

# Understanding Generation Z expectations for effective onboarding

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Generation Z  
onboarding  
expectations

1277

Received 28 February 2020

Revised 4 May 2020

31 May 2020

Accepted 19 June 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Organizations have long recognized that focusing on the onboarding experience is vital to the success of the employee and the organization. Organizations are confronted with inter-generational issues as they prepare to accommodate Generation Z in the workplace. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the expectations of Generation Z from the onboarding program so that the organizations are better equipped to welcome the new cohort.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study adopts the interpretive approach to understand the subjective opinions, thoughts and conversations of the respondents. The study adopted an interpretive research approach for two main reasons. First, in the absence of empirical evidence, such a type of approach is helpful when the study aims to understand the subjective experience of individuals, and often can help in theory construction. Second, the approach helps uncover unknown facts and relevant research questions for further research.

**Findings** – The results from the study can help organizations to fine-tune the onboarding program that meets the needs of Generation Z. The study identified six essential variables that could be addressed in the onboarding enabling the new hires to quickly onboard the organization.

**Research limitations/implications** – Data were collected from the students who are pursuing final year of masters in business administration. Since the respondents are business students findings cannot be generalized to the rest of the cohort as these respondents had a fair idea of what to expect from the organizations.

**Practical implications** – The study presents six important themes for designing and managing an effective onboarding program for Generation Z. It is important to note that the inter-generational differences are natural, and organizations have to live with it. HR professionals have to bear in mind that this is also an opportunity to revisit, redesign and readjust their onboarding programs to suit the new employees.

**Originality/value** – The literature on Generation Z is at a nascent stage. Empirical studies on Generation Z were conducted to understand their expectation, beliefs and attitude. However, studies related to their expectations during the new hire orientation programs are absent. The present study could be one of the first studies in helping both managers and the HR function in understanding the expectations of Generation Z.

**Keywords** Generation Z, Inter-generational issues, Onboarding, Interpretive research

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Millennials and the research on new millennials have taken center stage for quite some time. The cohort “millennials” are described as young, educated, assertive and outgoing (Strauss and Howe, 2003; Howe and Strauss, 2009). While the research on millennial continues, a new cohort, “Generation Z,” has begun to draw the attention of various stakeholders – business leaders, entrepreneurs, colleges, parents and the human resources practitioners in particular. A joint study by a Network of Executive Women (NEW) and Deloitte (2019) predicts that Generation Z surpasses the millennials with more than one-third of the population identifying themselves as Generation Z, therefore, understanding the new cohort and devising strategies to accommodate the new generation into the workplace assumes significance. Every cohort distinguishes itself from the rest of the generations concerning expectations, experiences, values, education, family, lifestyle and work ethics (Williams and Page, 2011; Grow and Yang, 2018), context, and behavior (Francis and Hoefel, 2018), significantly affecting the industry and the organization. Therefore, understanding the differences in the cohort and what differentiates Generation Z from the remaining cohort can help organizations successfully onboard the new generation.



Organizations have long recognized that focusing on the onboarding experience is vital to the success of the employee and the organization. Prior research studies (Acedo and Yancey, 2011; Smart, 2012; Ellis *et al.*, 2017) have established that the new hires leave the organization early during the first three months of the employment, and thus the current research focuses on creating effective onboarding strategies for Generation Z. The argument was further supported by industry research report as Bersin, an HR consulting firm, in their survey found out that 79% of the business leaders feel like effective onboarding is an urgent and essential priority (Bersin, 2014). As Generation Z starts entering the workforce, they are compared to the earlier cohorts in terms of their expectations, values, anticipations and how they would disrupt the workforce. The literature on Generation Z has been limited to understanding their attitudes, preferences and behaviors (Scholz, 2014; Turner, 2015; Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018) with very little research on organization's readiness to accommodate the new cohort. Organizations are confronted with inter-generational issues, as they start recruiting Generation Z in the workplace (Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the study assumes importance as Generation Z presents unique challenges for managers and organizations, and thus calls for a well-established onboarding program to successfully onboard the new cohort.

The study makes several contributions to both theory and practice. First, the study advances the understanding of the Generation cohort theory. Second, by studying the expectation of Generation Z from the onboarding, the study adds to our knowledge, the support Generation Z requires in the early days of their career. Third, the study investigates the expectations of Generation Z with the extant literature, thereby fulfilling the criteria of conformability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Finally, the study helps organizations understand the differences in the generation, thus making them ready to accommodate Generation Z into the workplace. Besides, the study contributes to the onboarding literature, thereby establishing the need for effective onboarding.

