

Young and the Restless –Development Strategies for Young Professionals

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SUMMARY

The Spatial Sciences are a new and emerging industry, growing in reach, breadth and impact. This evolving industry requires a workforce with a broad range of skills and knowledge. The explosive growth in the utilization of geospatial tools and data in nearly every sector of the global economy has been driven by dramatic increases in the capabilities of our tools and in the increased availability of better spatial data. This growth has created a substantial demand for additional, highly qualified personnel in all areas of the Spatial Sciences. Talented young professionals are required to assist in meeting these industry demands.

Generation X and Y have a different perspective on workforce dynamics, and if used strategically can provide significant input, expertise and innovation. Strategies to support the advancement of these people must recognize the different motivations of their work environment and career development path. The diversity of Spatial Sciences attracts a range of intelligent, motivated and committed individuals and the industry would be wise to instigate efforts similar to those being made in other professional sectors to attract, develop and retain young professionals. While some attempts are being actively pursued, more is required.

In the Spatial Sciences industry opportunities are numerous, technical skills are varied, and work demand and locations are global. The authors, young professionals working in international development on multilateral and bilateral aid projects, recognize both the difficulties and opportunities facing the effectiveness of young experts in this industry. As recent graduates from Geomatics, the authors also realize the challenges in focusing on a career path in this industry, finding appropriate professional development training, and embracing the Generation X and Y perceptions of an acceptable work-life balance. Therefore, this paper will present strategies to assist the development of young professionals within the Spatial Sciences. These strategies are recommended based on research into today's young professionals, understanding the changing paradigm of 'career', and the authors' experiences in international consulting on land administration and management.

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INTRODUCTION

It takes motivation, confidence and commitment to find your feet as a young professional. Once you have these attributes, knowing where you are headed and how to get there is the next step. Neither of these is easy. There are a number of reasons why today's young professionals lack a clear career development direction. In the Spatial Sciences industry opportunities are numerous, technical skills are varied, and work demand and locations are global. Of course, the question then ends up being, which path will suit me and how will I get there?

The Spatial Sciences have evolved to include technical disciplines of land, engineering and mining surveying, cartography, remote sensing and spatial information science. These disciplines are increasingly demanded to serve people and organisations that practice land administration, natural resource management of both land and water, emergency management, defence, local government, health, education, infrastructure and other activities including personal recreation and internet-based services. Young, highly-skilled graduates entering the Spatial Sciences have great choice as to where they can develop their skills as a young professional. With this enormous diversity there is a need to nurture the development of young professionals like never before. Reflecting on the 2008 FIG Working Week theme of "Integrating Generations" this paper presents strategies to engage young professionals, develop their skills and experience, and reduce employment turnover. Emphasis is placed on the Spatial Sciences industry, and in particular land administration and management, where the authors have experience.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

For consistency this paper defines young professionals as industry-based qualified people under the age of 36. This incorporates Generation X, born in the 1970-1980s and Generation Y born in the 1980-1990s.

Young employees today appear to be more demanding than they have been in the past. As recent college graduates, they are characterised as self-reliant, financially secure individualists. Young people today are electing to focus on careers and professional development early in life. This is reflected in recent membership figures for the Spatial Sciences Institute (Australia) where nineteen percent of members are young professionals. While young members show initial participation and involvement, they want benefits and support from active membership. It is important that the reasons for their involvement be understood, and strategies for advancement developed.

So what makes today's young professionals of Gen X and Y so different from the rest?

McCrimble, a qualified social researcher, suggests that Generation X and Y, particularly in modern society, have experienced different technology, mass marketing, changing political times, and pop-culture than previous generations. The different cultural conditions and social markers in which Generations X and Y have grown up have contributed to their different aspirations and world views (McCrimble, 2007). As a general observation, Gen X and Y have been charged with being needy and fragile, however McCrimble describes them as valuing feedback and input: "It's not that they are slackers or easily distracted as much as they want to enjoy work, and they value lifestyle and balance" (McCrimble, 2007).

