Value-Driven Media Management and Leadership Practices:
Strategies to attract and retain Generation Z in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

Attracting, retaining and managing talent has never been an easy task. This is also true for Generation Z, whose members are gradually entering the labour market. Recently, it has become popular topic to research how to appease this generation, as they are very susceptible of societal influences and will provide the workforce of the future. However, there is a gap in research regarding the specific values they hold and how compatible these values are with existing organisational cultures. Moreover, there are questions about how to communicate effectively about these values. This research explores how companies view Generation Z and identifies strategies they have used to attract and retain young talent what methods and ultimately answers the question: **What is the meaning and relevance of values in leadership and media management strategy practices to attract Generation Z in the workplace?** Ten semi-structured, in-dept interviews were conducted among HR managers, employer branding specialists and marketing professionals who provided insights into their practices and perspectives. This data was analysed using thematic analysis, which ultimately resulted in 4 main themes, 7 subthemes and 84 codes. The 4 main themes are: *1. Navigating the challenges of the youth labour market*, which provides a framework for interpreting the entire research – what awaits Generation Z, when they enter the workforce and what opportunities they have; *2. Aligning organizational and Gen Z values*, which provides an insight into the work-values of GenZ, the organizational values companies operate with, and how to align the two; *3. Leadership and Communication for Gen Z*, which explains how any interaction with Generation Z should take place, whether it be managing, motivating, or communicating, and *4. Strategic Communication and the Employer Brand,* which describes how different organizations identify employer branding and what methods are worth using to attract talent. It was found that, according to respondents, Generation Z has to compete in an extremely competitive job market, where, although structured internship and graduate programs are available, it is still difficult to find employment. In addition, most people, especially careerists, prefer multinational companies because of their stability and opportunities. Flexibility, learning opportunities, and open, authentic communication are the three main values that Generation Z and companies can agree on, but a conflicting value has also emerged, namely Generation Z's high salary demands, which no company can justify. The reason for this is the unstable financial situation in which this cohort grew up and now seeks stability. Furthermore, feedback, trust, and support are most important to this generation, and the easiest way to reach them is through social media with peer-generated content. They are also very responsive to offline event communication. Last but not least, there is still debate among respondents about where employer branding fits in and what its most important components are. The results showed that the candidate/employee experience works best as employer branding, because people listen much more to a personal, familiar voice than to any marketing message.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Contextualization of argument

Attracting and retaining Generation Z has become a priority for companies today, as young people are slowly entering the labour market in their entirety. This generation is more inclined to choose work that is meaningful (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020 p.237.), self-development plays an important role for them (Husainah et al. 2022 p. 857.), they require flexibility to combine work and studies (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017 p. 818), and they highly value community in their workplace (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020 p. 238). As a result, companies face a new set of challenges and have to rethink leadership, employer branding and recruitment strategies to serve this age group. Media management is central to this process, as it also involves how companies present themselves in the media, not only to consumers, but also to potential hires. This research aims to find out the meaning and relevance of values within leadership and media management strategy practices, focusing on attracting Generation Z in the workplace. The focus is on the perspectives of industry practitioners from the context of various small and large companies, as well as a recruitment marketing agency/job portal, who worked simultaneously with Generation Z job seekers and companies, helping them communicate their organizational values and job opening, thus gaining insight into both sides. The goal was to work from a versatile pool during the research; therefore, the respondents include several people working at Big4 companies, small marketing agencies and multinational organizations. These insights are presented as in-dept interviews. These people reside in the fields of marketing, employer branding and human resources and they were asked to draw conclusions about brand communication, leadership and retention strategies.

The motivation for this research comes from working for 1.5 years at said Gen Z-focused job portal in Hungary, where the development of recruitment strategies and the implementation of employer branding projects were part of daily operations. It was a first-hand experience of learning how to communicate "organizational values" (Mueller & Straatmann, 2014, p.4525) and what kind of messaging works when it comes to Generation Z.

These media management practices regarding leadership and strategy will have to embed different challenges that relate to characteristics of Gen Z. For example, companies need to be prepared for working with and being more if not "radically inclusive," Gen Z is always open to dialogue, and do not define themselves in a certain way but approach life in realistic manner (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p.3). Firms need to realize that at least three out of the six corporate brand-building functions – such as "defining corporate identity," "brand-oriented strategic planning," and "assuring employee's involvement (Juntunen et al. 2010, p.116) – need to be proceeded or complemented by the

establishment of "organizational values". Essentially, how a company communicates with its employees, the foundational pillars, and the benefits and opportunities it offers to young employees can affect retention and development. This shows media management practices have become important and may have to be used in distinct ways to be successful.

1.2. Theoretical relevance

The theoretical relevance lies in covering new ground and making connections that haven't yet been explored in this context. While existing studies are exploring the communication and marketing strategies for attracting young people to the workplace (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Zhong et al, 2018; Panditta, 2022), or researching what kind of marketing content is working on Generation Z (Bezbaruah & Trivedi 2020; Suryaputra et al., 2024), there is a lack of research on the intersection of brand values, value creation, and the attraction of Gen Z in the media work landscape. Similarly, how media management is practiced as an interdisciplinary approach to meaning-making needs to be better understood as well (Horst et al. 2019 p. 21). The current literature also addresses issues surrounding the definition of media management, given that we are talking about a fairly broad field with multiple disciplines incorporated in it (Baecker 1999, quoted by Greck et al. 2017. p. 120; Küng 2007, p. 22; 2008, p. 1). Moreover, questions arise even between the concepts of corporate communication and media management as well. The concept of organizational values has already existed in the literature. They suggest that it is worthwhile to align the organizational and employee values for better attraction and retention (Mueller & Straatmann, 2014, p.4525; Busa & Rutitis 2023, p. 34). However, there was even less discussion about how these organizational values are built (using specific company examples) and how successful firms have been in identifying what employees or in the case of this thesis, Generation Z, are looking for. Also, there is still plenty of debate on the leadership front about how to motivate employees. Some criticize Maslow's hierarchy of needs and advise a new scale to remedy the problems. (Kroth 2007, p.28)

1.3. Social relevance

The *social relevance* lies in better attunement to the needs and wants of Generation Z workforce through which companies can develop integrated value-based practices. Better understanding of these practices around values and value-creation enables creating sensible solutions and developments. Urde (2003, p. 1020) pointed out that the development of a brand's core values influences everything from leadership through product development to communication. These values are dynamic in nature, changing as the company evolves. With the advent of Generation Z, who are incredibly value-driven, and want to have a clear understanding of an organization's values (Chillakuri 2020 p. 1286), this is even more relevant. If a company did not focus on this aspect before, perhaps

now is the time. In addition, the research may provide an answer to the frequently asked question of why Generation Z's salary expectations are so high. This generation grew up in an uncertain economic situation, with no real experience of stability, thus it is obvious they long for it. The solution for them is to create a financial cushion for themselves, which companies at this moment in time may not be able to afford. This study also encourages mutual understanding between different generations in the workplace and highlights a problem whereby Generation Z feels that older age groups do not understand them and do not optimize their recruitment and work processes for them. The main takeaway is that different value systems can be bypassed through appropriate leadership techniques and open communication. Furthermore, based on these results, Generation Z has very clear self-development and self-definition goals and companies are slowly but surely noticing this. Understanding this gives us insights into the learning preferences of a generation which firms and educational institutions can later use to develop higher quality training and development paths. Besides, the finding may influence how companies incorporate flexibility, meaningful work and career identity into their processes. This may be even more important in this post-pandemic work culture. What makes a position useful? What opportunities for advancement are available? What types of work do different generations prefer? These are the questions we need to ask.

1.4. Practical relevance

As for *practical relevance*, this research can provide a basis for developing recruitment and retention strategies, as well as insights into whether there is a specific manual for managing Generation Z and what specific management practices young people listen to and expect from a job. If companies can respond well to these needs, they can strengthen their internal culture, gain a head start in the labour market and "remain a winning organization" (Singh & Dangmei 2016 p.4). In addition, the research can provide guidance to organizers and developers of leadership programs and training courses, encouraging them to place greater emphasis on value alignment, feedback culture, and transparency – in short, on soft leadership skills. Certain EVP (employer value proposition) frameworks can also be revisited from the perspective of young job seekers, as not all companies pay attention to this age group due to their aging corporate culture. Last, but not least, the research can indicate the direction for developing external and internal media and communication strategies as it provides direct examples from both large and smaller companies of what really works when it comes to young people, especially when discussing value embedding.

1.5. Structure

In order to answer the proposed research question, first, the theoretical framework is established, on the basis of which the interviews are analysed. The framework (Chapter 2) primarily attempts to define media management through various perspectives/research and identifies employer

branding as a subcategory. It then presents the meaning and purpose of organizational values and how they shape organizational identity. Subsequently, the literature discusses how employees can be motivated and what factors are significant in increasing their satisfaction. Finally, we cannot conclude without defining Generation Z and their values. The third chapter describes the research methodology, which was qualitative in nature. First, the chosen method is justified, followed by an explanation of the sampling strategy. Interviews were conducted with 10 employer branding, marketing and HR professionals who provided insight into various attractions, leadership and retention techniques they have used in recent years to appeal more to Gen Z, as well as discussing the general organizational culture and values at their respective firms. After explaining the operalization, the method of precise analysis is described. Finally, the analysis revealed four main themes in response to the RQ, which is discussed in Chapter 4. Here, I present the exact interview quotes and explanations, which is discussed more in detail in Chapter 5, drawing on the theoretical framework. The final conclusions are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Media management

Media management is the practice of managing media and was previously seen only to take place in the industries that produce media content as their focus in value-generation (Küng, 2007 p. 24). Today, this focus and the corresponding practices of media management are seen as taking place in most organizations, which can be mapped in a spectrum of how important media and content creation is for their operations (Horst, personal communication, 2025).

2.1.1. Definition of media management

Looking back, there has been an ongoing debate for some time now on the definition of media management (see Table 1). This is partly because the field is still young and because the media itself is a constantly changing discipline - let that change be technological or social - therefore, the disciplines and theories associated with it are difficult to grasp. Küng (2007) herself identified the field as a set of academic backgrounds. According to her, media management lies at the top of the domains of media economics, political economy, media studies, and journalism, pulling from a little bit of each (p.23). When companies want to apply this discipline, they reach out to these concepts, unwittingly. In comparison, Georgiades (2015) gave a somewhat clearer definition, stressing that media management can only be used by media firms. In his view, "media management refers to the management of media organizations, which is the application of the different management processes to media organizations". (p.2) This view is shared by others, with one pointing out that media management differs from general management because an information product is created as a result of media management, which will be adopted by others (Mierzejewska, 2011. p. 13).

Table 1. Definitions of Media Management

Author	Quote
Georgiades (2015, p.2)	"Media management refers to the management of media organizations, which is the application of the different management processes to media organizations."
Baecker (1999, quoted by Greck et al. 2017. p. 120)	" [Media] Management can be seen as a constellation of influential actors, whose power is grounded in the power to conceptualize, communicate, and control the institutional order of media organizations."

Mierzejewska (2007 p. 14.)	"Media management research shares with organizational studies a concern with financial outcomes, the field extends its focus to include study of the effects of organizational management on media content and society".
Malmelin & Moisander (2014, p. 2.)	"…Effective management of media brands"
Küng (2007, p. 22; 2008, p. 1)	"It is (...) not possible to provide a clear overview of the scope of media management." Host disciplines: media economics, political economy, media studies, communication, marketing theory.
Chalk (2023)	"Media management refers to the process of managing a business's online presence, which includes choosing the most appropriate platforms for that business, posting engaging content, and monitoring its success."
This thesis positioning and leading definition: "What is media management?" (n.d.)	"Media Management pertains to the overseeing, organization, and strategic handling of various media resources and operations within the realm of mass communication."

2.1.2. Corporate Communication

Another term that often arises in discussion of the definition of media management is corporate communication (CC). Based on the research, there is an overlap between concepts here, and the term "organizational communication" also appears in the literature. According to Cornelissen, the essence of CC is presenting the organization in some way to all of its key stakeholders, both externally and internally (p.21). It offers a framework and vocabulary for all means of communication to establish a favourable reputation for the firm (p. 23). Methods of CC can be public relations, media relations, community relations, employee relations, labour relations, government relations, investor relations technical communication, training and employee development, marketing communication, and management communication. (Goodman, 2004, p.217.) Based on this, it can be said that CC is an umbrella term for all interactions with the public in relation to the company, and media management is only a part of this. In their essay, Casalegno et al. (2023) examined the differences between CC and marketing and pointed out: the task of CC is to maintain consistency at all levels while marketing must keep up with market trends and respond to them (p.75). In this context, media management, like marketing, is responsible for a slice of the overall strategy. As mentioned above, his involves managing media resources and content. CC is a strategic practice, strongly embedded in corporate identity. It handles tone of voice, themes, visuals, logos, etc. (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 24). Media management on the other hand, is a much more practical, tangible process, which uses these elements to create media.

