

Generation Z as Employees in Public Pharmacies in Germany – Difficulties for the Health Care System in the Area of Pharmaceutical Supply due to the Absence of Skilled Workers

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Abstract

Generation Z is the workforce generation for the next 20 years and poses a problem for some industries. One of these is the pharmaceutical sector of pharmacies, which performs the important task of providing medicines and related advice. The shortage of skilled workers in pharmacies is not a new problem and was already recognised in the 1990s, but due to the generative characteristics of the members of Generation Z, it poses a new challenge.

Pharmacies need the next generation and must also adapt to demands of Generation Z, which, however, does not seem ready for this in many areas due to the structure and processes of pharmacy services. Pharmacies have undergone some changes in their areas of service delivery and some have already gone relatively far digital and are planning with part-time models. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage, which shows that pharmacy is not a preferred career field of the generation. For the personnel management of pharmacies, it is necessary to find the parameters that appeal to the representatives of the generation and adapt them to the personnel search. In this paper, the Big Five personality traits and the behavioural economics of Generation Z will be compared with the requirements of the pharmacy profession in order to determine some parameters.

Keywords

Human Resources Strategy, Public Pharmacies, Generation Z, Recruitment, Big Five, Behavioural Economics

JEL classification: C21, R13

Introduction

Research in various disciplines is concerned with the shaping of generations and their values, value concepts and life plans. In this context, three generations have emerged for the field of HR work, which are repeatedly brought into focus and compared. Generations X, Y and Z, as they are usually classified, exhibit differences in these personality traits (Armutat, 2018, p. 37; Heldenbrand, 2021), which prove difficult for companies to grasp when recruiting personnel. This results in different requirements for life plans that affect both the private and professional spheres. Generation Z, as digital natives and certain personality traits, seem to make things particularly difficult for employers here. Some sectors are particularly affected here, which includes retail, which includes pharmacies. What makes Generation Z so difficult for the public pharmacy sector, so that jobs remain unfilled and succession planning for business closures increasingly leads to the permanent closure of pharmacies? On the one hand, this question will be pursued through

literature-based research findings and a pharmacy-typical requirements profile for the employee in the form of a comparison of a profile of the public pharmacy with the profile of Generation Z.

1. Relevance

In 2023, the number of public outlets selling medicines fell below 18,000, a 40-year low. This is a worrying development for public health, as the supply and quality of advice is increasingly dwindling. Many reasons are cited in this context. Demographic change, the lack of profitability of pharmacies in certain areas, too much regulation and savings in performance-based remuneration. However, an equally important reason can be seen in staffing levels, which partly correlates with the aforementioned causes, but also represents a fundamental problem for the existence of pharmacies in isolation from them. This is especially true for salaried pharmacists, who as skilled workers represent a bottleneck profession in Germany (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2022, p. 14). The current new generation of workers is not willing to enter the specialist profession of pharmacist and reasons must be sought for this. Two hypotheses were put forward for this purpose.

Hypothesis 1: Generation Z is hostile to the profession of pharmacist due to their expectations of professional life.

Hypothesis 2: Pharmacies are not compatible with Generation Z in their structures and processes.

2. Methodology

Generation Z has become a widespread focus of research and studies have been conducted to determine the personality traits that define this generation. Some studies examined the so-called Big Five (e.g. Stelling, 2023; Marhadi and Hendarman, 2020), which are based on the traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and extraversion, as well as the respective opposing traits (Myers, 2014, p. 574). Extraversion means an energetic approach towards the social and material world. Agreeableness implies a prosocial and communal orientation towards others. Conscientiousness describes socially acceptable impulses that facilitate task and goal-directed behaviour. Neuroticism shows individuals emotional stability and general temper. Openness to Experience can be described as depth, originality, and complexity of mental and experiential life of an individual (Marhadi and Hendarman, 2020). From these studies, a portfolio can be created that determines the typical characteristics of Generation Z that can be adapted to career expectations. The understanding of the abstract term 'Big Five' is derived from the individual factors identified in the developmental history of psychology that make up a personality in a strong framework. Big Five thus represent five dimensions of personality, which in psychological research are determined to be determinant for the formed character and the actions associated with it (Stelling, 2023). The basis for the focus on five elements that help to comprehensively determine personality emerged from Allport's research in the early 20th century. He distanced himself from Freudian psychoanalysis, which had dominated until then, by using the behaviour of individuals as a means of identifying personality traits (Marhadi and Hendarman, 2020). A personal trait follows this approach: "[...]

