



Career Expectations of Generation Z

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Abstract. In this study we address the importance of understanding career expectations of members of Generation Z. This generation represents the demographic cohort after the Millennials with a starting birth years in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s. Most of Generation Z have used the Internet since a young age and are comfortable with technology and social media. The research was conducted on 357 under graduate students currently enrolled in University of Novi Sad. The results indicate that life-balance, expertise, learning and freedom are found as the most important career aspects for Generation Z students. Gender differences in career expectations were examined. We make several suggestions for how human resources professionals can adjust and evolve current HR practices in order to respond to requests of their future employees. Since there were no Generation Z studies conducted in Serbia, these results give an important insight into current position of Serbian students in relation to findings from similar studies conducted in other countries.

Keywords: Generation Z · Career expectations · Human resource management

1 Introduction

While Generation X and Millennials (Generation Y) are at their jobs, currently the biggest generation is either at the university or engaging in their first jobs [1] while bringing attention to researchers and HR professionals who are striving to understand the work preferences of this new group. Understanding generational differences and identifying motivation drivers, shared attitudes and values is the key for successful recruitment and retention of talents.

Even though very similar, there are some key differences between Millennials and Generation Z regarding their priorities and organizational behavior. Every generation has its unique traits, but Millennials were the first generation that was unlike any preceding.

2 Theoretical Perspectives

2.1 Generation Z

Generation Z is defined as “the most materially endowed, technologically saturated, globally connected, and formally educated generation our world has ever seen” [2]. The

members of Generation Z were born in 1990s and raised in 2000s during the most challenging period in the recent history [3]. McCrindle [2] defines Generation Z as those born in 15-year span: from 1995 to 2009. Members of this youngest generation are considered digital natives for integrating technology into their lives since their youngest age. They prefer visual content and, while mostly doing social interaction online, they highly value face-to-face communication.

Some studies predict that the gap between highly-skilled and unskilled workers will continue to grow with Generation Z [2]. These studies note that a growing elite of highly trained workers will emerge. The workers will have highly developed both technical and (inter)personal skills. It will be very challenging to effectively retain such employees. A different research has found that advancement, money rewards and meaningful work are of the greatest importance to the members of Generation Z cohort. It is not so important for them to have a good manager or to work for a fast growing company, but they point out the importance of their ideas to be listened to and their opinion to be valued. The members of Generation Z feel their generation is creative, open-minded and intelligent [4].

The results of a study conducted in Romania [5] indicate that members of Generation Z prefer to work in groups and want to develop a good interpersonal relationship with their coworkers. They express need for professional development but they expect to be monitored and guided through this process by a mentor. They express a strong need for security which reflects in their desire to have a secure job and high salary.

Some researchers justify that there are significant differences between the members of Generation Z and Generation Y, despite their similarities. These researchers agreed that HR professionals need to adapt their activities to the requirements of new generations [6].

2.2 Career Expectations

Pemberton [7] distinguishes the total of 8 different career themes: competition, freedom, management, life-balance, organizational membership, expertise, learning and entrepreneurship.

Competition is defined as the idea of a career as a contest. Competitive persons need recognition of their achievements, otherwise they feel frustrated and dissatisfied. People with highly expressed freedom need autonomy in work and setting priorities. Having high score on management implies the importance of position, title, status and rewards, as well as the use of a whole range of skills to achieve results through and with others. Life-balance suggests the importance of the right balance between work and off-work life, so flexible work practices are expected by that kind of people. Organizational membership implies identification with organizational goals and values. People with high scores on expertise need the opportunity to develop their expertise by specialization. Learning is defined as being challenged and learning to overcome obstacles through acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Finally, entrepreneurship is defined as set of features such as self-conviction, self-determination and self-control that stimulate risk taking, rather than making a person frightened and resistant.

A global workplace expectation study was conducted in 2014, which included the total of 1005 respondents from 10 different countries. Generation Y and Generation Z workplace preferences were examined; according to this study, generation Z has more entrepreneurial spirit, prefer face-to-face communication and is motivated by opportunities for advancement. Only 25% of Generation Z respondents consider money as a motivator to work harder, opposed to 42% of Generation Y [4]. Recent research conducted on university students in Slovakia explored career preferences of Generation Z. The results suggest that the nature of job and work-life balance are the most important factors [8]. The same authors [9] also tried to identify and explore the possible barriers to work motivation for Generation Z. Job aspects such as not enjoying the content of work, bad team climate, workload, and having no sense of purpose, are identified as key barriers to work motivation.

Schweitzer et al. [10] argue that inequities in the labor market originate in gender expectations. In their study on gender differences in pre-career expectations they found that, when compared to men, women expect lower salary and longer time to be promoted.

