

Understanding Post 1995s' career expectations:

What employers need to know

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Abstract— In the present hunt for human capital with intense competition for talents, talent management has become an important priority for employers. Dynamic adjustments in strategies are necessary to attract and retain talents as factors affecting employees' decisions have witnessed a generational change. The paper examines the theoretical validity of talent attraction and talent retention and how it develops in a Chinese context, which stresses the importance of updating the understanding on a young generation's career expectations. Serving as the methodology, a questionnaire survey is conducted among university students, most of which are post 1995s', to understand their career expectations. The results showed a shift in their career expectations such as preference for stability and attention paid to a fair system. Based on the research findings, recommendations are put forward for employers to better attract and retain talents.

Keywords—Attraction and retention of talents; talent management; career expectations; employer

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Attraction and retention of talents, talent management

The issue of attracting and retaining talents has been an issue of concern over the past three decades. Attraction of talents is often referred to in the context of recruitment. Potential applicants will be attracted to a firm based on the extent to which they believe the firm possesses the desired employee related attributes and the relative importance they place on those attributes (Shah, 2011)¹. Employee retention can be defined as "the effort by an employer to keep desirable workers, in order to meet business objective (Frank, Finnegan and Taylor, 2004)².

However, attraction and retention of talents are not independently discussed but are usually referred to in the

process of talent management, which emerged in the 1990s. The initial focus of talent management centered on worsening demographics and talent shortages that were emerging in the United States (Chambers et al. 1998)³. Not surprisingly, it has now become a growing concern in the global business environment. According to Lockwood (2006), talent management is the implementation of integrated strategies designed to increase employee productivity by developing processes for attracting, developing, retaining, and utilizing people with the required skills and aptitude to meet current and future business needs⁴. In this way, the employees can continuously utilize their talents to create profits in the long run.

B. Factors that affect employees' decision

In order to attract and retain talents, employers must know what are considered as important factors that will affect employees' decision to join and remain in a company. Previous research results showed that open communications, job satisfaction, and training opportunities were found to be associated with intentions to either leave or stay on a job (Martel, 2003)⁵. In the past, companies laid great emphasis on issues like a neat and safe working environment, job enrichment, good communication, financial incentives, praise and recognition for reducing employee turnover (MacKay, 2007⁶; Döckel, Basson & Coetzee, 2006⁷). However, employers should do more as "Generation Xers" and "Generation Yers" have become a major part of the workforce

³ Chambers Elizabeth G, Foulon M, Handfield-Jones H, Hankin M S, Edward G, "The war for talent", The McKinsey Quarterly, No. 3, pp. 44-57, 1998.

⁴ Lockwood, N. R. "Talent management: driver for organizational success," SHRM research quarterly, vol. 2(11), 2006.

⁵ Martel, L., "Finding and keeping high performers: best practices from 25 best companies," Employment Relations Today, vol. 30(1), pp. 27-43, 2003.

⁶ Mackay, A., "Motivation, ability and confidence building in people," Amsterdam & Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007.

⁷ Döckel, A., Basson, J.S. & Coetzee, M., "The effect of retention factors on organizational commitment: an investigation of high technology employees," South African Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 4(2), pp.20-28, 2006.

¹ Shah, Maitri., "Talent retention through employer branding," Journal of Marketing & Communication, vol. 6(3), p30, 2011.

² Frank, D. F., Finnegan. P. R, and Taylor. R. C., "The race for talent: retaining and engaging workers in the 21st century," Human Resource Planning, vol. 27(3), pp. 12-25, 2004.

(Horgan, 2008:1)⁸. Another research found that organizations designed as an innovative and flexible high performance work system, or characterized by high levels of integrity and respect, would also have a better chance of retaining talents (Kontoghiorghes & Frangou, 2009)⁹. According to Caplan (2011), talent management is not just about systems and processes but what you do with these and how you implement them so that you achieve a talent mindset across the organization. A talent mindset means that line managers will recognize their responsibility to manage talent effectively, just as they are expected to manage other resources¹⁰.

