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## **Human Resources Strategies for Integrating Generation Z into Labor Organization in Germany**



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- Kurzfassung:** Die junge Generation Z, die zum ersten Mal "digital" aufgewachsen ist, scheint ein besonderes Arbeitsverständnis zu haben und stellt andere Anforderungen an potenzielle Arbeitgeber als ihre Vorgänger. Während die Personalmanager in Deutschland gerade erst anfangen, mit den Erwartungen der Generation Y umzugehen, stehen die ersten Vertreter der Generation Z, der heutigen Generation von Kindern und Jugendlichen, vor Ihrem beruflichen Einstieg. Auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt sind die Generationen Baby-Boomer, X und Y, aufgrund ihres aktuellen Alters überwiegend vertreten. Inzwischen ist die nächste Generation bereits in den Startlöchern und teilweise schon in der Arbeitswelt angekommen. Diese Generation, die als Generation Z (auch Gen Z oder iGen) bezeichnet wird, ist derzeit in kontroversen Artikeln in Deutschland zu finden. "Die Generation Z stellt sich vor, die Arbeitswelt sei wie eine Facebook-Party und hat weniger Loyalität gegenüber dem Arbeitgeber als zu ihren Turnschuhen", so titelt eine deutsche Tageszeitung. Inwieweit solche Aussagen zu persönlichen Mustern und individuellen Vorstellungen der Generation Z zur Arbeitswelt richtig sind, kann nicht ausreichend dokumentiert werden, da die Mehrzahl dieser Generation Z (geboren ab dem Jahr 1995) noch nicht erwerbstätig ist. Der "War for Talents" ist der Grund, warum es Unternehmen in den nächsten Jahren zu einer wesentlichen Aufgabe wird, sich auf die Generation Z einzustellen und sie für sich zu gewinnen. Aus Unternehmenssicht ist es daher notwendig, sich auf dem Arbeitsmarkt zu positionieren und die besten Talente für die eigene Organisation zu gewinnen. Dieser Artikel untersucht, welche Personalstrategien deutsche Unternehmen aktuell verfolgen. Auf Basis dieser Ergebnisse werden aktuelle Strategien mit den arbeitsorganisatorischen Anforderungen der Generation Z verglichen. Anschließend werden erste Handlungsempfehlungen auf Basis der bisherigen Untersuchung für Unternehmen gegeben. Der Artikel schließt mit Empfehlungen für zukünftige Forschung und Praxis auf dem Gebiet der Integration der Generation Z in die Arbeitsorganisation ab.
- Schlagwörter (dt.):** **Generation Z, Deutschland, persönliche Muster, Arbeitsorganisation, Personalmanagement, HR-Strategien**
- Summary:** The young Generation Z, which for the first time has grown up "digital", seems to have a special understanding of work and places other demands on potential employers. While personal managers in Germany are just beginning to deal with the expectations of Generation
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Y, the first representatives of Generation Z, today's generation of children and young people, are already ahead of their career decision. In the German labor market, generations of baby boomers, X and Y are predominantly represented because of their current age. Meanwhile, the next generation is already in the starting holes and has partially arrived in the working world. These generation, designated as Generation Z (also Gen Z or iGen), are currently found in controversial articles in Germany. "Generation Z imagines the working world to be like a Facebook party and has less loyalty to the employer than to their gym shoes". The extent to which such statements on personal patterns and individual ideas regarding the working world are correct, cannot be adequately documented, because the majority of these Generation Z born from 1995 are not yet employed. The "War for Talents" is the reason why companies will become an essential task in the next years to adjust to Generation Z and win them over for themselves. From a company perspective, it is therefore necessary to position itself on the labor market and to win the best talents for one's organization. This article examines which Human Resources strategies German companies are pursuing. Based on these results, current strategies are compared with the labor organization requirements of Generation Z. Subsequently, recommendations are made for companies. The article concludes with recommendations for future research and practice in the area of Integrating Generation Z into labor organization.

**Keywords:****Generation Z, Germany, personal patterns, labor organization, Human Resource Management, HR strategies**

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## Introduction

Germany is one of the most influential and economically strong countries in the world. The country has made it into the Top Ten in the Ranking of the Global Innovation Index 2017. It is characterized above all by its constant ability to innovate in research and development as well as the development of knowledge. The country also performs well in terms of logistics and new patent applications (Cornell University et al. 2017).

