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A New Generation of Workers: Preparing for Generation Z in the Workplace

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A NEW GENERATION OF WORKERS: PREPARING FOR
GENERATION Z IN THE WORKPLACE

By

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Thesis Summary

A new generational wave has begun to enter the workforce. The oldest members of Generation Z, those approximately at the age of 25 and below, have recently begun their careers. In the past few years, some changes have been made to work environments, like constructing gyms and daycares at workplaces, expanding the options for work at home programs, and firms hosting social events to attract top, young talent. Some of these actions were to appease Generation Y (Millennials), but some, whether the intent was known or not, will be very pleasing and beneficial to Generation Z. However, Generation Y and Z have some key differences which can create new challenges for a firm's managers and human resource departments. For example, Generation Z desires to complete their work in the correct way to please their managers, so exceptional training would be strongly recommended for Generation Z to be confident in their work. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how Generation Z functions in the workplace and how Generation Z's desires and motivations related to their careers can affect the hiring and retaining process for firms. In this thesis, there is a survey that assessed the characteristics of Generation Z and their preferences for work environments, communications, and employee benefits. In addition to the results of this survey, a discussion of the characteristics of Generation Z will lead to suggestions for how firms should prepare for and accommodate millions of current and future Generation Z employees.

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INTRODUCTION

A 22-year-old, recent college graduate, begins her first day of her career. On Day 1, she meets her other 20-somethings-year-old colleagues, her 40-year old manager, and her 60-year old boss. She listens to the employer explain all of her employee benefits from healthcare to paid time off (PTO) to a gym membership, and she is introduced to her workspace. Maybe she reads an employee handbook dictating the workplace environment and culture. Six months later though, she's evaluating all of these dynamics and benefits she was presented with from day 1 as she considers her future with this company. From the potential intergenerational conflicts to the benefits not meeting her needs to an undesirable work environment and culture, there are many things that could lead to her questioning the long-term future at her company. Unfortunately, this is a very important issue that firms (as well as employees) face as a flux of new-generation employees enter their communities. In this case, we are talking about Generation Z, defined for this study's purpose as those born between 1995 to 2010. This thesis explores the perspectives of this new generation that is entering the workforce in order to prepare firms for recruitment and retainment of this young talent.

Generation, as used in this thesis' context, is defined by the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously." The current generations of the past 90 years or so include the Silent Generation (people in their-upper 70s through early-90s), the Boomers (people in their upper-50s through mid-70s), Generation X (people in their early-40s through mid-50s), the Millennials or Generation Y (people in their mid-20s to upper-30s), and Generation Z (people aged about 8 to 23) (Dimock, 2019). The specific age range of each generation is not an exact science and varies with each source, but the majority of sources I have researched are centered around the above ages give or take about 5

years. Also, the generation after Generation Z has not yet been defined. Later on, there will be a review of a few generational theories that researchers use to define these generations.

Throughout the past decades, the dynamics between different generations has become more apparent, especially in the workforce. A number of movies have even been made about this relationship, like *The Intern* with Robert De Niro and Anne Hathaway and *The Internship* with Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn, two Generation Xers that initially struggle upon starting an internship at Google. Younger generations, beginning with the Millennials, were born into an era of technological innovation; Millennials and Generation Z are known as digital natives. As technology has progressed, older generations, who grew up without hardly any modern technology, find themselves at a disadvantage as the average lifespan increases, and they must work longer and use the technology daily. Yet, as society and workplaces have not quite completely transitioned into a total technology takeover, the younger generations have a disadvantage of not knowing how to use desk phones, scanners, fax machines, and other office equipment. While generally not a big disadvantage, it can be a shock to new, young employees that must use this equipment in their daily work lives.

While technology is one of the most noticeable factors that make generations different, each generation faces different events as a collective group in their lives that changes their perspective forever. For example, the generations that were born starting a century ago, like the Lost Generation and the Greatest Generation, lived, at a young age, through the life-altering Great Depression that made people very conscious of their money, earnings, and spending. The next generations' momentous event was World War II, and while dependent upon the country a person lived in, it caused varying degrees of trauma and life changes worldwide. This cycle continues up to the most recent events like 9/11, the 2007-2008 financial crisis, and to the

coronavirus crisis. Not only do these events affect the people that lived through them, but these people also parent their children in a certain way based on the events they lived through or the way their parents parented them.

As this cycle sees no end and technological innovation seems to have an infinite pinnacle, the generational differences between people also has no end. Some pairs of generations have many differences while others have only slight differences. Through predictions, observations, and studies, psychologists, consultants, and even businesses themselves are able to define the general desires, perspectives, motivations, preferences, and personalities of each generation. However, only predictions and observations of people at early ages can provide this information early, or in time for companies to be ahead of the game in their recruitment or retainment of a new generation or preparations for intergenerational conflicts. Currently, for the current few years, we are in a relatively unique position where a generation is coming of age to enter society and make their mark as a group. The interesting part of that is that predictions and observations are not always correct, especially as these observations are made when the generation is not even of adult age. With so many sources and differences of opinions and survey results, it is important to look at the consistent characteristics and the actions businesses can take to appease the newest generation while remaining efficient even if some of the generalizations of a generation are inconsistent.

