

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES SELF-ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Technological progress is the basis of a rapidly evolving society and defines the current reality. Project management becomes one of the most important parts of managerial activities of any organization, including public sector organizations. As the demand for project managers increases in the area of project management, the new generation of employees is coming. This situation is a challenge to improve competencies development within the existing university structures and processes. Nowadays students (Generation Z) are equipped with high-level technological skills more than most of their lecturers (Generation X and Baby Boomers generation or the Traditionalists generation). In the research, we focused on the views of graduates of the university course in project management. The aim of our study was to establish the level of subjective perception of project management students' competencies paying special attention to the project management labor market coming generation Z. This information could be useful in determining the priorities of the project management competencies development taking into consideration the requirements of the stakeholders and changing project management practices. The quantitative survey was used in the research and implemented in Slovakia.

Key words: project management, project manager, competencies, generation Z, project

JEL Code: D3, O22, M15, H430

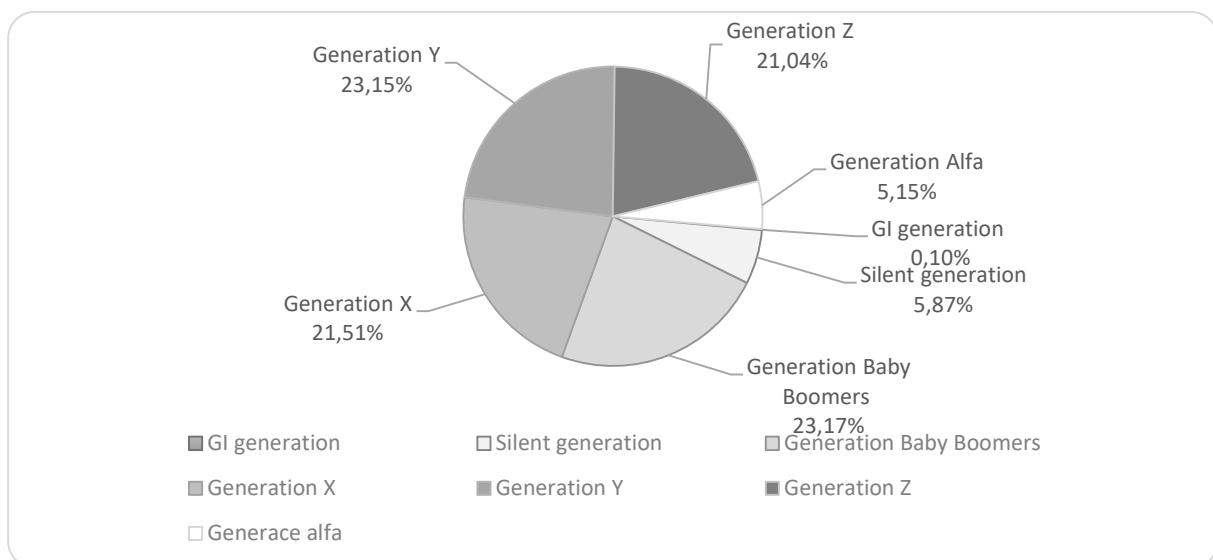
Introduction

Organizations are faced with a challenge of different generations' diverse attitudes towards work, management, and leadership. Five main generational groups can be identified. The first group is the group of traditionalists who were born between 1928 and 1944. This generation worships top-down authorities and works very hard in general. The second generation is the generation of Baby Boomers (born in 1945 - 1965). These people expect some respect for their opinion in the spirit of "to be whatever I want to be". Generation X was born between 1965 and 1979. For this generation is an important balance between work and private life. However, they

are ready to work very hard when it is needed. Their approach to work can be described as a classical career in an organization with a high degree of loyalty. Generation Y was born between 1980 and 1995, and in general we can say that it grew in prosperity. It is very important for them to be "respected", they are very selfconfident. They believe they can do anything. They are not afraid to express their opinion, including disagreement. On the other hand, thanks to its technological powers, their communication is impaired, including the ability to solve problems. In terms of approach to work, there is a high degree of independence and a desire for success. The latest and youngest Generation Z, born after 1995. They can be called digital natives, they are capable of quick decisions and high connectivity (Consultancy.uk, 2015). This generation is just about to enter the labor market.

In Slovakia, generation Z (1995-2014) is 21.04% of the population, which is only 2.11% less than Generation Y (1980-1994), representing 23.15%. Generation X (1966-1979) has a slightly weaker representation with 21.51%. The same representation as Generation Y is Generation Baby Boomers (1946-1965) with 23.17%.

