

THE VIEWS OF GENERATION Z ON PROGRESSION AT WORK

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Abstract The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the views of Generation Z in relation to progression at work. Based on a field survey of 113 business students. Generation Z members are encouraged to work hard, take responsibility and learn continuously as an appropriate way of increasing their chances of promotion at work. Their flexibility and intention to achieve their goals is also evident, which is reflected in their willingness to change their work environment if it does not suit them or does not allow them to achieve their goals. Difficult tasks present challenges that they want to overcome. Generation Z's motivation is declining rapidly, therefore constant encouragement is important to improve satisfaction and help organisations to achieve their goals. Due to their specific characteristics and habits, this generation will play a key role in the future in helping companies achieve their goals and establishing or improving their reputation and visibility in society. Companies will need to offer their employees value for money, otherwise they will lose quality staff and be plunged into crisis.

Keywords:

Generation Z,
ethical and moral
behaviour,
career progression,
self-criticism,
norms and values

1 Introduction

Examination of Generation Z has become an interesting topic of research in recent times (Arora et al., 2020; Balan & Vreja, 2018; Bender, 2021; Böhlich & Axmann, 2020; Emese, 2016; Sanalan & Taslibeyaz, 2019; Suarez & McKee, 2018). Studies are looking at Generation Z from various perspectives. Researchers initially sought to identify the characteristics and features of this post-millennial generation, but later turned to studying specific areas related to Generation Z. To date, a number of studies have been carried out to identify the characteristics of Generation Z in general and to compare them with those of previous generations.

In the area of management and business, studies prevail on how to integrate Generation Z into an organisation as effectively as possible and how to take advantage of the benefits that Generation Z brings with it. Generation Z is slowly entering the labour market. Due to their specific characteristics and habits, this generation has a lot to contribute to improving performance and innovation in companies. They can also accelerate digitalisation and the introduction of Industry 4.0 in companies, given their very good knowledge and use of modern technology. This in turn results in better business performance and a competitive advantage, as well as continuous improvement and progress, which will be key to keeping businesses on the market in the future. However, Generation Z has higher expectations and demands (Dolot, 2018; Prund, 2021; Vasilyeva et al., 2020). Identifying the needs of Generation Z will also be very important for employers. If they do not identify and meet the needs of their employees, they will leave the company for one that will meet their needs and give them a better chance of achieving their personal goals (Meret et al., 2018).

Generation Z is defined as the generation whose members were born between 1995 and 2010 (Črešnar & Nedelko, 2020). The characteristics of Generation Z suggest a strong tendency towards self-expression and self-fulfillment in the workplace, which consequently suggests a strong tendency towards career advancement. This triggers the questions 'What would representatives of Generation Z be prepared to do to advance their career?' Would they 'soil their name and image' in order to be promoted? The authors of this paper wanted to discover the answers to these questions by carrying out a survey of attitudes among Generation Z members. To the best of the authors' knowledge, to date no research has been carried out that reveals the attitudes of Generation Z towards promotion at work. Thus, this research

is expected to yield useful findings that can be used in further research on Generation Z, especially in relation to motivation and moral values. The aim of the survey among business students was to find out the views of Generation Z on career advancement, and to relate the results of the survey to the previously highlighted characteristics of Generation Z (with a focus on ethical and moral responsibility and the values of Generation Z).

The structure of this paper is as follows. It begins with a brief introduction to Generation Z followed by a focus on the importance of promotion at work as a way to motivate Generation Z. The results are illustrated of the survey on the views of students as representatives of Generation Z on the use of certain actions to improve the chances of promotion at work. The authors then tried to relate the results to the previously known characteristics of Generation Z, especially in relation to ethical and moral responsibility.

2 Theoretical background

A generation can be defined as a group of people defined by common characteristics, traits, values and historical events that have marked a period of time for that group of people. Generational differences also affect other aspects of people management, training procedures and career building and development or rewards and motivation at work (Fratrìeová & Kirchmayer, 2018).

Throughout history, the following generations have been identified over the last hundred years: (1) the 'traditional generation' or 'silent generation' (individuals born between 1925 and 1946), (2) the 'baby boomers generation' (individuals born between 1946 and 1964), (3) Generation X (individuals born between 1965 and 1980), (4) Generation Y or millennials (individuals born between 1980 and 1995), (5) Generation Z (individuals born between 1995 and 2010) and (6) Generation Alpha (individuals born after 2010) (Črešnar & Nedelko, 2020; Klopota et al., 2020).

