MULTIGENERATION WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA - EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z, CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYERS AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: After Generations X and Y, Generation Z also enters the world of work. Since the entry of representatives of Generation Z into the labor market has various consequences, it is important to know the values and opinions of this new generation, only then can it be possible to anticipate and implement changes, whether in the conditions their hiring, working conditions and working environment, in the care of employees, or in the nature of the employee benefits provided. Regarding the expectations of employees of Generation Z, we conducted two separate investigations, the results of which we present in this scientific study. Employers' and management's approach to this generation is changing, employers themselves must face new challenges and adapt in order to remain competitive.

Keywords: multigeneration, Generation Z, digital natives, Generation Y/Millennials, work environment, expectations, challenges

1 Introduction

Society is made up of multiple generations and while some differences are age-related, others are influenced by upbringing, culture, values and experiences. We can generalize that each generation has its own characteristics and influence on the society it forms. Differences between generations in values, demands, expectations, preferences, thinking, behavior and communication styles can cause conflict situations, but can also contribute to diversity and innovation. We believe that it is important to know and understand the different generations in order to better communicate and work together to create a better future for all. Of course, the work area is also connected with this, since in the workplace today we meet employees of several generations, who must be able to adapt and cooperate. Managers have to deal with a work environment that is both multicultural (see more in Milošovičová, 2018) and multigenerational.

In connection with the generational issue, already at the beginning of the 20th century, experts began to study the differences between generations and to deal with how representatives of individual generations differ in their attitudes and behavior. Generations are often judged by their span, and while there is no strictly agreed-upon formula for how long that span should be, a span of 15-20 years is established. According to McCrindle and Wolfinger, today's generations are defined sociologically rather than biologically, and the term generation today refers to a group of people born in a similar time span, who share a comparable age and life stage, and who have been shaped by a certain period of time - events, trends and developments. (McCrindle and Wolfinger, 2014) The environment in which each generation grows up, the events that occur at that time, economic and social changes, technological development - all this shapes the opinions of the representatives of the given generation - the generational cohort.

2 Multigenerational workforce

The labor market consists of individuals of different generations. Older or younger employees, each of them has something to contribute. Individuals have different experiences, they contribute their own skills and knowledge to the work team. According to the AARP survey on multigenerational work and mentorship the employees value the unique perspectives that a multigenerational workforce brings to their workplace. „In particular, workers value the give and take aspect in a multigenerational work environment. For older workers, their younger colleagues offer an opportunity to pass on their skills and knowledge (79%) and are valued for the creativity they bring to the work environment (73%). For younger workers, older colleagues are valued for their skill as teachers (77%), for providing an opportunity to consider a different perspective (76%), and for making the workplace more productive (69%)." (Anderson - AARP Research, 2019) Currently, 4 generations coexist in the workplace, which is why leading a multigenerational team is not easy and faces challenges.

2.1 The generation defined and timeline of generations

Based on the study of various literary sources, which were devoted to generations, we can conclude that we distinguish several generations, and currently the most often mentioned are those that are represented in society and also on the labor market. They are the Baby Boomers ("B" - born between 1946 and 1964), then Generation X ("X" - born between 1965 and 1980), then Generation Y ("Y" - born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z ("Z" - born between 1997 and 2012). Representatives of these generations were or still remain in the labor market (B) or are fully active in the labor market (X and Y) or are entering the labor market (Z). In some sources, the future generation - Generation Alpha (born after 2012), which has not yet entered the labor market, but is currently in the education stage, is already outlined and mentioned. In connection with this generation, we are of the opinion that it is necessary to begin to pay due attention to this generation and begin to examine its needs and address the issue of its education for the needs of the labor market.

The entry of employees of individual generations into the labor market, their influence on the market and the departure of employees from the labor market is demonstrated by the graph below, which we used to illustrate it for its clarity.

Figure 1 : The Generation Defined
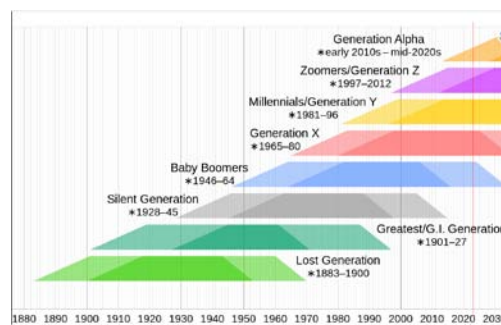
Source : Timeline of generations in the Western world as in its Wikipedia article with notable events. By CMG Lee - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91612069

We would like to point out that the Pew Research Center, as a research center, has been measuring public attitudes on key issues for decades and documenting differences in those attitudes across groups. It uses generational cohorts in survey comparisons, which is why the Pew Research Center also decided in 2018 to determine the cutoff point between Millennials and the next generation. Five years ago, they used 1996 as the last year Millennials were born, and they believe this year marks a meaningful boundary between Millennials and Generation Z for a number of reasons, including key political, economic and social factors that define Generation Y's formative years. (Dimock, 2019) Several authors lean towards 1996 as the boundary year dividing Generation Y and Generation Z, although we must mention that there are also sources that perceive 1995 as such a boundary year (e.g. Francis and Hoefel,

2018) or even 2005. respectively 2004 (e.g. Neil, 2014; Generation timeline / After the Millennials generation XYZ consulting).

