

The role of employer branding for generation Z based on HR expert interviews and their effects on the implementation of investments



Abstract

Differences between the various generations were always present at workplaces. This phenomenon exists for a long time, since different generations perceive the same workplace or task differently, and also evaluate the conditions offered by employers differently. However, it is a fact that the gap has never been so great between the active generations working at the same workplace as it is today. The study presents partial results of the research of generation Z, aiming to get acquainted with and explore the specific features of selecting Human Resources Professionals (HR) in order to increase employment, especially through the applicability of the tools of employee branding. Employers find it difficult to offer tasks and an atmosphere which would be optimal, attractive and inspirational for employees with different value systems and different socialization backgrounds. Based on the results of the generation Z research project, this study presents tools that can be implemented in the employee branding process for the potential employees from generation Z. The main purpose of this study is to explore the range of tools that can be implemented in brand building that may be well targeted to the generation Z as potential employees and to provide a practical insight into the tools that can be implemented in branding process. The study also discusses what kind of generation challenges an HR specialist is facing today and what are the effective solutions and practices to use. The study presents the sub results of a primary research process. In the framework of the research, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The study focuses on the results of the qualitative phase. In the frame of that expert interviews with HR specialists were conducted with the help of a semi-structured interview. The outcome of this research demonstrates what the HR specialists believe the benefits of employer branding are once they are able to act with a conscious and strategic approach to HR activities. The results presented by this study will provide insights into how HR professionals see the benefits of employer branding, and how they can engage with HR activities in a conscious and strategic way.

Keywords: employer branding, generation Z, targeted HR-communication solutions

INTRODUCTION

The labour market is on a worldwide scale transformation. Perspectives like the balance between work and private life, stress-free work environment, and inspirational labour conditions are becoming more and more important.

HR experts report that the actual quality and/or quantity deficiencies of the labour force are becoming more of a problem. Therefore, it's no surprise that for employers, a hard question is presented in how they can find and keep good labour force. Lack of labour force does not impact sectors negatively; it has a detrimental effect on the entire economy. There are professions with a huge demand of workforce.

A competitive wage is not enough, and multiple other not so motivational factors may come up in a company, like the over-regulated enterprise bureaucracy, the incorrect temperature of the office, the lack of further learning, etc. Extra income is more often integrated into the baseline wage nowadays. Apart from hardships during recruitment and actually keeping employees, the hardships of different generations working together is also causing further friction, which HR experts have to deal with.

Based on this changes and challenges we decided to analyse the employer branding solutions used by the HR experts and try to identify the most relevant and effective tolls in case of generation Z.

In the frame of the research project qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used. In the frame the study is focusing on the first step's results, present the main conclusions of HR experts' interviews and mini-focus group interviews with the member of generation Z. The goal was to understand what challenges and hardships experts in practice perceive on the labour market, and what they experienced concerning generation gaps. What methods do they employ, in order to connect with the generation Z? Do they have any HR or HR communication techniques, activities, campaigns which they believe to be more effective, based on their empirical experiences? Would they recommend them to other employers wishing to connect with the generation Z?

1. OVERVIEW ON THE HUNGARIAN LABOUR MARKET FROM THE ASPECT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

1.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOUR MARKET, GENERATION CHALLENGES

Observing today's Hungarian labour market, it is obvious that the quantitative and qualitative composition of the workforce is becoming increasingly problematic. This challenge emerges as an absolute obstacle to corporate growth and the development of investments. The recovery of investments has an absolute positive impact on the economy. During the economic crisis in 2008, the downturn in the investment sector had a direct negative impact on the performance of the economies. The currently perceptible positive change has the same effect,

with the opposite sign. This kind of cyclical sensitivity makes us contemplate the components of the investment sector, such as exploring labour market problems, getting acquainted with the relationship between choice and brand building, and identifying generation-specific changes in unemployment and structural rearrangement. The research focuses on the extent to which and how the factors revealed affect the labour market demand of the investment sector, the changes they make in terms of age-related differences between generations, and the factors that may reduce the frictions of different generations in a work area. Different age groups, preferences and corporate strategies are required in the selection process. The shortage of labour and, in particular, the shortage of skilled workers has an impact on the feasibility of investments, taking into account the recently started wage inflation, which drive the conclusion that the planned budget is not going to be sustainable any longer (Fodor et al., 2017).

