

WHAT REALLY SHAPES CAREERS?

THE INFLUENCE OF AGE AND
CULTURE ON CAREER PROGRESSION

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INTRODUCTION

How well do you know your workforce?

If you think that everyone wants a promotion, everyone wants to be paid more and that only a small number of people would be considering total career change in the next five years, you'll need to sit down before reading any further.

Unfortunately, many of the assumptions we make about how people feel about their jobs are not only false, they're colored by our own point-of-view. It's easy to look around and see how many of our peers are feeling and experiencing the same things and assume that those issues are common across the board. Well, they're not.

If the latest installment from the 2011 *Kelly Global Workforce Index* does one thing, it will show you just how influential age, culture and the length of time we've been in the workforce really are on career progression and choice. By examining some of the key patterns in career development across the globe, we hope to help you think about specific ways to effectively manage a more diverse and change-oriented workforce.

In times like these—when the overall workforce is aging, birthrates in mature markets are falling, labor pools in developed nations are shrinking, the number of skilled workers is dropping and the demand for skills is accelerating—knowing the expectations of your workforce is increasingly important.

"Make sure you meet the needs of the talent you have and the talent you want."
– Nina Ramsey

The reality is, employee choices and preferences follow strong demographic patterns. Our age, experience level, culture and location have a measurable impact on the choices we make about the types of roles we take on, and how we apply ourselves to our work. So, if you're managing a global, multi-generational workforce, it's highly likely you'll see many of the patterns outlined in this paper emerging in your own organization.



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01

EXPERIENCE WINS

What's more important: education or experience?
We asked 97,000 people global respondents in
the 2011 *Kelly Global Workforce Index*.

Despite the strong and growing focus on education, most people believe that experience is still the most important element of career progression and skill development. Classrooms and theories can't replace the practice of working in the real world, and across every region surveyed people agreed that their work experience has had a far greater impact on their career than any qualification they've gained.

The vast majority of people (80%) nominate experience as the most important element in developing their career, while 18% cite formal education and 2% are undecided. This view is consistent across all generations, although is higher among older age groups, with 83% of Baby Boomers and 82% of Gen X citing it as the most important factor in career development—somewhat higher than Gen Y (76%).

It follows that the more experience you have, the more valuable you feel it is. So, while qualifications may be critical to many young people getting their "first break" into the industry they want to work in, it seems that the older we get the more we see the impact of the experience we've gained on our career path. The results also point to the recognition that not all qualifications are equal—many people end up working in an entirely different field to what they're credentialed in, and the reputations of colleges attended as well as the qualification itself, will have a significant impact on its ability to assist with career growth.

Although there is very little difference across the regions in how people view the importance of education versus experience, there are some significant regional differences when it comes to considering the currency of qualifications and skills.



FIGURE 1.
What has been the most important element of developing your career—education or experience?

