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HONORS THESIS

The Future of the Workforce Depends on Generation Z: A Study on Generational Workforce Preferences

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ABSTRACT

This research paper closely analyzes Gen Z in order to better understand their views, preferences, and expectations of the workforce. We are living in the era with the largest generational diversity to date. The idea of a multigenerational workforce has become an integral part of the workforce itself. With Gen Z's coming of age and beginning to enter the workforce in large numbers, bringing along with them a unique set of skills, values, and expectations. It becomes of utmost importance for businesses and organizations to understand Gen Z workforce preferences and expectations as the demographic group is determined to shape the workforce. As Gen Z will compose almost 30% of the workforce by 2025, it is time to deep dive into this generation's preferences and to adapt workplace policies and procedures. Understanding and accommodating workplace preferences is pivotal towards a productive, engaged, and satisfied workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time ever, the workforce is composed of five generations. In this era of elevated workforce generational diversity, businesses and corporations are forced to adapt and leverage employee's strengths and weaknesses, while being open to generational trends. With such differences in views, experiences, and expectations – individuals across generations perceive the workforce differently, developing distinctly remarked preferences and expectations of their workplace and career path. Generation Z, commonly known as *Gen Z* or *Zoomers*, enter the workforce faced with unique challenges, a worldwide pandemic, historic rates of depression and anxiety, record inflationary periods... Nonetheless, the cohort is set to revolutionize the way individuals work. As writers Tom Koulopoulos and Dan Keldsen (2014) state in their book *The Gen Z Effect: The Six Forces Shaping the Future of Business*, “one of the most profound changes in business and society is the emergence of the post-Millennial generation, Gen Z. While every new generation has faced its share of disruption in technology, economics, politics and society, no other generation in the history of mankind has had the ability to connect every human being on the planet to each other and in the process to provide the opportunity to each person to be fully educated, socially and economically engaged”(p. 8). It becomes apparent that Gen Z's coming of age and launch into the workforce will introduce new and transformative values that will shape workplaces around the world.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, labor projections present increases of only 0.5 percent growth per year over the upcoming ten years. This minimal growth in the labor force alongside an aging population pressures companies and institutions to maximize their human capital. With the Great Resignation underway, employers face an intensely competitive landscape. With this economic trend being increasingly dominated by Gen Z, the demographic cohort has proven its strong-minded interests, being said to be the generation that has led the Great Resignation efforts. The *Gen Z at Work* report published by ThoughtExchange asserts, “As the most populous generation, with over 60 million members in the United States alone, Gen Z is well on their way to becoming the most influential group in the workplace.” The arrival of Gen Z into the workforce has led to a change of workplace standards and agreements. New and specific demands, like extensive benefit packages and additional paid time off, have been introduced entrance into the workforce – shaping workplace culture and atmosphere. With Gen Z reaching

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working age and ready to enter the workforce, companies must be mindful of workplace trends and seek out ways to meet Gen Z's expectations if they want to stay ahead of the competition. The existing generational diversity possesses valuable advantages to the workforce, but results in discernible generational differences. The older generations are working longer and retiring later which creates overlaps as they share workplaces with younger generations that think, work, and live differently. These differences in attitudes, behaviors, mindsets, values, and personal goals lead to workplace differences. The presence of generational diversity may bring superior information and experience dissemination leading to tacit knowledge development and an innovation-driven environment. A lack of coordination and understanding among different generations may result in conflicts and poor productivity. A multigenerational workforce is now the current business reality and requires effective management strategies to fully harness its potential. Developing a greater understanding of generational workplace preferences and expectations is pivotal to creating a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

Studies on generational workplace differences and generational preferences have gained popularity over the last couple of decades as these pose implications on the wellbeing and future of the workforce. Grasping the specific work-related traits and inclinations of demographic cohorts, in this case generational groups, allows us to understand generational differences, leverage workplace dynamics, develop appropriate workplace policies, and plan for the future. While substantial research has been done on Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials – research on Gen Z is still in its initial stages. This research paper will be analyzing Gen Z's generational workplace preferences. It will further analyze the relevance of the upcoming generational workplace trends and their implications for the future of the workforce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the four largest generations in the workforce

Organizations are finding it hard to manage the needs and expectations of Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z all in the workplace. As per CIPD (2008), this challenge arises because the workplace expectations and needs of these generations are different, and Gen Z's work style and attributes are little known to the managers. Since the focus of this literary review is on Gen Z, it is plausible to first understand the characteristics of this generation, and the previous generations, and then proceed to identify the workplace differences.

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Generation Z

People born in and after 1997 constitute Gen Z. They are called ‘digitally native’ (Turner, 2015) as they grew up in the era of the digital revolution and are tech-savvy. Gen Z is more connected and visible through the digital and the electronic world, as opposed to the previous generations marked by relationships and physical connectedness. Barretta (2008) reports that social networking is an inseparable part of Gen Z’s lives, and they are highly extroverted and straightforward in communication and interaction. They are good risk-takers, optimistic, and tolerant of uncertainties.

It is, however, also found that due to their high dependence on technology and poor physical connectedness, Gen Z is impatient, materialistic, and suffers from attention-deficit disorder (Generational White Paper, 2011). Their risk-taking behavior makes them want to be heard and engaged in entrepreneurial activities. They are conscious of their surroundings and are committed to environmental issues proactively.

Considering their workplace preferences, Gen Z demands independence, autonomy, flexibility, and transparency in workplace settings (Bascha 2011). They want to be heard and to express their opinion in demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Their entrepreneurial nature does not let them take orders and follow them blindly. Instead, they want active participation and empowerment in the routine business functioning. Their dependence on gadgets and technology is both appreciated and criticized by scholars and researchers.

Singh & Dangmei (2016) asserts that Gen Z prefers working in tech-facilitated businesses and may not survive in companies functioning through the traditional models with minimal technological solutions. Bridges (2015) posits that Gen Z prefers mentoring and coaching opportunities in the workplace for career and personal growth. Corporate social responsibility has become a business norm – Gen Z prefers honesty, integrity, and openness in an organization’s functioning and the fulfillment of responsibilities towards multiple stakeholders.