LITERATURE REVIEW: GENERATIONS & CHARACTERISTICS

Dating back to 1923 in Karl Mannheim's work, "Das Problem der Generationen" (translated to English in 1952), a generation was defined as a group of people that had collectively experienced a "tempo of change" at a young age. The tempo of change generally

comes from major historical events that change the status quo as groups of people grapple with their respondent surroundings (Mannheim, 1952).

One of the next major theories of generations comes from two historians, William Strauss and Neil Howe. They have written books such as *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* and *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*. As implied by the latter book title, Howe and Strauss established a theory involving generational cycles that last about 80-100 years; they called these periods turnings. Like in any cycle, these generational periods have high and low points that are defined by major historical crises that happen in each of the 4 periods that create a cycle. The idea behind the 4 20-year period cycles is that this is about the span of a lifetime with four phases: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and old age. Their theory says that the members of a generation share three criteria. The first is that the cohort shares an "age location in history" which means they experienced a major historical event in their childhood or young adulthood. The second shared criterion of a generation is that the people share common beliefs and behaviors. The final and third criterion is a perceived membership of that generation (Strauss & Howe, 1997). While similar to Mannheim, Strauss and Howe focused not on the tempo of change but on the four turnings, or 20-year periods of each cycle.

The four turnings are labeled, in order, as the High, the Awakening, the Unraveling, and the Crisis (Strauss and Howe, 1997). The High, or the First Turning, is when the economy is strong; society is collectively unified and motivated towards a common goal. The most recent one for the United States began after World War II in 1946 and ended with the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. The Awakening, or the Second Turning, occurs when society begins to break from the collective unity and reaches for social individualism. Strauss and Howe say the

most recent Awakening began in the mid-1960s with university and urban (inner-city) revolutions and ended in the early-1980s with the tax revolts. The Unraveling, or the Third Turning, is the swing before the crisis when individualism has been won and society continues down its separate ways. The most recent Unraveling in the United States began in the 1980s including the Long Boom (the period before the dot com bubble burst) and the Culture War (when topics such as gun politics, privacy, recreational drug use, abortion, and homosexuality escalated). The Crisis, or the Fourth Turning, generally involves a war or revolution when lives are lost and there is a massive national response for survival, and society begins to come back together to begin the Awakening completing the cycle. The previous Fourth Turning in the United States was the Great Depression through World War II (Strauss and Howe, 1997). We are likely currently experiencing the most recent Crisis which will include the 2007-2008 recession and the COVID-19 health and financial crisis of 2020. Strauss' and Howe's work is applicable in defining generational periods but not nearly as much research has been done on the actual characteristics of generations in relation to their experiences with the historical events.

Currently, only the Baby Boomers are a finitely defined generation that is actually designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Baby Boomers were born between the surge of birth rates after World War II and the beginning of a decline in birth rates after 1964. The rest of the generations vary among sources, but while surveying people of varying ages and including them in the results can skew it, the idea of a generational age range is just a tool based on research used to provide analyses (Dimock, 2019).

After gaining an understanding of how generations can be defined, I move to a discussion of the current findings on Millennials and Generation Z (the two most recently defined generations) and some of the effects that the characteristics of a generation have on the work

environment. The major issue when comparing generational research is that there is no exact age range that every researcher or study uses. Ones that are significantly different from what I have established as Generation Z's age range (beginning with a birth year of 1995) cannot be realistically compared. The recurring idea behind the beginning birth year being around 1995 is that people born then are unlikely to remember the times before 9/11 when the War on Terror was not the norm (Miller, 2018).

In a report published in 2020, Millennials and Generation Z are said to have similar beliefs. 519 Millennials and 519 Generation Z Americans were polled for this data. The report found that Generation Z plans to work for their current employer for 6 years and for Millennials, 10 years. While not a significantly long time, they are not planning to jump ship soon which is a common preconception of these younger generations. The data from this report suggests that, as expected, technology is a large part of their daily work life. 16 percent of Generation Z and Millennial employees in this report say they “have quit a job because their employer did not provide the proper technology for them to do their job” (Zapier Editorial Team, 2020). Also, 70 percent of Generation Z managers and 85 percent of Millennial managers “say they encourage their direct reports to solve problems using technology” (Zapier Editorial Team, 2020). Both groups very strongly embrace automation of jobs. 71 percent of Generation Z and 69 percent of Millennial employees said “they are constantly on or checking their work communication tools outside of work” which the report attributes as a cause to the majority of them experiencing “periods of decreased work productivity due to job burnout” (Zapier Editorial Team, 2020). The report continues on to a unique comparison of work attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z; this is visualized in Table 1 (Zapier Editorial Team, 2020). The overall result of this comparison,

like the entire report, is that Millennials and Generation Z do not differ from each other very much on certain topics like loyalty, technology, and mental health.

Table 1: Comparison of Generation Z and Millennial Work Attitudes

Statement	Generation Z	Millennials
My job is a key component of my personal identity.	65%	73%
My parents don't understand my job.	41%	45%
Employers should have a mental health work policy in place.	91%	85%
Discussing mental health openly at work is important to me.	77%	78%
I have felt competitive against my coworkers.	25%	31%
I discuss politics with my coworkers.	27%	24%

Data comes from the Zapier Report published in 2020. The percentages are the percentage of each group of poll takers that said yes to the statement.

