

E-RECRUITMENT AND GENERATION Z JOB SEEKERS

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ABSTRACT

JEL: M12, O15, O30 Recent times have seen traditional personnel management activities in organizations become significantly affected by the digitalization process. The aim of this paper is to examine one of the most essential activities in people management in companies – the recruitment of personnel, and to define its characteristics in a digital environment, in the context of the specifics of Generation Z. The tasks we set ourselves are related to conducting analysis of e-recruitment, the characteristics of Generation Z, as well as the attitudes of its representatives when seeking jobs in an electronic environment. The main research methods used are: literature review, descriptive method, analysis and synthesis. Specific conclusions have been drawn and recommendations have been made.

Received: 18-05-2023

Accepted: 16-06-2023

Published: 30-06-2023

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Keywords: E-recruitment; Generation Z; Job-Seekers

Citation: Koleva, V. (2023) E-recruitment and generation z job seekers. *Journal “Човешки ресурси & Технологии = HR & Technologies”*, Creative Space Association, 1, pp. 63 – 75.

INTRODUCTION

The great technological leap and digitalization in recent years have fundamentally changed the understanding of people management in organizations – they have provided flexibility and freedom for employees to work effectively remotely, changed the quality of life and relationships in an organizational environment, brought forward ethical dilemmas about the future of work places and the tangible threat of some professions disappearing. Terms such as “digital transformation”, “digital skills”, “digital competences”, “digital management of human resources” and a number of others have appeared in the specialized literature, attempting to analyze and at least partially explain these challenges of the environment. Companies have begun to purposefully digitize people management activities, especially since the young professionals on the current labour market – Generation Z, which were born in the 1990s and grew up in the current millennium, live in a world with the Internet, smartphones, laptops, open networks and digital media (Bascha, 2011; Brue Tulgan & Rain Maker Inc., 2013). That generation is digitally immersed and technology is its identity. Also known as Generation I, Gen Tech and Digital Natives, they were born and raised in the digital world.

The aim of the present paper is to examine one of the most essential activities in people management in organizations – the recruitment of personnel, and to define its characteristics in a digital environment, in the context of the specifics of Generation Z. The paper is theoretically oriented and comments on the essence and characteristics of e-recruitment and the specifics of Generation Z in the work environment, presents some research on the generation’s attitudes towards using the various channels when looking for jobs online, and attempts to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

E-recruitment

Recruitment means identifying, seeking and attracting potential candidates for a vacant position in the organization, then “screening” and selecting those who come closest to the requirements of the position. The more candidates are attracted, the greater the probability that there will be suitable ones among them, i.e. the richer the potential workforce for the organization will be (Antonova, Veleva, Koleva & Ivanova, 2020, p. 53). In turn, e-recruitment requires the application of HR software that uses technologies in a web-based environment (online technologies) and thus facilitates the recruitment activities, reduces the financial costs,

improves the operation of administrative departments and reaches a wider range of candidates (Ekanayaka & Gamage, 2019). According to Anand and Chitra (2016), e-recruitment is a technological innovation that improves the process by using the Internet. It makes it possible to update job offers and their status at any time, shorten the recruitment cycle and better identify and select talent, and provides a chance for the company to improve its public image.

Armstrong (2009) defines e-recruitment as the process of using the Internet to advertise or post vacancies, providing information about positions in the organization, enabling e-mail communication between employers and job seekers. Online recruiting can be more productive, given its capabilities to attract a larger number of potential candidates and make the selection process easier. According to Armstrong, the main characteristics of e-recruitment are:

1. *Tracking* – Helpful in tracking the status of candidate with respect to the jobs applied by him/her;
2. *Employer’s Website* – Provides details of job opportunities and data collection for the same;
3. *Job Portals* – Like Career Age, Indeed, Monster, Times Job, etc. these carry job advertisements from employers and agencies;
4. *Online Testing* – Evaluation of candidates over internet based on various job profiles to judge them on various factors;
5. *Social Networking* – Sites like Google+, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. help in building networking and finding career opportunities.