C. Talent management in a Chinese context

Since Deng Xiaoping initiated the Open Door policy and economic reforms, and China joined the WTO in 2001, the business environment in China has dramatically changed over the past decades. A great number of multinational companies (MNCs) have established their presence in China in various form and across many industries, which has posed tremendous challenges to and compete intensely with domestic companies. The intense competitions are not only for markets but also for talents. According to a survey from McKinsey, among the top 5 Euro-American companies that perform best in talent management, the investment in talent management has brought them a 22% growth of earnings¹¹. In comparison, Chinese companies are considered to be in embryo period of talent management¹². As MNCs have deployed the strategy of talent localization and have great demands for Chinese talents, it has become more difficult for domestic companies to attract talents, especially when MNCs provide talents with attractive remuneration packages, career development and excellent training systems.

Domestic scholars have analyzed the underlying causes of this phenomenon. Chinese companies, especially State-owned enterprises (SOEs), have evident problems of adhering to obsolete personnel management models formed under the planned economy on their management of people. Besides, the cultural conflicts between China and the western world, eagerness for quick successes, and short-sightedness of local management have gotten in the way of learning and implementing new management theories and thoughts for domestic companies¹³. But the trend of globalization has forced the Chinese employers to update the ideas of talent management. They are now actively studying and introducing

innovative ideas in talent management internationally into China. People-oriented ideas have been adopted by more and more Chinese enterprises, such as, for example, Haier¹⁴. Strategies such as setting up training system, motivation system, welfare plan, and performance evaluation system are suggested by domestic scholars and put into practice by more and more Chinese enterprises.

To sum up, the above literature reviews indicated that as the business environment has continuously changed and new generations have taken the place of elderly employees, strategies in talent management can no longer remain the same for talent attraction and retention because employees' career expectations have witnessed generational shifts. But what has changed? And the speed of change? In the present hunt for human capital with intense competition for talents, it is highly necessary for employers to have an updated understanding of the career aspirations of the younger generation, especially the post 1995s, whose skills and knowledge will be a competitive advantage of enterprises in future. This will provide new insights and inspirations for employers to deploy effective strategies to attract and retain talents.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to understand the career expectations of the post 1995s in China and serves as a reference for management. The methodology used is questionnaire survey conducted through WeChat (a Chinese social media platform) terminal. The questionnaire is co-designed by Career Partners China, a talent management consulting company and Enactus China, an international youth organization. Enactus China is also responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaire. The same survey was also done in 2015 through Survey Monkey, which makes the research findings of 2016 comparable.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Portraits of people surveyed

The total number of valid data samples collected in 2016 is 6,120, in which there are around 5,500 people born after 1995 and 63% of the total are female. 34% of all samples come from top universities and the rest are from ordinary colleges. Notably, 40% of people surveyed have engaged in or are now engaging in Enactus, which is an international youth organization aiming to serve communities through entrepreneurial actions.

⁸ Horgan, K.F., "Creating flexible workplaces," Open Forum [online] URL: <http://openforum.com.au>. Accessed on 24 June 2009.

⁹ Kontoghiorghes, C. & Frangou, K., "The association between talent retention," Antecedent Factors, and Consequent Organizational Performance. SAM Advanced Management Journal, vol. 74(1), 2009.

¹⁰ Caplan J, "The value of talent: promoting talent management across the organization," Kogan Page, 2011.

¹¹ 李恩平, 贾冀, "发达国家企业人才管理的几点启示," 理论探索, vol. 1, pp. 81 - 83, 2011.

