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GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WORK PREFERENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LABOR MARKET: SLOVAKIAN CASE

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Abstract

The study examines the differences in the work preferences of generations X, Y and Z. Its main goal is to identify the preferences of individual generations in the context of integration into the labor market, based on a questionnaire. To achieve the stated goal, we conducted a questionnaire, the results were verified through a chi-squared test, and last but not least, a comparison between all generations mentioned was also performed. The results indicate that significant differences can be observed among the examined generations in aspects such as the use of digital media in the form of social media for job searching, flexible forms of employment, career development, diversity in the workplace, and also loyalty to the employer. Simultaneously, it was found that generation Z has taken a dominant position in all the areas examined. They are the ones who use social media to the greatest extent for the above-mentioned purposes, among all generations they have the highest preference for flexible forms of employment, the area of career development is also the most important for them, they value diversity in the workplace compared to older generations much more, but they are also the least loyal employees among the generations in question. We see improvements in making working conditions more attractive depending on the generations. A universal policy of motivation or benefits is not sufficient, and a proactive approach by employers in the form of a more personalized approach is needed. Such an approach can have an impact on higher satisfaction and also employee loyalty.

KEY WORDS: generation, exchange of labor force, work preferences, labor market.

JEL: J11, J21, M5

Introduction

The labour force in the Slovak labour market currently consists of baby boomers, generation X, generation Y and the youngest generation Z. The specifics of the value orientations of the individual generations have an impact on the practices used in the field of human resources management and personnel management. Specifically, we are talking here about the transformation within the work preferences of individual generational cohorts. This transformation also has significant impacts on fundamental aspects such as employee turnover. This indicates that a universal motivation or reward policy is no longer effective. What is needed, on the contrary, is a proactive approach on the part of employers aimed at attracting, retaining and continuously developing talent from all the generations in question. The study is divided into several parts, where we talk about the literature review, research methodology, and last but not least, it also includes the findings and conclusions.

Literature review

The world faces a variety of challenges, among which we include, for example, globalization, communication and technological changes, or environmental sustainability - right here, human resources can represent one of the key factors in creating an organization's competitiveness (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). However, a problem that the field of human resource management may face is precisely the lack of resources as such (Szafranski et al., 2017). All managers, no matter what level of management they

are at, should be skilled enough to be able to manage and lead employees of any generation. They should also contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals and at the same time to achieving higher performance (Nylvlt & Pruskova, 2017; Kubařa & Vetráková, 2018). Managers should also have sufficient knowledge of aspects such as the specifics, values, attitudes, needs or behaviours of the different generations in the workplace, but they should also have knowledge of the motivational needs of the generations in question (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). When comparing older and younger generations, we can talk about the fact that they differ significantly in their values, but also in their approach to work and education (Kolarova et al., 2016; Němec et al., 2017; Bajkai-Tóth et al., 2022). The area of relationships is also influenced by individual generations - each generation has a specific impact on them. We can see this when comparing older and younger generations, where on the one hand the older ones need closeness or cohesion, but on the other hand the younger generations tend to be more independent or autonomous (Caganová et al., 2017). Looking at young people, their choice of work is determined by factors that include the attractiveness of the workplace, the alignment of the values of the individual and the organisation, but they also place emphasis on their personal characteristics or preferences (Spychala et al., 2017; Statnické, Čeledinaitė et al., 2018). It is extremely important for organizations to understand the way young people approach their workplace choices. It is important to emphasize areas such as career development, organizational climate or adaptation to work

