**Problem statement: Understanding the Career Aspirations of Gen-Z**

**Objective:** To explore and educate about the career aspirations of Gen-Z and the factors influencing their expectations.

**Introduction:** Generation Z (born between 1990s-2010s) are often renowned for growing up in a technologically immersed environment, characterized by unpredictability and high expectations in their professional life. However, understanding these aspirations and expectations poses a challenge for those from different age groups.

**Who are affected?**

1. Employers losing talented employees: Organizations risk losing out on valuable talent due to the challenges in retaining Gen-Z employees.
2. Co-workers: Interactions with the younger colleagues can be difficult for older generations, leading to issues of mutual respect and hierarchical clashes.
3. Businesses missing fresh perspectives: The reluctance to embrace Gen-Z’s innovative ideas may prevent businesses from gaining fresh perspectives.
4. Family: Families find it hard to accept the unique aspirations of Gen-Z because of the huge shift in thought process as compared to previous generations.
5. Gen-z themselves: While Gen-Z are vocal about their aspirations, they often face labels of arrogance and unfitness for the corporate world, hindering personal and professional growth.

Personal thoughts:

1. There have been instances where while browsing on LinkedIn I found people talking about how difficult it is to retain the “young” employees at their company and how managers find it difficult to interact with them. I even saw a recruiter saying that “youngsters” don’t respect people who are senior to them and how they do not want to work with them because they refuse to follow their existing company policies.
2. Talking to higher-ups in businesses, I realized that most of them prefer not to take suggestions or advices from young people because they lack decision making skills, they are “spoiled”, they do not know the struggle and they do not have the same values.
3. Most of the families cannot understand why their child want to shift from one career to another, why they don’t want to do anything related to their degrees. I particularly had a very tough time explaining it to my relatives why I “wasted” five years of my life in obtaining degrees which I’m not even going to use in my job. They just find it really “silly”.
4. Individuals like us who speak about big dreams are often labeled as "privileged," "silly," and "unrealistic." It's challenging because people don't want to acknowledge our struggles. While our challenges might differ from theirs, we've faced our own difficulties to reach where we are today. I recall a professor at my university who insisted on making us understand struggle, making our lives as difficult as possible. Because of such experiences, I've always felt that just because we belong to this generation, we do not have the right to express our grievances or seek something better.

**What is happening?**

1. Due to Gen-Z’s distinct approach to problem-solving and their emphasis on mental well-being and work-life balance, they are often characterized by the following stereotypes:

* Gen-Z is perceived as “difficult” to work with
* Expectations are considered unrealistic
* Allegations of disloyalty are common
* Demands flexibility and freedom
* Lacking co-operation

1. Most of the Gen-Z individuals either decide to resign from their recent jobs or they are laid off.

Personal thoughts:

1. These are the labels that I’ve personally experienced. Most of the people don’t like it when they talk to someone with a different opinion and that’s when the real struggle begins. All of these stereotypes feel like “slavery” to me. How can asking for a better life be seen as unrealistic expectations? How can requesting mutual respect be seen as non-cooperation and “difficult” to work with?
2. I’ve felt that I don’t want to work where I’ll be disrespected and exploited every day, even if it means facing financial difficulties. We’re neither fearless nor naive; we have just realized that jobs aren’t “life” rather, they serve as stepping stones toward a “better” life. Even if some of these youngsters don’t resign, they’ll be the first ones to get laid off. It can be because of less experience, difference in working culture or simply because they are too young.

**When is this happening?**

While the exact timing is challenging to pinpoint, but it is assumed that significant amount of Gen-Z entered the professional life during or after the end of pandemic.

Personal thoughts: Many of my friends began their professional journeys during the pandemic, a period marked by uncertainty and challenges. The job market’s unpredictability significantly affected out future plans.

**Where is this happening?**

It cannot be exactly determined but it is occurring in most career fields at global level.

Personal thoughts: On platforms like LinkedIn, it’s disheartening to read discussions that often paint our generation as lacking skills and making unrealistic demands. It creates a sense that we need a “reality” check from the people who are more experienced than us.

