support staff I	Support staff II
5.8	59.6	14	10	10.5

Table 2 reports that majority of the Generation-X alumni fall within the middle management category. Among them are lecturers, engineers, managers and assistant managers. Only 14% are executives while 20% are the support staffs. Almost 6% of the respondents hold top management position like the Assistant General Manager, Assistant Director, Managing Director, Chief Operating Officer, Professors and Heads of Department.

The second objective was to ascertain the factors that contributed to the success of the UiTM Generation X graduates. In order to achieve this, a test of relationship was conducted. As posited in Table 3, only Club, Committee and Soft Skills were found to be significantly related to Position. These factors affect position by 35.6%. This is explained by the R square value of .356. This also means, another 64.4 % of the variance change in position is explained by other variables which were not investigated by this research. Among the three variables that predict position, soft skills has the greatest influence ($\beta=.41$, $p<.001$). This is followed by committee ($\beta=.220$, $p<.001$) and Club ($\beta=-.010$, $p<.05$). Interestingly, Club was found to negatively related. This means the more the students are involved in activities of club, the lesser they will be positioned in the higher rank of the hierarchy. However, its influence on position was significantly very small. The results has confirmed the significant relationships between Club, Committee and Soft skills with Position.

Table 3. The results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	F
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	1.258	.636		14.441**
CGPA	-.098	.095	-.070	
club	-.013	.086	-.010*	
sports	-.127	.089	-.100	
committee	.267	.077	.220**	
SoftSkill	.776	.120	.410**	
HardSkill	-.136	.106	-.084	

Note: R=.597, R2=.356, ** $p<.001$, * $p<.05$

The equation model for Position is:

$$\text{Position} = 1.258 + .776\text{SS} + .267\text{Com} - .013\text{Cl}$$

Surprisingly, religiosity and student's academic achievement were not significantly related to position. Since religiosity was not found to be significantly related to position, it may be a moderator to the relationships between the predictors (soft skills, committee, and club) and criterion (position). This assumption can be illustrated by an example that if a student had soft-skills, his or her position in an

organization would depend on their level of religiosity. This means, even if a student has the soft-skills needed for a higher rank, or actively involved in committee or actively join in club activities, but if s/he refused to hold a higher position due to his or her commitment in religion, he or she may not apply for better position.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The first objective of this research was to identify corporate talents' positioning of the UiTM graduates (Generation-X) within the industries. The result shows that about 60% of the Gen-X are within the middle management position. Majority of them are involved with education, some are managers and assistant managers while a few are engineers. A small portion of them (14%) holds executive positions while 20% are the support staffs. A very small percentage of 6% holds top management positions like the Assistant General Manager, Assistant Director, Managing Director, Chief Operating Officer, Professors and Heads of Department.

The 2nd research objective was to examine the relationship between all potential predictors and employee position. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that only soft-skills, committee and club were significantly related to position. Religiosity was found to partially moderate the relationship between club and position. This means, club was related to employee position under different level of religiosity. Students who actively join clubs would be in a better position especially when their orientation for religion is higher. It is interesting to highlight that being actively involved in clubs is not seen as a required criteria by any organization. Moreover, it was found to be significant negatively related to position. However, an organization would offer good position to those who are actively involved in many clubs during their student's years if they are religiously inclined. This could be due to a general perception by any organization that students who join clubs actively may be social able and therefore would give less commitment to work. On the other hand, those who are religiously inclined, despite actively involved in clubs would be perceived as committed and accountable workers. Therefore, students should be advised to be actively involved in clubs and have high religious commitment and understanding at the same time.

Eventhough the academic system in most universities are constantly preparing the students for the work force, however, there is still a noticeable gap between them (Abdul Aris, Baharum, Mohd Sanusi, Abdul Rahman & Lee (2013). Partnering with the industries should be one mean of reducing the gap. By doing so, the students will be exposed to the work-life they will be facing and at the same time, they will learn on how to deal with the current issues and trends.

From the findings of this research, it is recommended that the importance of soft skills like critical thinking skills, leadership skills, problem solving and decision making skills are implemented within the academic and training courses. Specific individual modules focusing on all these skills should be carefully designed and implemented to ensure that the students are instilled with these skills. Students should also be exposed to talks, seminars and discussion with the successful Gen-X alumni. These activities could be motivational factors in helping the students achieve good grades when they graduate. In addition, the importance of involvement in clubs and committees during the students' years should also be emphasized. By exposing them to such activities, it will encourage the students' sense of responsibility, social interaction skills and hence leadership skills.

Future research involving the Gen-X should investigate other possible mediating factors such as management ability, motivation, financial background and people management skills, competency (Semeijin, van der Velden, Heijke, van der Vleuten and Boshuizen, 2006) and other variables to the career positioning. A deeper investigation should also be conducted in investigating how other forms of hard skills and other types of personality traits influence career success. A more diverse sample of Gen-X might provide more information regarding the correlation between academic achievements (Abdul Rahman, 2014), personality traits (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001) and career positionings. All these possible steps might illuminate on the necessary elements which could enable the success of the future generation.

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