3 Method

The purpose of this study is to investigate career expectations and to look into possible gender differences in career expectations of Generation Z. The research questions for this study are:

- RQ 1: What are career expectations of students, members of Generation Z?
- RQ 2: Is there a statistically significant difference between career expectations for male and female students, members of Generation Z?

3.1 Data Collection

Sample for this study included students from the University of Novi Sad currently enrolled in undergraduate studies. Target respondents were defined as students born in 1995 or later with no limitations regarding the field of study (see Table 1).

Table 1. General description of sample by year of birth.

Year of birth	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
1995	43	12%	12%
1996	73	20.3%	32.3%
1997	75	20.9%	53.2%
1998	69	19.2%	72.4%
1999	88	24.5%	96.9%
2000	11	3.1%	100%
Total	359	100%	

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by gender. The sample was not evenly distributed by gender, since more than half of the sample were female students.

Table 2. General description of sample by gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	127	35.4%
Female	232	64.6%
Total	359	100%

The quantitative data was obtained through an anonymous online survey. Data collection was carried out in Q1 2019. Respondents accessed the online survey through SurveyMonkey®. Descriptive statistics, frequencies and T-test were analyzed with IBM® SPSS® Statistics software, version 24.

3.2 Measurement

This paper investigates career expectations of generation Z. The total of 8 different career themes are examined: competition, freedom, management, life-balance, organization membership, expertise, learning and entrepreneurship.

Career Expectations Questionnaire, adapted from an expectations questionnaire presented in a book “Strike a New Career Deal” (Pemberton, 1988), was used to explore career expectations of students. Each of 24 questions relates to one of the 8 employee-employer related themes: 1. *competition* (3 questions), 2. *freedom* (3 questions), 3. *management* (3 questions), 4. *life-balance* (3 questions), 5. *organization membership* (3 questions), 6. *expertise* (3 questions), 7. *learning* (3 questions) and 8. *entrepreneurship* (3 questions). Students rated how important are statements describing their future career expectations, ranging from 1 meaning “No importance” to 4 meaning “Very important”. Questionnaire for socio-demographic characteristics has 2 items.

The Cronbach’s Alpha for Career Expectations Questionnaire was 0.837. The internal consistency of multi-item scale is established, since this value is above recommended threshold of 0.700.

4 Results

In the first section we examined the score distribution of Career Expectation Questionnaire. The structure of career expectations and its eight dimensions is analyzed in the next section. We used the key provided with questionnaire in order to compute the career expectation dimension’s variables. Factor analysis was not performed for the purposes of this study. In the last section we discuss gender differences in career expectations of Generation Z.

4.1 Score Distribution of Career Expectation Questionnaire

The respondents reported the highest level of agreement (mean > 3.60) on questions that represent: *competition* (question 1), *life-balance* (questions 4, 6, 16), *organization membership* (question 9), *expertise* (question 22, 13) and *management* (question 14).

The lowest level of agreement students referred to the other two items that address *competition* (question 19 and 11) and point to specific situations where their performance and abilities are compared to others in work environment (see Table 3).

Table 3. Score distribution of Career Expectation Questionnaire.

Question	Mean	Std. Dev.
1 Promotion	3.89	0.384
6 A balance between work and other areas of my life	3.84	0.448
9 Being part of an Organization	3.78	0.526
4 Enough leisure time to travel, relax and be myself	3.70	0.591
22 Knowing every year that I have further developed my expertise	3.62	0.530
14 Being able to get the most out of people in order to achieve the set goal	3.62	0.649
16 Being able to put work in its place as an important, but not the only part of my life	3.60	0.635
13 To be recognized for my expertise	3.57	0.656
18 To be involved in assignments which will take the organisation forward	3.47	0.651
5 Being able to contribute new ideas which will help build the future	3.39	0.746
10 Being given challenges which stretch me intellectually	3.38	0.710
2 Control over how and when I work	3.35	0.676
20 Knowing that I am respected for the specialist skills that I bring	3.32	0.809
21 Being able to work when and where I want so long as I can deliver results	3.32	0.784
8 Opening up new business directions through initiating new ideas	3.31	0.737
24 The excitement of creating something new whose success depends on me	3.29	0.795
12 Being able to identify closely with an organization	3.26	0.754
23 Being able to make decisions without being controlled by organizational bureaucracy	3.26	0.760
3 Being able to get a job done well through managing the efforts of others	2.95	0.867
15 Taking the risk of getting a new business venture off the ground	2.87	0.821
17 To have the status that comes with being part of a successful company	2.73	0.873
7 Leading a team on key organizational projects	2.60	0.881
19 To be able to see that I am doing better than those I am in competition with	2.48	1.027
11 Being able to show that I have more to offer than my colleagues	2.32	0.997

4.2 Career Expectations of Generation Z Students

Students expect to have good life-balance when they begin to work, but they also expect that their career will allow them to develop their expertise by specialization.