2.1.3. Fields of media management

The broadening of definitions from Küng (2008) to Chalk (2023) shows that media management has become more inclusive and is no longer strictly carried out by media companies. Media has become a more integral aspect of many, if not all, organizations. Not only are journalism, movies, or music "consumed" as media, but equally, the content of Instagram, TikTok, YouTube content creators, or the moderated brand engagement with audiences over social media platforms. Even non-professionals are using the same practices when they share posts on IG, on WhatsApp, or create reflections of their career for LinkedIn. In other words: "everyone does media". This shows that the mechanism whereby companies were geared towards core activities seems to be disappearing, as not all firms can afford to outsource a full support function to another company. External and internal communication, marketing, and brand activities related to recruitment can all be managed in-house to help the firm reduce costs (Bartosova, 2011. p. 196.), and this opens the possibility of examining companies whose core activities are very far from creating any kind of media. Overall, media management is not just about managing creative teams but also overseeing how companies present themselves in digital and traditional media, for example, to attract talent (alongside other branding activities).

2.1.4. (New) Media Strategy

Many companies prefer using "new media" to reduce costs. New media is a "product, service, system, or process that might be used to change or enhance the consumption of a mass media product and is perceived as new by the adopting firm" (Chan-Olmsted, 2006, p. 252). Because it is accessible and easy to use, it has the potential to transform the organization, shaping how it communicates and how they manage their public image. Plesner and Gulbrandsen (2015) argue that with the emergence of new media and co-creative media, the roles in the organizations (manager, worker, customer) have become blurred. It is no longer possible to separate internal and external communication either - they have completely merged. Even algorithms have a say in what the public even sees of the company. (p. 155). Companies accustomed to one-way mass communication need to rethink their strategy, as social media provides the space for "message spreading" and "re-contextualization", disrupting pre-constructed roll-outs and decisions (p. 156). Adding to this, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) highlight the issue of control and freedom on social media, and they ask for a better-informed user base and stricter policies on the general use of social media. According to their research, although corporate entities claim to have intermediate or expert skills in social media, there is a lack of training, monitoring and general guidelines that the company should follow (p. 297). This, combined with the uncontrollable, collaborative space that Web 2.0 has the media into, raises concerns. (p. 300) Macnamara and Zerfass therefore point out that a kind of governance-focused use of social media,

where organizations operate in a more rigorous, transparent way, including community engagement and listening, with clear regulations about who can talk about the company and how, would be beneficial for all. For this reason, when a corporation introduces this type of communication strategy involving new media, it must anticipate the problems that may arise and employ experts who follow the rules and implications of co-creation and user-generated media to develop these strategies, while clearly communicating the company's message and shaping its identity.

2.2. Employer branding

2.2.1. Organizational identity, values and employer branding

To understand how companies can attract Generation Z through their communicated values, we need to have a look at how an organization's image and identity are built because this is the first thing a prospective employee will see. Organizational identity refers to a unique set of traits of an organization, fundamentally concerning what the organization is, shaped by graphic design, employee behaviour, and corporate communication with both internal and external shareholders. (Balmer, 1998; Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Argenti, 1998; Jablin and Putnam, 2001, referenced by Amibola & Vallaster 2007, p. 343) It is an entity that defies the company, it is the first thing people recognize it by and acts as a top-of-the-mind awareness of the firm, therefore being extremely important. This is why the role of employer branding in the corporate world has grown significantly in recent years. Dedicated employer branding staff are appearing in more and more organizations, whose task is to bring together the communication and HR disciplines and to tap into an area of media management where the proper presentation of company values is vital. In this study, employer branding falls under the umbrella of media management because it uses the framework and methodology of marketing to address human resource issues, thus using promotion and branding and it considers not only prospective employees but also current ones as branding targets (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p.502; Edwards, 2009, p.6). It is important to recognize that employer branding and corporate branding are inadvertently intertwined. Foster et al. (2010, p.403-404) point out that both corporate branding and employer branding involve a kind of "promise" to stakeholders, and the quality of customer service or product can influence the image of the company as a potential workplace.

2.2.2. From employer branding to recruitment marketing

In order to understand how employer branding is operationalized in practice, it is important to introduce the concept of recruitment marketing and why the two concepts are not entirely interchangeable. Mashiah (2021) argues that the most obvious difference is that employer branding is more of a strategic concept, aimed at preserving the reputation of the firm as an employer, yet recruitment marketing is more of a tool, a tactical concept of what way in which this can be achieved.

The concepts overlap a little, as with media management, there are several perspectives in the literature, but the bottom line is this: recruitment marketing is the external practice of building an employer brand (p.2).

There are three components to the construction of an employer brand. First, the company needs to come up with a set of values that it cannot only convey but also implement. These are the so-called "organizational values", which are beliefs that are likely to be believed by all members of the organization, and which manifest themselves as an end goal or expected behaviour. These values influence the day-to-day operations and actions of the company (Mueller & Straatmann, 2014, p.4525). In the case of a good scenario - and this is how Gen Z thinks about the role of values - the values of the employee and the organization are aligned, working together towards a common goal. As highlighted by Busa & Rutitis (2023, p. 34): when job seekers are looking for a new job, they look at whether the company's employer brand matches their own personal brand. This can also factor into whether someone is a "cultural fit" or not.

At the same time, employer branding builds on these values and tries to align a company's attractiveness with these values. It was Berthon et al (2005, p. 162) who identified five factors in the process of making a firm attractive. These are: "interest value" and "social value" for psychological fulfilment, "development value" and "application value" for the functional benefits, and last but not least, "economic value", which is all about how much the company is worth financially for the prospective employee. Identifying these values and integrating them into corporate life and messaging is the cornerstone of the employer value proposition (EVP). EVPs are defined as a strategic approach to managing employees through a unique set of benefits employees receive in exchange for the skills, capabilities and experiences they bring to the firm (Łazorko, 2023, p. 70; Alashmawy & Yazdanifard, 2019, p. 572). These specific benefits are constructed from the employee attractiveness factors identified above. After identifying the company values, the communication of these values externally and internally begins. External communication aims to reach the target audience and sell them on the message (Sullivan, 2002). In addition, it is also closely linked to the already established product and corporate branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 p. 502). Yet, perhaps, one of the most contributing factors is the voice of current, high performer workers (Charbonnier-Voirin et al. 2016, p. 3; Foster et al. 2010, p. 404) also known as "brand advocates" (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016, p. 202), which is why, the third part, inner communication and building retention and satisfaction strategies are becoming another function of employer branding professionals.

2.2.3. Candidate experience and risks

Well-constructed organizational values and benefits - that can be understood and accounted for not only in words but also in action - are the key players in ensuring that both employees and

applicants have a positive experience of the company. If this does not happen, a state of brand dissonance may occur, making it more difficult to retain employees, as the promises made to candidates do not align with their actual experiences. As Soeling (2022, p. 6) pointed out, "the employer brand promise should be matching with reality". Similarly, Berthon et al (2005) also flagged that the construction of the employer brand has the potential to influence or reduce a certain "post-employment dissonance" (p. 169).

Ryan et al. (2000, p. 356) drew the "jobs as products" analogy: they argue that considering marketing as a strategic framework for human resources management makes a lot of sense. Both areas are constantly assessing consumer motivations, needs, and behaviours in order to offer something beneficial for all parties involved. Marketing tools such as segmentation, consumer analysis, and targeting can easily be transferred to the recruitment specialist's toolbox. By merging the two disciplines, different techniques are created to help companies attract top talent. This can include improving the candidate experience, increasing the visibility of the company website, holding recruitment events, or creating strong employee referral programs (Kulkarni et al, 2022, p. 739). This should be accompanied by an upgraded social media presence and creative visuals (p. 743). In contrast, Huang et al. (2011 p. 63) urge the promotion of personal development and training programs to attract talent, arguing that these should be utilized in the same way as the company brand name. These personal/career development programs, if delivered in a job package with benefits, can raise interest in the job and in the company (p. 60). These are perhaps even more powerful for early talent hires.

Although these instruments tend to emphasize the positive aspect of any product, and this can increase the willingness to apply, the quality of applicants and employee attractiveness, the candidates can have a biased experience (Busa & Ruitis, 2023, p. 36). Naturally, it is not sufficient for everything to go according to protocol in times of peace, but also in a real crisis, the employee will look to see whether these promises are being kept and will judge the employer accordingly. (Łazorko 2023, p. 70) Therefore, leadership and the organizational strategy practices need to reflect these values, interests and expectations concurrently.

2.3. Leadership and strategy

Both leadership and strategy are central phenomena that comprise many different ways of acting, being, supporting, decision-making, enabling and meaning-making for achieving organizational success. This thesis follows a practice-theoretical approach gaining ground in media management (Horst & Hitters, 2020 p. 24.). This perspective focuses attention on these habitual actions and situated performances through which strategies and changing realities are managed in

organizations (Horst et al. 2019, p. 207). It is about how people do things together, and how meaning-making and shared success are achieved in this context.

2.3.1. Distinguishing leadership from management

Now, what is management, what is leadership and what is the difference between them? One definition of management is a kind of power of direction that is conducted through executive, administrative, and supervising positions. Management is mainly task-based; their job could involve resolving conflict, mentoring, and developing staff (Katz 1955, referenced by Algahtani 2014, p. 74). In comparison, leadership is a higher-level, multidimensional concept. Leadership can be "a behaviour; a style; a skill; a process; a responsibility; an experience; a function of management; a position of authority; an influencing relationship; a characteristic; and an ability" (Northouse 2007, referenced by Algahtani 2014, p. 75) This also shows that every leader is a manager, but not every manager can step into the role of leader. The more managers can make this change in organizations, the more productive a team can be.

The "leadership as practice" literature highlights the strong connections between strategy as practice and leadership as practice. Both share the same assumptions and look at very similar things (Raelin, 2017, 2019, 2021). For Raelin (2017, p. 216), "The practice view in a nutshell depicts immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometimes evolving patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice". Practice is characterized by a continuous flow and development (Raelin, 2017, p. 216.). Research that follows this conception will focus on the collective efforts, responsiveness, and the sensitivity that people may show when they engage in leadership practices. The focus on participation and co-creation highlights understanding of leadership as collective actions in which the values of stakeholders and participants play a key role. Therefore, adjusting to values and value-based actions becomes an important aspect to consider.

2.3.2. Motivation Models

Maslow's hierarchy remains relevant in organizational leadership theory, especially concerning how managers can motivate employees through different value-based practices. The five basic needs identified by Maslow (1954, pp. 35-46) - physiological needs, safety needs, needs for love, affection and belongingness, needs for esteem and needs for self-actualization - are necessary to be fulfilled in the workplace and that the culture and management vision need to be built where these are accomplished. (Nyameh, 2013, p.39, Karadencheva, 2025, p. 50) Managers have to provide not only basic physical needs and a safe working environment, but also it is vital to create a social, inclusive atmosphere, where employees can belong, where achievements are recognized, not only financially,

but also mentally, and where employees can fulfil their goals and engage in meaningful assignments. (Nyameh, 2013, p.43) In a nutshell, meeting every need of the worker creates a productive and creative workplace, where trust is nurtured. Karadencheva highlights: "The leader's ability to 'read' people and identify their needs is perhaps one of the key leadership skills" (p.51). This may be the quality that differentiates between a manager and a leader.

In contrast, Kroth (2007) critiques Maslow's theory, pointing out that he believes that two functions have been left out of the calculation completely: the need for caring and the need for understanding. (p.28) Also, he calls for a more heuristic approach. In this model, there are seven actions he recommends to managers. These are "care", "understand", "design intrinsically motivating assignments", "craft extrinsically motivating work", "set motivating goals", "support goal pursuit", and "manage expectancies" (p.24). Caring increases trust and perceived organizational support and can be displayed by helping employees with their problems, listening to their ideas, and forgiving mistakes. The essence of understanding is for the leader to realize that although all people have similar needs (Maslow is not mistaken about this), each person is different. These human needs and individual differences have to be merged and used to develop strategic motivational leadership techniques. In terms of alignments, they should be aligned with the employee's intrinsic motivation and interest (although in principle, this should already be the case, since they have applied to the particular position), and the task itself should be exchangeable for some kind of reward or recognition. Finally, setting clear, realistic goals, providing the support needed to achieve them, and managing expectations by reinforcing self-efficacy are all responsibilities of a leader, thus increasing productivity and engagement. (pp.24-27)

2.3.3. Use in Media Management

There is a consensus in literature that media management needs a different approach to leadership than other areas. As mentioned earlier, there are distinct social and technological factors that emerge concerning media management, such as what kind of product is being created and how their work is affected by technological change to a greater extent than other fields of production. Zotto (2005 p.53) identifies the media as a "dynamic market", and says that those who work in it, have always had better technological skills and were better at creating and transferring knowledge (p. 53), which requires different attitudes and managerial decisions. To ride the rapid market change, companies need a fast-adapting manager, and this means being able to switch from "planning mode" to "improvisational mode" (p. 54) Additionally, this accelerated digitalization, and globalization means that the management's role is now extended to handling the digital skills and workflow of the people working under them (Deuze, 2016 p.19.). There is a new skill to be learned every day, and these skills come from the fresher, younger workers. As leaders, they must stay current with these

tendencies, otherwise, it will be difficult to maintain authority and the role of "mentor". A strong sensitivity to and understanding of the values of Generation Z is important.

