

Next-Gen Integration: Navigating the Onboarding Maze for Gen Z in Today's Workplace

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Abstract

As Generation Z enters the workforce, understanding their unique characteristics and preferences becomes crucial for effective talent management. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities associated with onboarding Gen Z employees into the contemporary workplace environment. Traditional orientation programmes, while valuable, often fall short in fully engaging and integrating this cohort. This study adopted a qualitative research design and purposive sampling was employed to sample the participants. The study was conducted at a university at a Centre for Teaching, who employs a large number of this cohort. A sample of 20 was selected for the study. The sample size was thirteen Gen Z employees between the ages of 18 and 25 and seven Gen Z supervisors' participants, who supervise Gen Z employees, were between the ages of 25 to 40. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and a thematic analysis were used to analyse the results. Evidence from the interviews reveals the expectations and challenges of both the Gen Z employees and the Gen Z supervisors and how these experiences differ. Additionally, this research explores participants' understanding and experience of participating in an onboarding programme and what a potential onboarding programme could look like.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Generation Z (Gen Z) or 'Zoomers' are the new generation joining the workforce. About one-third of the globe's population now belongs to Gen Z. Therefore, 2.56 billion of approximately 7.4 billion individuals are members of Gen Z. This age group constitutes an estimated 40% of the United States of America's economy and 46% of the South African economy (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Gen Zs must be recognised in the workplace due to their numbers in the workforce and the impact they can have.

This generation's sheer size and potential economic impact highlights the necessity for organisations to understand and effectively integrate them into the workplace. Integrating Gen Z into the modern workplace presents a multifaceted challenge for organisations aiming to grasp this cohort's potential effectively. Despite their digital proficiency and innovative outlook, traditional onboarding methods may fail to align with Gen Z's unique characteristics and expectations, hindering their seamless integration into the workplace. Moreover, there is a gap in the literature about customised onboarding strategies intended for Gen Z, considering their distinct communication styles, preferred methods of learning, and aspirations for career advancement.

According to Maloni et al. (2019), the top five things Gen Z values most in the workplace are (1) results, (2) promotion, (3) benefits, (4) future and (5) retirement. These young people have preferences that, in some situations, conflict with the organisational culture where they ultimately find employment. From an international perspective, we are at a critical turning point in the evolution of employment, namely Gen Z's entry into the workforce. Generally, in the past, getting your first job was seen as a rite of passage because it required you to start at the bottom of the ladder, learn how the business world really operates and perform tedious but essential tasks to gain more useful professional abilities. Technology and automation, however, have changed everything, eliminating many of the more laborious and repetitive duties (Deloitte, 2022). With these changes, the nature of work and the expectations for new employees have shifted significantly. For Gen Zs, who are entering a job market where many traditional entry-level duties have been automated, there is an increased need for comprehensive onboarding programs.

According to a study conducted by the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP), 78% of Gen Z employees believe that a well-structured onboarding programme positively impacts their job satisfaction and performance. Furthermore, research by Deloitte indicates that companies with effective onboarding processes experience 50% greater productivity among new hires. These statistics highlight the importance of tailored onboarding experiences for Gen Z individuals entering the South African workforce. Additionally, Newhouse (2022) agrees that a good onboarding approach reduces dropout and boosts employee engagement which impact customers' satisfaction.

According to Mangano et al. (2020), this generation appears to be driven by the desire to land their ideal job and the chance to develop their careers. Anecdotally, companies have experienced Gen Z making quick career moves to suit their liking more often than generations before them. The challenges faced by supervisors managing Gen Z employees reflect broader concerns about effectively integrating this cohort into organisational cultures and maximising their potential.