From the *Journal of Competitiveness*, there is a different comparison between Millennials and Generation Z. Instead of focusing on the similarities between the two cohorts, this piece of writing exposes some of the differences among the generations. The authors of this piece looked at a variety of behavioral and work characteristics. Part of their comparison table of the characteristics they discovered is below in Table 2 (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós, & Jubász. 2016).

Table 2: Journal of Competitiveness Characteristics Table

Characteristic	Millennials	Generation Z
Teamwork	Belief in the success of common effort	On a virtual level
Knowledge sharing	Only in cases of self interest or if forced	On virtual level, easily and rapidly, no stake

View	Egotistical, short-term	No sense of commitment, be happy with what you have and live for the present
Relationship	Principally virtual, network	Virtual and superficial
Aim	Rivalry for leader position	Live for the present
Self-realization	Immediate	Questions the need for it at all
Technology	Part of its everyday life	Intuitive
Values	Flexibility, mobility, broad but superficial knowledge, success, orientation, creativity, freedom of information takes priority	Live for the present, rapid reaction to everything, initiator, brave, rapid information access and content search
Other possible characteristics	Desire for independence, no respect for tradition, quest for new forms of knowledge, inverse socialization, arrogant, home office and part-time work, interim management, undervalue soft skills and EQ	Differing viewpoints, lack of thinking, happiness, pleasure, divided attention, lack of consequential thinking, no desire to make sense of things, the boundaries of work and entertainment overlap, feel at home anywhere
Incentive/motivation	Individual freedom of movement, opportunity to make decisions, competition, self-realization	Immediate remuneration, freedom, non-commitment
Performance evaluation	Future-oriented, direct feedback, discussion, talent management	Own limits not recognized, self-confident, values and self-image is distorted
Training, learning, development	Rapid, individual, based on IT, alternative, just in time	Based on interest, informal learning
Conflict management	Opposes	Provokes conflicts, but either does not follow through or reacts aggressively

Data comes from the “Y and Z Generations at Workplaces” report published in the *Journal of Competitiveness*.

From a *10 Things You Need to Know About Gen Z* article, the author, John Miller describes 10 personality traits by which Generation Z is characterized. In the following list, his 10 things are summarized (Miller, 2018):

- 1. “Generation Z Always Knows the Score”
 - From sports to the competitive educational environment, young people learn that others’ failures are their successes. Also it is mentioned that Generation Z desires immediate feedback.
- 2. “Gen Z Adopted Gen X’s Skepticism and Individuality”
 - Generation Z’s parents are generally Generation X, and Generation Z adopted the skepticism and individualism that Generation X desires.
- 3. “Gen Z is Financially Focused”
 - Compensation and benefits are more important than workplace engagement to Generation Z. Financial stability comes from watching their parents struggle during the Great Recession in 2008. Also, Generation Z needs structure as their lives have been determined for them by their parents, and burnout is a likely result for Generation Z.
- 4. “Gen Z is Entrepreneurial”
 - 58% of Generation Z wants to own a business one day, and 14% already do.
- 5. “Gen Z is Connected”
 - Generation Z prefers face to face communication as they want to see the authenticity and honesty of a person. While still connected to technology, electronic devices are primarily used for entertainment purposes.
- 6. “Gen Z Craves Human Interaction”
 - Hiring processes and weekly meetings should be in-person to please Generation Z.
- 7. “Gen Z Prefers to Work Independently”
 - In contrast to Millennials preferring collaboration, Generation Z is more efficient independently and in office spaces that have locations for collaborative and individual work.
- 8. “Gen Z is so Diverse that We Don’t Even Recognize Diversity”
 - This is the last generation that a majority of the population will be non-Hispanic white. Diversity is the norm for Generation Z.
- 9. “Gen Z Embraces Change”
 - Generation Z cares about becoming successful, and they quickly start social movements around major events like the massive gun control movement initiated by the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who experienced a mass shooting at their school. Generation Z is able to adapt to changes quicker and more comfortably than past generations. Generally, their political views lean fiscally conservative and socially liberal.
- 10. “Gen Z Wants a Voice”
 - Managers should ask Generation Z their opinions and ideas to satisfy their desire to contribute to the community. In addition, Generation Z is very creative (Miller, 2018).

In an article from *The New York Times Magazine*, Millennials are described as having been “coddled with open communication,” preferring collaboration and team meetings, and desiring open workspaces (Hughes, 2020). In the same article, Generation Z are described as being tech-savvy, pragmatic and driven, and enjoying personalized training and attention from their managers (Hughes, 2020). Distinctively, Generation Z does not continue the need for collaboration or open work spaces that Millennials desired, but they crave individualized communication from their managers.

From the article entitled *Are You Ready for Gen Z in the Workplace*, Gen Z is said to be the most achievement-oriented generation, better off economically, highly educated, and very diverse. According to this source, with only a slight majority, non-Hispanic whites make up 52% of Generation Z. On the negative side, Generation Z is the generation that is least likely to have worked before starting a full-time job and most likely to have depression and anxiety. Only 34% of teens had held a job in 2015 compared to 60% in 1979, and 73% of the Generation Z survey takers said they could have used more emotional support over the last year.

