

## GENERATION GROUPS AND OUTPLACEMENT PROGRAMS IN SLOVAK INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on outplacement as a concrete form (demonstration) of social responsibility and industrial enterprises sustainable management. The practice shows that businesses often face various problems regarding the lack of professional staff, lack of skills or skills in a particular area, or a surplus of necessary staff. With every situation, the company management needs to cope to ensure the sustainability, competitiveness or the business survival. The research study presented in the paper focused on the current state of need for redundancies, awareness of outplacement options and interest in these programs in case of redundancies. In addressing the issue, age diversity was also taken into consideration with regard to individual generations of employees on the labour market. The outplacement programs provide the enterprise management which has to make redundancies such services or support to redundant employees to enable them to actively seek work. However, the low use of such a form of support for outgoing employees causes low awareness of this possibility, whether by employers or employees themselves. The provision of outplacement services enables the enterprise to demonstrate a sustainable commitment to employee care even in the difficult situations in which the enterprise is set and to maintain the morale of the remaining employees, preserve goodwill and, if necessary, re-engage with former employees. The solved research problem presented in the paper was defined by setting the main research goal and defining research questions. The research results are interpreted through descriptive statistics quantitative methods.

**Keywords:** Diversity, generation groups, industrial enterprises, outplacement, sustainable management of human resources

**JEL Classification:** E24, J24, L16, O15

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### INTRODUCTION

Work has its position in the hierarchy of human values, but it has an important personal, economic and also social magnitude. Employees may perceive favourable or unfavourable treatment from corporate management as an indicator of the extent to which the organization appreciates the contribution to the business from the employee itself (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). In addition to the possibility of self-realization, the use of mental or physical energy by work, one contributes to the production of values, whether in the form of goods or services. The new challenges currently affecting the existence and sustainability of businesses stem from the dramatic changes that come from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Stachová, et al., 2019). The purely involuntary act is then the collective dismissal of employees, for which redundancy is the most common reason. The staff costs are often the largest cost item, so they are also one of the first ones the organizations focus on in reducing costs (Nwachukwu et al., 2017). The need for qualified staff is also continually diminishing with growing technological progress and increased automation of activities in organizations (Armstrong, 2007; Melé, 2014). When employees feel that the organization in which they work is striving to develop and implement socially

responsible activities, they identify with their organization and are satisfied with their work and subsequently show excellent work performance (Shin, et al., 2016). Human resources management practices for sustainable employment can differ significantly from common human resources practices resulting from the organisation's strategic objectives (Ybema, et al., 2017). Individual human resource management activities can directly increase employee performance (Pilková, et al., 2013) as well as their satisfaction and willingness to cooperate (Hitka et al., 2015), or to increase the positive perception of current or retired employees (Lee & Bruvold, 2003). Preferred values, attitudes, priorities, and approaches in human resource management activities may vary across different generations of employees (Kampf et al., 2017). For organizations, retirement and termination of employment raises many questions about the chronic problem of employee turnover and the exhaustion of knowledge in organizations (Beazley et al., 2002).

## **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FROM THE FIELD OF OUTPLACEMENT AND GENERATION GROUPS**

Some scholars have also pointed out that services such as outplacement counselling and career transition services have not been thoroughly evaluated and their benefits are not clearly understood, even though they have become a standard management practice in society and are universally provided for termination of employment relationships (Martin & Lekan, 2008). Sathe also claims that despite the fact that many employers offer outplacement services, many redundant employees are not satisfied with the help they have received from their former employer (Sathe, 2010; Vaňová et al., 2018). This fact prompted the authors of the paper to examine the subject area. There are several definitions and understandings of the term outplacement so, the authors of the paper have given an overview of those that describe the most appropriately the meaning of the term. The organization can offer outplacement assistance to outgoing employees in the event of redundancy. Outplacement programs provide support for job loss and job search, so that redundant and displaced employees find new jobs easier. Outplacement can be provided by the redundant organization by its own or external service (Kocianová, 2010). The outplacement is a process of supporting and assisting redundant employees by an employer in finding a new job on the market. Outplacement can be granted to all categories of redundant employees for the reason that the business or part of the business is removed or moved (Olexová, 2007).