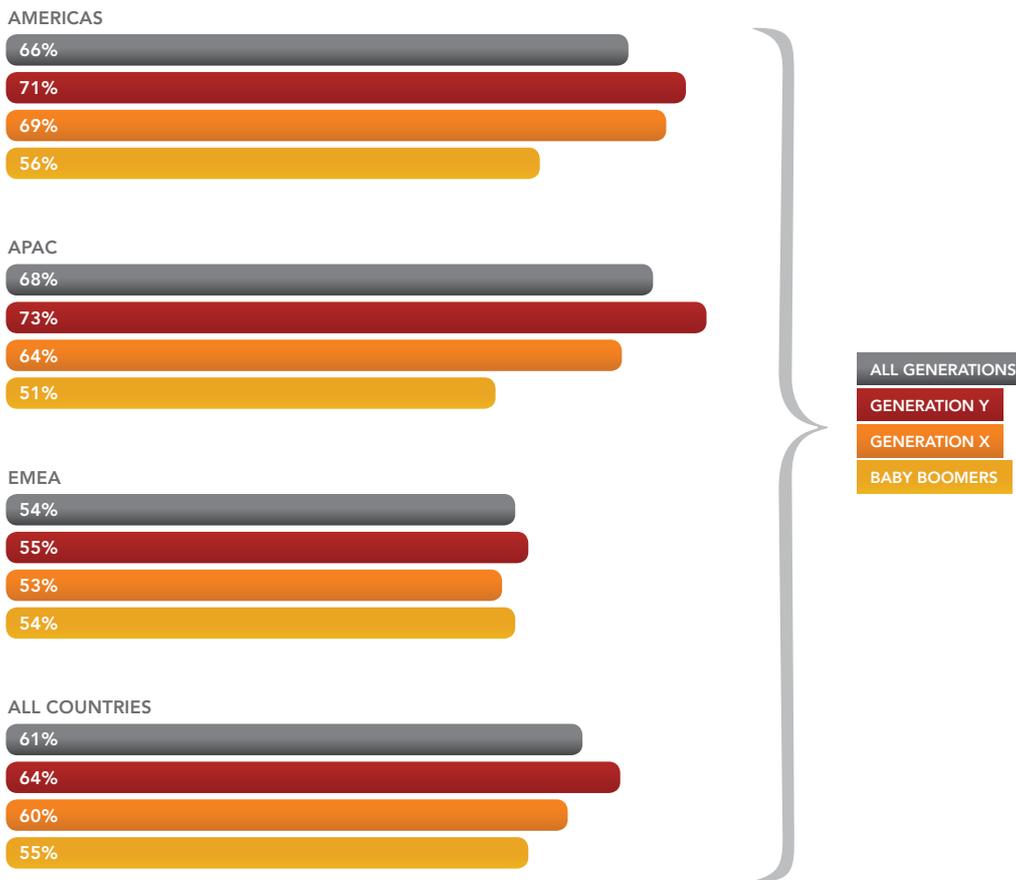


More people in APAC and the Americas than in EMEA believe it's extremely important to upgrade qualifications and skills to advance their careers. In APAC, 68% say that doing so is extremely important, compared with 66% in the Americas and 54% in EMEA.

There is perhaps another factor at work in these results—the rapidly changing and more technologically driven world we live in now makes qualifications obsolete faster than ever. What we learn at college or university is now likely to be irrelevant to the role we secure by the time we graduate. Employers increasingly look at the currency of skills and we see this reflected in the way people focus on ongoing education throughout their careers. In fact, most people believe they will not be able to advance their careers unless they continually upgrade their skills.

FIGURE 2.

In order to progress your career, how important is it that you upgrade your qualifications and/or skills? (% extremely important)

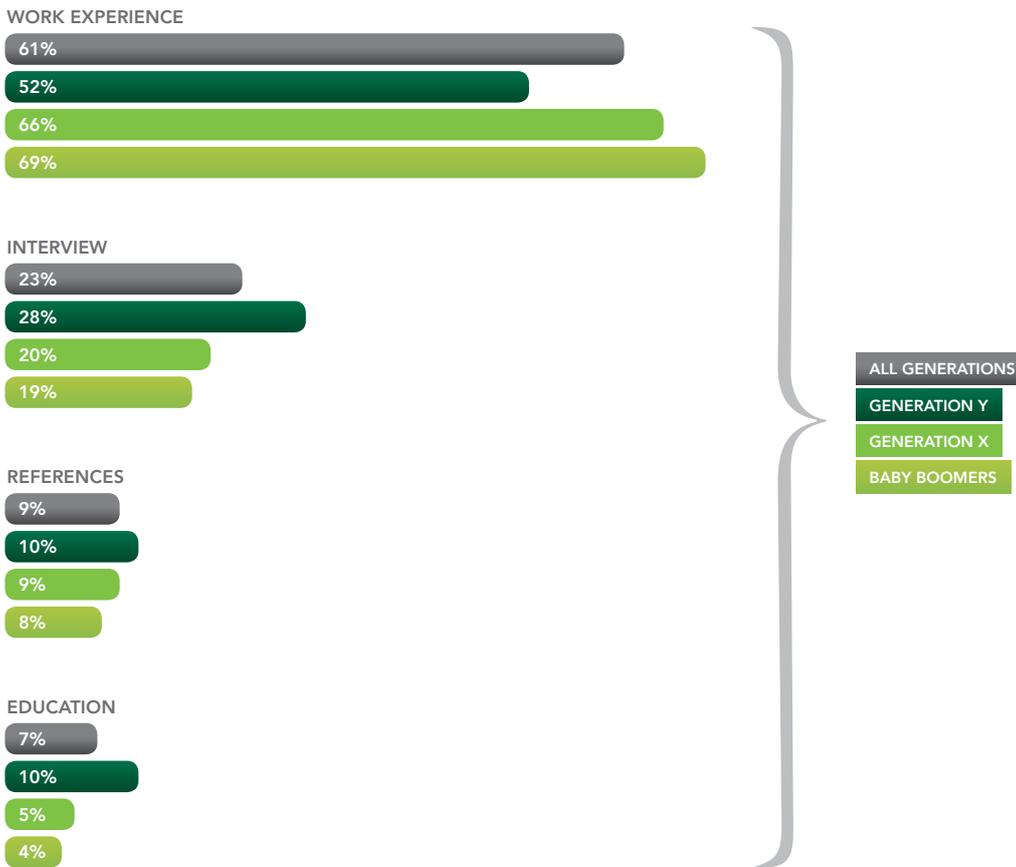


Across the generations, Gen Y is most likely to be aware of the need to upgrade skills and qualifications, with 64% saying it is extremely important for their career development. Although fewer Gen X and Baby Boomer employees feel the same way, (60% and 55% respectively) the relatively small difference across the generations demonstrates the importance most people feel about continually expanding their skills regardless of which stage they are at in their career.

When looking for work, most people (61 %) agree that the best indicator of a person’s talent is their work experience, followed by their performance in a job interview (23 %), job references (9 %), and education (7 %).

FIGURE 3.

In your experience, when looking for a job, what is the best indicator of your talent to a prospective employer?



Performance in an interview still rates highly across all generations, but most notably for Generation Y. With less experience, and perhaps also fewer qualifications behind them, it's clear that they view the interview as one of the best ways to differentiate themselves and impress prospective employers.

