Bachelor's thesis
International Business Management
International Business
2014

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EXPECTATIONS OF FRENCH GENERATION Y STUDENTS REGARDING THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF WORK



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Degree programme in International Business | International Business Management

2014| Total number of pages 36

Thesis Advisor: Matti Kuikka

ABSTRACT

TURUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU THESIS

Nowadays, companies and organizations have to adapt themselves in function of changes and evolutions of our society. People who start to work today belong to a new generation which has new expectations, goals and which requires new

adapted "management methods".

The generation arriving at workplaces called Generation Y has aspects, features and expectations sometimes differing from the ones of the previous generations, currently present in the professional environment. The Generation Y people are born between the beginning of 1980s and middle of 1990s.

The arrival of this new generation the professional life, might induct new styles of management and new work organization within the companies. A key for the success for companies in a near future will be to understand as best as possible their "new" employees, in order to adapt the management.

The main goal of this thesis is to understand and highlight the French Generation Y students' visions and expectations regarding the professional life and oraganizational environement of work.

KEYWORDS:

French, Generation Y, Students, Changes, Hierarchy, professional priorities

OPINNÄYTETYÖ (AMK) | TIIVISTELMÄ TURUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Koulutusohjelman nimi | Suuntautumisvaihtoehdon nimi

Opinnäytetyön valmistumisajankohta | Sivumäärä

Ohj aaja(t)

ASIASANAT:

Kirjoita tekstiä napsauttamalla tätä.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

GenY Generation Y (born 1979 – 1995)

CE Comité d'Entreprises (companies committee)

UN United Nations

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

ICT Information and Communication Technology

INTRODUCTION

What allows companies to be efficient is their resources and assets (material and human resources). Material resources might be changed whether they don't fit well with the organization or at least some improvements can be made on them. However, concerning the human resources, they are the most important resources the company has at its disposal, so companies need to adapt themselves and manage them the best as possible (Lahmar, 2012) and (UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission For Europe, 2013). That's why it is a real stake for firms to manage well their workforce because it will determine their efficiency and contribute a lot to their future success.

After some experiences working in quite big companies such as internships and seasonal employments I realized some facts:

- The difficulties that people can have sometimes to work together, difficulties due to a diversion of visions, different expectations or different ways to organize their work.
- Regarding Generation Y's behavior and expectations, the question is how they would be able to adapt themselves to organizational structures and professional world (their behavior, expectations and way of thinking sometimes doesn't fit with professional environment).

That's why I decided to focus on this topic and try to understand it. Moreover I think that it might be helpful for managers to understand better GenY (Generation Y) and to manage them the best as possible. I think that it's "easier" for me to talk about this subject because I belong to this generation. I am more than concerned because it deals with the management of tomorrow and the way that I will be managed in the next few years during my future professional career.

My research questions are the following ones:

- 1) What is the vision of French Generation Y students about the way of working in companies?
- 2) Which relation Generation Y has regarding the hierarchy?
- 3) What are the expectations of Gen Y people for their future professional career and the future kind of company they would like to work for?
- 4) What are the priorities of Generation Y people relative to their professional life?

I- THEORETICAL PART

1.1 Definition of Generation

We usually can describe the "generation" term according to four aspects: familial, demographic, social and politic aspects (Pech, 2010). In my thesis framework I will focus mostly on the social aspect. According Marie DESPLATS and Florence PINAUD, a generation might be defined as "a group of people with an age span of 20 years approximately. The concept of generation gathers individuals who have been grown during a homogenous period. Their economic, technologic, cultural and social environments are going to determine the trends regarding the values and customs of this generation. And these trends distinguish it from the previous one and the next one as well." (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012). Even if there is a common background to each individual of a generation, the personality of each of them allows to maintain the differences. Personality and then sometimes divergences from the common generational background is usually influenced by several factors such as culture, education and environment in which they grew up.

Thanks to common features and trends specific to groups of individuals, we can distinguish four or almost five generations (the distribution of the dates to define each generation varies from sources and references but, the one I found more often is below) (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012):

- Traditionalists generation (1922 1945)
- Baby Boomers generation (1946 1964)
- Generation X (1965 1978)
- Generation Y (1979 1995)
- Generation Z or C (After 1996 Now)

We are now at a point in which the Generation Y arrives in the companies and start their professional life. That means that they have to collaborate and work with the two previous generations who are still in the workplaces and who have a different vision of management, hierarchy and other work values. This new

professional environment (for each generation) and trans generational cohabitation might sometimes create conflicts due to a misunderstanding from a generation about the other one.