They are also challenged by learning to solve problems by developing new skills and creating new knowledge. Members of Generation Z do not see career as a contest. They do not attach importance to position, title, status or rewards, and express low interest to entrepreneurial features such as: risk taking, initiative problem solving, independence and commitment (see Table 4).

Table 4. Career expectations of Generation Z.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Life-balance	1	4	3.71	0.41
Expertise	1.67	4	3.50	0.47
Learning	1	4	3.41	0.53
Freedom	1.33	4	3.31	0.57
Organization membership	1	4	3.26	0.51
Entrepreneurship	1	4	3.16	0.59
Management	1	4	3.06	0.58
Competition	1	4	2.90	0.66

4.3 Gender Differences in Career Expectations of Generation Z

T-test for independent samples (equal variances assumed) compared the results of career expectations for male and female students, members of Generation Z. There were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between male and female students on *competition*, *organization membership*, *expertise* and *learning* (see Table 5). The female students showed statistically significant higher levels of these career aspects.

Table 5. T- test for gender differences in career expectations of Generation Z.

	Gender	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	t	df	Sig.
Competition	Male	2.74	0.670	0.059	-0.237	357	0.001
	Female	2.98	0.635	0.041			
Freedom	Male	3.28	0.557	0.049	-0.631	357	0.529
	Female	3.32	0.580	0.038			
Management	Male	2.98	0.622	0.552	-1.806	357	0.072
	Female	3.10	0.548	0.036			
Life-balance	Male	3.66	0.459	0.040	-1.723	357	0.086
	Female	3.74	0.374	0.025			
Organization membership	Male	3.06	0.579	0.051	-5.860	357	0.000
	Female	3.37	0.427	0.028			
Expertise	Male	3.38	0.518	0.046	-3.849	357	0.000
	Female	3.57	0.429	0.028			
Learning	Male	3.28	0.635	0.563	-3.524	357	0.000
	Female	3.48	0.457	0.030			
Entrepreneurship	Male	3.18	0.654	0.058	0.599	357	0.550
	Female	3.14	0.548	0.036			

The magnitude of the differences (Cohen, 2013) was small for competition ($\eta^2 = 0.01$) and learning ($\eta^2 = 0.04$), while this difference was medium for expertise ($\eta^2 = 0.09$) and organizational membership ($\eta^2 = 0.08$).

5 Discussion

The results of this study offer some insight into career expectations of students, who are members of Generation Z. The results indicate that *life-balance*, *expertise*, *learning* and *freedom* are found as the most important career aspects for Generation Z students. Female students show higher levels of *competition*, *life-balance*, *organizational membership*, *expertise* and *management*. These findings are largely consistent with present research on characteristic of Generation Z in work context.

This is an early, but valuable, insight on how important are certain job-related factors to generation Z and how to use them to adjust job design, benefits and other aspects of work. Findings presented in this paper may be useful to the research community, as well as human resource managers and recruiters in terms of obtaining more information on career expectations of students who will soon be entering organizations and become full-time workforce.

6 Conclusion

Identified importance of life-balance to Generation Z in this research, as well as in previous researches [9], will make organizations and human resources professionals to put a different perspective on productivity. For Generation Z the work will not be valued with the amount of work hours they get, but with the actual output they make. Flexible workhours and flexible workplace as we know will have to evolve even more to satisfy the growing desire for more time to spend away from work. Companies who fail to realize that “9 to 5” workday is becoming a part of the past will have difficulties in attracting and retaining Generation Z employees. The human resources professionals will have to provide the continuing education for their young employees who expect to develop their expertise through differentiation, but also to learn to overcome obstacles through acquiring of new skills and knowledge. Their technological supremacy will urge organizations to develop unconventional learning methodology in order to keep up with Generation Z needs. The new technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality and different interactive tools could be used for new knowledge and new skills acquisition. And finally, the managers will have to rethink the chain of command and their managerial style when managing Generation Z employees who are seeking for greater freedom in decision making and task prioritization.

The present study examined the career expectations of students from the University of Novi Sad. Larger and more (geographically and culturally) diverse sample size is needed to examine the generational stability of career expectations. This study explored only eight variables, but there could be more factors that can influence career choice. To extend and support the results of this study future research has to be conducted.

The new generations of employees who have no fear of change are starting to look for their first jobs. The organizations must make sure that they offer them a dream job, not a safe job. A job that is built on great relationships between employees, supreme work conditions, while fostering freedom and flexibility.

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