

Importance of work-life balance in the modern workplace; a model for examining reward preferences amongst UK's Gen Z employees

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Pillinger (2001, p.1) states that “adjusting work patterns so that everyone, regardless of age, race or gender can find a rhythm that enables them more easily to combine work and their other responsibilities and aspirations”. In essence, enabling individuals to have a fulfilling work and home lives creates a homogeneity that can engage a person without over burdening them. Similarly, according to Drew, Humphreys and Murphy (2003, p.13),’ “personal fulfilment is important inside work and that satisfaction outside work may enhance employees' contribution to work”. The acknowledgement of work-life balance as a factor in enhancing ‘workplace contribution’ indicates potential for tangible benefits for organisations. In the current market environment, the understating of a job as something that requires stability and hierarchy is rapidly changing with the advent of disruptive technology and the gig economy. The impact of the overarching challenges facing the younger generation of workers understanding their requirements need to be considered. Churchill, Ravn and Craig, (2019, p. 627) state that “Younger generations are arriving to a labour market in which ‘work’ has increasingly been replaced by ‘gigs’ and ‘tasks’ and this kind of highly casualised, non-standard employment is having a spill-over effect on their non-working lives, which are increasingly disrupted by these social changes”. As such, it is important for the contemporary workplace environment to be able to accommodate the issue concerning the younger employees.

Organisations employ the Human Resource (HR) departments to effectively motivate and engage their employees. Without proper human resource management, the needs of the individuals in the workplace can go unaddressed. Aspects like job security have become less important to the current generation than their predecessors, with them instead opting for flexibility in work environment and acknowledgement (Mahmoud et al., 2020). The economies that have emerged by the

disruptive innovations have allowed flexibility in job opportunities. Such flexible working conditions make the organisations more attractive to the younger workers. The success of online peer to peer service providers shows that younger participants within the labour pool are attracted to such working conditions over even financial gain (Polisetty and Kurian, 2021). This represents that work-life balance is important for the younger generations as they are disillusioned with the monotony of life and still value experiences more than stability. Such cultural phenomena need to be assessed carefully in order to determine the generational motivation for different reward types. As such, developing an understanding of the importance of work life balance to the younger generation of workforce is crucial to maintain a modern workplace. The access to technologies has vastly improved access to communication within and outside the organisations. This research will allow practitioners to engage their younger workforce with flexible time and autonomous job design.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

With these objects in mind, the aims and objectives of the study are as follows:

- To assess the contemporary academic and empirical knowledge regarding the subject matter.
- To explore the significance of work-life balance for the Gen Z employees in the UK.
- To examine the relative significance of work-life balance and other tangible and intangible rewards systems.

1.3. Research Question

With the research objectives clarified the study can firmly define its research question. The research questions for this study are as follows:

- How important is work life balance for a Gen Z worker in the UK?
- How does the importance of work life balance compare to other tangible and intangible rewards?

1.4. Rationale for the Study

The rationale for this study relies on different aspects of the research gap being addressed. Firstly, the study will include multiple comparative questions for assessment of the reliability of the responses received. Simply put, the process will compare different rewards without classifying them any further. Scenarios that represent both kinds of tangible and intangible rewards will be compared with each other and work-life balance. As such, the participants will not be able to discern which aspect is being examined. The ethical considerations of this presents a challenge, however, consent forms without explicitly mentioning the subject of the study could still inform the respondent regarding the use of work-life balance within the work. A single-blind controlled pilot study utilised with multiple comparative assessment should allow the responses to be highly reliable (White et al. 2003). Secondly, the study establishes a longitudinal timeframe for examination of the priorities of candidates as they resume their careers. The observation of the decision-making priorities and cultural influence over a long period of time creates better understanding of the subject matter. Having an intimate knowledge regarding the impact; both negative and positive, should aid in avoiding pitfalls and ensure easier workplace transition for a newer generation of workers. The changes in cultural and economic environments present challenges for the current generation of workers (Gaidhani, Arora and Sharma, 2019). Furthermore, the inevitability of the consistency of time makes age an issue to be considered for the modern work environment. With more retirements of the older generations, their replacement will need to be managed with care early on. The systems of performance management and rewards management; which have been designed and utilised on an older generation, need to accommodate the preferences and responses of the younger generations. With such considerations, the third rationale for the research is to establish a model based on the collected data which represents the continual importance of different factors for this generational cohort of Gen Z. This study, thus, aims to understand the phenomena while charting the data received for the analysis. This will help to create a model of appropriating work life balance measures; by establishing comparative questioning, through a cross sectional pilot study. The pilot study will provide valuable input on response patterns, response rates and question format errors. The study will present the weaknesses or unintended biases in the question patterns (Bell-Martin and Marston, 2021; Jordan and Troth, 2020). The study will also be able to test the cognition of work life balance as the main factor

within the study after taking the survey. The follow-up interviews from the questionnaires will present significant insight regarding the efficacy of the questionnaire format. The utility of such a model could be easily modified into cross checking survey questions and eventually application forms that could allow employers to ascertain if an individual is expecting more from an organisation than it can sustain.

In summary, the influx of Gen Z into the organisational landscape will require firms to be ready for assessing their requirements for motivation and engagement. This study aims to develop a qualitative model which can be implemented at the level of HR for hiring, motivation and engagement purposes.

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