Currently, half of the generation Y people have not entered yet to professional life but are still students and have for the moment only expectations and visions about the professional environment (even if some of them experienced it a little bit thanks to internships). Here, for my thesis, I decide to focus only on this second part of Generation Y (born after 1990).

This generational concept mainly relies on the society context and period in which those people grew up and also the education and beliefs they received. Those criteria determine, influence and impact their way of being, way of behaving and their way of life which are what characterizes each generation and makes it different from the previous and next ones.

1.2 Generation Y

1.2.1 Generation Y denomination

Through sources and references I used, I could find different denominations for this new generation (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012) (Ollivier & Tanguy, 2011).

- "Generation Why" (usually expressed and written as "Generation Y" due to the English phonetic pronunciation of the letter "Y"). This attribute "Why" was given to this generation because sociologists who studied this topic of new generation define them as people who always need an explanation as a reason to justify why they do something. Find a justification for everything either for positive reasons than negative ones.
- "Digital native", "Web children" or "Generation 2.0": Indeed they are born
 during this digital and web explosion which have now an essential place
 in their life. They use it and surf on the web every day.
- "Peter Pan Generation": Despite of their independence and "freedom"
 claim and their willingness to look like responsible adults the soonest as

possible they postpone certain habits to the adult age (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012) and in fact they often need to be "mothered". According to Allain Carol, they are "spoilt children who have become adult" (Carol, 2005). This feature should highlight the relation they have regarding the hierarchy.

1.2.2 Generation Y features

Concerning the Generation Y, Authors such as Richard Delaye, Benjamin Chaminade, Arthur M. Baldonado, Marie Desplats or Florence Pinaud used to mention the "4i therory" in their Generation Y description process (Chaminade, 2013), (Delaye, 2013), (Baldonado, 2008), (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012). This "theory" regroups four words which are individualism, Interconnection, Impatience and Inventivness, words that authors use to describe the Generation Y as the main common features of this generation (Bouchez, 2011).

Nevertheless there is a paradox for the 4i theory words and especially for individualism term. For Benjamin Chaminade, the individualism term is a contradiction itself regarding the Generation Y: "No, it's not that they are only thinking about themselves and are just here to take and learn. This individualism term deals more with individualization and personal recognition" (Chaminade, 2013).

As a paradox, Generation Y people tend to prefer work in team and around collective projects: "Gen Y got the habit of the membership in belonging to a group either through social virtual networks than real social friends groups. In the company they will appreciate to work under a team project way" (Pinaud & Desplats, Juillet 2012).

In a report of a conference about the company and the Generation Y, authors who participated to this conference explained the duality individualism and team work spirit of the Generation Y: " If they like working in team, they also need challenges in order to show and prove to others their personality, and then receive the consideration marks they are looking for" (Vulierme, et al., 2011).

1.2.3 Generation Y relationship regarding the hierarchy

The notion of hierarchy inducts indirectly the notion of authority. Indeed hierarchy can be defined as "A system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority" (Oxford Dictionnaries, 2014)

Max Weber (1864 – 1920), was a German sociologist who promoted the bureaucracy model as the most common model in modern companies (Bedeian and Wren, 2009). In his work, he mentioned and gave a vision of the hierarchy (Bedeian and Wren, 2009). The Hierarchy principle he mentioned is the following one: The hierarchy as a formal and essential structure in companies. According to him hierarchy is the only way which can allow an efficient and relevant decision making process. (Johnston, 2014)

However, this vision of hierarchy contrasts with the current trend. Indeed, nowadays companies go progressively to a collaborative management "which tends to flatten hierarchy levels and then put the manager at the center of the decision process and not at the top anymore" (Rocoplan, 2014).

Generation Y people have a different approach and vision about the hierarchy compared to previous generations but also to the historical hierarchy notion (Weber). Julien Pouget defines this approach "more in an horizontal way". More precisely he explained that « one of the feature of the generation Y is to work in an horizontal way. This notion should be understood in opposition to pyramidal systems or classic hierarchical systems which are mostly present nowadays." (Pouget, 2010).

