Navigating the Workplace Shift: Strategies to Attract and Retain Generation Z Employees in Russia

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Abstract: *This article explores the imminent generational shift in workplaces, focusing on the unique characteristics of Generation Z (Gen Z) born between 1995 and 2010. As companies prepare to integrate Gen Z into their workforce, it becomes imperative to understand their distinct preferences and expectations. The study investigates organizational culture, communication dynamics, company structure, and recruitment strategies based on interviews with 15 Gen Z representatives from a Russian university. The literature survey delves into generational theory, emphasizing the socio-cultural features of Gen Z. The study scrutinizes the influence of digital technologies, social media, and the expectations of Gen Z in the workplace. The research was concurred based on interviews conducted with a group of Gen Z representatives. Results reveal Gen Z's preference for open communication, a networked or communal corporate culture, and a flat organizational structure that prioritizes work-life balance. The discussion underscores the importance of mentorship and constructive feedback in managing Gen Z's unexperienced yet open-minded approach. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for organizations to adapt their practices, including recruitment, employee branding, and reward systems, to effectively engage and retain this dynamic generation in the evolving Russian work landscape.*

Keywords: Generation Z, Organisational culture, Company structure, Emloyeer's Brand

1. Introduction

It is a brief section usually not more than a page. It should be informing the reader of the relevance of your research. The world is at the edge of generational shift on the workplaces. Companies are preparing to embrace new freshly graduated employees who are a part of Gen Z, born approximately from 1995 to 2010. This is a concern for many companies and researchers because Gen Z is different from Millennials who are no longer the youngest on the job market. The world is changing and businesses need to adapt to stay afloat. This article will discuss general recommendations for organisations to attract Gen Z and some characteristics this generation finds important when choosing a workplace which author has acquired from a series of interviews with a Gen Z representatives.

2. Literature Survey

Generational theory, popularized by Strauss and Howe (1991), posits that individuals born during specific time periods share common experiences that shape their values and behaviors. This theoretical framework categorizes generations based on shared characteristics, and recent research has focused on understanding Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. This literature review provides insights into the key aspects of generational theory and recent studies that explore the unique features of Generation Z.

Generation Z, often referred to as Gen Z, has emerged as a distinct cohort with unique socio-cultural characteristics. Scholars such as Seemiller and Grace (2017) and Twenge (2017) highlight that Gen Z is characterized by technological proficiency, multicultural perspectives, and a strong desire for social change. This generation, having grown up in a digital era, exhibits distinct traits that set them apart from previous generations. Seemiller and Grace (2017) highlight Gen Z's digital learning styles and collaborative tendencies. They discuss the importance of integrating technology into educational practices and fostering an environment that aligns with Gen Z's passion for social justice and activism.

According to Benítez-Márquez et al. (2022), studies suggest that Gen Z are technologically skilled but may lack interpersonal communication skills. They value work flexibility, life balance, and meaningful contributions to the company. In terms of employee retention, honesty in leadership, face-to-face communication, open dialogue, and social responsibility are crucial.

As Gen Z enters the workforce, HR practices need adaptation. Forbes' HR trends for 2020 (Meister, 2020) emphasize a focus on a better working environment, work-life balance, and skills. The challenge is not only attracting Gen Z employees but also redefining entry-level jobs to align with their expectations. Some businesses respond by creating a friendly atmosphere, adopting the latest technologies, offering benefits, and engaging in corporate social responsibility activities.

However, organizations must recognize the diversity within Gen Z and adapt workplace values and culture accordingly. With multiple generations working together, HRM faces the task of managing intergenerational diversity and ensuring job characteristics cater to the preferences of different cohorts. Gen Z's entrance into the workforce prompts a need for HRM to explore new strategies for managing multigenerational teams while satisfying the unique needs of each generation.

According to Goffee and Jones (1998), the corporate culture of the company may be defined using two main criteria: Sociability and Solidarity. Sociability is a measure of

friendliness among members of a community and solidarity is focus on common tasks, mutualinterests and clearly understood shared goals among co-workers. There are four types of company cultures in context of those criteria: Fragmented culture (low sociality, low solidarity), Mercenary culture (low sociality, high solidarity), Networked (high sociality, low solidarity) and Communal (high sociality and solidarity). In this context, studies showed that "Z-Generation also prefers to build links by principles of network rather than hierarchy" (Arar & Yüksel, 2015). This article will further explore the perception of corporate culture for Gen Z.

