

GENERATION Z: A STUDY OF ITS WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS AND FUTURE PREFERENCES

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AND FUTURE PREFERENCES

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication.

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that Generation Z is the largest generation in the U.S. and will soon represent the majority of America's economy and its workplace. Generation Z is joining the staffs of more and more companies each year and combining with much different, older generations. If managers are not meeting the needs of each generation that they employ, employees will not work together successfully, which threatens the future of American businesses. Generation gaps are predicted to affect and interrupt the quality of the communication within organizations; therefore, current research on communication effectiveness is of utmost importance. The aim of this study was to explore what communication preferences and behaviors Generation Z has embodied in their short time as employees and if those preferences are lining up with the expectations and predictions in existing literature. The study showed that Gen Zs prefer face-to-face communication with their manager. When considering only digital communication, the study showed that current managers are using Generation Zs most preferred digital mode of communication (text messaging), and they are not using their least preferred digital mode of communication (social media).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Generation Z is the youngest of the five generations active in today's economy. They are already the largest generation in the U.S. and will represent 40 percent of the population in 2020 (Kalkhurst, 2018). The workplace entrance of Generation Z will only increase the complexity of managing and working across generations, especially considering that more than 75 percent of workers identify "managing multigenerational teams" and "different work expectations across generations" as challenges (Jenkins, 2019). Without good and consistent communication, both verbal and nonverbal, individuals would not connect in the various ways that are necessary to run successful workplaces. In fact, problems with interpersonal communication within the workplace can hinder the ability of both future and current employers to meet each other's needs. (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, Thomas, 2015). It can also be argued that our society would be detrimentally less productive without good communication and, therefore, cease to hold enormous power and potential. With this in mind, managers are beginning to notice one specific issue with communication in their various work environments: a communication gap between the various generations employed.

There is no doubt that the makeup of organizations is rapidly shifting as Baby Boomers retire while Millennials and Gen Zs take over the majority of new jobs (Tellervision, 2019). As younger generations move into professional settings across the globe, the need for managers to understand how they communicate is at the forefront. Organizational leaders and human resource professionals affirm that knowing and understanding your employees is critical in order to have and keep an effective workforce, making the distinguishing and addressing of differences among younger team members important (White, 2019).

For the purpose of this paper, Generation Z can be defined as anyone born between 1996 and 2010 (Figure 1). Because this generation has been in the workplace for such a short time, research on their communication behaviors at work is limited. Communication behaviors and preferences, in this research, can be defined as the mode in which Generation Z prefers to communicate. These modes include face-to-face communication, text message, email, phone call, messaging applications and social media. Research shows that several trends will take top priority in 2019 including increased accountability for corporate bad behavior, fewer organizations will suffer from a "culture of nice," Generation Z will no longer be ignored as an estimated 61 million will apply for jobs in the U.S. this year, organizations will move away from hierarchy and toward more agile teams and progress will be made on digital transformation (Tellervision, 2019). Companies rate communication skills, critical thinking and ability to apply knowledge to the real world as the most important skills for recent graduates, yet find a serious lack of preparedness in these areas (Schroth, 2019).

Generation Z is joining the staffs of more and more companies each year and combining with much different, older generations. If managers are not meeting the needs of each generation of which they employ, their employees will not work together successfully, which threatens the future of American businesses. Generation gaps are predicted to affect and interrupt the quality of the communication within organizations. In fact, generation gaps will likely delay the process for organizations to catch on to trends and inevitably miss opportunities. (Desai & Lele, 2017).

A study from Holmes Report found that the total cost of employee misunderstanding rose to \$37 billion, with an average cost per company of \$62.4 million (NDMU, 2019). Miscommunications slow down production and relationship building in the workplace, which is why searching for solutions in generation gaps is a major objective within organizations (Desai & Lele, 2017). With Generation Z as such a new phenomenon in the workplace, there has been little research done on how they prefer to communicate in professional settings. With a look into the existing research on what Gen Z has experienced and how they have communicated through their early adolescence, the goal of this thesis is to answer the questions related to their current experience and look into their future workplace expectations.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

Communication can have direct and indirect effects on team and organizational performance (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Researchers have concluded that what an individual achieves is directly connected to the messages he or she receives from an organization (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, Thomas, 2015). Employers also recognize the importance of good communication skills in the success of their companies. In fact, reports from the Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills show that employers rate communication skills as a top priority for both securing and retaining employment (Stevens, 2005).

