

Practical recommendations for a post COVID-19 resilient Generation Z workforce

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Abstract.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this short communication is to provide theoretical considerations that support Human Resources (HR) professionals' decisions regarding the development of a post COVID-19 pandemic career resilient Generation Z's workforce. Building on the work of Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy [1] and Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2], an effort to provide practical recommendations, that align workplace policies and practices with Generation Z's work values will be made, in order to develop a resilient workforce.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: The authors review literature on Generation Z, namely regarding the factors that shaped their underlying development and consequent work values. Furthermore, literature regarding current organizational policies and practices focused on this generation was reviewed.

FINDINGS: Although the recommendations made here allow worker integration and a better person-organization fit, this conceptual framework also suggests that very little is known about this generation, and as such, no one-size-fits-all recommendation exists for managers. It is our understanding that the recommendations set out here must be adapted to each organizational context, and each manager should pay more attention to its content than its form.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: This short communication presents a reflection regarding recommendations, that align workplace policies and practices with Generation Z's work values, in order to develop a career resilient workforce. It is a work that combines previous works and as such it offers a more encompassing systematization of the latest recommendations regarding this generation.

Keywords: Generation Z, work values, resilient workforce, COVID-19 pandemic



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1. Introduction

As the workplace continuously changes, a new generational cohort – persons born between 1995 and 2012 - referred to as Generation Z (GenZ) is beginning to enter the workforce [3, 4].

Representing 32% of the world population in 2019, GenZers, constantly connected by smartphone, tablet or computer, have always had ubiquitous Internet access. Consequently, they have grown up in a social world of likes and shares, with constant access to information and instant interaction with friends, family and peers [5, 6].

Having been born and raised in specific conditions that are different from the other generations in the labor market there is no doubt that GenZ will represent a new and important part of human resources within this market [5]. As this generation enters the workforce, HR leaders should be prepared to address any challenges that may arise due to age, experience, thinking, and style with other generations that will also be working in the organization [3]. As such, and as previously argued by Singh and Dangmei [7] and more recently by Gabrielova & Buchko [4], organizations would gain with a proper understanding of this generation. Without this proper understanding, organizations will find difficulties in recruiting and retaining the most talented GenZ candidates, and will fail to motivate and inspire them which in turn will have an impact on organizational performance.

In practice, and in line with Borg et al. [8], in order to sustain a resilient workforce, HR managers need to actively plan, develop, and organize human resource management initiatives that aim to instill career resilience in younger workplace entrants, in other words, foster in them the ability to adjust to a changing environment and cope with adverse circumstances. These managers should also keep in mind, that by strategically designing generationally-appropriate management practices to make the most of GenZers talent, organizations can strengthen their business sustainability in order to continue competitive in nowadays ever changing economy.

In sum, the presence of generation Z in today's organizations is a reality, and it's one that is generating a paradigm shift in the day to day workflow of both private and public sector organizations. The need for new policies and human resources practices is urgent. Therefore, the purpose of this opinion article is to provide theoretical considerations that support Human Resources (HR) professionals' decisions regarding the development of a post COVID-19 pandemic resilient Generation Z's workforce. As such, and building on the work of Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy [1] and Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2], an effort to provide practical recommendations, that align workplace policies and practices with Generation Z's work

values will be made, in order to develop a resilient workforce. By combining previous works we offer a more encompassing systematization of the latest recommendations made by different authors for this generation. Also, when combining their work a need for a more sustainable HR development becomes apparent.

2. Managing GenZers post COVID-19 pandemic

According to Gabrielova and Buchko's [4] work managers today don't just have to understand how to best manage these young, inexperienced workers but they also need to handle the distinctive characteristics of a generation that is shaped by their experiences, to which the COVID-19 pandemic is added.