The paper concentrates on the labour market situation, selection and generation Z. Economic policy has also recognized the difficulties of labour migration and lack of qualification in the recruitment process of companies, and has taken a number of measures, such as the raising of the minimum wage, the modification of public employment rules, and the stimulation of domestic mobilization. The employment rate of those aged between 15 and 64 increased to 68.7% from July 2017 to September 2017. There is also some improvement in the unemployment rate over the past year. According to the International Labour Organization, the Hungarian unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2017 amounted to 203.1 people, which is a significant decline since the crisis. Between June and August 2018, the average employment rate for this age group was 4 million 484 thousand and the employment rate rose to 69.4%. It is interesting to look at the tendency when the number of employees working in the public sector has increased, while the number of those who work abroad has decreased according to the CSO 2018 June-August Flash Report (KSH, 2018).

Overall, the number of Hungarian employees showed a positive trend in 2017 and 2018 and could be increased with the aforementioned government measures (Europa.eu, 2017).

1.2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYER BRANDING

Conscious, well-organized and coordinated employer branding is considered an effective strategic tool to respond to the challenges of the labour market. The empirical experience with job advertisements shows, that more and more companies are turning to the typical branding tools used in marketing for decades, which help distinguishing the job positions, the place of work, brand positioning the employer as a brand and make them more attractive.

The global labour market is also changing. Work-life balance, a stress-free work environment and an inspirational workplace atmosphere are becoming

increasingly important. The importance of the Employer Branding is on the rise for many companies. These companies have a higher proclivity to respond to employee needs as well as adapting their brand to this expectation. Employer branding means both external and internal branding simultaneously, and their combined presence provides tangible results. Employer brand is the image created by the company, which each institution possesses, and it affects the composition and qualifications of employees and candidates. A well-established employer brand can be a tangible competitive advantage for gaining talented labour force. However, there are a number of examples where it just assists the recruitment process or intensifies the effectiveness of internal communication. Employer branding is a complex concept: the company and the employee work closely together in the organization and both the hardship and the success are directly or indirectly borne together (Fodor et al., 2019).

The key role of employer branding is to provide a logical framework for management, which simplifies and focuses on priorities, improves productivity, improves recruitment and other HR processes, promotes employee retention and commitment. Thus, it is important to have the right Employer Branding strategy, which communicates well with new employees, both about the employees and the company. Candidates have a chance to see a real picture of a company that could be a good fit for them. This makes the job selection decision easier, and also provides companies a better chance finding the really valuable workforce who can be a useful member of the selected workplace on the long run (Hrportal.hu, 2009, Profession.hu, 2018).

According to HR specialists, the real volume and / or quality of the workforce is becoming increasingly problematic. Consequentially employers are becoming more and more concerned aiming to find and retain good workforce. One of the reasons for labour shortage is the fewer new entrants in the domestic labour market. 15 years ago, nearly 189,000 young people aged 24 were entering the labour market, while this number did not reach 128,000 by 2015, according to CSO data. The other main reason is the fact that many people decide to go abroad for the chance of a higher salary. This makes recruitment even more difficult, since in most cases employers are in need of well-trained and experienced team members (Hrportal.hu, 2017).

Competitive compensation is not sufficient however, as there are many demotivating factors in a company, such as over-regulated corporate bureaucracy, inappropriate office temperature, or the lack of individual improvement opportunities (Csiszárík-Kocsir, 2016; Kis, 2016). Benefits are getting incorporated into the basic salary. Direct head-hunter methods come in the forefront, while online data upload is losing its importance. Wage tension is becoming a common phenomenon. New staff members have to be offered higher salaries, which creates unpleasant tensions between new entrants and those already at work (K. Kópházi, 2016).