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers are known as the largest generation, born from 1946 to 1964. This generation was born after the cease of World War II and closely experienced the Vietnam War. It was influenced by personalities like Muhammad Ali. They grew up following the ‘American Dream’ which makes them highly materialistic and ambitious in their personal and professional lives (Kapoor

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& Solomon, 2011). They believe in equal rights and opportunities for all and are loyal employees. They tend to question everything. They prefer living in the moment and believe in personal learning and growth. Since they lived through several wars and political and economic disturbances, they handle crises well and are eager to take responsibility. They possess good communication skills and are highly competent and competitive.

They are focused to achieve much in life, as such, their motive is 'work to live'. They want to retire late as they believe in being active until their last breath. This makes them fast learners with strong work ethics and a willingness to participate in business decision-making processes. They can work for long hours and highly value their extensive experiences. They are accustomed to workplace authority and are less likely to take entrepreneurial risks than the modern generations. Unlike the tech-savvy generations, baby boomers believe in 'face time' and physical interactions for relationship building.

Gen X

Gen X was born in the years 1965 and 1980. The generational cohort was brought up at a time of extensive layoffs, epidemics, and periods of uncertainty (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). They are characterized by individualistic traits, fast learning capabilities, preference for work-life balance, and diversity acceptance. They have been influenced by Barack Obama and witnessed the energy and water crisis. The generation experienced a surge in single-parent families, which influences independence and the ability to look after oneself. They are a fun-loving generation willing to balance work with life. Gen X is highly educated and believes in workplace diversity. They are less loyal but have high employer expectations.

They possess considerable tech knowledge which enables them to mingle easily with Gen Y and Z. Their attributes and values do not match with Boomers which makes these generations poles apart and highly difficult for organizations to manage. Gen X features competence, confidence, flexibility, ethical values, and a result-focused work style. They also follow the motive of 'work to live' and are willing to prove themselves by taking on additional responsibilities. They are conservative when it comes to money but highly value time.

Millennials or Gen Y

Individuals born between the years 1981 and 1996 are considered Millennials. They were brought up during the internet boom but are less tech-savvy than Gen Z. Digital technologies

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were in their infancy at that time and possessing a gadget was considered a luxury. Hence, Gen Y displays a high sense of entitlement, luxury, and self-assessment that often creates a negative impression (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Millennials grew up in the shadow of wars and the 9/11 terrorist attack which sharpened their political views. They have also experienced a wave of recessions which shaped their perspective on money, time, and interpersonal relations.

Millennials have seen the internet boom, and hence, they are more aligned with Gen Z in their technology-facilitated work approach (Dimock, 2019). They are too ambitious to be termed loyal to a single employer. However, they are multitaskers and sociable, which makes them high-performing employees if trained and coached well. They enjoy work-life balance, flexibility, and personal achievements at work.

Generational workplace differences

Differences in work ethics

The core values of Gen Z are more aligned with social and environmental consciousness than the previous generations (FleishmanHillard, 2020). They are no longer influenced by product or service quality when deciding the company to work with. Instead, they believe in the alignment of the company's values with their values (Deloitte, 2021). Organizations making a positive social impact and working with ethics are given more importance by Gen Z, unlike other generations that emphasized financial health and product quality.

Gen Z as an independent and entrepreneurial population is more inclined towards working in tech-enabled industries and start-ups to have diverse experiences. As a diversity-appreciating generation, Gen Z relates to differences in identity and orientation. Their work ethics are also guided by their focus on learning and continuing education as a way to develop their skills and remain attractive to companies seeking specific capabilities.

Differences in the preferred work environment

Gen Z is open to diversity and hence, does not believe in limiting their work locations. They accept projects and assignments in different work locations, onsite or offsite. They are not afraid of cultural, regional, ethnic, language, or gender differences when looking for job opportunities, unlike other generations that suffer from such stigma (Lanier, 2017). The attention-deficit challenges in Gen Z make them constantly look for new opportunities in jobs and personal achievement – their criteria for professional choices keep on changing, which makes employers

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struggle with policy changes. To prevent Gen Z'ers from getting bored, employers have to devise encouraging and challenging projects that focus on soft skill development (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016). This is because Gen Z is not as good at managing time compared to previous generations.

Gen Z acknowledges this shortcoming and is willing to attend training programs for self-sufficiency and personal satisfaction. Their continuous access to technology and remote activities justifies the current dynamic business context where working and learning goes hand-in-hand. Unlike other generations, Gen Z does not earn more by working overtime. Instead, they focus on learning and getting skill-based knowledge that is concomitant with their professional development and monetary achievement expectations.

Generational Assets

The four generations bring different skills, capabilities, and resources to the table which makes them valuable in their way. The Baby Boomers bring rich experience, discipline, dependability, stability, loyalty, and intuitive wisdom which help an organization stand tall amidst all circumstances. Boomers may be seen occupying senior positions for mentoring, coaching, and strategic planning activities. Gen X and Gen Y are flexible, adaptable, and tech-savvy which makes them paint the big picture of the business accurately. They are good communicators with multitasking capabilities that help the organization become more consumer focused.

Gen Z, the digital natives, have completely altered the notion of a 'job' that used to look like a box. Instead, they are making companies curate jobs based on the specific skillsets of people working within. This brings creativity, collaboration, and consensus, as individual employees are valued for their contribution (Flippin, 2017). Gen Z is an asset because of their innovative, youthful, enthusiastic, and constant learning approach that unites the generations together.

Generational Liabilities

Some believe that a multigenerational workforce can be a liability, but it is the world's reality. While the Boomers are usually change-averse and resistant to new ideas and work practices, Gen X and Gen Y dislike authority and commanding management styles. They prefer freedom and dislike doing menial or standard tasks which fall below their education and smartness levels. Hence, while Boomers may support a rule-based work environment, the modern generations may

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find it a barrier to their work efficiency and motivation (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016).