Organizations face substantial long-lasting work trials following COVID-19. They may need to embrace new ways of working, circumstances that strengthen this young digital generations' place within organizations. As such, organizations will benefit from the GenZers abilities, when digital collaboration technologies are introduced, because they are able to manage considerable information flow as well as rapid changes that may come with/and regarding technology, and along their business life [1]. As Lanier [9] had previously stated, we cannot forget that: (a) generation Z is the first really generation that is connected from birth. GenZers can't remember a time without internet nor a time before social media; (b) their constant connectivity has this generation consuming information more rapidly than their previous generations; as such, GenZers are individuals that are strong on tech fluency on the workplace, and with them their workplace becomes a space for collaboration that values every digital savvy employee's input; (c) arising from this reality GenZers connection to others – (e.g. different cultures, backgrounds and circumstances) - makes them the first generation

to overwhelmingly expect diversity at work; (d) GenZers are pragmatic; living through a global recession and a pandemic has made them become more motivated by traditional opportunities for progression and development, in other words, they look for enhanced economic security and better benefits; (e) they are more entrepreneurial than Millennials; and, (f) GenZers have a higher and more frequent need for feedback than any prior generation. Although digitally and socially engaged, recognition and communication tools are still key to engage this generation, as such, feedback should be delivered in-person in meaningful conversations.

In line with the above, Pichler, Kohli and Granitz [2] identified 5 factors that shaped GenZers. These factors are presented in Table 1.

When compared to Millennials, born between 1982–1996, it becomes clear that GenZers have been subject to several factors that have led them to abrupt shifts in values and behaviors, they didn't adapt to them, they were born "within" them [2].

This information should be kept in mind, because, as Gabrielova and Buchko's [4] alongside Ozkan and Solmaz [10] and Turner [11] have noticed, this generation is looking for: (a) the best cultural fit between them at their yet to come workplace; (b) a company where they are in a position and place that allows them to have a positive significant impact; (c) a "fun" place to work, that allows them to have a flexible schedule and paid time off; and (d) a place where they're quickly valued. Furthermore, they need to be socially connected with everyone, even their boss. Finally, they're not looking to climb the ranks quickly.

Considering this, the impacts and expected transformations that will occur in office work in the post-COVID-19 era, Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy [1], have called attention to the critical management issues that concern GenZers preferences and expectations. The authors suggest that every HR professional should be aware of the following ideas for organizations on how to transform the work environment in this new era in

Table 1
Factors that shaped Generation Z (versus Millennials) adapted from Pichler, Kohli and Granitz (2021)

Factors	Generation Z	Millennials
Technology	Both internet and smartphones were always part of their lives	Both internet and smartphones were innovations to which they adapted
Mental Health	High levels of depression and anxiety	Moderate levels of depression and anxiety
Individualism and teamwork	More individualistic and less social	More group-oriented and more social
Diversity	Most diverse generation ever	Diverse generation

order to attract and retain employees, especially GenZers. Specifically for this generation, they propose a more comprehensive work value theory approach. Before proceeding, however, it is important to clarify what “work values” mean for the authors: “work values are preferences that individuals would like to have or consider important in job decisions, and they have a strong connection to motivation and job satisfaction” (p.152). As such, their approach highlights the work environment’s suitability features and integrates values that support the employees’ looked-for lifestyle and well-being, their recommendations are organized in Table 2 according to the five main work value categories proposed.

However, Table 2 expands Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy [1] work by crossing his approach with that of Pichler, Kohli and Granitz [2]. The latter propose a new research-based framework – DITTO. It includes recommendations for organizations on diversity (D), individualism and teamwork (IT), technology (T), and organizational support (OS), and, as the previous authors, intends to leverage the strengths of GenZers to benefit the organization and the workforce.