#### *Literature review*

Generation Z is the cohort group born after 1995 (Lanier, 2017; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018) comprises 32% of the global population (Miller and Lu, 2019). Research on defining characteristics of Generation Z is still at a nascent stage (Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019) due to the difference of opinions among the scholars. Several researchers have attempted to understand the generational traits and studied generational differences among the cohorts (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Lanier, 2017; Grow and Yang, 2018). Hoxha and Zeqiraj (2019) argue that developments and changes that occurred over the past few decades manifest in the characteristics of a cohort. Thus, each generation is unique and has to be understood differently. Generation Z stands out from other generations in at least one aspect that these cohorts have never seen the world without the Internet. The absence of empirical studies investigating the traits and characteristics and a lack of understanding adds more confusion. For instance, Howe (2014) and Crunch (2015) argue that Generation Z is concerned more about job security, while Bernier (2015) surveyed 50,000 members and opined that Generation Z is worried about job fit that suits their skills than job security, thereby underlying the need for further research in understanding Generation Z.

Despite the difference of opinions among the scholars, it is widely accepted that Generation Z shares qualities of millennials (Wiedmer, 2015; Kebritchi and Sharifi, 2016; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018; Schroth, 2019) but also differs from them in many aspects. Generation Z is considered to be early starters – prefer working while studying as they can learn and earn simultaneously (Cameron and Pagnattaro, 2017); entrepreneurial and outcome orientation (Lanier, 2017; Christensen *et al.*, 2018); tech-savvy, being raised with the smartphones and Internet from an early age (Opris and Cenusă, 2017; O'Boyle *et al.*, 2017;

Francis and Hoefel, 2018); independent – they are confident and do not rely much on the parents (Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018; Francis and Hoefel, 2018; Robertson, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019); prefers autonomy at work (Wiedmer, 2015).

Extant literature on Generation Z focused on studying the inter-generational differences (Lanier, 2017; Grow and Yang, 2018), values towards achieving goals (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Gutfreund, 2016; Christensen *et al.*, 2018; Grow and Yang, 2018; Berge and Berge, 2019), education and learning styles (Iorgulescu, 2016; Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018; Pousson and Myers, 2018; Berge and Berge, 2019), career expectations (Loveland, 2017; Grow and Yang, 2018; Fratričová and Kirchmayer, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019; Berge and Berge, 2019), the impact of social media on Generation Z (Turner, 2015; Woźniak, 2016; Duffett, 2017; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019), use of technology (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018; Sung and Choi, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019) and expectations at the workplace (Bohdziewicz, 2016; Fratričová and Kirchmayer, 2018; Grow and Yang, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019). At the same, studies were conducted to understand their buying behaviors (Gutfreund, 2016; Puiu, 2016; Priporas *et al.*, 2017; Hoxha and Zeqiraj, 2019; Ismail *et al.*, 2020). However, studies related to their onboarding expectations were notably absent, and the present study addresses this gap.

The literature on Generation Z is at an emerging phase. While there are studies on understanding their values, learning styles, the impact of social media, technology adoption, expectations at the workplace, studies relating to onboarding Generation Z, and the organization's readiness in managing the inter-generational differences are significantly absent. The present study is an attempt to understand their expectations in the initial days of Generation Z joining the workplace. Every new hire in the organization has a set of new expectations that impact their attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, and Generation Z is no exception (Sherman and Morley, 2015). The relationship between the employee and the organization is bidirectional as organizations expect employees to work hard, develop new skills, and follow organizational goals. In contrast, the employees expect the organization to treat employees fairly, provide opportunities for training, development, promotion, provide real-time feedback, and performance-based pay (Schroth, 2019). Against this background, the study attempts to gain an understanding of Generation Z and their onboarding expectations, thereby enabling organizations to address their expectations in the initial days of employees joining the organization.

### *Onboarding*

Recruiting talent is very critical for the success of any organization as the competition for skilled employees is precipitous (Edwards, 2009). Employers invest a significant amount of time, money, and energy on recruiting the best hires, and thus the organizations need to design a top-grade onboarding program in a way that employees are up and functioning as early as possible (Becker, 2010; Becker and Bish, 2019). The onboarding process varies from organization to organization, differs in procedures, techniques, style, and often depends on the size and level of the employees. Onboarding is a process of introducing new hires into the new job, acquainting them with the organization's goals, values, rules, responsibilities, procedures, and socializing the employee into an organizational culture (Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Bauer, 2010; Watkins, 2016), thereby helping the new employees adjust to social and performance aspects of the new job. Onboarding new hires is a critical activity that allows the employee to integrate with the organization, culture, and access to information, helping them to be effective in their day-to-day jobs (Becker and Bish, 2019). A well-designed onboarding program can help the new hires reduce anxiety and uncertainty, and provide clarity and understanding to their role (Schroth, 2019). Organizations treat the onboarding as a strategic program as the impression that is created during the initial days of the new hires will have a

lasting effect on the careers of the individuals. As a result, the typical onboarding process starts from the day an offer is made and continues up to six to twelve months upon the individual joining the organization (Fyock, 2012). Whatever be the onboarding model and the duration, the underlying fact is that faster a new hire is absorbed into the organization, sooner the employee would be able to contribute to the organization. The design of the onboarding program should include a definite focus on the importance of the new employee, transparent and open communication, performance measurement, and aligning new hires to strategies that support the mission and goals of the organization (Bauer, 2010; iCIMS, 2016).