Selection and retention of talents both play an important role in HR policy. According to Joseph Renzulli's "three-circle talent model," 3 basic factors

determine talent: above average ability, creativity, and task commitment. The Czeizel model includes four mental abilities (general intellectual, specific mental, creativity and motivation). Talent Management is a fairly popular research area within human resource management. The prerequisite for the management is four basic elements: planning, organization, management, and controlling. These factors play an important role in the recruitment, selection, retention and, last but not least, motivation of the workforce. Strategic planning is a key part of maintaining long-term co-operation. There is a need for a well-established and regularly supervised employer brand that can simultaneously involve and retain talented employees (Borgulya-Konczosné, 2017; Giger, 2006).

To be able to build an employer's brand efficiently and effectively from a strategic point of view, we need to know the brand's values. To make this brand appealing we also need to know what the employees are looking for. Therefore, the focus of the research was taken on the members of generation Z, as the potential target group of prospective employee/consumer needs, values and characteristics.

1.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATION Z AS WORKFORCE

Members of generation Z – the target group of the primary research project – were born into a world which is defined by the various digital technologies: they are the IT, or Digital X (DY) generation. Generation Z, who entered the labour market in the first years of the 21st century, is characterized by rapid changes. It is not by mere chance that they got their name from the expression “zappers”, or “switcher, hopper”. They live their lives in a much faster pace than their predecessors. If there is something they do not like – such as a job – they are ready to change immediately. Compared to the previous generations they represent an entirely different world: modern technology, IT, the online world reached the adult age at the same time with them, becoming a part of their personalities (Tari, 2011; Kis, 2016).

They live their social relations in the real and virtual world at the same time. For them it comes natural that their everyday communication, emotional and social life, creative spirit and playfulness are performed on the internet, with the help of mobile phones and other digital devices, with each other, and shared in front of the greatest audience. Members of the digital X generation practically never knew a world without internet, telecommunication or television. Maybe this is why they are battling with the lack of interpersonal skills, and the inability for active listening? (Fodor et al., 2017)

Job-hopping is natural for generation Z. They move on without compromises, they are jumping between workplaces just like a monkey jumps from tree to tree. Anytime they feel the need, they won't get stuck at a company, they will not worry about having a steady income or a fix desk somewhere. They are brave, they take initiative, and have less doubts regarding their own abilities and limitations. They have a practical mind-set, they appreciate the indirect, informal environments, and the freedom of the individual. They are building a new world, since they do not

represent a traditional office work culture, as they are able to perform their tasks in any part of the world with the help of internet, and they create their own virtual communities. Spiritual literature identifies them as the star or crystal generation. They are characterized as being rather smart than wise, and they feel comfortable in the world of technology. They are not good with words and emotions, and they are able to realize their desires even if the cost is high. They will not implement their revolutionary ideas individually, but they will rather serve the society in collaboration with each other. 97 percent of young people considers the protection of the environment important, and 74 percent of them already practices green behaviours such as recycling or selective waste collection, and purchasing energy-saving light bulbs. When having to choose between two workplaces, they rather prefer the one with a conscious CSR strategy and an environment-conscious way of thinking (Nordström-Ridderstrale, 2004; Kovács, 2017).

For members of the digital generation, personal relations are decisive, and they use the internet as a tool facilitating the maintenance of existing friendships and relations. The five most attractive occupations according to them are veterinarians, teachers, policemen, doctors, and of course football players, though 64 percent of them aspires to become their own boss as an adult instead of having to work for somebody. This is an important information for companies. They will have to establish such an organizational structure and culture, which supports individual work and has a flat hierarchy. The trend of “flattening” of organizations will continue in the beginning of the 21st century. Compared to the size of the organization, the levels within the hierarchy will decrease. The number of employees reporting to a single leader, and the number of employees supervised by the leader will increase, however hierarchical levels will disappear. The number of positions reporting to the CEO will grow, while the number of hierarchical levels in between will fall. Divisional leaders will get closer and closer to the CEO, they will work under a tougher control, but at the same time for a higher salary, and with an incentive that stimulates their long term interest (Kissné András, 2010; Tari, 2011).

