

GENERATIONS Z IN EUROPE

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF MANAGING PEOPLE

Edited by Professor Emma Parry, Cranfield School of Management, Swindon, UK

The past two decades have represented a time of unprecedented social, technological, and economic change that has required a transformation in human resource management (HRM). Shifts in demographics, continued increases of women in the workforce, and greater mobility across national borders have led to higher diversity in the workplace. Advances in technology, including social media, have enabled new ways of doing business through faster communications and vast amounts of data made available to all. Mobile technology with its ubiquitous connectivity has led to renewed concerns over work-life balance and extreme jobs. These and many other changes have seen evolving attitudes towards work and careers, leading to different expectations of the workplace and mean that existing ways of managing people may no longer be effective. This series examines in depth the changing context to identify its impact on the HRM and the workforce.

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GENERATIONS Z IN EUROPE: INPUTS, INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Series Editor Foreword

The attention paid to generational differences over the past 10 years has been overwhelming. If you open almost any media publication in the areas of human resource management, marketing or politics, you will find an article discussing the values, expectations and preferences of the younger generations and how these are different from those of people in their 50s and beyond. In particular, practitioners, consultants and the media alike have become fascinated with the Millennial generation (those born between the early 1980s and late 1990s) who have entered the workforce in large numbers over the past 20 years. Attention is now moving on to the newest generation, that is, just starting to enter the workplace – known as Generation Z (born from the late 1990s onwards). This book is one of the first to provide a detailed examination of that generation within Europe.

In academic arenas, the idea of generational differences – at least those depicted in the popular groupings of Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials – has been treated with some cynicism and with frustration at the overwhelming reliance on this concept within practice. This is mainly due to doubts about the strength of the evidence for differences between these groups. In fact, analyses of this evidence, including those that I have undertaken myself, suggest that the findings in regard to generational differences are mixed and do not provide substantive proof of differences between generations. In addition, those studies that do show generational differences fail to agree in relation to what the characteristics of each generation are.

One reason behind this confusion might be the tendency for commentators to take those characteristics ascribed to generations in the United States and apply them universally, regardless of the country or the context. Indeed, given that theory around generational differences suggests that individuals develop their values, attitudes and expectations as a result of their experiences when growing up, I have always felt that it makes no sense to presume that these experiences – and therefore the characteristics of a generational group – would be the same across different countries and societies. This text, finally, addresses this issue in some detail by examining the recent contexts within a number of European countries and the impact of growing up in these contexts on the characteristics of those individuals from Generation Z. This text is unique in providing this analysis, and therefore, I was very pleased to include it as part of this series – and also to contribute a chapter myself. I hope that you will enjoy this detailed analysis and use it to obtain a deeper understanding of how generational characteristics are shaped by the environment, and how we might expect the attitudes of younger people to be changing over time.

Emma Parry

Series Editor, The Changing Context of Managing People

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Preface

For several years, ‘millennials’, ‘digital natives’ and other names for ‘Generation Y’ have been in the focus of academic research and at the forefront of the discussions among practitioners in companies, politicians, teachers, parents as well as the media. However, in the last few years, a new generation has moved into focus. Even though ‘Generation Z’ is not particularly an inspiring name, this group of young people born sometime after the beginning of the 1990s are about to become real game changers. As the *New York Times* phrased it: *Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z*. Generation Z is totally different from other generations before, as they are more realistic, mistrust politicians, companies and the media, and furthermore prefer to keep their work and private life strictly separate. In this regard, companies should start to get ready for them.

Since Generation Z is totally connected to the Internet, they are also quite often considered as the first truly global generation. But what exactly does that mean? Global, yes, but identical? This is the question we are dealing with. For us, Europe, with its social, cultural, political and lingual diversity, is a perfect research object.

We are going to find out whether there is a specific European Generation Z and what drivers have been influencing the shaping of this generation. What, for instance, does the Generation Z in Russia have in common (or not) with the Generation Z in Spain? How do factors like the social, economic and political environment or family influence the development of special (same or different) value systems in Generation Z members? To the best of our knowledge, there is no book out dealing with the Generation Z in Europe. This means, our book *Generations Z in Europe*, might be the first one.

Our book compares the European Generation Z in terms of country- and culture-specific drivers based on interdisciplinary and international scientific research. It presents a generation born into a crisis-ridden, mobile and digitalised Europe. We do not talk about ‘the’ Generation Z in Europe in singular, since beyond all the similarities of young people in Europe, we see striking differences. Therefore, we use the plural and talk about Generations Z in Europe.