2.4. Generation Z

2.4.1. Who is Generation Z?

Generation Z, born in the late 1990s and 2000s, has inspired several studies in recent years (Gaidhani et al, 2019; Bencsik et al, 2016; Suryaputra 2024; Singh & Dangmei, 2016). They go by several names: the "Facebook generation", the "digital natives", or the "iGeneration" (Tari 2011, referenced by Bencsik et al, 2016, p.93). They are the ones who witnessed the Great Recession in 2008 and are now seeing a rise in the cost of basic expenses such as housing, transport, healthcare and food (Pandita 2022), just when they finally have the opportunity to become self-reliant and be adults. "The days of a no-layoff policy are gone," which means they can be dismissed at any time, by any means, for cost-cutting reasons; therefore, job security is not guaranteed, let alone pension. (Scholz, 2019. p. 8) Generation Z never saw a booming economy, which inevitably made them financially conservative and more conscious (Moore et al, 2017, p. 113, Sladek & Grabinger, 2014. p .4). There is a contradiction in the literature regarding whether compensation or meaningful work is valued more highly, because Nabahani claims the latter (2000 p.238) and a definite answer is still being sought. They are the ones who have grown up with a digital social web and who have fully embraced technology and incorporated it into their personalities (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). They can be described as "technological, social, global and developed" (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017, p.809); hence, they do not know a world without the internet and technology. Although they built up a very strong hard skillset in these technologies, this might be the reason why a soft skill gap has emerged: deficiencies in their self-presentation skills, in their self-evaluation, and their relationship with personal responsibility, among others. (Half 2015, p. 15) Moreover, there is a noticeable pattern of concern that these technologies are affecting their ability to form interpersonal relationships and develop people skills. (O'Boyle et al. 2017. p.10)

2.4.2. Values

In terms of values, the issue of identity is very important for Generation Z. They are constantly searching for themselves, trying to find what suits them. They are true "identity nomads". (Francis, & Hoefel 2019) That is why they are more involved in human rights, and they are also more likely to engage with brands that prioritize social values and environmental causes. (Salam et al. 2024, p. 54.) According to a study, 56% of Gen Z tried to participate in or effect social change by talking about the issues or actively engaging with issues that matter to them, and 68% of them believe in the power of individual voice (Conversations with Gen Z, 2018, p. 8). Moreover, they are always in touch

with each other and with the world. This can be linked to them being on the internet at almost breathtaking levels. This generation is creative, much more creative than previous ones, and they are aware of it, with more than half (51%) agreeing. (Business Insider, 2019 referenced by Mamula et al 2022 p.38). This suggests that we are talking about a very colourful and self-confident generation, who now make up the largest part of the global population (32%) (Spitznagel 2020), so they are definitely worth researching. All in all, they can be described as an understanding and open generation, who are "ambitious and self-confident" (Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy, 2021, referenced by Márquez et al, 2022, p. 2)

2.4.3. Workplace expectations

One thing is certain: the HR department is having trouble with Generation Z: they change jobs more frequently; therefore, not only attracting but also retaining them is a major challenge. (Márquez et al, 2022, p. 2) However, there has already been some research on what Generation Z likes about the workplace. They appreciate being able to do valuable, meaningful work (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020 p. 238), especially if it is also linked to career development. They care about organizational values and make choices based on those; they prefer if the organizational values and their personal values align (Kulkarni, & Rai 2023, p. 1391). They also avoid redundant tasks (Pandita 2022), moreover, if they have ideas, it is important that their supervisor listens to them (Bencsik et al., 2016 p. 100). They will also deem employment decisions unfair if they do not fully understand them (Schroth, 2019. p.5.) Moreover, they do not want to be associated with any hierarchical tags, they are completely resistant to authority and defined, standard processes (Pandita 2022, Racolţa-Paina & Irini 2021, p. 81). Ownership over their work and individuality in the workplace are also two important indicators. (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017, p. 810) They also value flexibility above everything else and are no longer impressed by the idea of a company being "multinational" (Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor 2018), but a large number of them want to work at a large international corporation, in an open office (Iorgulescu 2016, p. 50). This indicates that they might not choose this form of work because of the multinationalism of the company, but rather because of its stability, opportunities and a precise, "personalized career plan" (Racolţa-Paina & Irini 2021, p. 81).

Overall, one can see that the concepts (Table 2) from each section play an important role to better understand the following research question:

- **RQ: What is the meaning and relevance of values in leadership and media management strategy practices to attract Generation Z in the workplace?**

Table 2. Overview of key theoretical concepts

Concept	Definition/Explanation	Key Authors
Media Management	The management of media practices, which includes content creation, organization, distribution and strategic use.	Küng (2007); Horst et al. (2019); Georgiades (2015)
Corporate Communication	Strategic communication with both internal and external stakeholders to manage reputation and establish consistency.	Cornalissen (2004); Goodman (2004); Casalegno et al (2023)
New Media Strategy	Use of digital and social media where the roles blur between manager, worker and consumer. Emphasizes co-creation, but because of this, it has its dangers to become less controlled.	Chan-Olmsted (2006); Plesner & Gulbrandsen (2015); Macnamara & Zerfass (2012)
Employer Branding	A company's effort to position and promote itself as an employer of choice through constructing employer value propositions and communicating those values strategically.	Backhaus & Tikoo (2004); Foster et al (2023); Berthon et al. (2005)
Recruitment Marketing	A tactical aspect of employer branding, using marketing strategies to attract job candidates.	Mashiah (2021); Foster et al (2010); Edwards (2009)
Organizational Values	Core principles of the company, which are likely to be believed by all members. They guide company culture, behaviour and day-to-day operations.	Mueller & Straatman (2014); Urde (2003); Juntunen et al. (2010)
Leadership Practices	Enactment of leadership through mentoring, communication and value alignment.	Raelin (2017); Algathani (2007); Nyameh (2013)
Generation Z	The generation born between late 1990s until 2010. They are digital natives, raised in economic insecurity, living as value-driven. They are socially conscious, and pragmatic, with a fluid identity.	Csiszárik-Kocsír & Garia-Fodor (2018); Francis & Hoefel (2018)

Chapter 3: Research design and methods

This chapter explains the methodology used to conduct the research, including the sampling strategy, the data collection process, the operationalization of concepts, the analysis of the collected data, and the tools used for this purpose, as well as the discussion of quality criteria.

3.1. Qualitative methodology

Although there is already extensive literature on the values and workplace expectations of Generation Z (Zhong et al, 2018; Francis & Hoefel, 2018, Waworuntu et al. 2022, Nabahani & Riyanto 2020, Siregal at el. 2023, Nikolić et al. 2022) and organizational identity formation in general (Urde 2003, Juntunen 2010, Soeling 2022), it has not yet been fully examined how marketing and HR professionals specifically relate to Generation Z, or more precisely, to their management, as well as how they view the corporate identity and set of values in which they have been working for years. Most previously conducted research focused primarily on Generation Z, drawing on their thoughts and desires, while completely omitting reflections on these expectations and miss on how corporations can actually respond to these expectations or ideas, what corporate realities can be navigated in order to fulfil the wants of Generation Z. Another question is how managers view this age group and what plans or ideas they pursue when it comes to their leadership.

Overall, the research question posed calls for a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is about understanding the world around us, gathering experiences (be that feelings, behaviours, or actions), and making sense of them (Awasthy, 2015 p. 148). In addition, this mode of analysis - and this is also a key point that applies to this research - is used to uncover structures and processes in routines and practices. (Flick, 2014, p. 5) The essence of qualitative methods is their emergent design; the fundamental plan for the research is not prescribed, but changes continuously as the data collection progresses. The researcher's goal is to learn from the participants and understand the problems they encounter (Creswell, 2009, p. 164). In this essay, this function will be used to explore different practices and ways of engaging and managing Generation Z workers.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather empirical data and reflect with practitioners on their understandings of the challenges related to Gen Z and media management. The interviews followed pre-designed questions and themes, but the conversation remained spontaneous, shifting along with the answers, and new questions emerged based on the data received. (Agarwal, 2019. p.80) This helped me to gain some kind of background insight or "institutional perspective" (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 499), which is vital for achieving results in this research, because no other qualitative or quantitative method can go into such depth or mix theory and immediate application at the same time, the industry professional's experience is needed here. According to Johnson et al (2007 p. 32), in the field of management research qualitative tools work better because in

surveys or formal meetings, people in organizations are more inclined to hide their true opinions or better frame events or practices as they happened.

3.2. Reflection on ethnographic elements

To further contextualize and support the data analysis, the personal experiences of the author (me) was used reflectively. It can be said that the thesis contains ethnographic aspects. Why is that? When a researcher uses autoethnography, he or she is writing retrospectively and selectively about the events and insights that a particular culture or situation has brought about (Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2007). On one hand, I am a native of Generation Z, and on the other hand, I have worked as a specialist in recruitment management and communication in the industry. I had the opportunity to work for an early-career job portal in Hungary, which specialized in Generation Z workers, for more than a year and a half. Besides posting job advertisements, the company also designed employer branding and communication campaigns for other companies. Participating in these projects gave me an insight into recruitment marketing and an overview of how to target Gen Z. In addition, the company carried out a national survey every year, asking career starters about their workplace preferences. This body of knowledge will be reflected in the Discussion section because these experiences can only enrich this study. This means, interviews are the key source of qualitative data, but to aid the interpretation, the ethnographic experience plays a role.

3.3. Sampling method

The research used purposive sampling to interview professionals who have experience attracting, recruiting and retaining Generation Z workers. Purposive sampling was chosen because the research directly requires the insights of individuals who have specific expertise in employer branding, brand building and/or Generation Z management. This non-probability sampling technique is mainly used in qualitative research for its efficiency and validity and because its focus is on depth rather than generalizability, which is characteristic of quantitative research (Etikan et al., p.4). The function of this sampling technique is to "explore, test and refine our emerging ideas" (Rapley, 2014. p 60.)

My existing professional contacts facilitated access to knowledgeable respondents: the sampling process was based on my contacts from a job portal focusing on Generation Z, my previous workplace, allowing me to reach experts who are aware of recruitment trends and expectations of this generation, as well as who have already had the opportunity to engage in conversations about transgenerational workplace relationships and are even more aware of generational changes in the workplace. Additional interviewees were recruited through cold outreach to employer branding and HR employees of companies. Using these tools, I was able to conduct 10 interviews with practitioners. According to Saidler (1974, p. 823), a minimum of five informants is needed for a dataset to be

reliable, however, he considered a sample of 10 respondents with balancing biases to be the most preferable. In purposive sampling, the researcher specifies the purpose that the informants should serve and then searches for suitable people (Bernard 2002, p. 189). In this study, the so-called "suitable people" were selected based on the following criteria:

Expertise. The primary consideration was that the selected respondents should have extensive experience in employer branding, brand management, marketing, or recruitment/human resources. To recruit the right quantity and quality of participants, the interviewees were not limited to those working in the traditional media industry (e.g., media agencies) but who had the opportunity to design recruitment campaigns and be it on the human resources communication or the marketing/brand communication side, even if their company's core business does not involve media work.

Seniority. The research aimed at professionals who are at least at mid-level or senior level in their respective fields, not residing at their first place of work, and who can provide sufficient insight into the characteristics of corporate culture and possibly influence recruitment and communication strategies.

Work environment. An essential requirement in the sampling is to choose people who manage white-collar workers, people who are socialized in an office culture. The situations of managing a blue-collar worker (let that be flexibility, feedback or employee values), recruitment methods, and the communication channels and tone are vastly different; therefore, blending these experiences would not suffice, as this would affect the validity of this research.

Leadership. Another logical criterion was that the respondents should have leadership/management experience (ideally) with Generation Z.

During the interview process, it was decided that in order to confirm and clarify the results, even though they did not have direct leadership experience, two members of Generation Z (who had met all the other criteria) would also be included in the sample. In this way, there was the opportunity for interesting perspectives to arise as we could see how both of these respondent's answer - the "manager" and the "managed".

3.4. Data collection

The search for suitable respondents was divided into two parts: on one hand, I reached out to a few former colleagues who I knew had the right expertise and insight into my research topic and invited them for interviews. Then, to work from a larger pool of information and to increase the validity and credibility of the research, I contacted several recruitments, employer branding, and marketing practitioners from different companies on LinkedIn.

In most cases, the interviews were conducted online using the online video call service Google Meet. As recording was not supported in the free version of the platform, the interviews were recorded using the voice recording function of an Android phone. However, there were occasions when I had the opportunity to conduct the interview live, again using the Android phone's voice recorder application. These audio files were transcribed word-for-word for later analysis, which was also completed.

The respondents were sent a consent form explaining the purpose and conditions of the research and what topics they could expect to be asked about. They were asked to sign this and return it, giving permission to be recorded and to use the data in the research. The form can be found in the Appendix.

