



Research Paper

## Generation Z Entering The Workforce – A Big Challenge For HR Personnels To Manage Them In This Covid-19 Pandemic Times

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**Abstract** –Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) are born between 1995 - 2010.They are people with creative & techno-oriented skill-sets; seeking employment in organizations with new values & preferences.In a world where everything is being digitalized, creating innovation strategy becomes important; without which organizations may loose their competitive advantage. Hence, there is a need to gear up with technological change and accept the turbulent times work culture.A major challenge for organizations is to retain new & young talents in pandemic scenario – where they are unable to pace up with the employee standards of expectation &behaviour; thereby losing them to the competitors. The main purpose is to explore strategies & methods to retain young talents with innovative HR practices.Soon, there will be different generations sharing the same space within organization, so it becomes necessary to change the management style for upcoming generations.Organizations are trying to analyze the effective virtual work environment for its employees, whereas in between the Gen Z is entering the organizations. Hence, a major challenge for HR personnel'sto maintain the organizations work environment and onboard the new generation. There is a need to strike a balance between the generation gaps & grasp the opportunity from its strength.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Workforce,HR Personnel, Innovative Practices

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### I. Introduction

Generations are different age group people born between certain time period that affects the culture, education, economy and technology. Just when organizations were dealing with the baby boomers and millennials in covid pandemic time, Gen Z entered. Generation Z, is considered as the fourth generation joining Gen Y (1980-90), Gen X(1965-80) and Millennial(1990 – 95).The Generation Z workforce are young talents – who have just completed their degrees or have already entered the online work culture. This generation considers work values and reality more than the global principles. These will be considered as the workforce that has not seen the physical organization culture and environment. They are much different than millennials in respect to attitudes, belief and working style. They are people with creative minds, multiple skill-sets, techno-savvy and innovative skills. They are seen highly demanding, optimistic and motivated towards career advancement. It has been assumed that in next few years, they will capture the maximum percentage of employee workforce in all organizations. They'll be considered as the largest generation to reshape the economy.

All generations have four things in common – appreciation, job security, satisfaction and fulfillment of goals. But this Gen Z is shaking up the world culture more with practicality, ideas, innovations and creativeness. They work mainly not with old traditional principles but with personal morals, different career values and job aspects. They respect diverse community and equity. This demanding generation does not work only for pay checks, but they try to engage in achievements and recognition.

Where the world is still trying to deal with the covid pandemic environment, they are ready to join the workforce with their techno oriented values and preferences. It is considered to be advanced generation fully occupied with technology in every aspect. They have grown with internet and mobiles, their life is occupied completely around social media and World Wide Web. They are the fast learners and technology lovers. With the dynamic change in the global world, all organizations had to move online, with no options left. Some managed to work effectively, whereas some were unable to cope up with the pandemic scenario. It has shaken the professional working conditions in all parts of world. Today, the organizations are working partially online

and offline. Many of organizations have recognized various changes in the employee's demands, expectations and their nature of working in these times. Some employees are happy and accepted the work from home culture whereas some are resisting it. The HR managers have to face continuous challenges in maintaining the organizational virtual culture smoothly. In between the new workforce have no choice but to accept the new virtual and hybrid culture.

HR personnel's are struggling hard in dealing with the diverse generations. Generations working together with different conduct, values and opinions, have resulted in conflicts and disagreements, for which HR personnel's have to continuously mold their policies, plans, strategies and management styles with dynamic environment. It's a big challenge to deal with all generations together that require different levels of engagement. Hence, the new generation entering the work place will be a challenging task for HR personnel's to manage them effectively. To make the Gen Z employees comfortable, it is important to understand the mindsets of the generation. All efforts are made in finding best work environment for Gen Z, but still more has to be done for sustainable development.

## **II. Literature Review**

This section provides review of literature with respect to the new generations entering the workforce and HR personnel's dealing with them globally. Every new generation needs motivated and innovative work culture according to their expectations (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Every generation has different opinions and beliefs. It is important to make them comfortable, for which efforts should be made to maintain better communication and understanding. Sacks (2006) found that organizations must consider the generational conflicts to increase productivity, satisfaction of employees and reduce turnover rates, whereas, Houlihan(2008) disapproved the concept of changing the management styles for new upcoming generations. The new generation employees entering the workforce from last few years have never been retained with the traditional HR approaches – due to mindset of upcoming generations (Bencsik, Juhasz, & Machova, 2016).