(Csiszárík-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor, 2018). If we focus on identifying generational cohorts preceding generation Z, we can mention baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y (Susanti & Natalia, 2018; Southgate, 2017). Rudolph et al. (2021) point out that substantial differences can be observed in each generational cohort. However, currently, the labor market is being entered by generation Z, which significantly differs from the older generations in aspects such as their way of working and work motivation (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). This is a generation that is in constant contact with their friends, while also having a much higher number of friends compared to older generations. Multitasking is typical for this generation, in which they perform several activities at the same time. Representatives of generation Z are also very materialistic, they lack patience, but at the same time they are also realistic, creative and ambitious. They primarily undergo the education process in a virtual (online) space, where they tend to implement their creativity - through digital media they share their ideas without citing traditional sources of pre-existing knowledge (Lazányi & Bilan, 2017). In the workplace context, they prefer modern recruitment tools while prioritizing flexible working conditions (Dalessandro, 2018; Derous & De Fruyt, 2016; Lazányi & Bilan, 2017). Generations X and Y also have their specifics. It is typical for members of generation X to place emphasis on career, but also on work-life balance. Furthermore, freedom holds value for them, making them a generation for which management is not so straightforward – precisely for this reason, they prefer a workplace that allows flexibility (Parthasarathy & Ramalingam, 2015). Generation Y or in other words millennials are also known as the so-called children of technology (Grenčíková & Španková, 2016). When comparing it with other generations, it can be said that they prefer receiving information from online sources and also working from home over lectures or trainings that take place in a specific place and at a specific time, which requires their physical presence. In terms of the specifics of this generation, aspects such as flexibility, sociability, mobility and, last but not least, learning new ideas are considered its advantages (Hitka et al., 2019). Hitka et al. (2019) conducted research that aimed to compare the motivational preferences of Czech and Slovak employees with selected regions outside the European Union. Preferences were analyzed both in terms of country and age of employees. It turned out that there are significant differences in the expectations and motivations of individual generations, especially in the area of finances. The authors claim that regardless of which generation an employee belongs to, he has the right to both - a decent wage and adequate motivation. Managers should have knowledge about all generations, they should not be unfamiliar with their specific needs, characteristics or skills. On this basis, it is then possible to increase the efficiency of the workplace and the success of the organization. It is important

for supervisors to be able to communicate with each generation in question, while understanding the importance of diversity. Furthermore, it was pointed out that motivational factors such as the atmosphere at the workplace or a good work team do not show significant differences in the context of their perception by individual generations in the Slovak Republic. This means that these factors are perceived as important from the perspective of all generations. The authors point out that it is on this basis that it is essential that managers are able to provide a good and also motivating working environment for all generations. Last but not least, they claim that every single generation can contribute to the development of the organization. On the one hand, there are the older generations, who have years of experience, and on the other hand, there are the younger generations, whose contribution can be in the form of knowledge and technological advancements (Hitka et al., 2019).

Methodology

The labour market is influenced by many factors, one of the most prominent of which in recent times has been generational change. Each generation comes with its own specific value orientations, which are reflected in their choice of jobs. The main goal of the presented study is to identify the preferences of individual generations in the context of integration into the labour market, based on a questionnaire. Data collection regarding the value orientations of individual generations was carried out in electronic form. The questionnaire was constructed using a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and consisted of 14 questions. This was distributed to the general public via social media and email communication. The survey took place from November 24, 2022, to December 12, 2022. A total of 1257 respondents participated, meeting the age criteria and thus representing representatives of generation X (1965-1981), Y (1982-1994), or Z (1995-2010). The sample was even across all generations in question, meaning that there were 419 respondents for each generation. The title of the questionnaire was "Comparison of the preferences of generations X, Y and Z when joining the labour market". The data obtained from this questionnaire were processed using the statistical method and the chi-squared test was used for verification, through which we examined the dependence between the variables in question. The mentioned methods were used in accordance with already published studies, the authors of which deal with the issue of generational change. The questionnaire was used by the following authors: Edgarová et al. (2021), Jung and Yoon (2021), Smaliukieneová and Bekesieneová (2020) or Savanevicieneová et al. (2019). The following authors implemented the chi-squared test in their research: Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), Kupczyk et al. (2021) and Popaitoon (2022).

Results

From the analysis of the collected data through the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the differences between the mentioned generations are significant. The study focuses on the use of social media as a preferred source through which job seekers explore new job opportunities. The results are presented in Figure 1.