When businesses do not recognize these generational differences, sources say that there can be negative outcomes such as “intergenerational workplace conflict, misunderstanding and communication, poor working relationships, reduced employee productivity, poor employee well-being, lower innovation, and fewer organizational citizenship behaviors” (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014, p.178). However, as we’ve seen from the literature review, generational differences are hard to determine when sources produce varying survey and research results. Multiple sources concur that Millennials and Generation Z share common characteristics like their excellent technology capabilities, the need for feedback, and their desire for a work-life balance. However, when it comes to the differences, it is hard to exactly pinpoint them. Some of

the recurring Generation Z characteristics include the ability to embrace change, expecting a diverse environment, having a lack of confidence in their work, and wanting to feel valued at their workplace. Alternatively, Generation Z's desire for virtual or in-person communication, their loyalty to their employers, or their creative capacity are all varying characteristics among the different sources. Until much more research is done, the human resources departments of firms should be aware of many of these characteristics as things to look out for when hiring, recruiting, and retaining the younger employees, but it is not yet time to make major changes that are costly financially or time-wise. However, firms should take the recurring characteristics that seem to reign true with many sources and put plans into actions for those differences. Later on in this thesis, some solutions will be presented to accommodate Generation Z based on the knowledge that we have of them presently.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

To gain more data and also some insights into the current status of working Generation Zers, I developed and distributed a survey. The survey was distributed for respondents born after 1995 and that have had at least one job. This survey brought in 36 responses. There were questions based on Likert scales about personality characteristics, benefits, and communication preferences among other things. There were also open-ended questions centered around their best and worst aspects of their jobs and changes they wish to see in their work environment.

In addition, some demographic data was collected, specifically things that were important to verifying the respondents' status such as birth year and the number of jobs they have held. Out of the 36 responses, 34 of them were born between 1997 and 1999 (1 in 1995 and 1 in 1996). This makes the data weighted toward the people who are less likely on the immediate cusp

between millennials and Generation Z. Also, the lack of data after 1999 makes sense thinking about the fact that people born in 2000 and later were only 19 years old and younger when the survey was distributed. So, the majority of these people have not held a professional type job which was a requirement for this survey.

The respondents have worked in a variety of industries with at least 4 or more having worked in the following industries: accounting, advertising, arts and media, customer service, education, healthcare, hospitality, retail, science and technology, and sports and recreation. The respondents have mostly all held more than 1 job as well. 30% have held 2 jobs; 20% have held 3; 20% have held 4; 11% have held 5; one respondent has held 6 jobs. This variety of both industries and number of jobs held should mean that the survey captures people who have worked in a mixture of work environments with various co-workers, bosses, office styles and cultures, etc. With a limited number of respondents, this survey does not stand alone in determining the validity of generation Z characteristics, but it is used as support for claims made through other surveys and research for the purpose of this thesis.

SURVEY RESULTS

Through the survey, I desired to test some of the characteristics that articles suggest Generation Z has as well as obtain some of their opinions about their real-life experiences in working with people of older ages and in various environments and cultures. The first question was about personality characteristics, and I obtained results through a 5-point Likert agreement scale (option choices of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree). Not very many strong or shocking answers or results came from this question as

most statements received about 40% or more responses in the agree category. The results are summarized in Table 3 with the statement, the agreement category that had the highest response, and the calculated average with each option choice receiving a weight (1 through 5) beginning with Strongly Disagree receiving a 1.

Table 3: Personality Characteristics

Statement	Highest Category Response*	Calculated average**
You feel comfortable with change.	Agree (55.56%)	3.81
You are good at multitasking.	Strongly agree (52.78%)	4.42
It takes awhile for you to trust people.	Agree (41.67%)	3.56
You like to take the lead.	Agree (47.22%)	3.83
You are patient.	Agree (41.67%)	3.42
You like to dream rather than create realistic plans.	Disagree (38.89%)	2.25
You like to take risks.	Disagree (33.33%)	3.14
You prefer working in a team rather than independently.	Neither agree nor disagree (36.11%)	2.78
You foresee yourself in a managerial role.	Agree (41.67%)	3.86

*The answer options were: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

**The average is calculated with the weights of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively for the answer options above.

The statement that received the strongest polarizing response is “You are good at multitasking.” 91.67% of responses were agree or strongly agree. 63.89% of respondents said they disagree or strongly disagree that they like to dream rather than create realistic plans which corresponds with most sources that claim Generation Z to be the realists who prioritize carrying out actual plans. Another statement’s result that’s interesting: 72.23% of respondents said they agree or strongly agree that they foresee themselves in a managerial role in the future. One

characteristic that does not seem to be consistent among the Generation Z respondents is risk taking. Out of the 36 respondents, 12 said they disagree that they like to take risks, and 9 said they neither disagree nor agree; 9 said they agree, and 5 said they strongly agree. One characteristic related to this is the claim that Generation Z has a strong belief that they need to know something for sure before completing the task. As we will see later in these survey results, this proves to reign true from the respondents of this survey.