Generation Z (also Gen Z, iGen, centennials or post-millennials) is slowly but steadily entering the workplace, bringing with it a number of changes (Kılıç et al., 2021). To understand these changes, it is necessary to get to know Generation Z a little better. This generation is the first fully digital generation born at a time of the most intense technological development. Members of this generation are digitally literate and have no problems working with modern technologies. Social networks

(Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.) are the main means of communication (Dolot, 2018).

Tari (2011) defines Generation Z representatives as: (1) having less attachment to parents and other family members; (2) having lower emotional intelligence and lower concentration due to multitasking; (3) wanting to leave a visible mark or do something for which future generations will remember them; (4) considering the opinion of their peers as very important; (5) being highly creativity due to the digital environment (social networks, computer games, simulations, etc.) in which they are present on a daily basis; (6) being open-minded towards people who think differently (sexual orientation, partnership, etc.); (7) following famous people and influencers and trying to emulate them and (8) using different ways of learning (YouTube, podcasts, online courses, etc.) (Emese, 2016; Lev, 2021).

According to Half (2015), Generation Z will be loyal to their employer if it gives them the opportunity to develop their career, learn new skills and move up the ranks of the organisation. They also expect to be well paid and have a good working environment.

Promotion at work is one of the best ways to motivate employees. For the employee who is promoted, it usually brings an increase in power and authority, as well as higher pay, additional material benefits and bonuses (Chillakuri, 2020; Sanalan & Taslibeyaz, 2019). Due to the increasing competition among employees and the limited number of promotion opportunities, employees are keen to improve their chances of promotion. There are many different ways of improving one's chances of being promoted. However, some actions that improve promotion prospects can be classified as ethically, morally or even legally objectionable (illegal, prohibited by law) actions (Prund, 2021; Zabel et al., 2017).

Business ethics can be defined as the way a company behaves or acts in accordance with moral principles, values and norms. It is necessary to distinguish between the ethical actions of the individual and those of the company. Research on ethics and ethical values (Boyd, 2010; Klopotan et al., 2020; van der Walt et al., 2016; VanMeter et al., 2012) confirms differences in the perceptions of ethical and unethical behaviour between generations. They also show links between the characteristics of members of each generation and their definition of business ethics. In this paper,

the authors focus on the study of business ethics at the level of the individual employee (de Gama et al., 2012).

Given the characteristics of Generation Z, it can be assumed that this generation will use fewer ethically and legally questionable actions in order to improve its position in an organisation or in the wider environment (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). Similarly, actions that improve the chances of advancement in the workplace and that are defined as appropriate by members of the post-millennial generation can also be inferred. Ethical behaviour brings greater respect both at the level of the individual employee and that of the organisation (Suarez & McKee, 2018). Based on these cognitions, the central research question of this paper is ‘What would representatives of Generation Z be prepared to do in order to advance their career?’ In that context we can distinguish between most and least acceptable activities that are individuals willing to conduct for their promotion, on an interval.

3 Field survey among Generation Z

A survey was conducted among students of the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) in Maribor, Slovenia, during the 2021/2022 study year. All the participants took part in the survey on a voluntary basis. The questionnaire is based on the second part of the questionnaire titled ‘A Survey of Work-Related Issues’, which was developed by an international group of researchers from Oklahoma (USA), the so-called ‘University Fellows International Research Consortium’. The authors asked the students about their views in relation to promotion at work with the help of 38 different actions that can be taken to increase an employee’s chances of promotion. The respondents expressed their views relating to each statement using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (‘completely acceptable action’) to 8 (‘completely unacceptable action’). The questionnaire was completed by 113 people born between 1998 and 2002.

The results of the survey have been divided into three groups, according to the mean values of the 38 scenarios. Table 1 lists the most acceptable activities to improve the chances of promotion for Generation Z, Table 2 lists those that are considered partly acceptable, while Table 3 shows the least acceptable activities.