Gen Z, in particular, dislikes any fixed routine that hinders their autonomy and independence, and hence, their casual work approach may be conflicting with that of Boomer's disciplined one. This difference in ideologies and work preferences leads to disagreements, ego clashes, skirmishes, and conflicts that affect the work culture and reduce motivation and engagement levels.

View of authority, management, and leadership in the workplace

Gen Z looks at leaders and managers as their idols, shaping their work behavior and attitudes. They view the code of conduct, failure tolerance, influential personality, and delegation of tasks as essential aspects of effective leadership and connect with it personally. They like challenging projects, public appreciation, and a personal development plan that identifies their strengths and weaknesses and specifies ways to grow. While they do not like explicit authority or the idea of blindly following commands, they do prefer guidance and support from mentors in their early employment stages (Tyler, 2008). Gen Z considers their bosses heroes or idols if they make the right and ethical choices.

Unlike other generations, Gen Z is highly conscious of its workplace image as an active participant. Therefore, they like to discuss, express opinions, engage in problem-solving and decision-making, and pave their way for leadership skill development. In this context, Dimock (2019) states that Gen Z stays focused and motivated in a multi-generational workforce when recurring feedback is offered in a personalized and informal manner. They are receptive to such reviews because their propensity towards learning is the maximum when compared to other generations in the workplace.

View of salary and compensation, rewards, and feedback

When choosing a job, Baby Boomers and Gen X emphasize salary and the monetary components as they believe in 'work to live'. Gen Y and Gen Z, however, look at more intangible aspects of work profiles for intrinsic motivation. While salary is important, Gen Z prefers job satisfaction, security, mentoring, growth opportunities, and a good working environment for all-around development. This is justified by their sense of competitiveness in this dynamic society where an individual needs to excel in multiple skills to stay relevant. Kapil & Roy (2014) reveals that Gen

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Z can also be unrealistic with their salary expectations, even without any experience or skills to justify their employability. This is because Gen Z is also enrolled in higher-education programs while working.

Therefore, they consider their higher education as an entitlement for getting higher wages in the first contract. Employers, however, can find their constant request for support and mentoring to be a negative trait as it leads to increased costs, time, and efforts to provide for their learning and retain them on this ground (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016). Earlier generations considered money as the prime motivator for the workplace, which is a more straight-forward organizational aspect to manage by employers.

View of work-life balance

Gen Z is a fun-loving generation that emphasizes maintaining a work-life balance. They do not work to live like other generations. Gen Z likes to party, go out, meet with friends, have personal time-out, and have breaks from work to re-energize. A flexible work schedule is one of their topmost priorities when looking for job opportunities. Previous generations did not focus much on work-life balance as they grew up seeing long work hours as the norm. They resisted switching their jobs frequently, and hence, earning promotions in their only job was possible through hard work and sole focus on their jobs (Tyler, 2008).

Gen Z can multitask and be engaged in various activities simultaneously which makes them demand free time. Gen Z is confident of their capabilities; they do not tend to stick to one employer. Hence, they do not worry about putting their life's efforts into one job. Their positive and fun-loving attitude towards life often makes the work environment light and youthful, which helps foster innovation. In multigenerational workplaces, employers find Gen Z to be extremely helpful in combating a monotonous environment through their lively and professional attitude (Staglin, 2022). Their technological expertise in particular helps the other generations of employees learn from them to devise new ways of problem-solving in a more timely and cost-efficient manner.

In some organizations, the needs of Gen Z and previous generations are seen as complementing each other. Hence, organizational policies are developed in a way that supports older generations learn technical skills and professionalism from Gen Z in exchange for sharing experience and knowledge, and mentorship (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016). Other generations can

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learn adaptability, flexibility, enthusiasm, positivity, family focus, and connecting with technology as the major skills from Gen Z to stay contemporary.

Communication styles

The use of emails, social media messages, instant texts, and digitally facilitated communication modes are the most preferred by Gen Z (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014). They believe in instant exchange and closing the communication loop by getting prompt feedback from the manager or supervisor. Unlike other generations believing in formal communication, Gen Z believes in informal yet succinct messages using clear action words. They don't like to overexplain. Gen Z may not be good at deciphering non-verbal cues due to their dependence on digital tools for communication. Hence, face-to-face meetings, group discussions, etc. may seem a waste of time to them. They prefer connecting online to save time.

The previous generations believed in using formal communication as a means to respect the authority of a person within the organizational hierarchy. 'We' was preferred over 'I' to establish and retain the relations. Contrary to it, Gen Z is straightforward in their communication approach and not bound to an organization or individual. They consider workplace relations as a means to learn and facilitate their frequent job switching for better avenues. This may be seen as a lack of loyalty on their part; but their ambitious and independent nature does not allow them to stick to one organization or person for lifelong learning (Staglin, 2022).

View of Career Development Opportunities

As discussed earlier, training and development are revered highly by Gen Z to become relevant, competitive, and employable. In this pursuit, Gen Z is highly responsive to multiple training programs offered by organizations. McCrindle & Wolfinger (2014) believe that Gen Z is interested in training programs in soft skills like language improvement, time management, conflict handling, digital skills, etc. Internally, they prefer experienced leaders and managers transferring tacit knowledge for their fast development and climbing up the hierarchical ladder through positive reviews and internal promotions.

In terms of mentoring, Gen Z prefers tailor-made mentoring plans that suit individual learning and development needs which make employers brainstorm innovative ways of keeping this generation excited about their job (Racolta-Paina & Irini, 2021). The previous generations looked at training and career development as an annual affair that may be skipped as they were

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confident in their skills and capabilities. They considered their decisions as ‘victories’; therefore, general feedback helps motivate them. This is no longer valid in the case of Gen Z that always strives to get personalized feedback from mentors and peers.

