

Chapter 6

Conceptualizing Job Attributes Minoritized Gen Z College Students Seek in Employers

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ABSTRACT

Job preferences of college graduates before entering their professional fields is an area that should receive attention, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Job choice decisions literature suggests that demographic characteristics can impact individual's employment preferences, but little is known about what the current generation of college students (i.e., Generation Z) seek in a job. This study focuses on what job attributes Gen Z college students sought in employment during the pandemic. Additionally, the study explores job attributes minoritized Gen Z college students seek or avoid in employment. The findings of an online survey among 393 graduating college students suggest race and gender affect job preferences. The factors coworker/policy, status/advancement, diversity/work itself, and schedule/relocation are what college graduates seek. Moreover, the qualitative data analysis revealed four themes regarding qualities minoritized graduates seek and two themes regarding deal breakers for minoritized graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Employment preferences of college graduates before entering into their professional fields is an area that should receive immense attention, in particular during and post-COVID-19 pandemic periods (Hynes, et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), there are over 10 million job openings in the U.S. economy in October 2022. However, only around 6 million workers are currently

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-2173-7.ch006

seeking jobs, and over 3 million workers have left the workforce since February 2020 (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Given the current labor shortage in the U.S. economy, employers are more willing to hire new college graduates as experienced workers are harder to find (Kaplan & Hoff, 2022), making it imperative for employers to understand college graduates' employment preferences to effectively target their recruitment efforts.

Prior research on job choice decisions suggests that demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity, can affect an individual's employment preferences (Fouad, 2022; Johnson et al., 2017). For example, Sheppard (2018) found that women college graduates are less interested in top leadership positions than men and are less willing to give up enjoyable work for a promotion. Based on a meta-analysis of 242 samples, Konrad et al. (2000) found that there are cohort differences in rising aspirations among women studied in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s due to structural changes in gender roles. When examining the role that gender and race play in millennials' employment preferences, Murphy and Collins (2015) found that both women and Black college students value how much organizations embrace diversity and inclusion more than men and non-Black students.

Although prior research has examined employment preferences of college students and has demonstrated that generational cohorts matter, little is known about what the current generation of college students, i.e., Generation Z (Gen Z), seek in a job. This topic is especially important as anecdotal evidence suggested that generational differences coupled with experiences living through the COVID-19 pandemic have led Gen Z workers to demand more from workplaces, such as higher pay, more time off, and flexibility to work remotely (Francis, 2022). Additionally, Gen Z is by far the most racially and ethnically diverse and best-educated generation in the U.S. (Fry & Parker, 2018), and the majority of them (77%) emphasize the importance of working for an employer that cares about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI; TalentLMS, 2022). Consequently, it is crucial for employers to understand what job attributes minoritized college students seek or avoid in potential employers to both attract talents from this group and advance social justice and racial equity at the same time.

To that end, this study extends prior research on employment preferences by focusing on what job attributes Gen Z college students seek in employment around the COVID-19 pandemic, which can lead to changes in job preferences. Additionally, this study explores whether Gen Z college students' job attribute preferences differ based on minoritized group identification. Finally, this study identifies specific job attributes minoritized college students seek or avoid in employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristics and Employment Preferences of Generation Z

To investigate and comprehend what job attributes Gen Z college students seek in potential employers, it is vital to understand the characteristics of this current generation. Twenge et al.'s (2010) study highlighted generational theory and stated that a prototypical individual of a generation can be identified by examining the characteristics of people born within a bracketed timeframe. Generational theory is a field of sociological and psychological research that examines the characteristics, behaviors, and values of different generations, often categorized by birth years (National Academies of Sciences & Medicine, 2020). According to the pioneer generational theorist Karl Mannheim (Mannheim, 1952), generational theory helps with the understanding of how historical events, societal changes, and shared experiences

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