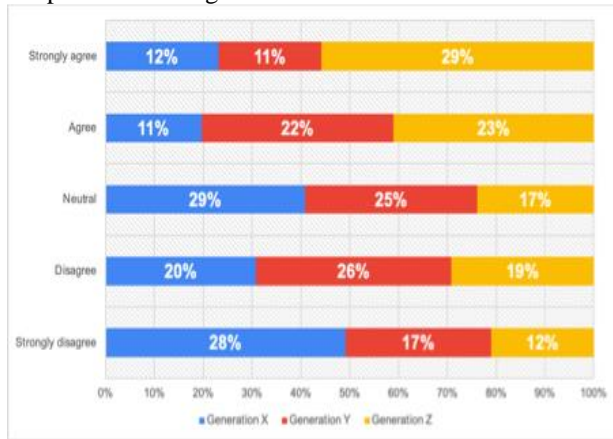


Fig. 1. Social media as a source of recruitment
Source: Own elaboration

The results point out that job opportunities are primarily sought through social networks, especially by the youngest generation Z, in comparison to older generations. This positive attitude was expressed by a total of 52% of respondents from generation Z, while only 23% of representatives of generation X. Generation Y took a positive attitude in a total of 33% of cases. This can be justified by the fact that generation Z represents the most digitally literate generation yet to be found in the labour market. They prefer working with the latest technical and technological advancements, and their relatively high preference for utilizing various digital tools is noticeable not only for personal purposes but also for job searching through social media. For the implementation of the chi-squared test, the following hypotheses were established:

H0: We assume that being part of the specific generation has no association with the use of social media as a source for job search.

H1: We assume that being part of the specific generation is associated with the use of social networks as a source for job search.

The test statistic (78.6034) exceeded the critical value (9.488), based on which the null hypothesis can be rejected while accepting the alternative hypothesis. The chi-squared test was performed with a significance level (α) of 0.05.

The study also looks at the use of flexible forms of employment in relation to different generations, whose preferences in this respect also differ to a significant extent. The findings can be seen in Figure 2.

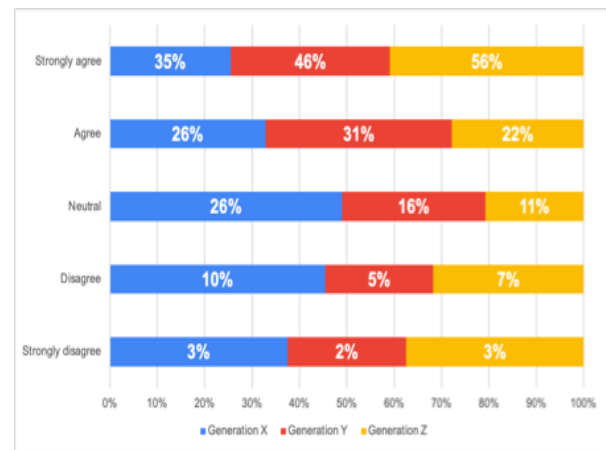


Fig. 2. Flexible forms of employment
Source: Own elaboration

Based on the results, we can see that flexible forms of employment are preferred across all three generations, but the degree of preference varies. While a total of 78% of representatives of generation Z and 77% of representatives of generation Y expressed a positive attitude, in the case of generation X it is only 61% of representatives of this generation. This means that within the older generation X there is still a higher level of resistance to flexible forms of employment compared to younger generations. This can be justified by the fact that representatives of the younger generation have a greater need to be mobile - to work when they want and where they want. On the other hand, older generations still prefer real interpersonal interaction outside of virtual space. For the implementation of the chi-squared test, the following hypotheses were established:

H0: We assume that being part of the specific generation is not related to the preference for flexible forms of employment.

H1: We assume that being part of the specific generation is related to a preference for flexible forms of employment.

The value of the test statistic (44.4185) was found to exceed the critical value (9.488) with significance level (α) of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Another aspect observed is the preference in career development. This is the key to eliminating work monotony or stagnation in terms of both personal and professional development. The results can be seen in Figure 3.