2. RESULTS

2.1. METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The paper presents the partial results of a research project, supported by the New National Excellence Program of the Ministry of Human Resources (ÚNKP-18-3-III).

In the framework of the project we analysed the factors influencing the career and job choice of generation Z through qualitative and quantitative techniques in the context of consumer and expert surveys. We also reviewed the opinions of the HR specialists on the employer’s side in the framework of expert interviews. Our goal is to provide points to help employers to focus on generation Z to effectively

aim for a target group-oriented employer branding strategy, as well as to examine employer expectations and selection methods and compare the differences between them (Fodor et al., 2017).

The first phase of the research project was the qualitative examinations. We conducted focus group interviews with the members of generation Z in order to be able to establish the standardised questionnaire. Afterward we used the questionnaires during the second, quantitative research step. We also initiated qualitative expert interviews with HR and Employer Branding experts, to identify the employer's ideas about the characteristics of generation Z.

In the frame of the qualitative phase we made focus-group interviews with the members of generation Z, as potential employees. We conducted thirty mini-focus interviews, using semi-structured interview guides and snowball sampling method. The only recruiting condition was that all interviewees should be the member of generation Z. All of the interviews have been recorded and the results were processed using a traditional content analysis methodology.

The main research questions of that qualitative phase were as follows.

- What does the generation think about career, success, and the preferred and disadvantaged workplace?
- What does their career, success in work mean, and what factors help them achieve their individual goals most effectively?
- How can the career goals that they formulate be achieved?
- What do they expect from a good job? Which employer's activities and programmes may be most target group-specific for them?
- What kind of generation problems do the members of the sample perceive? How open are they to work with other generations, what are its advantages and disadvantages?

The other, parallel qualitative research step was the expert interview with the HR and Employer Branding experts. The recruiting of the subjects was also done with the snowball method in this case, so the results are not a representative one, all the presented results and conclusions are valid in case of the sample. Interviews were conducted with automotive suppliers, manufacturing and development companies - HR managers of large and multinational companies and with HR specialists. All five companies were located in Hungary but were foreign-owned: two operate in the capital city, one in Békés, one in Csongrád and one in Veszprém County. Of these five companies, the smallest had a population of 300, the largest had a population of 3,700 full time employees.

Our goal was to learn the challenges and difficulties faced by the analysed participants of the labour market and what they experience regarding generational differences.

- What are the methods applied to address generation Z?
- Are there HR, HR communication techniques, activities, campaigns that were judged effective on the basis of their empirical experience and would they recommend it to other employers wishing to open up to generation Z?

In the second phase, the quantitative survey has been implemented. Again, the non-representative snowball method was applied during the sampling process, and we have recruited respondents with the same filter criteria regarding their age. While conducting the surveys, we have used a standardized questionnaire designed by the results of the qualitative method. With the application of the CAPI method, we have received 1,178 valid filled questionnaires as a result of the survey. The partial results of the first phase of the research project are introduced in previous studies (Fodor et al., 2017).

The paper demonstrates the partial results of the qualitative phase comparing the employer and employees' ideas regarding to the research questions. The chapter shows the results of the qualitative research, compare the revealed characteristics of the employee side (generation Z) in the light of the previous X and Y age groups and present the expectations and experiences gained through the interviews of HR specialists in the selection of the employees.

2.2 RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEMBER OF GENERATION Z

We were interested in what young people think about the conditions of entering the world of work, and how they perceive their own opportunities on the labour market. They all agreed that in the fact it is difficult to find a job, and it is even harder to find a proper workplace.

The majority of responders claimed that a higher level of education means a greater change (chance?) in finding a suitable workplace. According to them as future employees, the greatest challenge is to find a job which makes them happy and is lucrative at the same time. They believe that finding and maintaining the proper balance between work and free time will later become a problem. The results of focus interviews indicate that the importance of the work-life balance is also taken into account regarding the preferences in the selection of a workplace.