Notwithstanding the recommendations explained above, it is certain that many will require further training, specifically regarding skills that previous generations took for granted, for example managing meetings, calls or even writing emails. This will be necessary because GenZ has been less about face-to-face communication, and more about communication via text, emoji, and video [4, 11]. Furthermore, if we consider that this is a generation that enters the labor market at a time when concerns for well-being and career resilience are at an all-time high [12], it becomes clear that the development of social skills will be needed given that they allow workers to increase their self-esteem, autonomy, and more decisively for GenZ, their capacity to cope with stress, which enable them to reduce their anxiety, probability of depression, and individual and situational frustration [4].

3. Discussion

The purpose of this short communication was to provide theoretical considerations that support HR professionals’ decisions regarding the development of a post COVID-19 pandemic career resilient Generation Z workforce. Building on the work of Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy [1] and Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2], an effort to provide practical recommen-

dations, that align workplace policies and practices with Generation Z’s work values was made, in order to develop a resilient workforce.

By combining the work of Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy [1] and Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2], their work was extended, in a way that it now offers a more encompassing systematization of the latest recommendations made for GenZers. By analyzing the literature regarding the factors that shaped Generation Z, and the literature that considers their work values, it becomes clear that a paradigm shift in HR management is needed. In order to foster the ability to adjust to a changing environment and cope with adverse circumstances, GenZers clearly invoke the need for a more meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable HR strategy. As such, for a career resilient Generation Z, and probably future generations to come, HR should bear in mind that more and more common good values are emerging, and more than being advertised, they must be implemented. In this sense, and in order to extend this short commentary, future studies should focus on studying the impact of common good HRM on different generations, but particularly on the ones to come.

Although we have accomplished our goal, we acknowledge that, and as previously pointed out by Lanier [9], Chillakuri and Mahanandia [3], Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy [1], Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2] research on GenZ is still scarce. Very little is known about this generation, and hence, there is no one-size-fits-all recommendation for managers. It is our understanding that the recommendations set out here must be adapted to each organizational context, and each manager should pay more attention to its content than its form. Notwithstanding this opinion, managers, specifically HR professionals, can start preparing for the next generation, and along the process, as processes and policies adapt for the future of work, improve engagement and culture for all employees of all generations [9]. For example, and as stated by Chillakuri and Mahanandia [3], “the growing use of technology and the new generation entering the workforce should be seen as an opportunity by HR managers to redesign entry-level work” (p. 37), specifically, towards the development of a resilient workforce. In line with the authors, we suggest that a focus on individual employees’ career resilience will frame their ability to respond when faced with career challenges, which will, in turn, allow them to keep effectively functioning, being able to adapt in a flexible manner, and, consequently, successfully deliver work outcomes.

Table 2

Purposed practical recommendations for organizations to attract, retain and leverage GenZers post COVID-19 based on Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy (2021) five basic work value categories and GenZers preferences and Pichler, Kohli and Granitz (2021) DITTO research-based proposed policies and practices