¹² 张凤君, "论中国企业的人才管理新思维," 内蒙古民族大学学报(社会科学版), vol. 39(5), 2013

¹³ 鲍泓, "国有企业应对跨国公司人才竞争的战略," 2004

¹⁴ 于元香, 陈高华, "浅谈面对入世中国企业如何吸引和留住人才的几点策略," 北京市计划劳动管理干部学院学报, vol. 9(2), 2001

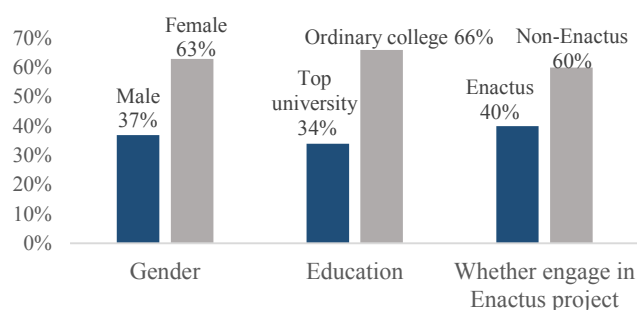


Figure 1. Portraits of people surveyed

B. Delay of employment and vague career plan

- **Most university students prefer to go for post-graduate learning after graduation.** Compared with 2015, most university students indicated becoming a post-graduate as their first choice rather than immediately hunting for a job. This could be the result of the growing fierce competition in the job market and university students think that they have to improve their competitiveness by securing a post-graduate degree. The sequence of choosing to study abroad, starting one's own business and become government staff still remains the same in 2016.

TABLE I. CHOICE AFTER GRADUATION

Ranking	2015	2016
1	Find a job	Post-graduate
2	Post-graduate	Find a job
3	Study abroad	Study abroad
4	Start own business	Start own business
5	Government staff	Government staff

- **Young generation is not certain about their career plan.** In the option of "others" except from the choices above, many students indicated their uncertainty about what they will do after graduation. "Have no idea" "Not sure" "Who knows" these words are commonly seen in their answers. Thus it is highly necessary to help them with their career planning.

C. Preference for stability

- **"Job stability" has firstly become one of the top five factors in young people's considerations on job selection.** Compared with 2015, the graduates become more rational when choosing a job. Compensation and benefits are still the most important factors they consider about a job. Promotion and training development, a harmonious team or working environment also matter in their considerations. Notably, job stability is highlighted and became one of the top five factors when young people choose their jobs in 2016, which seem to indicate that young people would now prefer not to switch companies unnecessarily.



Figure 2. Factors taken into considerations when choosing a job in 2015



Figure 3. Factors taken into considerations when choosing a job in 2016

- **Getting a stable job and income has become important ultimate objectives of career choices.** There are lesser young people intending to start their own business and become entrepreneurs in 2016. Instead, they hope for a stable job and income. This change not only indicates that students are now more cautious about entrepreneurship but also reveals the concern of fierce competition in Chinese job market in 2016.

TABLE II. ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE OF CAREER

Ranking	2015	2016
1	Realize financial independence	Realize financial independence
2	Start own business and become an entrepreneur	Get a stable job and income
3	Become an expert in professional field	Become an expert in professional field
4	Become a leader in any organization	Start own business and become an entrepreneur
5	Get a stable job and income	Become a leader in any organization
6	Become a professional manager	Become a professional manager

D. Expectations on employer

- **Young people are seeking corporate cultures that exhibit fairness and harmony.** Harmonious work environment, reliable colleagues and collaborative teams still remain the first priority when young people

choose their favorite place to work in, which indicates companies with such a kind of corporate culture can effectively attract and retain more talents. Besides, fair system and equal relationships are highlighted as the second priority in 2016, and the culture of innovation has dropped to 6th position compared with its 2nd position in 2015. Nowadays, young people want to be treated fairly and work in a harmonious team in the workplace, which inspires the employer to adjust their organizational culture.