There are no space limitations when advertising a job vacancy online and companies can develop comprehensive listings with links to job descriptions and specifications. Online recruitment can convey much more information to candidates in a much more dynamic and consistent way than traditional recruitment methods (Lievens & Harris, 2003).

With the help of online HR software, both the processes of finding, attracting and screening candidates (Omolawal, 2015), as well as interviewing and evaluating them at the “Selection” stage, can be digitized. Online attitude and aptitude tests are becoming increasingly popular as a selection tool (Yazdani, 2010). Video conferencing is also emerging, allowing interviews, job offers and offer acceptance to take place online, and electronic signatures enable candidates to accept and confirm the offer digitally.

Online induction training exists in many organizations. At a later stage, online databases are created where job seekers can store their Résumés, thus enabling employers to find candidates matching their required job profile. This speeds up the recruitment process and

enables people interested in changing their job position to identify themselves to the employer without actively applying for a job (Elkington, 2005; McCurrey, 2005; Omolawal, 2015).

The Applicant Tracking System (ATS) plays a major role in the digitalization of recruitment and its successful implementation. It is a comprehensive human resources software that automates the hiring process, helping to effectively manage every stage of it (from job posting to hiring) and solving serious challenges in the field. ATS provides opportunities to:

- ✓ Store organized information about applications (Résumés, cover letters, references, etc.) to which HR specialists have quick and easy access;
- ✓ Track candidates and their application status throughout the hiring process;
- ✓ Weed out the unqualified candidates and recommend the most suitable one based on the predefined criteria. Only shortlisted candidates are moved to the next stage of the process;
- ✓ Automate time-consuming administrative tasks – manual screening of applications, reading Résumés, scheduling interviews, and emailing job applicants and employees (Baes, H., 2022).

Based on our knowledge of the traditional recruitment procedures and taking into account the specifics of e-recruitment, we can summarize the process into the following few points:

1. Organizations post online vacancies (on their own website, on dedicated websites for ads, on social media, etc.);
2. Interested candidates are encouraged to submit their résumés (and supporting documents) electronically;
3. Résumés are reviewed online;
4. An automated selection system organizes and summarizes the application documentation;
5. Candidates with a suitable profile for the position are contacted electronically;
6. Interviews are conducted online;
7. Discussions by phone, e-mail or video conferencing follow;
8. Terms of hire are negotiated;
9. It ends with the submission and acceptance of the job offer.

Characteristics of Generation Z

A generation is a group of people born in the same year who share significant life events at critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66), and common experiences. The latter, in turn, contribute to the formation of shared beliefs and behaviours. Indeed, the socio-economic background of the family, the values-based upbringing by the parents, the environment and many other factors are of great importance here. Still, notable events, especially during the highly formative teenage years, give the generation specific defining characteristics (Erickson, 2009).

The following classification of the types of generations is established in the specialized literature: *Traditionalists* – 1928 to 1944 (who value authority and a top-down management approach), *Baby Boomers* – 1945 to 1965 (who tend to be workaholics), *Generation X* – 1965 to 1979 (who are comfortable with authority and view the work-life balance as important), *Generation Y* – 1980 to 1995 (who generally grew up in prosperity and have technology savvy), *Generation Z* – born after 1995 (Cilliers, 2017, pp. 189 – 190). Generation Z seems problematic in terms of defining its age range, which varies widely and is still not well studied, as it is the youngest generation in the labour market. It is followed by the Alfa Generation.

Generation Z is technologically advanced and extremely mobile. It adopts an informal, individualistic and direct approach to communicating, and social networks are a vital part of its life. It was raised “during the most profound changes in the century and exists in a world with web, internet, smart phones, laptops, freely available networks and digital media” (Singh & Dangmei, 2016, p. 2). It is believed that “this generation is about to spend their youth and adult years in an era of economic and social renewal” (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017, p. 809). This generation is also known as: iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Post Millennials, Facebook Generation, Switchers, “always clicking”, and otherwise referred to as:

- C Generation – this expression comes from “connected” because its representatives are “connected to the internet”, “computerized”, “communicating”, “content-centric”, “community-oriented”, “changing”;

- R Generation – Responsibility Generation (Csobanka, 2016, p. 67).

