

# Shiftwork Solutions



**Effective Shiftwork Operations Management**

4th Qtr, 2008: Volume 8, No. 4

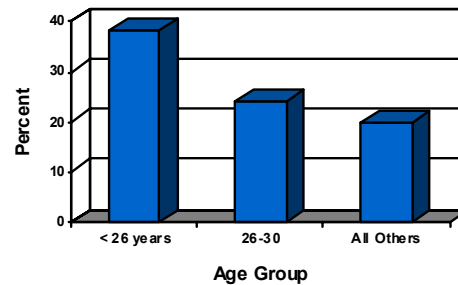
## Meeting the Needs of Generation Y Shiftworkers

You've undoubtedly heard about the newest group of workers called Generation Y. They are comprised of workers who are 30 years old or less. If you listen to the mainstream media, you might get the impression that this group is lazy, selfish, demanding, and disloyal. Bruce Tulgan, co-author of *Managing Generation Y*, argues the complete opposite. He says, "This is going to be the most high-maintenance workforce in history – but I think they're also going to be the most high-performing workforce in history."

What about Gen Y shiftworkers? Are they different than other shiftworkers? We decided to find out by analyzing our survey database of over 20,000 individual shiftworkers to compare the responses by age group. This article summarizes the findings of that analysis and discusses the implications for managers.

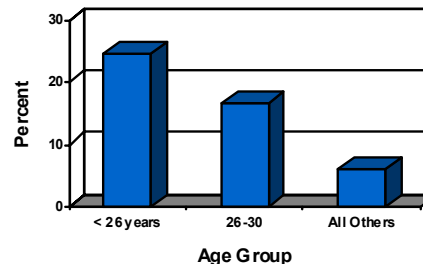
### Demographic Differences

Aside from the age difference, younger workers differ demographically from other shiftworkers in two major ways. They are more likely to be unmarried/live alone (Chart 1) and they are more likely to be students (Chart 2). Both of these make intuitive sense for this segment of the population.



■ Chart 1: Unmarried; live alone

Unmarried employees tend to have more scheduling flexibility because they do not have family responsibilities. Consequently, more of them are willing to work night shifts and to work overtime. Of course, this doesn't mean that managers should automatically assign every new employee to the night shift or treat them as a bottomless pit when it comes to mandatory overtime.



■ Chart 2: Student

The primary concern of students is how to find classes that don't conflict with the work schedule. Rotating shift schedules and unpredictable overtime can make this effort challenging. Managers should examine their policies on swapping shifts, to ensure that students are better able to accommodate class schedules. Managers also should review their overtime policies for fairness, timely advance notice, and swapping options.

### Health & Alertness

Younger workers tend to sleep longer on their days off (Chart 3). Since they sleep roughly the same amount as other age groups on the days they work and they need the same amount of sleep to be fully alert, this suggests that they sleep longer on days off simply because they can. Since many younger workers live alone (and therefore have fewer family commitments), they may have more opportunities to sleep in than other shiftworkers do.

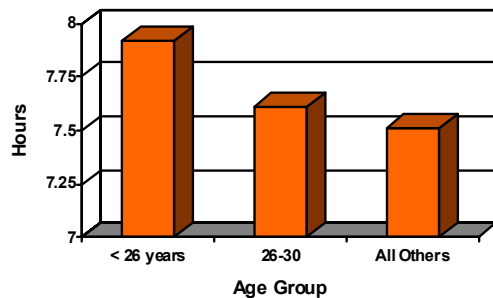


Chart 3: Hours of sleep on days off

### Working Conditions

Younger workers are somewhat less likely to enjoy the work they do (Chart 4). There are several possible explanations for this. The realities of working for a living could be a shock for newcomers to the workforce. Maybe the job doesn't match their pre-conceived image of work, or their expectations regarding employment. Perhaps this job is a stepping stone needed to reach the ideal job, or it could simply

be a way to earn money while attending school and not a career choice at all.

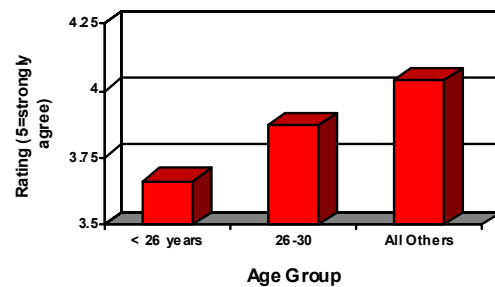


Chart 4: I enjoy the work that I do

As shown in Chart 5, younger workers are more likely to be satisfied with the amount of training they are getting. They may have recently completed new employee training. Other possibilities are that they have lower expectations regarding training, or they don't want to invest additional time in learning a job they see as temporary.

