

A Qualitative Study on the Working Attitude and Social Skills of the Post-90s in the Workplace in Hong Kong

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I. Background

The post-90s in general refers to people born between 1990 and 1999.

In the past five years, complaints from the management level of the companies in Hong Kong on the undesirable working attitude of the post-90s increased substantially. They claimed that the post-90s were not punctual to work, and they resigned immediately when they did not feel like staying in the job. What was worse, some post-90s did not give a reason for their lateness for work, some disappeared for a few hours during work time and some resigned via WhatsApp without giving any notice. They said the post-80s and the post-70s were never like that.

According to the Tang (n.d.) and Wong (2014), many employers (especially employers who were post-70s) complained that the post-90s would apply for sick leave via WhatsApp and they would ask their parents to apply for sick leave for them via WhatsApp or telephone. They would disappear for two days at their workplace without notifying their supervisors because they had gone to China to visit their relatives. They would also take sick leave after arguing with their boyfriend or girlfriend or their parent(s).

This is a relatively new phenomenon and there is not much research on the work attitude or the social skills of the post-90s so far. There is no qualitative or quantitative research paper published in relation to the work attitude or the social skills of the post-90s. The relevant surveys done by various institutes, which were reported in newspapers, are cited in this paper.

The purpose of this research is to suggest reasons behind the phenomenon and discuss possible ways to motivate the post-90s to improve their working attitude and to improve their social skills.

II. Method

Qualitative method had been used in this research and interviews with seven post-90s (age between 18-25), who had undesirable working attitudes and undesirable social skills, had been conducted in early July of 2016. Two post-70s had also been interviewed to see if they had different answers from that of the post-90s. Around 20 questions related to the working attitude and social skills of the post-90s in the workplace in Hong Kong were asked face-to-face in each interview and the interviews had been recorded with the interviewees' approval.

Here are the questions:

Have you ever been late for work?

Have you ever apply for sick leave?

How would you apply for sick leave?

(If use WhatsApp) Why do you use WhatsApp to apply for a sick leave?

Have you asked your parents to apply for sick leave for you?

Would you disappear during work time? (Would you tell your boss why?)

Would you take leave after you have argued with your boyfriend or girlfriend or parents? (If yes) What kind of leave would you apply for?

How do you see your job?

Do you need a job?

What is your career path?

Did your parents give you any pressure on finding a job (if you do not have a job)?

What is your impression on your immediate supervisor?

What do you think about your colleagues?

Do you like your current job?

Do you want to improve your social skills in your job?

(If the interviewee said immediate supervisor is not a reasonable person.)

What if your immediate supervisor is a reasonable person. Will you be late for work? Would you disappear from work without giving a reason?

Would you want to improve your social skills in the job then?

Would you want to stay in the job?

The findings of this research will provide us some ideas on the reasons why post-90s are not having desirable working attitude and social skills. Besides, we will also know if they are willing to improve their working attitude and social skills at the workplace in the future.

III. Results

All post-90s said they had been late for work. One said he was late every day. Five out of the seven said they had applied for sick leave during their service in their current company while the other two said they had never applied for sick leave. Two of the above-mentioned five said they used WhatsApp to apply for sick leave, two used email and one called his immediate supervisor. Those who use WhatsApp said they did so because WhatsApp was their major communication channel and it was a very convenient channel. Two used email because email was the way they communicated with others at work. One called his immediate supervisor because he said his boss was friendly. None of the seven post-90s said they had asked their parents to apply sick leave for them.

Three out of seven said they had never disappeared during work time. The other four said they had disappeared during work time without giving notice to their immediate supervisors. Two said they had disappeared for less than one hour and two said they had disappeared for half a day. The two who disappeared for less than one hour said they did not tell their immediate supervisors because they did not want to be scolded. For the two who had disappeared for half a day, one went to attend an interview in another company, the other one rushed to buy tickets for her idol's concert. These two said they did not tell their immediate supervisors because they did not care about the job. One said he did not care about the job because his immediate supervisor was not a fair person. The other said it was because her immediate supervisor had scolded her a few times in front of other colleagues and she did not want to talk to him.

All seven post-90s had never taken any leave after they had argued with someone. However, two of them said they might do so in the future depending on their mood.

All post-90s said they would prefer to have a job, in which two said it is not a must for them to have a job now and one said a job is not important for her. All seven did not know what their career path would be. One said he hoped to be a manager in the next five years. One said he had thought about working outside Hong Kong. Three out of seven have some pressure from their parents to stay in a work life while the other four can stay at home for the time being.

