

GENERATION Z'S EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS THE EMPLOYERS

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Purpose: The main objective of the paper was to identify the expectations of Generation Z representatives in terms of HRM practices in the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was carried out as an on-line survey. U Mann-Whitney test was used in the data analysis. The study focused on the expectations of Generation Z representatives towards HRM practices and gender differences.

Findings: The highest level of acceptance was observed for HRM practices related to evaluation and development. At the same time, acceptance for respective IT solutions varied, with the lowest levels observed for the possibility of a humanoid robot conducting job interviews and use of gamification. There are differences in acceptance of HRM practices in terms of gender.

Research limitations/implications: The study was carried out only in Poland. The author intends to continue the research in other countries to allow the results to be compared internationally.

Practical implications: It is necessary to adequately adapt the implementation of HRM practices to the specific needs of Generation Z and gender. The ability to identify the HRM expectations of Generation Z representatives help future employers to programming and planning such practices in a way more suited and better communicated to employees.

Originality/value: The study identified specific expectations of Generation Z individuals currently entering the job market in terms of a range of HRM practices. The publication is addressed to future employers as a way of facilitating efforts aimed at properly developing HRM practices in organisations.

Keywords: HRM practices, generation Z, expectation of generation Z, gender differences.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The current job market is populated by representatives of a number of generations who have varied expectations towards their employers. A particularly noteworthy group consists of members of Generation Z currently in the process of beginning their professional careers.

Generation Z is currently making its first steps in the labour market. Its representatives include people born after 1995, who clearly stand out when compared to other employee age groups in terms of their professional expectations, with additional discrepancies emerging when factoring in their respective countries of origin (Scholz, Renning, 2019). It is therefore particularly important to know their expectations of future employers. This will enable employers to develop appropriate human resources strategies and take measures to harness the potential of young workers for enterprise development. It should be emphasised that now is the time to take decisions that can aim to build up cooperation with young workers.

HR practices are effective if employees behave in a way that is necessary for strategies to be implemented and various business goals achieved (Jiang et al., 2012). At the same time, employees who wish to hire the best need to be aware of the implications of generational differences. Hence, the task faced by businesses entails employing adequate HRM practices to facilitate the accomplishment of economic goals, while at the same time ensuring that the same are correctly perceived by the workforce.

What matters most to employers is the discrepancy in terms of employees' value systems, which are reflected in their respective professional goals, attitudes, and workplace behaviour. Given the fact that Generation Z is characterised by certain distinctive values and preferences, one needs to be aware of the expectations shown by its representatives if one is to adequately adapt one's HRM practices to suit the needs of both sides of the equation.

For this reason, the main objective of this paper is to identify the expectations of Generation Z representatives with regard to HRM practices encountered in the workplace. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What HRM practices are expected by Generation Z individuals?
2. What is the level acceptance for the implementation of IT tools in the processes of recruitment and selection?
3. Are there any significant gender related differences in terms of expectations towards HRM practices?

The paper consists of 4 parts including introduction, literature review, methods, results and discussion.

2. Literature review

Among the trends in the labor market, the key are demographic changes caused by the generation change. Among them, the representatives of Generation Z, who successively start their professional career, deserve special attention. The characteristic traits of its representatives include: openness and directness, mobility, broad understanding of modern technologies, capacity to multitask, and resourcefulness (Pracuj.pl, 2019; Aterima, 2017). What matters most

to Generation Z individuals is the ability to overcome challenges, pursue passions and interests, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and continuously develop. In terms of career advancement, they show a preference for planning it jointly with their employer, and their motivation in that regard stems from prospects for future promotion (Smolbik-Jęczmień et al., 2017). They tend to believe that their careers are conditioned primarily by knowing the right people, rather than their individual predispositions or choices. Representatives of this generation are acutely aware of the technological changes taking place all around them.

Other studies allowed the identification of main expectations towards employers, which include (Pracuj.pl, 2019; Aterima, 2017):

- attractive remuneration,
- engaging work tasks,
- a sense of being appreciated,
- high job satisfaction,
- expectations of fast career advancement.

In the self-assessment of their own professional competence, 68% of the respondents declared having skills useful in their work, 59% reported having adequate social competences, and 39% the necessary knowledge (Bartczak et al., 2020). Moreover, Generation Z representatives appraised their value as future employees as high (Bartczak et al., 2020).

