Abstract— Nowadays, the generation Y workforce becomes a source of sustainable competitive advantage, and this group enters the workplace with desirable traits (technical skills, more acceptance for diversity at the workplace and high achievement). Despite that, this group has been exposed to different historical events, which resulted in different attitudes at the workplace. This generation is considered to be uncharted territory, and organizations strive to find possible ways to effectively manage it. With this said, this conception paper sheds light on how the influx of generation Y into the workplace requires different sets of motivational strategies rather than relying on conventional ones.

Keywords— Generation Y, Millennials, Motivation

I. INTRODUCTION

NOTICEABLE differences among the generational workforce lie in their life goals, general values/work values and personality traits. Generational theory maintains that as groups of individuals are born into identifiable years, besides the fact that they are exposed to common political social and economic events, these cohort will develop unique values, belief systems, and peer personalities, hence, resulting in patterns “strong enough to support a measure of predictability [1].

[2] and [3] described the differences in the generation as a myth rather than being a reality, and they reached the conclusion that the focus should be given to employee needs relating to age (maturity), life-cycle and career stage differences instead of tailoring particular management strategies for specific generational cohort; although it is true in the sense that career stage plays a role in identifying hierarchal needs, the differences among the generational workforce are impossible to be overlooked.

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The downside of studies against generational gap theory is their reliance on subjective opinions and perceptions rather than the utilisation of systematic empirical evidence, although empirical studies with cross sectional designs likely will report results that confound generational effects with age effects [4].

On the other hand, the disputes on the differences in the prescribed aspects (e.g., values and personality traits) are subsided with the remarkable consecutive studies conducted by Twenge and her colleagues during the 2000s until the current time, who have adopted a rigorous methodological approach that relies on time lag study, as in [5], [6] and [7], who examined generational differences in personality traits, work values and life goals respectively. These studies were conducted with purpose of disavow or to confirm the anecdotal information related to generational differences found in cross sectional studies or in the circulated media reports, and also to support the premises of generational gap theory, which was popularized in Western context during the 1960s by Schaie. Thus, the time lag study is able to distinguish between generational effects and age/career stage effects.

However, time period effects (e.g., changes of the traits and end states of generational cohorts over time) are less likely to have an effect, as each generational cohort develop their personalities and values during the formative years, and they are regarded to be fairly stable and enduring along their life [8].

Since there are differences in a generational workforce’s values, personality traits and life goals, this implies that managing a different generational workforce is necessary for them to be distinctive from each other, notwithstanding that the differences among generational workforces are sometimes exaggerated, however, even if the differences are a few, they require the attention of the management to employ the right human resource strategies that suit each generational workforce [9].

The effort to customize human resource strategies for each generational workforce through the investigation of generational workforce personality traits and values are of importance to organisations in the sense that such customization can promote harmony within organisations, reduce conflict among generational workforces (e.g. supervisors and employees) and, more importantly, comprehend the differences allow that organisations to influence attitudinal and non-attitudinal employees’ outcomes.
(e.g., commitment, satisfaction and performance) through specific strategies most tailored to different generational workforces. Thus, a win-win scenario is achieved for both employees and organisations.

Among the various generational workforces, the generation Y workforce, or alternatively coined Millennials, are considered to be a worthwhile area of inquiry in Malaysia, due to their current influx into the workforce and in conjunction with other generational workforce inceptions of retirement (i.e., baby boomers). Although there are inconsistencies with regards of when generation Y starts or ends in the literature, nevertheless, there is a prevalent consensus that a generation is born within the same time span of two decades, in the sense that during the two decades, fundamental life events are experienced at the developmental stage. Two decades are sufficient to notice a decline in birth rate in gen X, which signifies the start of a new generation [10]. Hence, gen Y could be defined as those born from 1980 to 2000 [11]. This definition of gen Y birth range is approximately consistent with the classification of labour force age groups provided by the department of statistics in Malaysia, as the first classification range is 15-34 years old.

Among the various differences between generational workforces, literatures are consistent in describing generation Y as the cohort with distinctive personality traits. Both designs of studies (i.e., time lag design and cross sectional study) reported consistent results, which specifically shows that generation Y has increased individualism traits relative to other generational workforces [12]. Exceptional is the study of [13], who disavow that personality traits do differ among generational workforces and found no evidence in personality traits differences. Despite that, individualism as a personality trait was not the focus of their study. Hence, generalising the finding of no differences in personality traits requires attention, given that the cross sectional study was the utilized methodology to reach such findings.

Unlike personality traits, differences in some of the work values among generational workforces are debatable and yet to be conclusive, as reported by [6] in her review of the empirical evidence for the differences in work values. Such inconclusive findings are either attributable to the methodological inconsistencies or due to that work values could change prior and post the entrance into the working world. Moreover, [14] suggested that personality traits are more stable, proximal to behaviour, and visible in others’ behaviour than are values, which signifies the worthiness of personality traits in effecting the attitudes.