- Professionalism – employees struggle to respect hierarchy, exhibit entitlement behaviour and are unable to uphold good work ethic. This lack of alignment with traditional expectations can result from onboarding programs that do not sufficiently emphasize or model these professional standards;
- Time management – employees do not meet deadlines and struggle to balance their academic and work life, showing no sense of dependability. Effective onboarding programs need to incorporate strategies for teaching time management skills and balancing multiple responsibilities, tailored to the unique needs of Gen Z;
- Communication - unresponsive to tasks or showing disinterest in tasks among Gen Z employees suggests a need for onboarding programs to include training in communication skills that bridge digital and face-to-face interactions, ensuring clarity and engagement;
- They do not see value in different skills that can contribute to their growth; and
- There is a lack of integration into the work culture, and dissatisfaction with work conditions highlights the necessity for onboarding programs that actively include cultural assimilation and provide opportunities for Gen Z employees to connect with the organizational ethos.

In addressing these challenges, this paper explores several key areas. The problem statement and research objectives delineate the scope of the paper. will provide the scope of the paper.

1.2. Problem Statement

For organisations looking to tap into the full potential of this dynamic cohort, integrating Generation Z (Gen Z) into the modern workplace is a complex task. Gen Z, the first generation to be fully accustomed to digital technology, offers special abilities, viewpoints, and expectations to the workplace. Nonetheless, research indicates that conventional onboarding procedures might not adequately address the requirements and inclinations of Generation Z, hence impeding their smooth integration into the labour sector.

According to Harpelund et al. (2019), there is a disconnect between traditional onboarding approaches and the traits of Generation Z, which includes a heavy dependence on technology, a preference for diverse and creative work environments, and a need for rapid influence in their positions. This disparity could eventually affect organisational performance and impede the growth of a dynamic, intergenerational workplace culture by lowering engagement, slowing productivity, and raising attrition rates among Gen Z workers. Managing and understanding the Gen Z employees in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is complex to navigate and integrate into CTL's culture. As an anecdote, informal discussions and management meetings (internal minutes) within CTL have highlighted challenges in integrating Gen Z into the workplace. Supervisors working closely with Gen Z employees often report issues such as dissatisfaction with work conditions, feedback mechanisms, and perceived entitlement among this demographic (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). In the workplace, they are not conforming to the organisational culture, they have complaints about long hours that are not covered by their salary, they are dissatisfied with feedback turnaround time, and they seem entitled. This problem has contributed to a lack of performance and has demotivated employees which has resulted in high staff turnover. Several academic sources support the idea that a well-designed onboarding program can enhance the integration and effectiveness of Gen Z employees in the workplace (Chillakuri, 2020) in addition to this study.

Moreover, there is a shortfall in the literature about customised onboarding strategies intended for Gen Z, considering their distinct communication inclinations, preferred methods of learning, and aspirations for career advancement. Inadequate comprehension of these variables

makes it difficult for companies to design and execute successful onboarding initiatives that provide Gen Z workers with a fulfilling and productive work environment.

1.3. Research objectives

Primary objective

The primary objective is to propose an onboarding programme for Gen Z

Secondary objectives

In achieving the primary objective, specific objectives have been established:

- To explore the literature on onboarding and onboarding programmes
- To identify challenges and expectations experienced by Gen Z employees and supervisors of Gen Z in the workplace;
- To propose strategies for an onboarding programme based on the expectations and challenges found.

2. Literature Review

The Generational Cohort Theory (Thatch & Camillo, 2020) serves as a foundational framework for this study. This theory proposes that individuals born within a specific time period share distinct characteristics, values, and behaviours shaped by their unique socio-economic and cultural experiences. By applying Generational Cohort Theory, this study aims to understand how the formative experiences of Gen Z influence their expectations and interactions within the workplace. This theoretical perspective provides valuable insights into tailoring onboarding strategies that align with the specific needs and preferences of Gen Z employees, thereby facilitating their integration and enhancing their overall work experience.