It is found that Gen Z’s political views are open and ready to embrace radical changes in society. Fleishman Hillard (2020) assert that employers should accept their appreciation of political transformation (like same–sex marriage) to induct them into the workplace culture. It is also noted that post-pandemic, Gen Z has turned cynical of corporations because of their unethical means of survival during this crisis. As such, organizations should endeavor to keep their public relations and messages to be genuine to attract this talented population.

The trend of online business model post-pandemic connects the most with Gen Z, attributed to its tech-savvy nature. Hence, brands should prioritize attracting Gen Z to make them brand advocates. Gen Z looks for these aspects, combined with continuous training, development, and involvement in corporate social responsibility and philanthropy when deciding on available career development opportunities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Overview

In order to conduct generational research and analysis, data on the groups being studied must be collected. As the purpose of this study is to obtain generational preferences and expectations, a survey appears to be the optimal methodology. Through a survey, we can reach a larger sample than through interviews or focus groups, leading to a better representation of the population being studied and, therefore, higher accuracy of the results. As Bryant University’s student population is predominantly made up of traditional students, i.e., students under 25 years old who enroll directly from high school, we were met with a large Gen Z population to whom the survey would be addressed. The survey includes a majority of quantitative questions, and several qualitative questions for further depth and understanding of generational workplace perceptions. As surveys count with a variety of limitations, it became of utmost importance to develop a survey that was engaging and of manageable length in order to have a high number of respondents and prevent response bias. Qualtrics was the chosen method for survey distribution. The goal of this survey is to learn more about Gen Z workforce and workplace preferences and expectations, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents. Using a survey

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as our methodology allows for higher replicability and cost effectiveness – allowing for the continuation of this research, if desired, across colleges and universities across the nation in the nearing future.

The survey consists of eighteen questions (Appendix A), of which questions one through fourteen ask close-ended or multiple-choice questions and fifteen through eighteen present open-ended questions. Question fourteen presented quantitative sub questions which were ranked on a Likert scale.

This Qualtrics survey was shared through email and social media. With the purpose of targeting Bryant University students, some faculty members shared the survey among their students. All individuals receiving the survey were invited to fill it out, no matter their generation. This was done in the hopes of achieving a large multigenerational sample which could allow for interesting cross-generational comparisons. Additionally, to reach a larger population and gain a stronger sample size, extra credit was offered in some courses for Bryant University students and four gift cards were raffled as an extra incentive to partake in the survey.

Sample

To conduct this research, the survey was shared among a large population through email and social media. Individuals targeted via email were mostly Bryant University students. As a member of Gen Z myself, it was expected that an overwhelming majority of respondents were going to be Gen Z members. Social media opened the survey to anyone who wanted to participate. The only requirement stipulated to participate was to be of adult age, *18 years old*. Respondents had to agree to the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) to take part in the survey. Instructions to fill out the survey were outlined throughout the survey. All questions in the survey were mandatory and one answer per device was allowed. Survey response time varies across individuals but a response time of about 6- through 10-minutes was intended. For this survey, convenience sampling was utilized – the only selection criteria being willingness to participate.

Procedures

The survey consists of eighteen questions, which are viewed as the independent variables – as I counted with full control over the question selection. Respondents are considered the dependent variable as the ways in which they behave throughout the survey depends on the questions asked.

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The selection of questions was done after becoming familiarized with the existing literature by drawing observations to grasp Gen Z's possible career and workforce needs and expectations. The questions selected allow for the grasp of upcoming generational views, trends, and expectations. Additionally, some of the questions were selected as answer variations across generations was presumed. These independent variables touched upon a variety of workplace topics such as flexibility, work-life balance, benefits, compensation, and organizational culture. These questions were expected to yield good comparative results and demonstrate generation-wide trends upon their analysis.

The dependent variable for the study, its respondents, were invited to engage with the survey and answer the questions based on their thoughts and views of the topic. Questions were developed to ensure that answers were precise, so that these were reflective of the respondents' views. Upon IRB approval, the survey was distributed and was live for a week. The survey received 380 responses in the span of this week. Nonetheless, data was cleaned out to avoid repeated and incomplete entries, leading to a significant reduction of the sample. 184 complete survey responses were accounted for and further analyzed. Data collected was analyzed through IBM's SPSS Statistical software as it allowed for high-level statistical analysis.

Research Issues and Ethical Considerations

This research study posed minimal foreseeable risks as no sensitive data was collected, furthermore, complete anonymity was ensured. No identifying questions were asked throughout the survey. To protect member identity, an independent optional survey was conducted for those who decided to benefit from the extra credit and gift card incentives. As the survey involved human respondents, Institutional Review Approval (IRB) was sought prior to survey distribution to make sure that all survey items were appropriate for respondents. This project proposal obtained IRB approval (Appendix C) on March 6th, 2023 – ensuring that ethical principles and guidelines were followed throughout the study.

An informed consent form was included at the beginning of the survey and written agreement was necessary to participate in the survey. This informed consent form established anonymity and confidentiality, as well as research participants' rights. All respondents who participated in the survey were self-chosen, meaning that they engaged with the survey in a voluntary manner.

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RESULTS

The theoretical model utilized for this research study was an inductive approach. This “bottom-up” approach allowed for flexibility throughout the study as data collected through the survey was used to develop generalizations on the subject matter. Patterns in the data were analyzed and studied further and potential explanations for these patterns were identified. The Qualtrics survey got a final sample size of 184 respondents. The demographic distribution of this survey can be found in appendixes A through C.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

To achieve an accurate grasp on the data, questions were broken up to gather better informed analysis. Four of the questions presented were analyzed for the whole sample, without isolating any generational cohort. These questions touch upon matters that affect an entire workplace and of which work-related policies tend to be dictated company wide. As a consequence of the pandemic, professional environment has become a widely debated topic. More than ever, companies have developed flexible policies to ensure that employees are given flexibility around their place of work. It is not surprising that employers have allowed for such flexibility as this study demonstrates that individuals prefer a hybrid workplace. With a majority of 55% of the sample preferring this professional environment style, compared to the 35% that prefers fully in-person and only the 10% that would rather be fully remote, we can infer that the hybrid model is here to stay as more companies incorporate it and employees across different generations take advantage of it. In terms of organizational structure, our study shows a preference towards flat organizational structures over tall structures. 58% of survey respondents chose a flat organizational structure, expected due to the overwhelming majority of Gen Z’s in our sample. This type of organizational structure has gained popularity over the years since Gen Y established themselves in the workforce. “Millennials tend to be uncomfortable with rigid corporate structures and turned off by information silos,” (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018) an aspect that appears to have passed through to Gen Z.

