BEHAVIOR OF GENERATION Z IN THE LABOR MARKET

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Abstract: This article aims to enhance knowledge about Generation Z as participants in the labor market, as well as to trace the main trends driving research on the topic. For this purpose, a sample of 102 publications from Web of Science between 2009 and 2020 was analyzed using bibliometric techniques. The study examines the most recognizable authors to provide a broad view of the context of the topic. A key emphasis is placed on the evolution of thematic clusters for each period, with results showing that the topic began to attract attention in 2018 and still has room for development. Among the most frequently used terms in this study are "Generation Z," "generations," "workplace," "management," "leadership," "career," and "learning–teaching–education." The need for a deeper exploration of various aspects regarding this generation and the labor market is noted.

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Introduction

Recent studies have examined various characteristics of Generation Z, including their values (Maloni et al., 2019; Cresnar & Nedelko, 2020), attitudes toward work and organizations (Barhate & Dirani, 2021), adaptation to the workplace (Chillakuri, 2020) and even intra-generational variations within this group (Scholz, 2019; Leslie et al., 2021), as well as the similarities and differences between Generation Z and other generations (Hernaus & Poloski Vokic, 2014; Klopotan et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021), with a particular focus on Generation Y (Raslie и Ting, 2021).

Given the need to adapt workplaces not only for the youngest generation but also to foster intergenerational collaboration and cohesion, managing human resources has become increasingly complex. In this context, the purpose of this article is to uncover research trends on the topic by reviewing existing literature on Generation Z as participants in the labor market

The contribution of this study lies in analyzing Generation Z as a workforce and their workplace behavior. Furthermore, this research can serve as a foundation for future studies and assist human resource management professionals in addressing the needs of young employees while enhancing organizational value.

The bibliometric analysis highlights the number of publications, the most prominent authors, and the journals with the highest impact factors in this area. The study's contextualization is presented in a systematic manner, including an exploration of Generation Z's characteristics, their general expectations of workplaces and employers, as well as current trends and practices in adapting HRM and organizational strategies. The third section focuses on the methods used for the bibliometric analysis, including the search strategy, sample selection, and publication analysis over specific periods. Subsequently, the results of the analysis are discussed within the broader context of activities related to the topic, the development of key terms, and period-by-period evaluations. This allows for the identification of implications, future research directions, and concrete recommendations, which are detailed in the conclusion.

1. Characteristics of Generation Z

Generation Z refers to individuals born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, with the exact dates varying depending on the author, but the most common range is from 1995 to 2010. This generation is considered the first true "digital natives," as they were born and grew up in a digital and technological environment. They learned how to use technology and engage in social networks from an early age, which is why they are often seen as tech-dependent. Members of this generation are also referred to as "Gen Zers," "post-Millennials," or "iGen." Generation Z is characterized by ambition and self-confidence. They tend to be realists, accepting whatever is given to them. Gen Z is even more entrepreneurial than Generation Y. This generation appears to be motivated by the pursuit of their dream jobs and opportunities to expand their skills, leading them to believe they will change jobs more often than previous generations. If they dislike something, they are ready to make changes immediately (Magano et al., 2020).

Other motivating factors for this generation include opportunities for advancement, high salaries, meaningful work, and a good team environment. When it comes to the way Generation Z thinks and acts, it is worth noting that they are not only more aware and informed about global events compared to previous generations, but they have also shown financial consciousness. Furthermore, their consumption habits are more rational, and they have greater freedom of expression. This broad worldview gives Gen Z a unique perspective on understanding others, while they also try to remain true to themselves, their values, and their goals. Although there is a prototype of this generation with generally shared characteristics and attitudes, with approximately 15 different age groups, it is clear that deeper research is needed. Moreover, the earliest studies on Gen Z were mainly conducted in the U.S., which has led to a biased perception of this generation (Scholz, 2019).

There are supporting studies for the differences between generations. These studies reveal how the visions, preferences, and characteristics of Gen Zers vary by region (Scholz, 2019) or even by their perceptions in the workplace (Leslie et al., 2021), depending on external situational factors such as events, crises, technology, or the trends of their youth. This generation has grown up surrounded by a global financial crisis, times of terrorism, political instability, and an almost irreversible climate crisis. At the same time, they live and evolve in an increasingly globalized world, operating with the same currency within the EU and having free mobility in member states. All these factors inevitably influence how Gen Z works on its identity and vision, distinguished by strong adaptability to the global world (Magano et al., 2020).