Retaining good employees is not just for convenience, replacing and retraining employees is a significant expense for businesses. Generation Z, named after the name zappers, is characterized by "quick shifts", so it is natural for them to change workplaces. (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). The cost to recruit, hire and train a new employee can cost, at a minimum, 50 percent of the salary for the position. Turnover costs rise, to nearly 60–75 percent of an employee's salary, the longer it takes to fill a position (Healthcare Registration, 2018). As a result, businesses turn to employee engagement to make their employees satisfied and keep experienced veterans on the team while curbing the high cost of turnover.

One vital piece of employee engagement and success is learning how different generations of people prefer to communicate. From a social perspective, a generation can be defined as a group of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural context, who experience the same formative experiences and develop unifying commonalities as a result (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Although different generations' communication habits will likely be picked up and accepted by the workplaces that seek diverse populations, there will be environments that are hostile to handling these differences. Communicative interactions in the workplace serve to create and maintain work relationships among team and organizational members and between those members and key organizational stakeholders (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

While there are many factors that play a role in a successful relationship between an employee and a manager, communication is believed to be of utmost importance. Managers today not only have to understand how to best manage youthful, inexperienced employees, but also the unique characteristics of the generation shaped by their experiences (Schroth, 2019). The next generation of employees, commonly referred to as Generation Z, are defined as those who were born in the mid-1990s and grew up in the early 2000s (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, Thomas, 2015). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Generation Z currently makes up nearly one-third

of the U.S. population (Hall, 2018). With so many young people becoming professionals, managers have begun to reevaluate the way that they communicate with their employees. Research shows that Generation Z has plenty of specific preferences related to how they prefer to communicate and be communicated with. After all, this generation has more options to communicate than ever before between social media and text messaging to email and message application like Group me. However, little research has been conducted on how communication in the workplace differs between generations, particularly with Generation Z.

2.1 Exploring Generation Z: Use of technology and social media

While they were in school, Millennials forced educators to begin using technology as a teaching tool. Gen Z learners do not see technology as a tool; they see it as a regular part of life. Gen Zs were born with technology. They will never know what life was like without the internet (Kalkhurst, 2018). Most agree that Gen Z students display shared characteristics, including being technologically savvy and consuming information through digital media (Desai & Lele, 2017). Technology plays a central role in Gen Z's lives from socializing to schoolwork, entertainment to exercise, relaxation to references (Schroth, 2019). Generation Z is accustomed to having information at their fingertips and being in constant communication through digital media, as they were raised in a time in which the Internet has always existed (Desai & Lele, 2017).

Generation Z places more value on speed than accuracy as they have grown up in a fast moving, ever-changing society (Desai & Lele, 2017). Research suggests that growing up with lightning-fast internet and upload speeds may have influenced their preferences on speed in communication. In fact, a survey by marketing company LeadSquared reported Generation Z expects rapid responses from whoever they are sending a message. (NDMU, 2019). However, Generation Z's communication preferences are quite different when at work or when communicating with Generation X and Baby Boomers. In professional settings, research from HR firm Rise has shown the best way to communicate with Generation Z employees is through face-to-face communication (NDMU, 2019). However, face-to-face communication does not come naturally to Generation Z. The introduction of smart phones has been shown to reduce the amount of face-to-face interactions that teens have with each other (Schroth, 2019). All of this can impair their ability to effectively communicate and interact with others, including the older generations in the work place (Schroth, 2019).

Gen Zs are more comfortable using technology to communicate, even when the use of technology is not appropriate (Schroth, 2019). When asked on a typical day whether they communicate more in person or digitally, Gen Z and Millennials reported they communicate 74% digitally and 26% in person (Schroth, 2019). Research also confirms one of the most commonly used forms of communication for Generation Z is the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Among people in their late teens and early 20s, the most common reasons for social media usage were to get information, engage in online discussions and, most often, entertain themselves (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, Thomas, 2015). Because of this, Gen Zs have missed out on learning some vital rules of conversation. This includes how to listen, ask questions, interject in a way that is seen as respectful to others, build relationships, problem solve in real time, and resolve conflicts (Schroth, 2019). Problems with interpersonal communication can hinder the ability of both future and current employers to meet each other's needs. The reliance of Generation Z on smartphone devices and social media outlets can diminish their

ability to communicate in an organization setting, which can affect the overall operations of businesses (Kick, Contacos-Sawyer, Thomas, 2015).