Distinct characteristics of Gen Z may cause hurdles for HR professionals (Puiu, 2017), whereas Lanier (2017) claimed that HR professionals are not ready for coping up with expectations of Gen Z employment. As per Chillakuri & Mahanandia (2018), Gen Z may suffer due to lack of preparedness in onboarding the new generation in work culture where already 4-5 generations are working side by side. HR personnel's were planning and thinking about the upcoming generation, where in between the pandemic situation arrived, where offline to online working impacted many organizations. Liu et al. (2020) suggested that to cope up in this pandemic situation, strategic agility should be maintained. Many organizations were unable to provide management plans to their employees (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020), but few were able to manage the stress, confidence and motivation of employees (Wong et al. (2020).

HRM practitioners in organizations were encouraged to identify the category of job positions to be performed remotely, physically and layoff the one provoked by the pandemic. These organizational changes have impacted employee's mental health as well as their work effectiveness. As per Deloitte Global Survey report (2021), sociopolitical environment have impacted not only employees but also management and owners. It has been analyzed that very less research is been done regarding Gen Z employees, as they have just started to onboard the organizations work culture. There is a need to research more on this aspect as they will comprise of large % of workforce and there will be an urgent need to redesign the strategies.

### **Objectives**

The paper highlights to achieve various objectives like–

- To study the present scenario of managing human resource in turbulent times
- To analyze the challenges that is being faced by HR managers to deal with young employees
- To suggest innovative practices in managing and training the upcoming workforce

## **III. Methodology**

The research is based on first hand data collected by researcher ethically. It is exploratory in nature. Data was collected through two questionnaires prepared – one for Gen Z entering the workforce/ already entered and second for the HR Personnel's. The secondary data has been collected from journals, conferences, newspapers and articles. Approx. 378 samples were collected randomly (with level of confidence = 95% and confidence interval = 3). Secondary data helped in reviewing the organizational behavior in present turbulent times i.e. impact of remote work culture. The data are analyzed with various statistical methods at significance levels  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.01$ .

#### **IV. Findings**

Findings of the study suggest that Gen Z workforce will require a sustainable development and changes in HR policies. 61% of respondents were males and 39% females. Highest level of education was either high school i.e. 48%, 20% doing graduation and rest were graduates and post graduates students. Results shows respondents had less professional experience i.e. 1-2 year whereas maximum respondents didn't start as yet.

Preferences of Gen Z-ers highlighted large organization work culture, entrepreneurship, private sector, good salary, benefits and flexible job timings. From recruiting to selection, wages to performance appraisal; they differ a lot from the millennial and boomers. The results have shown that yes, generation gap is present. This study proved that Gen Z employees will be pragmatic – who will not only emphasis on final rewards& benefits but will give value to job security. 62% respondents mentioned that they will like to work in the office physically, whereas 38% respondents will like to work from home with learning new capabilities on personal front. Perspectives of the Gen Z showed that more than half of the new-comers are optimistic and will want to explore 3-5 organizations in coming years. More than 78% respondents has concern for –

- finding appropriate jobs matching their skills
- opportunities for future learning & overall development
- inability to achieve goals and job security

Having policies to attract and retain employees are not enough; more is needed to keep them encouraged and engaged – as they are the future of the organization. In-person discussions with HR personnel have resulted in analyzing the practices of HR managers. 73% agreed that with onboarding new generation, it will be important to transform learning and development programs. As online, offline and hybrid culture have impacted many employees mentally & emotionally, it will be challenging for HR personnel's to coordinate and maintain balance between generations that have never seen each other. It will be better for HR personnel's to plan in advance about the work environment that will be comprising of not only gen z, but millennial and boomers working all together. To sustain the employee satisfaction level and maintain work balance will be toughest task for policy makers. Now, this is the time to shape up the hiring, training, motivating and retaining the HR policies and practices.

It has been found, that Gen Z are more prepared to adjust in this pandemic situation than any other generation today. They are the one who do not have world outside technology, internet and digital media. They are called 'digital natives'. They are familiar with the virtual environment and maintaining balance between work and quality. They easily understand the work culture and have high proficiency in using Information & Communication Tools (ICT).