Equally, we could apply these results another way and gain an insight into which elements the different generations look for in job candidates. If you're being interviewed by a Baby Boomer, they'll be looking more strongly at the experience you have to offer, and will be least impressed by glowing references. For Generation Y managers, your performance in an interview will be a very significant indicator of your fit for a role, and they'll also be looking much more closely at your qualifications and education than older employers.



THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER...

Using this experience vs. education research, can your organization help plan “experiences” that produce the desired development for your valued talent?

What is your organization doing to enable and encourage continuous and self-guided development?

Not all experiences are equally important. Which are most important for your organization and its key employees?

How can you use these multi-generation findings to develop experienced Baby Boomers to mentor/coach aspiring Gen X and Y talent?

Are your leaders prepared and rewarded to be talent champions?

What practices/tools /technologies are available to support employees who take the initiative and ‘own’ their development?

02

CHOOSING A CAREER CHANGE

There are two types of work experience—the kind you obtain through tenure and promotion within a single organization or field, and the kind you amass by consistently seeking new opportunities and roles.

HR practitioners know that people seek change and new roles now more than ever. Keeping talent is hard work and much of the reality of operating a business isn't conducive to the kind of flexibility that many employees want. Add to this the expectation that many people now have to move into different fields throughout their working life and you have a significant challenge to retain good people.

Across all industries and regions, more than half of people (57 %) say they expect to change their career or field of work within the next five years. While there is almost certainly a significant element of job dissatisfaction and economic uncertainty in this figure, there is a steadily growing trend towards people having multiple careers within their lifetime.

Six in ten (58%) Gen Y's and Gen X'ers believe they will have to change their careers within the next five years. Baby Boomers are only slightly below this at 50 percent.

There are some distinct regional differences in the data, with many more respondents from APAC (63%) anticipating a career change than in EMEA (59%) or the Americas (48%). It is likely that this is reflective of increased opportunity and investment in the Asian region, which is opening up greater options for career change.

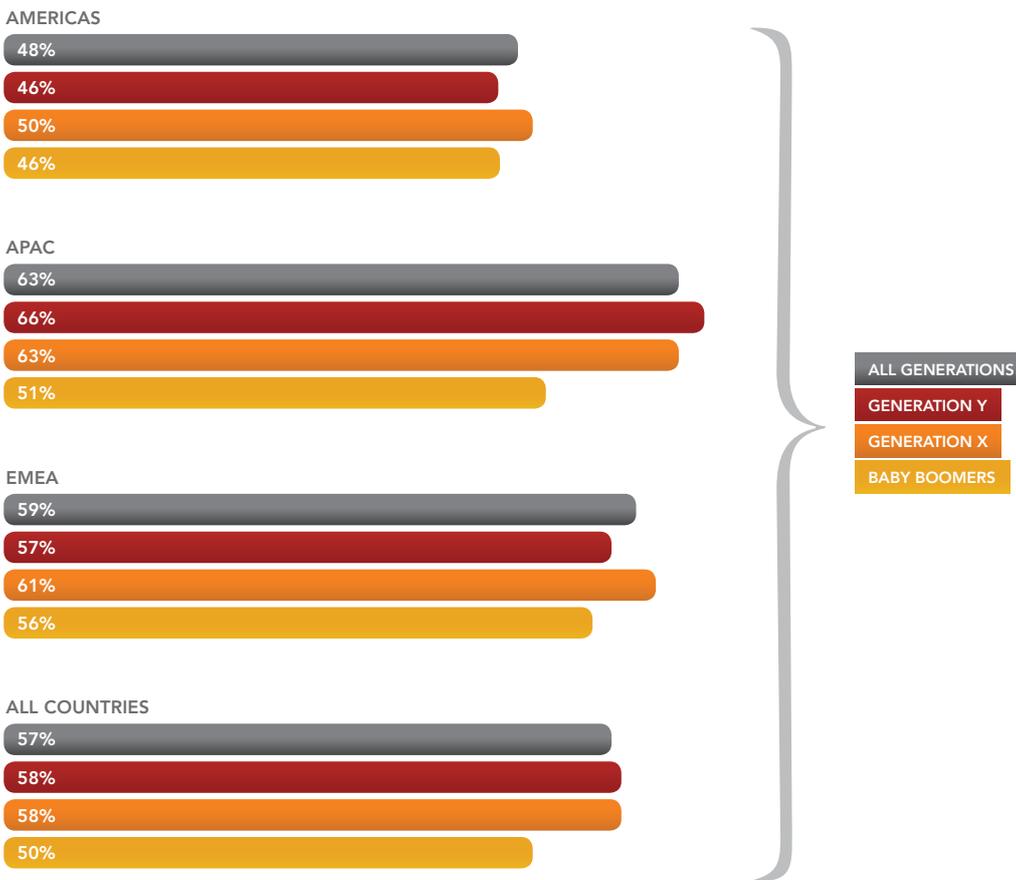
Within APAC, Gen Y is reporting the highest likelihood of change, with two-thirds anticipating a career change within the next five years. In EMEA, Gen X is the group most impacted, with 61% anticipating a career change.

In the Americas, less than half of all respondents are looking to change careers, but the most likely group to do so is Gen X.



FIGURE 4.