2.1 Exploring Generation Z: Work and career goals

Research shows that the generations in today's workplace differ in aspects of their personalities, work values and attitudes, leadership and teamwork preferences, leader behaviors and career experiences (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). More specifically, Generation Z values work-related goals of collaboration, road maps for growth and development, flexibility, training, career advancement, doing meaningful work, stability and having a consistent paycheck in addition to the aforementioned technology (Hall, 2018). The perceived decline in work ethic is perhaps one of the major contributors of generational conflicts in the workplace (Tolbize, 2008). Generation Z does not want to be stuck at one place. It is commonly argued that the younger generations, having seen their parents dedicate themselves to their careers only to fall victim to downsizing and layoffs, have adopted a "work to live" value orientation (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

Generation Z is demographically distinct from previous generations. They were born to older parents and with fewer siblings than any era. They are also the generation to start school at a very young age and are the most educated generation in history (Desai & Lele, 2017). Generation Z lived in households with higher median household incomes than older generations, so they may not have had to work to help the family. Another reason may be greater competition to get into top higher education institutions, so their summers are filled with extracurricular activities and classes (Schroth, 2019). They are the least likely to have worked when they were younger and most likely to suffer from depression and anxiety (Schroth, 2019). In 2018 of the kids between 15 to 17 years old, only roughly 19% of Gen Zs reported having worked at all during the prior calendar year compared to 30% of Millennials in 2002 (Schroth, 2019).

Generation Z is interested in how to make the world a better place including making a business and the lives of customers better. They want to know that they are valued and that business owners care about their success (Hall, 2018). They want to work for businesses that give back to the community and to know up front all of the benefits they can expect with their position. This means they want transparency with what growth opportunities that they will have (Hall, 2018). Managing expectations is crucial as Gen Z employees often have an idealistic picture that the work will be interesting and meaningful, that their managers will want to hear and implement their ideas, that they will have flexibility in the schedule and that they will enjoy everyone they work with (Schroth, 2019). Gen Z has been found to be the most achievement-oriented of the generations. In addition, Gen Zs have greater economic well-being, are more highly educated and are more ethnically and racially diverse than any other generation (Schroth, 2019). Gen Zs desire ongoing professional development and opportunities for promotion in their company (77% in the United States, 63% worldwide) (Schroth, 2019).

2.1 Exploring Generation Z: Employee well-being

Even though Gen Zs have an idealistic image of what their work place should be, few seem to be content with their coworkers, supervisors, or the advancement opportunities of their job. Four out of ten Gen Zs have little confidence in their coworkers and even less confidence in their senior team. One in five employees believes his/her personal aspirations are quite different from what the organization has planned for him/her (Desai & Lele, 2017). When asked what they want most from their boss in the workplace, Gen Zs said positive attitude and clear targets (Schroth, 2019). Gen Zs report that they could have performed closer to their bosses'

expectations if they were given more clear instructions and training on the job. Lack of proper onboarding is cited as the reason that 25% of new employees report that they want to quit their jobs within the first six months (Schroth, 2019).

The difference between Gen Zs and adults overall is evident in their stress about widespread sexual harassment and assault reports in the news, with more than half of Gen Zs citing these reports as a significant source of stress and fewer than four in the 10 of adults overall saying the same (American Psychological Association, 2018). Slightly more than nine in 10 Gen Zs between ages 18 and 21 say they have experiences at least one physical or emotional symptom due to stress in the past month, compared to around three-quarters of adults overall who say they have experience at least one symptom (American Psychological Association, 2018). Money and work consistently top the list of stressors for adults overall and both are common stressors for Gen Z as well. More than eight in 10 of Gen Zs between the ages of 18 and 21 report money as a source of significant stress, with nearly as many saying the same about work (American Psychological Association, 2018). In fact, Gen Zs are significantly more likely to report their mental health as fair or poor as compared with all other generations (Schroth, 2019). It has been found that comfort and autonomy were more important to successive generations, whereas status was less important (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

Gen Zs say the fear of failing in a leadership role and a lack of confidence required to lead as the main reasons that they would not take on more leadership in their roles (Schroth, 2019). Sixty-seven percent of Gen Z in the U.S. and 85% worldwide say that stress prevents them from taking on leadership responsibilities (Schroth, 2019).