In a separate topic we have examined the aspects considered by generation Z when they are choosing their next employer. They prefer flexible working hours, since it is important to have time for themselves. The atmosphere of the workplace is another important aspect. They would like to make sure they join an organization with an attractive work environment, a place where they feel good while performing their work. They are able and willing to work hard, as explained, to achieve their goals and dreams, but only if their efforts are recognised and compensated. Self-fulfilment, self-management and an inspiring working atmosphere are also significant factors. A number of experts have already highlighted that these young people show the greatest level of sensitivity towards receiving not only a salary, but also an identity from the company. Members of generation Z were asked about what they believe which factors are necessary for a successful career of a young beginner.

According to the participants, a beginner can only be successful today, if he is flexible, able to cope with load, up-to-date, well-informed, enthusiastic and motivated, can take up the “constant speed” of work and adapt to the expectations demanded by an ever accelerating pace of the world.

In order to obtain these characteristics and competencies, and generally for a successful start, mentors play a significant role. Young people agreed that it would be quite useful to have a supporting person (a mentor), who would prepare them to be ready for work.

They feel that the best possible way to implement this is within the frame of education (as an optional course), or to offer it at an affordable price as a training session, where managing directors, HR experts, successful people in particular fields would present the most important advices based on their personal experiences.

Beginners could receive personalized information and instructions about how they should prepare for an interview, and where they should gather information from about the job opportunities. What should they take into consideration when having to fit in at a workplace, and what kind of rights and obligations does an employee have, thus receiving practical and useful information and guidance.

We have asked participants to describe how they imagine their perfect workplace. The results revealed that at an ideal workplace, there is a good team, an expert leadership, there is no stress, yet a high-paced and diverse work awaits those who wish to work there (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Association of ideal workplace in case of generation Z



Source: Own qualitative research, 2017 - focus group interviews

As a summary of the results of focus group interviews, it can be established that a flexible workplace offering development opportunities and diversity in the scope of duties represent the ideal workplace for the young people involved in the research. They like to work in teams, to belong somewhere, and they are willing to put in a great effort, if they receive positive feedback and recognition.

They are also aware of the fact that finding a good workplace is a difficult task. However, they do not hesitate for a moment to change or to move on, if they do not feel comfortable at a workplace.

They also experience that beginners today have to face great expectations that are prerequisites of success, such as skills, ability to cope with load, and self-motivation. Many of them gather information from the internet, they spend most of their time in the online world, and their relations are also formed there. They expect the opportunities offered by the online world to exist in the world of work as well: home office, flexibility, task-orientation, “gamification”, as if the workplace was also a part of the augmented reality.

2.3. RESULTS OF THE SPECIALIST INTERVIEWS

Based on the results of the interviews with HR specialist we could say that in the current labour market environment not only finding the right workforce, but keeping it as well as retaining its motivation is challenging for professionals. Keeping the workforce is an essential issue for employer branding, since low fluctuation is a professional factor increasing the brand value in the selection process, and means a kind of “quality workplace” in communication. This is an absolute positive message for the future employee, and one of the best recruitments for professionals. Workers are more attracted to the workplace where they meet with a satisfied workforce.

Typically, more prepared candidates ask questions at job interviews.

- What is labour migration like?
- What about paid sick leave?

These considerations clearly reflect how long-term planning can be done in a given place, how demanding the job is for the employee. Experts have clearly emphasized, that in the current market conditions, the consistency of internal and external communication is even more appreciated. We must not forget the encouragement of the current employees, while recruiting new ones.

That is why we have looked separately at what they do for the employees to create a better employee-employer relationship. All the experts agreed that family days are more important for employees than corporate events, which provide an excellent opportunity for workers’ family members to get an insight into what they are doing, and where the wife, husband, father or mother works. Some employers also invite parents on maternity leave to these corporate events, with the aim of maintaining the bond between the workplace and them. Several companies invite their already retired colleagues to such events as they are able to report their experiences to younger colleagues credibly with a perspective, showing an example to current staff.

Just as every brand, employer branding is built from the inside, feeds from the inside, so this is the basis of its credibility. Current employees are the best messengers, ambassadors of any company.