It is important to point out that the sample turned out to be 100% Hungarian, the reason being that most of my professional network is from Hungary, therefore most of the interviews were conducted in Hungarian to facilitate access to real data, without language barriers. These interviews were translated into English. There were occasions, where the respondent agreed to conduct the interview in English, these occasions are indicated in the Respondent (Table 3) table.

Table 3. Interview Respondents

Respondent	Age range	Gender	Nationality	Occupation	Place of work (type)	Language of Interview Conduction	Duration Interview
Employer_branding_specialist_1	25-30	Female	Hungarian	Employer Branding Specialist	Global organization	Hungarian	00:57:42
Employer_branding_specialist_2.	25-30	Female	Hungarian	Employer Branding Specialist	Global organization	English	01:05:22
Employer_branding_specialist_3.	35-40	Female	Hungarian	Employer Branding Specialist	Global organization	Hungarian	00:44:09
B2B_Marketing_Specialist	50-55	Male	Hungarian	Marketing Specialist	Global organization	Hungarian	00:42:45
Marketing_Specialist_GenZ	20-25	Female	Hungarian	Marketing Specialist	Global organization	English	00:47:28
PPC_Specialist_GenZ	25-30	Female	Hungarian	PPC Specialist	SME	Hungarian	00:49:47

HR_Student _Cooperative	25-30	Female	Hungarian	COO of Student Cooperative	SME	Hungarian	00:45:47
Campus_comm_specialist	25-30	Male	Hungarian	Campus Communicati on Specialist	SME	English	01:22:57
Marketing_director	60-65	Female	Hungarian	Marketing Director	Global organization	Hungarian	00:40:51
EB_Marketing_Specialist	30-35	Female	Hungarian	CEO, Account Director	SME	Hungarian	00:46:41

3.5. Operationalization

The operationalization shows how the concepts from the theoretical framework are made "tangible" and come to life in questions that meaningfully engage the interview participants. An interview guide and topic list were made with the concepts mentioned in the theoretical framework; these are available in the Appendix. The following concepts are playing a role:

Media management. How people manage their communication and meaning-making in the context of digital media. This could include what kind of channels they use, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, or company websites, as well as the question of content types: they could use behind-the-scenes videos, employee testimonials, relatable, humorous posts or CSR messages and activities.

Strategy practices. How people in their context try to work towards organizational success and how that translates into specific routines and actions. Some firms are trying to attract young people through gamified recruitment processes (Obaid et al., 2020 p .1), others are developing retention techniques including mentoring, showing a clear career ladder and offering flexible working. These options vary from company to company (if they are used at all) so it is well worth asking about their implementation and methods in the interviews.

Leadership practices. How people show and enact a sensitivity of working with others to achieve organizational success; how leaders communicate company values and influence workplace culture. In order to operationalize this, we can examine leadership communication styles, possible policies that demonstrate organizational values or any other activities designed to better engage Generation Z in the workplace.

GenZ specifics. This generation has specific needs in terms of matching personal and organizational values, flexible working and career growth; they are looking for a different type of workplace than previous generations. To make this concept measurable, the research investigates their workplace expectations, how responsive they are to recruitment efforts, and how employers gather feedback from them and later incorporate it into day-to-day operations.

3.6. Method of analysis

The main purpose of qualitative data analysis is to interpret and categorize linguistic or visual material, and then to draw clear statements and conclusions from it, using its meaning-making function. (Flick, p. 5) These interpretations are not separable from the researcher's identity, background, context and prior understanding of the topic; therefore, they are a power factor in the result of the study (Creswell, 2009, p. 164). Codes are the basic units of interpretation (Caudle, 2004, p. 422), and coding is the process of breaking down the material into smaller pieces, organizing them and then making meaning with these organized chunks of information. (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). The chosen method for interpreting the codes was thematic analysis, which is a "method for identifying analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning with qualitative data" (Braun & Clarke 2017, p. 297) During this process, we put these segments into categories, assign names/terms to the categories, and finally develop themes based on these categories or by exploring the relationships between these categories. (Caudle, 2004, p. 422; Creswell 2009, p. 173; Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 82; Ayres 2008, p. 867; Williams & Moser 2019, p. 47).

The greatest advantage of thematic analysis is its flexibility: it can be used to discover themes within and across data, and there are no strict restrictions on the amount of data it needs to function. (Braun & Clarke 2017, p. 297) Oftentimes, thematic analysis can yield much more abstract results then it initially appears: This could be an argument, a narrative, or perhaps a certain belief or proposition (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 26).

The data was analysed and coded using the Atlas.ti software, based on five steps established by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87.)

1. Getting acquainted with and familiarizing yourself with the data: transcribing data, reading and re-reading, making comments and taking notes
2. Making the initial codes (open coding): Coding the entirety of the data, noting interesting features, even making in-vivo codes
3. Searching for themes (axial coding): Categorization/merging of similar codes, gathering data together
4. Reviewing themes: Building, transforming, revisiting and refining topics, generating a map of the analysis

5. Defining and naming themes (selective coding): Generating clear definitions and names for each section and making sense of them in the great scheme of the study

The visual documentation of the coding can be found in the Appendix. At the end of the open coding phase, a total of 93 codes were created, which were reduced to 84 codes during the reviewing phase, due to the process of refining and merging the codes. Then, in the axial coding phase, the main categories were created after their connections became apparent from the initial codes. Originally, 8 categories were created, including two distinct categories: "Value driven brand management" and "The role of media in value centered-employer branding". However, these two were later merged due to redundancy, as they contained very similar processes and ideas. This resulted in 7 main categories. According to Naem et al (2023, p. 10) developing themes requires a very thorough group of codes in order to obtain meaningful patterns and an appropriate answer to the research question. Based on the codes and the established categories, 4 main themes were ultimately identified. The method of creating these is also described in the Appendix.

Table 4. Exemplary representation of selected open codes

Interview Data Fragment	Assigned Open Code
"When it comes to incoming - what's the term - salary expectations, we feel that they tend to overshoot the mark. And not necessarily because we pay too little, but because the market prices are different than what's in their heads." - - Employer_Branding_Specialist_1	Gen Z value: High salary expectations
"The bigger issue is that some people just don't have a culture of openly discussing how they'd like to collaborate. That's something that makes the Gen Z relationship unique - our whole community culture includes people talking a lot about their emotions and how they're doing and how they'd like to feel. So that kind of openness is there - even if they don't say it, they value it." - EB_Marketing_Specialist	Leadership for Gen Z: Open communication
"a lot of places people don't really know how to separate it properly, and it's either categorized here or there. That can cause friction and frustration, obviously. For example, here locally: we can't always clearly and sharply define which project or task is clearly marketing's responsibility, and which is clearly ours" - Employer_Branding_Specialist_1	The blurred lines of HR and Marketing
"So, what I would see as a solution for small businesses is that if they don't have someone internally - like a younger person - who could help make the company appealing to younger generations, then hiring an agency could be a great option. Because as I see - and since this is such a new and modern field - it's mostly young people working in it. So, they have a better view of what could be attractive for younger people too." - PPC_Specialist_GenZ	Communication tools for GenZ: Content made by GenZ
"*they have to look at you as a mentor. Let's say a father figure - like hero journey - the old mentor. So, every hero journey has this old mentor. So, you have to be this old, brave, bearded wizard that knows everything about life - even if he doesn't. And he has to encourage these workers or the Gen Z. And they have to tend to - not just their company life - but their personal life as well.* - Campus_comm_specialist	Leadership for Gen Z: Be a mentor

Exemplary representation of selected axial codes

Open codes	Axial Codes (Categories)
Competitive job market for GenZ	Youth labour market dynamics
Tedious hiring processes by companies	
Big companies are more appealing to career-focused youth	
Corporate realities	Alignment of values and lifestyles
Matching personal and organizational values	
Organizational value: Achieving personal goals	
Employee/Candidate experience = Employer branding	The role of media in value-centered employer branding
Employer branding: Easier for big brands	
Organizations: Regulated content	

3.7. Quality criteria

3.7.1. Validity and reliability

It is important to note that although the conversations were conducted based on a specific interview guide and set of questions, the interviews were semi-structured and took place in a much less rigid, conversational manner. Not all respondents were able or willing to answer certain questions with the same level of detail, and in several cases, additional questions arose, or the respondents recounted their experiences through direct examples. The pre-written questions (see in the Appendix) ensured the flow and structure, but there were several deviations. Generalizability is one of the main criteria for determining the quality of the study (Patton 2001, referenced by Golafshani 2003, p .603) and "it deals with replicability" (Silvermann, 2014 p. 139) and I believe that although the interviews were organized as semi-structured, the interviews guide ensured that similar result would be obtained if the research was redone. Another way to ensure the academic rigor in research is to stitch to the date and verbatim. (Awasthy 2019, p. 156) The interviews accompanying the research clearly show that

this was done, and the data processing - since it was conducted with [Atlas.ti](#) - confirms the attention to detail.

I would like to reflect on my role as a researcher. As a member of Generation Z and also having prior experience in employer branding and marketing for Gen Z specifically, I am in a dual position in relation to this topic. In this way, I was able to have an insider's approach not only to the topic but also to the participants, to understand their language and to reflect on their information and knowledge, and I dare to say that I might have a deeper understanding of the themes emerged in the research. Interestingly, while writing this study, I was in the process of looking for a job, therefore I could observe for myself the values and expectations I had towards companies. However, I am aware that this kind of proximity may have influenced my interpretation and possibly created some kind of bias during data collection and analysis. To avoid this being an influencing factor, I tried to design the interview question in a way that they were open-ended, non-leading questions, and to allow the respondents to express their views and experiences, even if they did not match with my own.

3.7.2. Ethical considerations

According to Silvermann (2014, p. 214) when we involve someone in research, we establish a relationship with them. Therefore, we must proceed with great caution during qualitative research, as it is a much more people-centered form of method than others and we must ensure the security of participants' data and that they are not placed in any situation they do not want to be in. Several steps were taken to ensure compliance with these principles. First, since several employees of large organizations participated in the research, whose methods and codes of conduct are not available to the public but have significant impact on the market, I anonymized all interviews and deleted any references to respondents' current and former places of employment. Second, all participants received a consent form before the interview, which provided information about the purpose and method of the research, the means of data collection and a brief overview of the topics that would be covered during the interview. The participants were aware that they could stop or end the interview at any time, and could choose which questions to answer, which not to answer. The data from the interview has been kept in a secure location and they have not been shared with a third person.

Chapter 4: Results

Based on the 84 initial codes and 7 categories, 4 main themes emerged from the data. These themes arose mainly from the relationship and connections between the axial codes. I placed the categories into a hierarchical system, and this is when the themes became apparent. Each theme reflects on the relationship between Generation Z and organizations, as well as the context in which their preferred/developed values were created.
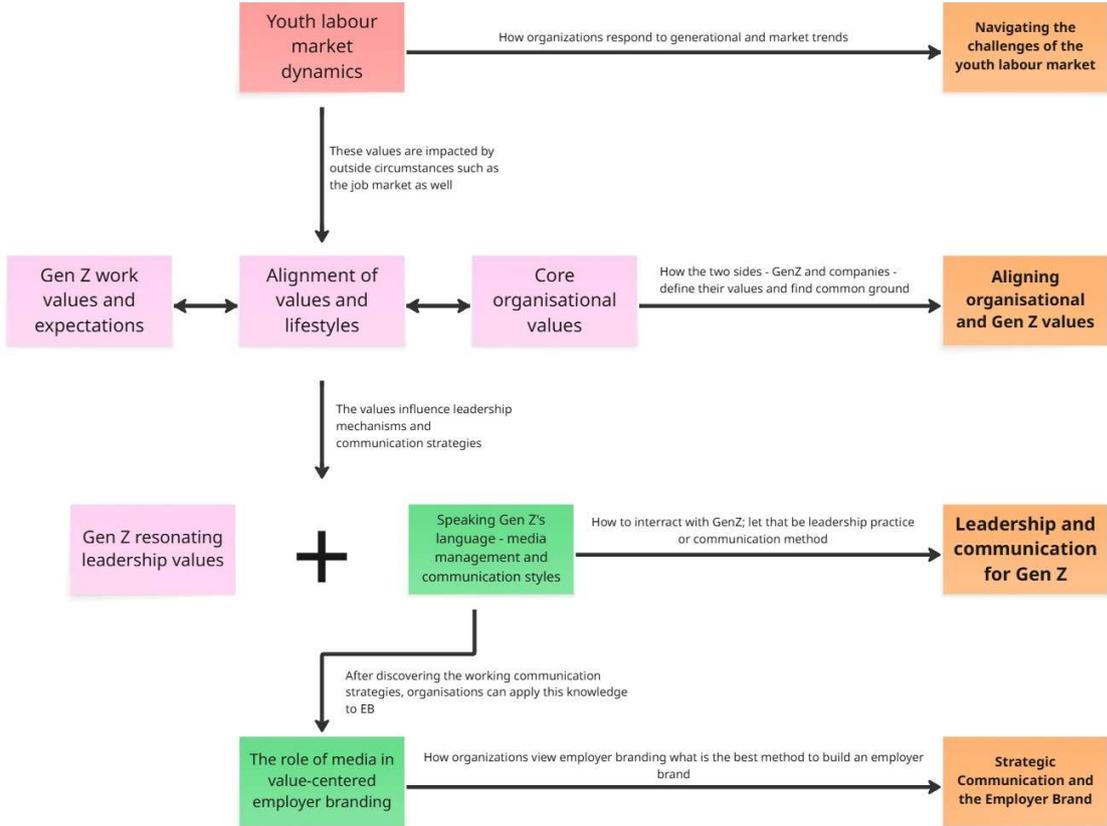
4.1. Navigating the challenges of the youth labour market

This theme was intended to show and paint a picture of the environment and context in which Generation Z is currently looking for work and where companies are currently operating. Several codes stood out in this theme, both from the corporate side and from Gen Z.