Since Gen Z began entering the South African workforce, the workplace culture has undergone notable transformations. This generation, characterised by their digital savvy and value-driven approach, has driven a shift towards more flexible, inclusive, and technology-driven work environments. Traditional hierarchical structures and rigid office norms are increasingly being replaced by flatter organisational structures and remote work options, reflecting Gen Z's preference for work-life balance and digital collaboration tools (Heyns & Kerr, 2018). These changes highlight the need for organisations to adapt their onboarding processes to better

integrate Gen Z employees, ensuring alignment with their expectations and improving overall workplace satisfaction and productivity.

In a review of the literature, onboarding, orientation and induction is defined in the following ways.

- Chillakrui (2020) defines onboarding to welcome new hires to their new positions, familiarising them with the organisation's objectives, beliefs, regulations and procedures, integrating the new employee into corporate culture and including socialising the individual into a workplace culture, thereby helping the new hires adapt to interpersonal and performance aspects of the new job.
- According to Harpelund et al. (2019), the terms 'onboarding' and 'orientation' are frequently used interchangeably. Although crucial, an orientation programme is only one step in the onboarding process. Its purpose is to involve the new hires in various activities while educating them about the organisation for which they will be working.
- Induction is another component of the onboarding process focused on integrating new employees into their specific roles and teams. It involves providing them with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to be successful in their positions. (Schroth, 2019).

In the definitions above, orientation and induction are components in the onboarding process and are similar in nature but do not provide the whole process that onboarding provides (Chillakuri, 2020). It is obvious that neither of these definitions is all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive. In fact, the variations in terminology within the literature reflect the fact that businesses really approach onboarding in a wide variety of ways.

For the purposes of this study, I have used Chillakuri's (2020) definition of onboarding as the cornerstone. Although, Chillakuri (2020) also addresses the organisation's values, objectives and procedures, the definition includes and focuses on onboarding as a tool to help employees adapt to the interpersonal and performance aspects of a job, which will be looked at in detail in later sections.

2.1. The onboarding process and programme

An effective onboarding program is essential for every organisation. Wigert and Pendell (2019) emphasize that organisations should not only implement efficient onboarding processes but also connect these processes to other key performance indicators (KPIs). Each onboarding

procedure should be tailored to meet the unique demands of both the organisation and the new hire.

The duration of onboarding programs can vary, but consensus among staff and HR departments suggests that it should extend over at least one year (Maurer, 2021). This process typically begins with the job offer and can last up to 12 months, contrasting with more traditional onboarding practices that start only on the first day at the office (Chillakuri, 2020).

Onboarding programs generally fall into two categories: informal and formal. Informal onboarding, as defined by Bell (2019), involves new employees gradually familiarizing themselves with their roles without a structured plan. In contrast, formal onboarding is characterized by a scripted set of organized processes and guidelines that help new hires transition smoothly into their positions, addressing both task-related and social aspects (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Bell, 2019).

Chillakuri (2020) identifies three critical factors for effective onboarding from a study on Gen Z expectations: meaningful work, performance management, and work-life balance. Regardless of the format, Bauer (2010) and Chen (2020) argue that onboarding programs should include four key elements: compliance, clarity, culture, and connections. The compliance component involves educating new hires about organizational policies, rules, and regulations. Clarity focuses on defining job roles and responsibilities (Bell, 2021). The culture and connections components are vital, as they involve helping new hires understand their role within the organisation and how they contribute to its success. Supervisors play a crucial role in this aspect of the onboarding process.

Different organisations may choose various approaches to planning and implementing their onboarding programs, offering flexibility in how these programs are conducted (Harpelund et al., 2019).

2.2. Gen Z characteristics in the workplace

The Post-Millennial Generation (1996–2010), commonly known as Gen Z, made up 41% of the world's population in 2021 and constituted a sizable share of the labour force (Bryce, 2021). Generation Z members are thought to be the most goal-oriented of all prior generations (Schroth, 2019). Younger generations, according to Nabahani and Riyanto (2020), are more

ready to pursue better possibilities if they find themselves in advantageous positions, which makes it difficult for firms to retain young talent.