1.2.4 Ambition and professional career expectations

According to a PwC survey, "Millenials at Work: reshaping the workplace", published in february 2012, "opportunities for career progession" constitutes a criterion "making an organization an attractive employer" for the Generation Y people. Indeed, with 52% of respondant to this survey, "Opportunities for

professional career" is the first element answered by Generation Y people respondants.



Figure 1: PwC survey results "Millenials at Work: reshaping the workplace"

However, even if French Generation Y students consider the opportunities for career progression as an important criterion or a priority in their professional life, they are looking for and claiming for a balance between their personal and their professional life. As mentionned by the newspaper les Echos "Generation Y people highlight the balance between their personal life and professional life. Their willingness is to be able to combine those two lives shading off the barriers between personal and professional world (read personal emails at workplaces, take a professional call during the week end ...). Their relationship with the company is based on a "give and take" relationship. That doesn't mean work less, but work in another way" (Bouisson, 2014).

In order to summarize and have a general overview about Generation Y, here a SWOT analysis of this generation (Pouget, 2010)

<u>Table 1: Generation Y SWOT Analysis (Pouget, 2010), (Fabres, 2013), (INSEE, 2006)</u>

Strengths:

- Ease in using digital and new technologies
- Curious → Get information easily
- Always looking for a justification for what they do (positive or negative), this can be also considered as a weakness
- International and global oriented
- Adaptable
- Frequent change need
- Sociable, ease to communicate, but maybe too much spontaneous
- Dynamic and willingness to discover new things
- Multitask (due to zapping habits)

Weaknesses:

- « Too much » digital → difficulties to make the difference between virtual and real life. (notion of reality)
- Impatience
- · Sometimes claim for « too much » autonomy
- Hierarchy → Claim for smooth hierarchy levels → don't stand well authority
- Don't fit well with administrational framework → advocate self organization
- Need « freedom » and possibility to express themselves
- · Need to be stimulated and motivated
- · Need find justification for what they do
- Need speed and have « NOW » expectation → Instantaneous feature

Opportunities:

- · More and more innovation in technologies
- Globalization
- Quite big demographic group (should represent 40% of active people in France in 2015 according to Insee institute and Les Echos magazine)
- More importance given to environmental and social causes → opportunities of involvement

Threats:

- Economical Crisis
- Unemployment
- Leaving/retiring of previous generations
- Damaged society
- More and more requirements and high expectations from companies
- · High English level required due to globalization
- Sometimes perceived as lazy people only thinking in leisure

1.2.5 French Generation Y's expectation for their future company and career

According to a survey conducted by "universum" company in 2013, "Almost the half of French students would like an international career" (Universum, 2014). In an article of l'Express newspaper, published in March 2012, mentioning the international career expectations from the Generation Y, we can see the ranking of the companies acclaimed by French Generation Y students. This ranking is divided in two: ranking according to French students from business schools and ranking according to French students from universities. (Lexpress.fr, 2012)

<u>Table 2: L'Express newspaper ranking of the companies acclaimed by French</u> Generation Y students

Classement grandes écoles de commerce et management	2012	2011	Classement universités de commerce et management	2012
LVMH	1	1	LVMH	1
L'Oréal	2	2	Apple	2
Apple	3	3	L'Oréal	3
Google	4	4	Air France	4
Canal +	5	5	Google	5
Danone	6	8	BNP Paribas	6
Air France	7	7	Canal +	7
Nestlé	8	9	Société Générale	8
Ernst & young	9	10	HSBC	9
Coca-Cola Enterprise	10	15	Banque de France	10

Nowadays, companies try to implement new managerial strategies and new kinds of management, always in order to understand better their employees with the aim of best performances. In the past years, there was like an evolution from a "theoretical" management (for the majority of the organizations) towards now a "relationship" management. "This relationship management aims at considering abilities needed for a manager to take care of his employees and support them taking into account also their competences. Those abilities are mostly personal, behavioral, relational and interpersonal". (Labruffe, 2005)

Companies such as Google (founded in 1998) or Facebook (created in 2004) were the topics of studies concerning a "fun" and "lax" management due to the working conditions in workplaces of those companies. They are really concerned with new generation because the median age of employees in Google is 31 years and in Facebook 26 years, and they are perceived as an "ideal" company for Generation Y people (student generation Y people who have not started working yet). (Soulé, 2013).