Gen Z responded to the perspective - which they believe to be measured more on the basis of quality of work they perform; rather than their personality and behavior in the workplace. They consider working effectively and efficiently with the other generations present in organization by delivering best results on time. Only hurdle in their way is the current pandemic situation that has caused unemployment, layoffs and economic disruptions. Gen Z is unable to get on job training and social experience that helps them to prepare for real world. For successful career – quality education and effective work plays an important role, but obtaining degrees without evaluations and moving online without adequate in-person learning; has impacted Gen Z recruitments. In current scenario, as per HR personnel, it is difficult to select right person on right job.

HR managers are concerned more upon joining of Gen Z employees remotely. They consider traditional workplace more favorable in maintaining proper communication channel between employees - formally and informally. Hence, working remotely will not have same opportunities which include interpersonal relation and bonding between the employees. HR personnel's are preparing strategies to build deep relationship and coordination between diverse people from different age groups.

#### **Challenges faced by the HRM Personnel's**

The current pandemic situation (Covid-19) has resulted in occurrence of various challenges for HR personnel's and managers. It has encouraged them to prepare themselves for the upcoming opportunities and hurdles in future times. The challenges faced by the HR personnel's in dealing with young employees are -

1. Virtual recruitment and selection process - is not easy in the current situation
2. Cutting back on recruitment of skilled people to reduce cost
3. Orientation of new employees to make them understand the company policies and plans is major challenge. It is very difficult for HR practitioners to make employees familiar with the ongoing work culture remotely; as communication barrier have become major problem in remote work environment
4. Developing training programs to adapt the new organizational culture and values, considering the physical distancing when working offline
5. To ensure that employees working remotely have necessary technological tools to perform the job like – Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Team viewers, etc.

6. To ensure effective communication and virtual supervision as the Gen Z employees have never met the other employees in the organization. Conflicts may arise between generations while working together with respect to views and opinions
7. Technical and 24/7 support to those working first time remotely must be considered timely. As many may face technical glitches that can cause delay in official works
8. Possibilities of family distractions
9. Increased use of ICT can lead to perception of constant availability of employees, which can increase employee stress level, frustration and dissatisfaction
10. Employee retention is very crucial in this condition
11. Performance appraisal has to be done not only on basis of quantity but quality work

In this context, the HR personnel's should consider constructing policies that support and train new employees via virtual team and informal relationship. While the work in organizations are still via offline and online mode - on rotation basis, it is important to keep flexible HR policies for workers to be satisfied. Workplaces are not fully equipped with employees due to covid protocols, so some preventive measures are required to be followed in organization with implementation of awareness campaigns. Health of employees should be first motive of any organization.

The major challenge is not only recruiting, selecting or making policies, but it is to manage the performance of new young employees in this situation. The main aim is to create a work culture when good opportunities can be provided with effective performance in return. Therefore, there is a need for HR personnel's to move towards strategic role rather than staying on administrative one. Managing all generations together will be challenging but will result in long term benefits. HR managers will have to prove their existence in this dynamic work environment, while remaining productive and positive.

### **V. Suggestions**

Many human resource managers have implemented activities and programs to support their employees in this pandemic scenario. To make it comfortable for new employees in knowing their seniors and colleagues, they have some activities like -

1. Virtual Socialization Activities
2. Virtual Lunch & Coffee Breaks
3. Festival Celebration
4. Office visits on rotation basis

Innovative practices and suggestions in managing the upcoming Gen Z workforce, HR personnel's should consider following points -

1. They are called as digital generation – grown with digital native. They cannot spend their single moment without mobiles, social media and digital world. This will require tech savvy workplace with collaboration from other generations
2. They consider and value the diversity aspect and are already connected to people of different background and culture via social media
3. This Gen Z has pragmatic behavior of dealing with problem practically rather than following old traditional values and principles
4. They are more creative and give value to quality of work
5. Customizing management styles will be beneficial in this pandemic situation
6. Make remote work smooth without any disruptions
7. Encouraging interdepartmental cooperation
8. Employer branding strategies might help in attracting the Gen Z
9. This generations wants more flexibility in their career planning and advancement
10. They are not afraid to ask question and do not like to be ruled. Therefore, it is always better to consider and solve queries as soon as they occur.
11. They should be given chance to come up with creative and innovative ideas and be constantly involved in organizational work