The increased level of individualism within generation Y personality traits becomes a major challenge to organisations, though the individualism has upsides in terms of the likelihood to recognize the right and ability of individuals to succeed and contribute regardless of their background. Nevertheless, individualism becomes of managers’ concern when it reaches the level of narcissism. Generation Y is known for its over-confidence and narcissism.

Narcissistic traits entail several attitudes at the workplace which are deemed to be unrealistic, such as high expectations at the workplace, entitlement and disconnection between performance and rewards, which will lead to unrealistic demands by generation Y from the workplace [4].

Although, with the awareness of the aforementioned facts about millennials’ attitudes towards the workplace, several scholars have developed motivational models merely to accommodate these attitudes of millennials, in attempt to engage millennials’ behaviors to achieve better organizational outcomes, such motivational models that are extremely different from the conventional motivation theories.

Moreover, these proposed motivational models are regarded to be with minimum practical usefulness to the organisations, and this is attributable to the high cost of implementation associated with the attempts to accommodate the millennials’ unrealistic attitudes at the workplace. Therefore, the result is coddling millennials at the workplace, however, the real issue is to develop a motivational model able to alter the unrealistic attitudes of millennials at the workplace by capitalizing on their positive attitudes, which ultimately result in a win-win situation for both organisations and millennials.

II. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Ample motivational theories are currently available in the context of organizational behavior. However, with the influx of generation Y into the workforce, such theories are rendered less effective and impractical, as the entitlement, unrealistic expectations from organizations are aggressively developed by this cohort. It is of priority to give an insight on the conventional motivational theories and how such theories may become less effective in motivating generation Y workforce at the workplace. Thereafter, possible practical solutions will be provided as justified means to motivate this cohort.

To start with, needs theories stipulate that humans have specific needs that act as motivators towards goal-directed behaviors. Later, Herzberg had proposed the two-factor theory, which distinguishes extrinsic rewards from intrinsic rewards. The theory stipulates that the extrinsic rewards are necessary to have in organizations; however, they are not the motivators, but rather, intrinsic rewards are the motivators at the workplace [15].

In view of the generation Y workforce, high emphasis is placed on extrinsic rewards, as affirmed in several cross sectional studies conducted in Malaysia and abroad. Yet, the results generated by cross sectional studies plagued from methodological issues, since they did not distinguish between generational effects or maturity/life cycle effects [16].

In line with this, Maslow’s hierarchical needs theory argued that individuals have hierarchical needs, whereby, at each stage, an individual strives to fulfill particular needs in a hierarchical manner that match his/her current desire or current life stage. With such inconclusive assumptions, research on generation Y motivational strategies is in need to implement rigorous methodologies to verify or disavow the preferences of extrinsic rewards are due to generational effects or career/maturity effects.

Other influential theories that belong to the school of employees’ motivation are the cognitive theories that comprise of expectancy theory, equity theory goal setting theory and behavior theory, as provided by Vroom, Adams, Sari and Latham respectively. These sub-theories share the principle that employees’ motivation arises as a result of the assessment
of a situation cognitively, which is presented in the surrounding environment. Although, these sub-theories have been instrumental during the last decades, nonetheless, scholars recently argue their effectiveness within the generation Y workforce.

Vroom’s expectancy theory viewed motivation as a result of three main components that act multiplicatively: expectancy (the perception that a certain effort will lead to a defined level of performance), instrumentality (the perception that a defined level of performance will lead to desired outcomes), and valence (the reward received that the performance is highly valued by employees). Although this theory is regarded to be realistic in the workplace, the first component (expectancy) poses a challenge to its validity within the generation Y workforce. [17] explains that the high individualism (narcissism) has led to a sense of entitlement and high expectation as part of the generation Y personality trait, and this, in turn, has resulted in disconnection between performance and rewards. In accordance with this, it is unlikely that the expectancy theory will result in a favorable outcome (motivation), since generation Y, at the first stage, accepts unrealistic expectations and views their performance as superior, and any underestimation of their performance is the rater's fault.

[18] further challenged the validity of the equity theory for the generation Y workforce. Adam’s equity theory emphasized on the social comparison as a motivator for an employee, in the sense an employee cognitively compares the ratio of input/outcomes for themselves and for others, which results in internal and external equity respectively. Since then, fairness has been highlighted as an essential component for motivation and satisfaction. [19] provides similar reasons for the inapplicability of the equity theory for generation Y workforce. They refer to high self-esteem, which constitutues a challenge for the equity theory, in the sense that generation Y, with high self-esteem, view their inputs as valuable compared to the rewards received, or even compared to others, including their supervisors. With this said, the ultimate result will be the perception of inequity among the generation Y workforce, and subsequently, counterproductive behavior will follow the perception of inequity.