"Google was chosen as number 1 in ranking "100 Best Companies to Work For" of the Fortune Magazine in 2012 and 2013 and Facebook was just appointed this year number 1 in ranking "Best Places to Work" of the Glassdoor survey." (Soulé, 2013).

However, with this young median age, they are companies who usually recruit people as a first job, using the ideal image people have about them. Indeed, before working for those companies, new generation people consider them as the ideal employer but articles and studies and especially a ranking done by Payscale company shows that "the half of Google employees leave the company only after on year within it". (Les Affaires, 2013) and (Dagnaud, 2011).

Apart from those examples, other companies such as Deloitte try to implement new and modern things to permit well-being of employees and provide them a harmonized professional environment in fitting with the values of the company they are working for.

These companies' goals pass through the implementation of things such as CE providing social advantages or other kind of benefits to employees, implementing events with social causes and goals. In that way, those events, which can seem sometimes without link with work and employee management, permit in fact a better cohesion between employees which young workers as Generation Y people are looking for.

II- RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted to give an overview and highlight the French Generation Y students expectations regarding the professional life and organizational environment of work.

In that perspective, the fulfillment of the research objective required specific research questions to be answered:

- 1) What is the vision of French Generation Y students about the way of working in companies?
- 2) Which relation Generation Y has regarding the hierarchy?
- 3) What are the expectations of Gen Y people for their future professional career and the future kind of company they would like to work for?
- 4) What are the priorities of Generation Y people relative to their professional life?

The choice of a survey was made in order to collect data in a quantitative way and then to permit a clear analyze of data collected. In first time, a questionnaire was realized and organized according to the research questions. Thanks to esurv.org tool, online survey software, the questions were able to be presented in a clear way to permit people to answer them with a time optimization and clearness aim.

The questionnaire was sent through three different tools which are personal network portal (Facebook), professional network portal (LinkedIn) and direct emails. At the beginning of this research work, the topic was larger covering not only French Generation Y students but international ones too. Then the questionnaire was sent to 70 Generation Y people from different nationalities. However, only 40 of them provided answers to the questionnaire. Moreover, because of the new orientation of this research work, requiring to narrow the study field, only the answers from French Generation Y people have been taken into account. Then in total only 24 answers could be taken into account regarding the French Generation Y students scope.

Due to the first orientation of the research thesis work, the questionnaire has been done in English. And this permitted to collect all answers on a common language base with the aim of avoiding misunderstanding or misinterpretation of answers which could have been due to a wrong translation.

The respondent profile was defined previously according to two criteria which are the following ones: People from the second part of Generation Y (then born between 1990 and 1995), who are still student and especially in a study field linked to Business in order to fit the best with organizational work world.

The questionnaire relies on 12 questions and the first five of them with a general background (such as gender, study field and previous work experiences) and the rest of them relative to professional life and organizational work environment. Among professional life and organizational work environment questions, four main points are distinguished thanks to those questions with the aim to highlight the expectations of French Generation Y Students regarding those topics: type of company for their professional career, Expectations relative to Hierarchy, Working way and Priorities in their professional life.

III- RESEARCH FINDINGS

The questionnaire realized, proposed to respondents, as introduction questions, general ones concerning their gender, their studies field and their potential previous professional experience(s). The distribution observed, thanks to the answers collected with those background questions, aims to give a more precise overview of respondents' profiles.

According to the first question distribution relative to the Gender of respondent, 75% of them are female and 25% are male. Inequality of this repartition comes from coincidence inducted by the new orientation and narrow research field.

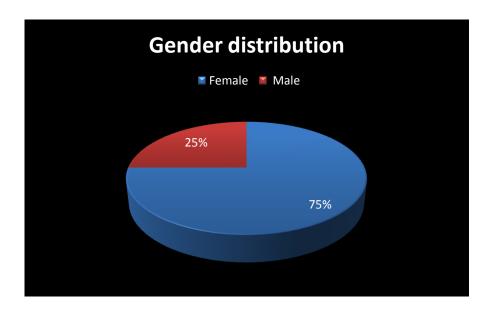


Figure 2: Gender distribution

Regarding the respondents' profile which deals with Generation Y students then who are not yet in the professional life, the second question made focus on potential respondents' previous professional experience. In this question, the following distribution was observed: 87% of French Generation Y students who answered the questionnaire have already had a work experience like an internship or seasonal employment as precised in the question formulation,

8.7% haven't had yet any professional experience and finally 4.3% of the respondents didn't answer this question.

