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Southeastern University - Lakeland

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGERS REGARDING STRENGTHS

AND GAPS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF GENERATION Z EMPLOYEES

By

TORI LANETTE HERSEY

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Organizational Leadership

Southeastern University
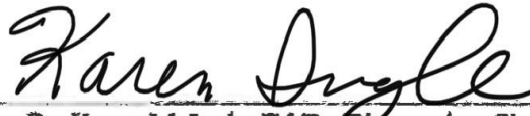March, 2021

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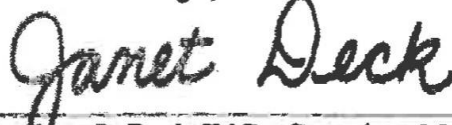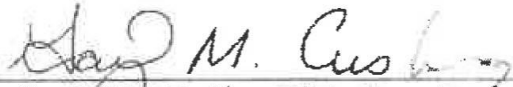
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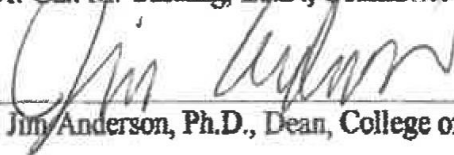
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_____

Dr. Janet L. Deck, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____

Dr. Gail M. Cushing, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____

Dr. Jim Anderson, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my seven heroes. First to Jesus who gave me the strength and desire to do this, thank you Lord for raising me up to be more than I can be alone; to my Granddaddy, Coma Crenshaw, who told me to get my education; and to my mama Betsy Hersey and daddy Elbert Hersey who taught me to work hard and do my best. I did it, Daddy! I love y'all, and I hope you are all proud of me in Heaven.

I dedicate this entire achievement to the two who inspire and amaze me every day, my angels on Earth, my boys. My sun and moon, John David and Bryar Schenck, I honor and thank you as you have made the biggest sacrifice to help me and have done everything you could to support me throughout this process. I will forever be your #1 fan as you have been mine! Your existence will be my most precious blessing and proudest accomplishment for all of eternity. Thank you for being amazing people! I love you and thank God for you, today and always! (I.L.Y.F.I.L.Y.F.A.A.L.A.I.L.M.B.Y.B & I.L.Y.E.B.Y.T.E.M.T.T.C.B.I.G100%.Google%)

Thank you to my incredible boyfriend Brian Gentry (Tree) who reminded me daily that I could do this, kept me grounded, and picked up my slack when I needed it. God knew *it was always you* that I needed. I love you with my heart and soul! Thank you for loving me. I would not have finished this doctorate without the self-sacrifice of you three. You all are my favorites, my treasures, my heroes, and you make life the best!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Abstract

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Generation Z is defined in the study as individuals born between the years 1997-2012. Managers of seven occupations, including a state prison facility, first responder, retail, restaurant, transport refrigeration, and grocery industries were asked open-ended questions and personally interviewed to determine any perceived strengths or gaps in the knowledge and skills of the employees falling into the Generation Z cohort. Strengths reported by the managers concerning Generation Z employees were that some employees were technologically savvy, can multi-task, and will take on a challenge that has a clear personal benefit. The gaps noted by the managers included that some Generation Z employees demonstrated poor work ethic, an inability to solve problems quickly, and minimal respect for others. The data were analyzed, and four themes emerged: technology, communication, life skills, and work ethic. Further research could investigate workforce dynamics as the Generation Z employees establish mutually beneficial relationships with their managers in the workplace environment. Additional research may include determining if training programs should be developed to narrow any gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees perceived by the managers prior to the employees entering the workforce.

*Keyword*s: Generation Z employees, managers, perceptions, technology, work ethic, problem solving, generational differences

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I. INTRODUCTION

Shifts in societal norms for employability, education, and work ethic over time spark the question: What does Generation Z need in order to be successful in their career? The interactions of Generation Z in the workplace are different than those of the generations before them (Dimock, 2019). Authors Zabel et al. (2017) have suggested that some of the workplace changes from previous generations to present are an increased need for work-family balance, increased need to work from any location, decreased loyalty to the employer, and a decreased work ethic. A reasonable question to ask is how the changes in these trends have affected Generation Z's employability. Generation Z is defined as those born in 1997 or after (Dimock, 2019). This dissertation is a study of the perceptions of organizational managers regarding the potential gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees in the north central Florida area. The research included interviews of organizational managers in the north central Florida area to discover the perceptions of employers regarding the necessary knowledge and skills needed for successful employment of Generation Z employees.

Background of the Study

Some employers have suggested that the Generation Z employee pool does not possess the skills needed to be successful in the workplace, fulfilling employers' needs (Manpowergroup 2013). The global study conducted by the researchers in the Manpowergroup (2013) polled over 38,000 employers who reported difficulty finding talented workers for various reasons. In the

study, 34% of the employers said the employee pool lacked "hard skills", while 24% said employees were not qualified due to lack of experience, and 19% reported the candidates had a lack of "soft skills" (Manpowergroup, 2013, p. 8). According to a study from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania College of Business (2020), managers noted that Generation Z employees possessed less work experience than previous generations. When polling 15- to 17-year-olds in the years 2002 and 2018, the 2002 poll results showed 30% of the teens had previously worked, but, by year 2018, only 19% of the same age group had been formerly employed (Fry & Parker, 2018). Based on reported information and work experience, hard and soft skills were possible gaps in the training or skills of the Generation Z employee pool.

The Center for Generational Kinetics conducted research and training to provide assistance for the Generation Z employers in the areas of employee retention and productivity. The societal impact of generational differences in the workplace is ever-changing, as older employees retire and Generation Z employees enter the workforce. Generational differences can include the concepts of managing money, managing time, interacting socially, and accomplishing work-related tasks. Generation Z is accustomed to rapid feedback and is unfamiliar with maintaining tasks for long periods due to the environment of immediate satisfaction that has shaped the generation (Dorsey et al., 2019-2020).

Generation Z has grown up in a technological world that has influenced a unique mindset differing from all prior generations (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Employers need to understand Generation Z and how they think to hire, train, and retain employees as effective workers (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Generation Z communicates in a variety of informal ways, portrays trustworthiness, and excels in technological knowledge (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Generation Z

is also described as "impatient, instant minded, lacking the ambitions of previous generations, have acquired attention deficit disorder with a high dependency on the technology and a low attention span, individualistic, self-directed, most demanding, acquisitive, materialistic and entitled generation so far" (Singh & Dangmei, 2016, p. 2). The purpose of the research study conducted was to determine if any of the characteristics of Generation Z were factors managers perceived to contribute to possible gaps in knowledge and skills in the workplace.

Research conducted by Deming (2017) revealed that social skills, or the ability of humans to interact and react to others based on behaviors, were lacking in the employees that had most recently entered the workforce, while the demand for social skills in the workplace was increasing. Abdullah et al. (2018) suggested that school systems could influence improving current students' soft skills, which are skills that emphasize managing personal relationships and behaviors between people, prior to entering the workforce. Additionally, Abdullah et al.'s (2018) study found that, "It is very important for youth to acquire social competence so that they can compete at the international level. However, an increasing number of unemployed graduates have shown a lack of social competence among graduates" (p. 374). At the time of this study, Generation Z employees were recent graduates of high school and college and were new to the workforce. The research study focused on discovering possible missing knowledge and skills gaps of Generation Z, including any lack of soft skills that are reportedly needed in the current workplace.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories were explored in the study. The first was social cognitive theory, and the second was the social constructivism theory. Additionally, portions of the multidimensional work

ethic profile were used in the interview process for managers providing their perceptions of an employee's work ethic on the job.

Social cognitive theory began in the 1960s as the social learning theory and later was published as the social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura (LaMorte, 2019). According to Bandura's (1963) research and development of the social cognitive theory, he concluded that one's learning is linked to a reinforcer and a response rather than strictly predetermined genetic dispositions. Bandura (1991) further explained that people make decisions based on both external and internal influences. The internal belief that a person can solve problems encourages the action to do something about the problem and to be further dedicated to the outcome. Perception of success in a task leads to a "can do" type of thinking, which gives learners the ability to better adapt to their environment and ultimately be successful (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005). An important aspect of the social cognitive theory is setting a proper example for one to follow (de la Llave et al., n.d.). Providing examples of successful behaviors for Generation Z employees on and off the job may increase work ethic and fill any gaps of knowledge and skills perceived by employers.

According to Verenikina (2010), the theorist Lev Vygotsky is the father of the social constructivism theory. Vygotsky based his theories on learning contributed by Piaget (Verenikina, 2010). Piaget (1959) stated that active social interaction contributes to learning. Vygotsky (1978) agreed with Piaget that one is an active learner and utilized research from other theorists to develop the social constructivism theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that people learn from their connections with changing influences and environments around them. Vygotsky (1978) explained that people interact with objects and other people in the world, and the interpretations of their stimuli is what constructs the human mind. Through further development of the social

constructivism theory, Piaget, Vygotsky, and other theorists encouraged a change from teacher-led classrooms to more student-centered learning environments (de la Llave et al., n.d.). Social constructivism theory is currently used in classrooms. The theory supports the idea that students learn and solve problems through their interactions with a teacher or peer with a higher skill level than their own (Eppard & Rochdi, 2017). A facet of the theory incorporates the collaborative learning style, suggesting that students learn best when interacting and solving problems with their peers (Eppard & Rochdi, 2017). Providing opportunities for Generation Z employees to work with peers or a mentor may narrow any perceived gaps of knowledge and skills reported by employers in this study.

One guideline used for measuring work ethic is the multidimensional work ethic profile (MWEP) based on Max Weber's 1905 work, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. Portions of Weber's criteria were utilized in the current study on the work ethic of members of Generation Z employees (Miller et al., 2002). Weber (1958) and Miller et al. (2002) stated that work ethic is a mixture of beliefs and actions. According to Miller et al. (2002), work ethic can be measured using seven layers of qualifications, including self-reliance, centrality of work, morality and ethics, wasting time, delay of gratification, hard work, which will lead to a successful outcome, and avoiding leisure activities. Measurements for work ethic have been modified by numerous researchers. The modified version, including the aforementioned seven layers, was used in this study to determine employers' perceptions of the work ethic of their Generation Z employees (Miller et al., 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The concept behind the research of this study was to determine any perceived gaps in skills that employers may be observing in Generation Z employees. Carillo (2010) used a visual to explain the triadic relationship that exists in social cognitive theory (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Demonstration of the triadic relationship of the social cognitive theory (Carillo, 2010, p. 11).
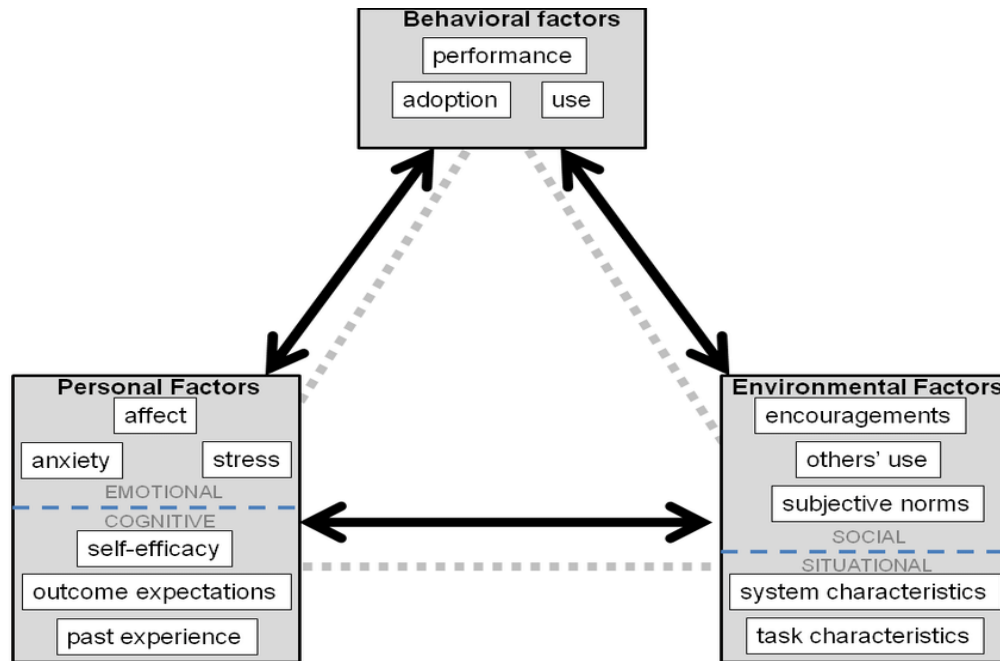
Carillo (2010) suggested that a person's behavior is determined by personal factors and the environment surrounding the person. Behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors work together and impact each other in a reciprocal manner. Environmental factors are "factors that are physically external to the person and provide opportunities and social support such as social pressure or situational characteristics" (Carillo, 2010, pp. 3-4). The personal factors affecting a person's behavior are described as "cognitive, personality or demographic aspects characterizing an individual" (Carillo, 2010, p. 4). Carillo (2010) explained that people can adapt and be affected by the world around them, while also affecting the environment in which they live.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees.