The Goal-Setting theory provides alternative means to motivate employees, as goals direct action and attention. Indeed, goal setting theories have their roots in the proposition that the work/job itself is the real motivator at the workplace. These theories assume that the success of these theories lie in satisfying three conditions: goal difficulty (the more difficult a goal, the better motivator for an employee than an easier goal) and goal acceptance (the perception that the undertaken difficult goal is attainable). Hence, goal acceptance interacts with goal difficulty and motivation. Lastly, goal specificity in terms of specified goals is a better driver for motivation than general goals.

Despite that, the practicality of goal-setting theories for generation Y employees requires reconsideration. According to [19], generation Y focuses on short-term goals, and this generation is unlikely to have long term presentence. In line with these characteristics, the goal-setting theory may not be adequate for generation Y; instead, the focus should be given to short term goals with constant feedback, which could be viewed more valuable.

In the context of employee motivation, the behavior theory provides another mechanism that seeks to motivate an employee. The principle of the behavior theory contends that human behavior could be altered and shaped with utilization of reinforcement/punishment procedures as described in the operant learning theory. The operant conditions act as distinguishable instruments to establish a clear relationship between antecedents of behavior and their consequence. For instance, a positive feedback and rewards may influence a behavior, such as performance, to a high level, and this high level of performance is subject to operant conditioning (i.e., rewards and feedback). Such a principle is referred to as Skinner’s theory (1953).

In contrast to its upsides, scholars question the practicality of continuing providing reinforcement, particularly for generation Y workforce. Several challenges are directed to the behavior theory (Skinner’s theory) in light of generation Y as the target group to be motivated. For instance, the reinforcement has influence over behavior as soon as it exists, nevertheless, such reinforcement may not continue forever. This, in turn, renders instable behavior, which only last as long as that particular reinforcement exists. This will be compounded within generation Y, as its threshold and tolerance at the workplace is described to be less than its counterparts.

In short, the unique life events experienced by the millennial generation creates unrealistic expectations at the workplace, leaving the conventional motivational theory incapable of dealing with this new cohort. On the other hand, the reality of the workplace is different, since at the workplace, employees are expected to receive accurate feedback about their performance, promoted based on actual performance or based on performance, which may not sound well for generation Y. Indeed, neither continuing to pamper the generation Y workforce, nor continuing to implement the conventional motivational theories would assist in solving the issue. It is then a question that remains to be solved and requires further discussion: what methods may an organization use to motivate the millennial generation with practicality usefulness? That is, moving them from coddling to real competencies.

III. Practical Implication

Gain sharing (GS) is presented as a better surrogate for conventional motivational theories for the generation Y workforce. The underlying assumption of GS is premised on the notion of “common fate”. GS assumes that rewards are received based on performance, and consequently, generation Y employees engage into the work as it is their own work. Additionally, GS necessitates participation and job involvement that are preferred by the generation Y workforce. As a result of GS, it is expected to bring positive outcomes for organizations represented in an increase of productivity and overall effectiveness of organizations.

GS is considered to be an effective strategy for this specific group of workforce, as GS will lead to the utilization of favorable work characteristics for generation Y. GS enables
generation Y to participate in decisions that allow them to experience a true sense of empowerment, and it further enables generation Y to work in a team and to be clear about the standards and rules as part of a collective work.

Moreover, GS is deemed to be appropriate, since GS assists in overcoming the negative characteristics stemming from generation Y at the workplace and such negative aspects, which are sensitivity to accurate feedback, high expectations and disconnection between rewards and performance. As stated previously, there is a need to bring these negative aspects in line with work’s reality. A possible way to do so is the use of the GS strategy. The mechanism of which by GS mitigates the associated negative characteristics at the workplace is explained in the next discussion.

Firstly, The GS plan establishes standards and rules for rewards based on performance, which will enhance the perception of equity among the generation Y workforce. The GS plan will require generation Y to engage in teamwork; in the sense that management could leverage the change of characteristics through utilizing desirable aspects for generation Y at the workplace.

Secondly, once GS is established, a prompt feedback on performance will be provided to guarantee that generation Y employees are in congruence with objectives and goals. At this specific stage, feedback provided will not be perceived negatively, instead, the provided feedback will be considered necessary and would be acceptable, since the rules and standards are set by teamwork, including generation Y themselves.

Finally, GS rewards are based on employee’s performance, and this enables generation Y to understand the mechanism of calculating equity on the basis of reality. Furthermore, GS establishes the belief that performance is based on improved performance, as rewards are the result of a meaningful contribution that is shared by generation Y employees.

IV. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper gives an insight on the traditional motivational theories and it is merit for the generation Y workforce. The evidences along with generation Y’s characteristics show that traditional motivation theories may not be capable of addressing generation Y’s characteristics. Albeit this, if they do, the practicality usefulness is questionable.

In view of such an argument, this paper suggests an alternative motivational strategy that is based on the GS principle to balance workplace reality with millennials’ high expectations.

In contrast, GS avoids coddling the generation Y workforce through accommodating their unrealistic characteristics, as previously done by researchers. It is the objective of GS to create a sense of organizational citizenship behavior.

REFERENCES