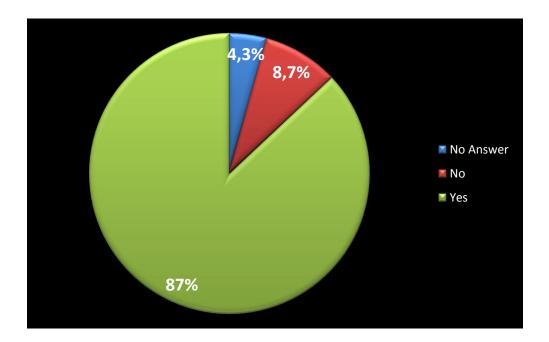


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents having or not yet a professional experience

Regarding the following question, question 6 asking the study field to participants, the studies sector repartition showed 55% of respondents studying in the Business and Management Field, 10% of them in the HR sector, 20% of them in Marketing and 15% of participants are currently studying IT.

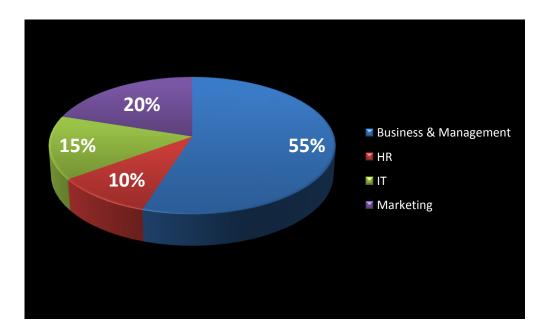


Figure 4: Respondents' study field

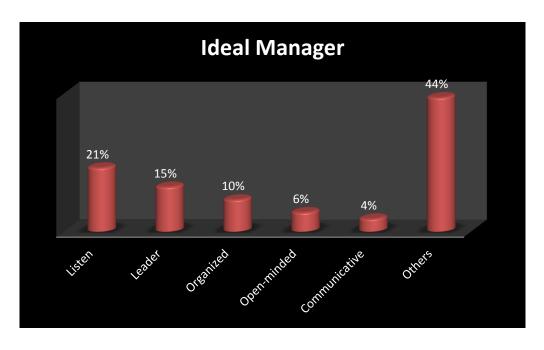


Figure 5: French Generation Y students 'vision regarding the ideal hierarchy

According to the Question 8 which deals with the expectation of the hierarchy through the ideas about the "ideal" manager, the distribution shows that 21% of the respondents expect a listening hierarchy, 15 % answered "leader" feature

(and 75% of those 15% precised take decisions for the leader feature). Then 10% of the French Generation Y student respondents gave the adjective "organized" to describe their ideal manager and 4% said "communicative". Finally other isolated adjectives and not linked between them were answered and this category "other" represents 44%.

Question 9 aimed to know French Generation Y student preferences regarding the way of working, more precisely preference between working alone or in teams. Figure 6, illustrating the answers to this question, shows that 67% of the respondents prefer working in teams whereas 33% of them prefer working alone.

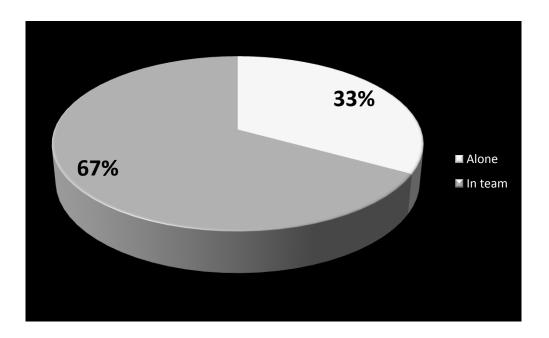


Figure 6: French Generation Y students' way of working preferences

Question 10 was done in order to collect data relative to priorities the French Generation Y students have, regarding several criteria in professional life. Eight criteria were given to participants to the survey so they put them in order from the most important according to them to the less essential. The criteria were the following ones: Personal life balance, career possibilities, relationship with own manager, Financial motives, appreciation and recognition, social cohesion,

content of work and responsibilities. The distribution illustrated by the figure 7, states that 45.8% of the respondents put personal life balance in first place as the most important criterion regarding their professional life, whereas 25% of them consider that the content of work is the most important criterion. Finally 20.8% of the respondents put the criterion "career possibilities" in first position. None of the "financial motive", "appreciation and recognition" neither "relationship with own manager" criteria were answered in the first position.