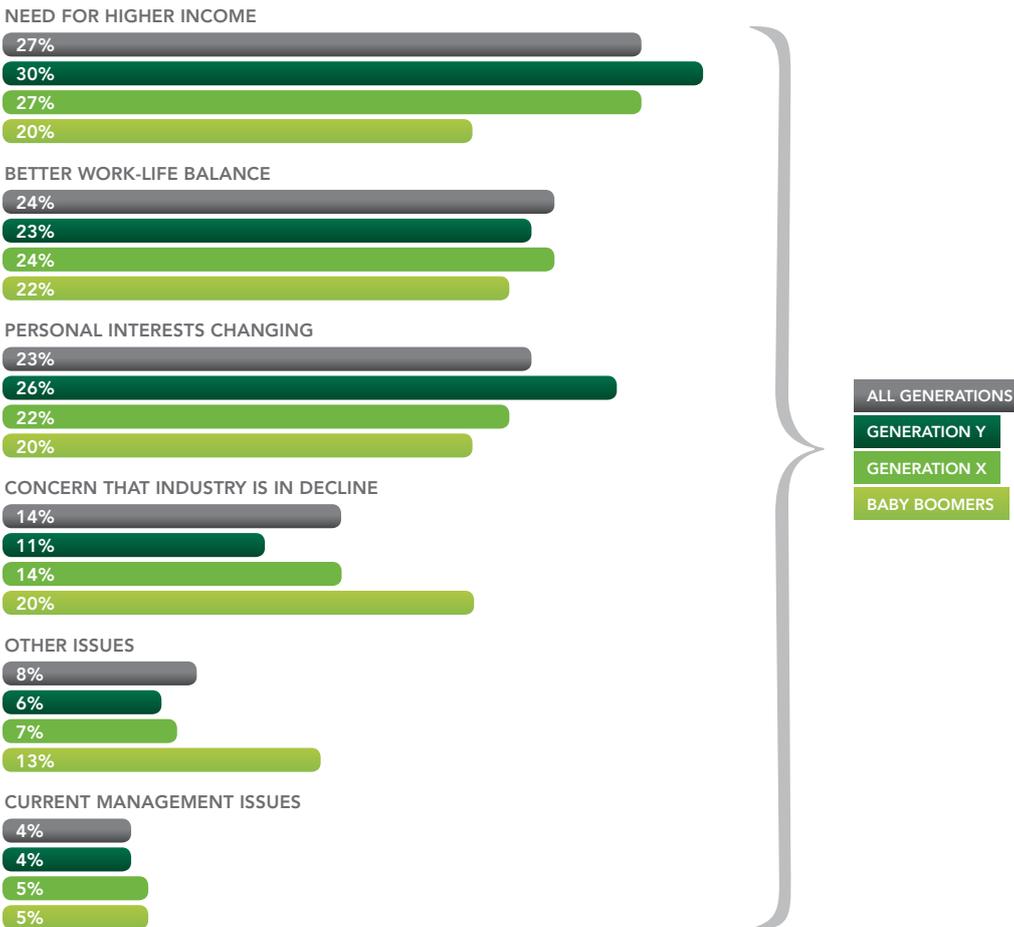
Do you anticipate having to change your career or field of work within the next five years?



When we look at the causes or reasons behind expected career change, we see a strong focus on work-life balance. While the main driver of career change for younger generations is the need for higher income (30% for Gen Y and 27% for Gen X), it ranks only marginally above other factors.

One-quarter of people (24%) expect to change careers to enable them to have a better work-life balance, and a similar proportion (23%) want to do so because their personal interests are changing.

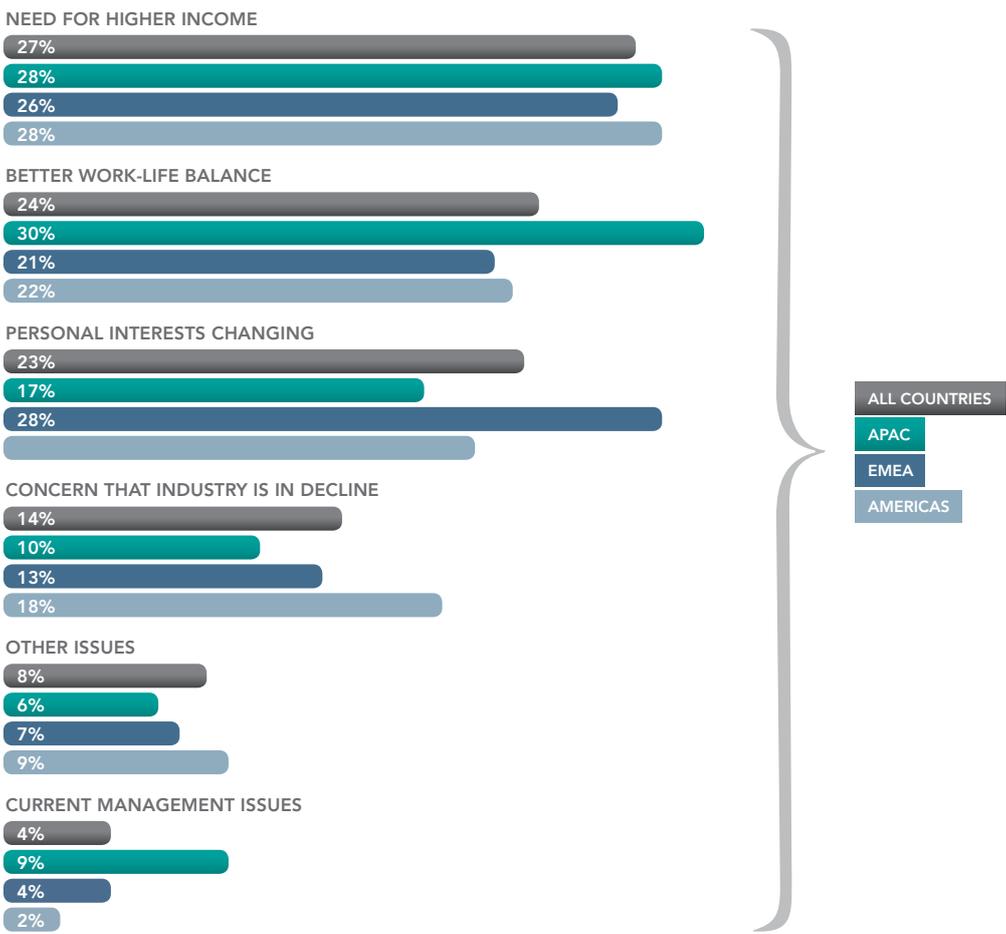
FIGURE 5.
What would cause you to change your career or field of work? (By generation)