2.2 How managers can facilitate engagement to help Gen Z succeed: Provide Active Learning

Engagement of the younger generations is crucial for employers who wish to gain and retain the best and the brightest of this large group (Schullery, 2013). Creating opportunities for employees to learn and grow is essential for employee engagement, as Gallup research shows a lack of such opportunities is the top reason employees leave a job (Healthcare Registration, 2018). Managers are now expected to relate to their team members in a way that maximizes their engagement, well-being and performance while also facilitating personal change (Schroth, 2019). Gen Zs say they prefer collaborative learning rather than a “telling” approach.

It is suggested to use aggressive communication to create a successful intergenerational workforce, as this method pre-empts and uncovers generational conflicts and other potential conflicts (Tolbize, 2008). Employers should give people the benefit of the doubt and avoid making decisions based on assumptions. If unsure of a person’s motive: ask. Members of difference generations view respect differently and may never assume that disrespect is intended (Tolbize, 2008).

2.2 How managers can facilitate engagement to help Gen Z succeed: Understand Different Communication Styles

To engage with employees of all ages, management must understand their communication styles and preferences. By simply substituting more Generation Z-friendly language, employers may find that they can attract the best and brightest of the younger generation (Hall, 2018). This generation wants to customize things and make them their own. They enjoy a conversation over a lecture, and they enjoy a fun environment in both school and work (Desai & Lele, 2017). Sixty percent of Generation Z want multiple check-ins from their manager during the week; of those, 40 percent want the interaction with their boss to be daily or

several times each day (Jenkins, 2019). Employers should adjust how they communicate with younger workers. Forty-two percent of Gen Z say that they want their boss to have a positive attitude and 33% want open communication (Schroth, 2019).

2.2 How managers can facilitate engagement to help Gen Z succeed: Manage Expectations Through Good Communication

Research shows it is important to talk to each new employee to understand that person's expectations about the work relationships, and to manage these expectations (Schroth, 2019). Organizations that have been successful in managing multiple generations have identified what are called the ACORN imperatives, which are approaches that contribute to intergenerational comfort. They include: accommodating employee differences by learning about their unique needs and serving them accordingly, creating workplace choices such as allowing the workplace to shape itself around the work being done, and operating from a sophisticated management style which would involve adapting leadership style to context or balancing concerns for tasks and concerns for people (Tolbize, 2008).

Consultative coaching helps employees explore alternatives and challenges the employee's thinking by asking the employee questions rather than telling them what to do (Schroth, 2019). Seventy-seven percent of Generation Z say having a Millennial manager is their preference over Generation X or Baby Boomers; this is an increase from 67 percent in 2017 (Jenkins, 2019). Another popular notion in the non-academic literature is that younger generations have less of a preference for teamwork than do older generations, creating the potential for conflict on multi-generational teams (Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

Other suggestions include: providing employees with regular guidance as needed, keeping employees "in the loop", building manager's credibility with employees, making coaching/training an essential responsibility in regular reviews, linking performance evaluation directly with concrete action steps, and implementing a technique called FAST feedback. It may be done informally by spreading a message across many levels, through team meetings, through voicemail or email or by paper trail (Tolbize, 2008).

2.2 How managers can facilitate engagement to help Gen Z succeed: Place Importance on Diversity, Equality & Gender

The notion of equality is important to Gen Z with 91% believing that everyone is equal and should be treated that way (Schroth, 2019). Managers must recognize that generational differences are a valid and important form of diversity. Unlike other forms of diversity, however, generational differences have a temporal element; they are dynamic and a long-term perspective is required to understand and react to them as they unfold (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Sixty-three percent of Generation Z feel it is most important to work with people with diverse education and skill levels; an additional 20 percent think that having people of different cultures (ethnicities or origins) is the most important element to a team (Jenkins, 2019).

Gender at work is an important topic. It comes in different forms and disguises. In addition to the rare moments where participants explicitly comment on gender issues, a variety of more implicit, subtle ways exist in which gender is made relevant in participants' everyday workplace experiences (Schnurr & Zayts, 2017). In fact, studies have shown that the communication preferences are not always the same for each gender. For example, a review of these studies revealed that men exhibit a higher percentage of task behaviors and direct

disagreements than women do, and women exhibit a higher percentage of positive social behaviors than men do (Davison, M., & Barrett, M., 2016).