In a world in which so many methods of communication exist, instantaneity and convenience have been prioritized. Individuals are more connected to each other than ever before, no matter the time zone or geography, thanks to technological advancements. However, the over-reliance of technology as communication methods has hindered personal connections, according to *The*

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Lee Group. Survey results showed that 64% of respondents prefer face-to-face communications over all technological methods of communication. This result is of immense importance as more workplaces are switching professional environments and, as a consequence, face-to-face interactions greatly suffer. While technologies are pivotal towards business development, personal interaction should not be forgotten – on the contrary, it should be prioritized for greater employee connectedness and satisfaction.

Over the past couple of decades, feedback has gained an important stage in the workforce. Feedback is crucial as it provides valuable information and insights that enable individuals or organizations to improve their performance, enhance their skills, and achieve their goals. 45% of survey respondents preferred quarterly feedback, in contrast to 25% respondents choosing monthly, 22% twice per year, and only 8% yearly feedback. As there is an increasing need for career control and an emphasis on job security, employees tend to enjoy quarterly feedback as it increases an individual's sense of purpose and permits timely intervention and resolution.

The importance of employee benefits cannot be overstated. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), benefits can boost employee loyalty. Traditional benefits appear to remain as the most popular benefits offered according to the survey: Health Insurance being the most popular, Paid Time Off as a close second, followed by Retirement Plans. Flexible Work Schedules and Life Insurance gathered a large number of votes as well, demonstrating the generational importance of flexibility, financial stability, and security. Unsurprisingly, some respondents added tuition reimbursement benefits as part of an attractive benefits package.

To better understand Gen Z's workplace preferences and expectations, the Likert scale statements were isolated by generation. To clearly understand trends, we utilized grouped medians – which allows us to determine cumulative frequencies. On a scale from 1-5, statements have been highlighted whether they present high frequencies, low frequencies, or unexpected frequencies. Scales that presented neutrality were not looked into further. Respondents agreed with a median frequency of 4.37 to the statement “I believe that on-the-job training is pivotal towards employee performance.” Additionally, a median frequency of 4.41 was attained for the statement “I expect formal training from my employer.” This is a representation of the high importance that developing training tasks and opportunities for Gen Z holds. A work environment of flexibility, belongingness, and connection has proved to be a strong trend for this

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generation. Gen Z respondents showed approval at a frequency of 4.11 towards teamwork in the workplace as large tasks become more digestible which leads better overall performance. Gen Z'ers also enjoy getting to know their coworkers on a personal level. Control and autonomy over work is believed to lead to better performance at a frequency of 4.14 by survey respondents – furthering away from previous micromanagement trends. However, multitasking is not as popular, showing an approval frequency of 3.52, demonstrating a preference to work on one project at a time. In terms of seniority and supervision, while Gen Z'ers are somewhat comfortable about working with someone 20 years or older (3.80 grouped median), a higher resistance towards having a younger supervisor is shown at a 3.39 frequency.

Respondents seem to prefer working at large corporations over small corporations at a frequency of 3.77 as it allows for greater networking opportunities; as Accenture Strategy Report on *Gen Z Rising* (2017) claims “With salary and training high on their list, large employers are better positioned than their smaller counterparts to provide the complete package: A strong career path with mentoring, training and competitive compensation.”

With diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives gaining traction and a necessary spotlight throughout the workforce, Gen Z'ers rate these highly – emphasizing equitable opportunities for all employees (4.40), the importance of workplace diversity as a driver of retention and satisfaction (4.23), the competitive-advantage given by bilingualism and multilingualism (4.24), and the necessity of reporting biases and discriminatory actions within the workforce (4.36).

Interestingly, Gen Z'ers expect feedback flow both from the employer side but also being able to contribute to the organization with their own feedback as it leads to a better workplace environment, scoring highly with a 4.40 grouped median. As the generation suffers from historically high rates of anxiety and depression, they value initiatives that promote and expand mental health to their place of work (4.14).

Gen Z highly prioritizes having control and autonomy over their careers, desiring a clear career path and stability (4.25). They are willing to change companies until they feel satisfied with their roles. The statement “I expect to stay in my first role after graduation for more than five years” only showed a 3.0 of approval frequency – we can expect Gen Z to job hop, especially during the beginning of their careers. Salary might not be the best strategy to retain Gen Z as the approval rate for this statement showed a 3.51 frequency rate. However, they do value companies and

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organizations that emphasize pay transparency as it leads to a more equitable workforce (4.14). As it was expected, Gen Z has a high level of acquaintance with technology and feels comfortable using it for their day-to-day work tasks (4.42). The emerging trend of the 4-day work week, currently on trial by many companies, as it has been proven that “shortening the workweek could help stem the alarming spike in burnout and overwork while increasing productivity,” is attractive to Gen Z’s which demonstrated its appeal with a 4.35 approval frequency rate.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

When considering qualitative data, we focused on repeated statements that led to the formation of generational trends. As work-life balance has been largely discussed over the last couple of years, we wanted to understand what Gen Z’s understood of work-life balance – especially as they are just entering the workforce. Being able to have a clear discernment between work time and personal time was the most repeated statement. Gen Z feels that life is not only about work and that having time for themselves and loved ones is equally important, or even more important, than work. The generation prioritizes rest and mental health, time for fun, and achievements outside of work. One respondent summarized the general feel and importance of work-life balance as follows, "Work and life balance" has always been a consideration when I choose to work. The working day is nine to six, no overtime, two days off, and the boundary between work and life is clear. Work is not taken home. After work, personal time is completely undisturbed, and there is sufficient time to accompany family and develop interests. Work and life do not delay each other." Professionalism is widely used in a variety of job postings, descriptions, and company expectations but it can have a multiplicity of meanings. For Gen Z, to be professional is not only about being respectful, competent, and displaying a businesslike etiquette but also about establishing boundaries between your private life and work life – relating to the importance of work-life balance.