Among Baby Boomers, a significant number of people are expecting to change careers because their industry is in decline—one in five Baby Boomers (20%) believe that career change will be driven by declining stability and profitability in their field of work. For Gen Y’s this figure is just 11%—a striking indicator of the currency and future viability of the skills and career paths Generation Y’s feel they are already involved in.

Across the regions, the reasons for considering a career change do differ, but there are some striking similarities, perhaps reflecting the globalized nature of many industries and professions.

FIGURE 6.
What would cause you to change your career or field of work? (By region)



The need to earn a higher income concerns a similar proportion of people across the globe, with around three in ten people in each region (26% in EMEA, 28% in APAC and the Americas) reporting that income will require them to make a career shift in the next five years.

More people in APAC have concerns about work-life balance than the other regions (30% compared with 21% in EMEA and 22% in the Americas) and many more people in EMEA feel that changing personal interests will see them change careers in the near future.



Notably, the Americas have a larger share of people concerned that their industries are in decline (18% compared with 13% in EMEA and just 10% in APAC).

The data reveals the scale of change that employees globally are preparing themselves for. And what's more, many people are not only preparing for career change, they are confident that it will not harm their career prospects over the long term. For those considering a change in career or a break from the workforce, approximately three-quarters (74%) believe they would be able to resume their careers at the same level if and when they return.

Younger workers are most confident about their ability to resume their careers after a break and are also the most likely to be considering career change within the next five years.

If these trends hold, it's likely that a significant proportion of the talent pool will not have the experience employers' desire, but will instead be looking for ways to enter new fields and careers. Employers may need to consider how positions can be created that would suit older workers with experience in other fields. The most talented and valuable people for your organization in five years' time may currently be working in an entirely different field.



THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER...

What will it mean for the business if more than half of the current workforce is looking to leave within the next five years? And how can the work-life balance issue be addressed to stem the tide of turnover?

Do you need to think more broadly about candidate selection?

How can these findings affect your workforce planning, succession planning, engagement, and retention efforts?

Knowing this, scan your organization (beyond speaking with peers!) to understand how good the organization is at honoring – not just tolerating – work/life balance needs and aspirations. Note that this also affects your ability to attract future employees.

How well do you know your employees' expectations and career desires?

03

CHOOSING LIFESTYLE

While most people have strong career ambitions, the lifestyle issues associated with moving up the management chain are weighing heavily on people's minds.

Higher salaries, greater decision-making power and the opportunity to affect change are clear advantages of executive roles. However, longer working hours, higher stress and a blurring of the line between work-time and free-time is often the consequence. While most people (72%) aspire to attain an executive position, there's a strong link between age and ambition—the longer we spend in the workforce, the less inclined we feel to climb the corporate ladder.

No less than eight in ten (80%) Generation Y's say they have aspirations to reach the executive level. This enthusiasm and optimism seems to decline slightly as we reach mid-career with 72% of Gen X'ers saying they have the same aspiration, yet the decline in this aspiration is significant as we reach the latter stages of our careers. Just half (54%) of Baby Boomers say they aspire to this level of management.