In connection with the interface between Generation Y and Generation Z, we would also like to point out that we can also sometimes encounter the term "Zillennials" or "Zennials". This term can include those on the cusp of Generation Z and Millennial - people who were born shortly before the turn of the millennium. This group of people includes older Gen Zers, who have been in the workforce for several years and young Millennials, who identify more with Generation Z. (McKinsey & Company, 2023)

Each of the four mentioned generations has its own characteristics that influence the way they perceive and interact with the world. Already in 2018, Francis Tracy and Hoefel Fernanda from McKinsey & Company conducted a survey and when publishing the results in their publication, provided an interesting comparison of the qualities and characteristics of individual generations. Even then, it was obvious that the influence of Generation Z was expanding. Indeed, the survey showed that the behavior of Generation Z is rooted in one element: the search for the truth of this generation. For Gen Z-ers, the key point is not to define themselves through just one stereotype, but rather for individuals to experiment with different ways of being themselves and shape their individual identities over time. In this regard, we could call them "identity nomads". The representation of the results of the aforementioned survey on the issue of comparing generations is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 : The Generation Comparison

Source: Francis T., Hoefel F. *'True Gen': GenerationZ-and-Its-Implication-for-Companies*, 2018. [online]. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Consumer%20Packaged%20Goods/Our%20Insights/True%20Gen%20Generation%20Z%20and%20its%20implications%20for%20companies/Generation-Z-and-its-implication-for-companies.pdf

Baby Boomers are often described as an idealistic and passionate generation who set out to improve the world. It is a generation of hardworking and disciplined employees. They are professionals who have great know-how and are motivated by financial rewards. Generation X is often characterized as individualistic and skeptical of authority. It is a viable, highly educated generation, „brings a different mindset to the workplace by bringing balance to his teams, prioritizing diversity and work-life balance. This generation likes to work with other colleagues and diversify their routine activities. Thanks to this independent mindset, Generation X finds ways to be efficient in the workplace so that they can also focus on their personal lives or mental rest." (BE-ID human, 2022) Generation Y employees/ Millennials prefer more efficient ways of working, use

innovative ways of fulfilling tasks and goals. Millennials are characterized by their dependence on technology and flexibility at work, while Generation Z is growing up with an even greater dependence on technology and an interest in social issues such as climate change and equality. (Parker, Graf and Igielnik, 2019) While they enjoy working with Millennials, they value independence. Due to the differences of individual generations, the manager has a difficult task in managing a multigenerational team. „Acknowledging age and competences can help managers understand and define each generation's elements of motivation as well." (INSPIRER, 2021)

2.2 Generation Z as successor to Generation Y in the time of technological progress

Due to the development of society, the impact of social, economic, political and economic changes, the attitudes, mindset and demands of individuals change. What was essential for the older generation, the younger generation puts in the background and vice versa.

We are of the opinion that technology and its use are one of the fundamental things that significantly differentiate generations X, Y and Z. Even though Generation X encountered computers, only Generation Y mastered working with them and already used them significantly and also began to communicate with the world through the Internet, Generation Z is the generation that grew up in a world of enormous technological progress. Whether an individual did not use technology or, on the contrary, fully used it, influenced his behavior at the time, his outlook and preferences on private and work life, as well as communication with friends and colleagues at work.

The group of individuals born between 1997 and 2012 has different names - "Generation Z", "Generation Zoomers", "iGeneration", "Post-Millennials", during the COVID-19 crisis "Generation C". The term "Homeland Generation" began to be used in the middle of the 21st century by LifeCourse Associates and is connected to the idea that this generation of children was literally more "at home" than any previous generation of children, thanks to the protective and hands-on parenting style of Gen-X parents. (Howe, 2014) Among all names, the term "Generation Z" has become established within the professional public and society.