Table 1: Most appropriate activities to improve chances of promotion according to Generation Z

	Question (claim, argument)	Mean	Std.	99.7% Confidence Interval ¹
1.	Develop a basic knowledge of the tasks of the job.	1.637	1.198	1.29-1.98
2.	Demonstrate the ability to get the job done.	1.717	1.223	1.37-2.07
3.	Leave the company for a better job in another company.	1.814	1.223	1.46-2.16
4.	Behave in a way that is acceptable in the company.	2.009	1.46	1.59-2.43
5.	Help subordinates develop their skills in order to help them achieve their goal.	2.035	1.072	1.73-2.34
6.	Dress like a successful businessperson.	2.204	1.242	1.85-2.56
7.	Ask to be given responsibility for an important project.	2.336	1.194	1.99-2.68
8.	Try to assert themselves by volunteering for important projects.	2.354	1.382	1.96-2.75
9.	To make important people in the company aware of their achievements.	2.381	1.155	2.05-2.71
10.	Maintain good working relationships, even with other employees they dislike.	2.513	1.198	2.17-2.86
11.	Try to increase the credibility of the work by obtaining an advanced degree (e.g. Master's, PhD).	2.575	1.419	2.17-2.98

Table 2: Partially appropriate activities to improve the chances of promotion according to Generation Z

	Question (claim, argument)	Mean	Std.	99.7% Confidence Interval ²
1.	Work outside regular working hours when necessary to complete work.	2.735	1.073	2.43-3.04
2.	Establish a close relationship with a person higher up in the hierarchy who could be a mentor to them.	2.761	1.576	2.31-3.21
3.	Find out what the important people in the company like so that they can be promoted more easily.	2.867	1.717	2.38-3.36
4.	Use technical knowledge to make a superior dependent on their help.	2.982	1.8	2.47-3.50
5.	Try to behave in a way that they think will win them the admiration of their colleagues.	3	1.76	2.50-3.50

¹ 99.7% Confidence interval of the difference in population² 99.7% Confidence interval of the difference in population

	Question (claim, argument)	Mean	Std.	99.7% Confidence Interval ²
6.	Assess how an influential person could help them gain promotion and then support and work for that person.	3.177	1.587	2.72-3.63
7.	Volunteer to perform an unwanted task in order to be more appreciated by their superiors.	4.283	2.168	3.66-4.90
8.	Support the opinion of important people in the company, even if they disagree with that opinion.	5.699	1.444	5.29-6.11
9.	Threaten to leave the company if their demands are not met.	5.726	1.547	5.28-6.17
10.	Do not bring problems to the attention of those higher up in the hierarchy for fear of their superiors.	5.788	1.484	5.36-6.21
11.	Withhold certain information to avoid being judged less favourably by someone else.	5.903	1.522	5.47-6.34
12.	Try to get answers to questions in a promotion exam in order to gain more points than other candidates.	6.044	1.604	5.58-6.50

Table 3: Least appropriate activities to improve the chances of promotion according to Generation Z

	Question (claim, argument)	Mean	Std.	99.7% Confidence Interval ³
1.	Try to influence a superior to make a bad decision if such a decision would help their promotion.	6.124	1.44	5.71-6.54
2.	Write a false CV to make themselves look better than they really are.	6.425	1.407	6.02-6.83
3.	Threaten to release confidential information to someone outside the company if their requests are not met.	6.434	1.438	6.02-6.85
4.	Take credit for the good work of their subordinates.	6.487	1.39	6.09-6.89
5.	Steal confidential business documents and give them to someone else in the company in exchange for a better job in that company.	6.664	1.461	6.24-7.08
6.	Contact a person who might obtain damaging information about other candidates for promotion.	6.752	1.36	6.36-7.14
7.	Blame others for one's own mistakes.	6.77	1.499	6.34-7.20
8.	Use friends to undermine the reputation of a person who is their rival for promotion.	6.77	1.451	6.35-7.19
9.	Spread rumours about someone who is holding them back from promotion.	6.823	1.507	6.39-7.25

³ 99,7% Confidence Interval of the Difference in Population

	Question (claim, argument)	Mean	Std.	99.7% Confidence Interval ³
10.	Use harmful information to blackmail a person who can help them get promoted in the company.	7.018	1.35	6.63-7.40
11.	Try to create a situation in which the person being considered for promotion is caught using drugs or engaging in other illegal activities.	7.053	1.516	6.62-7.49
12.	Install a recording device in the office of another candidate for promotion in order to obtain important information about them.	7.124	1.371	6.73-7.52
13.	Psychologically harass a competitor for promotion with anonymous, threatening phone calls.	7.327	1.648	6.85-7.80
14.	Hire a criminal to seriously injure their competitor for promotion.	7.389	1.588	6.93-7.84
15.	Offer sexual favours to a superior.	7.558	1.31	7.18-7.93

The survey results show that Generation Z is in favour of actions where employees improve their chances of promotion through their work, experience and results (Table 1). They also consider it acceptable to change their working environment in order to get a better job in another company⁴. However, they disapprove (i.e. at least do not favour) of actions that are morally and ethically questionable or even illegal in order to improve promotion prospects (Table 3).