Three pillars that should be considered while dealing with Gen Z –



1. **Skill Development** – Gen Z is facing a big disruption from school to college, offline to online, college to entering workplace and pass or fail situation without any exams. The situation has left them with confusion and dis-orientation. Great level of patience is needed to adjust Gen Z into the professional world with inter-generational support, reverse mentoring (where employees help seniors in learning technology and social platforms) and training. This will help in skill development of employees and help in selecting right person for right job.
2. **Stress Management** – It has been seen that Gen Z has high anxiety and stress levels than other. This leads to more absenteeism, turnover and less productive. Pandemic has impacted this more with regards to their work and career. Stress management policies and customized programs at the employee level and organizational level are needed to reduce the anxiety level and boost confidence in them.
3. **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**–Gen Z are entering the workforce with great level of adaptability, qualities and empathy which make three important components of EI. Having seen the pandemic condition on professional as well as personal front, they are likely to be more vigilant regarding emotions of co-workers.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In a world where everything is being digitalized, creating innovation strategy becomes important; without which organizations may lose their competitive advantage. Hence, there is a need to gear up with technological change and accept the turbulent times work culture. A major challenge for organizations is to retain new & young talents in the pandemic scenario – where they are unable to pace up with the employee standards of expectation & behaviour; thereby losing them to the competitors. The time remote work condition will end, is unknown, but the pandemic has already impacted a lot of organizations and economy. It has increased concern for organizations and HR personnel's to cope up with the changes and construct an environment for all those returning to work or entering the workforce for the first time.

The Generation Z workforce are young talents – who have just completed their degrees or have already entered the online work culture. They will be considered as the workforce that has not seen the physical organization culture and environment. They are much different than millennials in respect to attitudes, belief and working style. They are people with creative minds, multiple skill-sets, techno-savvy and innovative skills. They are seen highly demanding, optimistic and motivated towards career advancement. It has been assumed that in next few years, they will capture the maximum percentage of employee workforce in all organizations. They'll be considered as the largest generation to reshape the economy. Hence, all the generations will be working together. So, there is a need to strike a balance between the generation gaps & grasp the opportunity from its strength.

Many of Gen Z are searching for opportunities to begin their career journey, whereas few of them are already been fired or laid off. Full time opportunities for some of them have become part time without benefits and incentives. HR personnel's will have to address the fallout for their young and future employees. Gen Z while selecting a company; considers work ethics, job satisfaction, work life balance and diversity factors. The real challenge for HR personnel's is to retain and attract them. The current scenario has led to rethink the human resource strategies and move beyond the traditional way with new online culture. Many organizations have accepted the remote culture, whereas few of them are still struggling with them. Telecommuting, flexible

schedules, innovation opportunities, career advancement, remote work location can help to attract & retain Gen Z employees. It has become necessary for HR personnel's to adopt the unexpected transformation by supporting and helping the employees. They are required to consider the job redesigning within the organization. They are working hard in identifying the specific training needs to all generation employees as everyone do not have technological competencies. They may want to work freely for several companies at same time. Furthermore, employees should be allowed to work with flexibility without any limitation of working at workplace or home. They should be provided possibility to keep on visiting offices on regular basis with appropriate precautions. Performance standards must be communicated to them for effective working. Rebuilding of organizational culture is required to adopt the remote work culture and hybrid culture with flexibility.

This research is an effort made to learn about the expectations and strategies to be followed in managing generation Z in current and future conditions. It will help in managing HR functions smoothly while coping up with post pandemic condition.

### **Contribution of the study**

In the business world, some events are inevitable. However, no one can assume the crises & the duration for this pandemic to end. The current scenario has accelerated the disruption of traditional methods of HRM and has created significant challenges for managers and HR personnel's who were working in traditional way. Now they have to cope with the complexity & dynamic nature of this pandemic. The innovative strategies and practices suggested will help in retaining and attracting young employees. HR practitioners will be able to support and help the new generation employees, as this will give them an understanding of the demands and expectations of the Gen Z.

The contribution of this research, should be considered with some limitations like – firstly, not much research has been done and Secondly, during writing this paper, COVID-19 is still present. Therefore, it is not possible meet and identify the challenges in advance for long-term opportunities. This research is an effort made to learn about the expectations and strategies to be followed in managing generation Z in current and future conditions. It will help in managing HR functions smoothly while coping up with post pandemic condition. Future research should be directed toward longitudinal analysis to identify these challenges and opportunities, as it is an important area that needs effective research in future.

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