In the field of education, however, the country does not perform very well in the comparison of countries. Germany is ranked at place 29. According to the results of the Global Innovation Index, there is a need to catch up on both school education and tertiary education.

One question that should be asked, is how Germany can maintain its innovation ability in the future if education is a neglected area.

Additionally, German companies have been much more dissatisfied with the training of university graduates since the Bologna reform was introduced. Therefore, the recruitment process is becoming increasingly difficult from the point of view of companies. Currently, there seems to be a shift in the balance of power between employer and employee (Personalwirtschaft 2015).

On the one hand, the right candidate must be found from the company's point of view. On the other, candidates are becoming increasingly demanding and try to find, what they believe to be the right company from their point of view.

The recruiting process could become even more difficult by current social, political and economic developments in the future. Due to the demographic change, the politically driven discussion on the implementation of a women's quota, also in executive and management positions and the progress of digitization, HR departments in Germany are currently confronted with new challenges.

Besides digitization of HR processes, agile management questions in the area of HR and other demanding tasks, a core task will be the recruitment and the retention of a new type of employee in the future. The entry of Generation Z into the labor force presents new challenges to the HR departments of companies.

Because Generation Z, the first generation who completely grew up in a digital world, is found to have a different understanding and expectations of work and work environments, this might not match with current HR strategies.

To get one step closer to answer the question, whether HR departments are ready for the arrival of Generation Z, a pre-study in DAX-30 companies was conducted, analyzing companies' annual reports as well as their PR materials.

## Today's HR strategies in Germany

HR strategies today are strongly connected to digitization. Top management strategies as well as organizational processes are becoming increasingly digitally aligned and are being revised for modern communication (Klimmer and Selonke 2017).

CEOs in German companies are currently concentrating on the digital adaptability of business models, the expansion of the IT infrastructure and the construction of Smart Factory solutions. HRM is in the focus of digitizing strategies, too.

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The international HR service provider Hays recently conducted an empirical study on the competences required for digital change in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. For respondents flexibilization and digitization are the two most important topics in HR strategies (Eilers et al. 2017).

The three major organizational challenges in digitization are the management of increasing complexity in cooperation (58%), followed by the adaptation of leadership culture to flexible working models (53%) and the development of new networking forms (50%) (Eilers et al. 2017).

The focus on digitization has also an impact on recruitment. Hays found that the majority of companies recruiting new employees are looking for potential employees nationwide (54%) and regionally (38%). Only 23 percent are looking for new employees globally and 16 percent across the EU (Eilers et al. 2017).

In the channels for employee recruitment, the job portals on the Internet (81%) are back in front of the company's own corporations (76%), social media platforms have increased (28%) but are not yet a recruitment channel (Eilers et al. 2017).

Employee loyalty has lost importance (59 to 69%) in comparison to last year (Eilers et al. 2017).

A further study conducted by management consultant Roland Berger investigated the most important HR trends in Germany. Companies surveyed by Roland Berger consider the greatest need for action in the areas of talent management, strategic personnel planning, HR analytics, leadership, the digitization of HR processes and services, change management as well as corporate culture and commitment. For all listed ranges, the deviation from the desired presentation to the current state is particularly large (Roland Berger GmbH 2017, 2017).

Since the Roland Berger study is mainly based on the self-assessment of individual surveyed company representatives, the neutral observer perspective remains unanswered.

To get one step closer to this perspective, a neutral analysis pre-study of the DAX-30 companies was conducted. The results are based on the systematic evaluation of the companies' annual reports as well as their PR materials.

The pre-study showed that the strategic focus of HRM is on the areas of demographic management (mentioned by 90% of the companies in their annual reports), diversity management (mentioned by 84%) and the implementation of a women's quota in the personnel departments (mentioned by 84%). In addition, the development of corporate and innovation culture (mentioned by 78%) is another important strategic field in most companies.

Many companies offer their employees innovative benefits. The study showed that a large proportion of administrative employees can work from home and have flexible working time in 84% of companies.

Besides working from home and flexible working time, 78% of the DAX-30 companies provide other opportunities to reconcile work and family life.

In general labor organization in German companies seem to have become more flexible and it requires a proactive approach by the employees. Often the employees are assumed to work on their own responsibility and bring their own initiative.

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## Generation Z in Germany's labor market

After giving an overview of HR strategies in Germany and before giving some new insights in Generation Z' characteristics and behavior patterns, the article will take a closer look at Germany's labor market and the definition of a generation in general.