Polish representatives of Generation Z also identified a number of challenges, of which the most notable included (Pracuj.pl, 2019; Aterima, 2017):

- difficulties in terms of direct communication,
- difficulties in focusing on a single task,
- the need for change (including of the employer, industry, specialisation),
- a critical attitude towards employers.

Certain discrepancies were observed between respective professional expectations depending on whether the given respondent was an active or prospective employee (Gajda, 2017). This suggests that having actual work experience can affect an individual's expectations by rendering them more realistic.

It is noteworthy that representatives of this particular generation pose a considerable challenge to employers, not least due to how different they are from previous generations with which they have been working to date. Hence, literature reports commonly underscore the need to identify the specific expectations of the youngest generation currently introduced into the job market (Bartczak et al., 2020).

An important aspect of interacting with the workforce entails reliance on Human Resources Management (HRM) practices. As noted by P.M. Wright and L.H. Nishii, their purpose is to allow an enterprise to shape and encourage desirable employee behaviour (Wright et al., 2013). P. Boselie, G. Dietz, and C. Boon observe that such practices are to stimulate a desirable change in employee attitudes (Boselie et al., 2005). And in the opinion of C. Ostroff and D.E. Bowen,

HRM practices assure that adequate signals are provided to employees to guide them towards conduct valued, expected, and rewarded in the given organisation (Ostrow et al., 2016). For this reason, HRM practices are typically defined as tools, norms, processes, and procedures that, if synergised and combined, effectively define the structure of human resources management policies adopted in an enterprise (Björkman et al., 2014). Overall, it can be concluded that HRM practices facilitate the enhancement of the working relationship between employees and the employer. This allows staff members to develop desirable attitudes and behaviours, while simultaneously becoming more aware of their own competences and available paths of professional improvement.

In the current complex and dynamic business environment, companies need their employees to remain flexible in adapting to varied and constantly changing requirements. This fact has led to an in-depth debate regarding HRM practices as such as well as the ways in which they are to be structured. Consequently, organisations have paid greater attention to the needs of their employees with a view to facilitating their engagement and satisfaction from the work tasks performed. The capacity to incorporate the interests of the employee within the scope of the so-called key management practices (e.g. high-efficiency work systems) has led to the emergence of new HRM trends (Gableta et al., 2015). It has therefore become that much more crucial to identify the expectations of prospective employees in order to adequately fine-tune requirements and methods of their communication.

In order to attract the best possible employees, the HRM department strives to establish a common language with the recipient of the message and a suitable way to reach highly qualified potential employees (Pietroń-Pyszczek, 2014). Therefore, it is important to know their expectations in order to prepare and communicate the HRM practices accordingly.

The development of information and communication technologies has led to an increased use of IT tools in the recruitment and selection process, enabling more data to be collected and analysed to support these processes. Solutions such as robots, artificial intelligence, advanced technologies are used (Vrontis et al., 2021). However, it is important to know whether applicants accept them. The level of use of social media when it comes to employee management, the ability to create a positive company image in the social media and use these media to verify information on candidates applying for positions (Karasek et al., 2020). Since it is more difficult for the members of this generation to adapt to the working conditions imposed on them and to organise their working time, employers expect new challenges to cope with demanding tasks (Gajda, 2019). New skills of employees are needed to perform tasks efficiently and to cooperate with new technological solutions of production and control and monitoring systems of manufacturing and service processes (Gajdzik, 2022). Therefore it is important to receive information about generation Z in the area of HRM practices in the field of development and assessment. Moreover, the characteristics of generations are different in the area of knowledge management (Bencsik et al., 2016). Additionally, preferences of Generation Z are differentiated by gender (Acheampong, 2020).

Based on the literature review, a research gap was identified in the area of Generation Z expectations regarding HRM practices and gender differences.

3. Methods

In an effort to answer the research questions posed, a critical literature review was conducted in preparation for the analysis of reports and results obtained from the study. The review led to the formulation of an original questionnaire that was subsequently distributed among representatives of Generation Z. The survey included questions that aimed to identify the respondents' expectations in terms of HRM practices, with specific queries addressing the applications of IT solutions in the areas of recruitment and selection, development, appraisal, and knowledge management. The study was conducted in the 1st half of 2020 in Poland. A total of 312 fully completed and questionnaires were returned, as well as 318 partially completed surveys that were not qualified for subsequent analyses. The nonparametric significance test employed for the two independent groups was the Mann-Whitney U test.