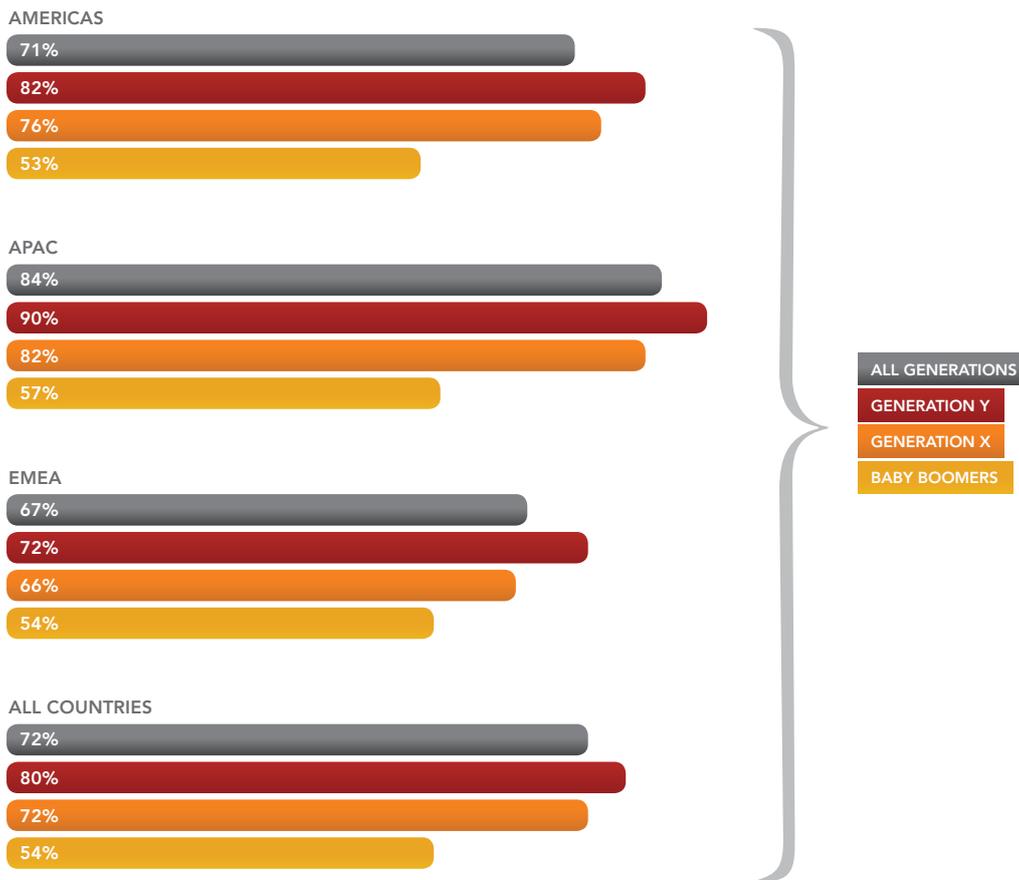
Generation Y in APAC is the most aspirational of all—nine in ten (90%) have an executive role in their sights. In fact, APAC has the highest levels of aspiration to reach executive management of all three regions. More than eight in ten people across all generations in APAC (84%) have this as a career goal, compared with 71% in the Americas and just 67% in EMEA.

The culture gap does seem to narrow as we age—Baby Boomers across the world have a virtually uniform attitude toward obtaining executive positions.

It's tempting to dismiss this trend and believe that many years of working hard for promotion have not paid off for older workers, so they have simply 'given up'. However, lack of ambition is not the reason older workers are avoiding executive management.



FIGURE 7.
Do you have aspirations to advance to an executive position? (%Yes)



The reasons why people have different aspirations are clearly affected by demographics such as age and culture. The research reveals a significant difference in the way that executive positions are viewed by people depending on where they live and work, and what stage they are at in their career.

Across all generations, lifestyle factors are the main reasons why people avoid executive roles—a significant obstacle when many organizations are looking to diversify their management teams, and particularly to attract more women to senior roles.

FIGURE 8.
If you do not aspire to an executive role, why not? (By generation)