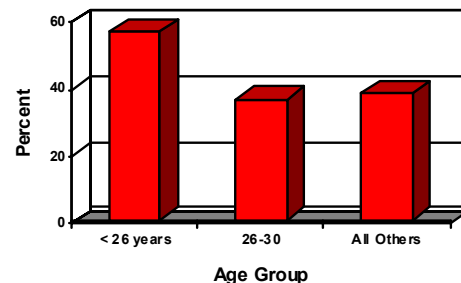
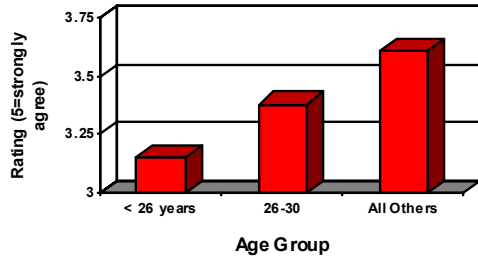


Chart 5: We train just the right amount

Younger workers gave lower importance to keeping current crew members together (Chart 6). Unlike older workers who have worked many years with the same people and formed close relationships with them, younger workers don't feel the same need for crew consistency. If they see their job as transitory, keeping crew members together is not essential.



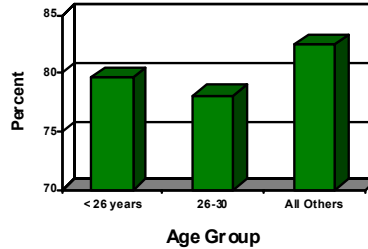
**Chart 6: Keeping my current crew members together is important to me**

When it comes to work conditions like safety, pay, communication, and fair treatment of employees, there are no significant differences in the preferences of younger workers and older workers.

### Shift Schedule Features

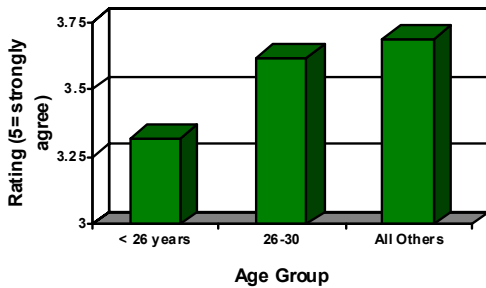
Fewer younger workers like their current schedule (Chart 7) and a higher percentage indicated that they planned to go to a better shift as soon as possible (Chart 8). Since younger workers have less seniority, they are more likely to be assigned to a less desirable shift.

A related result is that fewer younger workers prefer fixed shifts. Knowing that they will be assigned to an undesirable shift, many would rather work a rotating shift schedule. At least they won't be stuck on the same, "terrible" shift forever. These results are shown in Chart 9.

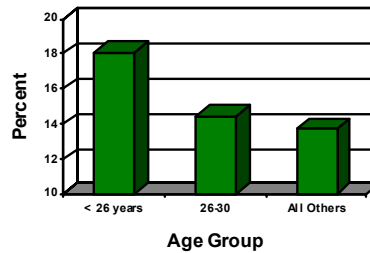


**Chart 9: I prefer fixed shifts (as opposed to rotating shifts)**

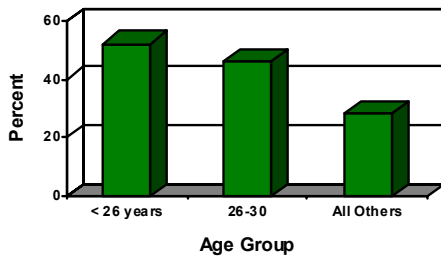
Younger workers are more likely to prefer the night shift than other age groups, as shown in Charts 10 and 11. Working nights could allow them to attend school during the day time. Since many are unmarried, there is less concern about matching their spouse or family's schedule. Shift differentials also may attract younger workers, who are eager to earn more money.



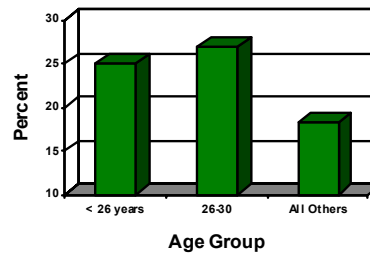
**Chart 7: I like my current schedule**



**Chart 10: My favorite 8-hour shift is nights (as opposed to days or afternoons)**

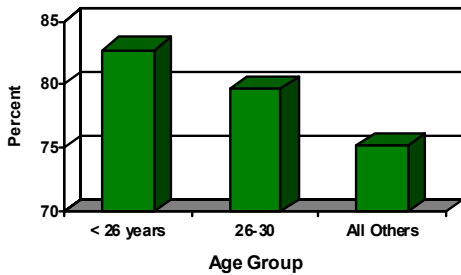


**Chart 8: I plan to go to a better shift as soon as possible**



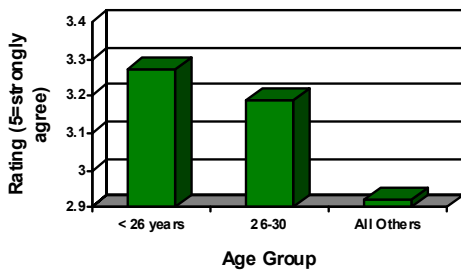
**Chart 11: My favorite 12-hour shift is nights (as opposed to days)**

A larger percentage of younger workers prefer to work longer shifts in order to get more days off each week (Chart 12). They place high importance on their days off, presumably to increase the time available for personal activities. A preference for longer shifts also may be influenced by their marital status, which eliminates the need to match the schedules of the spouse or other family members.