**Why is that a problem?**

1. Employers: Struggling to align with Gen-Z’s distinctive work style, employers find it challenging to engage and integrate them into their established work culture.
2. Inter-generational communication gaps hinder the sharing of ideas and collective growth.
3. Businesses: Retaining Gen-Z employees become a hurdle for businesses, they are often perceived as less loyal and prone to frequent job changes.
4. Lack of understanding regarding the aspirations of Gen-Z often leads to stress and frustration within families.
5. Gen-Z’s often feel a sense of powerlessness, they can’t say “no” and expected to adept at the expense of crushing their own expectations of a better life. This struggle often leads to burnout and mental health problems.

Personal thoughts:

1. I met a person during a webinar where he talked about how he didn’t know, as an employer, how he is supposed to ensure that he align with the Gen-Z work style because he realized they are a significant asset to their organization.
2. Most of the people from the “older generation” that I’ve met through LinkedIn always told me same thing: to keep your expectations low, don’t dream big, don’t listen to people who talk about demanding “better work life”. I just found it really frustrating to know. It limits the potential for personal and professional growth.
3. I saw few posts the other day that stated how today’s generation is “not loyal” and how businesses shouldn’t spend so much on this generation and not yield to their demands because it will lead to an imbalance in power within businesses.
4. During my master's program, as I worked on my thesis, my supervisor took credit for my work, positioning himself as the first author. What did I do? Nothing. I felt utterly powerless; my entire degree depended on his single signature. Experiencing this sense of powerlessness was disheartening, and I am determined never to feel it again. Sadly, many of my friends faced similar situations, being asked to remain silent about their requests for better working conditions, leading to heightened levels of anxiety.

Many people do not understand how these issues can seriously impact someone’s life. Life isn’t just about “money”, “professional life” and “profits”. I believe we aren’t born just to work our whole lives. There’s much more to the world, then why are we made to believe that this is the only right way to live?

Understanding the shift in thought processes among Gen-Z is crucial and various factors contribute to this change. Here are my personal thoughts on it:

1. An end to Generational Trauma: Millennials identified the traumas and Gen-Z took action to break from them. It can be as small as not conforming to family expectations when your interests don’t align or understanding that parents shouting over trivial matters (might seem common) is really a toxic way of dealing with a human. Breaking from past generational challenges has played a significant role in removing the limitations imposed on oneself. I’ve felt this exact thing when I overcame the challenges I faced at my home.
2. Increased awareness of mental well-being: The understanding of mental health has become more prevalent than ever. Therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists are looked as doctors and “helpers” rather than solely treating “mad” people. I notice more people asking for help and wanting to focus on becoming better individuals, rather than dedicating their entire lives solely to work.
3. Pandemic impact during formative years: The pandemic occurred during Gen-Z’s pivotal life stages. They were forced to complete their education remotely, missing out on valuable in-person interactions and experiences to add to their resumes. Additionally, we have lost a significant number of loved ones. This made us realize how fragile a human life is and question whether we should spend our entire lives doing something we don’t love.
4. Amplified voices advocating personal well-being: In the era of social media, there’s a constant voice emphasizing the importance of living life on your terms. We just want to challenge the notion of gaining independence only to be enslaved by companies.
5. Altered economic conditions: We are experiencing a recession where nothing is promised, not even job security. Gen-Z is often labeled disloyal, but is it true? How loyal are employers to their employees? Gen-Z has just shed light on this reality. I wonder why being “loyal” to a company is seen as a good thing when they treat you like an absolute slave.
6. Rising living expenses: Living costs have skyrocketed in just a few years, yet salaries haven’t increased at that pace. Freshers, often Gen-Z, are expected to work for minimal pay or even for free to gain “experience”. Money isn’t the problem, the problem is how undervalued we are. Companies offer Rs 10,000 per month for the full time job, which really doesn’t make sense to me at all.
7. Abundance of self-help resources: The availability of numerous self-help resources such as books, has empowered Gen-Z to explore alternative paths and priorities. Reading books like “The things you can see only when you slow down” and “Imperfect” by Haemin Sunim changed the way I perceive the world.

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