Generation X and Y are also contributing to the changing dynamics of "family". For hard working young professionals the workplace and work in general are required to be community minded and provide a social network. McCrimble suggests that since many Gen X and Y are delaying a family of their own, they are looking for new families in their friends, workmates, and their company. There is less differentiation between work life and social life, therefore the culture of the organisation and character of the individuals that make-up the organisation needs to match. These are critical differences in attitude between young professionals today and those of previous generations.

The new generation seek work which provides variety, interest and satisfaction. Young people place high value on the social and cultural importance of the workplace. Young workers are open to and often expect there will be continual learning as part of their work. However, a survey of young professionals found that thirty-five per cent say they are in dead-end jobs (Dytwald et. al., 2007). These feelings are being translated into young workers leaving professional service firms in record numbers (DeLong et. al., 2007). According to DeLong, Gabarro and Lees, hyper-competition has forced professional services firms to focus so much on satisfying clients that they've lost the art of developing talent. The overall average tenure for workers has been gradually declining for the past several decades. For workers under the age of thirty-five, the average is under three years; eighty per cent of young workers have a tenure of five years or less; and one-third in their first year with an employer (Dytwald et. al., 2007). Young workers do not have the same company loyalty as older staff. Employers who label these differences as poor work ethic and expect these workers to outgrow them will suffer from endless churn.

Another reason for high turnover amongst hard working young professionals is that they are prone to burnout as they try to get ahead in their careers. Disturbingly, forty-seven per cent say they are coping with feelings of burnout (Dytwald et. al., 2007). These feelings are far more pronounced today than in previous generations. Finding a balance between the nurturing and exploiting of enthusiasm can be difficult and requires good professional and personal dialogue between employer and employee.

Understanding the differences and integrating the values of all generations is essential. Senior workers typically want loyalty, respect and commitment. Gen X and Y typically want a workplace where they can belong, where stress is manageable, where hard work is combined with a social family-friendly workplace, and where there is importance on the triple bottom line. For managers in the Spatial Science industry the challenge is to create a workplace that is

team and community orientated, where hard work is rewarded and employees are made to feel valued and supported.

The characteristics and values of Gen X and Y significantly affect women in the workplace. For women, the balance between family life and work life is difficult and often comes at a cost to one or the other. Professional women, with children to raise, elderly parents to support, and other family demands, feel they have little choice but to leave their chosen profession (Hewlett and Luce, 2005). Within the Spatial Sciences, an industry traditionally dominated by men, the needs of women are more relevant as the number of women working in the industry increases. A study in November 2005 revealed that within the Spatial Sciences Institute (Australia) membership of women was as low as eight-and-a-half per cent, reflecting a serious imbalance of professional membership (Bartolo and Baldock, 2007). A follow up study of women in the Spatial Sciences, not necessarily members of the Spatial Sciences Institute, showed that the majority of women working in the industry are also young professionals (greater than sixty per cent) (Bartolo and Baldock, 2007). Therefore not only are there challenges for women in a male dominated workforce, they also face the challenges of being young professionals.

Not only in this paper do we advocate the benefits of young professionals in the workforce, but we also recognise the separate benefits of women in the workplace. Women typically contribute values of tolerance, acceptance and nurturing to the workplace and are often very good people managers. Conscious efforts of attracting women to the industry, and ensuring adequate support is available are essential for the future of the Spatial Sciences. These efforts will involve promotion of the spatial sciences as a career for women support for child care facilities in or around the workplace, flexible hours, developing a culture which supports and values women's input, and mentoring by other women in the spatial sciences to assist women to reach management positions.

Fostering diversity in age, gender and skills sets across a workplace is good for business. It provides a more balanced, adaptable and sustainable environment for a company's growth. The authors can attest to the value of being part of a diversified workplace where all staff actively participate in the business planning processes. Companies which value staff diversity and input will benefit from better decision making and more motivated staff committed to the longer term objectives of the company.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

In 1980 over half of the entire workforce in the United States was under thirty-five. Now that percentage has levelled off at about thirty-eight per cent (Dychtwald et. al., 2007). These demographic shifts have a significant impact on economies, industries and companies. There is recognition that in order to meet the challenges of business there is a need to draw on and develop new expertise. A Foresight 2020 study suggests that improving the productivity of workers by technology, training and organisational change will be the major boardroom challenge of the next 15 years.