As the Generation Z is now and will be in the years to come, entering the labour market, the time is right to sensitise companies to the needs of these young future employees. We have to reflect on the opportunities a generation might create for a labour market that grew up in different social, cultural and political contexts in different European countries, but in a completely globalised world, and that is more mobile than any generation ever before. What challenges does the working world face as ‘GenZ’ enters professional life? How can diversified companies benefit from these country-specific differences between generations? What do companies need in order to respond effectively to the

generational change in working life? What consequences can be seen for politics and the educational system in dealing with Generation Z?

Being academics ourselves, the authors of this book also aim at academia: both to give a little impetus for research about young people in Europe and to provide material for teaching. What more could be interesting than discussing with young people in Europe the Generations Z in Europe?

There are segments in this book where objective facts about Generation Z are combined with personal thoughts about Generation Z in that particular country. Our goal as Editors of this book is to give the reader a chance to understand Generation Z in its variety across Europe. This includes impressions as indicators for a culture-specific perception of social reality, history and zeitgeist.

Taking this into account, there is a second target group for our book: politicians, even though they do not have discovered these young people in their relevance yet and we are sceptical that they will. But the dynamics of Europe are changing and the political establishment in Europe might find out that there is something else beside the traditional group of voters and lobbyists. In the process of convergence and divergence politicians should in their own interest begin to think about Generation Z.

It looks as if politicians neither understand Generation Z in their own country, not to speak of Generation Z in Europe. We do not judge whether they are not able to do so or just see other and basically older groups more of interest as voters. But this is dangerous. The idea of Europe can only continue to be developed if the young people get a chance to be part of it. Therefore, we would be happy if at least one or two of the ten thousands of politicians in Europe would read our book.

Our book starts with the section 'Input: What Great Thinkers Would Let Us Know', which provides some theoretical approaches and scientific background. How can basic sociological/philosophical theories be applied to research about Generation Z? This part introduces classical thinkers like Karl Mannheim, Jean Baudrillard, Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman. It aims to embed the following country-specific chapters in common theories, taking into account the deeply interdisciplinary approach to Generation Z. The Editors chose, in this part, a more dynamic approach to the basic theories, so the short chapters focus on 'how the theorists would have talked to us', experimenting with a change of perspective.

The following main section is titled 'Insights: What the Experts Tell Us' and gathers together different analyses of researchers from all across Europe. All country-specific chapters follow the same structure, with every chapter giving us information about the Generation Z in each country. It starts by contextualising the research: Which historical lines might influence the younger generation's lives? What is the specific cultural context? What demographic, economic or political outlines are given in the country? How is education organised? What conflicts and tensions are present in the social discourse? To be able to compare the scientific results, we have to consider and understand the different situations that Generation Z is growing up with. Another question would be: What technological drivers, media, or role models influence the younger

generations – compared to the Generation Z in other European countries, but also in relation to previous generations?

Furthermore, for the main section, it is important to explore what the ‘typical Z’ in each country is feeling, thinking or doing. Are there special attitudes and visions? What is the younger generation expecting from future employers or jobs? What about their work–life arrangement? How is their consumption oriented? Are they more pessimistic or more optimistic? Last but not least, the contributors had to develop some recommendations for different target groups.

The chapter ‘Implication: What Do We Want?’ offers a look into the future: representatives from Generation Y share their visions and expectations about Generation Z and its future role in Europe.

Thanks to all the authors who worked on this project. Since we did not just want to put together some isolated articles, interaction and coordination were necessary: this book is based on an international and interdisciplinary conference held at Saarland University in Saarbrücken, Germany, in November 2016 organised by the Chair of Business Administration, especially Organisational Behaviour, Human Resource Management, and Information Management, and the Collegium Europaeum Universitatis Saraviensis (CEUS). This conference brought together an excellent team of researchers from the whole of Europe and was such a great experience that we went on to organise a symposium about Generations Z in Europe at the Academy of Management in Atlanta, USA, in August 2017. Now in November 2018, the book is completed and more joint projects will follow.

We also thank the team at Emerald and our other partners who helped us realise both the conference and the publication, in particular, Villa Lessing – Liberale Stiftung Saar, Saarland University’s international research funding and the Eastern partnership programme of DAAD, as well as of course our whole team. They all made this book possible which is not the end of a process. It is a beginning.