Gender-difference is a position that supports the notion that men and women communicate differently (Barker and Zifcak, 1999). In the workplace, men and women communicate differently just as different generations do. With more and more women taking on leadership roles in the workplace, it is estimated that the male to female communication experience may change. It has been found that the role of the leader may to some extent prescribe particular behaviors regardless of the gender of the leader, which would effectively reduce gender differences in leadership style (Davison, M., & Barrett, M., 2016). However, after conducting research, it was found that female leaders display a more democratic style, encouraging collaboration and involving subordinates in decisions, whereas male leaders display a more autocratic style, discouraging participation by subordinates in favor of transactional leadership (Davison, M., & Barrett, M., 2016). Therefore, the question of whether or not the men and women in Generation Z prefer different communication methods would be interesting to research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS & MEASURES

With the assistance of the fall 2019 professors of Comm 111 courses at Wichita State University, a group of at least 150 students was contacted via email in order to request their participation in an online Qualtrics survey. The group was asked to complete the survey by September 20, 2019. The group was likely to be of the Generation Z population, as Comm 111 is typically taken within the first year of college. The students were contacted early in their first semester of college in hopes of removing the potential to get answers they expected were correct based on what they had learned about appropriate communication from college professors.

An online survey [Appendix A] was chosen for many reasons. It is time-efficient for both the participants and the researcher. It can be assumed that all students on campus have access to use a computer and Internet in order to take the survey. The information gathered via online survey could easily be exported to the statistical analysis software SPSS, eliminating the opportunity for many human errors that may occur during the data entry process associated with other type of data collection methods. Also, the researcher easily monitored the data collection process in Qualtrics by checking various user-friendly real-time reports provided by Qualtrics. The Qualtrics online survey protected confidentiality of the information entered by respondents through a secure data collection system. A sample received a recruitment e-mail from their professor in August 2019 to participate in the Qualtrics online survey. To follow up with respondents who had started but failed to complete the survey, the researcher sent out a reminder e-mails to the professors until it closed. The recruitment email and announcement explained to the participants that their responses would be kept strictly confidential.

Upon receiving results from the survey, a descriptive analysis took place to answer the research questions presented in an initial proposal. The respondents who were excluded from the research were those outside of 18-23 years of age and international students. It was planned to remove students who had only worked in a professional workplace where their supervisor was a family member, but upon viewing the results, there was no significant difference between this group and the group who had worked for supervisors outside of their family. Several variables

were considered in the results including how Generation Z is communicating with their manager and how it may differ from how they prefer to communicate with their future manager.

Through the software SPSS, descriptive statistics testing was the primary process when seeking statistical results from the data. T-tests were conducted in order to show the differences in communication preferences for male and female respondents. Chi-Square tests for association were ran as well in order to find if there was a statistically significant difference between gender of the respondent and gender of their future manager.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Participants

One hundred and eighty respondents completed the survey. Upon cleaning the data to remove international students, incomplete surveys, participants outside of the 18-23 age range and those with no work experience, there were 153 total respondents. Of those, 84 (54.9%) identified as female, 67 (43.8%) as male and two as non-binary. In the collection, 102 (66.7%) identified as white, 21 (13.7%) Hispanic, 17 other and 12 as multi-race. The majority of the Generation Z participants to complete the survey were born in 2001 (73 people, 47.7%) while the next largest group was born in 2000 (51 people, 33.3%).

One hundred and thirty two (86.3%) respondents selected to reflect on a non-office environment position that they held in the past while 21 (13.7%) respondents reflected on a position that they held in an office setting. One hundred and thirteen (73.9%) respondents had worked for someone who was not in their family while 40 (26.1%) had only worked for a family member. Originally, removing the participants who had worked only for a family member was planned, as bias would be present. However, upon review of the results, there were no statistically significant differences between how each population of employees responded to the survey questions.

4.2 Research Questions

1. What modes of communication do Gen Zs prefer to use with their manager in the workplace and how does it differ from how they are being communicated with now?
2. Do Gen Zs mostly prefer to communicate with their manager digitally or in person?
3. Do men and women Gen Zs prefer different communication methods in the workplace?