Social media, constant connectivity, entertainment and on-demand communication are innovations that Generation Y members have adapted to as adults. However, for those of Generation Z, born after 1995, these are largely assumed. (Dimock, 2019) They were exposed to the Internet, social networks and mobile systems from an early age, they grew up on technology. Since Generation Z lives in the digital era, they are used to constant updates, improvements, therefore Generation Z can be called "digital natives". Dingli and Seychell (2015, p. 9) commented: "Digital natives are today's young people who were born into the digital era and are growing up exposed to the continuous flow of digital information. Digital natives are a generation or population growing up in the environment surrounded by digital technologies and for whom computers and the Internet are natural components of their lives. They do not need to familiarise themselves with the technology by comparing it to something else. On the contrary, they propose new ways of thinking about how technology can be effectively used." The experience and knowledge of these young people in the digital age are very valuable for companies.

2.3 The Generation Z entering the labor market

If we assume that an individual starts working properly only after completing university studies (an individual aged 24-25), Representatives of Generation Z born in 1997 entered the labor market literally in the post-pandemic period. Theses "Post-Millennials are entering adulthood with less experience in the labor market than prior generations." (Fry and Parker, 2018) Some of them also worked in the form of part-time work or shorter hours, this way they gained experience, but after

completing their studies they become a full-fledged full-time workforce, entering their professional life.

What job are they applying for? What is important to them in the work environment? Their view was influenced by the events of the time, which definitely includes the COVID-19 pandemic. The way they communicated, gained new contacts and educated themselves during the pandemic also affected their attitude to work and the idea of how they should perform their work at the employer. Affected by the pandemic, they attach great importance to interpersonal relationships and therefore look for a pleasant working environment. Financial resources are important to them, but "they may not always be the top job priority. Instead, their list includes flexibility to work from the office and remotely, wellness and mental health initiatives as well as meaningful work and culture." (Abril , 2022)

Overall, it can be seen from the preferences of this young workforce that, in addition to wanting to be financially secure and wanting to have some freedom in order to be able to combine work with private affairs, they demand from the employer, as it were, comprehensive care for their body and soul. They expect to be taken as they are. It seems that in the past a job was created and an employee was sought for the given job, the employee had to adapt, today there is a period when the job will seem to adapt to the young employee and his requirements.

In connection with Generation Z (also partly with Generation Y), employers encountered the trend of "quiet quitting. A typical attitude of the employee is that he will only do the work that is necessary to do and that is paid for. It is related to the dissatisfaction of the employees at work, and therefore the employees limit themselves only to the work that is in their job description. "They don't spare an extra minute and don't participate in non-work, volunteer activities organized by the company. They won't even participate in team building or an evening meeting with colleagues and the boss." (Fabrici, 2023) Employers also have to deal with this negative phenomenon, which tends to affect not only company productivity, but also the professional growth of individuals, which was also confirmed by the State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report (GALLUP, 2023). As stated by Gabrhelová et al, (2019), job satisfaction an is an important factor influencing the whole organizational behaviour as a part of sustainable enterprise development.

3 Methodology and methods

Treľová and Hlásny conducted two scientific surveys in 2023. In both researches, we set a relevant empirical goal, and in both conducted researches, we tried to obtain the first data in the new digital era context and in a specific target group of respondents. From a methodological point of view, we will consider both conducted research as preliminary research verifying the validity and reliability of both research tools. The data obtained through the questionnaire were processed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, performed in SPSS at a significance level of 0.5.

4 Results of the research

Primarily, in 2023 Treľová and Hlásny conducted research on aspects that are important for respondents from Generation Z when choosing an employer. They also investigated differences in terms of gender. 507 respondents, whose average age was 22, took part in the research. Of these, 337 (66.4%) respondents were women and 169 (33.6%) respondents were men. The scale of the questionnaire used for individual items was 1 - very important to 7 - not important at all. The data obtained through the questionnaire were processed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the calculations were performed using SPSS at a significance level of 0.5. It turned out that statistically significant differences in terms of gender in the overall assessment were not demonstrated, they were found only in two items. In the item "having a feeling of acceptance and that I belong somewhere" in a group of respondents, they found that women put statistically significantly more emphasis when choosing an employer on the

feeling of acceptance in the work environment and belonging to the work team or as part of the company. They explain the finding by saying that men get this feeling more often and more fully, while women perceive this aspect of work much more sensitively. The second statistically significant finding in the different perception of importance was found in the item "having security and stability in employment". They also assumed the same reason for this finding - women are very sensitive to their job classification, job security and job stability, also on the basis that they are still considered "risky" employees in our society, e.g. from the point of view of future motherhood or the risk of single parenthood, when they can become single mothers and the like. As can be seen, also according to our findings, the seven strategies of Harvard Business Review (Fernandez, J., Lee, K. and Landis, J., 2023) can help by increasing the sharing of information in order to alleviate the fear of uncertainty especially of Gen Z women.