The Spatial Science industry is experiencing this rapid demographic change. Within Australia there are the dual pressures of an aging workforce and an explosive demand for new skills. In 2001, more than a quarter of the workforce was over the age of 50. By 2008 this number is expected to have grown significantly. There is such demand for qualified staff that young professionals are able to preference companies that commit to strategies which recognise their needs. Employers are also increasingly understanding of the necessary and vital role young professionals have in the Spatial Science industry. There are a number of initiatives which promote the recognition of young professionals, and mobilise and enhance the capacity of young professionals to provide leadership and take action.

Globally, the Commonwealth Heads of Government support young professionals through the establishment in 2001 of the International Young Professionals Foundation (IYPF)¹. The IYPF aims to inform, inspire and equip young professionals as sustainability practitioners and social change agents. More specific to the Spatial Sciences, in 2007 the FIG endorsed the establishment of the FIG-Young Professionals Group. The Group has been created because many of the FIG member organisations are facing difficulties attracting young people to the profession of surveying. The group is dedicated to attracting more young professionals for the next generation of surveyors with support from today's experienced professionals. This group aims:

- To improve the number of young professionals participating within the FIG;
- To help young professionals in the beginning of their careers with contacts;
- To increase co-operation between the commissions, students and young professionals.

Young Spatial Science professionals in Australia can benefit by being involved as Young Professional members in the Spatial Science Institute. Formed in 2004, the aim of the group, which operates in most states of Australia, is to deliver services to young spatial professionals. This is achieved through four main areas: networking, career, education and information, and recognition and representation. There are a variety of direct benefits gained through the young professional program and its events. These include:

- specialised networking with people relevant to a career;
- access to current information related to the spatial industry;
- voice and representation throughout SSI;
- involvement and experience at committee level;
- development in industry related areas, both locally and internationally;
- opportunities to be involved in a monitored mentoring program;
- belonging to an industry accredited body.

In addition, the Spatial Sciences Institute has instigated a Women in Spatial initiative, recognised as the peak group to inform the spatial profession on issues related to women and the profession. The model for the initiative is an informal and flexible group in each Spatial

¹ The IYPF is a not-for-profit organisation focused on enabling young professionals to make a positive difference in the world (<http://www.iyps.org>).

Sciences Institute region and has the benefit of providing male colleagues with an avenue to contribute to strategies that address women in spatial issues.

The international community can offer a range of exciting opportunities for professional development. Often international development career paths begin through volunteering, “a symbol of human solidarity and equality”. Since the 1960s the Australian Government has supported over 11,400 volunteers. The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program is one such initiative which aims to strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region and make a positive contribution to development. Skilled young Australians (between 18-30 years of age) are placed on short-term assignments in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. Such opportunities, which enable young workers to learn and grow, are highly important. With growing ties between FIG and UN agencies, such as UNHabitat, there are increasing opportunities for young professionals of the Spatial Sciences to be involved in a career that crosses borders, continents and often requires a change of perspectives from their place of origin. In these situations, people are dislocated from the personal and professional support networks available in the home country. As such, the culture and ability of one’s company or professional membership organisation to support and stimulate personal as well as professional relationships is important.

Young professionals are also increasingly eager to join the consulting arena, where liberal and innovative ideas are rewarded. Consulting provides ambitious young people with workplace diversity, independence, and the ability to quickly contribute to an organisation. Young professionals can provide an innovative perspective on issues that recognise the societal changes experienced by Gen’s X and Y. At present, consulting tends to be dominated by professionals who are reaching the end of their careers rather than the start. While experienced consultants are incredibly valuable, it is also important to support the next generation of consultants who often bring fresh ideas, more confidence with new technologies, and alternative ways of doing business.