The workforce is rapidly changing, external factors like technological advancements have a big influence on the rate of change. While important advancements have been accomplished, a lot of unproductive and destructive traits still reign. Gen Z is focused on creating a more equitable, accessible, and human workforce. This was reflected in the open question of “What do you believe needs to change in the current workforce?” Gen Z places an emphasis on increased and

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equitable pay structures, bigger focus on employee's mental health and burnout, eliminating the expectation to work off-hours, measuring performance over hours worked, 4-day work weeks, and leaving behind discriminatory, biased, and limiting beliefs. Gen Z trends are clearly outlined and remain consistent through their rhetoric – as seen by the trends mentioned in the question's answer and throughout the analysis.

Summary of Results

Throughout the analysis of the survey results, strong trends were identified and highlighted. These themes are of great importance for employers to consider for the positive development of the workforce. Among the strongest trends were diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, workplace flexibility, comprehensible benefit packages, work-life balance, culture belongingness, job stability, and 4-day work weeks. The trends identified are indicators of the changes and adaptations necessary for the workforce to continue developing and growing. Gen Z can be expected to demand and generate these groundbreaking changes in the workforce.

DISCUSSION

Significance of Results

Generational studies are of great importance for the development of our society. Furthering from workforce studies, generational research allows us to understand in which ways people's perceptions of the world are shaped by formative experiences. Generations are impacted by world events during specific age ranges - historic events, pop culture, environmental events, development of new technologies, political situations, shape cohorts' views in specific ways. Gen Z was brought up in the era of internet, social media, global warming, polarized politics, and Covid-19, to mention a few. Without proper understanding of Gen Z, organizations will face difficulties hiring and retaining them, limiting the sustainable growth of these organizations. By achieving an understanding of Gen Z, organizations can determine more apt organizational policies, adapt recruitment and workplace strategies to achieve higher retention and satisfaction rates among their employee body. As Gen Z is entering the workforce in large numbers, composing nearly 30% of the workforce by 2025, understanding and analyzing generational trends becomes of greatest importance.

Through this study, significant trends were found. Gen Z's sense of belongingness must be fulfilled throughout different organizational strategies and workplace culture. It is a driver of

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performance and satisfaction. Control and autonomy over work are highlighted trends for the generation, similarly to flexibility in the workplace and one's work. As a survey respondent commented "As long as the work is done in time, why should it matter the time one worked on it." Gen Z'ers enjoy workplace support by being offered a wide variety of benefits, alongside high salaries. When it comes to salaries, individuals enjoy transparency in terms of pay transparency – promoting fairness and reducing discrimination through payroll. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives are highly valued by Gen Z's, as these are drivers of innovation and engagement. As Gen Z's enjoy having ownership of their career and lives, they look out for employers who might open new doors for them. Gen Z'ers are obstinate about what they want and how they want it, while being flexible, dependable, and open-minded. Meeting Gen Z's needs and expectations is pivotal towards building a 21st century workforce, founded upon productivity and engagement.

Importance

As Gen Z is the largest demographic group set to join the workforce over the next decade, expected to account almost 30% of the workforce by 2025, it is important to largely study this group and gain a firm grasp around their preferences, perceptions, and expectations. As the HR field diversifies and gains notoriety for its value proposition, it is pivotal for HR professionals to really understand what employees are looking for. In today's rapidly changing and increasingly competitive work environment, it is essential for businesses and corporations to adapt their policies and logistics accordingly. By doing so, businesses are able to attract and retain talented employees. This rising generation has different expectations about work-life balance, career control, and the flexibility of work arrangements. By understanding these expectations, businesses can develop more appropriate policies to offer increased flexibility around work arrangements, more opportunities for career growth, and better work-life balance, all of which can help to attract, satisfy, and retain their employees – leading to improved productivity and performance. Businesses who understand and meet these rising demands will achieve a competitive advantage in regard to their competitors, allowing for higher sustainability within their industry, and ultimately an elevated value proposition for its stakeholders.

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Limitations

Several limitations could have hindered the accuracy of the results of this study and, therefore, must be addressed in further detail to allow for a future study with lesser constraints. Limitations to this study include sampling method utilized, data being self-reported, a biased demographic sample, and research bias through the offering of incentives. As convenience sampling was used to gather data for this study, it must be acknowledged that convenience sampling contains a variety of limitations. By collecting data this way, it is unlikely, not to say impossible, that the sample achieved is representative of the population being studied. This restricts the generalizability of the data. As the survey was distributed among a limited group of individuals, of which only some decided to engage with the survey, we can infer that the data collected may represent only partially the subject studied. Similarly, self-reported data may present exaggerations, a lack of truthfulness – if respondents feel the need to fit the perceived status quo, or respondents depicting themselves inaccurately. While there was an attempt to get a representative ethnic demographic, 71.7% of our sample is white. Gen Z being the most diverse generation to date and the first generation having a non-white majority, this ethnical breakdown is clearly unrepresentative of the generation focused throughout this study. Nonetheless, this skewness was expected as Bryant University is a predominantly white institution and it served as the main channel of distribution for the survey. To achieve a larger sample, incentives were offered to respondents in the forms of extra credit and gift cards. While these forms of incentives are ethical ways to influence participants, they might lead to research bias. Respondents may have felt interested in partaking in the research because of the incentives offered and could have presented unreal answers – through lack of attention to the questions, rapid response times, or duplicated entries. While there was an effort to eliminate responses which appeared to have such characteristics. It is difficult to assess if we were fully successful in such endeavors.