Christian Scholz and Anne Rennig

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THE GENERATIONS Z IN EUROPE – AN INTRODUCTION

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The Generations Z in Europe – An Introduction

Christian Scholz

1. Raising a Question

To understand the future, we have to comprehend young people since it is up to them to shape the future. This becomes even more important as we look at all the dynamics currently hitting us: the digitalisation, the globalisation and the virtualisation. The Internet of Things does not just connect machines and computers, coffee machines and online shopping, it also connects us to the information technology of our employer, of public transportation and of the government. We get new technologies, new styles of politics, new models of work, new media, new types of transportation and new kinds of housing.

Young people are born into these dynamics. They are almost always ‘on’ – at least with regard to their smartphones. What do young people think about all this? How do they behave? What will they change? How does all that affect companies, families, schools and media? These questions are addressed to what is currently called ‘Generation Z’, which started – depending on the chosen author – around 1995.

Europe displays a fascinating variety, and we would like to know the consequences of that for homogeneity or heterogeneity of the young generation. Also, Europe is undergoing challenging changes – in its economic and educational systems, in labour markets and in the political dynamics. In addition to that, we have demographic issues, with not enough young people for the existing jobs, and not enough acceptable jobs for all the young people. All that spells relevance.

To deal with that we need rigour. Here we chose the concept of ‘generation’ as a theoretical background, as it explains to us why and how cohorts of people are shaped in a specific period of time in a similar way.

A small note at the beginning: this introduction does not have a section about ‘academic literature on Generation Z in Europe’. There is a good reason for that. Apart from the small network of European researchers who met for a

conference at Saarland University (November 2016), to date (October 2018) no substantial research has been found that looks at the Generation Z in Europe. Also, our symposium (Scholz et al., 2017) at the Academy of Management in Atlanta 2017 proved the non-existence of such research beyond our preliminary attempts.

2. Looking at the New Dynamics of Europe

Besides the Middle East and Africa, whose developments also reach Europe, no other part of the world has experienced more disruptions than Europe during the last 100 years. Even the last 50 years have seen radical changes: the fall of the Iron Curtain, the reunification of Germany, the splitting up of Yugoslavia and of Czechoslovakia, dramatic wars on the Balkan, the fall and rise of Russia, the war in Ukraine, the beginning of political transformation in countries such as Romania and Bulgaria, as well as very specific activities in Poland, Hungary, and Turkey.

Older generations, when travelling from Austria to Portugal, had to present their passports four times, change currency four times. And if you happened to be an Austrian living in Saarbrücken, Germany, in 2000, you even needed a visa to cross the adjacent border to France. As for the young people of today, they do not remember all that, not the wall in Germany, not the different currencies with all the exchange rates, not the border controls. Today they are used to travelling freely at least through large parts of Europe, not even recognising borders between countries. But this is changing gradually: Generation Z in Europe has to get used to at least a partial loss of that feeling; today you see heavily armed police even when entering Germany from Austria – not to mention fences, walls and invisible barriers at other parts of Europe. The times are changing, and this affects people of all age groups, including Generation Z.

Using ‘Europe’ in the title of this chapter brings us to the question of how to define Europe. From the political standpoint, the best approximation is using the European Union with countries such as not only France, Italy, and Spain, but also Hungary and Latvia. But what about countries on the waiting list, such as Albania and Serbia? Or countries at the exit door, such as the United Kingdom? How about Switzerland? Does Russia belong to Europe? And Turkey? Or Israel, which participates as a regular attendee in the Eurovision Song Contest?

Accepting the huge variety of definitions and the depths of the discussions around it (e.g. Durand, 2014; Lacy & Van Houtum, 2015; Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2015), for practical reasons a geographical definition will be used: it sees Europe as extending up to the Urals and to the western part of Turkey. This scope also covers the cultural aspect, looking back at the history of Europe. Therefore, this definition will be used – counting Russia and the United Kingdom in.

3. Understanding the Logic of ‘Generations’

3.1. How ‘Generations’ Evolve

The concept of generations has a long tradition, especially in Europe, starting with the work of Mannheim (e.g. 1927/1928). The generational concept existed as early as the sixteenth century (Kuhn, 2010). This concept tells us that generations are shaped during their formative years by simultaneity, by their social and political environment: “[...] the social phenomenon ‘generation’ represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related ‘age groups’ embedded in a historical-social process” (Mannheim, 1927/1928, p. 292). In addition, the value system each generation has acquired during their youth stays basically the same but is lived in a different way (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

There is a wide range of influences that shape generations: usually on top of the list are spectacular events and crises, such as wars or economic disasters. Also technology, fashion, music, films and prominent people enter the minds of people when they are young.