Moreover, prior research studies (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Harris *et al.*, 2007; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Meyer and Bartels, 2017) established that effective onboarding results in increased performance, job satisfaction, and loyalty to an organization, and therefore the organizations must provide the necessary input for the new hires to be successful. As part of their work, employees might need to coordinate with different processes within the organizations, and unfamiliarity with the procedures, and people could be daunting. Organizations have realized the importance of the initial experience, and thus have well-established onboarding programs serving mainly three purposes – increasing the confidence of the new hires, helping employees become fully productive more quickly, and build a mutually positive association with the organization and the employees (Guðmundsdóttir and Lundbergsdóttir, 2016). However, the expectation of the new hires seems to be different, and thus, there is a wide gap between Generation Z's expectations vs. what is delivered. Generation Z wants to start working as soon as they are onboard, as they are career ambitious, and prefer real-time feedback (Gale, 2015). Therefore, the present study focuses on welcoming and integrating Generation Z into organizations equipping them with the necessary information and skills to work effectively.

The term onboarding is recent, but the concept of new onboarding is not a new phenomenon, as the HR practitioners referred to the process as orientation (Klein and Heuser, 2008; Daskalaki, 2012). Extant literature indicates several onboarding models. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) argue that organizational socialization is the underpinning theory from which onboarding emerged, and therefore the majority of the scholars derived their models based on socialization theory. For instance, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) proposed six tactical dimensions of onboarding based on socialization. Klein and Heuser (2008) developed a model with 12 content areas contributing to adequate socialization. To support the model, they later developed an Inform-Welcome-Guide (IWG) model to identify critical onboarding areas. Bauer (2010) developed a 4Cs model comprising four levels (lowest to highest), namely – compliance, clarification, culture and connection. Meyer and Bartels (2017) further investigated the 4Cs model noted that all these levels are necessary and reported that new hires who have received all the levels, including connections, reported higher perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. All these models highlight the importance of learning in all the onboarding process, establishing the need for effective onboarding leading to organizational commitment, and job satisfaction.

Considering Generation Z as the new cohort joining the organization, their expectations from the onboarding process have to be studied. These are a new generation that has not seen the world without the Internet, considered as the first digital natives; they are very comfortable in collecting the information and integrating virtual and offline experiences (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Besides, they expect to access information and use them before they make a decision. Therefore, the onboarding experience has to start even before they enter the organizations. In the age of digital disruption, if the onboarding process is still a paper-based and begins on the joining day of the employees, they likely perceive the organization lacks digital thinking (Deloitte, 2019). As a result, Generation Z might be preferring competitive organizations that offer digital thinking and digital onboarding experience. While a majority of the organizations provide a digital onboarding experience,

there are specific processes that are still paper-based; as a result, the onboarding process is slow. Therefore, the present study understands their expectations, so that the HR professional can redefine, and readjust their onboarding program to make it as effective as possible.

## Methodology

The study adopts the interpretive research using qualitative methods on the lived experience of the respondents. Interpretive research is an approach that embraces a voluntaristic view of human experiences in a way that the individuals are not acted upon by the external world instead of behaving proactively (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989). This approach is popular in social sciences and information systems research (Klein and Myers, 1999; Livari, 2018); however, it is applied in management discipline also. A wide range of studies has been proposed in the literature. For example, Jansen (2018) used interpretive research to explore how management accounting research can be practically applicable in shaping an intervention. The interpretive approach is often used to explore studies related to performance management (Cunha *et al.*, 2018), leadership (Felix *et al.*, 2019), organizational work-life balance practices (Nwagbara, 2020), sustainable human resource management (Podgorodnichenko *et al.*, 2020). The study adopted an interpretive research approach for two main reasons. First, in the absence of empirical evidence, such a type of approach is helpful when the study aims to understand the subjective experience of individuals and often can help in theory construction (Smith and Bowers-Brown, 2010). Second, the approach helps uncover unknown facts and relevant research questions for further research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Moreover, such an investigation is helpful in theory construction in areas of insufficient *a priori* theory. Interpretive research involves using qualitative methods; a critical aspect in interpretive research is seeking meaning in context, combining social, historical and cultural contexts impacting the subject matter, which cannot be ignored (Klein and Myers, 1999; Maroun, 2012). Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) argue that interpretive research does not reject quantitative approaches; instead, view them as measures based on one aspect at one point in time. An essential element of interpretive researchers is studying the phenomena from the perspective of those participants involved with the phenomena rather than participants as part of the physical world (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). Qualitative and interpretive research does not generalize the findings; however, it provides an insight into the studied phenomenon (Maroun, 2012), and therefore our aim is not to generalize results to a population but to understand the expectations of Generation Z as they prepare to enter the workplace. Moreover, interpretive research offers the potential to interact with practical implications. Opinions, thoughts, and suggestions by the respondents with certain limitations may be incorporated by the organizations to ensure that Generation Z is appropriately welcomed into the organization.