Experiencing the young professional challenge themselves, the authors took initiative within their own workplace and developed a company-wide Professional Development Strategy with the support of management. In a small company with limited resources, professional development programs are often not as developed or well managed as they should or could be. This lead to adhoc professional development that is not transparent or equitable to all employees. The result of this is uneven development of staff and it is often unclear to others what opportunities are available. Nevertheless, when presented to the Board, the Strategy was very well received and there was immediate commitment to an open Professional Development Policy. More consideration is now given to those willing to make concerted efforts in their own personal and professional development. A sample of commitments made by the company were supporting post-graduate studies, attending international conferences, and providing advice for mentoring programs. Recognising a significant gap in the experience between older and younger employees and company associates there was an initial agreement to conducting an annual roundtable in-house workshop that allows some intergeneration discussion on reasoning issues and problem solving using typical work examples. The

company's young professionals are encouraged to take responsibility of organizing the forum and developing the program. Fortunately the company environment allows an informal forum such as this to be held where critical and debatable topics can be discussed openly and experiences while varied are useful "lessons learnt" illustrations.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Strategies for professional development that recognise the values and attitudes of Generation X and Y, we believe, will assist in attracting and retaining talented young professions in the Spatial Sciences. Strategies should be undertaken with flexibility to meet the realistic needs and constraints of the workplace and the individual. Based on corporate and personal experiences the following five strategies are recommended for the Spatial Sciences industry:

- Strategy 1: Develop and maintain diversity
- Strategy 2: Career pathing
- Strategy 3: Continued professional development
- Strategy 4: Mentoring programs
- Strategy 5: Promote and maintain a work-life balance

These strategies highlight the need for organisations to be proactive in offering professional development opportunities rather than responding to disgruntled employees. The industry should ensure that employers pay attention to developing the competencies and qualifications of staff. In saying this however, professional development is a two-way street. While organisations focus on making retention a continuous priority and effort, individuals wishing to pursue their careers must also make concerted efforts to engage in opportunities being offered. The five strategies presented rely on young employees being an integral part of the process, sometimes they will need to be the initiator. Young professionals stand to benefit significantly, and unless they are prepared to be active participants in the various strategies, then no one will benefit.

Strategy 1: Develop and Maintain Diversity

Developing and maintaining a diverse working environment can be used to attract and retain young professionals. Studies show that young professionals are more comfortable with diversity and abhor abiding to the one-size fits all approach (Dychtwald et. al., 2007). The ability to adapt, search for, and accept diversity is a significant advantage of the Spatial Sciences, as the industry itself is diverse and the nature of the work requires a level of adaptability. Indeed, within land administration alone there are more than 75 occupations which are critical to the industry. Diversity can be used to develop a more holistic approach to staffing, job opportunities, and working environments. Marketing the diversity of work opportunities within the Spatial Science industry could be improved. Showcasing diversity of work within the industry can be used to attract young professionals into a stimulating workplace.

Diversity in the workplace is also good business sense. A diverse workplace brings better communication, a matching of skills where men and women complement each other, and ultimately, a workplace that is more representative of the client base. Davidson and Burke (2000) suggest that companies are highly motivated to increase the number of women in positions of leadership, and are motivated by the need to use the brightest and human resources available. This can also translate into corporate performance. There is growing recognition that in companies where women fill senior management positions, those organisations are more financially successful than those in which women are absent.

Strategy 2 – Career Pathing

While work diversity is encouraged, particularly when involved in international opportunities, there is a need to foster career paths. Opening avenues for young professionals entering the Spatial Sciences industry is a first step, but this requires follow-up. Young professionals need guidance on developing the right set of skills for their given career path within the industry. Supporting the entry of young professionals in the Spatial Sciences industry is actively recognised as a positive strategy to encourage professional development. This is exemplified by the establishment of the FIG Young Professionals group and the Australian Spatial Science Institute Young Professionals group. Utilising industry-based professional bodies, young professionals are introduced to industry networks and develop critically important personal and interpersonal skills. Emerging networks and linkages in the Spatial Sciences industry offer considerable opportunities, and economies, for formal and informal education. Young professionals are also able to find comfort networking with other young people with similar work-life experiences and expectations. By engaging with professional industry bodies young people can also stay in touch with industry news and developments, be integrated with experienced institute members, and be provided with a close support network to help build confidence in starting a career.