These influences configure the minds of young people when they are young. And some of these beliefs stay in their minds even when they grow older. Those who started out as hippies from Woodstock may have changed their haircut, but beneath that at least some of them have kept their value systems. Of course, this does not hold true for all of them: many of them turned to what could be called the ‘dark side’. Or, as Bruce Gibney (2017) puts it, transformed them into a generation of “sociopaths”. Still, for many of them, the dream “of love and peace, combined with fairness and sustainability” exists, but just as a silent dream that does not fit into today’s world.

When we discuss and analyse generations, the best approach is to compare them with respect to the same age bracket, that is, to compare Baby Boomers when they were young with Generation Z whilst they are young. These “generational differences are important where they appear, as even small changes at the average mean that twice or three times as many individuals score at the top of the distribution” (Twenge, 2010, p. 201).

3.2. Which Generations Exist?

3.2.1. Five Generations

With some variation in the time span covered by each generation, most researchers (e.g. Howe & Strauss, 2000; McCrindle, 2014; Scholz, 2014) agree on up to five generations.

The Silent Generation was born up to 1949. For this group, the Second World War and the time immediately after play an important role. Crucial for them are survival, recovery and taking chances as they come. Hard work dominated their lives, with the emphasis on ‘hard’. The Silent Generation tried to improve their own situation, got their first car and took their first real holiday. Most members of the Silent Generation are retired, but some still struggle in

politics and other institutions to finally make their mark on history. A few of them took all their chances and got really rich.

For Baby Boomers (1950 to 1964), hard work was, and often still is, also important, with the emphasis on ‘work’. The collective mind has been shaped by the war in Vietnam, by seeing people landing on the moon, by rock concerts such as Woodstock, by visionary politicians and by the energy crises (in Germany four Sundays without driving cars). For the United States, we have to mention politicians such as Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. Technology also played an important role: at that time the first television set and the original *Star Trek* series entered the living room. Also – both for the United States and Europe – we have to mention the rebellion of the students who tried to create an academic system that was fairer, more open, more democratic, more for the people and less for the companies. To some degree idealistic, this generation, in addition to improving their own lives, tried to make the world a little bit better.

Generation X (1965 to 1979) was described partially correctly by Douglas Coupland in his novel *Generation X* (1991) as living a life is not as easy as it has been before. As a consequence, we see a more pessimistic view of the individual future in working life. Also, Generation X is struggling with parents and teachers, with whom they mostly do not connect. However, Generation X has the best education of all generations. That helps with jobs, which in some cases are basically seen simply as means to optimise their private lives. Generation X is seen in many cases as the workhorses to set the ground for the visions of some of the Baby Boomers.

Generation Y (1980 to 1994), also known as Millennials or digital natives, differs totally from all the other generations before. This negates the hypothesis that those generations are just a pendulum swinging back and forth. For Generation Y, information technology really became the driver, starting with the personal computer and then with the Internet. We see the dotcom bubble and its peak in Europe in March 2000 with all its promises of becoming successful and rich as long as you really invest your private life into your career. The environment is totally darwinistic, the individual style opportunistic, turning Generation Y into “darwiportunistic” (Scholz, 2003) creatures. Nevertheless, this generation is unbelievably optimistic when it comes to their own perspectives.

Generation Z (born after 1995) has been seen wrongfully as a small variation of Generation Y. However, this generation is totally different and definitely a generation of its own. It has seen older relatives from Generation Y suffering in their jobs, breaking up in their partnerships, having health issues. Generation Z is realistic. They know that companies usually do not care about employees (when they do not need them any more), that politicians do not care about voters (except during election time), that media products are in many cases fake (in order to get audience) and that schools including universities do not prepare you for real life (only for what companies consider to be important right now). However, they accept all that as given, and – with notable exceptions – they do not fight it. When they see that Martin Winterkorn from Volkswagen – just as a random example – gets more than 20 million euros a year and still claims he had no idea about #dieselgate, they do not protest. And when democratic

universities turned into presidential systems, Generation Z did not object but searched for ways to comply. However, today's young people find their own and very specific way, what makes them a true and unique 'generation'.