## Sample and procedure

The most commonly used technique of data collection in interpretive research is interviews that can be facilitated through face-to-face, telephonic, or focus group discussions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Besides interviews, another technique that is followed is direct observation, where the researcher can be either a passive external observer or an active participant sharing their inputs about the phenomena being studied. Therefore, taking a cue from the interpretive research, the study adopted interviewing and participant observation techniques to elicit information from the respondents. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting the respondents were followed through a two-step process. First, the respondents should

belong to the Generation Z cohort, and hence, participants are chosen from three educational institutions, who are pursuing final year master’s program (business students). As an introduction, the participants were explained about the different cohorts, Generation Z, and the objective of the study. A pilot study with one focused group was conducted to test and organize the interview schedule. Initial conversations with the participants helped in modifying the sample size, as few of the students did not belong to the Generation Z cohort. The group consisted of participants who had prior work experience, and few of them did not have any work experience. It was observed that the participants who had work experience were sharing their expectations, while others were quiet. A key criterion to interpretive research is that the participants should have first-hand knowledge about the phenomena being studied (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

Therefore, in the subsequent discussions, we have selected participants only who had completed a minimum of two summer internships. The second criterion was critical for this study as the participants during the internships had the first-hand experience and knew what to expect from their organization. During the internships, they are generally not exposed to all the HR practices in the organizations. However, these participants understand organizational functions and the way employee relations are handled. The interview ranged from 40–50 min, with each discussion having 7–10 participants. We conducted 15 group discussions covering 136 participants (see Table 1 for details) with the following questions: First, what should be the duration of the new hire orientation/onboarding? Second, what are the key topics new hires are interested to know during the onboarding? Third, what are some of the specific topics that must be covered in the onboarding?

Analysis

The study adopted an inductive approach complemented with Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) in analyzing the findings. Inductive reasoning is an approach that starts with observations and searches for the development of patterns and theories. Such an approach is appropriate when exploring participants’ perceptions, perspectives and behaviors (Mueller and Lovell, 2015). Before conducting the interviews, each of the participants was requested to mention five key topics that they must know as they join the organization. Thus, the total number of responses were 680 (136 × 5); the data was analyzed carefully and arrived at 18 key themes. Table 1 presents the first-order model with 18 concepts (*n* = 136). The study

Table 1.  
Participant details

Group	No. of participants	Male	Female
Group 1	7	4	3
Group 2	9	4	5
Group 3	9	5	4
Group 4	8	4	4
Group 5	7	5	2
Group 6	8	4	4
Group 7	8	5	3
Group 8	9	5	4
Group 9	10	6	4
Group 10	8	4	4
Group 11	10	5	5
Group 12	8	4	4
Group 13	9	5	4
Group 14	8	4	4
Group 15	9	5	4



followed Gioia *et al.* (2013) two-step process of first-order and second-order concepts for data analysis. The Gioia methodology assesses participants as knowledgeable agents, and the researcher as a knowledgeable person, who can link participant knowledge to the extant literature. Following the Gioia methodology, the first step was to record all the conversations with the participants. The conversations were decoded, and the team arrived at 18 emerging topics, which we considered as first-order concepts. Subsequently, in the second step, the 18 emerging concepts were discussed again with the participants to identify the overlapping themes. Since the study did not rely on any single group, measures were taken to record all the conversations, and subsequently, the interviews were coded. Consistency of coding was maintained throughout the interviews. In the third step, the researchers arrived at second-order themes basing on the number of responses against each theme. Table 3 presents the number of responses against each theme. The second-order themes were limited to six categories as the difference between the sixth and seventh themes was large. Table 4 presents the second-order categories.

Generation Z is a new cohort who have started joining the workforce recently. While academic literature on Generation Z is still at a nascent stage, key findings of this study reveal much more about their interests and their expectations from the workplace. Table 1 details the number of focused group discussions and the number of participants in each group. Table 2 provides insights into the duration of the onboarding program. Forty-one percent of the respondents opined that a two-week onboarding program would address the majority of the concerns associated with the new hires.

In comparison, 28% responded that a five-day onboarding program would be sufficient. Table 3 lists the various topics they would like to know during the onboarding program. To judge the rigor of interpretive research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) presents four-step criteria, where dependability and conformability are very essential. Dependability refers to authenticity, wherein different researchers assessing the same phenomenon arrive at the same conclusions. Credibility refers to the inferences to be believable. The credibility of interpretive research can be extended by providing evidence of earlier studies. Therefore, the study, while interpreting the analysis, compared to the previous findings on Generation Z, thereby fulfilling the conformability criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Results revealed that the present findings resonate with the research earlier concerning Generation Z.