Gen Z is known for having high levels of ambition and self-assurance as its defining traits (Pataki-Bittó & Kapusy, 2021). They are also known to be realistic and willing to take what is offered (Parry et al, 2019). This generation is more entrepreneurial than generations before it (Magano et al., 2020). Dobrowolski et al. (2022) state that Gen Z youth are commonly described as ‘tech savvy’, internationally linked (in the computer-generated world) and agile.

Stahl (2019) adds that although being technologically inclined, 90% of Gen Zs indicated that they prefer visual and interpersonal communication in the workplace and that they would prefer to have an online or virtual call over a telephonic call. Advocating this notion, Gen Z’s like in-person interactions and real-time feedback. They do not wait for the annual report since they want to fix their shortcomings on a continuous basis due to their aspirations for their careers (Gaidhani et al., 2019).

People in Generation Z have favoured open, well-lit work settings that offer chances for both solitary and collaborative work (Schenarts, 2020). However, the desires of Generation Z for social connection at work have been the subject of conflicting studies in the past. According to Schenarts (2020), Gen Z likes to work independently before contributing to their group, rather than wanting to work in groups all the time. Yet, according to Hampton and Welsh (2019), Gen Zs also favour flexible employment arrangements that allow people to balance their duties both at work and at home. Additionally, they contend that if performance is unaffected, there should be no excuse for not introducing flexible working schedules (Chillakuri, 2020).

In the workplace, Gen Z individuals exhibit a powerful desire for purpose and fulfilment. They are driven by the need to make a positive impact in their organisations and society (Macmillian, 2023). An expert on Gen Z health and employment, the director of technology and mental health at Harvard Alumni for Mental Health, states that Gen Zs want to collaborate with people who work collaboratively and have meaningful work that gives them a sense of autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance (Peterson, 2023).

Berge and Berge (2019) suggest that Gen Z workers do appreciate financial benefits and have a strong need for substantial remuneration. While it may be possible that Gen Z values purposeful work over financial security, the contradictory research implies that this generation's workers may not fully dismiss money; instead, they place less emphasis on it than earlier generations (Dobrowolski, 2022).

Most of the research that looked at Gen Z and its characteristics has drawn its sample from developed nations with high internet access rates. Farrell and Phugsoonthorn (2020) remark that because researchers have not adequately considered people living in developing nations with poor internet connection and where the generation grew up in various societal settings, their findings might not accurately represent Gen Z workers around the world. Given the impact technology has had on Gen Z, there may be a great disparity in expectations, values and experiences between people from developed and underdeveloped countries around the world. (Sfodera & Di Leo, 2022).

Continuing with the notion that theory collected is predominantly from developed countries, HR departments of businesses should be conscious of many of these traits as things to watch out for when hiring, recruiting and keeping younger people. However, it is not yet time to make significant adjustments that are expensive both monetarily and in terms of time (Bell, 2019). Yet, businesses should consider the common traits that tend to hold true across a variety of sources and implement plans for those variations.

2.3. Gen Z career intentions and onboarding expectations

Following a review of the literature, Gaidhani et al. (2019) provided the Generation Z expectations for employers and the workplace. The Z generation consists of individuals who have their own demands and, as a result, have expectations of employers. The organisation must establish suitable working conditions to meet their needs. The Generation Z representatives:

- prefer transparency and treat self-reliance, flexibility and individual liberty as non-negotiable aspects;
- must be given appropriate freedom to ascertain themselves and get instant acknowledgment;
- favour face-to-face communication and want to be taken seriously; and
- wish supervisors listened to their ideas.

Finally, Schroth (2019), asserts that if Gen Zs had received clearer instructions and on-the-job training, they could have achieved closer to their supervisors' expectations. The generational divide has caused Gen Zs to have distinct expectations for the onboarding process.