Specialists highlight the fact that Generation Z can function both in the virtual and in the real world. They can easily switch between these two realities as they perceive them as complementary to each other (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz & Chomałowska, 2014, after: Dolot, 2018). Generation Z people possess values similar to those of their parents, such as responsibility, consideration, and determination (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018, after: Dolot, 2018). They

value development and diversity, tolerance, openness and respect for different ideas and ways of thinking (Deloitte, 2018). At the same time, they are technological, global and social; they can quickly and easily get and check the information they need, and then immediately share it with others. Among them communication is continuous, as they use a wide variety of communication devices or social networks. “The active social media users have many contacts and they mainly live their everyday relations through these channels (personal meetings are also important to them; however, keeping the online contacts has an equally important role)” (Csobanka, 2016, p. 68). With the help of mobile devices, they comment on reality and the environment they live in; they express their opinions and attitudes through Twitter, blogs and Internet forums; they share photos (Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat) and videos (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat). Facebook can be used for all the above activities. Generation Z not only consumes Internet content – it also creates and controls it (Hardey, 2011, p. 750-753). Researchers emphasize that “due to applications that support multitasking, being precise or being able to concentrate, memorize something in the long term” has become more difficult for Generation Z (Tari, 2011, after: Csobanka, 2016, p. 69). As suggested in “The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations” (2018), Generation Z tends to be impatient, instantaneous, has acquired attention deficit disorder with a high dependence on technology and a low attention span, individualistic, self-directed, demanding, acquisitive and the most authorized so far. At the same time, it is concerned about environmental issues, very aware of impending water and other shortages, indicating that it has a high sense of responsibility for natural resources,

The preferences of Generation Z members in the work environment are specified in several points (Dangmei & Amarendra, 2016):

1. Based on the study by Bascha (2011), it is clear that they prefer transparency, self-reliance, flexibility and personal freedom. These are essential aspects of the work ethic for members of this generation, and ignoring them could result in frustration, reduced productivity, low morale and lack of engagement. They expect to be informed, heard and acknowledged;

2. Mihelich (2013) argues that they need to have enough independence to prove themselves and earn recognition. As this generation has never lived in a world without smartphones or iPads, they expect not to be deprived of these devices when going to the office;

3. According to a study by Schawbel (2014), they prefer in-person communication and want to be taken seriously. They want their managers to listen to their ideas and value their

opinions. They want to work for an honest leader, to have openness in communications and not to hide information from them because of their young age;

4. According to Bridges (2015), they prefer a work environment that cultivates mentoring, learning and professional development opportunities as they believe their education has not given the required skills to deal with real-life problems. A work place that encourages their entrepreneurial skills, a work environment which is friendly and allows for flexible schedules are the attributes that the Generation Z looks for in a job. Technology is an integral part of their lives and they prefer organizations that are at the forefront of workplace, that support and allow them to communicate and advance regardless of geographical or time zone barriers;

5. They prefer an office workplace that is easy to adjust within, value arrangement and certainty in the workplace and find complex planning layout undesirable (Knoll, 2014);

6. They prefer to work for a leader with honesty and integrity (Half, 2015);

7. They prefer to work for an organization that demonstrates genuine ties to society and is socially responsible (Middlemiss, 2015).

2. E-RECRUITMENT AND GENERATION Z JOB SEEKERS – PRACTICAL ASPECTS

The specialized literature on the subject indicates that representatives of Generation Z would like to achieve an impressive professional career immediately, without much effort. It is difficult for them to accept the idea of gradual career development through small steps. They seek jobs not only in their immediate environment, but also all over the world, as their characteristic features are mobility and command of foreign languages. They are not interested in stability at work– they easily change their workplace, preferring flexibility and escape from routine. They are the most educated and sophisticated generation in history (Hysa, 2016, Steinerowska-Streb & Wziątek-Staśko, 2016, after: Dolot, 2018). They prefer self-employment as a way of professional development because they think it is better paid and gives a sense of independence (Pocztowski & Buchelt & Pauli, after: Dolot, 2018).