Table 4: Importance of Work Opportunities and Values

Statement	Highest Category Response*	Calculated average**
You feel your ideas are valued.	Very important (41.67%)	4.08
You feel you are making a difference.	Very important (50.00%)	4.00
You have professional development opportunities.	Extremely important (41.67%)	4.17
You have opportunities for promotion with a higher salary.	Extremely important (41.67%)	4.17
You have adequate training, so that you feel you know what you are doing.	Extremely important (63.89%)	4.56
You are continuously challenged.	Very important (47.22%)	3.72
You are able to creatively express your ideas.	Moderately important (47.22%)	3.56
You have access to mentors within the company.	Very important (50.00%)	3.78
You have job stability.	Extremely important (58.33%)	4.53
You feel you have independence in completing you work.	Very important (47.22%)	4.14
You are recognized for your accomplishments.	Very important (41.67%)	3.83

*The answer options were: Not important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, or Extremely important.

**The average is calculated with the weights of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively for the answer options above.

The next question from the survey is about the importance of different work situations and opportunities for Generation Z. This question was also written using a Likert scale, but the choices were based on importance with options of not important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, and extremely important. Like before, the responses are summarized in Table 4 with the statements, the importance category that has the most responses, and the calculated average with Not important receiving a weight of 1 and Extremely important receiving a weight of 5. The majority of the statements resulted in a strong average of “Very important.” So, in this discussion, we will look at 4 statements that received the “Extremely important” category and one only “Moderately important” statement. The following are 3 of the “Extremely important” statements: “You have professional development opportunities;” “You have opportunities for promotion with a higher salary;” “You have job stability.” All of these are not surprising given the many sources that say Generation Z enjoys a learning approach and is financially conservative. The final and strongest statement with 63.89% saying it is extremely important is “You have adequate training, so that you feel you know what you are doing.” This supports the many claims that Generation Z needs reassurance that they are doing things the correct way. Combined with the strong statement for professional development opportunities, it supports the belief that Generation Z prefers on-going training to be assured and confident in their work abilities. The final statement of interest from this question is the one that ranked the lowest of importance: “You are able to creatively express your ideas.” While this could just be due to personality differences and careers that individuals have, it can concur with the idea that

Generation Z is a much more realist generation that supports and executes the plans of the Millennial generation that are said to be more of the dreamers, or idea-generators.

Table 5: Importance of Employee Benefits and Perks

Benefit or Perk	Highest Category Response*	Calculated average**
Health Insurance	Extremely important (47.22%)	4.28
Vacation Time	Extremely important (47.22%)	4.25
Flexible schedule	Very important (44.44%)	3.86
Ability to work from home	Moderately important (41.67%)	2.78
Time for volunteering	Slightly important (38.89%)	2.47
On-site kitchens/cafeterias	Moderately important (47.22%)	2.58
On-site gyms	Slightly important (36.11%)	2.25
On-site daycare/free daycare	Slightly important (33.33%)	2.31
Maternity/Paternity leave	Extremely important (41.67%)	3.89
Monetary annual bonuses	Very important (50.00%)	3.81
Travel opportunities	Very important (41.67%)	3.83

*The answer options were: Not important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, or Extremely important.

**The average is calculated with the weights of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively for the answer options above.

One of the most important factors of working and one of the primary motivators for working (besides money and passion) is the benefits your company provides including things such as health insurance, vacation, and maternity and paternity leave. When employers are recruiting and implementing plans to retain Generation Z employees, these benefits are an essential part of job offers and job satisfaction as health insurance costs skyrocket and a work-life balance remains a paramount desire. In the next question in the survey, I looked at Generation Z's perceived importance of employee benefits and perks. Like the previous

question, this was also written with a Likert importance scale with options of Not important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, and extremely important. The results are summarized Table 5 just like the other questions. From most important to least important, the 11 benefits or perks are ranked as follows: health insurance, vacation time, maternity and paternity leave, flexible schedule (an option for variable hours, or to arrive later or leave early), travel opportunities, monetary annual bonuses, ability to work from home, on-site kitchens and cafeterias, time for volunteering, on-site or free daycare, and on-site gyms. It's likely not surprising that health insurance and vacation time are the top 2 on this list, but it is interesting that the third most important on this list is maternity and paternity leave since most of the respondents likely do not have kids yet being only 20 to 24 years old. Also, these survey results discounts the notion that Generation Z desires on-site gyms or volunteering time. While 72.22% of the respondents say that a flexible schedule is very important or extremely important, only 22.23% say the same about the ability to work from home. Finally, while not at the very top of the list, 69.44% said that monetary annual bonuses were very important to extremely important, and 66.67% said the same about travel opportunities.

The next few questions in the survey focus on communication and interactions among bosses and co-workers. The first question asked the survey takers to rank the following communication characteristics from their bosses or managers in order of importance to them: positive attitude, open communication, clear goals/instructions, and frequent feedback. Positive attitude was ranked number 1 with 63.89% ranking it first or second most important. Clear goals and instructions were number 2 with 61.11% ranking it first or second most important. Open communication was number 3 with 52.78% ranking it first or second most important. Finally, number 4 was frequent feedback with only 22.22% ranking it first or second most important.

Frequent feedback was significantly lower than the other 3 which is in contrast to the Millennial generation that grew up in an environment that always told them they were doing well. Some sources have not been separating this characteristic between Millennial and Generation Z, but many studies, including this one has supported that Generation Z does want to be confident in their work but on the front end of starting their assignment, not in a feedback approach after the work has been completed. Also, clear goals and instructions are very important, and so as just noted, Generation Z wants to know how to do things the right way from the beginning.