4.3 Results

When the group was asked about the age and gender of their current manager, 99 (64.7%) of the respondents said their manager is ten or more years older than them, while 29 (19%) said their manager was five to ten years older and 19 (12.4%) said they were one to five years older. Seventy-seven (50.3%) respondents said their current manager is male while 76 (49.7%) respondents said their manager is female. The study done by Jenkins showed that 77% of Generation Z would chose to have a Millennial manager if they could. In the current study, when asked what age they picture their future manager to be, 46 (30.1%) of the Gen Z group hoped their manager would be five to ten years older, while 42 (27.5%) said it would not matter to them. When asked what they picture their future manager's gender to be, 101 Gen Zs (66%) said it would not matter to them.

Male (67) and female (84) were considered while the two non-binary participants were removed. When considering their future manager, gender was not a factor for 100 participants.

However, when it did matter to them, they preferred their own gender. A chi-square test for association was conducted between gender of participant and the preferred gender of their future manager. There was a statistically significant association between gender of participant and future manager gender, $\chi^2(2, N = 150) = 12.53, p = .002$, Cramer's $V = .289$. Men were more likely to prefer a male for their future manager while females were more likely to prefer a female (based on a review of adjusted residuals for each cell).

Participants were asked to rate their current manager's communication from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). They also were asked to rate their future manager's communication using the same scale. Those scores were compared using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test. The results confirmed there was a statistically significant difference between the quality of their current manager's communication and the preferred quality of their future manager's communication. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test indicated that good communication with their current manager was statistically significantly less than good communication with their future manager $Z = -8.639, p < .001$. This shows that the group wants better communication with their future manager than what they are currently experiencing.

The Gen Z participants were asked if they believe they will be more comfortable communicating with a future supervisor digitally or in person. Of 151 responses to this question, 93 people selected to communicate in person while 58 preferred communicating digitally. To further analyze the findings, gender was compared. A chi-square test for association was conducted between gender and type of communication, $\chi^2(1, N = 151) = 1.582, p = .208$. There was no statistically significant difference between type of communication and gender. Both men and women in the survey preferred in person communication over communicating digitally. The relationship between the variables was not statistically significant, Cramer's $V = .102$.

The survey asked the respondents to rank how their current communicates with them including email, phone call, text message, social media and message applications like GroupMe or Slack. Later, the survey asked the respondents how they imagine their future manager would communicate with them. The same responses were offered as choices. Upon testing each of the modes of communication, a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test indicated that emailing with their current manager was statistically significantly less than emailing with their future manager $Z = -3.675, p < .001$. This shows that the group wanted more email communication with their manager in the future.

When the group was asked to rank how their manager is currently communicating with them, 1 was most often and 5 was least often. Table 1 shows that text messaging was used most often between them and their current manager while social media was used the least.

Table 1

Mode of Communication	Mean	Median	Mode
Text Message	1.86	1.50	1
Phone Call	2.26	2.00	2
Email	3.04	3.00	3
Message App	3.57	4.00	4
Social Media	4.27	5.00	5

When asked to rank how they hope their future manager communicates with them, 1 was most preferred and 5 was least preferred. Table 2 shows that text messaging was preferred by the participants to be the most used mode of communication with their future manager while social media was preferred to be used the least.

Table 2

Mode of Communication	Mean	Median	Mode
Text Message	1.99	2.00	1
Phone Call	2.48	2.00	3
Email	2.57	3.00	3
Message App	3.52	4.00	4
Social Media	4.44	5.00	5

This shows that this group of Gen Zs is being emailed often as the option was ranked third on the five-option question, but they would like to be emailed more often as they ranked it second on the same scale for their future communication.

According to Schroth, Gen Zs considers technology a central role in their lives. According to Desai and Lele, they also place more value on speed than accuracy. However, the data from the study shows otherwise. When picturing their future supervisor, most were okay with waiting one or more hours to hear back from their supervisor, 62 (40.5%) at one hour and 59 (38.6%) at a few hours. Only 18 (11.8%) of the respondents wanted to hear from them within a few minutes. In fact, when asked how often they hope to communicate with their future supervisor, most said multiple times per week would be enough (81 respondents, 52.9%). This is consistent with the Jenkins study that said 60% wanted multiple check-ins from their manager during the week. The findings in the study agreed with HR firm Rise’s research that in a professional setting, Generation Z employees communicate best when they are face-to-face. The majority of the sample 94 people (61.4%) said they are more comfortable communicating with their supervisor in person while only 59 (38.6%) were more comfortable digitally.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