It should be noted that part of Gen Z is already active in the labor market, while others are still in the process of developing their work habits. The generation has started entering the labor market in recent years. Their integration into the workforce is a challenge, occurring during a time of pandemic, followed by economic decline and other social and labor consequences. Unfortunately, studies examining the impact of COVID-19 on Gen Z in the context of the labor market are scarce (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). However, it is evident that the consequences of the pandemic do not prevent this generation from having high expectations for their work and well-defined career development plans. According to a Deloitte report (O'Boyle et al., 2017), Generation Z is expected to introduce high-tech skills into the workplace. Other researchers, however, emphasize that the youngest members of the labor market do not always possess interpersonal communication and relationship skills. They also focus on multidisciplinary and global work, and they believe that companies generally employ and care for their employees only when necessary (Scholz, 2019).

It is also claimed that Gen Z changes jobs more often, which means that human resource professionals not only need to worry about how to attract young

talent but also how to focus efforts on providing them with what they need to stay within the company. Given the limited research on what attracts Gen Z to companies, flexibility at work and work-life balance can be considered as starting points. Young people want to make a direct contribution to the company, desire to have an impact on the outcomes, and are driven by an entrepreneurial mindset, which makes the company's reputation key in this regard (Randstad Canada, 2014). Moreover, regarding employee retention, there are common behavioral aspects within this generation (PR Newswire, 2014; Randstad Canada, 2014) – they value honesty above all else in their leaders, prefer face-to-face communication with their supervisors, enjoy open dialogue, and have a strong desire to have their ideas heard and valued by managers. Last but not least, they expect social responsibility. Therefore, several questions arise: Do companies provide this to their employees? If not, why does it take so long for businesses to adapt to the newest generation? Are companies considering organizational change to meet the needs of Generation Z?

2. Generation Z as part of the workforce and labor market

Over the years, the workforce has evolved and been affected by numerous events such as the Great Recession and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the economic, psychological, and social consequences of these global events, the workplace has developed a qualitatively new dynamic – from separated spaces by department to the current open offices, where different professionals share resources and knowledge in a faster and more efficient manner, or even coworking spaces shared with other companies or independent professionals.

The driving force that selects a company's employees and manages most of its initiatives, procedures, and even its culture is human resource management. This specific set of management practices is a fundamental building block of the company, which attracts new talent, conducts training, and aims to ensure the most effective and efficient work environment for achieving, among other functions, the goals of the organization. In 2020, most trends shifted toward better work environments, work-life balance, and skills development. A growing number of organizations allocate resources to care for and motivate their employees. As the new generation enters the labor market, HR management needs to consider and adapt to the characteristics of this generation. This not only means attracting young employees in a novel way and offering them a wide range of job-related benefits to ensure their retention within the organization, but also redefining entry-level positions (O'Boyle et al., 2017).

There is limited research on how the labor market adapts to the needs and expectations of Generation Z. This may be due to the fact that most

members of Gen Z have recently been in education and are only now beginning to enter the labor market. Some studies examine the relationship between employees and companies or job positions. The first model in this context is the person–organization fit, where company characteristics align with the needs and desires of their employees (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). The second focuses on the alignment between the employee and the workplace to achieve job satisfaction, work engagement, and performance. (Truxillo et al., 2012). According to Bielen and Kubiczek (2020), the most common way businesses respond to the demands of young people is by creating a friendly work environment, staying up-to-date with the latest technologies, offering internship programs, benefits, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Similar findings have been reported by Randstad Canada (2014). However, to meet these demands, organizations must have the courage to break away from traditional approaches by using existing tools in new ways. They must also recognize that even individuals within the same generation may have needs that differ from the generational prototype. An example of this can be seen in companies that use online recruitment as an initial step (Tato-Jimenez et al., 2019). Additionally, HR departments must be prepared to introduce or adapt workplace values and culture, along with other aspects, rather than expecting Generation Z to adapt to the company (Graczyk-Kucharska и Erickson, 2020).

Today, as Generation Z becomes part of the labor force, many organizations will have four or even five different generations working together. As Urick (2019) highlights, generational differences in the workplace can lead to intergenerational biases, stereotypes, and misperceptions, potentially creating conflict. Therefore, it is essential for human resource professionals to have a deep understanding of the various generations and their comfort zones. Much like their approach with Generation Y, companies need to adapt their policies to manage the significant generational diversity effectively. To address these challenges, HR professionals must explore new ways to meet the needs of newcomers while ensuring that the needs of employees from other generations are not overlooked. Moreover, they must learn how to manage teams composed of members from multiple generations.

3. Analysis of publications from different periods

The next step in the research is to analyze the significance of each cluster in terms of Callon's measures of density and centrality. The centrality measure reflects the interaction between networks, while the density measure indicates the internal strength of the network. Special attention is given to the main cluster in the primary themes, followed by an explanation of the network surrounding the central issue for each period.

First period 2009–2017

The "Generation Z" cluster is a relevant topic that, despite having a higher number of articles, shows lower-than-expected average citations in the early stages of this period. The centrality of "Generation Z" stands at 103.69, with a density of 52.48. This indicates that while "Generation Z" is an important theme in the research, it requires further development. The "management" cluster leads the period with centrality and density values of 55.9 and 87.5, respectively. This demonstrates that the "management" network has strong interactions and internal strength, making it a focal point of the research during this timeframe.