According to research, motivated and educated youth are frequently dissatisfied after their first-job or intern experiences (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). So, knowing and understanding Gen Z, their beliefs, expectations, and motivations is extremely beneficial. Research on the distinguishing characteristics of Gen Z is still in its initial stages as seen in the section above because of divergent viewpoints among academics (Chillakuri, 2020). In contrast to earlier generations that focused on training early in their careers, Berge and Berge (2019) added that Gen Z anticipates continuous training from the start of their profession to the finish.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research approach

The research followed an interpretivist approach with a qualitative research design. This framework provided the researcher with data to comprehend participant's attitudes, interactions, behaviours and beliefs regarding onboarding in the workplace (Streefkerk, 2022).

3.2 Sampling

Non-probability purposive sampling was used. In this study, the population consisted of two groups: (i) employees that fell within the Gen Z age group and (ii) supervisors who managed Gen Z employees. Participants were formally approached through CTL which employed many students and informally through various communication platforms. Since the goal of qualitative research is to understand rather than generalise, the sample does not have to be representative of the population (Andrade, 2020). CTL is situated in a university that focuses on student success and therefore employs mainly students part-time and full-time students. Students were invited to participants through the line managers of the different divisions employing students between the ages of 18 – 25.

For the study, the first sample group consisted of 13 participants. The second sample group consisted of 7 participants (supervisors of Gen Zs) from the sample.

3.3 Data collection method

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. According to Morgan Brett and Wheeler (2022) semi-structured interviews are an adaptable interview style that can be used to collect a variety of information. The Gen Z interview questions differed from those asked to the

supervisors. The interview schedule for the Gen Z employees and supervisors of Gen Z employees consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The questions for the two groups were not the same.

3.4 Data analysis

These individual interviews and audio recordings took 20 to 60 minutes and then transcriptions of the interviews were done. Once the data was transcribed, the data was analysed using Atlas.ti. The data was coded by the researcher to identify the different themes that emerged from the interviews. The researcher followed a thematic approach in which various issues were covered in the discussion section, guided by the research questions. The thematic analysis focused on analysing meaning patterns. To determine significance, the researcher examined the themes in the data sets.

3.5 Trustworthiness

The researcher was sensitive to the 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 generalised. The experience of reading papers on qualitative research can vary greatly. There are numerous approaches for organising qualitative data and rhetorical frameworks for writing (Stahl et al., 2020). The researcher made use of the technique, data saturation to enhance the credibility of the data (Guest et al., 2020). To guarantee that the conclusions in a study are reliable, qualitative researchers must provide evidence of the following four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.6 Ethics

Permission from the department, which conducts the study among the participants, is essential to obtain (Arfin: 2018). The researcher followed the ethical guidelines of the UFS and the Business School. The researcher had sent through an email and letter to the Director of the CTL to conduct the research, followed by an email. When approval (ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2023/0568) was granted, the researcher moved forward with the study and specified who the participants were and all information relating to the interviews.

4. Results and Findings

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to gather data for this study. Thirteen Gen Z employees and seven CTL supervisors were interviewed individually and a total number of 10 questions were asked. The researcher employed codes during the thematic analysis procedure. A code is a name given to a word document that is used to identify and list the key aspects of a piece of data, such as an interview transcript (Crosley, 2021). The thematic coding of the data produced the following themes regarding onboarding: need for meaningful work, support need and support given, communication and technology. From the coding of the data of the Gen Z employees, the following were identified as expectations, challenges and support:

4.1. Need for meaningful work

Managing Gen Z's expectations is a challenging issue for organisations because they have an idealistic view of the work that they are allocated; they believe that it is interesting and relevant and that their bosses would implement their ideas (Schroth, 2019). Redundant work has emerged as a prominent subject, which emphasises how crucial it is to match onboarding procedures with Gen Z's expectations and skill set. Concerns about monotonous work and the need for more interesting and difficult assignments were raised by the participants. This is what a Gen Z employee Participant E had to say: "Um, the challenges that I've faced, it would be the redundancy of the work that we do. Because generally what we do is we contact students or different students from a specific list that we get. So, we do get a rapid response list. And what we do is that we contact plus minus 200 students and in capturing the responses or students' responses. That is repetitive work. So that's a bit of a challenge, um, in terms of that."