TABLE III. FAVOURITE CORPORATE CULTURE

Ranking	2015	2016
1	Harmonious work environment, reliable colleague and collaborative team	Harmonious work environment, reliable colleague and collaborative team
2	Innovative	Fair system, equal relationships
3	Flexible and enthusiastic	Flexible and enthusiastic
4	Fair system, equal relationship	Quickly absorb the newest information and knowledge, learning-oriented
5	Strong social responsibility, serve others	Strong social responsibility, serve others
6	Quickly absorb the newest information and knowledge, learning-oriented	Innovative

- **Young employees expect a boss who is provident and can influence them.** Ranking the characteristics of their ideal boss they would like to work with remains the same for 2015 and 2016. The first and second characteristics are providence and influence respectively, which means the new generation pursues a sense of identity with their boss and the future of the company. They hope to find managers who can “tell stories” and use good communication and influencing skills to inspire them. The third and fourth characteristics also indicate that boss is expected to treat each employee equally and set a good example for them.

TABLE IV. FAVOURITE TYPES OF BOSS TO WORK WITH

Ranking	2015&2016
1	Providence
2	Influence
3	Fair and impartial
4	Set a good example
5	Professional

- **A relaxing atmosphere of team and clear guidance are more desired by the new generation.** Compared with 2015, a relaxing atmosphere of team with outdoor activities held at times is highlighted as the first priority when young people are asked about their favorite management style in 2016. Besides, giving clear guidance when a task is assigned also jumped from the fifth (2015) to third (2016) while freedom of work is less important in young people’s consideration. These changes indicate that young people expect to work in a more relaxing atmosphere rather than being regarded as merely a production unit. They also desire to know where they should start from and how to do things right when they are given a task. These new expectations would drive employers to adjust their management style for attracting new talents.

TABLE V. FAVOURITE MANAGEMENT STYLE

Ranking	2015	2016
1	Give feedback and coaching to my work regularly	Create a relaxing atmosphere of team (outdoor activities etc.)
2	Create a relaxing atmosphere of team (outdoor activities etc.)	Give feedback and coaching to my work regularly
3	Allow more freedom in my work	Give clear guidance when assigning tasks
4	Recognize my contributions to the team	Allow more freedom in my work
5	Give clear guidance when assigning tasks	Recognize my contributions to the team

- **Organized, humorous and direct ways of communication at work are preferred.** When it comes to favorite ways of communication at work, young people showed their obvious preference for well-organized, humorous and straightforward ways. Among these, a planned and organized communicate method is most popular. Next, it would be better if some interesting and humorous elements are added into conversations. Young people also want to be informed about something directly rather than euphemistically. In addition, detailed and careful communication as a preferred choice has increased noticeably in 2016, which indicates that employees are now paying more attention to the quality and preciseness of the communication.

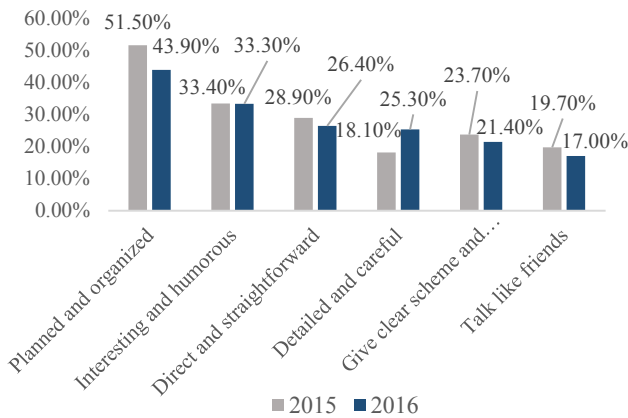
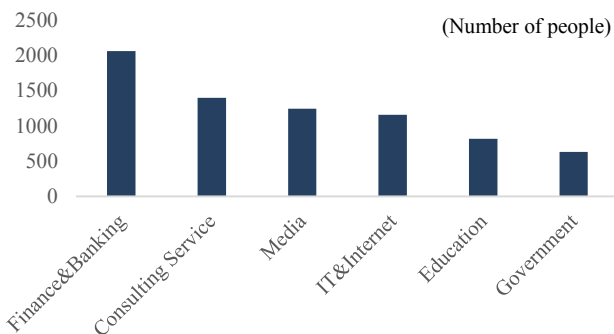