How is Generation Z looking for a job? Companies can define and implement their recruitment strategies depending on what platforms the generation uses to apply for their future positions, how they prefer to process information and engage with the organization. Generation Z is found to search for information about their prospective employers through the latter’s websites and job portals. Unlike Generation X, who prefers to get information from relatives or

acquaintances, Generation Z is thought to be “active seekers: they generally prefer media they can interact with, as opposed to passive TV or print texts. Their brains are adapted for the rapid transmission of content, data and images” (Wozniak, 2016, p. 208).

According to research by Hochreiter (2022), there are several main channels for recruiting Generation Z¹ (see Fig. 1)

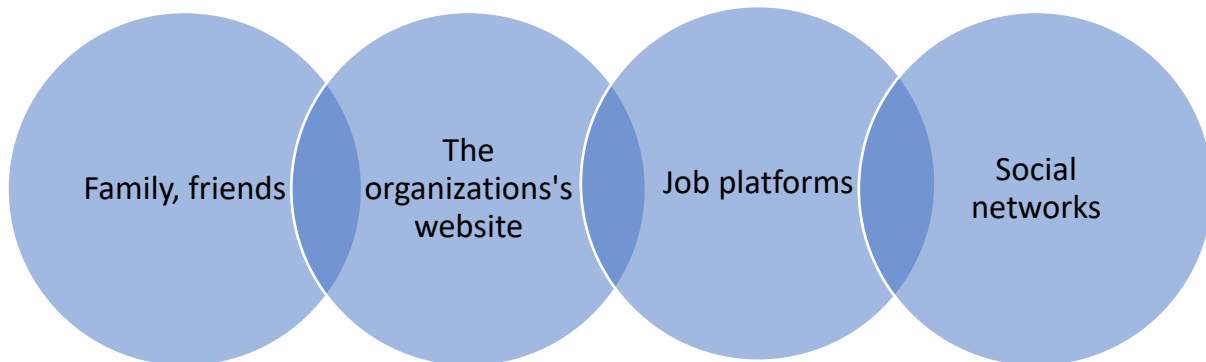


Fig. 1. Generation Z Recruitment Sources

(Source: Hochreiter, 2022)

First of all, Generation Z members look at which organizations are close to their hometown and which they know of because of school or their interests. Most of them talk to their family, friends and colleagues about a job position that would interest them. This, however, applies to those born before 2000. After commenting with their relatives, they search directly on the websites of the organizations for job offers. The majority, as well as those born before 2000, also use classic job platforms such as karriere.at, Stepstone or Indeed. Other channels mentioned are Jugendservice, Google, AMS, Willhaben, ePunkt, radio and newspapers. Two respondents mentioned Facebook and Instagram as they follow the companies and have already seen job postings there. It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents would use the organization’s website or job portals (platforms) and would not seek job on social networks. They regard the latter more as a means of advertising or additional information about the company giving them insight into what working there is like and how a typical working day goes. After finding out from social networks that an organization is looking

¹ It is important to note that the respondents in the survey have little professional experience or are still in school or university.

to hire, they will then go directly to its website. This shows that nowadays it is a must for companies to have social media profiles in order to advertise themselves. Some respondents receive job postings by e-mail and claim that if they received a direct and personal message, they would feel sought after. But the e-mail must be personally addressed, otherwise they wouldn't even read it and would get angry if they found out that the employer writing to them did not bother to look at their résumé.

It should be noted that Generation Z members tend to gather information before they decide which company they want to work for. The main source of information is people who work in the relevant organization and know it well. Some of the respondents claimed that they would directly talk to employees working in the company, even though they do not know them, but they nevertheless follow them on Instagram. Others mentioned that they would do a trial working day – that way they would get the chance to talk to people and get a first-hand feel of the colleagues and the atmosphere. Still others would go through the organization's website for additional information and videos. The job interview itself is not to be underestimated either, as this is where candidates get an impression of the company. Several respondents mentioned that they would look for information on Facebook or Instagram. However, not every company has an Instagram profile. Others refuse to even look at social media for additional information because organizations always put themselves in the best possible light there. These respondents would rather look for accounts (profiles) of employees, as their posts may be more authentic.