Consequently, managers have an obligation to assist staff members in realising how their work contributes to the success of the company. Employees sense a connection to the organisation's mission and purpose when they find significance in their work.

4.2. Support

An interesting trend among the Gen Z employees was that even though Gen Z supervisors are readily available for support in overcoming challenges and obstacles they faced, the employees feel more comfortable to reach out to their peers and colleagues for help and/or being self-reliant in trying to troubleshoot the challenges themselves. Yet, they have difficulty collaborating with other stakeholders and people in the organisation due to different generational personalities. Working together on projects or tasks was also an obstacle that was

raised by Gen Z employees. This can be confirmed by a Gen Z supervisor Participant F's experience: ". . . building close relations with everyone that they work closely with them and those that they don't work closely with them, because like, for instance, we're working with internal and external stakeholders, so they have to ensure that they build close relations with everyone, not only those that they are in office with."

Gen Z employee participants had very specific expectations when they came into the workplace and they persisted in their roles whether their expectations were addressed or not; some reached out for support and others opted to overcome the challenges themselves. According to Hughes (2020), Gen Zs prefer individualised training and attention, which can be seen in how Gen Z employees prefer going to their colleagues or peers for assistance.

From the coding of the data of the Gen Z managers the following was identified as expectations, challenges and support:

4.3. Communication

Communication was mentioned by Gen Z supervisors to be a characteristic that they struggled with regarding the Gen Z employees, knowing that they may be tech savvy and use their devices for everything, communicating in the workplace seemed to be a problem. Gen Z supervisor Participant B stated: "So, I do experience that I think communication is a little bit lacking. Or we just prefer different communication, um, types. I, I'm experiencing them to be quite verbal and they do the quick response thing. So, they would either send, um, a Skype message or a WhatsApp or quick phone call, but not so much phone calls if they can, or they just pop into my office. So, there's a lot of quicker communication, if that makes sense. And a lot of verbal communication. Um. We as we prefer to capture things on email also so that you have that track, especially if you're discussing an issue or problem or finding a solution up for the email track. And that is interesting to know that there is that communication preference difference that we have."

In this instance, the quotes above align with what the literature says about communication; Gen Zs prefer visual and interpersonal communication, having online or virtual calls or a quick pop in face-to-face (Stahl, 2019). Being technologically inclined, the most convenient way of communicating will be the most preferred method of communication with Gen Zs (Ran et al., 2019).

Gen Z employee participants' expectations were also different. Many participants thought that they would be communicating with their supervisors on a frequent basis, but it turned out that

the communication was on a needs basis. Many also indicated that interactions with people would be face-to-face but due to the new move to a hybrid learning environment, many interactions were online only.

Gen Z is engaged and are quick-to-respond (Chillakuri, 2018). Owing to the fact that they are digital inclined, they prefer instant communication (Machová et al., 2021). Additionally, the current study supports earlier research, which found that the majority of the participants recommended instantaneous and real-time communication.

4.4. Technology

One cannot overemphasise the importance of technology to Gen Z workers' professional lives. Being the first generation to grow up with access to the internet, they acquire the most sought-after skills for their employment and understand that learning new things is a lifelong learning process. Although they are eager to learn new skills, the results show that participants require training in the systems and technology that they need to use, as some systems challenge them, so they anticipate receiving the required training from their new workplace so that they can begin contributing right away.