4.1.1. Hiring processes

There were clashing opinions about how difficult it is for young people to find employment at the moment, leading to the emergence of **Tedious hiring processes by companies** and **Competitive job market for GenZ** codes. According to Marketing_specialist_GenZ:

"Because I know I've seen that these days it's also somewhat popular with some companies that they don't do the CV application, but they do some like assessment of their own and everything. But it's like such a tedious process with everything these days with like writing a motivational letter and then like they send you a quiz or a test or I recently saw like an application process to a job where it was like a cognitive assessment then a phone call then a video call then you need to go and work for a day and then they tell you if you're hired. Yeah. So, like it almost feels like a full-time job to try to get a job".

This quote shows that companies are not making it easy for Generation Z to find employment. It is understandable, that organizations want to ensure the sufficient qualification of prospective employees, but generation Z perceives this as a lack of trust in them. In contrast, some feel that the situation is now a little simpler with the creation of structured internship positions, but acknowledges the necessity of recommendation systems:

"Obviously, it's somewhat easier than for earlier generations - back then it took a lot of effort to, I don't know, print 30 copies of your CV and take them to workplaces one by one. Back then it was much more common that if your parents worked somewhere, they'd put in a good word for you to work there too. So, the opportunities were more limited, and I think we're the first generation in Hungary where this has really become more widespread - that there are internship programs and internship positions." (PPC_Specialist_GenZ)

This shows that although organizations use a much more structured recruitment process and developed internship systems, this may already be influencing Generation Z in terms of where to apply. Structured programs help by providing young people with a clear entry point, allowing them to join and develop within companies in a much more streamlined and straightforward manner.

4.1.2. Large Organizations vs. SMEs

The contrast between large and small organizations is important to consider when managing, both in terms of what they can offer to candidates and in terms of communication. In this regard, we can see that "**Big companies are more appealing to career-focused youth**," whereas **SME** may be more **flexible** in their actions. At the same time, the younger organizations get, and the smaller they are, especially start-ups, may make it difficult, and problems arise (code: **Negative experiences with SME/startups**).

Employer_branding_specialist_2 described the type of young people who, in their opinion, apply to the large, multinational organization where they work: *"And they are very ambitious. And they liked the idea that they can work at a very huge company, it's a very good salary, very good opportunities, very big exposure. It's a premium program and things like that. So, people who are*

really trying to get ahead fast with their career." This stance was also confirmed by PPC_Specialist_GenZ: *"Well, actually, I think their reputation is also appealing to career-focused young people, who really care about having a clear career path, have goals, and want to be at a professional level - then obviously they want to work for a big multinational, because it has a name, it looks good on a CV, you can go anywhere with it, and you can learn such amazing knowledge there, wow."* The opportunities, clear career path, learning options and brand name itself attract young workaholics, they are the ones to gravitate towards multinational organizations first.

But what about the small and medium sized enterprises? What can they offer? According to respondents, flexibility. Based on Campus_comm_specialist's and EB_Marketing_specialist's answers, SMEs can offer flexibility in terms of job roles: *"As a startup, you can try to aim that they can experience different things and different fields, and they get more responsibility. But on the other hand, they don't have many opportunities for building up - because the hierarchy of the system is very flat. (...) You can have a little bit of HR experience, marketing experience, and recruitment experience. You can see how a company works on a small scale"* and *"You can wear so many hats at a company like that. Even just thinking of our own, or other SMEs around me - it's often the equivalent of doing three jobs compared to a big company."*

In summary: early career professionals at SMEs can try out different roles, learn and figure out what their strengths and general interests are. Of course, this flexibility can quickly lead to chaos, which can result in negative experiences for employees. *"I have quite some friends who work or have worked at startups. I've never heard a good experience from a startup. It starts out fun and fine until they have been there long enough to see all the problems. And when it starts to show that this is really a startup, and it might be the first semi-successful idea that the CEO/owner had and actually has no clue how to run a company"* (Marketing_specialist_GenZ) This shows that there are still problems with Generation Z's view of SMEs and refrain from these types of companies, even though it may be these small organizations that are willing to employ them despite their limited experience.

4.2. Aligning organizational and Gen Z values

Perhaps one of the most important themes that emerged from the data is the intersection of Gen Z's work values and the companies' organizational values. These two groups must work together closely, responding to each other to create a workplace where everyone feels appreciated.

4.2.1. Gen Z's work values and expectations

The most prominent code during the entire research process was the **Gen Z value: Flexibility**, which was attached to a total of 35 quotes. According to Employer_branding_Specialist_1, Gen Z is *"much more free-spirited than previous generations. Much less - pardon the expression - much less submissive to all kinds of expectations. (...) They also really demand flexibility, especially those who finished high school or college during Covid and experienced that if school can be done digitally, then*

why can't anything else be?" Generation Z considers working from home to be the norm, and if this is not a given, the company immediately loses its appeal. This was confirmed by several respondents. *"And I actually think what also comes up is flexibility, home office options, even full remote work.(...) In Hungary, since our SSC operates here, basically flexibility [is what attracts them] - those classic things young people look for - besides pay"* (Employer_branding_specialist_3) and *"I think flexibility is definitely up there. But I think it's not just Gen Z. After COVID it's for everyone".* (Campus_comm_specialist) This is related to the fact how digitally native this generation is and clearly feels more effective when working in their own environment.

They want flexibility not only in their working environment, but also in their career prospects; they don't want to be tied down to one area. As Employer_Branding_Specialist_2 said: *"They see [their career] as like patchwork (...) They actually don't just want to follow one path, and they are afraid of commitment, but they try to just build these different identities which can coexist at the same time".* This can be explained by how they are interested in many things and do not want to be labelled as anything at the beginning of their careers.

Another code that played an important role in shaping this theme was **Gen Z value: Learning.** Based on the results, one of Generation Z's top work values is the opportunity to learn and they will be much more grateful if they receive support and tools to do so - they may even stay with the company longer. HR_Student_cooperative was the one who pointed this observation out:

> *"And I think it's so much better, and safer for the company, to hire people (...) who feel a huge amount of gratitude, loyalty, and thanks toward the company. Because they'll remember: 'Back when I was just a nobody, totally clueless - having one of those quarter-life crises - this company took me under its wing and mentored me.' If that's the company that helped them grow, they're going to stay a lot longer. Because that kind of gratitude - honestly, it's a really powerful feeling".*

Campus_Comm_specialist, who is right on the cusp of Gen Z and Millennial, also reflected on this: "*I believe in lifelong learning. So, I really think that - especially when we have AI and other things like that - that we try to always look for other opportunities to work on ourselves".* In addition to opportunities for learning, giving Generation Z prospects can also be a retaining force, based on Employer_branding_specialist_3: *" I see in practice that if they can constantly see the next step, what they can improve on, what makes them better, then white-collar workers can be retained.(...) I can definitely say: development opportunities, learning opportunities".*

This showed that Generation Z does indeed have loyalty, despite claims that this age group changes jobs quickly.

"But at the same time, they're quicker to bail. Like, I've often felt - and maybe you'd know this better, since it's your area - but what I've noticed in the past is that I was lucky to work with great talent, but still, they left quickly. (...) [GenZ] people don't turn it into an emotional thing if they quit. If they don't like something, or it doesn't make sense, or it's not appealing - they're gone. Yeah." (HR_Marketing_Specialist)

GenZ switches jobs when they feel unappreciated, unable to learn and grow, or feel redundant in their work. In such cases, change is inevitable. This generation has its finger on the pulse of the information stream, which is why they value the power of knowledge and information so highly. They recognize that certain types of insight – especially those gained through direct workplace experience – are not easily accessible in other ways, which in turn makes it even more valuable within the organization.

Although most of the values appeared in the interviews were rather holistic and based on some abstract, ideological factor, one expectation stood out from the data - which could not really be framed as a value - but it was impossible to ignore: **High salary expectations.** Based on the research, it has been repeatedly found that Generation Z enters the labour market with a very inflated and ambitious salary expectations, which are not justified by their knowledge or skills. *"The salary expectations of Gen Z are insanely high (...) salary levels are lower in Hungary than in Western Europe - but if we're talking generational or experience-based shift, it's extremely skewed. The salary demand is definitely there, where someone with 15–20 years of experience is."* (Employer_branding_specialist_3) Another noted: *"When it comes to incoming - what's the term - salary expectations, we feel that they tend to overshoot the mark. And not necessarily because we pay too little, but because the market prices are different than what's in their heads."* (Employer_branding_specialist_1) PPC_Specialist_Gen Z felt that Generation Z was not entitled, rather had practical reason due to Hungary's economic situation. *"Of course, a competitive salary is essential (...) people might even accept a less appealing job if the salary is higher – just so they can establish a foundation for themselves,".* But this problem is not unique to Hungary; someone specifically mentioned how much of a deciding factor money was according to the intern at their company: *"Our Amsterdam region is the only one with Gen Z employees and only because of the internships.*[SEP]*And that's the only reason why- because it's a well-paid or at least it used to be a well-paid internship, which is why Gen Z came to work here."* (Marketing_Specialist_GenZ). Employers now also realize that salary expectations and honest communication about benefits are no longer negotiable, but a given. *"Any ad that doesn't list salary just isn't going to work"* (HR_Student_Cooperative). This aspect concludes that also certain holistic ideal is still very important to Gen-Z, nothing can surpass financial security and stability (**code: Gen Z value: Stability**).

4.2.2. Core organizational values

Echoing the values of Gen Z, one of the most common codes for organizational values was the **Mentoring/Learning opportunities** code. Employer_branding_specialist_3 was the one who described it in detail, how they formulate this value proposition: *"With us, an actual value - no matter how weird it sounds - is that there are a lot of senior people here, and you can learn from them. We're not a Gen Z hub. We're a place with excellent, experienced professionals, from whom you can learn and grow. That's a value proposition we can authentically offer - we're not selling a dream workplace, but you can learn and grow here."* This level of motivation to learn is more common in larger companies, as revealed in several interviews. However, this is due to a more developed internal learning system. Employer branding_specialist_1 listed the opportunities available at a multinational company: *"We have unlimited access to Udemy, so everything is really available there. Plus, we have a lot of internal trainings, and a lot of internal trainings are held by external companies but organized internally. Just this week I was at a time and energy management training, which was organized internally, we got learning credits for it, but it was run by an external company. They really put a lot of effort into this. Every month, I think there's at least one, but usually two Learning Fridays – a whole day of trainings, lectures are scheduled in one-hour or variable time slots".* This reflects companies' recognition that sharing knowledge is a cost-effective way to make the employees performance better, while also answering for their desires to be invested in and grow.

Regarding mentoring programs: Larger companies have also taken up this cause. *"There are more and more mentoring programs out there. And they allow you to meet seasoned, well-known professionals on the Hungarian level. In some departments, there's a so-called 'buddy system.' But not everywhere - it's not totally standardized across the company. So, some departments use it well, and in others, it's not part of the onboarding or induction process."* (Marketing_director). In fact, some companies market themselves with this knowledge transfer function, sending a message of "giving back" to compensate for the fact that they do not currently have any entry-level positions available. "*For example, we will have a mentor program starting this June. We are going to have mentors from the company, and they are going to help eight or ten students in their journey of becoming a full-time employee somewhere. So, we are actually just trying to help them. They are still in school. So, they are going to be studying at university, and we are trying to help them to understand what type of roles they are going to be able to work in and what type of careers they can have with their diplomas and things like that. So, these are the questions we're trying to answer. (...). We are also going to have like a two-day boot camp where you can learn how to write a CV and things like that. So, they are all connected to being an employer and they are all connected to young people trying to find food in the job market"* (Employer_branding_specialist_2) This keeps candidates "warm" and help young people identify the company as a source of support. It also came to light that

small companies tend to consider mentoring a fundamental function of leadership, rather than a separate program. This will be discussed in a later section.

Open, realistic communication was another prominent code. The general consensus here was that companies need to communicate in such way that candidate/employee's do not feel misled and later they can feel comfortable in the workplace. "*Well, I think the best is if you actually treat your employees the way you say you do in your communications.*" (EB_Marketing_specialist) and "*If we don't also mention the downsides that actually come with this job, and not because someone's personality isn't a good fit for the career, but because this profession demands those things, then we shouldn't sweep that under the rug. So that's what I'd mention as a strategy: that honest communication is important.*" (Employer_branding_specialist_1). The business must be ware of its strengths and weaknesses and develop internal processes and communication in an honest way.