In conclusion, the literature review provides an overview of generational theory and recent studies focusing on Generation Z. The unique characteristics of Generation Z, shaped by technological advancements, multicultural influences, and a desire for social change. As Generation Z continues to navigate societal trends, ongoing research will contribute to a deeper understanding of this dynamic cohort and inform strategies for engaging and supporting them in various aspects of life. The topic of work conditions for Generation Z is particularly understudied in Russia (Bogacheva & Sivak, 2019). That is why the research will study Russian representatives of Gen Z.

3. Methods / Approach

The research will be based on the series of interviews conducted with 15 Gen Z representatives of a Russian university X (the name of university is changed) conducted in 2022. The interviews will explore the following areas of work life for Generation Z: organisational culture and structure, communication within the company, attitude towards leadership and decision-making, employer brand and elements of an Competencyframework: selection and recruitment, performance management, reward system, learning and development

4. Results / Discussion

Organisational culture: There is a myth that Gen Z is a generation of introverts because they grew up at the age of the internet. However, the interviews revealed that Gen Z representatives value communication because internet gave them an opportunity to connect and keep in touch with people all over the world. For more than 50% it is important to build a career network and expand it as much as possible because "all those connections help one to grow". Networking allows to share knowledge, experiences, get valuable feedback on one's performance.

Talking in terms of Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones view of the corporate culture, sociability in the company should be rather high. So, the most chosen corporate cultures during interviews were Networked (high sociality, low solidarity) and Communal (high sociality and solidarity). As for other types, the interviewees have been a part of fragmented culture in university and it was not suitable for about 70% of them because it created unhealthy competition for ratings among students. Fight for rating switched focus from actual learning to chasing the grades. As for mercenary culture, it is

unsuitable for Gen Z either. They value work-life balance very much and would not want to "get to work on Sunday". On the other hand, they are used to technology and expect to work from any place. Covid-19 pandemic also showed opportunities and benefits of distant work. This is why companies should prepare facilities for distant work and provide infrastructure to make data accessible from anywhere. This way Gen Z will have mow flexibility and freedom which is one of their core expectations (Looper, 2011).

Company structure: From Gen Z perspective company structure is best when it is open. Organisations with strong hierarchy are not as desired anymore. Gen Z has a lower power distance (even though it is high in Russia) which affects their attitude towards their co-workers. They do not believe in strong hierarchies and therefore do not wish to work in "tall" companies (which have many levels of authority). This is why new organisational forms start to appear. Thus, the best organisation for Gen Z is flat and agile. Gen Z representatives also seem to value work-life balance and are not as focused on achieving maximum in their careers. 60% of the respondents want to be able to combine work and active lifestyle. According to Journal of Competitiveness, they are not success driven, rather happiness and peace driven(Bencsik et al., 2016). They are also focused on their mental health and to not tend to be willing to sacrifice it for professional goals. As for the agility of organisation, as it was stated above that communication and networking within the organisation is valuable. So, working on different projects with different people helps to widen the web of connections and experience new roles. Gen Z, since they grew up with infinite access to information, tend to lose focus in long term, so small teams with finite projects can better keep them concentrated on achieving good results.

Communication: The interviewees and generally Gen Z representatives are mostly unexperienced or have a limited experience (the maximum experience during interviews was 18 months), so it is important to guide them on the workplace and pay close attention to their performance. Gen Z representatives respond well to mentorship form of communication. They are usually open to learning and respond well to constructive criticism. In Russia, giving feedback may not be a common thing for managers because of high power distance(Choi & Kochetkova, 2023).In Russia it is a common stereotype that manger knows what is best and manager is always right. This is why managers are scared to ask for advice causing unclear communication and dismissing potentially good ideas coming from subordinates. This may be a dealbreaker for Gen Z when choosing a workplace because they "want to be heard irrespective of their young age"(Gaidhani et al., 2019). Otherwise, Get Z workers tend to lose motivation and efficiency.