This was clear from the data and indicated by both supervisors and Gen Z's. Gen Z supervisors thought that the Gen Z youth would be well versed in technology. Gen Z supervisor Participant F mentioned this: "Um, one of the expectations is that, um, they would be well orientated or well versed in the use of technology. Um, so that's the number one expectation, um, and that could be your basic technological platforms like, of course, your Microsoft Office, um, or even other, um, Technology engines here, things like your, um, let's say, you know, expect them to be well versed in social media, technological platforms as well."

However, this expectation also became a challenge that Gen Z supervisors experienced after having worked in the organisation for a few months, Gen Z supervisor Participant F said: "Um, so some might not be as familiar and others, and that's really where the challenge comes in, just to get them up to date or on the same level at least then. Um, because the way we then use these technologies is still different to what, you know, they've used it for in the past. Um, so that takes some time for them to get used to it."

Looking at the quotes, there is a gap between expectation versus experience when it comes to working with technology. According to the literature, Gen Zs were born into a world shaped by digital technologies and are tech savvy (Stahl, 2019). However, from the responses, we can see

that there is a clear contradiction and that Gen Zs may use technology to their advantage but need guidance in the workplace with technologies they have not used or seen before.

4.5. Support

The Gen Z generation indicated that they would like to be mentored by their supervisors. They need someone to rely on, someone who has answers to all their inquiries because they have not graduated with all the skills and information they need. Therefore, the need for constant support and feedback that Schroth (2019) identified, holds true, as seen below by a Gen Z employee G: “Yeah, I would say like, that would be my expectations being welcomed into the organisations and then having somebody that will guide me that has already been there for some time so that I can be able to be free and understand that, okay, this person was also in my state and then this is how they gradually adjusted to the environment.”

5. Managerial Implications

Integrating Gen Z into the workforce requires a thorough understanding of their unique characteristics, preferences, and expectations. A well-structured onboarding program should ensure that every new employee, regardless of their position, receives consistent and comprehensive information about the institution. This approach minimizes the need for additional orientation or department introductions, allowing new hires to start with a solid foundation that can be built upon based on their specific role and tasks.

A successful onboarding program should either be developed in collaboration with HR or function independently to ensure new hires feel connected to the company culture from the outset. Implementing a formal onboarding process helps new employees integrate seamlessly into their roles, understand their place within their team, and contribute to the company’s success from day one. Feedback from interviewees highlights the importance of such programs and expresses eagerness for their implementation, underscoring the need for a structured onboarding experience.

The onboarding process should begin with a warm welcome and introduction. New employees should be familiarised with professional conduct, dress code, interpersonal etiquette, and the transition from student to young professional through insights from experienced colleagues.

They should receive clear guidance on company policies, HR information, contractual obligations, and organizational rules, and be introduced to various departments and systems.

To foster a meaningful connection and commitment, the onboarding program should align new hires with the company’s mission, vision, and values. This helps in establishing a sense of purpose and belonging. Employees should be introduced to team members across different divisions to clarify roles and build working relationships. Effective communication channels are essential to keep employees informed and engaged, promoting transparency and collaboration.

For role clarity, the company should provide detailed job descriptions tailored to each department, enhancing understanding of responsibilities. Communication and feedback loops should be optimized using internal tools and channels to streamline information access and assist with requests. Regular check-ins should be implemented to monitor progress, address development needs, and resolve any issues promptly, demonstrating the company's commitment to supporting employee success and well-being.

Finally, training should be job-specific, covering tools, systems, and processes, along with a guided tour of the office and support for navigating work-related technology. Comprehensive training and support empower employees to perform their tasks efficiently and contribute meaningfully to their roles.

Duration of onboarding

To maintain continuous engagement, organisations should customise onboarding durations to the unique demands of Gen Z. This should involve a combination of fundamental training and ongoing learning opportunities. From the literature, onboarding typically ranges from six to 12 months; however, since there are different roles for which people are appointed, two types of programmes could be created: one for permanent and one for contract employees. In addition, the amount of exposure to the workplace needs to be considered to determine an onboarding



Figure 2: The ideal duration of onboarding an employee

programme for ad hoc or contract appointments. An onboarding programme duration could follow in sequence as illustrated in the figure below.