Each generation is connected by shared common experiences, values and life experiences. The connectivity is mostly loose but significant. It is loose because members of a generation group experience life differently (Töröcsik et al. 2014). However, there can be recognized a significant trend of values and common experiences, that lead to the conclusion that there are differences between generations and some similarities within generations.

Nevertheless, human nature and the basic characteristics of behavior are often in contrast with the organizational and corporate requirements for the sake of reaching and maintaining competitiveness (Bencsik et al. 2016).

In the German labor market today, generations of baby boomers, X and Y are predominantly represented because of their current age. By 2030 the demographic representation will have changed significantly.

Table 1 shows an overview of the generations, their respective birth years, as well as the population structure in Germany in 2017 and 2030 and the generations' ages in 2030.

<b>Table 1. Generations and their cohorts</b>				
<b>Generation</b>	<b>Cohorts</b>	<b>Number of citizens in 2017 in Millions</b>	<b>Number of citizens in 2030 in Millions</b>	<b>Age in 2030</b>
Baby boomers	App. 1950 – 1964	16,6 (20,3%)	14,3 (18,1%)	66 – 80 years
Generation X	App. 1965 – 1979	16,8 (20,6%)	14,8 (18,7%)	51 – 65 years
Generation Y	App. 1980 – 1994	19,3 (23,6%)	14,6 (18,4%)	36 – 50 years
Generation Z	App. 1995 – 2010	15,0 (18,4%)	12,2 (15,4%)	20 – 35 years
Generation Alpha	App. 2010 – 2025	4,2 (5,1%)	10,8 (13,6%)	5 – 19 years

Table 1. Generations and their cohorts

Source: (DESTATIS - Statistisches Bundesamt 2015), own calculation

Because of lower birth rates and longer life expectancies in Germany, the percentage of younger population is decreasing in comparison to the total population. Due to a pension reform, German employees are employed up to their retirement age of 67 years. This means that because of the demographic change (an aging society in Germany) there are fewer young people to pay for the pensions of an increasing number of older persons.



The question of which labor behavior patterns Generation Z represents in Germany is therefore of particular interest to German companies. Together with Generation Alpha, they will make up a large part of the workforce in the future. Figure 1 shows a possible scenario of Germany's employment structure in 2030.

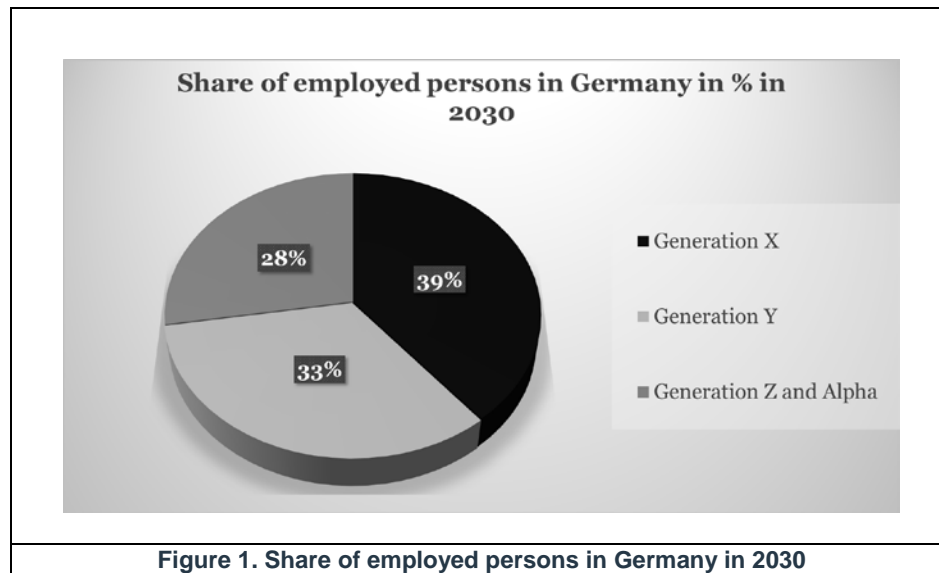


Figure 1. Share of employed persons in Germany in 2030

Figure 1. Share of employed persons in Germany in 2030

Source: (DESTATIS - Statistisches Bundesamt 2015), own illustration

By 2030, almost one third of the employable population will be made up of Generation Z and Generation Alpha. For this reason, HR departments and top management within organizations need to have an understanding of these groups' attitudes towards work within organizations.