Work value categories	GenZers preferences	DITTO -Organizational policies and practices	Practical recommendations	Purpose
Extrinsic values that provide tangible rewards and allow for the reduction of daily uncertainty	Compensation High salary Performance-related salary Payment in kind Company services Stability Security	Consider adopting formal benefits such as employee assistance (EAP) programs as well as health benefits and deferred income and savings programs (OS)	<i>Organizations should:</i> offer long-term contracts as security matters more for the employees than uncertain financial benefits provide an employee health program or corporate health insurance focus on security in communication	Improve firm performance throughout formal organizational support
Intrinsic values that make the individual feel good by working – (mental rewards) – and foster autonomy and recognition	Work enjoyment Autonomy Challenges Creativity Interesting work Self-realization Recognition Diversity Meaningful work Meaningful goal of the company Ideological match Social Responsibility Personality Growth	Be prepared for the inherent diversity coming with Gen Z recruitment (D) Recruit a more diverse workforce through programs such as targeted recruitment (D) Create generationally diverse teams where Gen Z can serve as role models for openness to diversity (D) Implement policies and practices that promote inclusivity such as nondiscrimination policies and diversity training (D)	<i>Managers must reach out to consistent one-on-one calls or meetings to:</i> reduce friction and misunderstanding improve confidence encourage peers celebrate successes <i>Organizations should develop and strengthen digital creativity and creative thinking by:</i> promoting diversity training (including team training) searching for new experiences and perspectives spending time thinking about new ideas on a daily basis making weekly goals creating a work atmosphere where effort and failure are respected.	Enhance organizational attraction, by creating an inclusive, multicultural organizational culture
Growth/power future-oriented values (in the prospect of future rewards related to GenZers career and professional development)	Career development Professional fit Professional Development Positive corporate image International employment opportunities Status	Promote perceptions of organizational support through supportive work conditions (e.g., by recognizing individuals for their work) (OS)	<i>Employers should offer training courses on:</i> online communication techniques different useful platform usability courses boundaries management	Improve firm performance by providing opportunities for individual promotion and development
Social values that are focusing on social needs like collaboration and socialization	Positive impression of the colleagues Positive impression of the manager Team Building Team Spirit Teamwork Opinions of social contacts	Facilitate social support through electronic communications (OS) Adopt socialization programs that will enhance person-organization fit (I&T) Promote meaningfulness through the understanding that being part of a team means being part of something that is bigger than oneself (I&T) Provide opportunities for Gen Z workers to serve as exemplars in terms of coordinated work with team members who are dispersed geographically and communicate electronically (I&T)	As hybrid work schedules will undoubtedly be normal in future work culture, management must consider a weekly block of time for in-person collaboration and informal personal meetings. Given that in a virtual environment, verbal cues dominate more than non-verbal cues, leaders must build new communicational and behavioral practices in order to avoid conflicts. The use of IT tools that support virtual interactions and allowing for employee avatars is advisable. Furthermore, in the medium-term organizations	Retain top talent by promoting effective work organization and person-organization fit

(Continued)

Table 2
(Continued)

Work value categories	GenZers preferences	DITTO -Organizational policies and practices	Practical recommendations	Purpose
Convenience values that are external facets to the job itself and foster person–organization fit	<i>Life at work support:</i> Atmosphere of the office Harmony with nature Office facilities Office layout Privacy Sensual Comfort Building facilities Environmental protection in office environment		should: support online/ web-based learning Integrate technology that allows for performance management monitoring and training and development systems. Training in information and communications technologies GenZers need freedom and trust, therefore, organizations should foster flexible and hybrid work schedules. As organizations possibly will need to compromise on the office functions, keeping those that support teamwork and socializing might be advisable.	Gain competitive advantage by supporting new, alternative, and sustainable ways of working
	<i>Work-life balance support</i> Easy to reach Remote work opportunities Flexibility in working hours Limitation of working hours Flexibility in general	Implement opportunities that facilitate more virtual interactions through remote work and electronic communication technologies, which may become even more desirable in the post-pandemic workplace (T)	In the post-COVID-19 era, workplace hygiene standards should be upgraded. Regarding interior design, bright colors and clear surfaces can ensure the feeling of cleanness and also meet the expectations of GenZers.	
	Employee-centric attitude	Allow employees to create their own avatars for intra-organizational communications (T) Integrate technology with performance management and employee development systems (T)	Furthermore, environmental and health expectations should be met, as such organizations should rethink and set their sustainability goals.	
	<i>Health support</i> Recreation Vacation Low stress level Workload expectations			

Note. (D) – Diversity, (I&T) – Individualism & Teamwork, (T) – Technology, (OS) – Organizational Support.

4. Conclusion

Building on the work of Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy [1] and Pichler, Kohli & Granitz [2], this short communication provides theoretical considerations that support HR professionals' decisions regarding the development of a post COVID-19 pandemic career resilient Generation Z workforce. When analyzing them, it becomes clear that a paradigm shift in HR management is needed. So, in order to foster the ability to adjust to a changing environment and cope with adverse circumstances, GenZers are clearly in need

of a more meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable HR strategy.

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