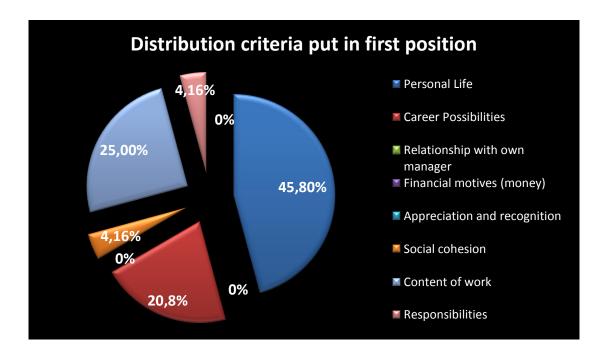


Figure 7: Distribution priorities criteria put in first position

Still based on the question 10, here is the distribution concerning the criteria choices put in second position. 29.16% of the respondents consider the social cohesion as the second most important criterion for their professional life. And 20.8% of them see "Financial motives" and "Content of work" as their second most important criterion. Also 81% of the 20.8% who answered "Content of work" as second priority had choosen "Personal life balance" as their first priority.

The rest of the distribution concerning the criteria put in second position was the following one: 12.5% answered "Appreciation and Recognition", 8.30% answered "Responsibilities" and finally both "Personal life balance" and "Relationship with own manager" were answered by 4.16%.

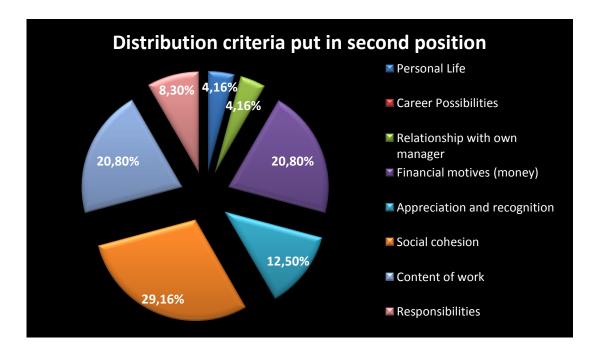


Figure 8: Distribution priorities criteria put in second position

For the question regarding the ideal company French Generation Y students would like to work for 37.5% of them gave the name of an international company such as Apple, Deloitte, Mercedes, Google, Unilever, BASF and LVMH. Then 16.2% of the respondents said NGO or UN. The distribution shows

that 12.5% of the respondents answered "National Comapies" such as Air France, Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicot and another 12.5% gave an answer relative to a company sector instead of a specific name of a company. These answers were considered in the "other" category.

8.3% of the respondents have a preference to work in small or medium companies and 8.3% of them don't have any idea yet about which company would be their ideal one. Finally 4.2% of French Generation Y students who answered this survey would prefer work on their own.

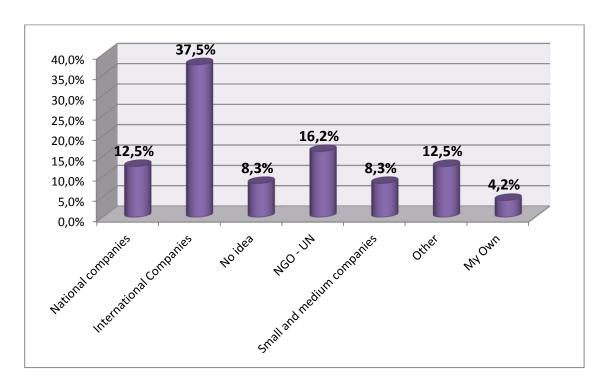


Figure 9: French Generation Y students' ideal kind of company for their future professional career

IV- DISCUSSION

The data collected from the survey to French Generation Y students permitted to get answers for the research questions and then fulfill the research objective of this thesis research work. As mentioned previously, this research work aimed to highlight the expectations of the French Generation Y students regarding their professional life and the organizational environment of work. The four research questions wondered were the following ones:

- 1) What is the vision of French Generation Y students about the way of working in companies?
- 2) Which relation Generation Y has regarding the hierarchy?
- 3) What are the expectations of Gen Y people for their future professional career and the future kind of company they would like to work for?
- 4) What are the priorities of Generation Y people relative to their professional life?