All social and behavioral studies will face limitations. For the continuation of this research, achieving a greater, more diverse sample could suppress some of the limitations faced throughout this study. Collecting sufficient data is important to support the research question and avoid any potential biases or limitations of the data.

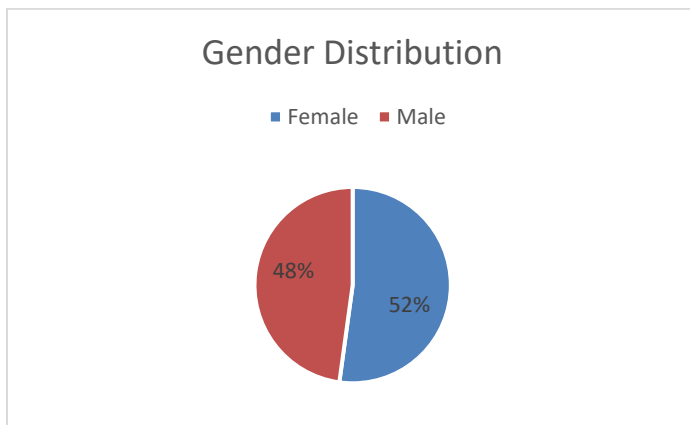
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CONCLUSION

Generation Z will compose nearly 30% of the workforce by 2025. Throughout this study, Gen Z'ers have proven to be shifting workplace environments, expectations, and rules as the most diverse generation in history. Gen Z is not only open to change but a propeller of change. While navigating what they want and how they want it, they know very well what they do not want. They expect clear boundaries between work and their personal lives but enjoy creating meaningful connections with coworkers – even outside of the work environment. They value fair and equitable salaries but are driven by a strong work culture and belongingness. They are firm believers that when diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are prioritized, these can lead to a more innovative, dynamic, and satisfied workplace. Gen Z'ers want to feel ownership and control over their careers – while they show loyalty towards organizations that treasure them as employees, they are not scared to move around seeking better and bigger opportunities. They are open-minded, perseverant, adaptable, ambitious, proactive, and entrepreneurial. Businesses must be open to different ways of working and diverse work ethics. Gen Z talent will help drive any organization that believes and invests in them. Attracting and retaining Gen Z talent will become increasingly important in the upcoming years as they will become one of the largest demographic groups in the workforce. It is of utmost importance to understand and consider Gen Z workforce expectations and preferences as they will make sure these are met once they achieve greater power and influence in the working world.

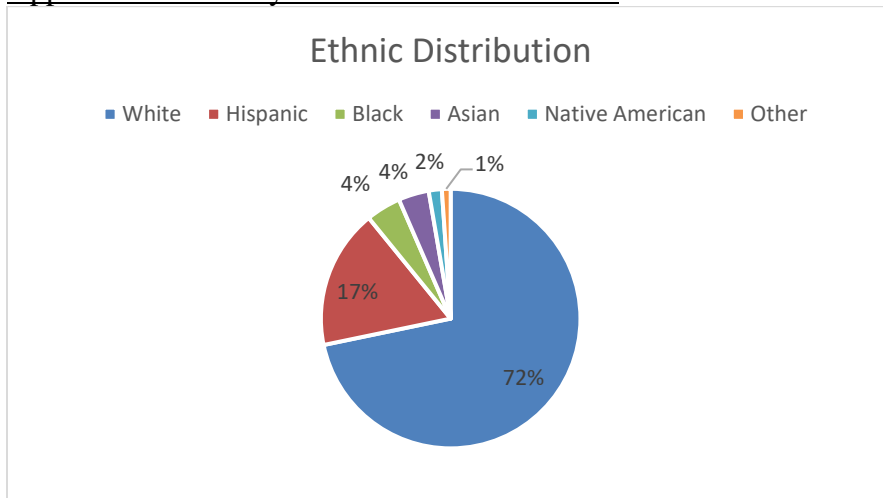
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Survey Gender Distribution Chart

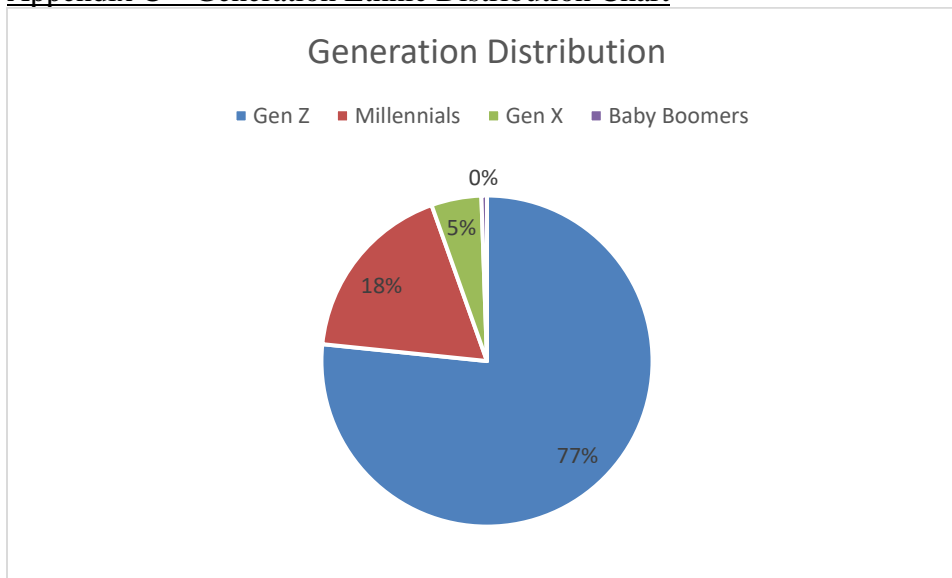


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Appendix B – Survey Ethnic Distribution Chart