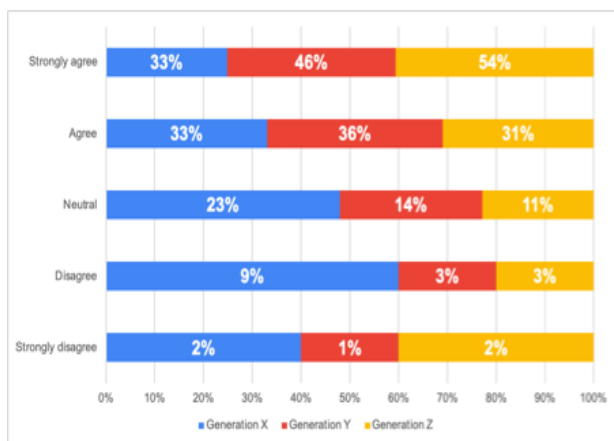


Fig. 3. Career development
Source: Own elaboration

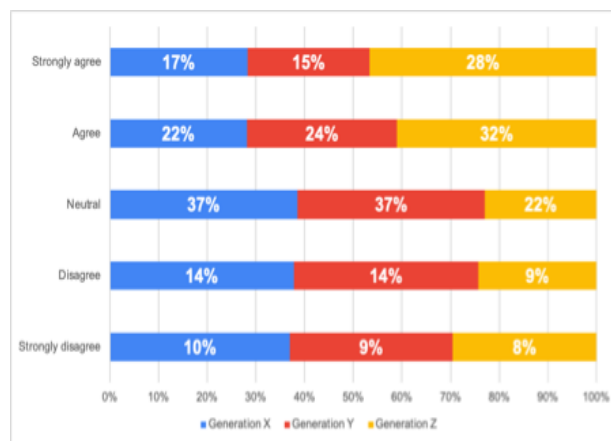


Fig. 4. Diversity in the workplace
Source: Own elaboration

The findings pointed to the fact that the younger the generation, the higher the preference for career development. When comparing the youngest and oldest generations, we see that while 85% of the respondents of generation Z have a need for career development, in the case of generation X it is 66% of respondents. Within the generation Y, we then talk about 82% of respondents expressing a positive attitude. Furthermore, we also observe a greater neutral attitude of generation X towards career development in comparison to younger generations, indicating their indifference towards this preference in favor of other aspects of work. This may be due to the observed need of the younger generation for rapid career growth. Representatives of this generation want to do work that they find interesting, which gives them the opportunity to develop. As a result, they will also have a greater need to constantly move up in their career. For the implementation of the chi-squared test, the following hypotheses were established:

H0: We assume that being part of the specific generation is not related to career development preference.

H1: We hypothesize that being part of the specific generation is related to career development preference.

The established test statistic (51.4248) exceeded the critical value (9.488) with a significance level (α) of 0.05. As a result of these findings, the null hypothesis was rejected and, conversely, the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Workplace diversity is an increasingly discussed concept. We can speak of various differences, whether they are cultural, racial, age-related, gender-related, and many others. Currently, the uniqueness of each employee is being emphasized, regardless of the above-mentioned aspects. The presented study also deals with the preference of a workplace that values differences. The results can be seen in Figure 4.

Among the generations compared, it turned out that generation Z prefers diversity in the workplace the most. Specifically, they expressed a positive attitude in 60% of the cases, while in the case of both generation X and generation Y only 39% of respondents took this positive attitude. A high preference for diversity can also be observed in the neutral attitude, where while 22% of generation Z representatives hold this stance, for generation X and Y, it amounts to an identical 37%. Diversity is thus most valued from the perspective of the youngest generation Z. It can be argued that it is generation Z that reacts to aspects such as equality and inclusion perhaps the most among all the generations studied. This means that based on this, they will also be interested in working in a workplace that values diversity and utilizes its uniqueness to its advantage. For the implementation of the chi-squared test, the following hypotheses were established:

H0: We assume that being part of the specific generation is not associated with the preference for workplace diversity.