Overview of Methodology

The method used to conduct this research was a qualitative collective case study. Creswell (2013) explained that it is appropriate to use qualitative studies when a "problem or issue needs to be explored" (p. 47). Using qualitative research is common when the researcher wants to hear from the individuals involved in the study and allow them to express their situation. Qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting where the problem takes place, giving the researcher the opportunity to observe the people in their usual environment. The researcher in a qualitative study uses self-made, open-ended questions when interviewing participants in the study. Once interviews are conducted, the researcher organizes the data, looking for themes in the results (Creswell, 2013).

A collective case study is conducted when multiple cases are chosen to shed light on one issue or problem (Creswell, 2013). The data for this study were collected through interviews of a convenience sample of seven managers in the north central Florida area. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions.

The analysis of the data was a qualitative research strategy in the form of embedded analysis, using detailed facets of the case of the workplace (Creswell, 2013). The information about Generation Z employees' daily activities and actions given by those interviewed helped the researcher understand the context of the behavior and look for common themes in the results.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of organizational managers regarding strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees?

Research Design

This research is a qualitative collective case study. The research participants were chosen from a convenience sample of seven. The participants were business owners and managers of Generation Z employees in the north central Florida area.

Data Collection

The researcher interviewed organizational managers responsible for managing Generation Z employees in the north central Florida area. Interviews were conducted in person using the interview questions in Appendix A. After approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited for this study. Interviews were scheduled with participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher and validated by participants for accuracy. The researcher provided an informed consent (Appendix B) to the participants, and the identities of the parties were protected. Interview and participant information was stored electronically on a password-protected computer, and access to personal information was available only to the researcher and the dissertation committee for the purposes of this study. All data will be permanently deleted after three years.

Procedures

Local managers and business leaders in the north central Florida area participated in the study. The managers were responsible for overseeing, hiring, and interacting with Generation Z employees. A diverse selection of business leaders and managers with varying job types were interviewed. The researcher conducted interviews with the north central Florida area business

leaders and managers who manage Generation Z employees. Otter software was utilized for recording and transcribing the interviews. After the data were validated by participants, transcripts were reviewed to determine themes. Saldaña (2013) explained that a code can be a phrase, word, paragraph, or text that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The researcher searched for key words to determine patterns of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees found in the interview transcriptions with the managers.

Limitations

Limitations in research can be defined as weaknesses in the study identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The limitations of this study included a small sample size that represented a community in the north central Florida area. The sample size was small and may not reflect the perceptions of organizational managers in the general population. Another limitation was the regional limits of the study. The region chosen for the study was solely based on the proximity to and location of the researcher. A third limitation was the broad focus of organizational managers. The many tasks for which managers are responsible may distract from the quality of responses and attention to the research. Additionally, the organizational managers interviewed for this study represented a broad variety of types of managers at different levels and sizes of organizations. Each manager was responsible for a distinct type of organization and a varied number of employees. The worldwide pandemic was a limitation in the study as some industries were closed, making the managers unavailable for interviews by the researcher.

Definition of Key Terms

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

- **Generation Z:** This phrase is defined as those born in 1997 or after (Dimock, 2019). The beginning year used to define Generation Z is accepted and identified; however, the official ending year for this cohort is yet to be determined. For the purpose of this study, Generation Z is defined as those born from 1997 - 2012.

- **organizational managers:** For the purpose of this study, the accepted definition of organizational managers is those responsible for achieving organizational goals effectively through leading, planning, and controlling resources, including human resources of a business (George & Jones, 2018).

- **work ethic:** This term was defined by Hill and Fouts (2005) as the attitude and characteristics that workers deem important and worthy of merit. Work ethic could include being dependable, having excellent interpersonal skills, showing initiative, and assigning positive value to a job well done. Work ethic is measured using the criteria of an employee's self-reliance, centrality of work, morality and ethics, wasting time, delay of gratification, hard work, which will lead to a successful outcome, and avoiding leisure activities (Miller et al., 2002).

Significance

Generation Z is becoming the largest generational cohort and will have a tremendous presence in the workforce in the near future (Iorgulescu, 2016). The upcoming leaders of the world are represented by Generation Z; therefore, it is significant to understand Generation Z, as they are a unique generation (Iorgulescu, 2016). Attempting to improve relationships is essential in the workplace for the mutual benefit of the employee and employer (Martin & Ottemann, 2016). Through this research, providing leadership training that targets skills lacking in Generation Z may help improve overall success in the workplace. Since employers report that

skills are lacking in the selection of Generation Z employees, it is vital to discover what those missing skills may be and how to improve them (Manpowergroup, 2013). Perhaps developing and incorporating programs to target the missing skills may lead to more successful employment experiences for Generation Z employees.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Children seem to be moving further away from the basics of what it means to work hard, making it increasingly important for "Generation Z," defined as those children born between the years of 1997 and 2012, to learn business ethics and skills for interacting appropriately in a social setting (Dimock, 2019). The authors of a study conducted with over 38,000 employers revealed that soft skills, including flexibility, adaptability, professionalism (namely in the areas of appearance and punctuality), motivation, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills were lacking in Generation Z employees (Manpowergroup, 2013). According to Abdullah et al. (2018), studies on the training of soft skills, or social interactions of current students entering the workforce, have shown that school systems may influence the improvement of these skills. Additionally, the results of the Abdullah et al. (2018) study indicated that, "It is very important for youth to acquire social competence so that they can compete at the international level" (p. 374). However, many who graduate demonstrate a deficiency in social skills (Abdullah et al., 2018). A deficiency in social skills, or lack of strong work ethic, may affect the employability of the person. The research in this study was designed to determine any gaps in strengths of knowledge and skills that existed in Generation Z employees.

Generational Differences

Before discussing Generation Z, a defined time frame is needed to separate the existing generations by ages. Defining the cohorts of generations varies depending on the researcher. Generations can be grouped by experiences, events, location, common thoughts, social changes, and cultural context (Moore et al., 2017). Dimock (2019) separated the generational cohorts by birth year. The "Silent Generation," people born between 1928 and 1945, are the first grouping of individuals. "Baby Boomers," the next group, were born between 1946 and 1964, and "Generation X" followed the Boomers, having been born between 1965 and 1980. People born between the years 1981 and 1996 are considered "Millennials". The cohort of current adolescents, or individuals ages 7 to 22 at the time of this study, is referred to as "Generation Z", having been born between the years 1997 and 2012. Figure 2, taken from the Pew Research Center, provides a visual representation of the generations broken down by birth year (Dimock, 2019).

Figure 2

Generational Break Down
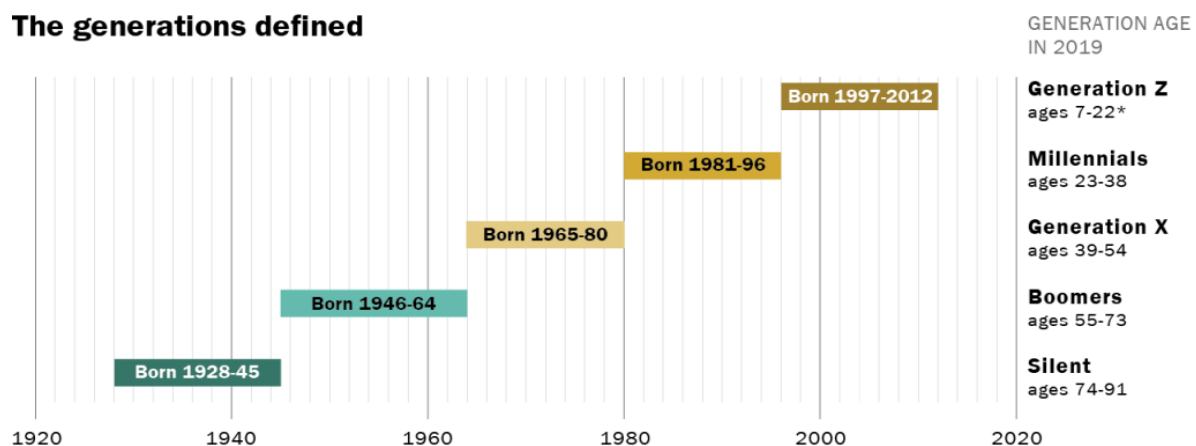
*No chronological endpoint has been set for this group. For this analysis, Generation Z is defined as those ages 7 to 22 in 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins.* Pew Research Center. https://pewrsr.ch/2szqtJz.

Many changes have occurred between the Silent Generation and the Generation Z period. The year 1945 marked the end of the Silent Generation, and 52 years elapsed before the dawn of Generation Z in 1997. One of the most important changes during this time frame had been the advent of technology and the evolution of interpersonal communication over the years. The Baby Boomers experienced the beginning of television, which quickly became an integral part of their lives, replacing the radio for entertainment and information (Dimock, 2019). Generation X was a part of the period when computers were developed and began to be used more regularly to store information and complete tasks that had previously been accomplished by hand or typewriter.

Millennials witnessed the "internet explosion" (Dimock, 2019, p. 4). Generation Z was the first generation to possess access to technology in the form of computers, cellular phones, smartphones, and the internet, from the beginning of their lives (Dimock, 2019). Dimock (2019) explained in his research that it had yet to be determined what the "implications of growing up in an 'always on' technological environment are," but noticeable changes had been observed in the "behaviors, attitudes and lifestyles–both positive and concerning–for those who came of age in this era" (Dimock, 2019, p. 4). Not only is an obvious difference in technological advances seen by these generations, but an obvious variance existed in each generation's perceptions of work. Eisner (2005) reported that human resource departments had noticed conflicts caused by differences in the perceptions of older and younger generations in the workplace relating to values, authority, attitudes toward work, social skills, and daily operations. Glass (2007) conveyed that workers having "different backgrounds and life experiences result in five areas of potential workplace strife surrounding their differing expectations, distinct work ethics, deep-seated attitudes, opposing perspectives and diverse motivators" (p. 99).

Gibson et al. (2009) conducted a study at Nova Southeastern University, including Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, finding that Baby Boomers and Generation X had different perceptions about work. Baby Boomers seemed to be more dedicated to their work and specific tasks. The Baby Boomer generation thrived on competition and showed loyalty to the workplace. Generation X tended to exhibit more independence, showing a desire to balance work and family. Generation X also displayed more skepticism toward people and tasks. In the Gibson et al. (2009) study, Millennials and Generation Z were combined and labeled as "Generation Y," classified as being born from the year 1980 to the present time of this study. Generation Y, in this study, was noted as technologically savvy, sensitive to social environments, and being easily bored (Gibson et al., 2009).

When people of the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z generations were surveyed by Gibson et al. (2009), they were asked to prioritize items, such as loyalty and responsibility. The results showed that the Millennials and Generation Z cohorts ranked loyalty as very low in importance, while the people surveyed from the other two generations ranked loyalty much higher. Interestingly, all generations ranked responsibility as high on the list of importance (Gibson et al., 2009); however, responsibility may be defined differently by older and younger generations.

Carter (2018) contended that Generation Z had used their observations of previous generations to make decisions on what to do and what not to do in their lives concerning finances, with Generation Z being financially conservative. Carter (2018) explained that Generation Z experienced the financial struggle of their Generation X parents and had been taught to handle financial decisions more successfully. Generation Z had also observed how Generation Y was burdened with tremendous debt. The need and desire to avoid that debt

influenced Generation Z's financial decisions. Carter (2018) maintained that, if one facet is lacking in a generation, for example being debt free, it may become more important to generations after them.