The following question surveys what characteristics and abilities Generation Z wants in their managers. The survey takers were asked to choose their top 3 from the following: intelligence, integrity and honesty, mentorship abilities, passion for work, humor, creativity, vision, flexibility, and compassion and empathy. The top 2 characteristics by a large margin (60+% choosing them as an important characteristic) were compassion and empathy and integrity and honesty. The next top two were also ahead of the bottom of the pack by a 20% margin; these were mentorship abilities and intelligence. Generation Z desires a boss that shows kindness, has strong principles, knows what they are doing, and can give them advice and guidance.

Table 6: Characteristics of Millennials as Rated by Generation Z

Statement	Highest Category Response*	Calculated Average**	Average for Under 30**
Committed	Agree (58.33%)	3.86	2.80
Disrespectful	Disagree (38.89%)	2.42	2.82
Hardworking	Agree (55.56%)	3.89	2.82
Have no values	Strongly disagree (47.22%)	1.81	2.83
Well-mannered	Agree (55.56%)	3.83	2.90
Selfish	Neutral (33.33%)	2.56	3.02

Have good problem-solving skills	Agree (41.67%)	3.67	3.08
Work independently	Agree (44.44%)	3.86	3.11
Cooperative	Agree (44.44%)	3.78	3.13
Motivated	Agree (38.89%)	3.50	3.26
Smart	Agree (44.44%)	3.89	3.29
Expect help	Disagree and Neutral (tie) (27.78%)	2.94	3.31
Purposeful	Agree (47.22%)	3.72	3.33
Likes teamwork	Neutral (41.67%)	3.25	3.38
Full of ideas	Neutral (38.89%)	3.31	3.45
Can communicate well	Neutral (33.33%)	3.5	3.50
Creative	Neutral (36.11%)	3.22	3.68
Has too much self-confidence	Neutral (41.67%)	2.94	3.84

*The answer options were: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

**The average is calculated with the weights of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively for the answer options above.

***Data comes from Bencsik, Horváth'Csikós and Tímea. Respondents were asked to choose how typical the characteristic is of those under 30.

As Generation Z enters the workforce, they will begin working the most with the Millennial generation. In this next question, Generation Z was asked their degree of agreeance with statements from their experience of working with people in the Millennial generation, roughly ages 26 to 40 years old. While the results are summarized in Table 6, I will look at some of the statements that resulted in strong agreeance among the respondents. Overall though, there were not any strong negative feelings towards Millennials. The only negative characteristics that had some agreeance were “has too much self-confidence” and “selfish.” 33.33% said that they neither agree nor disagree that Millennials are selfish while 19.45% agreed or strongly agreed. 41.67% said that they neither agree nor disagree that Millennials have too much self-confidence while 27.78% agreed or strongly agreed. While not completely aligned, there was definitely not a

strong concurrence of agreement that Millennials are not selfish nor that they do not have too much self-confidence. The statement that had the strongest alignment was “have no values.” 55.56% disagreed or strongly disagreed that Millennials have no values. Other statements that received strong agreement (at least 65% of respondents choosing that they agree or strongly agree that Millennials have this trait) were: “committed”, “hardworking”, “well-mannered”, “work independently”, “cooperative”, and “smart.” From this data, the only foreseeable conflict between Millennials and Generation Z is that Generation Z has a preconceived notion of Millennials being overly confident and selfish.

The data in the fourth column of Table 6 comes from the *Y and Z Generations at Workplaces* report in which the authors surveyed 410 people of ages from 18 to 64. My survey used some of these authors’ characteristics from their research for a question. Respondents in these authors’ survey were asked to select how typical that characteristic was for people under the age of 30 in the workplace (Bencsik, et. al, 2016). Because this article was written in 2016, the age range under 30 in the workplace includes mainly younger Millennials. People born in 1995 (the beginning birth year for Generation Z) would have only been about 20-21, so the survey could include some of the oldest Generation Z adults who had already entered the workforce. The average difference among the two surveys is .56, so overall, only about a half step of agreeance in one direction or the other for each characteristic. The largest few differences in the survey results are from the characteristics: committed, hardworking, and have no values. Generation Z (from my survey) ranked Millennials higher for being committed than the other authors’ survey with respondents being of all ages. Generation Z also ranked Millennials higher for being more hardworking than the other survey, and Generation Z disagreed more that Millennials have no values than the respondents of all ages in the other survey. Overall,

Generation Z in my survey had better perceptions of Millennials than the survey with all age respondents suggesting less likelihood of tension between these two generations based on the circumstances tested.

Table 7: Interactions with Co-workers

Statement	Highest Category Response*	Calculated Average**
Occasional conversations in passing about your lives outside of work.	Very desirable (55.56%)	4.5
Meeting up with co-workers for a drink or dinner after work.	Desirable (27.78%)	3.92
Hanging out with a co-worker and their family.	Neutral (50%)	3.44
Communicate with co-workers by text/call outside of work.	Desirable (47.22%)	3.83

*The answer options were: Very undesirable, Undesirable, Neutral, Desirable, or Very Desirable.