According to Brothwell (2022), when applying for a job, Generation Z want:

✓ *A Mobile-Friendly Experience*

As much as 73.4% of Generation Z prefer their smartphone's messaging app over the phone functionality, and 74% of them spend their free time online (and 60% of job applications last year across generations were over mobile). Generation Z spends much of their free time (and some of their work time) on the phone, so companies must ensure that their job postings are mobile-friendly.

✓ *Facetime*

Although Generation Z spends most of their free time online, they still value face-to-face interaction, which sets them apart from Millennials, who prefer remote work and texting. 51% of Generation Z job seekers prefer face-to-face communication and want to feel a connection with the people doing the hiring. 57% of them want feedback several times a week or more. This can be useful for the organization – it needs to provide candidate feedback, develop its employer branding and carefully prepare the job interview process.

✓ *A Quick Process*

Generation Z grew up with technology and expect results quickly. A fast-paced process will secure the most qualified candidates for the job, while drawing things out can make them think they are dealing with a technologically out-of-date organization. 60% of Generation Z say applying for a job should take less than 15 minutes, and 17% expect job offers to come less than a week after the first interview.

✓ *Inclusivity*

Generation Z is utterly diverse and expects companies to prioritize inclusivity – 83% of Generation Z job candidates told Monster.com that a company’s commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is essential when choosing an employer. Nearly 75% of them said they would reconsider their job application if they were not satisfied with the company’s DEI compliance efforts. This generation approaches diversity differently, going beyond age, religion, gender, race, and physical ability, to encompass what they call “cognitive diversity” – how different points of view are accepted and valued, diversity in identities, ideas and opinions, and diversity in the way people process information. 60% of Generation Z believe job application forms should include more genders than “man” or “woman” and feel comfortable using gender-neutral pronouns.

✓ *Salary Transparency*

A higher salary is the top motivating factor for young employees to change jobs – 35% of Generation Z job seekers said salary and benefits is the leading factor they consider in new positions. These young people have grown up in an environment where talking openly about money is allowed, and they expect companies to be transparent about it from the outset.

✓ *Cutting-Edge Technology*

Generation Z never knew a world without the Internet or smartphones and grew up during an era of rapid technological advancement. 54% of member of this generation would not fill out a job application if the recruiting methods were outdated, and 26% agreed that a lack of technology during the hiring process would deter them from accepting a job.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z are the youngest job seekers in the labour market. They have specific characteristics (discussed earlier in the paper) that should determine employers’ approach to them. The process of recruitment of representatives of this generation needs to take into account several important points:

✓ **An exceptionally technological generation** – employer presence on social networks and the right job platforms is a must. Using an appropriate method of communication is essential. The more important recruitment channels are:

- The company’s website where it publishes job vacancies;
- Classic online job platforms;
- Social networks (where they could learn about the employer organization);
- E-mail (where candidate can be contacted in person).

✓ **Job postings must be mobile-friendly** – young people of Generation Z spend a huge part of their time on the phone;

✓ **Multichannel** – Generation Z are used to communicating through several channels: e-mail, text messages, video chat, social media, etc.;

✓ **Quick process** – most Generation Z candidates expect the hiring process to take about a week after their job interview;

✓ **Face-to-face communication** – since the pandemic, remote interviews have been integrated into work environments, but face-to-face communication is still essential, especially for Generation Z candidates (they regard video conferencing as such a type of communication);

✓ **Independence, honesty, integrity, social responsibility** – they value sincerity, openness and integrity in the communication, including in the recruitment and selection process.

It is important to point out that the presented results of studies are from foreign researchers. The specifics of the Bulgarian political and socio-economic environment probably have certain impact on the characteristics of Generation Z in our country (although we fully agree with its basic characteristics described above). As this subject is of particular interest to us as researchers, it will be studied in detail in the context of the conditions in Bulgaria in later publications – both in a theoretical and in a practical and applied aspect.

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