<p align="center">**Influences on Generation Z Behavior**</p>

Societal changes in expectations over time, including cultural differences and the acceptance of varied lifestyles, may have contributed to the characteristics of Generation Z. Generation Z had been raised in a culture of diversity and had seen varied family dynamics. Researchers Hill and Foust (2005) suggested that children in schools at the time of this study were experiencing industrial, technological, and familial dynamic changes in their life spans, which could possibly contribute to a belief that relationships, products, and expectations in life were fleeting and would not last. The four influencers affecting Generation Z were family dynamics, school years, required responsibilities, and a protected lifestyle (Hill & Foust, 2005).

Influencer 1: Family Dynamics

Of the existing generations, the Silent Generation is the oldest, and Generation Z is the youngest. Through the years between the oldest and most recent generations, dynamics have shifted in the family setting. Today, many children are raised by either a mother or a father, but not both. In areas of poverty, children are often raised without a father (George, 2008). The lack of parental supervision and involvement with the children at home may have been due to a parent's lifestyle choices or working outside of the home due to financial necessity. George (2008) verified that the absence of a stable family environment can be harmful to children and their capacity to determine what is right and wrong. George (2008) stated that "the widespread failure of family formation," contributes to the "disastrous social consequences of delinquency,

<p align="center">16</p>

despair, drug abuse, and crime and incarceration" (para. 10). The family dynamic has shifted away from the days of the Baby Boomer generation, when 73% of children lived in a home with two parents in their original marriage. Over the next 20 years, the percentage of children living in households with two parents who were in their first marriage began to decline (Igielnik, 2015). According to Igielnik (2015), 61% of children lived in homes with two parents in their first marriage by 1980, and in 2015, 46% lived in homes with two parents in their first marriage.

Kautz et al. (2014) suggested that children in single-parent homes were sometimes at a disadvantage as a result of receiving less cognitive stimulation than children in a two-parent home. Kautz et al. (2014) explained that traits are no longer considered to be inborn, but rather skills that can be taught and fortified through good parenting and caring environments. Regarding teaching skills to a child, Kautz et al. (2014) stated that, prior to formal schooling, learning gaps can emerge and be identified. Children in single-parent homes may lack cognitive stimulation, resulting in shortcomings of knowledge and skills when compared to others their age, because the process of teaching skills and character begins in the home setting (Kautz et al., 2014). George (2008) suggested that parents or caregivers at home can make a difference in the future employability of their child, and often, not enough emphasis is placed on the role of the family. George (2008) stated that businesses expect, and even depend on, pools of hard-working and honest people to employ, but the businesses cannot create those people. George (2008) explained that the hard workers must be trained somewhere prior to entering the workforce, and businesses nor government can manufacture those people, thus "they must rely on the family, assisted by religious communities and other institutions of civil society, to produce them" (p. 3).

Influencer 2: School Years

Glass (2007) suggested that the years children spend in school contribute to the formation of their employability skills. A portion of Generation Z was the age group who would currently be attending middle and high school during the time of this study. According to Armstrong (2006), author of *The Best Schools*, the natural biological event of puberty causes changes in teens, affecting areas of their lives on a social, emotional, and cognitive level. Skills learned in school were evident in the generations of workers in the workplace during this study. The idea that people's skills are molded during adolescence supports the statement that the "defining events in each generation's life all occurred between the ages of 5 to 18, the developmental years, which affects their outlook on life and work" (Glass, 2007, p. 99).

Extracurricular programs are beneficial and can teach leadership skills to students, especially when students become involved in extracurricular programs in middle school, but no later than high school (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Dugan and Komives (2007) conducted a national study of over 50,000 college students to determine the effects of the college environment on leadership. Dugan and Komives (2007) suggested that students who were involved in leadership roles prior to entering college scored higher in the areas of commitment, common purpose, and leadership efficacy. Supporting the conclusions of Dugan and Komives (2007), Glass (2007) added that students develop needed skills during the ages of 5-18. Students can learn leadership skills by being the captain on athletic teams, editor in the newspaper club, or holding the office of president of a 4-H club (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Baggetta et al. (2013) provided additional research from the *American Sociological Review,* that suggested leadership commitment can be developed through formal characteristics of an organization, peer

expectations, and social exchanges. The results of the study by Dugan and Komives (2007)
explained that mentors play a role in developing leadership skills, and that colleges should work
with K-12 school systems to develop mentor relationships. The Big Brothers Big Sisters
organization supported the idea that mentors assist in guiding young individuals because, at
this time in the students' lives, the direction of their future may be affected by even the
smallest of choices (Public/Private Ventures, 2018). Dugan and Komives (2007) discussed that
higher education contributes to the development of positive character traits, integrity, and
leadership skills.

In addition to being influenced by mentors and time spent in higher education, students
personalities are molded during the years of elementary and secondary school (Dugan &
Komives, 2007). Generation Z represented the population of people attending K-12 schools and
college, and those entering the workforce during this study. According to Dugan and Komives
(2007), the skills learned during the years spent in school were crucial in the lives of the
Generation Z cohort, as these years may influence Generation Z's future work ethic and
leadership in the workplace.

Influencer 3: Requiring Responsibility

Responsibility can be taught to children early in their lives. Research conducted by Ochs
and Izquierdo (2009) showed that toddlers as young as three years old can learn to do minor
tasks, such as making food, and carry a task through to completion. The definition of being
responsible is interpreted using several meanings: "liable to be called on to answer as the
primary cause" and "able to answer for one's conduct and obligations" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.,
n.p.). Teaching toddlers their first lessons of responsibility require effort on the part of the
teacher, who is generally the mother (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) had

proposed that cultural differences play a role in how children are taught responsibility. When defining responsibility, Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) stated,

> Recognizing social awareness, social responsiveness, and self-reliance as keystone properties of responsibility supports an argument that children's routine work at home enables not only social but also moral responsibility, in the form of respectful awareness of and responsiveness to others' needs and reliance on knowledge that takes into consideration others' judgments. (p. 391)

The article titled "Responsibility in Childhood: Three Developmental Trajectories," compared the cultural differences of raising a toddler in two cultures (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). The first group of people identified in the study by Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) were members of the Matsigenka (Peruvian Amazon) culture. The second group of people studied were those of the middle-class American culture specific to Los Angeles, California. The toddler of the Matsigenka people began taking on responsibilities as soon as he could walk at approximately one and a half years old. Parents in the Matsigenka culture allowed toddler-aged children to perform tasks, such as heating their own food on a fire, cutting grass, and chopping wood with sharp tools. By taking on tasks that could be potentially dangerous, the children were made to learn from trial and error, which led to the development of self-sufficiency and autonomy in the children. In contrast, the child-rearing practices of the middle-class American family presented in the study showed a mother performing remedial tasks for her children who were the specific ages of 11, 12, and 15. Children 11 to 15 years old were members of the Generation Z cohort, and the particular mother in the study asked her children what they preferred for breakfast and proceeded to prepare the meal for them while the children played video games. A simple household responsibility, such as taking out the garbage, was a task that the mother in the study requested

for her children to complete, but her children were resistant until the mother was frustrated to the point of just taking out the garbage herself. The article concluded that children of some middle-class American families were raised in a manner that allowed them to resist tasks and elect to ignore responsibilities that their parents request of them (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009).

Elaine Loveland (2017) conducted a study of 1,200 Generation Z students regarding college recruitment. Loveland's (2017) findings suggested that students would be more likely to find an app to help with a task rather than performing a task themselves. Loveland (2017) suggested that Generation Z became bored with mundane tasks, as their world consisted of ever-increasing technology, and their view of the world was through a screen that had many new and improved apps simultaneously running. Kautz et al. (2014) suggested that family dynamics and school programs play a crucial role in the development of skills in children. Family dynamics, school training, and varying levels of responsibility of Generation Z may contribute positively or negatively to their work ethic.

Influencer 4: Protected Lifestyle

Schroth (2019) discussed in her study that the protected childhood and lifestyle Generation Z had experienced as being detrimental for workplace preparation. A portion of Generation Z had been extremely overprotected by their parents and society (Schroth, 2019). Furthermore, Schroth (2019) contended that growing up in an overly safe culture had removed Generation Z's ability to learn how to adjust their decision making should an initial choice result in a negative outcome. The ability to develop the life skill of autonomy had been eliminated because of overprotection. Protecting children from bad news and removing obstacles for them generates a shielded world view that everything is positive and pleasant, which contributed to Generation Z's inability to understand failure or constructive criticism (Schroth, 2019). In

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addition to overprotection, Generation Z was being encouraged to grow up more slowly and stay at home longer. Teens were less likely to move toward becoming responsible adults, because they did not feel the need to do so. Schroth (2019) stated, "growing up more slowly combined with protection from life's adversity detrimentally impacts this generations' development and ability to cope" (p. 11).

A protected lifestyle and growing up more slowly had also contributed to Generation Z having a fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset. Having a fixed mindset in the workplace means that employees expect that they must look smart and be knowledgeable. The fixed mindset interprets abilities and knowledge as inherited traits, not traits that can be learned. Employees having a fixed mindset may ignore useful feedback, blame others for mistakes, hide failures, and not take on new challenges. In contrast, employees demonstrating a growth mindset desire to learn, are more engaged, gain inspiration from others' successes, and take on challenges (Schroth, 2019).

Manager Expectations in the Workplace

According to a study by Hill and Foust (2005), "Employers continue to search for employees with a strong work ethic" (p. 48). Work ethic is described as a worker having the characteristics of connecting positive value and merit to doing a good job, having respectable interpersonal skills, maintaining initiative, and being dependable (Hill & Foust, 2005). The study by Hill and Foust (2005) measured work ethic attributes of interpersonal skills, initiative, and dependability skills of those seeking jobs, grouped by age, gender, and employment status, using an ex-post facto research design and web-based survey with 373 participants. Hill and Foust (2005) determined that employees of various generational groups demonstrate a different measurement of work ethic.

Zabel et al. (2017) conducted a study to determine if work ethic was truly different between the generations. According to Zabel et al. (2017), studies showed that differences existed among generations in regards to job satisfaction, turnover, craftmanship, pride, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. The results of the Zabel et al. (2017) study revealed that a strong work ethic was related to communication skills that assist in problem solving and will result in moral and ethical interactions with other people.

Work ethic was measured using seven layers, developed by Miller et al. (2002), including self-reliance, the centrality of work, morality and ethics, wasting time, delaying gratification, hard work leading to a successful outcome of assigned tasks, and avoiding leisure activities, such as time off or breaks at work. Zabel et al. (2017) explained each of the facets of work ethic in the following table (p. 3).

Table 1

Explanations of the facets of work ethic

Facet of work ethic:	Explanation:
Avoiding leisure activities	the extent one prefers work over leisure activities
Centrality of work	the importance of work to one's meaning in life
Delay of gratification	the degree to which one is willing to postpone immediate rewards for larger future rewards
Hard work	the level to which one believes that working hard will yield desirable outcomes
Morality and ethics	the magnitude that individuals should be moral and ethical when dealing with others
Self-reliance	the measure of which one strives to be independent from others
Wasting time	one's belief that time is a precious commodity that should not be wasted

Zabel, K., Biermeier-Hanson, B., Baltes, B., Early, B. & Shepard, A. (2017). Generational differences in work ethic:

Fact or fiction? *Journal of Business and Psychology, 32*(3), 301-315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-016-9466-5

Chungyalpa and Karishma (2016) indicated that potential job candidates were evaluated on traits, such as work ethic and integrity. The researchers reported that, during the time of the

employee evaluation, potential employees were observed and evaluated on motivation, integrity, honesty, dedication, and work ethic. The employee evaluation process takes place during a probationary period that can last from six months to a year. Once the probationary period ends, if the potential employee meets the expectations, then the employee will be hired to hold an official position in the workplace (Chungyalpa & Karishma, 2016).