The fact that a Generation Alpha advances, which is so far little known, should give companies the opportunity to think strategically about their potential employees and adapted recruiting processes. As the pre-study of the DAX-30 companies showed, there might be other topics that are sharper in focus of strategic efforts in HR departments.

## Generation Z' attitudes and personal patterns in Germany

To understand Germany's Generation Z' attitudes towards labor organization we should understand some of their general attitudes first. Therefore, some hypotheses from newspaper articles, articles from academic magazines, surveys, trade magazines and internet blogs are compared. The primary goal of this comparison is to get the most comprehensive characterization of Generation Z, even if empirical data is not used.

This author is aware that further research is required regarding Generation Z' characteristics before definite conclusion can be drawn.

Generation Z has the features of the net generation due to the highly developed digital era, which they were born into. They were also characterized as the Facebook-generation, digital natives or sometimes the iGeneration (Bencsik et al. 2016).

The norms of Generation Z are different from the norms of the previous Generation Y. Words, slang and expressions used by Generation Z are quite strange to their parents and sometimes it is very hard for members of older generations to understand the younger ones. As Generation Z was born into the world of technology and they feel comfortable in that world, thus it

is primarily important for them to be surrounded by that environment. They seem to be always online on various technical devices (Scholz 2014).

Research into Generation Z in Germany first began in 2014, which means there are still few studies as references. However, the lack of German research in this area is compensated by previous international studies suggesting that many of the values which relate to the Generation Z seem to be a global phenomenon. Further research needs to be conducted to assess whether this is the case for values regarding labor organization.

Forbes Magazine for example conducted a survey on Generation Z in North and South America, in Africa, in Europe, in Asia and in the Middle East. 49 thousand young people participated in the survey (Dill 2015).

On the basis of the results Generation Z seems to be the first real global generation. Referring to Forbes Magazine there are no fundamental global differences in their behavior patterns. This Generation tends to be highly skilled in using internet technology and they have grown up in uncertain and complex environments which influences their views about work, studying and the world.

Employers should face the fact that this generation will likely choose a career based on their own interest and not to suit the requirements of others. At the same time, their most important career goals seem to be work-life balance and workplace stability. Generation Z is not as optimistic as their predecessors were from the viewpoint of the workplace. A number of them may worry about unemployment, or if their career can get stuck and they cannot improve their skills (Elmore 2010; Guenes et al. 2017).

Generation Z is fickle and focusses on problems very quickly. In principle, it is not intended to have any emotional attachment to a company. They strictly separate private and professional life. This is underlined by the Shell Youth Study 2015 (Shell Deutschland Holding GmbH and TNS Infratest Sozialforschung 2015).

## Current strategies in comparison with Generation Z' behavior patterns

As Generation Z grows up and matures, the characteristics which are now faintly in view will come into sharper focus, helping companies frame themselves to attract this new generation as employees. For now, businesses would be well advised to double down on building cultures of giving which help employees feel a sense of purpose with their work.

Connecting their jobs to social impact will remain a very important priority for Generation Z as it has been for Generation Y and employee volunteer and giving programs will continue to be creative tools for strengthening teams, skills and leadership. This might be very helpful, not only to attract Generation Z' members, but to retain them. Referring to Ozkan and Solmaz, working in groups is very important for Generation Z (Ozkan and Solmaz 2015).

There's every indication that technology-centric Generation Z will be more attracted to volunteer and giving if the experience is social, mobile and interactive. Companies should walk the talk of employee-led service by investing in tools that integrate giving feedback into the regular work life of employees.

Referring to the fact, that Generation Z might be always online, social media platforms shall become a recruiting channel.

Regarding flexible work offers and working from home possibilities, companies should respect the demands of Generation Z for the compatibility of work and family life. A blurring of these

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two spheres, as in the case of working from home, might therefore not be an option for this generation. In addition, the constant accessibility in the case of working from home is felt as a disadvantage. Generation Z is more interested in clear working structures with fixed working hours (Scholz 2014). However, the review of annual reports of DAX-30 companies showed, that 78% of the companies provide opportunities to reconcile work and family life and even see them as a benefit for their employees.

In the future, organizations should create a framework that allows older generations to take advantage of working from home and at the same time ensure that the use of this service does not trigger conflicts in the cooperation of their staff.

It is interesting to note that Generation Z is credited with a lack of loyalty to the company and also enterprises at the same time say, that employer-loyalty has dropped in importance (Scholz 2014; Eilers et al. 2017). Here is seen high potential for an investigation.