Three out of seven had negative impression on their immediate supervisors. They thought their immediate supervisors were stubborn, inflexible, or unreasonable with big ego. The other four thought their immediate supervisors were okay. Five of the seven said they were okay with their current job, in which three were for money, two for the good location near their home. Two of the seven wanted to leave their job. One thought his supervisor was not a fair person and always pinpointed on him. The other said she saw no future in the company no matter how hard she worked.

On the other hand, the three who had negative impression on their immediate supervisors said if their immediate supervisors were more reasonable and flexible and would listen to them, they would want to cooperate more with

their immediate supervisors and improve their working attitude and social skills in order to create a more harmonious relationship with the supervisors.

Four of the seven think that their supervisors are not fair to all staff. They did not know why certain staff would get a prize when the others who also worked very hard did not. They also did not know why a staff was promoted because there was no transparency of how a staff was promoted in the company.

The two post-70s had rather different answers. They said they were late for work only for a special reason like sickness and their mindset was they should not be late for work. Both said they had applied for sick leave during their service in their company and they would call the human resources manager early morning of the sick leave day in order to inform them of their sick leave. They would never use WhatsApp or email to do that. They had never imagined about asking their parents to apply sick leave for them. They had never disappeared during work time without notice because they think this was very irresponsible behaviour (Hong Kong Economic Times 2013). If they had to be away for a while during work time, they would inform their immediate supervisors. They had never taken any leave after they had argued with someone, either it's their parents or their spouses or their boyfriends/girlfriends. They could not even imagine someone taking leave because of this reason.

The post-70s thought their job was very important and they needed a job to earn a living. They had high hope in their career path and they hoped with their hard work they could be promoted to more senior level or the management level. They treated their job as a way to showcase their capabilities and having a job was a sign of self-worth for them. The job was also the major financial source to support his family. They found some of their immediate supervisors stubborn and unreasonable, but in order to survive in the job, they would still try to make these immediate supervisors happy and they would improve their social skills and tried to create a harmoniously relationship with their immediate supervisors and the other colleagues. They thought no job was perfect and they just had to live with the job they had now. If the job was not too bad and they needed to pay their mortgage and the tuition fees of the kids in the universities, they had to stay in the job. They said of course it would be even better if their immediate supervisors were more reasonable and self-reflective people.

IV. Findings

It seems that some of the post-90s did apply for sick leave via WhatsApp. This was because WhatsApp was their usual communication channel. In this respect, a supervisor may have to consider WhatsApp as the social media channel with the post-90s. However, none of the seven post-90s had asked their parents to apply for sick leave for them, and none had taken any leave after they had argued with someone.

All of the seven post-90s did not know what their career path would be. Only three had some pressure from the parents to keep a job. This shows that the other four parents were financially capable for keeping the living

standards of the family.

The above research suggests that the post-90s are willing to improve their working attitude and social skills if they feel their immediate supervisors are reasonable people. Supervisors scolding their staff in front of others did not make them look reasonable or respectful, and therefore the post-90s would not want to communicate with them. If the supervisor is willing to show more care to the post-90s and take the initiative to talk to the post-90s in a friendly way and listen to them (C Money Home), the post-90s would be more willing to communicate with them and tell them the reason for their lateness, apply for leave before actually taking leave and tell the supervisor what happened if they are unhappy or if they have argued with anyone. Then the supervisor will understand the situation of their staff and accordingly make necessary arrangements to their work or workload.

The post-90s would want to work with their immediate supervisors if they think their immediate supervisors are fair to all staff. According to Hong Kong Economic Times (2015), if the company has a fair system to all staff and the supervisors can follow this system and avoid bias in treating different staff, the staff will feel it and they would trust the system and the supervisors. And they will have a better idea of how they will be treated if they behave in a certain way. If they feel they are fairly treated in the company, they will treasure their job.

The post-90s would want to stay in the job if they can see their future in the job. And if they want to stay in the job they would want to improve their working attitude and social skills because they do not want themselves to be unhappy in their job. So the supervisors can think about ways of how to make the post-90s see promotion opportunities in the company. For instance, the supervisors can directly tell their staff the necessary skills and requirements of a higher rank and they can teach them some of these skills themselves (Etnet). They can also encourage them to take some related courses after work or during weekend.

V. Conclusion

This research gives us a very positive outlook on the working attitude and social skills of the post-90s in the workplace in Hong Kong. The post-90s are not unreasonable people and it is advisable for the post-70s not use their own standard of values which was formed from the 70s. It's easy for one to judge others with their own standard of values and without self-reflection. Young people are always our future and we need to help them and cooperate with them to make Hong Kong a better place.

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