Generation Z was entering the workforce at the time of this writing; therefore, less was known about their work style and characteristics on the job than other generations (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Kautz et al. (2014) described the non-cognitive skills needed to be successful in school, the labor market, and society as

> perseverance ("grit"), conscientiousness, self-control, trust, attentiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, resilience to adversity, openness to experience, empathy, humility, tolerance of diverse opinions, and the ability to engage productively in society. (p.2)

However, Moore et al. (2017) discovered a noticeable separation between the skills managers required on a job and the skills possessed by the graduates of the college of engineering. The college of engineering began restructuring their educational standards, attempting to produce graduates who possessed the characteristics reportedly needed most in the workplace. The desirable characteristics of college graduates who eventually become employees were noted to include leadership, management, analytical skills, creativity, ethical standards, ability to understand the principles of business, professionalism, lifelong learners, being adaptable to change, having practical ingenuity, and maintaining proper communication skills (Moore et al., 2017).

Schroth (2019) indicated that a psychological contract exists in the workplace based on the expectations of the manager and the employee. The presence of Generation Z represented

approximately 30% of the workplace; therefore, it was increasingly important for all generations

and managers to understand Generation Z (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Recruitment to attract

qualified Generation Z prospects for employment must be engaging enough to hold the

prospect's interest through the entire recruitment process. If managers understand Generation Z,

the recruiting process was more successful, and the employment experience between the

manager and employee was more productive (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Sokro (2012) concluded,

regarding managing in the 21st century, that performance and efficiency in a task were linked to

motivation. According to Gaidhani et al. (2019), managers must understand how to motivate

Generation Z, because motivation impacts the quality of performance on the job. Schroth (2019)

added that Generation Z wanted to understand the reason behind the work they were doing

before they were motivated to do the job. Gaidhani et al. (2019) noted that the attitudes

Generation Z had toward work differed from the preceding generations. Most Baby Boomers

were retiring, which leaves management positions in the hands of the Generation X or

Generation Y cohorts (Ray & Singh, 2016). Some managers may feel that the increased reliance

on technology that Generation Z was known for will take away the personal touch of their

business (Glass, 2007).

Generation Z Workplace Expectations

Generation Z preferred immediate acknowledgment and thought that their superiors on

the job should take an interest in their feelings and ideas (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Additionally,

Generation Z expected their job environment to be flexible and have work-life balance (Ozkan &

Slomaz, 2015). Generation Z desired to be associated with a mentor at the workplace, and felt it

was essential to be connected with other humans for security. Iorgulescu (2016) further explained

that Generation Z required constant feedback on accomplished work. Generation Z would have

rather completed tasks that included collaboration, since they liked working in large teams and open-spaced offices (Iorgulescu, 2016).

Generation Z expected their ideas to be appreciated and for their managers to listen to them (Schroth, 2019). Additionally, Generation Z valued being respected, but Schroth (2019) suggested that they would not respect a manager if they felt disrespected as the employee. According to Schroth (2019), disrespect for Generation Z included managers dismissing or not listening to their ideas. Senior Master Sergeant Chris Moore (2019) discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Generation Z in the military and explained that training the managers to understand Generation Z's way of thinking was necessary to lead them well. Moore (2019) suggested that managers must give Generation Z the "why" behind the task or the employees will put their energies into a new job they felt was making a difference. Generation Z wanted to be allowed to solve problems and have their opinions valued (Schroth, 2019). Moore (2019) stated that Generation Z enjoyed being a part of something and wanted to incorporate their ideas and creativity, as long as the task was valued by the manager or leader.

According to a convenience sample study of over 100 students by Iorgulescu (2016), Generation Z was considered to be productive, even while working on more than one task at a time. Iorgulescu (2016) specified that this cohort can process large amounts of information that can be associated with the technology Generation Z had been exposed to since their birth. However, formal communication skills need to be taught to Generation Z as they were accustomed to an abbreviated language. The use of an abbreviated language can also affect the quality of socialization, listening, and interpersonal skills for this generation of employees (Iorgulescu, 2016). Moore (2019) mentioned that one strength of Generation Z was the ability to process large amounts of information at one time. Other strengths included Generation Z's

ability to multi-task and learn independently with a comfortable reliance on the internet and technology (Moore, 2019). During their lifetime, Generation Z had always had the option for questions to be answered instantly with the touch of a button connecting to the internet. A problem associated with the hyper-connectivity to information was that Generation Z had difficulty processing the information and may have had the feeling of being overwhelmed (Moore et al., 2017). Weaknesses discovered by Moore (2019) were that Generation Z tended to be distracted, exhibited less social interaction, and lost interest in tasks easily.

Generation Z Strengths and Gaps in Knowledge and Skills

Schroth (2019) suggested that, because Generation Z was growing up in households with higher average incomes, the children in the family had no need to get a job to help the household financially. Time outside of school hours was spent on extra-curricular activities and enrichment, leaving little time for teens to get their first job. Work experience can help one learn how job environments operate and how to behave correctly in a work setting. Generation Z's lack of work experience in entry-level positions can lead to unrealistic expectations when entering their career (Schroth, 2019).

Generation Z had characteristics that set them apart from the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X. Although Millennials possessed some technological skills, Generation Z was the most advanced with technology and was the first generation that had never been in a world where technology items, such as the iPad, smartphones, and tablets, did not exist. Generation Z desired to lead and would out-communicate previous generations when it came to video conferencing or other forms of verbal communication (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) conducted a study of approximately 270 university students to determine work perceptions of Generation Z. According to Ozkan and Solmaz (2015), 85.6% of those in the

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study described themselves as a hard worker. Over three-fourths of the respondents thought of themselves as helpful and innovative, stating that they were willing to work in groups (Ozkan & Slomaz, 2015).

Moore et al. (2017) produced a report for the *American Journal of Engineering Education*, specifically about engineering education for Generation Z. Moore et al. (2017) said that Generation Z had grown up in an environment of twenty-four hours a day news reports showing the war on terror, global terrorism, mass shootings, and health epidemics. The exposure to violence may have been a reason that Generation Z was described as risk-averse (Moore et al., 2017). Additionally, Moore et al. (2017) noted that the structure of the brain of Generation Z and their way of learning was different than other non-technological generations because of their fixation with technology and video games. The ability to have immediate answers at home and in their educational setting, where they receive regular and constant feedback, could positively or negatively affect their work performance on the job.

Carter (2018) designated Generation Z as the largest and most ethnically diverse generation thus far. Generation Z can be described as one who can access many resources quickly to accomplish a task (Carter, 2018). Carter (2018) stated Generation Z enjoyed both social interactions and individual work opportunities, had a self-reliant attitude, and was conservative with finances. Carter (2018) specified that struggles endured, for example living under financial strain, or priorities maintained, like hands-on parenting, will shape what becomes important to future generational groups. Therefore, changes in what is prioritized in the culture of prior generations contribute to the characteristics and preferences of Generation Z (Carter, 2018).

Social Cognitive Theory

Psychologist Albert Bandura established the social learning theory that was developed into the social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1999) the social cognitive theory is demonstrated by three major components including one's personal, behavioral, and environmental interactions. Bandura and McDonald (1963) explained that although stimuli are important facets of one's learning, additionally "imitation of modeling behavior is an essential aspect of social learning" (p. 275). Bandura (1999) added that people contribute to their own lives by not strictly enduring experiences, but reacting to and influencing the experiences and the environment surrounding them. Researchers de la Llave et al. (n.d.) broke down the social cognitive theory into five segments. Social cognitive theory is a learning style where behavior is goal oriented, a person is influenced by his environment and the environment influences him, a person can learn by watching others, behavior is regulated by the person, and the process of learning is internal (de la Llave et al., n.d.). Wood and Bandura (1989, 2014) further emphasized that a large portion of a person's knowledge is obtained from following another person's example.

Bandura (2006) stated that "people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting" (p. 9). Beauchamp et al. (2018) reported that during the process of reciprocated influence among people and their environment, other thought processes are simultaneously occurring that impact the mind, such as imaginative innovation, self-regulation or reflection, and learning by observation. The triadic relationship demonstrated in the social cognitive theory helps to connect the idea that internal and external stimuli can affect a person's choices (Otaye-Ebede et al., 2020). Stimuli to be considered as influencers of outcomes for choices made by employees are work environment, personal beliefs, morality, skills training, observations,

perceived barriers, and verbal persuasions (Otaye-Ebede et al., 2020). Social cognitive theory includes actively learning through "actual performances, observing models, listening to instructions, and engaging with a variety of materials" (de la Llave et al., n.d., p. 4). Therefore, proper work behaviors could be learned through the modeling technique allowing a new Generation Z employee to shadow and follow a successful employee as an example.

Social Constructivism Theory

Another method that an employer could use to train employees on the job is the social constructivism theory. Creswell (2013) explained that the social constructivism theory includes training people who desire to understand the environment where they work and live. Various strategies are used when incorporating a social constructivism style of teaching. Vygotsky, one of the developers of the social constructivism theory, supported the zone of proximal development (Admawati et al., 2018). The zone of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The zone of proximal development is an attribute of learning that allows for internal developmental processes that only occur when the child is cooperating with peers or people in his environment (Vygotsky, 1978). When utilizing zone of proximal development, the employee would collaborate with another skilled employee on a task. With the support of the skilled employee, the new employee can move into the next zone or level of understanding of the task assigned (Admawati et al., 2018).

Social constructivism theory encourages communication, social interaction, and self-expression (Admawati et al., 2018). Employees can express mastery of content or work-related tasks by having peer-to-peer and peer-to-leader conversations to demonstrate understanding as de

la Llave et al. (n.d.) suggested works in the classroom. Another strategy for the employee or trainee to show learning was successful is through demonstrating inquiry activities. Utilizing the social constructivism theory for teaching and learning involves being willing to use multiple sources of information to demonstrate learning. The social constructivism theory should involve the learners verifying their understanding of what is being taught in a variety of ways, not just one way (de la Llave et al., n.d.). In a workplace setting, the employees would be the learners. The employees could demonstrate understanding of the work-related tasks by working with peer groups, following, and modeling after a team leader until the employee is fully trained, or taking charge of the learning by determining the best way to fulfill the task apart from the manager's assistance.

Summary

Employers actively seeking to hire Generation Z suggested that it is difficult to find individuals who have the needed skill set to be productive and successful in the workplace (Manpowergroup, 2013; Hill & Foust, 2005). The need for training Generation Z is demonstrated by the children in schools from this generation who showed the lack of evidence of appropriate behavior for social interaction and business ethics. Social skills and ethics may not have been prioritized in the home environment, and the lack of training was evident when observing the children of Generation Z (Kautz et al., 2014). Students lacked the soft skills necessary to accomplish tasks in the workforce (Abdullah et al, 2018). Additionally, some members of Generation Z failed to take the initiative for finishing tasks and did not assume responsibility for the choices made.

Generation Z, defined as those who were born between the years 1997 and 2012, did not demonstrate an understanding of what it means to have a strong work ethic (Dimock, 2019).

Employers wanted to see Generation Z employee candidates who were motivated and enthusiastic for the job (Manpowergroup, 2013). Training is needed to help the students understand the importance of appropriate interaction, and why employability skills are needed to be successful citizens and leaders of the future (Abdullah et al., 2018). Those considered to be good citizens would not only be employable but would "have moral and civic virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference" (Levinson, 2010, p. 317). Evidence of changes or improvements in industry and technology have occurred over time. Improvements are expected and, in some ways, incredibly positive.

Schroth (2019) explained that Generation Z had not been forced to have frequent social interactions like previous generations, due to the introduction of the smartphone. Some social interactions that were underdeveloped in Generation Z included eye contact, proper facial expression, appropriate body language, word choices, and voice tone. The lack of knowledge of proper social interaction carries over into job performance. Employers want people who understand how to effectively interact socially and be able to problem solve (Schroth, 2019). A potential employee belonging to Generation Z who is willing to take responsibility for choices, has a solid work ethic, and successfully completes tasks may be refreshing for an employer looking to hire a young person.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Using a qualitative case study design for the research in this study allows for the phenomenon being studied to be evaluated through multiple lenses and be well explored, as the research is gathered on-site within its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Description of Research Design

A qualitative case study design was used for this study. Yin (2018) described case study research as being studies conducted within real-life settings. A multiple case study affords a researcher the opportunity to examine data "within each setting and across settings" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). Selecting managers to be interviewed in their work setting, recording those interviews, and coding the results from the transcriptions allows a researcher to "gather accurate information not lost by time" (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). Using qualitative research, data was gathered from the field, and observations and notes were interpreted from the experience. Qualitative research is defined as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Creswell, 2013, p. 43).