Generation Z isn't the only generational change we need to anticipate in our work lives, but they represent a critical part of our collective futures. The more companies can prepare for their arrival into the workforce, the better they will be at harnessing their potential for the success of our businesses and communities.

## Methods

This research is based on secondary data. Secondary data gather the relevant information from their resources. Some information gathered from the relevant journals, reviews of annual reports and promotional material as well as different magazine articles.

Figure 2 shows the Modified Research Model with the relevant research steps in each phase and the used methods in every step.

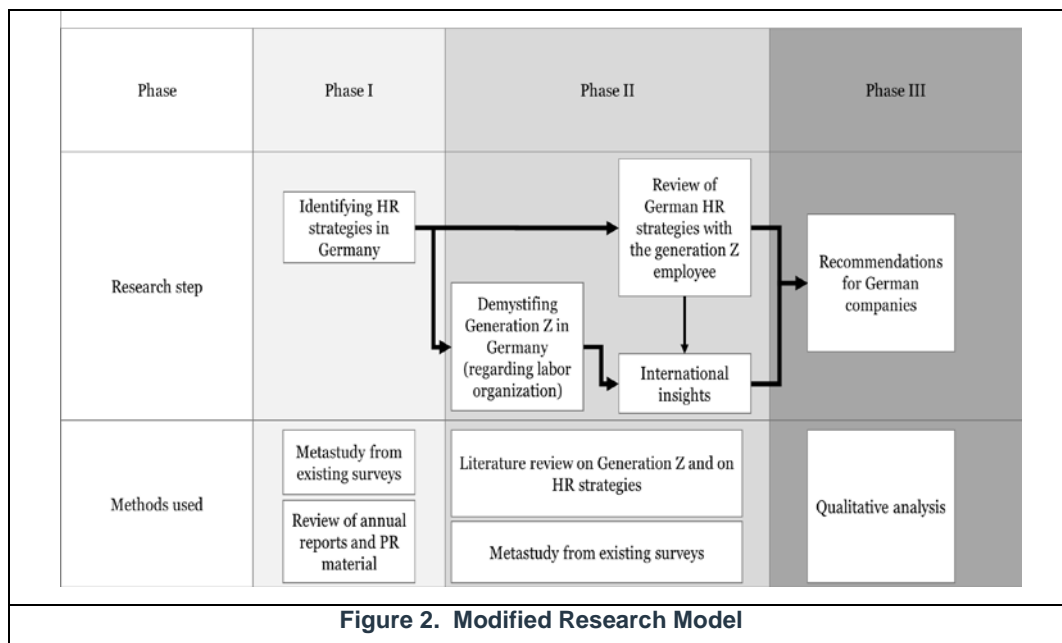


Figure 2. Modified Research Model

In the first step, the annual reports of the 30 DAX companies and their PR material were reviewed. Additionally, existing surveys were used to get insights in today's HR strategies.

To characterize Generation Z published Information into this group was viewed and discussed. Again, existing surveys were used to collect secondary data. The literature review in

this field shows that, in particular, the leisure and consumer behavior of Generation Z is being investigated.

In a further step, the results of the two investigations were compared. To mitigate the existing deficit between the HR strategies and the requirements of Gen Z regarding labor organization, international strategies have been screened. By analyzing the results so far, some recommendations for German companies were made.

## Limitations and future work

At this point, it must be noted again, that the previous results of this study are based exclusively on secondary data.

Figure 3 shows a possible procedure for further investigation.

