

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Motivating Generation Z at work: Literature review & preliminary findings

By Ravikiran Dwivedula, Ph.D.



### Why this research is important

This research is important for management practice and theory. There is extensive research on what motivates employees from previous generational cohorts (such as millennials and Generation X). Generation Z is an emerging workforce, and therefore, research about this generational cohort is limited. Understanding its motivation has significant implications for organizations in terms of attracting these employees to work for them, and to retain them. From a theoretical standpoint, this study further adds to the research on employee motivation by focusing on an emergent workforce.

### How the research was conducted

We first set out to understand the status of current research on the topic. For this, we extracted 19 peer-

### What you need to know

The purpose of this study is to understand what motivates Generation Z employees. Generation Z is comprised of individuals born in the late 1990s. We wanted to know what the status of current research on the topic is, and also, what Generation Z workers find most motivating at their workplace.

reviewed relevant articles published between the years 2000 and 2019. We analyzed the text within these articles by a qualitative research technique called co-occurrence of keywords. Using an open-source software (VosViewer 1.6.10), we analyzed the frequency with which the keywords in the papers occur together. The more frequently the keywords occur, the more it means that they refer to a common research cluster or a theme. We also developed a survey instrument to be distributed to potential respondents. Our sample included Generation Z employees from India and the United Arab Emirates (where the authors of this study had worked in the past). This project is an ongoing effort, and so far, we have received 17 responses. The respondents are required to describe factors, which they believe are most motivating to them at work. The text of these responses was analyzed using the open-source software Voyant Tools.

## What the researchers found

The co-occurrence of keyword analysis revealed 33 keywords that were organized in five clusters. These five clusters may be understood as the underlying research themes. The five clusters are (1) Generation Z characteristics, (2) workforce expectations, (3) convenient generation characteristics, (4) inter-generational dynamics, and (5) workplace transformation. On the characteristics and expectations of Generation Z, the literature suggests that these employees are less optimistic towards work as their values are strongly influenced by an economic recession. Furthermore, as they are the 'digital native' generation, they tend to use technology to collaborate at work more than the workers from other generations. Research on their characteristics also suggests that Generation Z employees value opportunities for growth and more freedom at work.

Interestingly, on the effects of previous generations' values, research indicates that Generation Z is not influenced significantly by older generations at work. However, the older generations are more invested in their careers, which affects the opportunities available for Generation Z. Finally, extant research suggests that through their values-need for freedom, integration, speed, and innovation, Generation Z is transforming the work culture in organizations today.

The initial results from the survey of 17 respondents indicate that the challenging nature of work, opportunities to learn, and financial security are the three important factors to motivate Generation Z.

## How this research can be used

Understanding what motivates the young workforce can help managers develop reward structures and development programs to meet employee expectations. Organizations will also need to adapt their culture to suit the work values of this generation in the near future. It is also expected that the research themes identified in this study can be further

developed/critiqued to develop a theory base for the management of Generation Z employees.

## About the researchers

Dr. Ravikiran Dwivedula (Ravi) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Business Administration at Brandon University. His teaching and research interests are broadly in the area of employee motivation, human resource management, and project management. Prior to joining Brandon University, he has worked in India, France, Singapore, and Dubai. [Dwivedular@Brandonu.ca](mailto:Dwivedular@Brandonu.ca)

Dr. Poonam Singh is the former Provost and Vice-President Academic at the American College of Dubai.

Dr. Mehran Azaran is an independent project management and quality management consultant based in Montreal.

## Keywords

Employee motivation, Generation Z, qualitative research, co-occurrence of keywords

## Publications based on this research

Dwivedula, R., Singh, P., & Azaran, M. (2019). Gen Z:

Where are we now, and future pathways. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, XII(2), 28–40.

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Editor: Christiane Ramsey [Ramseyc@brandonu.ca](mailto:Ramseyc@brandonu.ca)  
<http://www.brandonu.ca/research-connection>

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