Participants

The participants used in the study were organizational managers in north central Florida who oversaw Generation Z employees. Maximum variation sampling was used in this case study.

resulting in 7 managers whose responsibilities varied from managing grocery stores to managing shifts of first responders. Creswell (2013) noted that maximum variation sampling is used often in qualitative studies, and it allows for diverse perspectives from the participants to "maximize differences at the beginning of the study" (p.157). The proximity of the researcher was a factor in choosing the sample used in the study. Managers chosen were those who were not members of the Generation Z cohort, being over the age of 23 years old, those who were responsible for interacting daily with the Generation Z employees, and those willing to be a part of the study. Interviewees were emailed a letter asking for their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix B). Managers who agreed to participate were scheduled for an in-person interview at a convenient time for both the researcher and the interviewee.

Role of the Researcher

Yin (2018) explained that a researcher analyzes, designs, and presents ideas from a variety of sources. Utilizing a qualitative case study, the researcher can obtain relevant information from multiple people. The researcher in this study had been a part of the educational field for 17 years. Throughout the 17 years in education, the researcher had taught, observed, and managed Generation Z. Yin (2018) added that researchers who remain flexible and open to the data that the participants can provide may contribute more to a study than originally anticipated. The role of the researcher for this case study was to provide an open forum for the interviewees to express their perceptions regarding their Generation Z employees.

Measures for Ethical Protection

To avoid any ethical issues during data collection, researchers take steps to ensure safety and anonymity of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Upon approval from the Southeastern Institutional Review Board (Appendix C) organizational managers were emailed an invitation to

participate in personal interviews for this research study. The managers were given a list of the questions they would be answering and approximately how long the interviews would last. Ten organizational managers of the north central Florida area were asked to partake in the study, and seven of the ten agreed to participate. In order to participate, a consent form was signed (Appendix B). The questions were sent to the managers before the interview to eliminate any confusion about the nature of the study (Appendix A). Permission to record the interviews was granted by the parties prior to signing the consent for participation. Participant protection was ensured by removing actual names and job locations from the analysis. All data in the study was assigned to a participant number rather than a name. Other information pertaining to the interviewees was stored on a password protected computer stored in a locked office that is only accessible to the researcher. The data will be permanently deleted after 3 years of the completion of the study.

Research Questions

The research question used as the basis of the study was: What are the perceptions of organizational managers regarding strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees?

Data Collection

Case studies involve obtaining specific types of data, such as documents, interviews, observations, and artifacts (Creswell, 2013). In the study, interviews were conducted, and the transcriptions of the interviews were used as data. Creswell (2013) presents data collection as a circle of these seven activities: "locating a site or an individual, gaining access and making rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, exploring field issues, and storing data" (p. 145). Once the individuals agreed to participate in the study, interviews were

scheduled. Prior to the meeting, email correspondence included providing the interviewees with interview questions, the approximate duration of the interview, and how their identities would be protected during the study.

Those working in qualitative research will seek to explore a problem or issue through face-to-face interactions, allowing others to share their story (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted in-person, allowing the interviewees to speak freely in a conversational style. However, challenges can occur during data collection, especially when doing personal interviews (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2013) suggested that a qualitative researcher gathers data in the field and then analyzes any themes that may be present, using instruments that have been designed by the researcher. The research questions used to gather data through the interviews were formulated by the researcher, with guidance from the dissertation committee. The interview transcriptions were then coded and analyzed to search for themes.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Seidman (2013) stressed the importance of "paying attention to the words of the participant" (p. 54). The student investigator, with guidance from the dissertation committee, developed open-ended interview questions to allow the participants to speak freely about the topics. The questions were given to each participant prior to the interview to provide the interviewee time to process the questions and formulate informed answers. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form agreeing to participation in the study, and permission was granted to record the transmissions before beginning the interviews. The participants were interviewed in the setting where they manage the Generation Z employees, and the interviews were recorded for accuracy. Study participants understood that the data would be protected, and that honest

answers were necessary to gather the most accurate data for the research. The interviewees were told that the information obtained from the interviews would be used to understand organizational managers' perceptions of the strengths and gaps of skills, to provide knowledge of their Generation Z employees. The participating managers were told the information from the interviews would then be used to code, analyze, and draw conclusions for the study. The data obtained from the interviews was studied and analyzed.

Validity

Creswell (2013) listed four criteria when discussing validation of research: authenticity, integrity, credibility, and criticality. Creswell (2013) mentioned that using credibility can help a researcher ensure an accurate account of the intended meanings of the study participants, and that integrity guides the researcher to be self-critical. The data obtained in the study provided the element of authenticity, as the data were personal interviews from organizational managers who directly managed Generation Z employees. Additional authenticity was demonstrated by the quotations provided by the interviewees.

The data in the study was audio recorded, allowing for integrity in the reported data. Creswell (2013) explained that the researcher must be conscious of personal biases in the presentation of the data. When describing the data, a researcher must attempt to avoid interpreting the data from a personal perspective and must present the data in a factual and neutral manner, curtailing any biased interpretation (Yin, 2018). Integrity was maintained in the study, as the dissertation committee reviewed the findings conveyed by the researcher.

In reference to credibility, the managers interviewed had personal, hands-on knowledge of Generation Z employees. Creswell (2013) maintained that, for a study to be valid, the researcher must understand the topic, utilize previous understanding from outside sources, and

document these interpretations in the study. The researcher in this study understood the topic and had experience as a manager of Generation Z employees. The information obtained from the outside sources (interviewees) contributed to the understanding of the topic and was similar to the quoted information from vetted, published, and knowledgeable experts in their fields of learning previously referenced in the study.

When evaluating the data, a researcher should be self-critical and use analytical thinking (Creswell, 2013). Producing valid research includes clearly defining the steps and measures taken to obtain the research for subsequent replication of the study to be accomplished (Yin, 2018). The research processes should be listed and include any mistakes or room for error that may have occurred in the investigation. An extensive coding process should be used to ensure that the data presented is as accurate as possible.

Procedures

Organizational managers in the north central Florida area were asked to participate in the study through an email invitation (Appendix B). Once verified as an organizational manager who managed Generation Z employees, face-to-face interviews were scheduled. A signed consent form was obtained from each participant, which included the estimated duration of 30 minutes for the interview process. Permission to record the interview was granted by each participant. All interactions were recorded using a cell phone and a recording software application.

The interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants for verification. All participants verified the transcripts for accuracy and agreed to the content. Materials from the participants, including the recordings, the transcriptions, and the identifying information about the managers, are kept securely on a password protected device, in a locked office and only available to the principle investigator, methodologist, and student investigator. The information

obtained in the study will be permanently deleted 3 years from the date of the study's

completion.

Data Analysis

Yin (2018) expressed that case studies answer the how and why questions. Creswell

(2013) indicated that the case study approach is used when a researcher needs to examine a real-

life system involving numerous sources of information. The participants in this case study

provided a varied depiction of organizational managers in the north central Florida area by

representing multiple types of industries. Participants were from the following employment

areas: transport refrigeration, hardware retail store, dine-in restaurant, fast-food restaurant, first

responder fire rescue, grocery store, and state prison facility. The data was obtained through

interviews in the approximate setting where the manager usually observed the employees.

Managers responded to six open-ended questions, and their responses were used for data

collection. Through the data analysis, the data were transcribed and coded, which provided a

multi-faceted perspective on the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of the Generation Z

employees. Yin (2018) explained that it may be necessary for a researcher to use a coding

program as a guide for maintaining validity and accuracy of the data. A color-coding tool in

Microsoft Word was used to identify key words and phrases that were like each other. The color

codes were used as a tool to assist in the accuracy of the data analysis process.

Patterns from key words and phrases emerged during the coding process. When

identifying similar words and phrases, the goal was to discover the perceptions of managers

regarding their Generation Z employees in the various businesses. Categories were established

based on key words that were similar among the managers. Parallel key words helped to identify

commonalities in phrases and ideals presented by the managers. Using key words and phrases,

the data were sorted based on the criteria of similar categories. The codes of comparable

categories were collapsed into themes.

Summary

The multiple case study sought to determine organizational managers' perceptions of the

strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. The processes to protect

the identifying information of the participants was consistent with the Institutional Review

Board, Southeastern University's policies, and federal regulations. Seven managers from various

professions who employ and manage Generation Z employees were interviewed in the study.

Qualifying managers agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews with recorded conversations

to contribute information to the study. The data were transcribed for accuracy and sent to the

interviewees for validation. After receiving validation from the participants, data coding began.

Four themes emerged from the coded data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. When compared to previous generations, less is known about Generation Z's work style and characteristics, because Generation Z was just entering the workforce at the time of this study (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Understanding the strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees is important for managers in various industries, as Generation Z employee numbers continue to increase in the workplace. The use of a qualitative case study provided the opportunity for managers to share stories and information regarding their Generation Z employees (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), in a qualitative data analysis, the data should be separated into parts, reformatted, categorized, and analyzed for differences or similarities among multiple cases. The qualitative data analysis and findings from the study are presented in this chapter.

Methods of Data Collection

Organizational managers in the north central Florida area were contacted through email to request participation in the research study. Managers qualifying for possible participation in the study were those who managed Generation Z employees. Various occupations were selected to increase the validity of the study. The managers agreeing to participate were located within a 60-mile radius of the researcher. Once agreement to participate was granted, interviews were

scheduled at a time that was mutually convenient for the interviewee and researcher. Interviews were conducted in person and took place in office settings near where the managers managed their Generation Z employees. The data were collected for the research study through face-to-face interviews with seven organizational managers, with the interview questions designed to answer the research question: What are the perceptions of organizational managers regarding strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees?

The demographic break-down of participants, shown in Table 2, delineates the participating managers by occupation, gender, time in management, number of people managed, and age range. The actual names, ages, and other identifying information has been omitted to protect the privacy of the participants. The participants signed a consent form for participation with the understanding that their identities would be kept confidential in the study, and all information would be password protected, accessible only by the researcher and the dissertation committee. Each participant was labeled throughout the study as a number, which is listed on the table, rather than using the actual names of the participant.

Table 2

Demographics of Organizational Managers in the north central Florida area

Interviewee #	Managers' Industry	Gender	Experience in Years	# of People Managed	Managers' Age Range
1	Retail	M	20	15+	40-50
2	Transport Refrigeration	M	15	10+	35-45
3	Fast Food Restaurant	F	5	20+	45-55
4	Dine-In Restaurant	F	4	15+	35-45
5	First Responder/Fire Rescue	M	15	10+	40-50
6	Grocery Store	F	35	25+	55-65
7	State Prison Facility	M	20	200+	50-60

To ensure accuracy of the data and continuity of the study, the managers answered six identical open-ended interview questions (Appendix A). Each interview was conducted in an office setting with minimal interruptions to ensure accurate audio recording. Prior to the interviews, each participant granted permission to record the conversation. The transcriptions of each interview were prepared and emailed to the participants for review. Each participant was given the opportunity to make changes to the transcriptions. All seven participants replied and agreed to the noted transcription.

The data of each transcription were coded using a multi-colored coding system. The coding system was utilized to highlight words using various colors, notating significant phrases, ideas, and quotes that were parallel or identical. Phrases that included similar ideas were transferred into a table. The table was used to organize the data and collapse the data into themes of perceptions noted by multiple participants. Themes that emerged from the data included technology, communication, life skills, and work ethic.

Findings by Research Question

Creswell (2013) stated that a researcher should code the acquired data and identify those codes into common themes or categories. The transcriptions of the interviews served as the data to answer the research question. Using the transcribed interviews, the information was coded into twenty-two segments and compressed into four themes. The themes integrated similar ideas found in the coded data. The four themes address the research question regarding managers' perceptions of Generation Z employees. The themes are listed and described in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes recognized in data gathered from managers in the north central Florida area.

Theme Name	Description
Technology	The strengths and weaknesses of the Generation Z employees' use of technology.
Communication	The Generation Z employees' ability or inability to communicate with customers, coworkers, or managers in the workplace setting.
Life Skills	Generation Z employees' life skills influenced by home-life and learned experiences from work and school.
Work Ethic	The Generation Z employees' work ethic were considered working hard, continuing working regardless of outside influences, such as moving slowly and wasting time.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of organizational managers regarding strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees?