behavioural or dispositional pattern typical of a particular individual, expressed in the way he or she feels and acts; may be recorded by questionnaires designed to elicit self-evaluation and other-evaluation." (Myers, 2014, p. 569). In addition to the Big Five, Behavioural Economics are also included in Munkes and Schmid's study, which are derived by combining economic and psychological elements. They can also be anchored in behavioural types in generations and reveal preferences in lifestyle that can also be applied to career choice and fit to a profession. They are therefore not only applicable to marketing, but to every area of life that requires decisions. The approach deliberately separates itself from the classical theory of rational choice, which has been considered too static in research (Spindler, 2020; Bauer and Wätjen, 2021). It also involves weighing up which employer, for example, best suits one's own ideas. According to the study by Munkes and Schmid [2019], the Big Five and 'Behavioural Economics' should be used to compare the requirements of Generation Z for their own profession with those for the profession of pharmacist.

3. Generation Z

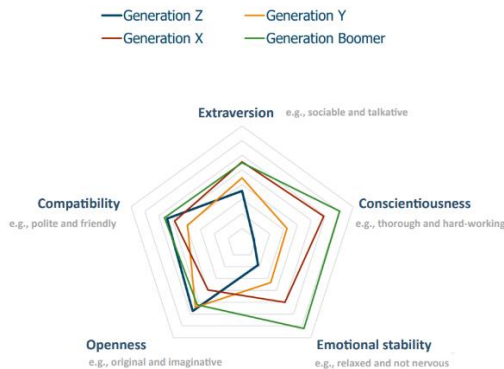
Generation Z has already entered the world of work with the first cohorts from 1995 onwards or will enter working life in the near future. As of 2022, the generation comprises about 11 million people in Germany, of whom about 1/3 have entered or are entering working life (Rapp and Réthy-Jensen, 2023). Like all other generations, this generation has been shaped by its immediate environment, which favours certain overarching patterns of behaviour. Often these emerge:

- a) Often as an only child in the family with overprotective parental care (Salleh et al., 2017; Brademan and Piorr, 2018; Hass, 2021).
- b) Numerous opportunities for mobility in education, work and private life through travel, study abroad and international work opportunities. Cultural and social diversity is part of everyday life (Holopainen/Suslova, 2019, p. 3).
- c) Highest demands on jobs, high material demands (Brademann and Piorr, 2018).
- d) The first generation to grow up in a completely digital and high-tech world → is also referred to as the social media generation. (Waffenschmidt, 2018; Holopainen/Suslova, 2019, p. 2).
- e) Influenced by an affinity for technology and digitalisation in everyday life, → also transfers to the expectations of the professional environment (Wulf et al., 2020, p. 8).

More than previous generations, Generation Z is not focused on a long-term commitment to a single company in their professional lives. They are considered the first generation to orient most of their information gathering towards the internet and to absorb and pass on opinions via social media. However, Generation Z is said to have some deficits in their social behaviour, which also affect their professional life and career choice. However, it must be put into perspective here that the fields of work in studies often revolve around office work and rarely involve retail (including Waffenschmidt, 2018; Brademann and Piorr; Schultz, 2021). Here it has been found that face-to-face communication in teams is seen as very important. How this plays out with customers is not discussed in most studies. However, this would be very important in retail pharmacies, for example, as communication with customers is a cornerstone of services. In 2019, Munkes and Schmid from the Gesellschaft für innovative Marktforschung (Society for Innovative Market Research) conducted a survey of test persons from the four generations of baby boomers as well as generations X, Y and Z in the area of personality. The breakdown of the cohorts was as follows. **Generation Z** up to 24 years (n=685); **Generation Y** 25-39 years (n=740); **Generation X** 40-54 years (n=652); **Generation Baby Boomer** older than 55 years