Another code that could be associated with this value is **Authenticity -** as organizations also becoming more aware how important for youth that is, and they attempt to reflect these values externally. One participant mentioned: "*And to be authentic, you need to be aware of your own value proposition. What do you believe in? (...) what are your everyday practices, and what among those can be attractive to different target groups?*" (Employer_branding_specialist_3) Here, authenticity is more about choosing precisely and selectively what a company can offer and matching these propositions with the wants of potential employees. This could manifest as some kind of inclusion messaging. „*…our message is primarily that no matter what kind of figure you are, there is a place for you here. (...) whatever kind of figure you are, try to find your place in the puzzle. (...) You don't have to change yourself to fit into that one spot, but you do need to find the spot that fits you.* (Employer_branding_specialist_1). In addition, even during the recruitment process, there may be moments that strengthen personal connection and provide a more unique and personalized experience for the candidate: "*I had to fill out a questionnaire - provide info, availability, that kind of thing - and at the very end, there was a question like: 'What are your three favorite drinks?' And so, I wrote things like Cappy multivitamin, ginger, and green tea… and when I went to the interview, those three drinks were waiting on the table*". (PPC_Specialist_GenZ)

This kind of personalization can leave a positive impression on applicants during the recruitment period, as they feel their qualities and personality are valued. What is more, this gives them an insight into the corporate culture. Open communication and authenticity are beneficial strategies to attract people who are committed to the company's cause as well. Generation Z responds well to such actions as they themselves like to proceed with honesty, there companies following this path can appear to be more successful with them.

Respondents also reflected that intergenerational conflicts could rise certain differences in value understanding and value systems within organizations (code: **Navigating values across**

generations) This raises the question of how these common values can be built between age groups and how organizations can mitigate these conflicts. The main question is whose values dominate the workplace? Certain values on which the organization was built upon may have been established based on the needs of a previous generation. "*The higher-ups are from our fathers' generations and mothers' - parents' generations. And what was the common thing about their generation? That they had a job. They worked at the company for a lifetime. They only changed when they were fired or there was a huge change in their personal life. (...) But they stayed loyal. And that's why they can't comprehend that - 'Why these kids want to have a new job at a new company after half a year when I worked for 30 for this company?'*". (Campus_comm_specialist) These values and attitudes influence work processes in several areas. "*We're a company that believes experience comes with years. Lots of years (...) the older generation is quite dominant within the organization*" (Employer_branding_specialist_3). The solution would be mutual understanding, as highlighted by multiple participants. *"I think it's fair to expect both Gen Z and earlier generations to get to know the traits of the other generation when they have to work together"* (PPC_Specialist_GenZ) and *"I wish they saw that we are the future, and we are going to dominate the world. And we will be in their shoes at some point as well"*. (Marketing_specialist_GenZ) Organizational values should not only exist on paper, but corporations must consider whether everyone interprets them in the same way. One HR professional highlighted: "*You can't do what I see many companies doing - and I mean this as a negative example – which is to completely shut out Gen Z (...) They should be thinking about the fact that time only moves forward – not backward." (*HR_Student_Cooperative) A positive countermeasure to this could be the development of programs and opportunities where younger employees can demonstrate their leadership skills and show their competencies. One respondent's company recognized this need and developed a similar program.

"What's interesting is that in Austria, we had a dedicated program called "Generational Shift." The aim was to sensitize leaders. (...) And the result was that many more Gen Zs were promoted into junior leadership positions. That was new - because earlier team leaders were either hired externally or came from older generations. And this program led to them actually starting to consider Gen Zs in selection, and quite a few Gen Z team leaders emerged - which was a very nice and big result. But of course, it required that Gen Z themselves saw the potential - that we constantly communicate the opportunity to them, encourage development, career progression, and then actually consider them when they apply. (Employer_branding_specialist_3)

Based on this response, such an event can open the eyes of senior managers to the qualities of Generation Z and also provide motivation and support for young employees to dare to apply for managerial positions.

4.2.3. Alignment of values and lifestyles

An organization should not only align the different values of generation but also respond to the belief systems of its employees. The alignment of personal and organizational values was repeatedly mentioned as an important deciding factor during interviews. out of the three codes in this category, one really stood out as the backbone of this section: **Matching personal and organizational values.** Most participants confirmed that Generation Z in particular - but this can be extended to some other generations as well - is looking for a work environment where the company's values, goals and working methods are matching with their own. As one participant put it: *"You spend the majority of your waking hours at work (...) so it really matters – like, really matters – what kind of environment you're doing that in"* (B2B_Marketing_Specialist). This alignment often is expressed in shared priorities and identity, possible due to moral or lifestyle commitments. *" If someone's grandparents both died of lung cancer from smoking, then they're probably not going to work for Philip Morris. Or if someone's vegan - and that's their belief, that they don't consume anything animal-based - then they probably won't do an internship at Bonafarm.(...) These are more moral or ethical connections - like whether someone aligns with a company's mission."* (HR_Student_cooperative). Another example: *"I wouldn't go work for like a gas company probably. Or some of which are real a drill oil or people make military equipment. (...) I would sleep less soundlessly if I worked for companies like Google, Amazon, Tesla."* (Marketing_specialist_GenZ) One participant explained this with the "cultural fit" phenomenon: *"I believe it matters much more how well someone fits into a workplace community than how much they know. (...)If I had to choose between someone with slightly less knowledge but great social skills, who integrates well into the team, versus someone who's a hyper-smart, let's say, "geek" but antisocial - then the choice is obvious. It's the first one* (B2B_Marketing_specialist). This "working towards the same goal" can create a mentally motivating enviroment that should not be underestimated. This fully covers the "interest value" and "social value" concepts discussed by Berthon et al (2005, p. 162), and if a candidatee cannot appreciate the specific qualities of the company, there will always be a disconnect. However, that does not mean another applicant would have the same problem. In the best-case scenario, it will become clear to both parties during the recruitment process if they are compatible in terms of values and communication style or not.

4.3. Leadership and Communication for Gen Z

When developing this theme, the primary common ground was defining the language and interactions with Generation Z. Just as leadership is directly addressing internal, everyday situations within the company between people who are working the closest (manager and subordinate) communication in this case focuses on addressing Generation Z and attracting their attention. But what really works in these instances?

4.3.1. Trust, support and feedback as core leadership practices

Based on the data, the most frequently appearing motifs were **Feedback, Support, Trust, Be a mentor** and **Open communication**, which corresponds to the previously realized desire of Generation Z to participate in knowledge transfer and have an authentic and honest communication with organizations. When it comes to feedback: the more consistent, the better. *"We want instant feedback for everything. Obviously, that's because we're digital natives - we constantly have our phones in hand, constantly getting notifications, constantly need impulses and input."* explained one respondent who although is also a member of Gen Z but had experienced mentoring interns. (HR_Student_Cooperative). This generation also constantly need to know, where they stand. *"First of all, feedback itself - whether it's positive or negative, just tell them. Feedback needs to be there, because maybe this is also some kind of generational anxiety, or something: if I don't know whether what I'm doing is good or bad, I just freeze"* One participant described, what she feels like going down in GenZ's mind. *"If I know it's bad, okay, I know I need to fix it. If I know it's good, great, I know I'm on the right track. But if I don't know anything - that's the worst. So, I think that's why giving feedback is super important"*(Employer_branding_specialist_1). This indicates that Generation Z, who grew up in a word of constant feedback and instant gratification - especially online - tends to expect similar responsiveness in the workplace.

In addition to feedback and mentoring, respondents explained that this generation does not believe in rigid leadership and instead expects mutual respect and trust. According to Employer_branding_specialist_3: *"You still have to be able to transfer knowledge and be credible toward your younger subordinate - even if they're much more competent in many things than you (...) you have to acknowledge their knowledge, be open to what they know, integrate it into the big picture."* Another respondent added: *"Being able to take ownership no matter how junior, major, senior level you are and getting support for it and like your boss having faith in you and trusting you with your work and not micromanaging you"* is the most rewarding leadership practice. (Marketing_Specialist_GenZ)

A third respondent explained that sometimes you have step out of being a boss to provide support. *"Also, if you ask them how they're feeling in general. Are they comfortable, uncomfortable, whatever. Of course, it's not all about them feeling good - but I think it's great if there's a platform for that Whether it's about work, collaboration, or processes - having a place to release that frustration, like a pressure valve, is really helpful."* (HR_Marketing_Specialist) This again related to personalization, which arose from the desire for authenticity earlier on. If young people see they are treated as human beings, nut just numbers, and their manager really listens to them, that can only be a positive thing.

4.3.2. Communication with GenZ

A consistent message emerged during the interviews: communication aimed at Gen Z will only be credible, if it is delivered by their own generation. (**Communication tools for GenZ: Content made by GenZ**) As one respondent highlighted*: "I think [a piece of content] can only be credible if a Gen Z person delivers the message or helps deliver that message.(...). Because if they don't involve a Gen Z person, they won't understand the style or what is actually appealing to us - they will just be guessing - and then it can really go in a negative direction."* (PPC_Specialist_GenZ) This was also confirmed by another participant: *"If I can see that someone from Gen Z made that post or that video, I'm immediately more attracted because I know I will have like-minded people there that I'm left with and that I can have fun with and I'm not gonna be closed into an office for I don't know four days a week with people over 40 who don't know what the word 'rizz'."* (Marketing_specialist_GenZ) These responses could indicate that the use of GenZ employees in communication enhances credibility in the eyes of Gen Z, as they feel it reflects their voice, experiences and values, as well as signals that this age group takes an active, creative part in the communication of that particular firm.

If there has been no consultation with a member of Generation Z, and the messaging is strictly filtered through the corporate lens, it comes across as overly dry and forced. *"And these trends are not known for being very corporate-friendly. (...) We asked our colleagues about this in the focus group - what they think about companies using TikTok - and they said it can turn out well, but that's like 2% of the time, and mostly it's just cringe".* (Employer_branding_specialist_1) Humor is also a great resource for content creation. "*The content has to be attention-grabbing. And to be attention-grabbing, you have to step outside the corporate BS framework. (...) I recommend humor to everyone - even self-irony. Of course, riding trends is good too. But in the corporate world - especially in a big organization where you have approvals and maybe even an external agency - by the time a decision is made, that trend is already over.* (Employer_branding_specialist_3)

Social media platforms, mainly TikTok and Instagram were consistently names as the key communication channels. **(code: Communication tools for Gen Z: Social media/video)** *"Spend an hour on TikTok every day"* advised a marketing specialist. *"Familiarize yourself with the communication style of Gen Z. The slangs, the inside jokes - because we are all the same almost."*(Marketing_Specialist_GenZ). However, it is not only a question of '"where" but also "how". *"Social platforms or others, where real employees can talk about what it's like - from their lived experience. That can represent values in the most authentic way"* (EB_Marketing_specialist). This can be explained from the fact that this Generation really made the internet as part of their personality, therefore if someone is not following any type of recent media, there will be a social language barrier.

However, according to the data, generation Z cannot be reached solely through social media communication: they also respond well to offline, activation events (**code: Communication tools for Gen Z: Offline Events**) or in other terms "*personal contact points*" (HR_Marketing_specialist). University partnerships, job fairs and interview all appeared in the interviews as critical point of engagement. *„We mostly go to university job fairs"* highlighted one respondent. "*But especially the direct connection with universities - the courses - when we can develop a direct relationship with students. Collaborations with student associations - either they come here, and we host programs for them, or we go there and hold something for them."* (Employer_branding_specialist_1). It is all about being proactive. *"We went where they were, not just tried to attract them to our own events"* (Campus_Comm_Specialist). This may be due to digital overstimulation and commercial noise -this generation is constantly online, where stimuli come from all directions, therefore corporate messaging can get lost. Offline event, on the other hand, can help build closer relationships between companies and applicants.

4.4. Strategic Communication and the Employer Brand

The final theme examines how media tools and content strategies influence the way employer brands communicate their values to potential and current employees. It answers question such as how employe branding fits between HR and marketing according to the respondents and why employee experience important in terms of communication.

4.4.1. The place of Employer branding

Respondents report ongoing debate with their organizations about where employer branding's place is at organizations. **(The intersection of Marketing and HR)**.*" Here the structure is a bit different, because my position belongs to the recruiter team. At the previous company it was much more merged with marketing (...). Here, however, there is a separate marketing group, and then there's us, the HR people, within that recruitment, and within that this employer branding position. It's really hard, because you really can't clearly and distinctly separate whether this is a marketing area or an HR area".*(Employer_branding_specialist_1) Some people specifically emphasized that employer branding is not just about attracting new employees, but also about retaining them. *„ ...employer brand building isn't just about what many people think - how we communicate outwardly - but of course the foundation has to be sought and strengthened within the organization.*" But they said that often there int enough energy or budget for this part. *„ ...whether in HR development or employer branding - that the real value and real impact, the part that actually gets implemented and realized on an organizational level, often falls short of the ambition".* (EB_Marketing_specialist) In contrast, there was one participant who specifically questioned whether the HR department should be used for anything else than recruitment. *"I think HR has one single task - to make the company attractive to potential employees. Forget 360-degree evaluations. Everyone evaluating everyone,*

training programs, whatever - I think those can be handled professionally without HR. A company doesn't need that. HR has one task only: to build the company brand on the labor market so that everyone wants to work there.'' (B2B_Marketing_Specialist) This shows that even though employer branding is recognized as a concept and profession, its place is still unclear. One thing is certain; it belongs among the communication and media professions.