The participants represented various industries, and all participants managed Generation Z employees, providing information on their strengths, as well as gaps, in knowledge and skills in the workplace. Managers were asked about their experiences, the strengths and gaps of Generation Z employees, the differences observed in Generation Z employees when compared to employees of other generations in the same workplace, and what made Generation Z easier or more difficult to manage. Each manager added to the study by providing unique experiences from their industry, while still connecting the themes across businesses. Therefore, commonalities of Generation Z's work behaviors emerged from the analysis.

Each manager reported the ability to use and navigate technology as a strength for Generation Z employees. Interviewee 1 explained that technology use was the solid strength of Generation Z employees. Interviewees 5 and 2 noted technology use as a strength and that

employees often found ways to use technology to make work easier, as well as providing immediate communication. Interviewee 4 added that the use and understanding of various technology was a strength for Generation Z, in addition to the strength of assisting other generations with understanding how to effectively use computers, smartphones, tablets, and software programs. Interviewee 3 reported that Generation Z employees were "very confident, very technologically savvy, they can be very teachable, very flexible, good at multitasking." Additional strengths of Generation Z employees were noted by Interviewee 7:

> They are not easily intimidated or shy away from challenges that are intellectually challenging. They do have a skill set for problem solving using technology. They are driven, are very technologically aware and strive to succeed, when the benefits are obvious to them. They are singularly focused.

The understanding and navigation of technology was an overwhelming strength for Generation Z employees; however, each of the seven interviewees stated that there were also apparent gaps in the knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. The gaps perceived by the managers included poor work skills, the inability to articulate face-to-face conversations, and an absence of motivation and work ethic. Interviewee 1 said that, "Generation Z employees seem to lack problem-solving skills, work skills, and social skills." Interviewees 2 and 6 added that social skills and interacting face to face were a perceived gap seen in some Generation Z employees. Interviewee 2 stated

> I believe the Generation Z [employees] and again, we're putting everybody in one box we're making a lot of generalizations here we can both understand that there are exceptions to every rule. If we're going to put them all in a box, I would say the gaps that they possess are socially face-to-face.

Interviewee 6 added that Generation Z employees "have more computers skills than their previous generations. But I think we've lost, knowing how to relate to each other, and how to treat each other in a nutshell." Interviewee 7 added to the perceived social skills deficiencies of Generation Z employees stating, "The mere idea of personal interactions seems to be based on social media and the idea of safety from having to be held personally responsible for their viewpoints."

Interviewees 3, 4, and 5 perceived and observed gaps in communication skills, including work ethic, in a few of their Generation Z employees. Interviewee 3 suggested, "I would say my overall perception is they don't come into the job that we are hiring them for knowing how to work hard. Knowing how to work hard for a long time, just hot, sweaty yucky, you know, monotonous work." Interviewee 4 perceived that the Generation Z employees demonstrated poor work ethic through lacking motivation for working, seeming unapproachable, and being unwilling to be trained. Interviewee 5 stated "I think they [Generation Z employees] have a hard time talking to other people."

The perceptions of the organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees were generalized into the four themes of technology, communication, life skills, and work ethic. Several managers mentioned that their perceptions of the Generation Z employees in their industry cannot represent all the Generation Z population, but the skills and gaps were seen in many of the workers encountered in the workplace. While some Generation Z employees were noted to share similar characteristics, exceptions to the findings of the study existed, as the study only encompassed seven industries in the north central Florida area and not every industry who employed Generation Z workers.

Strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills were interwoven throughout the themes and will be explained through the remainder of this chapter. In the technology theme, for example, six of the seven managers stated that Generation Z showed a strength in technology. However, six of the seven managers also expressed that the use of and dependence on technology had possibly developed the social skill deficiency the managers perceived in the Generation Z employees.

Themes

Theme 1: Technology

Technology was perceived to be strong strength and a weakness for the Generation Z employees. Six of the seven managers interviewed agreed that technology was a strength. Generation Z employees knew how to utilize technology and could assist older generations in the use of that technology. At times, Generation Z employees used technology to make jobs easier. Regarding technology, Interviewee 4 explained, "I think one of the greatest things that they [Generation Z employees] have is that they are technology smart, where some of us, that aren't in this generation, don't have that advantage." Interviewee 7 stated that, "Generation Z is very technologically aware and have a solid skill set utilizing computers, phones, etc." Interviewee 1 added about the strengths of using technology by commenting, "They can do anything on a computer." Interviewee 2 agreed, stating that Generation Z employee's strengths are "definitely tied to tech, 100%." Having technological understanding can be used by Generation Z employee's to their advantage by making tasks easier, and at times, Generation Z employees can help others learn technology in the workplace. For example, Interviewee 3 stated that being older than the employees and unfamiliar with current technology sometimes provided an opportunity for Generation Z employees to assist with technology, with Generation Z employees saying, "Oh

yeah, I can do that and it is a tap, tap, tap, done." Interviewees 4 and 5 added that Generation Z employees may help other generations in areas of technology, such as teaching other generations about using technology or even posting and selling items online.

Technology use was a perceived strength for Generation Z employees; however, Interviewee 2 mentioned that Generation Z employees enjoyed immediate gratification through texting, rapid responses, and quick answers. Interviewee 1 noted the strength of technology seen in Generation Z employees but added that handling threats, questions, or problems through text or social media outlets, rather than in person, seemed to have become normal behavior for Generation Z employees. Interviewee 3 shared that Generation Z employees showed a strong dependence on the phone "and they don't know necessarily how to just go outside and have fun. It's very much tied to the phone." Interviewee 3 perceived that some Generation Z employees may have felt the need to be in contact with their social circle, which distracted them, and they could not focus on the tasks they were given without being preoccupied by their smartphones. A perception by Interviewee 4 was that social interactions with others were becoming very impersonal in general: "[Social interaction] it's not taught in just their everyday life because they [Generation Z employees] don't have to communicate like we did, without cell phones or whatever."

The perceptions of the managers showed that, although Generation Z employees interacted with those in their social circle through technology and social media, perhaps the on-screen interaction created a false sense of personally socializing. Some Generation Z employees may "post their entire lives on social media, which is unnecessary" and can be troublesome for the employee, according to Interviewee 5, because "it seems that they are too worried about their peer group's opinion of them, and not doing more in their job to be successful." Social media

through technology provides a great opportunity to stay connected with other people. However, Interviewee 6 stated social media may provide somewhat of a safety net where people, including Generation Z employees, "can make your opinion known, you can make your statements, but there's nobody in your face there to react to it." The social gaps perceived to be related to technology use noted by the managers were thought by four of the managers to be related to Generation Z employees' dependence on technology and having access to technology from the beginning of their lifetime. Three managers added that, in their opinion, being able to utilize technology to obtain answers has made it more difficult for Generation Z employees to learn how to think individually and patiently wait for results. Interviewee 3 noted that, although technology use can be a strength, "technology works to their [Generation Z employees] disadvantage sometimes, because they have so much access to the screen, so much access at their fingertips to any information that they don't know how to work for it."

Theme 2: Communication

Managers were asked about the strengths and gaps of Generation Z employees. Interviewees 4 and 5 established that immediate feedback and communication using technology was a perceived strength of Generation Z employees. According to Interviewee 4, Generation Z employees helped in the industry to increase understanding of how to communicate with recent technology. Nevertheless, the gaps perceived by all seven interviewees were underdeveloped face-t- face communication skills in Generation Z employees. Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 reported that, although Generation Z employees were able to remain in contact with social groups through their cellphones, they also had difficulty communicating with other people in a face-to-face setting. Interviewee 7 suggested, "Generation Z employees are socially driven utilizing distance technology, but they do not deal well in personal interactions."

Furthermore, Interviewees 2, 5, 6, and 7 claimed that the perceived struggle of Generation Z employees to communicate properly in person was linked to the consistent use of technology, including smartphones, computers, and gaming systems. Interviewee 6 stated, "It's my opinion that telephones, laptops, and game consoles have replaced having in-person relationships, and knowing how to relate to each other, how to treat each other." Interviewee 2 expressed, "The gamer thing is so prevalent in this generation," providing some of the Generation Z employees the ability to understand and play video games extremely well for long periods of time, but distracting the employees from having practice in social skills and communication. Interviewee 1 described being surprised that some of the Generation Z employees in the retail industry were unfamiliar with "communication skills," such as speaking to adults using eye contact and listening to another person before responding or interrupting.

Interviewee 2 contended that Generation Z employees' ability to interact with people using in-person or face-to-face methods may be lacking due to communicating through texting and online chats. Interviewees 5 and 6 elaborated on the perceived lack of communication skills. Interviewee 5 continued, "I also think they [Generation Z employees] struggle with communicating with people, because I see them get nervous about having a face-to-face conversation." Interviewee 6 stated, "I don't feel that the Generation Z employees have social skills, especially with adults. They are comfortable with their own age group, but in a job like this you are dealing with adult customers anywhere from age 20 to 90." Interviewee 2, a member of Generation X stated, "We had to talk to people on the phone, we had phone etiquette, we had face-to-face etiquette, we were used to dealing with people and the face-to-face drama, whereas I think they [Generation Z employees] sometimes miss that."

Interviewee 4 expressed that, rather than communicating in person, Generation Z employees could use cell phones to text, therefore face-to-face or oral communication was used and practiced less. Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 perceived that a portion of their Generation Z employees lacked what they interpreted as appropriate in-person communication skills, such as listening and giving a thoughtful response, using manners and not interrupting, and speaking to a person directly facing the person using eye contact. Interviewee 5 added that a portion of the Generation Z employees, "seem to get nervous about having a face-to-face conversation and don't know how to keep a conversation going." Interviewee 3 expressed that a cruel world exists which may not be very forgiving to Generation Z employees who do not possess appropriate communication skills. Interviewee 3 contributed that having conversations and dealing with people was a struggle for Generation Z employees. Interviewee 6 described Generation Z employees as "very socially awkward," especially when dealing with people of other generations and age groups. Considering the young age of Generation Z employees, Interviewee 6 contributed that learning to speak with adults was possibly linked to maturity and, therefore, a skill Generation Z employees had not learned by their age.

Theme 3: Life Skills

Potential life skills were mentioned by six of the seven managers. According to research studies by Kautz et al. (2014), when Generation Z employees had been raised in homes with minimal parental interaction, they may have experienced learning fewer life skills in the home than others in their generation or previous generations. Interviewee 3 discussed that some Generation Z employees did not know proper work protocols and stated, "I don't know if that's lack of instruction from the parents or what, but there seems to always be some excuse of why you're late, why you can't come in... it's not reasonable, it's not justifiable excuses." Interviewee

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6, a member of the Boomer Generation cohort, expressed the perception that parental

expectations have changed over time. Interviewee 6 stated that some Generation Z employees

had been influenced to have manners and respect for others. However, many of the Generation Z

employees in Interviewee 6's grocery industry did not demonstrate manners toward others,

which relates negatively in their customer service for that job.

Interviewee 1 described the job of a manager of Generation Z employees reaches beyond

traditional managerial duties, suggesting that some employees did not come to the job having

learned things "they should already know, like how to work hard, and do a good job, or do what

they are told." Once workplace experience begins, Generation Z employees obtained influencers

on their behaviors and life skills that may be based on home life, social groups, mentors, and

formal education (Kautz et al., 2014; Public/Private Ventures, 2018; Dugan & Komives , 2007).

According to the manager's perceptions from the retail industry, Interviewee 1 proposed that

lessons, such as working hard, may not be taught to some of the Generation Z employees prior to

working age.

Interviewee 3 contributed that it was necessary for the manager to teach most of the

Generation Z employees "that they have to work, this is a job that you know you have to show

up, you have to show up on time." Interviewee 6 stated, from personal experience, that growing

up in a home with two parents was fortunate and may not be the situation for some Generation Z

employees, "as many live with just mom or just dad who are both working." Interviewee 6

proposed a possible connection between working parents and single parent homes stating, "I

don't think parents have the time or the energy to teach the kids, you know, to teach them the

skills that they need to get out into the world." Interviewee 4 added, it is not all the Generation Z

employees, but some of the employees do not seem to have been taught life lessons prior to

coming to a job. Interviewee 3 described the difference between some Generation Z employees who seem to have been taught lessons or been positively influenced prior to working, and those who seem to have not. Interviewee 3 said:

> We get the occasional kid whose parents have taught them how to weed, and so they know what it is to stand out in a burning hot sun and work for hours at a time, but most of them don't know how to get their hands dirty and with a good attitude, you know, only some of them do.