**The average is calculated with the weights of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively for the answer options above.

This next question as summarized in Table 6 was about their personal interactions with co-workers. The statements were decided upon by using a desirableness Likert scale with choices ranging from Very undesirable, Undesirable, Neutral, Desirable, to Very Desirable. We see that 3 of the 4, the 3 least personal statements, are desirable by large percentages. Firstly, 94.45% find talking about their personal lives with their co-workers to be desirable or very desirable. Secondly, 69.45% find meeting up with co-workers for a drink or dinner and communicating with co-workers by text or call outside of work to be desirable or very desirable. While the other statement (hanging out with a co-worker and their family) is least desirable, there is actually a surprising 44.44% that do find it desirable or very desirable. This idea of Generation Z

connecting on a deeper level with their co-workers is supported further in the next questions that were more open-ended.

When asked about any changes that Generation Z would want their bosses to make, there were a few repeated, common answers. Number 1 was communication with problems varying from the lack of any communication, to not receiving in-person communication, to the trouble of trying to communicate with co-workers in offices across the country, to not having an opportunity to communicate with their bosses. One other common theme for this question was that Generation Z wanted to be valued employees. One respondent said they wanted bosses to “see us as people not just as employees,” and another said they wished they would “show they value their employees and treat them with respect.” Consistent with what other researchers have found, Generation Z needs to either feel that they are valued or see how they are contributing to the firm. Then, the most consistent and aligned response for any question came when I asked the open-ended question about what the best aspect of their job is. Out of the 36 responses, 24 said it had to do with how they got along with their co-workers. One person said, “Even when I didn’t want to go in for work, I knew that I would get to be there with people who I liked and considered my friends.” This suggests how important it is to hire the right person that will fit in with the work culture and current employees and that Generation Z highly values the social aspect that their work environment can give them.

Overall, the survey produced results comparable to other sources. It supported that Generation Z needs adequate training to have confidence in their work and that a competitive salary and employee benefits like health insurance remain top priorities. The survey results did not support that Generation Z needs constant feedback or that they have major negative preconceptions against older generations. There are probably two major takeaways from this

survey. Firstly, employers should try to close the gap between what Generation Z needs in a boss versus how bosses manage or mentor. This will be further discussed in the Solutions section later. Secondly, hiring managers and other management professionals should be very conscious and aware of what type of work culture and environment they have, so when they hire a new Generation Z employee, they can predict whether the new employee will feel valued enough and whether it is likely they will get along with their co-workers. Despite all the variability, this survey supports that there are some relatively definitive characteristics of Generation Z for which managers can prepare.

LITERATURE REVIEW: SOLUTIONS

While research on individual generations are common, research on generational differences is sparser. However, it has also been popularized in the press that firms need to recruit, retain, and train each generation differently. Even though this is important, you can imagine how much it costs for a firm to make these preparations and accommodations every 15-20 years. Despite all the press and investigations into generational characteristics, research on generational differences is sparser, and currently, as Generation Z is still trying to be defined, it may be hard to foresee or predict the worthwhileness of any accommodation from a time or financial perspective. However, below, are some moderate changes that are gaining traction not only for Generation Z but also for the changing society.

In a very recent article in *The New York Times Magazine*, the business of generational consulting firms is discussed (Hughes, 2020). The article begins by pointing out how for the first time, there are 5 generations of employees working together from the Traditionalists to the Baby Boomers to Generation X to the Millennials and to Generation Z. Lindsey Pollak, an author that

writes about multigenerational workplaces, explains how people have different characteristics and personalities collectively as a group due to the experiences and circumstances that they live through which makes 5 generation cohorts together a new and maybe challenging situation. David and Jonah Stillman, a father and son, Generation X and Generation Z duo, run a generational consulting firm and talk about some of the changes made to attract young talent, especially when recruiting high school and college students (Hughes, 2020). Some of those actions involve using social media to show what it's like working at that company, personalizing training by using virtual reality and autonomous videos but with the employee's name called out, giving out metal straws at recruiting events to show that the company cares about corporate social responsibility, or speed-date interviewing with 3-minute conversations. Also, Companies are using personality tests that can determine whether the candidate would match that specific work culture. In addition, to deal with Generation Z's desire to experience different jobs in the organization, the businesses have programs that allow their new hires to do this (Hughes, 2020). Coincidentally, I have accepted a position in one of these programs, and to me, a member of Generation Z, the appeal to experience different roles is very strong.

Published in a California Management Review article, Holly Schroth, the author of *Are You Ready for Gen Z in the Workplace?*, writes “Approaching generational differences with a blame mentality, which was prevalent with the Millennial Generation, only fosters complaints and derision toward the group instead of focusing on growth-oriented solutions” (Schroth, 2019, p. 5). This is why it's important to focus on solutions that are efficient, worthwhile, and beneficial to Generation Z and perhaps, past and future generations as well. This particular article walks through multiple management solutions to cope with Generation Z's quirks that were described from this source in the literature review section of this thesis. The first of the

solutions cover the lack of work experience in Generation Z. To reduce the turnover from unrealistic expectations of a full-time job, the author suggests that the hiring managers make honest conversations about topics like the working conditions, positive and negative aspects of the job, and the future growth and career path.