No. of days	No. of participants
2 Days	14
5 Days	38
2 Weeks	56
30 Days	28

**Table 2.**  
Duration of  
onboarding program

Second order
Meaningful work
Performance management
Work-life balance
Personal connect
Bigger picture at work
Learning and development

**Table 4.**  
Second order themes

**Table 3.**  
Onboarding  
expectations (*N* = 136)

First order	No. of responses
Meaningful work	114
Performance management	81
Work-life balance	78
Personal connect	76
Bigger picture at work	64
Learning and development	56
Rewards and recognition	29
Innovation	28
Career development	28
Diversity and inclusion	26
Organizational culture	21
Internal mobility	18
Corporate social responsibility	16
HR policies	15
Core values	15
Leadership	12
Supportive team	2
Office events	1
Total	680 (136 × 5)

One of the fundamentals of interpretive research is the ability of the researcher to have clarity on the subject and write clearly. Besides, the researcher should be able to explore the phenomena from different angles and make a meaningful contribution. Therefore, all interviews with the participants are recorded and decoded. The conversations and the recordings allowed to elicit respondent’s experiences, perceptions and narratives. The conversations in the recording, which are relevant to the subject matter, are carefully examined, and few of the excerpts are mentioned in the discussion section to strengthen our arguments. The study followed the four-step criteria of dependability, credibility, conformability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to establish authenticity and rigor to the interpretive research. Transferability, the last step in the criteria, refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized. Such a study requires the researcher to provide detailed descriptions and assumptions. The results in the form of six categories from the focus group interviews are presented in the findings and discussion section.

**Findings and discussion**

*Meaningful work*

Managing expectations of Generation Z is an uphill task for the organizations as they have an idealistic picture that the work assigned to them is meaningful and exciting and that their ideas will be implemented by their managers (Schroth, 2019). Employees often feel their job boring, repetitive and mundane when the work does not energize them; as a result, their contribution to the organization may decline. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the managers to help employees understand the contribution and how their work is significant to the success of the organization (Pradhan and Jena, 2019). Prior studies indicated that meaningful interactions with colleagues, managers and clients have a positive effect on the innovative behavior of the employees leading to innovative and creative work solutions (Zhou and Shalley, 2003; Pradhan and Jena, 2019). As employees derive meaning from their work, they feel connected to the mission and purpose of the organization. In today’s business world, the work is less strictly defined. Hence, it becomes challenging for the organization to discuss the work in the onboarding orientation program, as jobs in the organizations often



undergo changes. Many, at times, the nature of the job depends on the client's requirements and business needs. Participants mentioned that when the purpose of the work is known, their contribution goes beyond the financial gains. On the contrary, when their work is not explained, they are not motivated to do, even though it is a small task:

As new hires, we may start with low-value tasks. If there is a way to automate the redundant tasks, we would love to give a try. Just because we are new hires, we cannot be taken granted to get unnecessary jobs done. We would like to know why a particular activity is executed and its impact on the client and to the organization.

Generation Z wants to have a clear understanding of the organizations' values, vision and strategic goals. Therefore, the initial onboarding has to set the stage in helping the new hires understand the values and objectives of the organizations and need to reinforce the values, so they are aligned to organization values. Unlike the previous cohorts, Generation Z values ethics, practices and the social impact that the organization creates. In a survey by Network of executive women (NEW) and Deloitte, 77% of Generation Z responded that they choose organizations not based on their innovative products and resources but based on the organizations' values and ethics that reflect their values. The survey also highlights that Generation Z likes to have an understanding of the other social initiatives and opportunities they get to participate apart from their daily routine. Therefore, to attract the right talent, organizations need to highlight their efforts towards social activities, and the values have to be manifested in the onboarding program. It is evident from the conversations that these cohorts think differently from the previous generations, while they prefer job security, financial security (Iorgulescu, 2016; Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Lanier, 2017); they like to do what energizes them and take up work that has a sense of purpose. A participant commented:

If the work is explained in detail, I will be much more motivated to complete the assignment. We are more interested in creating an impact from an ethical perspective. For instance, I would like to work for non-profit organization clients. While the nature of the work may be similar to commercial clients, I feel more motivated working for non-profit or charitable organization clients.

The findings from the study are in line with Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018). In their research on Generation Z's motivation observed that uninteresting nature of work, work overload, working with no sense of purpose are the barriers of motivation. Similarly, they identified that career advancement, career growth, and continuous learning act as motivating factors. The findings resonate with the thoughts of Bruce Tulgan (2013), the CEO of Rainmaker Thinking, that the structured and defined responsibilities with a sense of meaning enable Generation Z to work and succeed.