4.4.2. Using employee experience as employer branding

Another code that emerged in relation to employer branding in none other than **Employee/Candidate experience = Employer branding**. Quotes marked with this code reveal that employee experience is perhaps the most powerful tool in the employer branding toolkit for attracting GenZ. *"Maybe probably hearing a personal experience from someone that I know is more important than, for example, what I would see on social media or what kind of pre-made assumptions I have in my head about what it must be like to work there because I know the brand and it's big and it's been around for so long. So, in that sense, the opinion of someone I personally know would be the number one important thing.''*(Marketing_specialist_GenZ) Another respondent confirmed that, advising to let the employees roam the internet and share the message themselves. *"But let your employees be relatively active on different platforms and be willing to share their opinion. So, like, you encourage them to do that - on LinkedIn, or wherever. I don't know how active Glassdoor these days is. Social platforms or others, where real employees can talk about what it's like - from their lived experience. That can represent values in the most authentic way''* (EB_Marketing_specialist). Just a few positive experiences are enough to attract candidates. *„And maybe it's not true - maybe it's not true for everybody - but it's enough to have one person say that to you and you believe it, because they worked there and you didn't.''(*Employer_branding_specialist_2) However, employees will only act as "brand advocates" if they truly feel comfortable at the company and feel appreciated. *"I think it's easy to have a good employer brand when you actually give the employees a lot of things. So, we have a lot of benefits. We have okay salaries, I think. And we have a lot of things that we give to the employees. We have a gym in the [COMPANY] campus. We also have a lot of different parties and we have concerts and we have things that we give to them - a lot of programs within a work week, where if you don't have a meeting and things like that, you can attend''* (Employer_branding_specialist_2).This once again highlighted the importance of authentic communication and the fact that as an organization, it is only worth communicating what you can actually deliver.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

During the qualitative analysis, whose dataset was derived from semi-structured, im-depth interviews, the following four themes emerged: 1, The current dynamics of the youth labour market and how do young people currently navigate this environment 2, the values of generation Z and organizations, and how can these be aligned 3, The values that underpin communication and leadership towards Generation Z. 4, how can value-driven communication and employer branding be developed.

In this chapter, the overall result of the data analysis is explained and discussed in relation to previous theories and research.

5.1. The hardenings of the youth labour market

Not only from personal experience, but also from the in-depth interviews conducted during the research, it became clear that there is a very distinct, polarized opinion among today's young job-seekers and employers about the current labour market - the two groups somewhat contradict each other, and the jobseekers themselves have different opinions about the factors they have to contend with. Originally, both academic literature and corporate discourse painted the recruitment of Generation Z as a competition for their attention (Márquez et al, 2022, p. 2) make it important for companies to appeal to young talent. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing recession, the tables have turned, and Generation Z responders now report difficult, lengthy interview processes and an extremely competitive job market.

Although companies have implemented more refined internship and graduate schemes, these have been designed to filter candidates more efficiently and rigorously, making it difficult to find employment. From a corporate perspective, attracting talent is no longer particularly difficult, the struggle rather lies in retaining them. Larger organizations have an advantage in this regard. Several participants confirmed that retention and attraction are much easier for larger companies than for SMEs, especially in the case of career focused youth. This is due to several factors: On the one hand, these companies oversee more resources and budget, which generally means cleaner processed and opportunities for development, as well as larger opportunities/projects and exposure. Together, these characteristics suggest a more promising career trajectory and a stronger forecast for professional development.

In contrast, the biggest selling point of SMEs is their flexibility. SMEs offer Generation Zs journey-seeking mentality an opportunity to themselves out in several areas without taking on relatively high risks, allowing young people to discover where their true talents and interests lie. However, this level of structural freedom can easily lead to employees being assigned multiple roles or

being promoted too quickly to fill a needed position. As a result, inexperienced employees may suddenly be given too much responsibility, which can come across as a negative experience. In addition, it has also emerged that Generation Z may not have a high opinion of startup leaders and generally recommend to their peers to avoid this business model when looking for a job.

5.2. About GenZ and Organizational Values

The findings indicate a strong, clear consensus on what values Generation Z considers important, with flexibility emerging as one of the cardinals. Employer branding and HR professional respondents clearly demonstrated an awareness of these preferences and are trying to respond to these needs accordingly. Flexibility is one of GenZ's greatest values and it manifest itself in work arrangement preferences such as home office, online work or relocation opportunities, but also as in they appreciate and gravitate towards programs in which they explore different areas of business (rotational programs).

There are several reasons for this: most notably the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has completely changed the dynamics of the labour market. Generation Z, who spent their formative high school and university years online, has transitioned into remote work without a problem. For many, working from home feels natural, familiar and they have no need or desire to return to the office. Instead, they gravitate toward companies who support this preference. This generation's digital nativeness is no longer confined to virtual workspaces, in fact they prefer the freedom that comes with it. Flexibility could also mean for them that they can combine their educational progress with work (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017 p. 818). Furthermore, given that most of Gen Z are still in the early stages of their career, they do not want to attach a label to themselves, they want to explore their options. As Employer_Branding_Specialist_2 said: *"They see [their career] as like patchwork (...) They actually don't just want to follow one path, and they are afraid of commitment, but they try to just build these different identities which can coexist at the same time".* In their minds, nothing is set in stone yet and many remain open to the possibility that their future career path or particular job may not even exist yet.

When a companies invest time and money into Z Generation's education - let that be training or just mentoring - it greatly increases their loyalty and appreciation for the organisation. This is often rooted in a feeling of gratitude. This is strongly related to the current labour market conditions - where getting a job can be perceived as a privilege rather than a guarantee. In addition, this desire to learn is also linked with young people's pursuit of doing meaningful work. They will be able to do useful work if they get the associated skills knowledge. For them, learning is a source of intrinsic motivation. This is why Learning is also presented as core value based on the respondents. Kroth's (2007, p. 24) motivation model - which was developed primarily for leadership, but can also be applied to

organizational values in general - reinforces this, as the 'design intrinsically motivating assignments" action can also be projected onto this desire to learn. With the advent of AI tools, this has become a priority, as it is easy to fall behind. Companies have responded actively to these learning and personal development desires by integrating educational opportunities into their EVP's. According to the employees of multinational companies, they often come up with themes such as "Giving Back", "Improvement", "For Better" "Excellent", or "Care for others". Some organisations have recognized that one of their important value propositions they offer to Generation Z is the number senior colleagues who can share knowledge - thus turning a typically negatively perceived attribute (by younger workers) into an opportunity to knowledge transfer. Other employers hold career building and path-finding workshops for GenZ to keep them "warm" as candidates and build gratitude. Additionally, many organizations provide access to digital learning platforms as a benefit or allow employees to go to trainings during working hours, reinforcing the idea that learning is organizationally supported. Companies have realized that one of the greatest benefits they can provide to their employees in a cost-effective manner is an internal and/or external knowledge base. This observation is echoed in Nyameh's (2013, p. 43) and Huang's (2011, p. 63) study, who both highlighted, how many organizations give out tuitions or allocations for different conferences, and if the employee finishes these learning opportunities, it can even improve their position at the firm and urge companies to launch these personal development and career programs. By transferring this knowledge, they improve their employees, who will be able to produce more quality work, while also showing them that their personal goals matter and that the company is investing in them. The support is personal and professional goals is extremely important to Gen Z, according to Racolța-Paina & Irini (2021, p. 81).

One prominent concern between the respondents, Gen Z's desire for high pay can be explained by several factors: First, since this generation grew up during a global economic crisis (and is just entering the workforce at the beginning of another one), many have been directly exposed to financial instability in their social circles, which gives them a strong motivation to avoid a similar situation. This value feels stronger in relation to Generation Z, the desire for stability above anything else. This claim is supported by Moore et al, (2017, p. 113) Sladek & Grabinger, (2014. p .4) and Scholz, (2019. p. 8), who all wrote about the economic anxiety experienced by Generation Z. This generation seeks stability, because as they are having their careers finally in their own hands, they want to make the most out of it. Furthermore, Generation Z is self-confident (Pataki-Bittó and Kapusy, 2021, referenced by Márquez et al, 2022, p. 2) and does not want to bow to expectations. It follows that this gives them the courage to ask for higher salaries, even if they cannot have so much experience to show for.

In relations to this and other situations that could lead to misunderstandings, several respondents described experiences of intergenerational conflict within the workplace. In most cases,

the reason is simply a clash between different upbringings and value systems between age-groups. Behaviours or traits esteemed by one generation may be viewed as not acceptable or unprofessional by another. Among the most frequently reported causes were the phenomenon of "job-hopping" (changing jobs at relatively short intervals),wage tensions, the fact that Generation Z does not entertain the idea of hierarchical respect and the perceived lack of understanding from older generations towards Generation Z. Overall, it can be concluded that in most organizations, the integration of Generation Z has not yet been fully successful, and organizational values are not fundamentally tailored to them. The goal would be that, over time - and probably as this generation moves into leadership positions - corporate values and culture will evolve to take greater account of Generation Z's work preferences and worldview. In the meantime, openness and opportunities given to Generation Z to prove themselves could be the solution. The shortage of these values is particularly noticeable in larger, multinational companies. However, according to the respondents, it is already becoming common in younger, small companies/startups. Although this aspect was not directly included in the interview guide and the methodological background, it emerged organically from multiple conversations, noting a relevance to the research topic.

Several employer branding specialists highlighted the importance of authentic and open communication, noting that they conduct day-to-day operations based on these values. However, reading between the lines of their answers, from a marketing standpoint, some of them struggle with balancing honesty and promotion, because traditional communication and advertising practices have only focused only positive aspects. Although Ryan et al (2000, p. 356) urged to use marketing tools into recruitment practices, it is essential to recognize, that employer branding and human resources management needs to be more subtle and honest when "selling" an organization. This goes hand in hand with the dangers of bias candidate experience highlighted by Busa & Ruitis, (2023, p. 36) in their paper. Unlike consumer marketing, once they have attracted a candidate, firms must also focus on long-term retention and motivation of employees. Because of this, authenticity in employer communication is essential. Personalization and the opportunity to express individuality are also non-negotiables that must be built into corporate culture and recruitment processes when hiring Gen Z employees. This also occurs in large multinational corporations, where respondents noted the difficulty to break away from corporate norms and structures. An example for this: "*You don't have to change yourself to fit into that one spot, but you do need to find the spot that fits you*" (Employer_Branding_specialist_1) That is why it is important to match personal and organizational values, especially for this generation. If the post-employment dissonance mentioned by Berthon et al (2005, p. 169) occurs and the young employee still cannot find their place at the company (even though they were promised a welcoming workplace that align with their values and interest), it is a given hey will leave or become less motivated.

5.3. Communication and Leadership for Gen Z

Kroth (2007) who further developed Maslow's (1954) motivation model, identified seven actions that he recommended manager take - care", "understand", "design intrinsically motivating assignments", "craft extrinsically motivating work", "set motivating goals", "support goal pursuit", and "manage expectancies (p. 24) - which are echoed by the codes produced as a result (Feedback, Support, Trust, Be a mentor and Open communication) in this study in the context of leadership. Understanding and rationalizing things is one of the major preferences of Generation Z, as Schroth (2009, p. 5) also pointed out, which is why feedback, especially instant feedback is extremely valuable. We are dealing with a generation where instant gratification is present in all areas of life; there is no such thing as not getting an immediate answer to their questions. According to those interviewed, not understanding or knowing things can have a paralyzing effect on this age group, which must be addressed immediately. This is also related to the fact that there are problems with self-evaluation in this cohort (Half 2015, p. 15), which is why they rely heavily on external feedback.

Generation Z presents itself extremely self-confident, which makes ownership and autonomy over their work significant to them. (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017, p. 810) As one respondent explained, the most important thing for them is *"Being able to take ownership no matter how junior, major, or senior level you are and getting support for it, and having your boss have faith in you and trust you with your work and not micromanage you"* (Marketing_specialist_GenZ). This generation have a sense of pride and want to be seen competent - paired with an expectation the support will be there when they actively seek it - as a form of feedback. As we know, they believe in the power of individual voice (Conversations with Gen Z, 2018, p. 8), and this translates into their work as well. For them, an ideal leader is more like a "supportive wiseman", who gives advice when needed but allows opportunity and space for growth. The reason for this is the aforementioned lack of hierarchical respect - they view the manager-subordinate relationship more as a collaborative effort, where everyone brings something to the table.