4. Results

The study was carried out as an on-line survey. On the basis of the review of literature an original survey questionnaire with 16 questions was developed. Based upon the review of literature, HRM practices in the following HRM areas were selected: using IT in recruitment and selection (four HRM practices), development (five HRM practices), assessment (three HRM practices), and knowledge management (four HRM practices). Responses to these questions were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Table 1 contains detailed information on the respondents participating in the survey.

Table 1.
Structure of respondents

Gender of respondents [%]	
Female	73.74 %
Male	26.3 %
Length of using SM [%]	
Under 20 years	12.5 %
From 20 to 25 years	87.5 %
Work experience [%]	
Never work	14.1 %
I have work in the contract and seasonal/	82.1 %
Other	3,8 %

Source: Based on own study.

The results of the research regarding the expectations of the Z-generation representatives in the field of HRM practices in the area of IT use in recruitment and selection, development, evaluation and knowledge management are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Expectations for HRM practices

	Question	Total average	Total median	Women average	Man average
HRM practices in IT in recruitment and selection					
1.	I prefer submitting the application documents in electronic form rather than in paper form	4,50	4,15	4,20	4,00
2.	I accept that potential employers may verify the information contained in my CV on social media	4,00	3,47	3,39	3,71
3.	The recruitment interview may be conducted by a humanoid robot, not by a human	2,00	1,97	1,97	1,96
4.	Gamification should be used when selecting employees	3,00	3,05	2,91	3,46
HRM practices in development					
5.	I want to develop my skills in the field of creativity and innovation	5,00	4,41	4,41	4,43
6.	I want to expand my skills through self-development	5,00	4,64	4,69	4,50
7.	The ability to work as a project leader is an important element of development for me.	4,00	3,87	3,83	3,95
8.	I expect to use the latest IT technologies to develop my skills (e. g. virtual reality, gamification, learning platforms)	4,00	3,89	3,87	3,95
9.	I prefer the further development of my skills through lectures, workshops instead of distance learning	4,00	3,89	3,84	4,04
HRM practices in assessment					
10.	I want to receive continuous feedback on the activities that I can implement	5,00	4,51	4,54	4,44
11.	I would like to receive information on areas/spheres where my work needs to be improved	5,00	4,61	4,63	4,57
12.	I want to be judged for individual results	4,00	4,27	4,29	4,20
HRM practices in knowledge management					
13.	I think it makes sense to disseminate data on past failures and lessons learned among staff	3,00	3,33	3,23	3,61
14.	I want to work in the project team	4,00	3,62	3,60	3,67
15.	I want knowledge-sharing mechanisms to be used at my workplace	4,00	4,35	4,34	4,38
16.	I want to leave time for the development of innovative ideas in my area of responsibility	4,00	3,91	3,88	3,99

Source: Based on own study.

As follows from Table 2, the respondents looked the most favourably towards the prospect of submitting recruitment documents in electronic rather than hardcopy format. They were even less inclined to consent to having the information contained in their CVs verified against social media, and less yet to the potential applications of gamification in employee selection. However, the lowest acceptance scores were recorded for the possibility of job interviews being conducted by a humanoid robot rather than a human recruiter.

The analysis in terms of respective HRM practices revealed that respondents were the most open to possible self-development at work and only slightly less so to the development of competences in areas such as creativity or innovation. They were less inclined to expect the latest IT advances to benefit the development of competencies during lectures and workshops

held directly, rather than remotely. They were slightly less interested in assuming the position of project manager as an important element of such development.

The respondents' expectations with respect to the HRM practices considered in the analysis are presented in the graph. Overall, they were the most willing to receive information in areas/aspects of their work that need improvement, and only slightly less so in terms of ongoing feedback on the tasks they perform. The respondents were somewhat less willing to be evaluated based on their individual results.

The results revealed varied levels of acceptance with regard to the respective HRM practices related to knowledge management. The respondents would most like to see knowledge sharing mechanisms implemented in the workplace. Slightly fewer agreed that their job description ought to reserve time for coming up with innovative ideas, and fewer yet were willing to work as part of a project team. The lowest level of acceptance was recorded for the suggestion that "lessons should be learnt from mistakes by making them known to all employees".