### *Performance management*

Generation Z is engaging and prefers instant feedback (Lanier, 2017; Chillakuri, 2018). In a survey by Inc. (Jenkins, 2019), 60% of the respondents indicated that they would like to receive feedback frequently. They are also described as a cohort that does not have patience (Opris and Cenusă, 2017). As digital natives, they want to obtain real-time feedback and prefer in-person feedback (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Lanier, 2017) rather than through workplace communications. The present study also corroborates with the previous research, wherein 66% of the respondents suggested to have instant and real-time feedback. Frequent and meaningful conversations with the managers help Generation Z understand the priorities and provide appropriate direction (Chillakuri, 2020). Moreover, they believe that timely feedback about their performance is essential to learning so they can focus on the improvement areas instead of waiting for the year-end review (Chillakuri, 2018). Participants, while emphasizing the need for instant feedback, also underlined the need for candid feedback. A participant mentioned:

We take up a job not just for salary but to contribute to the organization. We want managers to appreciate the good things we do; similarly, we want them to give us candid feedback where we have gone wrong. Instant feedback will help us to overcome mistakes and help us not to repeat in the new work.

Organizations realized the importance of frequent discussions the employees have with their managers. Therefore, multinational companies Accenture, Deloitte, KPMG, Microsoft, Adobe scrapped the existing bell curve approach of performance management and moved to a new system that is future-oriented than mere assessing the past performance (Chillakuri, 2018). Generation Z would like to know where they stand in reaching their goals and what it takes to reach the next level. As mentioned earlier, Generation Z values in-person, timely feedback, at the same time, they are career ambitious and likes to know opportunities for career advancement. A participant mentioned:

I would like to know more about the promotion process and what it takes to move to the next level, so I can start preparing from day one. I feel tenure should not be the criteria for the promotion, and if a two-year tenured professional is doing a job a manager, he or she should be promoted to manager. In fact, it will be a big motivator for others to perform well.

The respondents opined that they would like to have a deeper understanding of the performance management system in the organization so that they can develop their goals aligning with the system. Generation Z takes shortcuts and leverages technology to achieve these goals; however, in terms of performance and career progression, they want to make sure that they complete all the requirements for the next level. They have grown up during the recession and economic uncertainty. At the same time, they spend money on the bills, travel, and other interests, they are equally cautious about building wealth for the future earlier and thus expect to have high salaries (Deloitte, 2019). Unlike the previous generations, they are career hungry, eager to learn, and questions the status quo as to “why does it take so many years to move to a particular level” (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Lanier, 2017). Moreover, they often feel that they are ready for promotion within a few months. Therefore, the organizations need to discuss performance management and outline the career path during the initial days of Generation Z joining the organization.

#### *Work-life balance*

As a generation, who had witnessed the great recession, they are more concerned about the salary, perks, and job security (Iorgulescu, 2016; Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Lanier, 2017); however, they are equally vocal about work-life balance and flexibility in the workplace. Work-life balance is incredibly important not just for Generation Z, but for all the employees, and this generation values greater flexibility and work-life balance at the workplace (Opris and Cenusa, 2017; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018; Dwivedula *et al.*, 2019; Berge and Berge, 2019). In fact, Generation Z believes that it is a mandate for the organizations to provide flexibility as it only increases productivity and efficiency (Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018), and such a flexible work arrangement should be open and unreserved for all levels of employees. Frequent discussions with the managers build a strong foundation of trust, enabling them to operate flexible working arrangements. Flexibility could include flexible working ranging from the different start and finish times, staggered shifts and the denial of flexible work arrangement could have the impression that their managers do not trust them. Lanier (2017) defines Generation Z as more pragmatic, in a way that as long as work is not getting affected, there should be no reason for rejecting flexibility. A participant responded, stating that she would not like to spend her personal time for office work. In her words:

I want to work as much as I can in the office. But once I step out of the office, I just want to unplug from the office work. I would straightaway say no if my manager asks me to work on a weekend. It is

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important to balance both personal and professional lives. When I am in the office, I do not want to think about home, and when I am at home, I do not like work bothering me.

Contrary to this, a report by Priceline work-life balance (Priceline, 2019) that surveyed 1,000 full-time employees reported that 24% of Generation Z feel guilty taking any time off work as they fret that taking time off would provide an opportunity for others to judge their work. They are also under pressure to check emails and notifications, even on holiday. As a result, they like to avail of flexibility than taking a day-off as they end up doing some office work during vacation. They want to be independent yet collaborative when required, and as digital natives, they know how to connect with colleagues seamlessly (Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015). They are ready to relocate to any region for a career of their choice; however, expect equal flexibility on the part of the employers. There exists a difference of opinion among the researchers; however, the present study shows that Generation Z wants flexible work arrangements. People are productive at different times of the day, and therefore they appreciate the opportunity to flex their schedule to meet their personal obligations. In the words of a participant:

We understand that it is important to show up on time in office, but it is equally important to strike a balance between professional and personal life. By providing flexibility, we are not shying away from work. It is just that we are doing the work from a different place at a different time.

Our findings corroborate with the existing literature citing Generation Z values flexibility and work-life balance. Further, Morahan (2019) surveyed 1,000 Irish graduates, in which more than 60% reported that they place more value on work-life balance over career progression. The study also highlighted the different scores across disciplines with the medicine graduates (67%) rating work-life balance as a top priority. Therefore, the organizations must provide flexibility and allow employees to balance professional and personal life.