It is far more credible if someone who works there speaks positively about a job, compared to a manager who wants to recruit people to work there. In connection with corporate events, family days have been mentioned several times, the Christmas banquets, the regular team buildings, whereas the purpose is to strengthen the community, team spirit and ease any internal tension. Some of the members mentioned the following in connection with the greater consistency of internal communication and internal processes: Organizational development, efforts to optimize corporate processes.

These are complex and lengthy processes, cost, time and labour-intensive projects, but HR experts say they can do a lot to help simplifying internal business systems and increase their efficiency. However, the necessity and the expected benefits of these developments must be explained to the staff in every case. Without the necessary education, such projects will also have less efficiency; internal acceptance and support are key factors for such process development provisions as well.

There were four HR managers among the interviewees where the blue collar workers were dominant. They were unanimously in the opinion concerning to internal communication. In the internal communication toolkit, besides the generational differences, attention must be paid to the different information needs of the intellectual and blue collar employees as well as to the fact that a blue collar worker and an office worker have different possibilities to read internal news. “We pay particular attention to using both online and offline communication channels to get information to both divisions. In addition, personal consultations are also available for staff members (HR reception hours, employee briefing, one to one meetings). “

The larger number of the HR experts involved in the interviews highlighted the importance of career path support and ensuring individual development opportunities, as these considerations contribute very much to the overall employee satisfaction. They also agreed that it is important to ensure adequate flow of information to provide the staff with the information: they need clear goals, competencies and responsibilities. They pay attention to make their appearances fit for the virtual, dynamic, and innovative needs of the generation Y and Z, using “gamification” and an interactive communication style.

Most of the experts have stressed that a number of methods are used to manage the internal brand professionally so that they can meet all the needs and expectations. To this end, they provide their employees with business phones, home-based work opportunities, free health care, and options to exercise social responsibility. Some people mentioned the lack of internal communication when there is insufficient coordination, cooperation between the HR and marketing communication activities of the outside target group.

Experts agreed and highlighted the importance of CSR in employer branding. Similarly, earlier research shows that for generation Z it is really important to work in a company whose value system and corporate mission fit into their own value system (Fodor-Jäckel, 2018).

3. CONCLUSIONS

As the generation differences and the challenges of Hungarian labour market generate much more attractive answers from the HR specialists could be useful for the practice to understand the requirements of the potential employees and based on that create a well-targeted HR-communication strategy. The main aim of the study was to explore the most important elements of a success employer branding strategy in case of generation Z.

With the help of the relevant theoretical background we analysed the most important features of generation Z as a potential employee, on the other hand the most important challenges which a HR expert has to face nowadays. The study presents the sub results of a primary research project focuses on the experts' interviews results which has been made with the help of a semi-structured guide. Since the snowball sample making methods were used during the recruiting process only local value results are presented in the study.

The companies taking part in the primary research were clear on how one of the cornerstones of their success is human resources. They named successful recruitment and keeping employees as key factors in keeping their competitiveness.

An important conclusion is that the experts believe that the successful solution for market challenges is cooperation. As part of this, they named the necessity of synchronising education institutions, expert organisations, and the interests of the companies on the employer side.

As another important pillar, they stressed the importance of taking part in education: in a technological environment which develops quickly, and becomes more specialised each day, companies also have to take part in education. Due to the sector's trends, actual job descriptions will transform in the future, and they also have to prepare their colleagues for this. An excellent opportunity for this is internal courses, advanced courses, and the option of specialisation.

Generation gaps are also challenges, both in recruitment and in keeping qualified, talented personnel. On the side of the employer, this demands an adaptation initiative and flexibility when facing a generation's needs. This makes it necessary to realise that HR and HR communication tools have to be tailored to the employee ranks in question.

While in the case of the generation Z, individual goals, individualism in general, and the possibility of realising personal career and path of life clearly gained an increase in importance, older generations believe that trustworthiness, stability and transparency are more important. This is why we need the long-known differentiation of marketing to be adapted to HR as well: identification of the needs of target groups, in this case, employees, and solutions tailored specifically to these needs. Therefore, highly standardised solutions will lose their efficiency in calling out to the employees having more and more heterogeneous demands, and will have less of an effect on keeping them.

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