If Generation X and Y don't want job security why is career pathing important? While it is recognised that low retention rates of young professionals within companies is a reality, providing strategic career direction is still desired by many. Having a clear direction is favourable as skill-upgrading can be better targeted and synchronised to what both the young professional and organisation would like to achieve. The sense of disillusionment that can come from not having a guide for career development can lead many young professionals to drop out of professional service and change career directions. Often this is not from lack of knowing what they want, but more a lack of not knowing how to get there. It is recommended that young professional groups place more emphasis to help people understand career options and strategies to make career goals possible.

Strategy 3: Continued Professional Development

The third strategy for the development and retention of young professionals within the Spatial Sciences is for continual upgrading of skills. Since the early 1990s, there has been a massive expansion in the number of leadership development courses, seminars, and curriculum areas focused on developing the personal and interpersonal leadership skills of young workers.

Young professionals are not waiting for opportunities to learn and grow, rather sourcing employers that will allow them to develop skills in the working environment. Young people value knowledge and skill more than tenure and are attracted to companies which can offer them these opportunities.

It is the recognition of the importance of the Spatial Sciences industry that is driving governments around the world to invest in the skilling of the workforce and the development of policy that will ensure the viability and growth of the industry (Cane, 2007). It is through training opportunities that young professionals obtain the technical and business development skills to apply to their work. Training is not a silver bullet solution to many of the retention problems facing companies and the industry. Rather, it is a combination of training and real working practice with exposure to diverse working environments that is critical to support professional development (Cogner and Fulmer, 2003). It is essential that companies and employees remain jointly committed to upskilling opportunities over the long term.

The form and process of continued professional development should recognise the different learning styles of Generations X and Y. It is recommended that training programs are situational more than structured, with specific attention to scenarios, risks and consequences. Young professionals tend to experiment from the start and like to try things and learn what works. In younger workers, particularly those from a non-western culture, the kinaesthetic and visual learning styles are most prominent. As such, training that is conducted in different formats using a variety of different media is most successful.

Regular feedback and communication with a senior professional in the company are important to supporting young professionals and maximising the benefits to the company of continued professional training. Receiving performance feedback once a year in a formal review process simply does not meet the expectation of young professionals (Dychtwald et. al., 2007). Engaging, holistic and less formal review processes are recommended to be adopted by companies. Improving opportunities for open and informal dialogue aims to help foresee issues before receiving resignation letters. Likewise, recognition and reward of the achievements of young professionals within the industry is important to the self esteem, confidence and longevity of employees. Such recognition is strongly encouraged by professional bodies through conferences, papers and awards.

Strategy 4: Mentoring Programs

Mentoring is an increasingly popular strategy being implemented by companies and professional bodies. The Spatial Science Institute of Australia launched a mentoring program to align young professional members' requesting support with well-regarded and mature professional members of the Institute. Mentoring relationships do not need to be formal, but it is important to set out clear objectives of how each individual can contribute to the relationship. Well-tailored mentoring schemes assist young professionals "looking for mentors who can give them advice, encouragement, and space to grow" (DeLong et. al., 2007). Young workers want to be mentored by and learn from managers with the skills, knowledge, and leadership styles that the organisation values. Mentors should enable and

encourage young professionals to experiment within their current positions and should help to design next steps without locking people into career paths.

With assignment work dictated by project cycles there are opportunities to develop and engage senior project staff to act as mentors to young professionals during assignments. The relationship between the young professional and mentor should start with a short-term view, but depending on the success of the relationship, could prove to be a longer term partnership. This will require some flexibility and a joint understanding of the expectations of the relationship at the commencement of the initiative. Where face-to-face mentoring is not possible, practical solutions might include the use of communication technologies and the development of social networking on the internet.

The authors have had mixed responses to entering mentor type relationships. Often the mentor request is seen as an arduous wherein lies actions that they may be accountable for, particularly if the mentor has business relations with the mentoree's workplace. This fine line should be addressed upfront and the mentor-mentoree relationships should be kept confidential. The initial communication and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentoree at the outset are most critical. The authors found it most useful to have a clear understanding of why you are choosing a particular person, what your expectations are and what form of communication the mentoring relationship will take. Finally, mentoring does not always need to be seen as a one way relationship, there are networking and knowledge sharing opportunities for both parties.