Generation Z has been in the workforce for a short period, therefore research on their professional communication preferences and behaviors is limited. However, predictions and assumptions can and have been made based on their behaviors in non-professional settings. For example, we know that Generation Z is comfortable in a technology driven society because they were born with the worldwide web, cell phones and email. They are comfortable with more communication options than any other generation because they have had time to experiment with them throughout their lives. Many studies show that Generation Z prefers to communicate digitally in the personal and recreational parts of their lives. In fact, their favorite modes of communication will likely continue to be social media and text messaging for some time. Although we know a good deal about their communication preferences in their personal lives, Gen Z preferences for workplace communication are important to research and pinpoint. With

more options to communicate than ever before, it is important that millennial, Gen X and Baby Boomer managers know how to communicate with Gen Z in the ways that they prefer. This is the best way to ensure that they are effectively communicating with their employees.

Based on this study, today's managers are communicating through the digital avenues that Gen Zs most prefer. Survey results found that Gen Zs prefer face-to-face communication, but if given only digital modes as options, text messaging is their top choice. With that in mind, the survey also found that their current managers are using text messaging as the most common form of communication with them. Although it is good news that today's managers are using Gen Z's top choice of digital communication, they might be avoiding face-to-face communication because they know Gen Zs prefer digital media in big parts of their personal life. As Schroth pointed out, Gen Zs have less practice with face-to-face communication, so it is possible that Gen Zs will not be great at in-person communication at work – even though they say they prefer it – and thus, managers rely on text messaging as a more effective means to communicate with them.

According to the study, it is recommended that managers combine a mixture of communicating in person and via text message with their Gen Z employees for an optimal communication experience. The study showed that Gen Zs have a slight preference for more communication via email than they are currently receiving. This could be because Gen Zs are busy - “Zappers” -, and they prefer to have a strand of communication to refer back to when needed. Like a text message, an email can be left in an inbox and answered when either party is available. It also leaves behind a digital footprint for reference later. It is also recommended that managers stay away from communicating with Gen Z employees through their social media platforms. According to the study, social media is the least used mode of communication from current manager to employee and it the least preferred mode of communication for Gen Zs with their future manager. This could be because Gen Zs express themselves through social media and find it to be their personal platform. They do not want their professional lives, including communication with their manager, mixing with their personal life.

5.2 Limitations & Future Research

This study was done with a convenient and small sample of college-aged students who are regionally located within the Midwest. Because this group is degree-bound, their responses are likely much different from those who are not currently in college or planning to seek a college degree. Because this sample consisted of students attending a University in the Midwest, it is recommended that the same survey be distributed to areas outside of the Midwest that consist of Generation Z populations who are both enrolled and not enrolled in college credits. The Generation Z communication preferences were evaluated in this study, but were not compared to other generations. Future research should survey multiple generations of workers to find the differences that may exist between them in the workplace.

Another interesting study would be to look at what order a Gen Z employee would seek communication with their employer at work. The study in this thesis indicates that they prefer face-to-face communication with their manager, but just because they prefer it does not mean they would start with it. Would they prefer to text them first? Would they follow up with a call and then move on to face-to-face communication, which is what they preferred from the beginning? Are the Gen Z's going against their own preferences to meet the preferences of someone else like their manager?

Lastly, in the survey that was conducted, respondents were asked to rank their preference of modes of communication including text messaging, phone calls, emails, message applications and social media. However, face-to-face communication was not an option on the survey in this section. It would be interesting to see how many current managers are using face-to-face communication and in what order it is preferred by Gen Z with their future manager.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX: THE DEPLOYED SURVEY

What is your gender?

What year were you born?

What is your ethnicity?

Are you an international student?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Have you held a position where you reported to a supervisor? (Not someone in your family)

Yes

No

For the next set of questions, consider your supervisor in the most recent job that you have worked or are currently working. If your supervisor was a family member, pick the next most recent job.

Approximately how many months did you hold this job?

Which of these resembles the position you are describing?

Office environment. Examples: customer service, internship, administrative, sales, etc.

Non-office environment. Examples: customer service, retail, restaurant, lifeguard, warehouse, volunteer, etc.

In choosing this job, how important was the following to you?

Please score the following: Not important (0) to Very important (5)

Work schedule/Flexibility – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Location of job – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Compensation – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Manager – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Coworkers – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Gain work experience – 0 1 2 3 4 5

What is your manager's age?

Younger than me

My age

1-5 years older

5-10 years older

More than 10 years older

Unsure

What is your manager's gender?

Male

Female

Unsure

In this position, consider your manager.