In a further step of the analysis of the results, it was demonstrated that between expectations of HRM practices and gender. The presence of statistically significant differences was assessed using the non-parametric U Mann-Whitney test (Table 3).

Table 3.

U Mann-Whitney result test for expectations for HRM practices and gender

Question	Z	p	Z corrected	p
I prefer submitting the application documents in electronic form rather than in paper form	1,35080	0,176759	1,46175	0,143811
I accept that potential employers may verify the information contained in my CV on social media	-2,04558	0,040798	-2,11808	0,034169
The recruitment interview may be conducted by a humanoid robot, not by a human	0,56191	0,574176	0,59763	0,550087
Gamification should be used when selecting employees	-4,60810	0,000004	-4,99531	0,000001
I want to develop my skills in the field of creativity and innovation	0,19238	0,847446	0,21567	0,829244
I want to expand my skills through self-development	2,03243	0,042110	2,51622	0,011863
The ability to work as a project leader is an important element of development for me	-0,51001	0,610044	-0,53440	0,593068
I expect to use the latest IT technologies to develop my skills (e. g. virtual reality, gamification, learning platforms)	-0,77713	0,437084	-0,81277	0,416350
I prefer the further development of my skills through lectures, workshops instead of distance learning	-1,56048	0,118647	-1,65580	0,097762
I want to receive continuous feedback on the activities that I can implement	1,23385	0,217258	1,42381	0,154503
I would like to receive information on areas/spheres where my work needs to be improved	0,71000	0,477703	0,85924	0,390211
I want to be judged for individual results	1,02348	0,306080	1,11803	0,263556
I think it makes sense to disseminate data on past failures and lessons learned among staff	-2,33302	0,019648	-2,39773	0,016498
I want to work in the project team	-0,50780	0,611597	-0,53179	0,594873
I want knowledge-sharing mechanisms to be used at my workplace	-1,04045	0,298132	-1,15258	0,249086
I want to leave time for the development of innovative ideas in my area of responsibility	-0,80556	0,420499	-0,85264	0,393860

Source: own study.

The following HRM practices examined differed according to gender (Fig. 3):

- I accept that potential employers may verify the information contained in my CV on social media. More often men expected this HRM practice.
- Gamification should be used when selecting employees. More often men expected this HRM practice.
- I want to expand my skills through self-development. More often women expected this HRM practice.
- I think it makes sense to disseminate data on past failures and lessons learned among staff. More often men expected this HRM practice.

5. Summary and discussion

HRM practices facilitate the achievement of a company's business goals. This is because organizational procedures are not unlike a roadmap guiding employees towards more desirable behaviour, which in turn improves business performance (Edgar et al., 2014). However, representatives of the generation now being introduced into the job market, the so-called Generation Z, need such practices to be adapted to their particular requirements. Research results indicate that members of that age group have rather varied expectations as to the use of IT in the context of employee selection and recruitment. Overall, they tend to be more open to solutions they are already familiar with, while largely rejecting innovative alternatives. At the same time, respondents from this generation tend to value practices that facilitate self-fulfilment, feedback in areas/aspects that require improvement, and all opportunities to develop one's professional competencies.

The obtained results allowed the formulation of certain recommendations for employers. It is necessary to adequately adapt the implementation of HRM practices to the specific needs of Generation Z and gender, as well as to communicate the same with the same in mind. It is important that employees are guided towards desirable behaviour in an organised way, via a variety of communication channels including organisational documents, meetings with superiors, meetings with other employees, visual presentation tools (boards, websites) so that the message can reach all employees, regardless of personality or learning style preference. Moreover, it is worth enhancing HRM techniques by incorporating certain IT solutions, however, further efforts are needed to inform and convince employees of their functional value. As this particular generation tends to put significant stock in change, it is advisable to employ individualised and flexible strategies in managing employees. This, in turn, requires HRM departments to assume adequate roles and responsibilities. A particularly important facet in this context is the role of a change agent who can lead the efforts towards generating greater social capital within an enterprise.

A critical literature review and analysis the research results obtained led to the identification of the expectations of Generation Z towards HRM practices in the workplace. This allowed certain recommendations for employees to be formulated with a view to identifying HRM directions that may prove beneficial to employers and employees alike. One major limitation of the described study stems from the fact that it was only conducted domestically. In the future, studies are planned that will allow a more comprehensive, international comparison of results.

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