4 Discussion

The results can be linked to the characteristics of Generation Z (Arora et al., 2020; Lev, 2021; VanMeter et al., 2012) relating to their moral and ethical behaviour. The representatives of Generation Z who took part in the survey want to prove themselves in both personal and business environments, as indicated by the survey results. In fact, Generation Z emphasises actions that relate to proving oneself, one's work and performance, as well as one's enthusiasm and contribution to the success of the company and wider society, as the most relevant ways to improve one's chances of advancement.

⁴ Question 3 in Table 1

Generation Z is flexible and adapts very quickly and effectively to changes in the work environment and beyond (Emese, 2016). Therefore, changing jobs and environments is not difficult for them, the latter is just a challenge and an opportunity, which members of this generation are known to grasp with both hands and in which they are of favour. Previous generations have been characterised by company loyalty, with many people remaining loyal to one company throughout their career (Boyd, 2010).

The post-millennial generation is quite ethically and morally responsible, which is also reflected in their tendency towards greener industry, organic food and waste reduction, and a greater concern for a healthy and clean environment (Bulut & Maraba, 2021). Their ethical and moral behaviour is also reflected in a negative attitude towards actions that are morally and ethically questionable or even criminal (such as threats, use of violence, lying, etc.), even if these actions would improve their chances of advancement or make it easier for them to achieve their personal goals (Fratrièová & Kirchmayer, 2018). Generation Z has a neutral stance towards actions that are socially accepted as partly controversial or questionable, but not illegal, or highly morally and legally questionable. The choice of such actions depends on the individual and their personality.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that members of Generation Z strive to achieve their goals in a 'relatively ethical' way through their own actions and efforts rather than by taking side-roads or shortcuts that, in one way or another, are controversial or even illegal. This reflects cognitions about the characteristics of Generation Z (Emese, 2016; Tari, 2011), their interest in ethical behaviour and work ethics. If, despite their best efforts, employees do not achieve their demands or expectations, they are more likely to change their working environment and less likely to take controversial actions, as they are reluctant to take actions that they themselves would not want other people to take.

Employers in business need to be aware of the characteristics of Generation Z, to know and understand their expectations and needs, and to adapt to a certain extent if they want to retain quality staff in their business (Bender, 2021). Generation Z represent a significant challenge in terms of employee management, human resources management, motivation and work organisation in general. At the same time, Generation Z also represents an opportunity for employers (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), as it can bring many advantages to companies and contribute to faster

digitisation and computerisation, the implementation of Industry 4.0, increased innovation and quality, and overall business growth and development (Bender, 2021; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Yunos & Din, 2019).

The most important thing in the future will be to find a ‘middle ground’ that both satisfies the personal needs and interests of employees while also contributing to companies’ growth and development. Many companies are already aware of the importance of quality and qualified staff and are investing heavily in improving employee satisfaction in order to retain the best employees (Bender, 2021; Vasilyeva et al., 2020).

5 Conclusions

Previous research has examined Generation Z in terms of personality traits, generational characteristics and their behaviour at work, whereas this research specifically focuses on attitudes towards promotion in work environments. However, in addition to these attitudes, the results include the ‘hidden’ personality traits and characteristics of the generation. This research could be useful for companies in setting up reward and motivation systems in their organisations, especially in relation to retaining successful employees in the company and also in terms of improving the climate in the organisation. In summary, the Generation Z entering the labour market is ethically and morally responsible and expects the same from their employers, who will have to adapt accordingly.

The main limitation of the paper is related to defining different groups of (un)ethical behaviour related to promotion in the workplace, as only 38 scenarios were categorised into three groups of behaviour, based on the obtained mean values of each statement – ranging from the most ethical to the least ethical. This limitation provides a direction for further research, as the next logical step would be to identify different groups of unethical behaviour of Generation Z in relation to advancement in the workplace and delve deeper into (un)ethical behaviour in terms of advancement in the workplace.

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