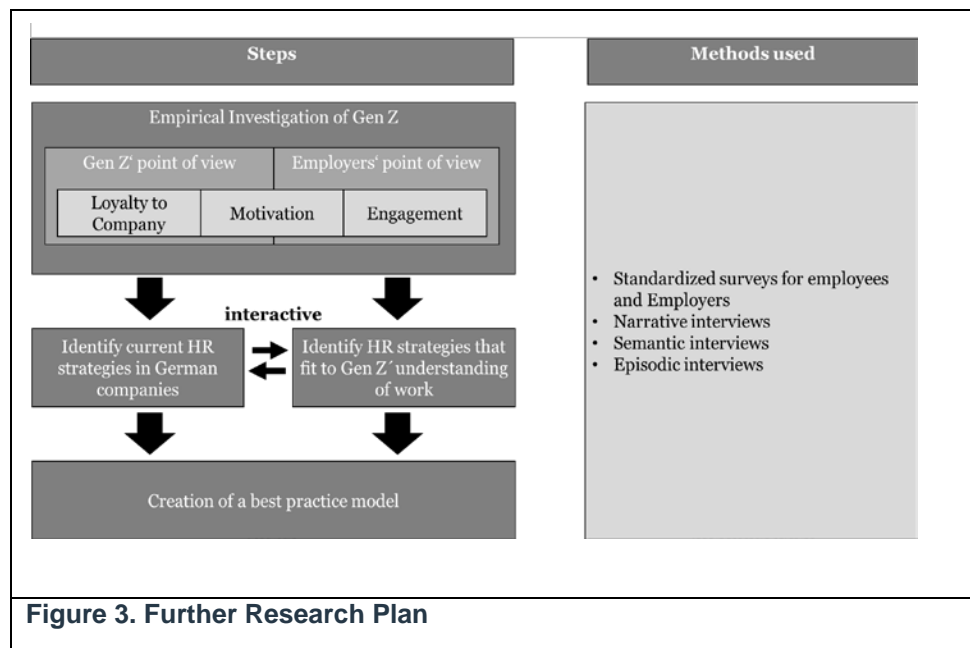


Figure 3. Further Research Plan

In the future, an empirical study of Generation Z' characteristics should be carried out. The focus shall be on the three characteristics loyalty to company, motivation and engagement.

These values are of particular interest because they particularly affect the value of human capital and are currently being discussed in German popular media.

These values should be researched in further detail. It could also be interesting to see the employer's point of view regarding these values and what companies are supposed to do to influence and attract them. A German youth researcher found, that Generation Z is highly sensitive and enormously multi-tasking but cannot concentrate well, distracts easily and has little perseverance (Bedürftig 2016). As Scholz mentions, Generation Z seems to have less loyalty to their employers (Scholz 2014), this could be another characteristic worth for investigation.

It could also be helpful to examine how previous generations, baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y are characterized regarding loyalty, engagement and motivation. Recent studies about those Generations could help to determine variables to measure the mentioned values (Lyons et al. 2015).

To determine the assessment of Generation Z with respect to loyalty, engagement and motivation, a standardized survey would be appropriate, supported by isolated narrative interviews with representatives of the generation. Standardized surveys would also be suitable to get to know the employer's point of view of how they see Generation Z' characteristics. Once the empirical investigation has been completed and evaluated, a new comparison of the model of the Generation Z and the existing HR strategies can take place.

To identify current HR strategies in German companies, employers should be interviewed. A qualitative methodology seems to be useful in order to gain an even deeper insight into the topic. At this point, episodic or semantic interviews are conceivable.

As a next step, the use of HR strategies could also be systematically surveyed. In addition to the DAX-30 companies, the focus group will also be numerous medium-sized companies from various sectors.

Those two steps might be interactive. An iterative change between both perspectives is possible.

By carrying out a case study in a company, the development of a best practice model can be approximated.

## Conclusion

Generation Z represents one of the greatest generational shifts the workplace has ever seen. Generation Z will present profound challenges to leaders, managers, supervisors, HR leaders, and educators in every sector of the workforce. It will be increasingly important to understand where they are coming from and finding key strategies for bringing out the best in this new emerging young workforce. This article shows by using the results of various studies and reviewing the results of DAX-30 companies' annual reports that other efforts are in strategic focus of HR departments.

Referring to the results of this pre-study the most important topic in strategic focus of HRM seems to be on the area of demographic management. Diversity management and the implementation of a women's quota in the personnel departments is in sharp focus, too. In addition, the development of corporate and innovation culture is another important strategic field in most companies.

It was also screened, that a large proportion of administrative employees can work from home and have flexible working time in 84% of companies.

Besides working from home and flexible working time, 78% of the DAX-30 companies provide other opportunities to reconcile work and family life.

Referring to those findings, the fit of the strategic efforts with Generation Z' behavior patterns are discussed. There seems to be a strategic lack between Generation Z' imagination of work and the current HR actions, that should further be investigated.

On the one side, the focus of this article is on HR strategies to recruit Generation Z' members and to retain them. On the other side, the aim of the article is to sensitize organizations and HR to be prepared for what is coming and sensitize them to be prepared for the same. This research also calls for wider research and attention from both practitioners and academicians.

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Der vorliegende Arbeitsbericht fußt auf einer Forschungsarbeit, welche am Fachbereich Wirtschaftsingenieurwesen der THM im Sommersemester 2018 entstanden ist.

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