#### *Personal connect*

In today's business world, organizations change with the environment it operates. Digitalization and collaboration tools made it easier for employees and managers to connect from anywhere in the world. As a result, there is an increase in remote work (Felstead and Henseke, 2017; Bathini and Kandathil, 2020) aimed to provide flexibility in terms of time, space, and practice. It is beyond doubt that new ways of work allow an employee to strike a balance between personal and professional targets. However, the participants emphasized the need for personal connect with the managers and team members in the initial years of their career; that way, they can be absorbed in the organization quickly. In fact, they need human connections more and perform when they are engaged in intensive working relationships (Tulgan, 2013). Technology often overshadows the personal experience that the new hire can have through in-person discussions with the colleagues and the leaders. They view that personal connect with colleagues, managers, and leaders are more valuable in career advancement (Grow and Young, 2018). When inquired about why they prefer personal connect, a participant responded:

I expect my peers, seniors, and managers to help me understand the organization, culture, and work. I would like to have frequent connect with my reporting manager and preferably a face to face conversation than a videoconference or a skype call. I want to go to the office every day in the initial days until I believe I can do work from home. Personal connect with the team members will allow me to settle comfortably in the job.

Drawing upon the discussions, it may be suggested that organizations can conduct a department-wise new hire orientation session, during which the new hires get a chance to interact with senior leadership of their respective practice. Expectations from the managers

are on the rise; they are expected to coach, guide the new hires, thereby helping Generation Z to be successful in their jobs. Gen Z prefers collaborative learning than a “telling” approach, and this would be successful only when the managers relate to employees in such a way that maximizes their engagement, well-being, and performance (Schroth, 2019). A participant commented:

I believe a personal connect with my manager will result in increased psychological and workplace well-being. If my managers understand my personality, style of work, it will be easy for us as a team to be more collaborative,

The discussions are in line with the previous studies on Generation Z. Lazányi and Bilan (2017) studied the impact of earlier cohorts on the new entrants and identified that Generation Z values in-person connect. Gupta (2018) suggests that lack of interpersonal relationships could potentially lead to attrition; therefore, organizations should focus on establishing interpersonal relationships. Although this cohort wants autonomy and values greater flexibility, work-life balance, the organizations need to create opportunities to connect with other cohorts in the workplace.

#### *Understanding the bigger picture*

It is but natural that the new hires in any organization are assigned tasks by their seniors and managers. Most often than not, these tasks are small, redundant and low value-added tasks. Unlike other cohorts, Generation Z is more tech-savvy, and feel that low-value work can be automated, reducing the human errors besides guaranteeing the quality. Their dependence on technology gives them first-hand experience, and involvement in the learning process makes them active learners. A study by Barnes and Noble College (2018) surveyed 1,300 middle and high school students in the US reported that 89% of the respondents rated college education as valuable.

Further, they do not like to sit in the class just for attendance or merely showing up in the class; instead, they want to be fully engaged in the class and be part of the learning process. The study also reported that 40% of Generation Z take up careers that suit their specific interests, and one-third of them either have their own business or plan to have in the future reflecting their entrepreneurial identities. Due to their entrepreneurial orientation (Singh Ghura, 2017; Christensen *et al.*, 2018), they prefer transparency and honesty over anything. Participants shared their opinion:

Everyone in the organization is an employee, and I feel everyone works for the success of the organizations. I do not see any merit in managers hiding important information from the juniors. The more they hide, the excitement level increases. Knowing the bigger picture of the project would help us to understand the subtle nuances.

Generation Z is a lot more ambitious than the other cohorts and generally do not settle for the status quo (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; Chillakuri and Mahanandia, 2018). They like to take up challenging work, as they are self-confident, self-directed, and reliant on self-learning (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016; PeopleMatters, 2019). Despite being self-confident and hard-working generations, they experience more anxiety about work expectations. In a survey by SHRM (Wilkie, 2019), 44% in Canada, 40% in the U.S., and the United Kingdom reported that their anxiety is holding them back from job success. Therefore, the leaders need to set the stage right during the onboarding program, the expectations and the details associated with their day-to-day work. Another participant expressed that knowing about the job and the necessary information is very critical for the success of the job.

Knowing the bigger picture of the work helps us to contribute better. We want to put into practice what we have learned in our academics. During our internships, we were not exposed much, probably because managers might have felt that we are there for only two months. Now that we are

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ready to take up full-time jobs, we want to contribute to the organization, and that only happens when we are equipped with the necessary information.

Based on the observations and the conversations, it can be inferred that Generation Z values transparency, and therefore want their leaders to be transparent in their dealings. This particular finding corroborates with [Bencsik et al. \(2016\)](#) studies, where the scholars defined Generation Z as ambitious, detail-oriented, and therefore they would like to have all the details before they start the work.