Fig. 1: The share of generations in the total population in Slovakia



Source: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

The young labor force will be incredibly demanding in the market and will have a much longer lifetime purchasing power than the previous generations. In addition, they will live longer - life expectancy at birth since 1990 has increased by 8 years for men (76 years) and 7 years for women (82 years). From the misunderstanding of basic attitudes of different generations, generational conflicts may arise (Nechtelberger et al, 2017). They may require effective management of their emotions, which is defined as a major trend in today's workplace.

1 Generation Z

The nature of Generation Z is defined by the time in which it grew up. For Generation Z there were two decisive events. They are the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the related fears of terrorism. The second event is the world economic crisis (2007 – 2012). Because of these events, this generation perceives the world as an insecure and dangerous place where it is necessary to be independent and alert, to plan and to rely primarily on oneself. For a proper understanding of this generation, it is important to realize the difference between Generation Y and the coming generation Z.

Generation Y grew in prosperity while generation Z was disturbed by critical events. It is essential for the generation Z to have a permanent Internet connection. Smartphones are considered as a basic communication tool.

2 Methodology

As part of our research, we have focused on evaluating several attributes that are relevant to key areas of project management. Similar studies previously conducted in other areas such as information technology or computer programming have shown that students' attitudes and experiences have a significant impact on-course performance (Davis 1989, Nijhuis, 2018).

The aim of our study was to prioritize the level of subjective perception of project management students' competencies. Our research focused on two categories. It was the importance of project management and knowledge of project management. To establish these topics, we used three sources that illustrate different frames of project management competence, especially Experience Project Management and Knowledge Self-Assessment Manual (Project Management Institute, 2000), Project Manager Competency Development Framework (Project Management Institute, 2013) and APM Competence Framework (Association for Project Management 2008).

Our investigation has been running from 2015 till 2018. 161 respondents participated in the survey, they were stratified by age for members of Generation Y (92 respondents) and Generation Z (69 respondents). They all were the students of the University of Economics and Management of Public Administration in Bratislava.

The following seven competencies were evaluated in the survey (Kanabar, 2014): an approach to project management, desire to learn the project management, basic knowledge of project management, knowledge of project management planning, knowledge of basic project

planning tools, knowledge of behavioral and organizational aspects of project management, knowledge of project control instruments and monitoring.

2 Results

The evaluations of Cronbach's alpha scores were compared at first, as shown in Table 1. Statistical program STATA 14 was used in the evaluation.

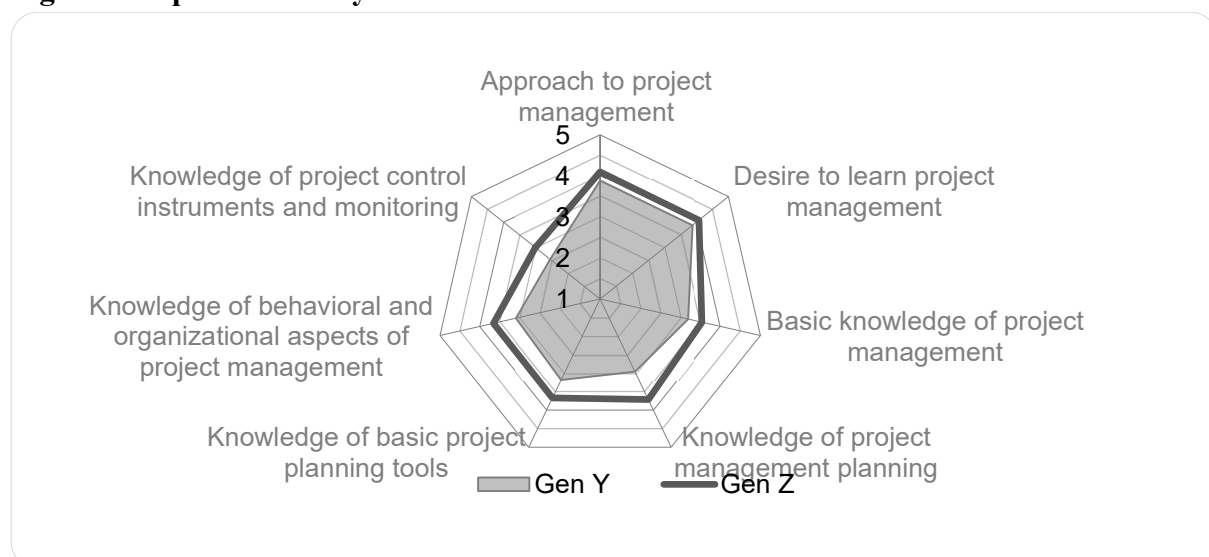
Tab. 1: Cronbach's alpha scores

Competency	Cronbach α	Number of items in the scale	Average interitem correlation
Approach to project management + Desire to learn project management	0.65	7	0.27
Basic knowledge of project management	0.70	4	0.24
Knowledge of project management planning	0.80	4	0.53
Knowledge of basic project planning tools	0.88	4	0.51
Knowledge of behavioural and organizational aspects of project management	0.80	7	0.54
Knowledge of project control instruments and monitoring	0.85	4	0.60

Source: own study

From the perspective of a detected score Cronbach's alpha questionnaires can be regarded as sufficiently producing reliable indications. Overall, the survey results can be seen in the following Figure 2.