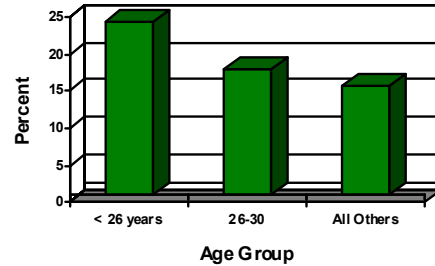
**Chart 12: I want to work more hours each day so I can get more days off each week**

Younger workers also want more flexibility in their schedules, as shown in Chart 13. This is consistent with the observations of generational experts (like Bruce Tulgan who was cited earlier in this article) who note that Gen Yers have a more balanced approach to work and personal responsibilities. Unlike older workers who tend to put a higher priority on career, younger workers are more interested in having their jobs accommodate their activities away from work. Another reason for wanting a flexible schedule is to avoid conflicts with classes.



**Chart 13: Ability to swap shifts is important**

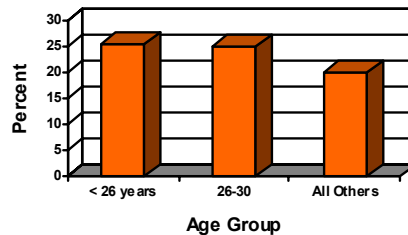
When asked about adopting a new shift schedule or having to work weekends as part of a 24/7 schedule, a larger percentage of younger workers said they would quit before changing (Chart 14). Younger workers are not bound as tightly to their employers. They don't feel guilty about leaving a job that might jeopardize their time off or require changes in their personal lives.



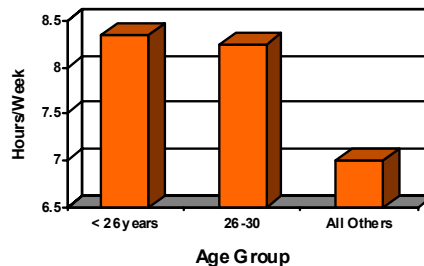
**Chart 14: I will quit before changing schedules**

### Overtime

Many younger workers want to work more hours of overtime every week. These results are illustrated in Charts 15 and 16.



**Chart 15: Over the last few months, I've been working less overtime than I like**



**Chart 16: Desired hours of OT every week**

It is possible that younger workers see overtime as a means of increasing their income, perhaps to compensate for their lower wages. Since more of them live alone, a greater proportion may be able to work the longer hours. The dilemma is that some want more overtime, while some want more time off.

Managers should determine whether there are ample opportunities for overtime. They also should ensure that overtime is allocated fairly. Do younger workers have a good chance of getting all the overtime they want? Can they avoid mandatory overtime on certain occasions by trading with other workers?

### Conclusions

Generation Y workers differ from other age groups in several important ways:

1. **Demographics.** More members of this group are unmarried and live alone. This gives them more freedom to choose higher paying shifts or to work more overtime if they want. In addition, more members of this group are students. To avoid potential schedule conflicts, they need a predictable work schedule and/or the ability to swap shifts. For many students, the current job may be temporary – it is a means of support while attending school or a step along their career path.
2. **Work/life balance.** This group places a high value on time off and the ability to participate in activities away from work. As a result, they are willing to work longer shifts to get more days off. They prefer flexible schedules to avoid missing out on personal activities or events. They also are more willing to change jobs if their personal time is put in jeopardy by a schedule change.
3. **Mobility.** This group seems to have less attachment to their job and employer. Finding work somewhere else would not be a significant set-back for benefits (retirement, medical insurance) or shift

assignment (assuming it's based on seniority). This job may not be their long-term career choice. They may be exploring different jobs and career options, using this job as a stepping stone to something else, or simply earning money while attending school.

What should managers do about this fastest growing segment of the workforce? The first thing is to recognize that the workforce is changing. They don't have the same attitudes or values that the older managers do. They have different expectations, and they are willing to seek another job if their current job doesn't satisfy those expectations. Most of these expectations revolve around work/life balance.

Schedule-related changes that would be supported by many younger workers include the following:

1. **Longer shifts.** Adopting longer shifts will increase the number of days off and also the number of weekends off. 8-hour shift schedules provide 91 days off per year, whereas 12-hour shift schedules provide twice as many or 182 days off per year.
2. **Schedule flexibility.** This can be accomplished by reducing the restrictions on shift swapping.
3. **Overtime flexibility.** This can be accomplished by allowing occasional swapping of mandatory overtime.
4. **Proper staffing levels.** Maintaining the optimal number of employees will keep overtime to reasonable (and tolerable) levels. Although Gen Yers tend to want more overtime than other shiftworkers, too much overtime will interfere with their personal time.