Hybrid onboarding programme

In this new digital era, it proves to be more beneficial than disadvantageous to have any programme in hybrid format. Some tasks can and should be done in office; however, some positions require work to be done remotely. Onboarding programmes that are recorded can help when employees need to go back to information or use it as a refresher. Having a hybrid programme will ensure that any type of interruptions that may surface, will be avoided and accounted for in a proactive approach. Gen Zs value personalised experiences and opportunities for self-directed learning. Onboarding programs should be tailored to accommodate individual learning styles and preferences, providing flexibility and autonomy in the learning process.

Onboarding mentor

Establish mentorship programmes or buddy systems to connect new hires with experienced employees who can provide guidance, feedback and support helping Gen Z employees navigate organisational culture, norms, and expectations. Pairing Gen Z employees with experienced mentors or coaches can facilitate their transition into the workplace. Utilise digital communication tools such as instant messaging and collaboration platforms to facilitate seamless communication, ensuring that Gen Z employees feel connected and informed.

Addressing challenges and expectations

Gen Z craves regular feedback and recognition for their contributions. Implementing a culture of continuous feedback and recognition, supported by tools such as performance management software or regular check-ins, can keep Gen Z employees engaged and motivated. Additionally, provide access to on-demand resources to cater for diverse learning styles and time constraints.

Organisations that include immersive technologies in training material can make sure Gen Z employees engage and practice digital skills required for their roles and to maximise the onboarding experience.

Overall, the implications highlight the importance of a comprehensive onboarding programme that addresses the specific needs and preferences of Gen Z employees, emphasising meaningful

work, effective communication, technological proficiency, and ongoing support throughout their transition into the workplace.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

As workplaces evolve to accommodate the influx of Gen Z talent, it's evident that effective onboarding strategies are pivotal for their seamless integration. Employers must recognise Gen Z's unique characteristics, preferences, and technological fluency, leveraging tailored approaches to foster engagement, productivity, and long-term success. By embracing innovation, adaptability, and a deep understanding of this generation's needs, organisations can navigate the onboarding maze and fostering a positive and inclusive work environment where Gen Z employees can thrive and contribute their unique talents and perspectives. Also enhancing overall employee satisfaction and productivity cultivate a thriving workplace culture for the next generation of talent.

This study investigates the integration of Generation Z into the workforce, focusing on the efficacy of onboarding programs in meeting their unique needs. Conducted at CTL, which employs a significant number of Gen Z individuals, the research utilized a qualitative approach with purposive sampling. Through semi-structured interviews with 13 Gen Z employees and 7 Gen Z supervisors, the study revealed key expectations and challenges faced by both groups. Thematic analysis of the data highlighted that traditional onboarding programs often fall short in fully engaging Gen Z employees. These employees prefer more interactive and technology-driven onboarding experiences, while their supervisors emphasise the need for a structured approach that aligns with Gen Z's values and expectations.

Gen Z employees value meaningful and flexible onboarding experiences that integrate technology and offer a clear alignment with the company's mission and values. Gen Z supervisors highlight challenges in managing this cohort due to discrepancies between traditional onboarding methods and the specific needs of Gen Z. Both employees and supervisors advocate for a revised onboarding program that better addresses these needs and provides a more cohesive introduction to the organisational culture and systems.

The findings align with existing literature which suggests that traditional onboarding programs often fail to engage younger generations effectively. Previous studies, such as those by Bauer

and Erdogan (2010) and Harpelund et al. (2019), support the notion that onboarding needs to evolve to accommodate the technological and cultural expectations of new generations. However, this study adds nuance by demonstrating specific preferences and challenges unique to Gen Z within an academic context.

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