H1: We assume that being part of the specific generation is associated with the preference for workplace diversity.

The test statistic (50.0514) was higher than the critical value of 9.488. The chi-squared test was performed with a significance level (α) of 0.05. Based on the results, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Lastly, we can also highlight the aspect of employee loyalty to the employer. Trends like "quiet quitting" or even the so-called "great resignation" are resonating more and more. This raises the question of whether these issues leading to high employee turnover are solely a problem of generation Z or if they represent a broader societal phenomenon. The acquired findings are presented in Figure 5.

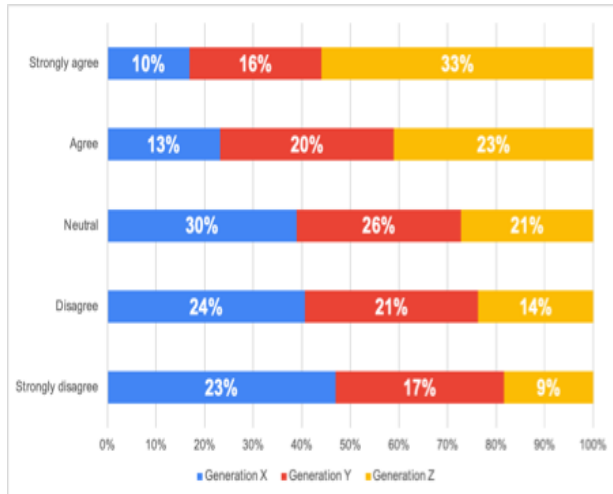


Fig. 5. Loyalty to the employer
Source: Own elaboration

The way in which the value orientation of the younger generations has been transformed is also observable in this case. The findings show that as many as 56% of generation Z respondents would have no problem leaving their employer, while only 23% of generation X respondents would have no problem doing so, which is half the number of generation Z respondents. For Generation Y, 36% of respondents would have no problem leaving their employer. The reason is that the younger generation has no issue, and in fact, they actively seek to try new things. It turns out that they are much more responsive to areas such as CSR, mental health or organizational culture, as a result of which they will also demand more attractive working conditions compared to previous generations. For the implementation of the chi-squared test, the following hypotheses were established:

H0: We assume that being part of the specific generation is not related to employee loyalty.

H1: We assume that being part of the specific generation is related to employee loyalty.

The value of the test statistic (100.5571) is higher than the critical value (9.488) with a significance level (α) of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to identify the preferences of individual generations in the context of integration into the labour market, based on a questionnaire. Many previously published studies have shown significant differences in the issue of work preferences of different generations, and the same was confirmed in the present research. The study emphasized several aspects, among which we are talking about the use of social media as a source of searching for job offers, flexible forms of employment, career development, diversity in the

workplace and, last but not least, loyalty to the employer. Generation Z was found to be the dominant generation in each of these areas. This generation is by far the most digitally literate, which is why they use channels like social media when entering the labour market. They also have a strong desire for flexibility. Fixed working hours, during which they have to spend their time in the workplace, are not attractive to them. Instead, they want to be mobile and work at a time and place they deem most suitable based on their subjective preference. When looking at the area of career development, once again, it is generation Z that shows the highest preference in this aspect. For representatives of this generation, it is important to do work that they find interesting, thanks to which they can learn, develop and thus move forward and grow in their career. Additionally, workplace diversity is significant for them, with findings indicating that among all examined generations, generation Z is the one most inclined towards valuing differences. Finally, we can also mention the area of loyalty of generation Z to the employer, where it has been shown that, compared to older generations, generation Z is the one that has no problem trying new things and thus has a tendency to so-called fickleness in the sense of changing employers frequently. This has very negative impacts on aspects such as high employee turnover. Based on the findings, we suggest making working conditions more attractive depending on the individual generations. A universal policy of motivation or benefits is not the path to increasing employee satisfaction and overall loyalty to employers. If the employer's goal is to attract, retain and develop the talents of all the generations in question, it must take a proactive approach in the context of the transformation of the above-mentioned areas.

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