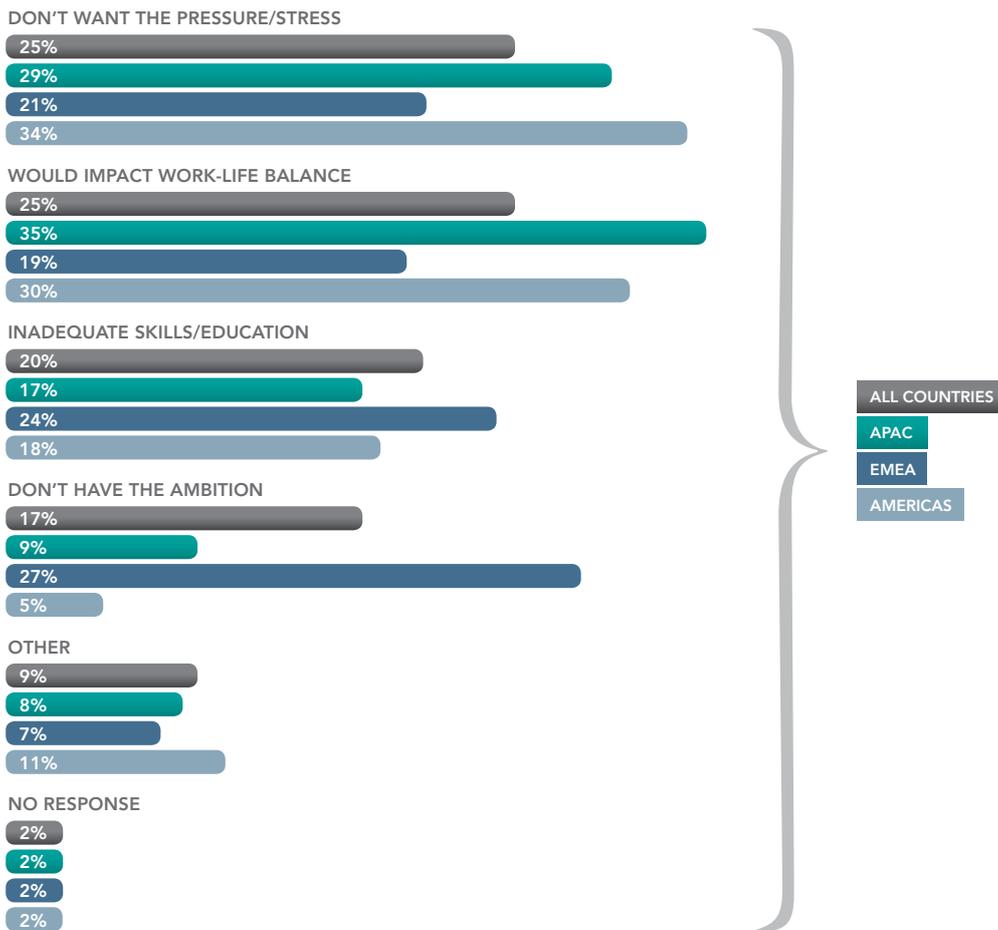


Yet these lifestyle issues (pressure/stress and work-life balance) are more pronounced among Baby Boomers—54% cite them for avoiding an executive role compared with 51% of Gen X and 45% of Gen Y.

Concern about inadequate skills or education is most pronounced among Gen Y, as is the view that they lack the ambition for an executive role.

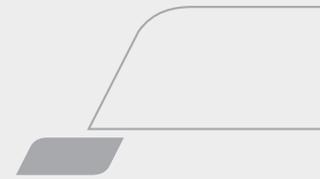
In both APAC and the Americas, lifestyle issues are the main reasons for shunning executive roles—64% of people in these regions cite pressure/stress and the impact on work-life balance as their reason for not pursuing a senior management position.

FIGURE 9.
If you do not aspire to an executive role, why not? (By region)



By contrast, just 40% of people in EMEA, say these lifestyle factors influence them to avoid promotion.

In fact, more than one-quarter of employees in EMEA (27%) say they do not aspire for an executive role. This compares with just 5% of people in the Americas and 9% in APAC. Individual aspirations clearly have a cultural context and this is a significant challenge for companies applying a uniform talent management approach across multiple markets.



One-quarter of people in EMEA believe their education and skills would not be sufficient to take on a senior management role—another critical consideration for companies expanding in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER...

What impact do these findings have on senior leader succession planning?

With organizations moving toward flatter, matrixed, leaner models, how do you balance the expectations with reality?

Do we need to fundamentally redefine “executive roles” to be less about hierarchy and spans of control and more about contribution based on influence, collaboration, innovation and thought leadership?

What work-life balance practices are you implementing to attract and retain talent?

04

CAREER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: TURNING THE RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

At Kelly, we know that research is a powerful thing. Understanding what the trends and forecasts are telling us is the first step, but putting the findings into practice can be entirely another.

Some of the practical strategies we provide to help you get in front of the trends outlined in this paper are:

1. EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE PLANNING

An organization's ability to achieve its mission and goals is predicated on having access to the talent it needs to execute a business plan. Astute organizations are asking themselves questions like "given our strategy, what are our most important talent needs?" "What roles are most important or pivotal?" "How do we gain access to the talent we need?" The answers to these questions will help to pinpoint the specific talent needs they have... or don't have.

Organizations will benefit from identifying:

- Key or pivotal roles that are differentially important to driving or impeding success
- The mix of key skills, knowledge, behaviors and experience that is required
- Where talent is best deployed, both functionally and geographically
- Gaps or barriers impeding access to talent
- Plans for gap reduction

Approaches to workforce planning can range from organization-wide and technology-driven, to less robust yet still aligned to the strategy. Regardless of the approach, leaders must be clear on the business strategy and focus on identifying the talent implications.



2. IMPLEMENTING EMPLOYEE-LED CAREER DEVELOPMENT

While workforce planning sets the stage for understanding talent needs, career development ensures a steady supply of engaged internal talent. Both recent and historic research indicates, across all generations, that the opportunities for career development and the quality of relationship with a person's manager dramatically impacts a person's intent to stay. The manager and employee relationship hinges on how well the manager takes an active "interest" in the employee. Taking interest means regular conversation that includes understanding the employee's career interests and aspirations. While knowing interests and aspirations is good, it's the committed action that the employee and manager take together that drives career growth. Committed action typically includes a development goal and plan of action that is regularly discussed. At Kelly Services, we reinvented the performance management process to drive greater emphasis on employee-manager dialogue, and dramatically improve the planning and execution of employee-led, career-focused development.