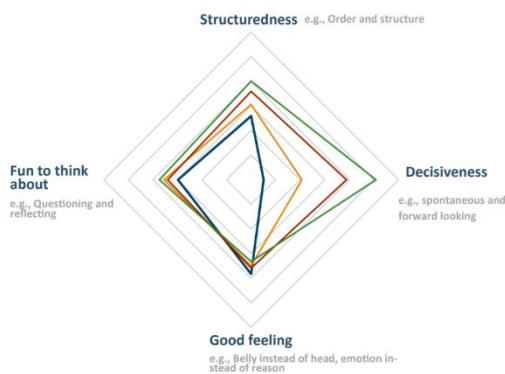
(n=740). When comparing the generations in the area of personality dimensions and values, the following results were obtained. The spider web diagrams are scaled in such a way that they show a low level of expression [1] from the inside and increasingly pronounced personality characteristics further out.

Figure 1. Generative differences of the Big Five personality dimensions



Source: Munkes & Schmid, 2019, p. 10

Figure 2. Generative differences in behavioural economics



Source: Munkes & Schmid, 2019, p. 14

The results listed here show that Generation Z clearly stands out from its predecessors in many parameters and can thus demonstrate a uniqueness just like the other generations. What is striking here is the already strongly pronounced spectrum of differences to the predecessor Generation Y. But what about the fit with the profession of pharmacist?

4. Results

For the comparison made here, the most important general majority characteristics of Generation Z from the Big Five and Behavioural Economics, which are also scientifically recognised as valid, are contrasted with the demands on the pharmacy profession in the pharmacy. This is contrasted with the demands on the pharmacy profession that come from both the legislator and the necessary demands on customers and other employees. Here, work is also being done to ensure that soft skills for pharmacists are increasingly included in the curriculae according to the Bologna framework at university, which should also prepare them for the profession of (self-employed) pharmacist (EPSA, 2016).

Pharmacists need specific skills to adequately communicate their expertise, empower patients and thereby optimise the daily use of medicines (Laven et al., 2018). Therefore pharmacists need to know the rules of their job well but they also depend on talking to clients to build a successful career, dealing well with clients require excellent soft skills like communication skills, relationship skills etc. Soft skills would include: communicating effectively, problem solving, time management, conflict management, leadership, and work ethics (Al Abed, 2016). Based on this, own experiences from many years of working as a manager were also implemented, which are used as a selection criterion for personnel selection.

Table 1: Comparison table – Part 1

Generation Z/Pharmacy Parameter	Attitude of Generation Z	Requirements for the profession of pharmacist
Extraversion	Low pronounced	High demands, as customer contact is usually face-to-face and makes high demands
Compatibility	Very well pronounced	High demand, as customers perceive courtesy and friendliness in retail pharmacies as a positive indicator.
Openness	Is moderately pronounced	Not often required as new methods or areas of work are rarely added.
Conscientiousness	Not very pronounced	High demands in counselling (communication (cf. extraversion)), medication safety etc.
Reward and reward expectation	Strong expression	In most pharmacies only conditionally possible via tariff
Structuredness	Rather low pronounced	Required in pharmacies due to the small team structures and the variety of tasks performed
Ability to make decisions	Poorly pronounced	Absolutely necessary for pharmacists, as responsibility is imposed on the pharmacist in everyday work → Makes final decisions regarding medication in the interest of the customer/patient → Must also sometimes act against the opinion of a doctor
Attitude private life/profession	Strongly pronounced in the sense of a strict separation of private life and work.	Pharmacists are obliged to work full-time, even if they are salaried, if there are not enough staff available → Emergency services and weekend shifts are compulsory