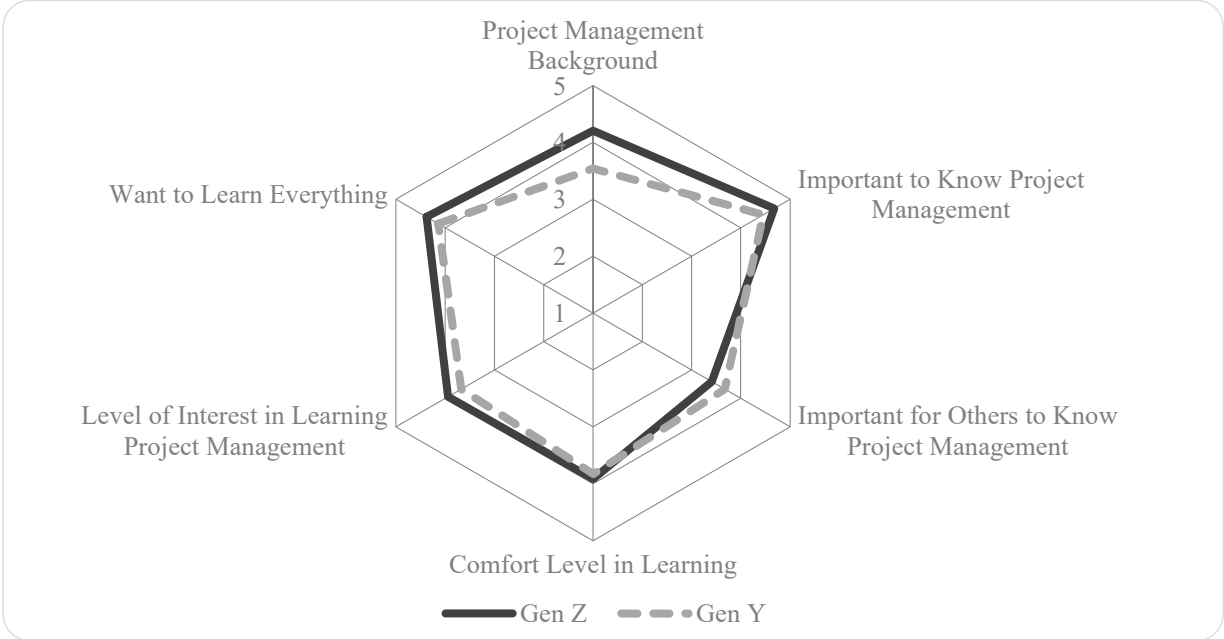
Fig. 2: Comparative analysis of results



Source: own study

The assessment shows a shift in Knowledge of project management planning. Here is a different view of their own competencies in Generation Y and Generation Z. On the other hand, the smallest differences can be observed in the areas of "Approach to project management" and "Desire to learn project management". A detailed comparison of the results in these areas can be seen in the following Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Comparative analysis of detailed results



Source: own study

The survey results can be seen that significant differences were found in perceptions of the level obtained basics of project management. Consequently, there is also a shift in perceiving the importance of project management knowledge. These results correspond to the results obtained from the Randstad survey (Randstad, 2017) conducted by the first worldwide study that compared behavioral expectations at Generation Y and Generation Z workplaces.

The knowledge gained in the area of project management is considered to be key to the future of employment. The respondents of Generation Z are more entrepreneurial than the respondents of Generation Y. 17% Generation Z versus 11% of Generation Y wants to start their own businesses. It is also interesting that although Generation Z has grown up with technology preferring face to face communication. Unlike the assumption that younger workers want a "permanent connection" with technology, most of the respondents, Generation Z, say they prefer personal communication with managers (51%), unlike e-mail (16%) or instant messaging (11%). A few believe that technology develops personal relationships with