The author in the same article also discusses what they define as the psychological contract: “what management expects from workers and vice versa” (Schroth, 2019, p.7). One of my questions from my survey was based on the research cited in this article based on the psychological contract. As reported above in the survey results, I asked what communication characteristics Generation Z would want the most from their bosses. In my survey, 36% of the respondents ranked positive attitude as the top desired characteristic, and 33% ranked clear instructions as number one. Interestingly, the top 2 characteristics in the article’s survey was also positive attitude and clear targets for Generation Z. However, the problem lies in that in the report’s survey, only 33% of Generation X bosses say they were likely to have a positive attitude, and only 31% were likely to offer clear targets. So, as a part of the honest discussions during interviews or the hiring process, the author suggests talking about the positive and negatives of working for the specific manager as well as working in that specific job (Schroth, 2019).

The last solution to managing the inexperienced Generation Z relates to the onboarding process. The author writes that onboarding “provides them with the necessary tangible (e.g., explicit knowledge) and intangible (e.g., relationships) resources to become fully functioning organizational members effective in their new role” (Schroth, 2019, p. 8). With 91% of Generation Z respondents in my survey feeling that having adequate training, so they know what they are doing is important or very important, the process of onboarding should be of top

importance to the managers of firms. The author of the article cites that only 12% of new employees say that their onboarding process was good while 87% say they do not have the “optimum level of knowledge and tools necessary to do their job” (Schroth, 2019, p.8). For Generation Z to overcome their anxiety of not having the knowledge or skill to do their work, the author suggests a list of best practices. The first best practice is to provide a checklist that includes timelines for the first days, weeks, and months as this is how students, especially college students, are trained to systematically work, even if they do multi-task among many items on the checklist. The next best practice is to facilitate communication by having networking meetings with upper management and co-workers, using technology and social media for internal communication and learning, and utilizing an orientation program. The third best practice is to reinforce existing culture and sense of purpose by routinely showing them their effect, growth, and achievement within the company. The last best practice is to provide feedback channels by staying in touch personally with the new employee and providing an opportunity for the manager to give feedback and for them to ask questions or share any concerns (Schroth, 2019).

After providing solutions for managing expectations, Holly Schroth discusses the solutions for the very diverse workplace that Generation Z creates. She does not encourage training programs as they may increase the tension among co-workers who will start perceiving actions as prejudice when they are not. Instead, she encourages introducing and reinforcing positive behaviors. The next issue she covers is Generation Z’s high rate of anxiety and depression. She says, “Gen Z is unique in growing up with a culture of safety where overprotective parenting inadvertently took away their opportunity to learn life skills” (Schroth, 2019, p.10). In addition, this leads to Generation Z afraid to make mistakes or trying to avoid

appearing unintelligent by not asking questions. Because of this, firms must help Generation Z grow in their autonomy. They can do this by fostering trust and support for the new employees to make decisions, take ownership of projects, and control their time management. According to Carol Dweck, a psychologist who studies the growth mindset of children, whose research was cited in Holly Schroth's article, firms should "present skills as being learnable and that everyone is learning on the job," praise the effort and perseverance of employees, coach employees to be ready for positive and constructive feedback, and managers should share their own mistakes and how they learned from them (Schroth, 2019, p.10). Additionally, as mentioned before, there is a misalignment between what Generation Z desires in communication from their managers and what managers provide in their communication, so management should try to close this gap as best as possible. Workplace coaching can be a useful tool as Generation Z resists being told what to do, instead they prefer a consultative or almost learning approach (Schroth, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the next decade, workplaces will continue to welcome the influx of Generation Z employees. Older managers who welcomed in Millennials will prepare again as this new generation brings new demands and preferences. Perhaps, many younger managers will experience a new generation entrance to the workforce for the first time. As to how they handle it, Generation Z will be waiting to see. At this time, there are some but not a lot of characteristics that are definitive for describing Generation Z. Some of those are that they need to be provided sufficient training, to be given reassurance in their abilities, and to have a boss with a positive attitude and clear goals and instructions. However, whether they want frequent feedback, prefer virtual or in-person communication, or have loyalty to their employers remains to be determined

as Generation Z continues to grow up and become more defined. Current solutions or changes for the management of Generation Z include personalizing interactions as much as possible, managing expectations, providing excellent, digital training programs, and approaching situations as a learning experience rather than telling them what to do. These are all managerial perspective changes that can be made while researchers continue to define Generation Z. Each person will have their own personality that changes as they age and will have characteristics that don't always match up with the other members of their generation. While this cannot generally be prepared for on a large scale, a generation that shares commonalities overall can be cautiously defined and planned for and if that's not the focus now, it should be in about 3 or 4 years when we are farther out from the end birth year of Generation Z with more completed research. In the meantime, Generation Z may feel uncomfortable as they enter the workforce without many of their generation counterparts who are younger. However, if the small amount of differences between Generation Z and Millennials remains true and by making a few accommodations, workplace managers may not find this transition to be majorly transformative compared to the Generation X to Millennial transition. For now, Generation Z will continue aging into adulthood, entering the workforce, and analyzing their work culture, environment, and co-workers to hopefully find how they fit into this world as managers and researchers learn along with them.

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