Vision of French Generation Y students about their future company and the management in general mainly relies on the type of the company, the possible involvement they can have in it and also the kind of management applied in those organizations.

The first point concerning the relationship French Generation Y students have regarding the hierarchy was considered through their vision of their "ideal" manager and the essential quality which are required from the hierarchy, according to them. The adjectives about ideal managers according to French Generation Y students, collected through the survey were listener, leader (as take decisions), organized, open-minded and communicative.

These adjectives are linked to the trend this new generation is claiming for: smoothing over of the hierarchy levels and new place of the manager at the center of the making decisions process and not anymore at the top. Horizontal way of thinking of the Generation Y people regarding the hierarchy comes from their relation they have to authority and can make wonder then about a kind of

willingness to go towards a new organizational way such as participative and collaborative management. Most of the adjectives answered by the respondents are shared also by other generations as common expectations for all individuals but more expressed or claimed in a stronger way by this Generation Y: "We can notice that Generation Y people, even if they amplify the trend to reconsider their priorities, are not so much different from the previous generations, they have exactly the same needs. Nevertheless, their tolerance regarding the frustration is lower, then they express more those needs and claim more for them." (Pascual, 2013).

Concerning French Generation Y students way of working preferences, on one hand the great majority of the respondents said that they prefer working in team rather than alone but on the other hand there are 33% non-negligible of them who prefer, on the contrary, work alone. That fits with the theoretical part and sources illustrating here the dualism or paradox of the individualistic feature of this Generation Y and their willingness to be in group.

One of the research questions of this thesis work, taking part in fulfilling the research objective, concerned the priorities of the French Generation Y students regarding their professional life. Some facts can be noticed relative to the answers collected through the survey and also among the authors in the theoretical part. Indeed the ranking of the priorities coming in first position was personal life balance, content of work and career possibilities. Those findings fit with theoretical references: in their survey,"Millenials at Work: reshaping the workplace", published in february 2012, Pwc highlighted the fact that "opportunities of career" was the criterion more claimed by French Generation Y students regarding their professional life.

Also Les Echos magazine, showed how the personal life balance was one of the priorities of the French Generation Y students in their professional life (Bouisson, 2014). Moreover the "content of work" criterion was answered in quite great proportion either in first position than in second one. So these three criteria are the most essential to consider regarding the Generation Y, even if, once again, they are needs and claims shared also with previous generations

but expressed in a stronger way by French Generation Y students (Pascual, 2013).

Concerning the French Generation Y students' professional career, the main fact which appears in majority is the international aspect either in the survey results of this research work than in theoretical references. Both research findings and theoretical framework showed willingness for career within international companies, and career evolution possibilities at an international scale.

V- CONCLUSION

Despite the personality of each individual, which makes them unique, the generation to which they belong to and the environment in which they evolve influence their opinions and behavior.

Indeed, nowadays, the challenge for organizations is to manage as best as possible the transition with the new generation arriving in professional life adapting themselves to those new people, reducing conflicts and staying aware about a fast changing society.

In this research work, the scope was reduced to a part of the Generation Y people (those born after 1990) and who are currently students but also geographically reduced to France. Two different "fields" would be relevant to be taken into account for a potential extension of this research work: geographical area and Managers' vision about Generation Y. In fact, concerning a geographical enlargement for the research scope it could be interesting to consider Generation Y at a global scale and/or as a global phenomenon.

Also, regarding the French Generation Y students' expectations and visions about their future professional career and the organizational environment of work, it could be relevant to compare it to the feeling of the previous generations currently present at the workplaces (Babyboomers, Generation X and the first part of Generation Y). Then this extension of research work could make us wonder about the potential generational conflicts which might happen in the organizations, due to the arrival of Generation Y at workplaces.

Through all those evolutions and considerations, we can wonder also what could be the possible adaptation from the companies to the Generation Y and from the Generation Y to the organizations. In other words how their expectations will be able to fit with the organizational environment of work.

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Generation Y Survey

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