In contrast, the "leadership" theme exists between an emerging or declining theme and a driving theme, with centrality and density values of 15.85 and 50, respectively. Given that this research area is relatively new and lacks a substantial number of publications, the focus on "leadership" during these early stages is particularly interesting, similar to the central theme. Shifting quadrants, the "attitudes" cluster stands out as a peripheral topic with centrality of 0 and density of 0.25. This cluster disappears in the subsequent periods (2018, 2019, and 2020).

The thematic network of the central theme is then analyzed to drive an in-depth exploration of the "management" cluster. The network surrounding the main themes of the period consists of the following internal connections:

- “experience“– “competence“;
- „conflict“ - „personality“.

To a lesser extent, these clusters are also linked to "Generation Y" and "Generation X." The "experience" cluster connects to the "labor market," which in turn links to "competence." Various models addressing conflict and employee personality are also part of this main theme's network.

Second period 2018

In 2018, the number of clusters increased by one compared to the previous period. Two driving clusters defined the thematic focus for this period: “Generation Z” and “Generation Y”. Both clusters attracted significant attention in publications and demonstrated high average citation rates. The “Generation Z” cluster exhibited strong interaction (centrality of 145.61) and notable internal strength (density of 54.06). Similarly, the “Generation Y“ cluster was identified as a driving theme, albeit to a lesser extent, with a centrality of 51.85 and density of 51.94. Two cluster groups were observed at the boundaries of primary themes. The ”career” cluster garnered the highest number of citations within this group. However, due to its relatively low density, it was positioned on the border between emerging/declining themes and primary themes. The “organizational” cluster, due to its central placement, was situated at the

boundary between primary and driving themes. Its evolution needs to be studied further to determine if it will transition into one of the surrounding quadrants. The *users* cluster emerged as a new peripheral theme. And finally, the "teams" cluster, categorized as either emerging or declining, was underdeveloped, with a centrality of 11.75 and the lowest density (50) within the dataset. In terms of the internal thematic analysis of the core network of driving themes, "generation Z" maintains the most important connections, followed by: "Baby Boomers" with "generation X"; "models" with "behavior"; and "organizational commitment" with "entrepreneurship". Additionally, to a lesser extent, "culture and values" with "generation X", "behavior", "models", and "baby boomers".

Third period 2019

In 2019, there are two leading themes that define the period's topics and generate publications – "results" and "Generation Z" – which set the current trend for the published articles. Both are characterized by the highest internal strength of their networks, with scores of 82.90 and 81.21, respectively. One of the main differences between these two driving themes is that "Generation Z" has significantly more publications (22) and citations (46) compared to impact (13). The "Generation Z" cluster first appeared in the initial period (2009–2017), lost significance in the second period (2018), and re-emerged, even stronger, in the last period (2020–2021). In this new emergence, its centrality increased by over 50%, and its density grew by over 60%. The "personality" cluster is considered an emerging topic due to its low centrality, while "learning–teaching–education" is a main theme with higher centrality, as its internal coherence is considered more significant than "personality". Additionally, there is a peripheral theme, "planned behaviour theory", which has been developing since the second period (2018) from the career and users clusters. Regarding the internal thematic analysis of generations as the main driving thematic network for this period, the relationships with the highest density are as follows: "workplace" with "Generation Z", to a lesser extent, the connection between "Generation Y" and "Generation Z", and "Baby Boomers" with "eneration X". All clusters share connections to other themes with lower weights.

Fourth period 2020.

In this final period, the "workplace" cluster stands out as the leading research topic for 2020. When considering the development of themes in a longitudinal analysis, the workplace cluster is connected to "Generation Z" and "generations" clusters from previous periods. In this last period, it achieves the necessary internal consistency to become a leading research topic. On the other hand, the "generations" cluster remains a core theme without further development compared to 2019, despite receiving 22 citations in 2020. Peripheral themes include "organizational change" and "results", which lose

their relevance from 2019, although they still received 22 citations in 2020. There are no emerging or declining themes in this period.

Regarding the internal analysis of the driving theme ”workplace” (the core thematic network driving the period), the most intense internal connections include ”mentor” and ”fact analysis”, and to a lesser extent: ”organizations” and ”Industry 4.0”, ”organizations” and ”leadership”, ”organizations” and ”Generation Y, and ”factor analysis” and ”organizational”. Thus, from this inter-periodic approach, it becomes clear that the main driving force is the theme ”Generation Z”. However, the keyword filter included in the search is the primary reason why different perspectives and interdisciplinary connections are highlighted.