Table 1: Comparison table – Part 2

Generation Z/Pharmacy Parameter	Attitude of Generation Z	Requirements for the profession of pharmacist
Setting Place of work	Expressed in terms of independence of time and place of work	Pharmacists are obliged to exercise their profession on site in the pharmacy → Home office not possible
Setting Technology/Digitisation	Very affine and as a user very skilled and willing to learn → Career decisions are also made according to the degree of digitisation of companies	Digitisation in pharmacies is not equally developed across the entire sector → Many pharmacies have a low level of digitisation

A comparison of expectations and attitudes towards the profession shows that Generation Z lacks either the competences or the affinities for most of the requirements. The red fields mark the problem areas, blue is considered negligible and green fields determine a high benefit for the pharmacies. Competences are therefore a factor that pharmacies have to help build up and pass on to new staff as experiential knowledge. Expectations can only be met to a certain extent and require adjustments to working hours and staff deployment. The discussion will refer back to the results.

5. Discussion

Work, motivation and job satisfaction are inextricably linked and cause behaviour - regardless of generation - when they are fulfilled or not. "Employees invest their lifetime in a company; with all their ideas, with all their energy and ultimately not infrequently also with their lifeblood. But when does investment make sense?" (Meyer/Dietz, 2019, p. 66) The characteristics that make up this sense and promote motivation and satisfaction are perceived differently by the generations. In the Big Five, four out of five parameters are shown to be poorly compatible with pharmacy work. This already makes it difficult for pharmacies to build up a certain attractiveness in the personal behavioural characteristics. Likewise, the two factors of structuredness and decision-making ability are important basic requirements in pharmacies, but the majority of the generation is poor at these. For Generation Z, for example, it is evident that work is an important area of life, but that it should be strictly separated from private life. Flexibility, work-life balance and independence from the place of work have become important determinants that determine the search for work. Presence in the pharmacy with a licensed pharmacist is subject to legal obligation and thus non-negotiable. This eliminates the home office factor and other independent workplaces where services can be provided. Flexibility is a factor that pharmacies can offer to Generation Z staff if there is a sufficient number of equally qualified staff sharing the presence. As seen, this is becoming increasingly difficult and can only be ensured with appropriate part-time contracts and working models. This would theoretically require the hiring of two pharmacists in the lowest denominator for every full pharmacist position. Putting this in direct relation to salary expectations, these

are designed in the range to specialist pharmacists, who now have to be paid above the pay scale to address within this parameter (Schultz, 2021, p. 12). An important benefit that pharmacies can have from Generation Z is digitalisation. What pharmacies can use as a driver for recruitment is the will to digitalise and the use of modern technologies needed in this field of work (Holopainen/Suslova, 2019, p. 25). Generation Z has a high affinity for this in their career choice and can be addressed in many requirements through involvement in development. The differences between pharmacy and the generation seem large in comparison, but they are not insurmountable.

Conclusion

The situation of pharmacies will not change in a short time. This can definitely be stated, because the profession of pharmacist does not meet the expectations of Generation Z in only a few areas. It must be noted, however, that the characteristics that were examined are not generalisable factors that apply to all generation participants. However, they do correspond to a majority and will be more difficult to recruit for certain occupational groups in the demographic development with fewer and fewer people per generation from Y onwards. Efforts are being called for to change this state of affairs. For example, in 2021, the Federal Association of Pharmacy Students in Germany e.V. demands that the study places as well as the study locations should be expanded (BPhD, 2021). An expansion is questionable insofar as the number of admitted graduates increases slightly, but does not bring about a change in the shortage in pharmacies. So nothing can be done about the quantity alone to bring about a solution. Generation Z is going into other professions - including pharmacy. However, the field of pharmacy and the areas of work will continue to change against the background of developments in the health care system. This can offer stronger incentives for Generation Z, which include variety, flexibility, digitalisation and ownership of the areas. Pharmacies need a transformation towards more digitalisation here, even if there are still reservations so far. If pharmacies succeed in further driving the transformation towards digitalisation and in marketing the profession of pharmacist as a helping profession in terms of personnel, then it is possible to win Generation Z back for the professional field.

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