3.2.2. The Age Cohort Effect

The relevance of the concept of generations and the relevance of 'being young' can be seen in a multilevel analysis of political generations and their participation repertoires in western Europe (Grasso, 2014). The author highlights the fact that the 1960s–1970s generation – which are basically the Baby Boomers – were more likely to engage in political activities such as demonstrations and petitions than 'younger' generations. She then concludes:

Given this, it appears that the more radical and ideologically-polarised context of the political socialisation of the 1960s–70s Generation meant that they are more likely to engage in 'unconventional' or 'new' activities even than younger generations. (Grasso, 2014, p. 72)

Maria Grasso, referring to the work of Karl Mannheim, shows that the political activities depend to a large extent on the political characteristics of the era in which the generations got their political socialisation:

It could be considered that the 1980s and 1990s Generation have not matched the levels of political engagement of the 1960s–70s Generation since they were able, in their youth, to enjoy many of the benefits emerging from the social and political battles which the 1960s-70s Generation fought and won. (Grasso, 2014, p. 75)

From this research we draw the following conclusions: (1) each generation definitely gets shaped by situational factors during their youth; (2) the context in which Baby Boomers grew up was favourable to political activities and the Baby Boomers accepted that challenge; (3) Generation Z feels they do not need to be active in this sense since they enjoy the benefits of older generations automatically. However, there is an additional aspect: (4) some parts of Europe enjoy this paradise on earth (like central Europe), others do not (like south-eastern Europe (SEE)). This could increase the likelihood that Generation Z in some parts of Europe might start to become politically active, while others stay inactive and enjoy life. As a consequence: (5) we will get different variations of Generation Z in different parts of Europe.

3.2.3. The Relevance of Time Spans

The time borders between the generations are not sharp ones. Nevertheless, the differences between these generations are suggested to be fundamental and quite large (e.g. Nielsen, 2015, p. 6). Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the

concept of different generations and their way of living/working with each other turns out to be relevant both for theory and for practice (e.g. Hillman, 2014).

3.3. *How Different Is Generation Z?*

Until about 2015, hardly anyone accepted the existence of a Generation Z. However, suddenly headlines such as “Move Over Millennials” (O’Brien, 2018) appeared, signalling the need for action and a totally different generation. But in which way is Generation Z different? Is it technology, as suggested by the following quote: “A virtualised, hyperconnected ecosystem where Gen Z feels at home. Obsessive, the savvy and attached, Gen Z finds fulfilment in their devices” (CommScope, 2017, p. 17)? And what are the drivers behind all that?

Condensing the huge amount of observations dealing with Generation Z into the characteristics, three typical issues are connected to Generation Z:

The first key issue is structure. Generation Z sees more structure and more regulation in schools. For instance, in Germany, the shift towards the Bologna system created a totally overstructured and over-bureaucratic system. Generation Z got used to it and, even expects this kind of structure in everyday situations. This makes ‘structure’ one of the key issues of Generation Z – in sharp contrast to Generation Y before accepting openness and fluidity. Generation Z goes for structure because they are used to it and they like it.

The second key issue for Generation Z is security and this is for totally different reasons. Here the reason is the lack of security in everyday life. The days of a no-layoff policy are gone, which was at least partly common in some countries or companies: in order to increase short-term profit, without any hesitation, almost all companies fire people, sell parts of the company or engage in outsourcing activities. Goals such as flexibility and agility increase individual insecurity since it reduces stability. The discussions about ‘digitalisation as a tsunami’ with many jobs hanging on the cliffs of the labour market do not add to the feeling of security. In most countries, politicians have absolutely no clue how in the short term the health system can be financed and how in the long term the pension system will survive. All this explains as to why Generation Z likes the idea of working for state agencies with no-layoff policies and with lifelong employment.

The third key issue for Generation Z is driven by both being used to systems (like structure) and by the need for a coping mechanism (like security). This issue can be labelled ‘feeling good’. There are many stories dealing with helicopter parents who expend a huge amount of energy in protecting their little children (even in their mid-20s) against all the uncertainties of life. These helicopter parents confront teachers when they dare to criticise their poor kids. And the poor kids feel really good, since the teachers are not allowed to give them bad grades. Everything is taken care of. And Generation Z expects this not only in the family and at school: feeling good is also important for them in companies. Of course, other generations also like feel-good managers. But Generation Z demands a 100 per cent feel-good environment – at home, at school, at work.

In addition to these three key issues, Generation Z displays a behaviour that is disturbing in particular to Generation Y. In most cases, Generation Z as