Interviewee 2 suggested that a noted difference in influencers of Generation Z employees may be related to lifestyle. Interviewee 2 stated that, from personal managerial experience, "There's a lot of difference in rural America versus big cities, the way that kids have been raised." Interviewee 2 contributed that, "Rural communities have those guys whose Dad was up at 5am and worked till dark, and they have more of an acceptance of, hey that's what you're supposed to do, that's what I'm gonna do."

Each of the seven managers contributed data regarding life skills that were beneficial in the workplace. A compiled list of the managers' description of life skills needed by employees included problem solving skills, paying attention to detail, holding down a job, using tools, thinking on their feet, respect, self-control, and manners. Interviewees 1 and 7 discussed Generation Z employees' ability to perform any function on a computer, but they struggle with problem solving in the workplace. Interviewees 5 and 7 expressed concern for the Generation Z employees, as they observed some that did not have the ability or knowledge to perform physical work skills and lacked knowledge of how to use common tools; skills that would help them in their workplace and daily lives. The perception of some managers in the study was that in the absence of a concerned manager, some Generation Z employees may not have been given

guidance where skills were lacking. Interviewee 7 stated that, in the prison industry, an increased number of Generation Z employees had been observed who were not able to use simple hand tools or perform tasks relating to solving mechanical problems. Interviewee 5 said that many of the "Generation Z employees do not pay attention detail…and are not able to work with their hands very well." Interviewee 1 expressed that, in the last 5 years, there had been an increased need for the managers to assist the employees in solving customer service problems occurring in the store. Interviewee 1 stated, increasingly "as well as trying to train them [Generation Z employees] on how to accomplish their duties, I also have to teach them life skills that they should already know." Interviewee 5 suggested that being able to think quickly and find solutions for issues was perceived and recognized as a life skill missing in many of the Generation Z employees. Interviewee 5 explained:

[Generation Z employees] have a hard time thinking on their feet. Especially in a first responder job, it is necessary to be able to think quickly and efficiently to solve the problems and many can't do that very easily. There seems to be a struggle with the ability to see an issue, think of the best solution, then try that, and ok, that didn't work, let's try something else that should work. It's like, if there is no solution told to them in very specific steps, they panic.

According to Interviewee 6, vocational training should be encouraged more in schools to narrow the perceived gap in the skills of Generation Z employees. Interviewee 6 continued, stating that, in a vocational training program "you actually learned the skill for a job, and you went and worked, and you learned [the skill for a job] in high school before you got out [Graduated]."

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Interviewee 3 stated that managers have opportunities to help Generation Z employees learn. Interviewee 3 explained that managers can create an opportunity for learning life skills, which can then be utilized in that employee's future. The chance for learning is created when employees observe others in the same positions, being held accountable for an unsatisfactory job, or see others do a satisfactory job, then learn by their example.

Respect, self-control, and manners are life skills that can be taught, and based on the perceptions of the managers, would be beneficial in the work environment. The data showed that managers perceived that respect for others can coincide with self-control when working in jobs with face-to-face interactions and consistent customer service. When interacting with the public, Interviewees 3 and 6 argued that, in the realm of their particular industries, employee's perceptions should be controlled and set aside for the good of the business. The difficulty with social interaction and communication previously reported by the managers was interwoven in this theme, as it was perceived by all seven of the managers that Generation Z employees seemed to struggle with appropriately interacting with other people. Interviewee 5 added that, in the first responder industry, a "lack of respect for not only their elders, but their peers, too" has been observed in some Generation Z employees. Interviewee 5 suggested that the level of respect for those in authority is a life skill that may not have been taught to some Generation Z employees. In other words, according to Interviewee 5, "It takes a sense of respect to obey those in authority without feeling the need to argue your point, some of that is definitely missing in my Generation Z employees."

Interviewee 4 had found Generation Z employees who "can be easier to train, if they do have that ability to be respectful and respect that I am a manager and that they need to listen to me." According to the data, the managers considered respectful behavior to include an

employees' ability to communicate properly with people. Interviewee 3 stated to foster the growth of mutual respect, solving problems with coworkers, and proper face-to-face communication, Generation Z employees were encouraged with the statement, "Don't talk to me, talk to each other."

Theme 4: Work Ethic

Chungyalpa and Karishma (2016) listed seven facets of measuring work ethic, with six of the measurements revealed in the data: hard work, delaying gratification, avoiding leisure activities, morality and ethics, centrality of work, and wasting time. According to the perceptions of the participating managers, many Generation Z employees had strengths for being able to solve technological problems. Additionally, Interviewee 5 suggested that Generation Z employees seemed willing to help in situations when technological issues arised on the job, which related to the centrality of work mentioned as a facet of work ethic. However, all seven managers noted areas that were missing in the work ethic of Generation Z employees when compared to the facets used for measuring by Chungyalpa and Karishma (2016). In reference to hard work, as one of the facets of work ethic, Interviewee 1 remarked that some Generation Z employees demonstrated what was perceived as a lack of "drive" and desire to complete a job successfully. Interviewee 1 reported instances of some Generation Z employees attempting to stop working in the middle of a task and having to be reminded by the manager, "No, it is not ok for you to walk away from the task I have given you to finish just because you are tired, or you are aggravated. Work through it and finish the job." Interviewee 3 discussed the need to encourage Generation Z employees to continue working until the job was finished.

Interviewee 3 perceived that, possibly, Generation Z employees were not familiar with working "four or five hours straight, non-stop." An example stated by Interviewee 3 was having

to explain to a Generation Z employee, "Yes, you've got to keep making the fries; yes, you've got to keep making the chicken. Yes, I still need you to mop the floor, even though you just did all of this." Interviewee 3 suggested that perhaps the lack in the understanding of sustained work of Generation Z employees was due to a lack of experience, which can be learned on the job or prior to a first job. On the other hand, Generation Z employees demonstrated a lack of work ethic through impatience, and, according to Interviewee 2, while at work, "when put on long or drawn out projects, I see the younger generation [Generation Z employees] just gets so frustrated with it." Interviewee 3 stated that, "Work ethic-wise, a lot of the kids that I work with don't know what it's like to have a lawn mowing business or a summer job outside, you know, just working hard for a long period of time."

Interviewee 6 suggested that, in particular industries, manager expectations included employees who should "know that they need to keep busy" while on the job, and in agreement with Chungyalpa and Karishma (2016) stated that leisure time should be limited in order to demonstrate a proper work ethic. Interviewee 6 perceived, through one's own efforts, Generation Z employees can succeed in the workplace. Furthermore, Interviewee 7 concluded that Generation Z employees "are not easily intimidated nor shy away from challenges that are intellectually challenging."

Chungyalpa and Karishma (2016) explained that work ethic included delaying gratification and hard work. Interviewee 3 stated that Generation Z employees possessed the strength of multitasking, which may help the employees to do more than one job at a time. Interviewee 7 stated that, at times, Generation Z employees did not make decisions based on others, the work team, or the greater good, but decisions were made based on satisfying a personal benefit, which demonstrated a lack of work ethic, according to Interviewee 7's

perception. Interviewee 7 stated that, for Generation Z employees, "Individual accomplishment and acclaim is more important than the success of the organization or team as a whole." Regarding work ethic, Interviewee 5 contributed that there were some Generation Z employees who understood the hierarchy in a job setting, and there were some with a mindset that mundane job duties were "beneath" them. Interviewee 5 suggested that a portion of Generation Z employees, although subordinate in seniority, felt that someone, anyone else besides them, should be made to do difficult duties, even if it is the employee's superior. Therefore, according to the standards used to measure work ethic, the Generation Z employees were not perceived by Interviewee 5 as hard workers. Interviewee 3 expressed experience with some Generation Z employees not being willing to perform tasks with a good attitude, which was perceived as poor work ethic in the workplace.

Each of the seven interviewees noted a difference in work ethic of Generation Z, when compared to the work ethic observed in employees of other generational cohorts in their industry. The perceived lack of work ethic was not gender specific. Interviewee 3 expressed that some Generation Z employees did desire to please the managers and were looking for praise. Some interviewees suggested that Generation Z employees' work ethic, whether positive or negative, was directly related to the ability to gain a reward rather than intrinsic motivation related to the centrality of work. Interviewee 5 explained that the older generational cohort employees, when they the same ages as the Generation Z employees, understood that work was a job and getting paid was the reward. It was the perception of Interviewee 5 that Generation Z employees "expect some bells and whistles just for doing their job that they are supposed to do anyway" and doing a good job while working hard, "because it is the right thing to do" was not a common trait seen in Generation Z employees. Interviewee 7 perceived the idea that there was a reward for

participation and not excellence that may have contributed to the difference seen in the work ethic of Generation Z. Although not represented in previously referenced literature, Interviewee 7's perception expanded to suggest that:

> Society has lowered the bar for what is considered success by providing recognition for all instead of the just the best of us. A Generation Z employee expects to be rewarded for just completing the bare basic duties; they do not understand why another employee might receive more accolades for doing more, being more successful.

According to Interviewees 1, 3, and 6, it would be beneficial for Generation Z employees to have a plan of action regarding work ethic by an employable age. Interviewee 3 continued that some of the Generation Z employees "have not been given the opportunity to learn about working hard on the job yet, but they can learn." Interviewee 3 expressed that:

> It should be very intrinsically rewarding, a job well done, you know, they don't have a concept of that intrinsic reward of a job well done…I think there's always going to be a generation gap. I think there's always going to be the older generation saying you young people don't know how hard we had it…because every generation is going to have certain things a little bit easier than the ones before and that's okay. But it doesn't mean that all generations can't be hard workers.

Evidence of Quality

Creswell (2013) described the qualitative researcher as one who endeavors to understand the research by meeting with those being studied. Validating the study included personal meetings with the organizational managers to gather accurate accounts of the perceptions of the participants regarding the Generation Z employees. Additionally, Creswell (2013) stated that a valid study would include a researcher understanding the topic being researched, gathering and

understanding evidence of the study from other sources, and documenting the research in a written study. Meeting Creswell's (2013) requirements, the data was reviewed, analyzed, and a written study was created to present the findings. Yin (2018) explained that, although a researcher has experience with a topic, a qualitative researcher must attempt to remain open and accepting of responses from the participants, striving to set aside preconceptions and personal bias to create a valid study. The interview transcriptions demonstrated the interview questions were asked, and interviewees were allowed to provide open responses for each question. Providing further validity, the researcher's dissertation committee participated in a review process of the data analysis throughout the course of the study.

Summary

Chapter IV served as an analysis of the data gathered from face-to-face interviews with seven managers in the north central Florida area. Validity of the data was supported by giving each interviewee the opportunity to check the transcribed interview for accuracy using member checking. The data were coded, and similar findings were transferred into four themes: technology, communication, life skills, and work ethic. Answering the research question, the data presented the perceptions of organizational managers, finding strengths and gaps in the knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Perceived strengths of Generation Z employees supported by this research, encompassed the ability to use and teach others technology, remain singularly focused, not shy away from a challenge when there is a clear benefit, and to multitask. The discerned gaps of Generation Z employees included the lack of interpersonal communication skills and work ethic. Chapter V will include suggestions for additional research.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in the north central Florida area regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. A qualitative research design was utilized to gain insight from managers in the north central Florida area. Managers interviewed for the study discussed both strengths and gaps found in the characteristics of the employees of the Generation Z cohort. The interview questions were comprised of six open ended questions to address and support the research topic. This chapter will outline the study and provide insight into further research that can be conducted on the strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Limitations of the study, recommendations for additional studies, and implications for mutually successful working relationships between managers and Generation Z employees will be discussed in this chapter.