Please score your manager in the following categories:

Good communication – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Goal-oriented – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Honesty – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Confidence – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Empathetic – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Problem-solver – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

How is your manager communicating with you?

What are the most frequent ways your manager communicates with you? Most often used (1) to least often used (5)

Email

Message application: GroupMe, Slack, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc.

Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, etc.

Phone Call

Text Message

After spending time working here, how important are each of the following factors?

Please score the following: Doesn't make a difference in my decision (0) to Most important in my decision (5)

Work schedule/Flexibility – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Location of job – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Compensation – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Manager – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Coworkers – 0 1 2 3 4 5

Gain work experience – 0 1 2 3 4 5

For the next set of questions, think about the job that you hope to have in the future. Consider your manager in this dream job.

In this future job, what is your manager's age?

Doesn't Matter

Younger than me

My age

1-5 years older

5-10 years older

More than 10 years older

Unsure

In this future job, what is your manager's gender?

Doesn't Matter

Male

Female

Unsure

In this futuristic position, consider your manager.

Please score your manager in the following categories:

Good communication – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Goal-oriented – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Honesty – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Confidence – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Empathetic – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Problem-solver – Poor Somewhat poor Neutral Somewhat well Excellent

Picture communicating with your future manager.

Please rank the following communication platforms with your manager. Most preferred (1) to least preferred (5)

Email

Message application: GroupMe, Slack, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc.

Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, etc.

Phone Call

Text Message

When I reach out to my supervisor, I expect a response within:

A few minutes

An hour

A few hours

A day

Other

I am most comfortable communicating with my future supervisor:

Digitally

In Person

Other

Unsure

How often do you hope to communicate with your future supervisor?

Always

Multiple times per day

Multiple times per week

Multiple times per month

Never

Unsure

Does your future supervisor talk to you about your personal well-being by checking in on you regularly?

Definitely yes

Probably yes

Might or might not

Probably not

Definitely not

Unsure

If your future supervisor called you and left you a voicemail, you would:

Call them back

Text them

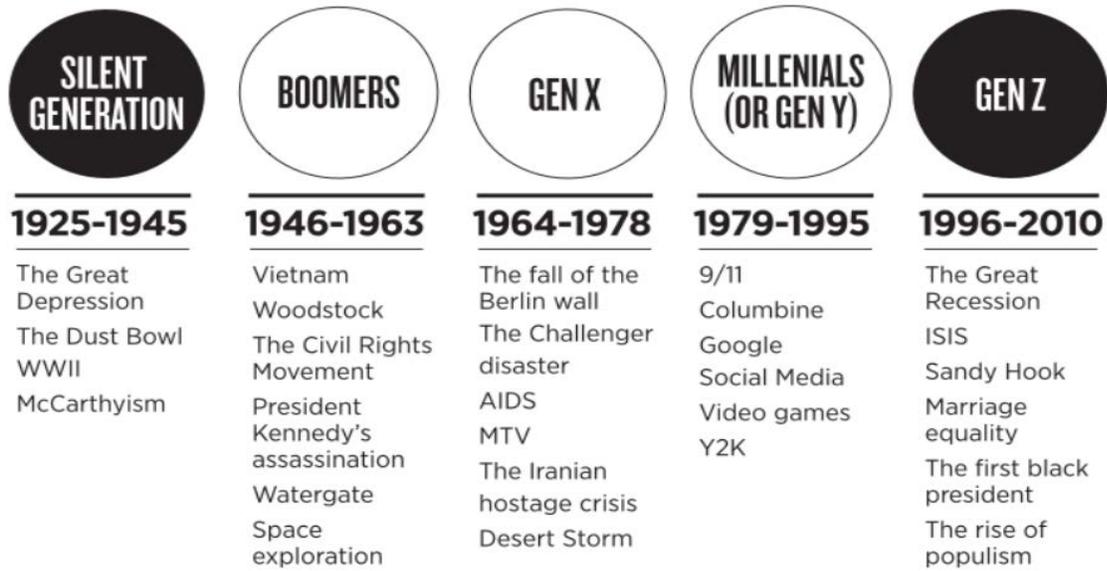
Email them

Wait to see them the following day to respond

Other

Unsure

***FIGURE 1: THE GENERATIONS DEFINED**



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*<http://www.millennialmarketing.com/2018/03/the-birth-years-of-millennials-and-generation-z/>