Turning to the level of media management and communication, Generation Z clearly answers well to two things, according to the respondents: One of these is online social media communication which needs no explanation: Generation Z are true digital natives. However, what enhances their sense of authenticity is when they see content that bears the mark of another member of Generation Z. Peer-based communication appears to be effective for all age groups including Generation Z. Content created with the help of/by Generation Z resonates much better with this demographic, as it highlights their interests, tone of voice and priorities. This makes the message much more credible as also shows that the company is at the forefront of inclusivity at an organizational level - young employees have a voice, visibility and decision-making opportunities. It could also be said, that by using these new media tools, the roles of manager and employee can also blur, as their will be some knowledge in this

regard that only the younger subordinate possesses. Organizations can take advantage of Gen Z's involvement by leveraging their familiarity with new media tools and platforms, that make corporate communication and agenda distribution more cost effective. (Bartosova, 2011. p. 196) Furthermore, as this research has shown, this age group can be engaged by involving peers. In general, if Gen Z's voice can be heard in the workplace that counteracts the intergenerational conflicts mentioned earlier: this step shows that this is not the case at that particular organization, not to mention, allowing GenZ into this "dynamic market" (Zotto, 2005 p. 53) can keep the content fresh and creative. If this is not the case, any form of media will feel forced to this Generation. This age group is extremely self-aware, that is why respondents recommend humour, especially self-deprecating humour as a gateway to them.

Based on the results of the research, the other channel that works well in this cohort is the activating offline events. According to the respondents, the most dedicated applicants come from these events - they are the ones who put in the energy to show up and they are much more committed. Due to continuous digital content exposure, corporate messages are less likely to reach Generation Z. Therefore, offline events can be effective because they allow people to associate a face with the company. This can all be traced back to Generation Z's pursuit of authenticity, personalization and them being "identity nomads" (Francis, & Hoefel 2019), as this increases the perceived authenticity of the employer, allows people to ask questions freely, and gives them a more realistic picture of the organization. It also conveys a sense of humility, noting that companies are willing to engage directly with the people rather than staying in their offices, distanced. And because all this can be done in a university environment (student organizations, university career fairs), it seems like an even more effective use of time.

5.4. Value-driven strategic communication and employer branding

A clear debate arose among respondents regarding the position of employer branding within the organization. Every company structure its talent attract processes slightly differently. While some urged the development of retention methods - highlighting that this area is often overlooked and is filled with empty promises - others felt that HR's primary function should be recruitment and brand development only. One thing is clear: this research confirmed that employer branding is considered the lovechild of marketing and HR. The emergence of this discipline only indicates that all companies are increasingly trying to bring all support business functions in-house. (Bartosova, 2011. p. 196.) While employer branding feels to be a retroactively defined role, that is created to fill this available space, this does not detract from its validity. In fact, it's partial departure from HR and marketing has been beneficial: even though employer branding uses traditional marketing tools (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p.502), it also requires having a deep understanding of organizational and generational values identified above and applicate these to shape corporate culture.

Most respondent suggested that employer branding should leverage the employee/candidate experience as a flagship in communication. This finding can be traced back to the theoretical perspective of Tanwar & Prasad (2016, p. 202), who argue that high-performing employees can act as "brand advocates" both online and offline. These individuals are usually sharing positive experiences about their workplace, promote company events on social media and perhaps most importantly, recommend their workplace to their personal networks. This kind of word-of mouth is a powerful asset not only in marketing but also in recruitment as it uses trust and connections to appear more credible. Of course, this kind of support can only develop if employees are truly cared for and valued. Support may take the form of useful benefits and competitive compensation, support during crisis (Łazorko 2023, p. 70), meaningful work or inclusive atmosphere - what matter the most is that these are honestly and openly communicated. This is further proof that authentic, honest communication is important in employer branding but also highlights that larger multinational organizations due to their greater resources are often have more opportunities to offer such benefits that encourage employees to speak positively about their workplace.

5.5. Contributions

The research contributes to the employer branding, leadership, media management literature in several ways. First, it updates the existing theoretical framework by applying it to Generation Z and filling the gap regarding value-based communication and leadership strategies. At this level, no study has asked the perspectives of seasoned professionals on Generation Z in relation to the corporate culture and values they helped define, therefore this research offers a new angle and contribution to this field.

Besides this, this research gave more thorough, updated description of the youth labour market. It explained the circumstances surrounding the recruitment processes of young people and highlighted the difficulties caused by the current economic situation that may affect GenZ.

Furthermore, the research reveals how well companies are able to respond to the work values of Generation Z when creating or updating their organizational values. In addition, the research highlighted intergeneration conflicts within companies and offered solutions to resolve them (openness and opportunities for younger employees to show their capabilities)

Last but not least, it draws attention to various structural tensions between HR and marketing departments, which has been an unexplored area in employer branding literature. Although research has been conducted on how this area is developing, such direct questions and issues have not been identified.

5.6. Limitations

Of course, like all research, this study also has its limitations. First, the entire sample of the study is a 100% Hungarian and except for one respondent, all of them work in Hungary, which is a result of the researcher's professional network. When planning the study, the goal was to create a more diverse sample and in addition to the planned Hungarian early career job portal employees, to find respondents of other nationalities, but based on the relatively personal research method (semi-structured interviews), ultimately only my Hungarian professional network was willing to participate in the interviews. Thus, the results of the research represent a regional job market, situation and mindset, therefore it is possible that it can only be scaled to a certain extent. The research also did not use a specifically Hungarian socioeconomic lens. No contextual analysis of Hungary's political, cultural or economic scene was mentioned in the theoretical framework or the data interpretation.

It is also important to note, that the research fundamentally based on a temporal context. The value orientation of a generation is not permanent, but subject to continuous change, especially in the event of rapid economic and global changes. Therefore, the research examines a specific time period.

Furthermore, Since I have experience and background in employer branding, I may have influenced the interviewees with my prior knowledge, views and proximity to the topic when formulating question and preparing interviews. However, since I indicated that the thesis would contain ethnographic elements (which mainly appeared in the interpretation/discussion section) and I structured the analytical process well and applied the same coding criteria to all interviews, the validity and integrity of the research was not compromised.

5.7. Future research

Future research should primarily focus on multiple culture/regions in relation to personal work values as well as Generation Z's expectations regarding their workplace and whether communication and management of organizational values may differ between countries at certain multinational companies.

Beyond this, the research method of the study could be expanded. In a mixed-method research, next to the interviews, direct content analysis of companies' employer branding pages, recruitment videos and social media post campaigns could also be conducted to determine whether there is truly alignment between declared organizational values and the tone, language and visuals used in communications

This study concentrated entirely on white-collar workers, but completely different results and perspectives may emerge, if future research investigates blue-collar workers and possibly draws comparisons. Shedding light of strategies for attracting, retaining and managing blue-collar workers

could bring a whole new dimension and conversation to this field of research, and it would also be worth investigating what work values they have and how these values were formed.

5.8. Conclusion

This study shows how complex and sophisticated the integration of Generation Z into the workplace is. The values upheld by this generation not always match those of their colleagues, occasionally leading to intergenerational friction. Based on the economic situation they were born into and their strong sense of self-assurance, this generation enters the labour market with high salary expectations, which must be navigated at the managerial level and all interactions with them must be permeated by open, authentic communication. Furthermore, engaging and reaching this generation requires a diverse toolbox and adaptive use of media channels, which is why the current and future employer branding professionals most develop new approaches to align with this generation's preferences. Ultimately, investing in these methods is a must, as this generation is the foundation of the future workforce.

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Appendix

A, Initial and secondary codes of the data analysis

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title	*Values-Driven Media Management and Leadership Practices: Strategies to attract and retain Generation Z in the workplace – Master Thesis*
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Viola Vadász (743151). I am inviting you to participate in this research project about Values-Driven Media Management and Leadership Practices: Strategies to Attract and Retain Generation Z in the Workplace. The purpose of this research project is to explore how companies communicate their values through media management, employer branding, and leadership practices to attract, engage, and retain Generation Z employees. This study aims to understand the role of digital media, organizational strategies, and leadership styles in shaping the workplace experience for Gen Z.
Procedures	You will participate in an interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. You will be asked questions about your experiences with employer branding, recruitment communication, internal workplace culture, leadership strategies, and the expectations and engagement of Gen Z employees. You must be at least 18 years old.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.
Confidentiality	Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. Moreover, only trained research staff will have access to your responses. Within these restrictions, results of this study will be made available to you upon request. As indicated above, this research project involves making audio recordings of interviews with you. Transcribed segments from the audio recordings may be used in published forms (e.g., journal articles and book chapters). In the case of publication, pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study will be stored in a secure location in the researchers' offices or on the researcher's password-protected computers and will be destroyed within ten years of the initiation of the study.

Compensation	Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and there will be no monetary compensation or other incentives for taking part. However, your insights will contribute to a better understanding of how organizations attract and retain Generation Z employees.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. The data you provided before you stopped participating however will be processed in this research; no new data will be collected or used.
	If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the primary investigator:
	Viola Vadász
	743151vv@student.eur.nl
	+36708849671
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree that you will participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.
	I agree to participate in a research project led by Viola Vadász. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the project through being interviewed.
	1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.
	2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.
	3. Participation involves being interviewed by (a) researcher(s) from the Erasmus University. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I allow the researcher(s) to take written notes during the interview. I also may allow the recording (by audio/video tape) of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be taped I am at any point of time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.

4. I have the right not to answer any of the questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview.

5. I have been given the explicit guarantees that, if I wish so, the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. In all cases subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies at the EU (Data Protection Policy).

6. I have been given the guarantee that this research project has been reviewed and approved by the researcher's thesis supervisor and by the EU Ethics Committee. For research problems or any other question regarding the research project, the EU Ethics Committee may be contacted through **ethics@eur.nl.**

7. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

Signature and Date	NAME PARTICIPANT	NAME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Viola Vadász
	SIGNATURE	SIGNATURE
	DATE	DATE **24.03.2025**

C, Questions

Chat-GPT was used in brainstorming and formulating the questionnaire. It also helped me tailor the questionnaire for different types of professionals, such as HR managers, Employer Branding specialists and Marketing specialists.

The following prompt was used when brainstorming for the questions:

Act as a research assistant. Help me came up with interview questions, that are suitable for solving the following research question: **RQ: What is the meaning and relevance of values in leadership and media management strategy practices to attract Generation Z in the workplace?** You should incorporate the following concepts:

- Media Management: *Short definition of the concept*
- Organizational values: *Short definition of the concept*
- Leadership: *Short definition of the concept*
- Recruitment: *Short definition of the concept*
- Employer Branding: *Short definition of the concept*

Please help me tailor the question for an HR manager/Employer Branding Specialist/Marketing Specialist

1. Introduction & Background

- o Can you tell me a bit about your role and what your day-to-day work looks like?
- o How did you get into this field? What attracted you to this type of work?
- o What are the key goals you focus on in your job?

2. Media Management & Communication

- o Can you describe the key digital platforms your company uses to attract and communicate with potential Gen Z employees? What influenced these choices?

- o What kind of tone or style do you use in your digital content to appeal to Gen Z?

- o What type of content has performed best in your Gen Z recruitment efforts? Can you share an example of a post or campaign that worked particularly well?

- o What's one mistake companies often make when trying to communicate with Gen Z through digital media?

3. Strategy Practices:

- o How do you integrate company values into your recruitment messaging for Gen Z?

- What routines or frameworks do you follow to maintain consistency in employer branding across different platforms?

4. Leadership practices:

- What communication methods work best when managing Gen Z employees?
- What sort of advice would you give a manager on how to lead generation z? How to motivate them? Or how to handle this sort of age group?
- How do leaders in your company communicate organizational values to employees in their daily work?
- What role does mentorship play in leadership strategies for Gen Z employees?
- What leadership practices have you found to be particularly effective in developing trust with Gen Z employees?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge when leading Gen Z employees?
- How do you give feedback to Gen Z employees? Is it different then giving feedback to more seniors?

5. GenZ Specifics

- Have you noticed Gen Z candidates asking about company values during interviews? If so, what specific topics do they focus on?
- What values do you think are most important to Gen Z when choosing a company to work for? How do you highlight these in your recruitment efforts?

6. Big Companies vs. Startups

- How does recruitment and employer branding messaging differ between a multinational corporation and a startup when targeting Gen Z?
- What are the main advantages and challenges of employer branding for a multinational company?

7. Final Reflections & Takeaways

- What's one key lesson you've learned about working with or attracting Gen Z talent?

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Course Assignments

Student Information
Name: Viola Vadász
Student ID: 743151
Course Name: Master Thesis Project
Supervisor Name: dr. Sven-Ove Horst
Assignment Title: Master Thesis
Date: 26.06.2025.

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
-   Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot)
-   Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
-   Language translation (e.g., DeepL)
-   Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding, debugging code)
-   Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, in the process of creating parts or components of my course assignment. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of the assignment.

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the assignment were undertaken by me. <u>I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.</u>

Ethical and Academic Integrity
☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

Date of Signature: 26.06.2025