Appendix C – Generation Ethnic Distribution Chart



Appendix D – Survey Instrument

Demographics

- Year of Birth
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Educational attainment
- Employment status

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Workplace Preferences

1. Would your ideal workplace be fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid:
 - Fully in-person
 - Fully remote
 - Hybrid

2. Which format do you prefer to communicate in at work?
 - Face-to-face
 - Emails
 - Phone Calls
 - Messages
 - Handwritten notes

3. Would you prefer working in a flat organization (fewer levels, wider spans of control) or a tall organization (many levels/hierarchies):
 - Flat organization
 - Tall organization

4. With what frequency would you like to be trained at work?
 - Monthly
 - Quarterly
 - Semesterly
 - Yearly

5. What would your ideal feedback time frame be at work:
 - Bi-weekly
 - Monthly
 - Quarterly
 - Semesterly
 - Yearly

6. Which benefits do you expect from your employer? (multiple choice)
 - Health Insurance
 - Paid Time Off (PTO)
 - Retirement Plan Benefits
 - Flexible Work Schedule
 - Dental Insurance
 - Pet Insurance
 - Life Insurance
 - Paid family leave
 - Mental Health Insurance
 - Disability Insurance
 - Professional development and educational benefits
 - Other: _____

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7. Which qualities do you feel that you have?

Dependable	Progressive
Straightforward	Entrepreneurial
Tactful	Global
Loyal	Achievement-oriented
Optimistic	Open-minded
Competitive	Civic
Workaholic	Competitive
Team-oriented	Independent
Flexible	Skeptical
Informal	

8. What is the highest level of education you plan to pursue?

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctorate, Ph.D.

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- “I believe that on-the-job training is pivotal towards employee performance.”
- “I expect formal training from my employer.”
- “I perform best when given control and autonomy over my work.”
- “I enjoy working with others as it allows me to break down complex tasks and perform more effectively.”
- “I believe that a four-day workweek would boost my performance and productivity.”
- “I enjoy getting to know my coworkers on a personal level.”
- “I thrive by carrying out multiple projects at once.”
- “It is a must that my employer meets my needs.”
- “I would feel comfortable to work directly with someone who is more than 20 years older than myself.”
- “I would not mind working under a supervisor younger than myself.”
- “I desire a clear career path and stability.”
- “Employers should provide equitable opportunities for all their employees.”
- “I would prefer to work at a smaller company after graduation that allows for professional self-discovery.”
- “I would prefer to work at a large corporation after graduation that allows for countless networking opportunities.”
- “I plan to open my own business or venture at some point in the future.”
- “Workplace diversity is pivotal towards employee retention and satisfaction.”

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- “Being bilingual/multilingual (proficient in more than one language) gives an individual a competitive advantage in the workplace.”
- “Reporting incident biases and discriminatory actions to the proper authorities is important for workplace satisfaction and safety.”
- “Having a bachelor’s degree is necessary for the current job market.”
- “Having a master’s degree is becoming a necessity necessary for the current job market.”
- “I would be willing to relocate for work purposes if given relocation assistance.”
- “I believe that working outside of work hours is unacceptable.”
- “I expect to stay in my first role after graduation for more than five years.”
- “Salary is the most important factor when considering a position.”
- “Pay transparency is important to achieve a more equitable workplace.”
- “I am comfortable to use technology for my daily tasks at work.”
- “Communicating feedback to supervisors is beneficial for a better workplace environment.”

Open-ended Questions

1. What do you understand of work-life balance in a brief sentence?
2. What are three indispensable qualities that are necessary for the current workforce?
3. What do you believe needs to change in the current workforce?
4. What does it mean to be professional in the workplace?

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: “Gen Z workforce preferences”

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Kathryn Ostermeier, Bryant University (Department of Management)

Student Investigator: Laura Urgal, Bryant University

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to the preferences of Generation Z in the working environment.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to respond to several questions, as well as some demographic questions that will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: The risks associated with submitting this survey are similar to a person’s normal use of the internet to confidentially provide personal information to another party.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: The study is not expected to directly benefit you, but the information you provide will enable a deeper understanding of generational workplace perceptions.

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Compensation for Participants: For participating in the survey, you will receive extra credit as determined by your course instructor. Your identifying information will be removed from the data after you are marked to receive credit for your participation. If you do not wish to participate in the study, a non-research alternative way to earn the extra credit points that is equivalent to the same amount of time and effort as participating in the study will also be provided by the instructor.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Any provided information that indicates your identity will be removed after you are marked to receive your extra credit. The information pertinent to the study will be made anonymous and any published information will not be traceable back to you. Your name will not be made publicly available in any analysis of the data.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Kathryn Ostermeier at kostermeier@bryant.edu and Laura Urgal at lurgal@bryant.edu.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your participation in the survey confirms that you have read all of the above and that you agree to all of the following:

- Laura Urgal has explained the study to you and answered all your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant, and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- Please print a copy of this notice for your records.

If you are at least 18 years old and agree to participate in the survey, press the continue button >> at the bottom right-hand corner of this page.

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Appendix F – IRB Approval



March 2023

Laura Urgal, Kathryn Ostermeier:

RE: IRB Proposal #2023-0306c
TITLE: Gen Z workforce preferences

Dear Laura and Kathryn:

Your proposal, entitled “Gen Z workforce preferences” was considered under IRB Guidelines for expedited review. The IRB Committee of Bryant University approved the proposal on March 6, 2023.

Bryant University is strongly committed to adhering to the basic ethical principles related to the conduct of research involving human subjects as set forth in *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. The submission of your proposal to the IRB Committee supports the goals of Bryant University and the IRB Committee and ensures that research involving any members of the Bryant community is in strict accordance with these ethical principles and guidelines.

Thank you for your submission, and good luck with your research.

Very truly yours,

Sukki Yoon
Chair, IRB Committee

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