Figure 4. Favorite ways of communication in work in 2015 & 2016

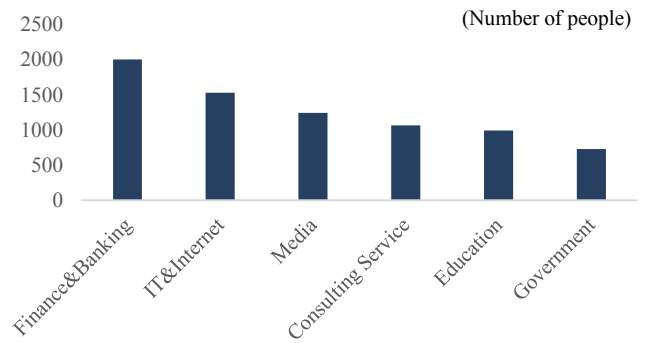
E. Some objective factors that affect new generation's decisions

- IT & Internet has become a popular industry that young generation wants to join.** When it comes to the industry that young people would like to join after graduation, the IT & Internet, which ranked the fourth place in 2015, rose to the second place in 2016. By the end of 2014, the number of Chinese netizens have reached 632 million, taking up nearly 23% of global netizens. This has driven the development of internet industry in China. Ever since the government announced the strategy plan of "Internet-Plus Traditional Industry", the number of internet companies have also boosted. By the end of April 2016 in China, there are 29,807 internet companies, providing many job opportunities for young generation. Financing & Banking is still the most popular industry that most Chinese university students pursue.



*Consulting service: Auditing, accounting firms, professional consultancy, etc.

Figure 5. Favorite industry to join after graduation in 2015



*Consulting service: Auditing, accounting firms, professional consultancy, etc.

Figure 6. Favorite industry to join after graduation in 2016

- Parents influence young generation most in the decision of job selection.** Ranked second in 2015, parents have become the most powerful people to influence students' decisions on career in 2016. Young people are less likely to make job decisions by themselves. Besides parents, friends, interviewers, teachers and classmates also contribute to influencing their career choices.

TABLE VI. PEOPLE WHO INFLUENCE THE DECISION OF JOB SELECTION

Ranking	2015	2016
1	Self	Parents
2	Parents	Self
3	Friends	Friends
4	Interviews	Interviewers
5	Teachers	Teachers
6	Classmates	Classmates

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the career expectations reflected from the post 1995s, several recommendations below can serve as references for employers to improve their competitiveness in talent attraction and retention.

A. Design clear plan of career development for employees

As most of the graduate students have no idea about their career plans and may choose not to hunt for a job immediately after graduation, a clear and foreseeable career development plan will provide them with greater certainty about their future that would attract them to join the company. A career development plan designed for employees can describe how the employees can develop and grow in the company, what position they can attain at different phases, and timelines.

Most of the Fortune 500 companies have long recognized having a career development plan as one of their competitive strengths in attracting and retaining a talented workforce. For example, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), one of the top four accounting firms in the world, has shown its career path to the new generation. From an entry-level auditor or consultant to

becoming a director or partner, applicants are able to foresee their future career in PwC. The recruitment team also invites some experienced employees to share their stories of career development, which makes the career path more specific and attainable for graduate students.



Figure 7. Path of career development in PwC¹⁵

B. Fair performance evaluation system

Among the corporate cultures favored by post 1995s, fair system and equal relationships are highlighted, which indicates that the young generation desires to be treated fairly in a company. This can be achieved by a fair performance evaluation system set up by employers. In this system, the key performance indicators (KPIs)¹⁶ are identified for each employee, thus the line managers can measure the performance of employees based on their achievement of these KPIs. For example, the KPIs of a salesman can include the growth rate of sales, the sales volume and the time spent on every customer etc. In this way, the performance of employees is not judged by subjective perceptions but is based on the real work that they have completed.