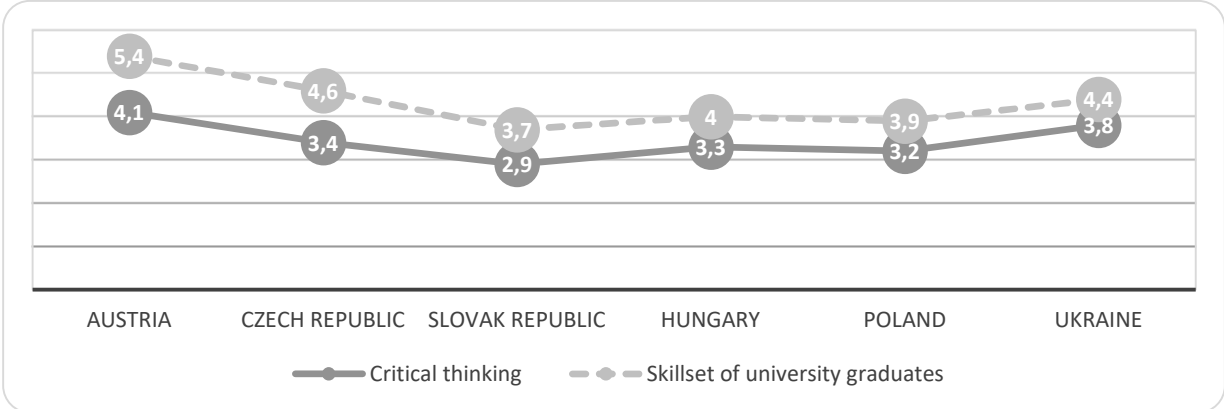
colleagues (13% Generation Z, Generation Y 14%). Both generations are satisfied that the job will work with projects (from 76% Generation, Generation Y 81%).

Generation Z has new technologies in blood. And because the generation Z was born into the world of technology, it is especially important for them to be surrounded by this environment everywhere. Today's children expect the presence of educational digital aids and tools in schools, and they also always expect to be available without any access barriers. Learning for them is not limited to classrooms or fixed to a specific place, it's something mobile they can move from place to place. Teachers, as well as employers, should pay more attention to these young people. This is because it is just this generation that shapes what the school environment will look like in the future. They are the driving force behind innovations in new educational tools, learning styles, and unrestricted access to resources.

The key can be considered for future development for Generation Z the development of critical thinking. Critical thinking is the ability to assess the quality of information. Not all information is just as reliable and accurate. Art is then correctly identifying the information, so we can make better decisions.

For a better idea, we looked at the Global Competitiveness Report 2018. In this review, we looked at two categories. The first assessment is critical thinking in Teaching (which is part of the Skills of the future workforce) and the second is of Skillset University graduates (this is part of the Skills of current workforce Skills). The evaluation Critical thinking in teaching the Slovak Republic reached a frightening place 109 out of 140 countries evaluated. Rating Slovakia's Skillset of university graduates reached 115 places out of the 140 countries surveyed. For better orientation in the current situation in the Slovak Republic, we compared the results in this category with the neighboring states. The results can be seen in the following figure 4.

Fig. 4: Critical thinking and Skillset of university graduates



Source: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-competitiveness-report-2018>

The results are not encouraging. Slovakia from the perspective of neighboring countries is listed in the worst position. It means that teachers are largely focused on memorization and does not support creative and critical thinking individual enough. In addition, it appears that graduates of universities in Slovakia do not have the necessary skills necessary for businesses and their future applications. A surprise is the situation in the area of critical thinking in education in Ukraine (41st place), which won the second place behind Austria (35th place). It is the lack of critical thinking that prevents confidence-building in order to gain success and achieve its highest potential. As far as the Skillset of university graduates in Austria is 14th place and the other Czech Republic in 50th place. The difference over the Slovak Republic 115 is extreme.

Conclusion

Requirements for the skills of school absolvents today are sharply different from those required by older generations. Students and teachers need to be prepared for this situation. Educational establishments must confront the challenges posed by education in the new era of information and technology. Understanding how today's students learn and understand the learning styles of different generations and their values will be increasingly important. It is especially important to ensure quality education that prepares students for success in the 21st century (Juranova, 2018; Bencsik, 2016).

In view of the foregoing, there is an increasing demand for project management skills. Computer World has awarded project management among the most demanding skills for 2017 (Pratt, 2016). Also, according to the Project Management Institute, Project Management still seems like the growing, attractive skill that employers want. According to [PMI's] "Job Growth and Talent Gap Report", by 2027, employers will need 87.7 million individuals working in project management-oriented roles, increasing the need for skilled and experienced project and program managers. Organizations will continue to place a greater focus on project management performance improvement to stay competitive and relevant." (Adair, 2018; Henderson, 2010).

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