3. DEVELOPING MANAGERS' CAPABILITIES AS TALENT CHAMPIONS

The manager's commitment to helping an employee grow and develop can take many forms. The minimal effort identified above begins with understanding and planning an ongoing dialogue. Career development truly needs to be owned by the employee. A manager who goes beyond to truly "champion" development stands out. Expressions of commitment include:

- Creating time for development
- Identifying together the best ways (e.g. coaching, mentoring, opportunities for new work experiences, education) to drive targeted development
- Introducing the person to a suitable mentor
- Sharing the employee with another department for a project
- Ongoing dialogue to help ensure self-reflection and growth

At Kelly Services, an aspect of the Talent Management process is a strong emphasis on understanding and recruiting internal talent for open roles. To be considered for new opportunities many employees complete an online "profile" that includes their education, experience, skills, and career aspirations.

4. ESTABLISHING A LEADERSHIP BRAND

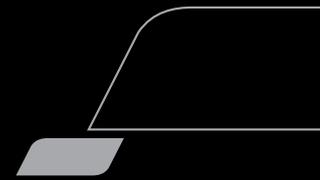
A leadership brand as an aspect of the employer brand can be powerful. It affects employee engagement, retention and attraction. Leaders who role-model valued behaviors and hold others accountable for the same, become brand ambassadors. The adage that 'actions speak louder than words' is true. Consistently leading in balanced ways that exemplify what matters most to a firm, helps create and sustain an environment that is multi-generationally engaging. Leadership, once just the domain of people managers, is now in bounds for all employees. The current and emerging organization structures allows and requires everyone to lead. Leadership behaviors apply whether you are a team working on a short-term project, or one that will be together indefinitely. Key for success is the ability to collaborate, innovate, and achieve goals together as an aligned team. Leadership is the catalyst for this magic to occur.

At Kelly, our journey to a leadership brand started with the creation and broad use of a leadership model. The model, dubbed the "Leadership Blueprint," lays out a balanced image and description of mission and value-based behaviors expected of all who lead. It's used as the backdrop for important talent processes including performance management, career development and selection, inclusive of succession planning. It also has been shared with customers and candidates as foundationally important in our employer brand. "As a company, we aspire to be an employer of choice. We realize this means we need leaders of choice. This blueprint is our view of what it means to be a leader of choice." – Nina Ramsey

5. USING TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE RELATIONSHIPS

The number of social media platforms seemingly grows daily. The regard for these tools and means of engagement varies across generations. The simple fact is that we all need to embrace social media – it's here to stay. Remaining connected and working as communities of thought leaders, learners, and doers is enabled through the wise use of technology. If we value each other and the power of collaboration, the best place to gather for work is no longer just the conference room down the hall. The key, like almost anything, is balance.

Research the various technology solutions out there. Make your choice based on your most important objectives and what you can reasonably afford. At Kelly, we found a human capital management system with a relatively new company that allowed us both to learn together, and we did this within a conservative budget. It can be done. The benefits gained are well worth it.



CONCLUSION

The latest *Kelly Global Workforce Index* demonstrates that our age, experience level, culture and location have measurable impact on the choices we make about our careers.

Work-life balance and personal interests are now key aspects of how people manage their careers, and this is only likely to increase as traditional job security and structures respond to continued economic and social shifts. The vast majority of workers are looking for more experience, want to continually upgrade their skills and are keen to build alternative career paths to fulfill their individual needs throughout their careers—they're not looking for loyalty, they're looking for opportunity.

Employees know that change is central to everything they do—large-scale changes in global organizations, including downsizing, outsourcing and prominent collapses, have ensured this. As a consequence, more than half of employees are actively preparing for the likelihood that they will be forced—by economic circumstances or personal life choices—to change their entire career focus within a relatively short timeframe. So it's clear that this ongoing change, the desire for greater work-life balance and the knowledge that skills are only in demand if they're up-to-date, are all central to the way most people now plan and manage their careers.

The challenge for employers is to understand how to turn these patterns to their advantage. How can experience be measured and valued differently? How can the ambition of younger generations be channeled positively and how can a greater sense of balance be integrated across entire organizations without compromising productivity?

Career choice and progression is a multi-layered, shifting dynamic. And in this increasingly diverse, globalized context, managing for individual career choice and increased flexibility will be key to maintaining competitive advantage.



This whitepaper is also available in summary format in the ebook *Four Factors that Shape Careers*

 **DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE COPY TODAY.**

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ABOUT THE KELLY GLOBAL WORKFORCE INDEX™

The [Kelly Global Workforce Index](#) is an annual survey revealing opinions about work and the workplace from a generational viewpoint. Approximately 97,000 people from the Americas, APAC and EMEA responded to the 2011 survey with results published on a quarterly basis. Kelly Services was the recipient of a MarCom Platinum Award in 2010 and a Gold Award in 2009 for the Kelly Global Workforce Index in the Research/Study category.

ABOUT KELLY SERVICES®

Kelly Services, Inc. (NASDAQ: KELYA, KELYB) is a leader in providing workforce solutions. Kelly® offers a comprehensive array of outsourcing and consulting services as well as world-class staffing on a temporary, temporary-to-hire and direct-hire basis. Serving clients around the globe, Kelly provides employment to more than 530,000 employees annually. Revenue in 2010 was \$5 billion. Visit www.kellyservices.com and connect with us on Facebook, LinkedIn, & Twitter.

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