4. Comment on the results

As stated at the beginning, the goal of the article is to uncover trends in thematic research and their evolution regarding Generation Z as employees within the workforce and workplace, as well as to outline topics that are still underdeveloped. This research does not aim to delve deeply into the content used for its purposes, but rather to create a framework that provides full context on the issue, supporting further studies. The effectiveness and relevance of the methodology used have been proven, and the collected data have been appropriately revealed through a series of steps that seem to transition from broad research areas, such as authors or journals, to more specific aspects of the topic, unveiling a network of the most influential thematic clusters for each period.

The main conclusions can be summarized as follows: 13 authors stand out from the others, having published more than one article, while 33 have received more than 20 citations. Among them, one researcher deserves mention—Goh—who not only published three articles, while the others wrote two or fewer, but also received the maximum number of citations (92) for his research on topics related to the hospitality sector, the theory of planned behaviour, talent management, and recruitment strategies (Goh and Kong, 2018; Goh and Lee, 2018; Goh and Okumus, 2020). The most influential journals in terms of JIF are the International Journal of Hospitality Management, California Management Review, Journal of Competitiveness, Tourism and Management Perspectives, and Sustainability, all of which have a JIF index above 3500. An expected outcome from the journal analysis is the focus on management in the most impactful journals.

Another interesting finding from the study is the orientation towards hospitality and tourism, psychology, and interpersonal relationships as related areas of analysis, joining the main theme. However, a lack of research related to other key sectors, such as the financial sectors or customer service, distinct from the hospitality and tourism industry, is revealed.

After the shift in trends in 2018, the number of publications on the topic increased, but it is still relatively small. The results demonstrate an increasingly significant line of research on Generation Z within the workforce and workplace since 2018. These studies are mainly focused in the field of management, highlighting the importance and impact that this generation has on companies and their dynamics. The largest number of materials were published in 2019, followed by a slight decline in the number of documents in 2020.

The development of key terms across the periods shows the following effects:

- A total increase of only 12 words throughout the entire duration of the studied periods;
- During this entire period, 28 key terms were discarded, and 40 were included.

Furthermore, the longitudinal analysis reveals that the four groups from the first period ("Generation Z", "management", "attitudes", and "leadership") form the foundation of the topic's evolution. In the first and second periods, the "Generation Z" cluster stands out. It develops into "generations" in the third period and into "workplace" in the final period. This fact suggests the interest in considering the workplace as an ecosystem where Generation Z must interact with other previous generations. The size of the "workplace" cluster indicates that this research line may potentially expand in the near future.

5. Conclusion

The special characteristics and behavior of the newest generation entering the labor market make the management of Gen Z in the workplace and as part of the workforce a true challenge. It is necessary not only to recognize that changes are ahead but also to begin the adaptation now, if it has not already happened. When a new age generation enters the workforce, organizations and employees face a change in work dynamics and corporate culture. Therefore, the role of human resource management is critical for the effective entry and proper adaptation to the new normal workplace. The addition of another generation to the working environment inevitably affects both the professional and social contexts in which employees develop their careers.

There should be no misunderstanding or oversimplification of methods and techniques, as the strategic goals of each company are individual, and its formal and cultural structures must be aligned with them to ensure proper decision-making. As for the results of this study, they allow for a better understanding of the thematic field of Generation Z related to the workforce and the workplace. The analysis reveals the development of the research on Gen Z,

the workforce, and the workplace over a period of 11 years. From 2009 to 2017, the number of publications was relatively small, but from 2018, the topic began to attract more attention. Most authors have only one publication, while a few have written two articles, with only one author standing out in terms of the number of publications and citations—Goh, who has four articles and has received 168 citations for all his works. In addition, the journals with the highest impact factor are International Journal of Hospitality Management, California Management Review, Journal of Competitiveness, and Sustainability.

This highlights a slow but steady growth in research on the topic, along with a relatively small percentage of included keywords and low stability between periods. This suggests a gradually increasing interest among researchers in the field, with broad potential for future development. Moving on to the analysis of the thematic cluster development, the distribution of topics has been examined, and the network of leading themes for each period has been shown. The core of the research on Gen Z within the workforce and at the workplace mainly revolves around "Generation-Z," "workplace," "generations," "learning-teaching-education," and "career." Given the fluctuating progress of key clusters throughout the periods, it is not possible to definitively predict which topics will be included in the coming years, but it seems that "Generation Z" will maintain its key significance, while the current core clusters related to performance and the workforce will remain unchanged.

Some suggestions for future research areas have emerged due to the lack of or insufficiently developed publications. On one hand, attention could be paid to the technological aspect of the workplace to clarify how companies should or are currently preparing for a digital evolution driven by the technology-savvy Generation Z. On the other hand, it might be interesting to study the knowledge and skills of Generation Z as leaders and how these are passed on to future generations.

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