QUANTUM LEAP

The wired GENERATION

A study by Inti International Universities and Colleges finds Gen-Z to prefer more adventurous career options, while spending more time online

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The instinctive urge to nurture and protect the young is ingrained in the deepest parts of the human psyche, based on the biological need to preserve and propagate our species as a whole. In the jungle of contemporary society and urban lifestyles, however, the increasing impact of technological and cultural change on Malaysia's youth requires a simultaneous transformation in the way we perceive and interact with the next generation of leaders.

"In the past, there was a clear divide between the virtual and the real world. The Gen-Z study reveals that those lines are blurring, which then presents new opportunities for key stakeholders, including parents, educators, businesses and policymakers to engage with this generation," says Inti International Universities and Colleges CEO Rohit Sharma.

Basing its findings on a landmark survey conducted via focus groups and in-home interviews, encompassing more than 500 Gen-Z respondents throughout the country, the group explored the growing trend of "hyper-connection" among Malaysian youths, along with its associated effects on their outlook and goals as they enter the workforce.

Following Gen-X and Gen-Y, Gen-Z is generally defined as the subset of the population born between 1999 and 2005. While a previous Ernst & Young (now EY) study in 2013 emphasised the management qualities of previous generations, Inti's research found a preference among Gen-Z representatives for adventurous career options while spending a larger proportion of their time online.

"As a nation, we should be pleased that Gen-Z is a generation that wants to be its own GPS. They are self-starters, wanting to be entrepreneurs to carve out their own unique career path. They are hungry to acquire skills such as creativity, time management, problem solving, teamwork and leadership," says Sharma.

Accordingly, 42% of participants stated the desire to do something completely new when making career choices, while 37% hoped to parlay their hobbies into a profession. In terms of success, salary was cited as the primary indicator of accomplishment, with personal happiness, health and job satisfaction as secondary concerns.

The survey findings were accompanied with a panel discussion by industry leaders such as Google Malaysia managing director Sajith Sivanandan (right) and Rohit Sharma, CEO of Inti International University and Colleges

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The next generation is also highly reliant on devices, to the point that many now profess to having a fear of being offline. More than 80% of respondents peruse multiple devices throughout the day, including smartphones, laptops, desktops and televisions, while the vast majority — 94% — visit social media platforms such as Facebook, WeChat, YouTube, WhatsApp and Google+.

The Gen-Z survey findings were released in conjunction with a panel discussion by key industry leaders, including Google Malaysia managing director Sajith Sivanandan, Leaderonomics managing director Roshan Thiran and PricewaterhouseCoopers Malaysia partner Patrick Ng.

"Every generation is born into different eras, and is of course raised differently. So when we have our own kids, our offspring, we see that we need to teach them different skill sets, so that they are brought up with something more. In passing the baton to the next generation, I think that we need to tell them to look beyond the short-term and invest for the future, because they will need that to grow," says Ng.

In applying the research findings to effective strategies in managing and harnessing the potential of Gen-Z representatives in the classroom and in the workplace, Thiran also highlights the need for a sincere understanding of their motivations, as well as a commitment to addressing them.

"I think what people look for, whether it's Gen-Z or otherwise, is authentic leadership. You need to walk the talk; as we focus on transforming lives and re-inventing education, if our classrooms and the ways we approach education are not changing, it is readily apparent. So you need to embrace what you believe in, and deliver on that," he concludes.

FROM FAR LEFT:
Ng advised those in Gen-Z to look to the long-term for improved growth prospects