Strategy 5: Promote and Maintain a Work-Life Balance

The final strategy, and probably the most difficult to achieve, is developing a sense of balance between work and life. Schwartz and McCarthy (2007) suggest that there exists an unwritten contract between organisations and their employees that sees each take as much from the other as they can, as quickly as possible, and then move on without looking back. This suggestion is confirmed by survey results which reveal that only twenty-eight per cent of young workers think their organisation maintains values similar to their own. The same low percentage say that their organisation inspires the best in them (Dychtwald et. al., 2007). This approach is mutually self-defeating for both the individual and the company.

Young people expect to make their work fit in with other life commitments and pursuits. For women in particular this can be difficult, as responsibilities of family are realised in mid-life, when careers and opportunities are developing. A number of studies have shed light on the struggle to balance work and personal life, and specifically the balance for women between work and family responsibilities (Hewlett, 2002). In the United States it is estimated that twenty-two per cent of the workforce in 2000 opted out of the labour market to have children (Hewlett, 2002). This can have devastating effects not only on companies but on industries. Hewlett and Luce (2005) term the opting out of work mid-career as 'taking the off ramp' while on the career highway. Off-ramping, particularly by women, (men are included but for different reasons), is attributed not only to having children but also to the responsibilities of caring for elderly family members (Hewlett and Luce, 2005). Recognition of off-ramping by

the Spatial Sciences industry can help in the development of mechanisms to aid in the eventual return to work and on-ramping of their members. Each strategy presented in this paper aims to assist the ramping process.

A common approach to balancing work-life pressures is to establish flexible working arrangements. The traditional 9 am to 5 pm, five-day working week is being compromised through options of flexi-hours and the ability to take time-in-lieu. Flexible workplaces can accommodate the life pressures faced by many professionals as they juggle family responsibilities and pursue a more balanced work-life ratio.

The encouragement of a work-life balance and enjoyable work place aims to improve productivity during work hours. The Google office in Seattle is considered, particularly among the young generation, the pinnacle of work places. Almost literally, it has a playground of facilities that are socially and environmentally responsible. While this is not in the reach of most organisations, taking a leaf out of their book on a more feasible scale may boost office morale and motivation where one's workplace has become tired or stagnant. Some mechanisms companies have successfully used to develop employee relationships and create a company culture of openness and support include; company lunches, corporate sporting teams, and regular wine tasting evenings. Suitable events that include all staff help to build relationships across all generations in a company and lead to better communication, higher productivity and job satisfaction for all employees.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational diversity is a key feature of the modern workplace. More so it is something that should be celebrated and strategically incorporated into all business activities. The attitudes and values of the new generation of young professionals are not short-term trends, rather permanent priorities for any organisation looking for continued growth. It is important for companies and managers to better engage the new generation of employees rather than expecting them to conform to old ideas of career and outdated styles of doing business. The development of young professionals with a broad range of skills and knowledge is a critical issue for employers and professional bodies in the Spatial Sciences.

There is no one magic solution for companies to retain Generation X and Y employees. The reality is that there will always be lower retention rates of young staff than seen in previous generations. However retention can be improved. Working with young professionals in the "on ramp" and communicating with those wanting to take the "off ramp" requires improved employee-employer understanding and communication. It is hoped that employing some or all of the five strategies suggested there will be increased retention of young professionals.

Efforts taken thus far to incorporate young professionals into professional associations supporting the Spatial Sciences industry are encouraging. At a national level, the Spatial Sciences Institute Young Professionals group and Spatial Sciences Institute Women in Spatial maintain an active and growing membership and are providing support to those groups currently under-represented in the industry. At the international level, the FIG Young

Professionals group, which is helping to facilitate co-operation and networking between young spatial professionals and the various FIG Commissions, should be further developed. The title of this working week “Incorporating Generations” demonstrates the importance and value of engaging with young professionals to develop their skills and lead the industry forward.

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