### *Learning and development*

Generation Z is high on self-learning and prefers self-directed and independent learning, leveraging technology. As part of their graduate studies, they undergo internships, showing an appreciation for the need to bring practical skills as they begin their full-time careers. Being the first digitally native generation, they learn the much-desired skills relevant to their jobs and know that keeping up with technology requires ongoing learning. While they are keen on acquiring additional skills, they also expect the new employer to equip them with the necessary training, so they start contributing from day one. When asked about the type of information, they would like to receive during the onboarding, a participant responded

I feel organizations should invest in our learning. It could be in the form of classroom training or e-learning. The more we are equipped with the new tools, processes, and technologies, the more we are prepared to take up any new task. Once we have the necessary information, we would not like to depend on others; instead, we would like to work independently.

Soft skills such as communication, collaboration, time management, mentoring, coaching should be honed, and therefore, they require extra support ([Grow and Yang, 2018](#)). They prefer working in a collaborative group as they desire hands-on participation rather than listening to a lecture ([Seemiller and Grace, 2016](#); [Adamson et al., 2018](#)). To meet the learning styles of Generation Z, organizations need to adapt to technology, provide hands-on experience, offer self-learning courses, and be comfortable with this tech-savvy and on the go group. Besides, they like to prefer virtual teamwork over the offline meeting and wish to engage in teamwork only under compelling situations ([Bencsik et al., 2016](#)). [Wiedmer \(2015\)](#) highlights that Generation Z values autonomy at work; they do not want to depend on colleagues or team members, and therefore they like to have complete knowledge about the work. They are also uncertain of the future requirements, and a participant was quick in sharing that they would want to be associated with an organization that provides learning opportunities.

We want a stable job, and in this uncertain economy, we need to master skills that keep us going. We were told that smaller organizations do not focus much on learning and development. I want to be part of any organization that encourages learning and provides opportunities to learn skills apart from what is required in my job.

The respondent's conversations are in line with previous studies. In one of the first studies on the work motivation of Generation Z employees, [Fratričová and Kirchmayer \(2018\)](#) observed that opportunities for learning and professional development are a motivating factor in the workplace. Therefore, organizations need to focus on providing learning opportunities as continuous learning is perceived as the essential skill for career advancement and growth. The findings also corroborate with the studies of [Iorgulescu \(2016\)](#), wherein Generation Z, have a low proclivity to work in a start-up or small organization; instead, they want to be associated with stable organizations.

### *Implications*

The findings of the study have implications for both academics and practitioners. First, the study extended the understanding of cohort theory ([Meredith and Schewe, 1994](#)). The focus of

the study was not to compare the inter-generational differences, and so efforts were not made in that direction; however, the study presented a detailed literature review and investigated Generation Z and their traits and characteristics. Second, the study presents an understanding of Generation Z's expectation at the workplace, precisely from the onboarding/new hire orientation programs. The study advances the previous research by responding to understanding their expectations at the workplace (Schroth, 2019). Third, the study contributes to the HRM literature by adopting a Generation Z lens, reconfirming that onboarding is a very crucial aspect of human resource management function. In addition to the HRM literature, the study also contributed to Generation Z literature. Fourth, the study presents six important themes for designing and managing an effective onboarding program for Generation Z. It is important to note that the inter-generational differences are natural, and organizations have to live with it. HR professionals have to bear in mind that this is also an opportunity to revisit, redesign, and readjust their onboarding programs to suit the new employees.

### Conclusion

New hires bring talent, experience, skills and newer perspectives to the job. Therefore, investing in the new hires through effective onboarding programs ensures employees meet their potential, thereby contributing to employer–employee success. It is essential for the organizations to be ready in meeting the demands of the new hire, and designing a well-structured onboarding program starting with understanding the new hires' expectations, values, attitudes, thinking, behaviors, and why they behave as they do. The onboarding solutions that the organizations' design has to be consistent, personalizing, and should provide a positive new hire experience. Employees' experience of an organization starts from the day they give the interview, and therefore managers need to provide a realistic view of what job entails. In a survey by Glassdoor, 61 % of the respondents indicated that the reality of the job was different from the expectations set during the interview process (Mackay, 2018). Unlike other cohorts, Generation Z would not like to do a job for which they are not hired. Such employees tend to leave the organization during the initial months of joining the organization. There are certain expectations that both the organization and the employees need to fulfill; therefore, they should engage in a psychological contract (Schroth, 2019), and the violation of such an arrangement leads to poor performance and high turnover. Organizations that know how to engage this group are bound to be successful.

Strategies mentioned in the study would be helpful for HR managers to integrate generation Z into the workplace successfully. As outlined above, empirical studies on Generation Z is still at an emerging phase. While the current research detailed the expectations from organizations, there are certain limitations as the respondents were primarily business students. Future research can look into a diversified set and see if the expectations from the current study still hold good. Moreover, the study adopted interpretive research, and as such, there might be a higher degree of subjectivity. Therefore, future research can look at other methodologies to empirically establish objectivity.

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### Further reading

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