The measurement of KPIs can serve as an objective and fair instrument for the measurement and evaluation for bonuses and promotions, for which employees have equal opportunities to compete based on a merit. Thus such a system will retain young employees in the company for a longer period since they are now in favor of a more stable job.

C. Offer daily guidance and feedback to employees

As young generation has become more eager for clear guidance and feedback, line managers are expected to increase their engagement in the daily communication with their staff. When assigning the tasks to their employees, they should at least indicate where and how employees can get started, such as the briefing of tasks, while autonomy is still given to the employees. After the completion of tasks, if young employees can receive feedback their performance and how they improve, they will gain satisfaction and seek continuous improvement. This, too, is a form self-actualization according to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs¹⁷. Employees may then be able to achieve individual potentials, for which they are likely to be loyal to their employers.

D. Become a leader that young people advocate

The young generation indicated their preference for a boss who provides and influence, at the same time talks to them in

an organized and humorous way. Among these characteristics, provident, which can also mean articulation of vision, is one of the five behavioral attributes a charismatic leader has (Conger & Kanungo, 1998)¹⁸. It requires a leader to foresee the future of the company and articulate a powerful vision about it. The ability to influence would be another quality that is useful to improve employees' sense of identity with the leader. Organized and humorous are highlighted in the ways of communication that a leader would use. In the briefing session for recruits, the leader can utilize these qualities to tell stories of himself and the company to the applicants in a well-organized and interesting way. This will attract new talents.

E. Some employers need to create brand awareness in campus

As Finance and IT & Internet industries have become more and more popular among post 1995s, employers from manufacturing and other industries should early cooperate with campuses to promote their brand awareness on site. The recommendations from faculty advisors who are popular among students will be more effective than posting advertisements on campus or through associations. In addition, the utilization of social media can also expand the influence of the employer.

V. IMPLICATIONS

The change in the young Chinese generation's career expectations noted in the research findings reflects the growing fierce competition in job market and the changing economic environment. China's GDP growth rate in 2015 has slowed to 6.9%, the lowest since 1990¹⁹. The CPI has also increased by only 1.4%, the lowest since 2009²⁰. Under this economic situation, employers in China have to either rationalize their scale of businesses or shut down. For example, multinational companies like Philips has closed its subsidiary in Shenzhen²¹. This implies that job opportunities for young people are becoming more limited creating fierce competition to the job market. Accordingly, there is a shift in career expectations of the post 1995s including a desire for greater job stability.

VI. LIMITATION

- The participants of this research are university undergraduates. They are young people who have high level of education, thus their career expectations cannot represent all the post 1995s in China.
- Further in-depth interviews could be done with focused groups for qualitative answers, which can further extend the research findings.

¹⁵ Career development path of PwC, http://www.pwcn.com/home/chi/students_careerpath_chi.html

¹⁶ David Parmenter, Developing, implementing, and using winning KPIs, 2007

¹⁷ Maslow, A., "A theory of human motivation, Psychological Review," vol.50, 370–396, 1943.

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¹⁹ GDP of China in 2015, http://www.cssn.cn/zx/shwx/shhnew/201601/t20160119_2833994_3.shtml

²⁰ CPI of China in 2015, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2016-01-18/doc-ifxnrahr8486047.shtml>

²¹ News of Philips shutting down Shenzhen subsidiary, <http://mt.sohu.com/20160604/n452836379.shtml>

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Career Partners China thank Dennis Lee and Rachel Xie for putting together this paper and bringing these insights to more people. This paper introduces the real expectations of the post 1995 generation in China. Therefore, we could make a change together to create better places to work.

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