Statement of the Problem

The qualitative collective case study was performed to identify any existing strengths or gaps in the knowledge and skills possessed by Generation Z employees. Managers in the study recognized both strengths and gaps in the rapidly increasing Generation Z workforce. Martin and Ottemann (2016) suggested that managers and employees should maintain a working relationship that can mutually contribute to meeting the goals of the organization. Most managers desire an employee to have, or be able to learn, the skills needed to be successful in the position

for which the employee was hired (Manpowergroup, 2013). Generation Z employees had unique characteristics and had been influenced by societal changes that were different from the generational cohorts before them (Dorsey et al., 2019-2020). Managers who perceive gaps in knowledge and skills of the incoming employees may become frustrated because of a lack of understanding of the employees of the Generation Z cohort.

Methods of Data Collection

A qualitative collective case study was used in the research study to discover any perceived strengths and gaps in the knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. Convenience sampling was used to collect data from a grouping of seven managers from various backgrounds and industries in the north central Florida area. Each manager was asked to participate in the study, and upon agreement, signed a consent to be interviewed. The managers were interviewed using semi-structured interview questions to allow for the participants to elaborate on their experiences with Generation Z employees. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, were audio recorded, and consisted of six open-ended questions relating to the research question for the study: What are the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees? The managers were provided with the interview questions prior to the appointment to eliminate any confusion on what would be studied and were given a copy of the recorded transcription after the interview to check for accuracy.

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Summary of Results

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As Generation Z employees continue to enter the workforce, existing managers find the need to understand and relate to the incoming workers. The managers participating in the research study described the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of their current Generation Z employees. Upon answering the interview questions (Appendix A), the managers

provided insight into the characteristics of the Generation Z employees of their various industry. Four themes emerged from the data collection in the study, and both strengths and gaps were identified.

The managers unanimously stated that Generation Z employees were technologically advanced and had a skill set that surpassed other generational cohorts in the area of technology. Managers suggested that Generation Z employees used technology to make jobs easier and could use their knowledge of technology to help other employees learn tech programs used in the industry. The managers explained that communication skills were not a strength of the Generation Z employees. Four managers noted that not all Generation Z employees possessed gaps in the areas of respect, responsibility, and work ethic. However, five managers suggested the areas of respect for others, responsibility for personal actions, and appropriate work ethic were gaps in the skills of their Generation Z employees. A reason suggested to explain why some employees did not have a gap in the areas of respect, responsibility, and work ethic was that some employees were influenced by people who demonstrated an appropriate example of respect, responsibility, and work ethic qualities.

Managers mentioned that opportunities often arose for training the Generation Z employees in the areas of initiative, social skills, and problem solving. However, Gaidhani et al., (2019) stated that Generation Z had the desire to lead in the workplace and could out-communicate prior generations in video conferencing and other forms of technical communication. Ozkan and Solmaz (2015) added that Generation Z considered themselves to be hard working and innovative. The data reflected that managers did not observe an intrinsic motivation within the Generation Z employees to perform tasks, and there was a lack of initiative to go above and beyond any required duties. Previously referenced research by Manpowergroup

(2013) supported the findings of the research study, explaining that Generation Z employees

lacked motivation, interpersonal skills, and enthusiasm. Studies by Abdullah et al. (2018) also

stated that Generation Z employee pools lacked appropriate social skills.

Carter (2018) expressed that Generation Z was able to access many resources quickly and

would work individually, or in a group, to accomplish a task. Interviewees 1, 3, 5, and 7 noted

that many of the Generation Z employees were not familiar with solving problems without the

aid of their phone or explicit instructions. Research by Singh and Dangmei (2016) supported the

suggestions by Interviewees 1, 3, 5, and 7 that Generation Z employees were dependent on their

technological devices for entertainment and educational purposes. According to Interviewees 1,

3, and 5, many times learning the skills of solving a problem quickly and efficiently or finding an

alternative solution for an issue was a skill that needed to be taught by the manager.

<div align="center">**Discussion by Research Question**</div>

The reason for the study was to determine if any strengths or gaps in knowledge and

skills existed in Generation Z employees. To discover any perceived gaps or strengths in

knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees, seven organizational managers from north

central Florida were invited to participate in the qualitative case study to provide perceptions of

their employees.

Research Question 1: What are the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of

Generation Z employees?

Throughout the study, the organizational managers interviewed contributed information

toward the strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees. The strength

supported by all the managers was Generation Z employees' use, navigation, and understanding

of technology. The gaps noted related to interpersonal communication, work ethic, and life skills

<div align="center">64</div>

that may potentially be learned at home or school. Managers in the industries used in this study stated that there were exceptions to the strengths and gaps in the employees. However, managers expressed that the noted strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills were present in many Generation Z employees. The managers who participated in the study had work related experience ranging from four years to fifteen years. Gleaning information from the knowledge of experienced managers contributed to the validity of the data as the managers could present accurate data for their industry.

Study Limitations

Although the study provided valuable information regarding the strengths and gaps of knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees, one limitation of the study was the small area represented by the data collection. The managers chosen for the study were from the north central Florida area only. The representative sample could not provide information about every Generation Z employee in the state, country, or world. Another limitation was that Generation Z employees may exhibit different attributes in other industries. The seven industries represented could not provide enough information to fully encompass characteristics of every Generation Z employee in any industry.

Yin (2018) suggested that a researcher is not able to control all bias in a study. The managers interviewed did not share an equal amount of leadership experience because of their tenure on the job. The interviewees difference in years in a managerial role may have presented supplementary variables to the study. Since the managers represented multiple industries, Generation Z's job requirements differed. Furthermore, as the managers' duties were multi-faceted and included various responsibilities, there is a possibility that managers may have been distracted while participating in the study. The researcher's previous experience with, and

management of, Generation Z employees also needed to be overlooked to allow for the interviewees perceptions to be exclusively expressed in the study.

Another limitation to the study was the worldwide pandemic, caused by the Corona virus, also called COVID-19. The pandemic caused a shut-down of some industries, with managers and employees becoming unavailable for the study. While the country was in a state of emergency, several industries were unable to sustain workers, and people were laid off from their jobs. Although some industries remained open during the pandemic closures, the managers were reluctant to meet face-to-face for interviews because of the restrictions set forth by the health departments discouraging personal interaction. Interviews that were originally scheduled to be held in person with managers from three additional industries were cancelled, because the interviewees chose to decline participation in the study due to the fear of spreading the virus, thus reducing the number of interviewees from ten to seven.

Implications for Future Practice

Managers can incorporate the triadic social cognitive theory demonstrated by Carillo (2013) into the workplace to help develop the knowledge and skills of their Generation Z employees. The social cognitive theory suggests that an employee can improve behavioral factors of performance based on environmental stimulation in the work environment, such as encouragements, leading to personal factors, such as an increased self-efficacy, which, in turn, leads back to an improved overall behavior in the workplace (Carillo, 2013). Eppard and Rochdi (2017) proposed that the social constructivism theory is a successful teaching and learning style that involves a person working collaboratively with a teacher or peer. Social constructivism theory may be integrated into the workplace using managers or workers, with a higher skill level than the Generation Z employees, to interact as mentors. The mentors would work with the

Generation Z employees to solve problems occurring in the workplace through training and collaborative work groups. Interviewees 3 and 5 suggested that the restaurant and first responder industries have successfully introduced aspects of the social constructivism theory to assist with gaps in knowledge of employees.

Understanding the characteristics of Generation Z employees may assist managers in formulating successful relationships with their employees, possibly leading to a more productive workplace environment. Researching and developing a training program targeting the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees could be developed to help fill in or narrow the gaps reported. The programs could be developed for training programs at schools, workshops in the workplace, and teaching aides for managers to use on the job. Developing and utilizing a training program geared toward increasing the strengths and reducing the gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees discovered in the study may help to assist Generation Z employees to be more prepared for the workforce in the future.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

Based on the qualitative case study conducted, many opportunities exist for future research. One way to gain additional data about Generation Z employees would be to use a quantitative design in a research study. A researcher may find that quantitative data could provide the chance to count the specific number of times a particular action occurs in the workplace by a Generation Z employee. The mixed methods design for research could be used in an additional study to incorporate both the qualitative and quantitative data needed for further research. Adding additional data to the research, such as more questions and an increased number of interviewees would heighten the results' pool from which to draw conclusions about the characteristics of Generation Z employees.

Supplementary research may be needed to further investigate Generation Z employees after several years on the same job. Exploring Generation Z employees after obtaining work experience in an industry could help a researcher discover if they improve in a workplace over time. Data to be discovered could be new strengths reported by interviewed managers, or possibly if the same strengths and gaps described in this study remain characteristics of Generation Z employees. A longitudinal study of a minimum of five years may show that the employees have quickly learned the manager's expectations. However, the data may show that the Generation Z employees remained on the baseline of this study. Additionally, a researcher conducting further studies may be able to determine if Generation Z employees learned more appropriate work skills through the social cognitive theory or social constructivism theory training methods.

Conclusion

Martin and Ottemann (2016) and Interviewee 4 (in this study) mentioned that the overall desire of the manager is for a mutually beneficial relationship between the manager and employee to exist in the workplace. A problem can occur in the workplace when the relationships are out of balance. This study provided insight related to perceptions the organizational managers had regarding their Generation Z employees. When collecting data for the study, the managers were asked to be specific and honest about their experiences with their Generation Z employees. Unexpected problems occurring during the study, such as COVID-19, made it difficult to gather an abundance of data. However, enough data were collected to provide recommendations for future practices and further research. Ideas for future practices in the workplace generated from the study were to implement a mentor training program. Additionally, to narrow the gaps discovered in the knowledge and skills, it may be beneficial to develop

training programs to be available for families and schools. Lastly, a longitudinal study observing Generation Z employees in the workplace over a minimum of five years could provide insight into learned behaviors and help determine the employees' ability to rise to the managers' expectations. The unique culture of the Generation Z cohort requires that managers understand this generation and know how to assist the employees in reaching their fullest potential in the workplace.

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Appendix A

The interview questions were written to answer the research question to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in north central Florida regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees.

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences as an organizational manager.

2. In your opinion, what strengths do Generation Z employees possess?

3. In your opinion, what gaps do Generation Z employees possess?

4. What are the differences in skills, knowledge, and work ethics that you perceive are different based on the generational attributes of your employees?

5. What traits do Generation Z employees possess, positive or negative, that make them easier or more difficult to manage?

6. What else would you like to contribute to this study regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees?

Appendix B

ADULT CONSENT FORM
SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE
The perceptions of organizational managers regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees

INVESTIGATORS
Dr. Karen Ingle, Principal Investigator
Southeastern University
1000 Longfellow Boulevard
Lakeland, FL 33801

Ms. Tori L. Hersey, Student Investigator

PURPOSE
The purpose of this case study is to explore the perceptions of organizational managers in North Central Florida regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills of Generation Z employees.

PROCEDURES
Once you give consent to participating in this study, I will contact you to schedule an interview. The interview may be conducted in person, digitally, or by telephone. The interview will be audio recorded, and I will be taking notes. Any information that can specifically identify you will be kept confidential. I will use a pseudonym or code in place of your real name when I compile, analyze, and report the results of your interview. The purpose of the audio recording is to get an accurate account of our conversation for developing a transcript. This information will be kept in a secure area to which only I have access. The average amount of time that you will dedicate to this research process for the interview will be approximately 30 minutes.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION
The study has the potential to influence the way that managers train and manage Generation Z employees.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office, and only researchers and

individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

COMPENSATION
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

CONTACTS
Dr. Karen Ingle
863-667-5414
kmingle@seu.edu

Ms. Tori L. Hersey
352-478-1617
tlhersey@seu.edu

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C

Institutional Review Board approval letter

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
DATE: September 21, 2020
TO: Karen Ingle, Janet Deck, Tori Hersey
FROM: SEU IRB
PROTOCOL TITLE: The perceptions of organizational mangers regarding the strengths and gaps in
knowledge of gen employees
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 20 ED 30
APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: September 21, 2020 Expiration Date: September 20, 2021

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, The
perceptions of organizational mangers regarding the strengths and gaps in knowledge of gen employees. The project
has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any
changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to
include the following:

• Description of proposed revisions;

• *If applicable,* any new or revised materials;

• *If applicable,* updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within
24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for
Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's
Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd

Chair, Institutional Review Board

irb@seu.edu