Later in the same year, the authors of the study investigated the special expectations of IT sector employees from employers in the digital era. There were 50 employees of the IT sector as respondents, of which 35 were men and 15 were women. The data obtained through the questionnaire were processed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the calculations were performed using SPSS at a significance level of 0.5. The authors found that in terms of the age of the respondents, in the research set in Dimension 1 Work and working conditions, it was shown that younger respondents most expect from the employer in the IT sector Adequate technologies in the workplace and least expect Training to work with new technologies. In Dimension 2 Superior employees, it was shown that younger respondents most expect Sufficient information about the development of the organization from superiors and least expect Effective feedback related to work performance. In terms of the age of the respondents, in this research set, in Dimension 3 Remuneration, it was shown that younger respondents most expect salary conditions comparable to competing employers and least expect an increase in salary during the employment relationship. In Dimension 4 Employee benefits, it was shown that younger respondents most expect Vacation Allowance and least expect Extra Vacation. The cited authors believe that the most expected item and the least expected item are related - when I can no longer expect an extra vacation, it would be good to have it in the highest possible quality, with the highest possible number of additional activities or in the highest possible comfort with a contribution from the employer. The authors further state that the results of the research on the expectations of IT sector employees from employers in the context of the digital era, based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test according to the age of the respondent, did not show statistically significant differences between younger respondents and older respondents, which the authors attribute to the common characteristics of employees in the IT sector. However, the obtained results of the cited research point to the unique characteristics of the younger generation in this specific employment segment. (Treľová and Hlásny, 2023)

5 Conclusion

Generation Z has recently been gradually entering the world of employment and integrating into the workforce. If the company hires young employees, it must know this young generation. We identify with Felix Behm from Germany, who specializes in Generation Z and holds the opinion/He stresses that a manager must put himself in the shoes of young people in order to talk to them at all. Behm talks about 3 key points that form the basis for Generation Z: a) Meaning (means having fun in what they do - 92% of young people say that my job must be fun), b) Appreciation (sometimes with a cuddle factor because Zoomers grew up with likes), c) Perspective (personal development, because they are often still involved in too many possibilities in the world and uncertainties) (Behm, 2023) As Wittmann (2023) states, the rising generation is relatively relaxed when it comes to career and possible job changes, strives for self-realization and independence, desires to constantly develop, emphasizes the importance of family and friends. Flexible working model, meaningfulness of work, good working atmosphere and fun at

work are the most important for them, even a higher financial reward is not enough motivation for them.

We are convinced that employers must be aware that if they want to attract young talents and keep them in their jobs, they will have to really accept and accommodate the preferences of representatives of Generation Z. They will need to show care for this young workforce. As the number of employees belonging to Generation Z grows, employers and company management have to face the following challenges:

- determination of a suitable working model
- creation of a generationally favorable and cooperative environment - inclusion of the young generation and creation of a single work team
- method of mutual communication on a horizontal plane (intergenerational communication of fellow employees)
- method of mutual communication in the vertical plane (intergenerational communication between a subordinate and a superior)
- modification of the work environment - the issue of the intergenerational workplace (connecting generations as stated by Fernandez, Landis, and Leesedem (2023) e.g. by creating a mentoring program with Millennial and Gen X employees, by creating a partner or buddy program in which Gen Z team members are paired to always had someone to turn to for support)
- internal company culture - building a culture of belonging
- increasing the support and engagement of the young workforce (engaging with the possibility of submitting proposals and presenting ideas, creating opportunities) - preventing the "quiet quitting" trend
- encouraging and maintaining the motivation of the young workforce
- increasing awareness - introducing a policy of open communication (dialogue)
- focus on individual development - ensuring the continuous development of the young workforce
- introduction of a policy of transparency in the area of recognition and remuneration
- providing regular, direct, substantive (short) and constructive feedback and also receiving it
- make aware of their importance, meaningfulness and contribution in the performance of tasks in the team
- avoiding strong criticism – a milder approach when expressing dissatisfaction with work performance
- adaptation of the management style - providing more space and autonomy to explore and discover improvements in work processes
- increasing mental health care - finding ways to increase the mental well-being of Generation Z and thus prevent stress and burnout that affect work performance.

Although we have generalized the above expectations and challenges to the entire Generation Z, it is important to remember that in this generation, as in others, there are individuals who may hold different values and have different expectations. Individual approach plays an important role.

In conclusion, we would like to state that it is a challenge for the manager to integrate the new workforce into a multigenerational work environment. Pendell and Vander Helm (2022) emphasize that employers and managers play an important role in connecting new employees early in their careers with the employees of their organization. As Berger (2021) states, employers who understand how to approach the young generation and manage Generation Z employees accordingly not only open the door to the next generation, but also secure the young talents of tomorrow.

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