Selection and recruitment: When hiring Gen Z company should be prepared for open communication. Generation Z are naturally more open-minded because of high social media usage. They are not afraid to ask various questions about their future place of work, so organisation should be ready to answer them during hiring process. Establishing trust is the key to retaining Gen Z candidates. However,

organisations should be careful, too. Youngest generation representatives are mostly still searching for their "true calling" (about 40% of interviewees are not sure what they want to do as their future career), so recruiters should keep that in mind. This issue can be eliminated with multidisciplinary approach allowing employees to switch from one department to another. Another shift with Gen Z is that they do not have life-long loyalty to the organisation (about 50% of the interviewees). Compared to baby boomers who were ready to work in one firm for 20 years, Gen Z do not see moving from one company to another as something negative. On contrary, this falls into their plan to experience and learn different things, so companies need to adapt to these changes and reshape their employee journey to focus more on growth and development within the company (Looper, 2011).

Employer's brand: According to *MetLife's 17th Annual Employee Benefit Trends Study (2019)*, Gen Z value company's mission, purpose, and values and find them essential more, compared to total population. This is why for companies it is crucial to build strong employee brand. Social media can be a very good tool to achieve positive employee brand and communicate the values of the company. Almost 60% of the interviewees value company brand and about 80% value salary as one of the main criteria when choosing a workplace. It is important for companies to communicate advantages they can offer to candidates. Those advantages are part of employee value proposition, "the unique set of benefits that an employee receives in return for the skills, capabilities, and experience they bring to a company". Companies should keep in mind that nowadays, it is almost impossible to conceal fabrication of good company image. There are many platforms for honest employee reviews and Gen Z (more than 40% of the interviewees) uses those resources when choosing companies.

Performance management: Social media and technological savviness of Gen Z is a reason why they tend to have narrow attention span and lose focus. Thus, it is important they have a strong leader who is goal-oriented and will guide them. Direct strict control may make Gen Z resistant, so managers should be clear about why certain goals are set, how they contribute to the company overall. It is also important to establish iterative meetings to discuss new ideas, progress and evaluation of the work done.

Reward system: Generation Z has grown up in a digital age with instant access to information. They appreciate real-time feedback and recognition for their contributions. Instant recognition platforms, such as social media-style shout-outs or digital badges, can align with their desire for immediate acknowledgment (Twenge, 2017). Majority of the interviewees would prefer to get frequent feedback on completed work. Still, Gen Z representatives value financial recognition, too. Growing up at the age of Great recession, Gen Z value financial stability very much. They believe their employers can and should help them do more to reduce stress and help them with their financial well-being (MetLife, 2019). This idea was supported by current research: About 80% value salary as one of the main criteria when choosing a workplace.

Learning and Development: Gen Z are very much focused on self-development and constant learning through practice. They are interested in practical learning and start taking internships and project during their bachelor's degree (Bridge, 2015).About 50% of interviewees are already working full-time jobs in IT. Gen Z values learning opportunities as a big part of onboarding. They are used to constantly improving their skills in technology, they are more adaptive and capture new competences faster. On the other hand, Get Z are very motivated to improve their soft skills such as communication, time management, coaching, etc. To meet those expectations, companies should provide diverse range of learning opportunities and tools. Gen Z are used to learning effortlessly via technology, so organisations should establish Learning Management System (LMS) to make development more structured and efficient for Gen Z.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Z generation, as future employees, have a big potential for organisations, however, they have certain traits and expectations, too. They value flexibility, open communication, cross-functional networking and technological advancement. They are used to sharing information fast. Another benefit of Gen Z is that they are good learners and they are willing to develop on the workplace. Even though they value freedom, they tend to lose focus and are not usually goal-oriented. Still, they value mentorship, and respond well to criticism, so the issues with focus can be resolved by frequent performance reviews and trainings.

As for the future scope, it is necessary to expand research of Gen Z criteria of workplace choice to other countries apart from Russia. It would also be useful to study Gen Z representatives in terms of their age, sex and other features which may give deeper knowledge on the topic.

Current research was limited by the number of interviewees and only considered the students of one university. In the future works, it is necessary to diversify the research sample and compare the results to make the findings more general.

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