Outplacement programs are based on helping redundant workers to find a job. The organization chooses, according to available funds and available workforce in the personnel department, to what range and to what extent it will design its outplacement program. The basic services provided by organizations within outplacement programs are (Kocianová, 2010; Olexová, 2007; Stacho & Stachová, 2015):

- providing information on the procedures at the authorities (work, social, health);
- search and selection of appropriate training courses and trainings based on a comparison of qualifications and current staffing capabilities with job requirements;
- training for job search (CV creation, motivation letter, selection interview training);
- trainings and counselling on how to act, act at a job interview, communicate with potential employers what to do after release;
- development center (providing professional guidance);
- educational programs (language, development of communication or computer skills);
- help in establishing working contacts, addressing potential employers in a given region operating in related industries;
- counselling a psychologist (for both redundant employees and their families), setting up a crisis line that employees can call during outplacement periods;
- possibility to use the organization's facilities after the departure from the organization (internet, computer, telephone, fax, printer);
- assistance of HR managers after leaving the organization (with job search correspondence - creation of business correspondence);
- establishing an enterprise advisory center for 3 to 6 months;

- individual care of specialized consultants of a personnel agency about the released employees that entered the outplacement program.

Practice as well as some studies have shown that redundancies should first focus on addressing the emotional consequences of shrinking before focusing on some outplacement activities (Probst & Jiang, 2016). Increased trend towards outplacement advisory services confirmed that outplacement as an alternative to dismissing employees minimizes loss of work habits and loss of morale (Charlesworth, 1989). The possibility of re-employment can be more challenging for employees who have spent a longer time in one job or be different for age groups (employee generations). People born in relatively the same period are generally classified as generations. Given the members of one generation who entered life in the same historical and socio-technical age, their personality and development affected a similar socio-cultural environment (Aristovnik, 2012). Members of one generation are people who are close to age, but also values, interests, goals, attitudes, needs, preferences and so on. There are currently several different generations of employees on the labour market (Stareček et al., 2017; Cagáňová et al., 2017; Čambál et al., 2017). A generation of veterans, called the "silent generation", born before 1945, almost disappeared from the labour market. Followed by the generation X, born in 1961-1980, generation Y born in years (1981-1995) and generation Z, born in 1996-2009, currently entering the labour market. The youngest generation born since 2010 is known as the Alpha generation (Reháková, 2006). However, there is no absolute consensus among scientists and practitioners to limit the years of birth of individual generations. More importantly, members of each generation show certain characteristics that are common to them and can be different for different generations of employees (Reháková, 2009; Kutlák, 2018). Understanding age diversity in the workplace can maximize the strengths of older people at work (Martin & Tulgan, 2012). Given the diversity of Western and Eastern culture (SR) and the environment in which the generation of veterans (silent generation) was located, their characteristics differ. At present, at the labour market they are only found in exceptional and specific professions, but it has affected the next generation of employees by its approach to work (McIntosh-Elkins et al., 2007). Baby boom is a generation in which successive cohorts have achieved and expected constant improvement in living standards (Roberts, 2011). This generation in Slovakia spent the productive age at the time of normalization, when unemployment was an undesirable phenomenon for society. Persons avoiding permanent employment have been prosecuted for parasitism (Trestní zákon – Criminal law, 1957). Work and employment have thus become an integral and essential part of their lives. **Generation X** - Compared to the younger generation, this generation's employees want more to identify with the organization and stay in the organization for work duties (Valickas & Jakštaitė, 2017). Generation X is less loyal to companies than previous generations, but loyal to people (Tolbize, 2008). **The Y generation** is richer in knowledge, more technologically advanced, more educated and more ethnically diverse than the previous generation. They always try to develop new skills and take on the challenge. Generation Y often takes longer to find a stable career and settle into lifelong relationships. Although generation Y often takes longer to reach the professional world, they are more likely to gain postgraduate education than previous generations because of their high interest in learning (Spiro, 2006). **The Z generation** has become a global generation. The Z generation is also called: children of the Internet, digital generation, digital natives (Mladkova, 2017; Stareček et al., 2018). Characteristic features of Z generation are addiction, freedom, individualism, dependence on technology, and reaction time rate. The evaluations made in relation to the Z generation cannot go beyond assumption because they are age-old, their personalities are not mature, and it is not known what events may affect them in the coming years. It is expected that thanks to the advanced technology they will have a better standard of living, longer and richer than previous generations (Stareček, 2018). Compared to previous generations, they are beginning to be educated at an earlier age and acquire advanced and planned education. They can benefit from the education they gain in business life. Only a few of them can work because of their age (Berkup, 2014). These generations have varying degrees of representation on the labour market. They coexist, interact, cooperate, and influence each other. It follows that human resource management is diversified

for different generations. The attractiveness and use of outplacement programs are also different for different generations of employees.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the next part of the paper, a research problem will be defined, along with a definition of the main research objective and the definition of the research questions. The section contains a description of the research sample together with a description of the collection tool.

### 2.1 Research problem, research goal and research questions

Research problem was defined in the area of human resources management with emphasis on dismissing of employees and outplacement programs in the industrial practice. Due to the fact that countries within the European Economic Area are currently facing changes in population demographics (declining natural increase, increasing retirement age or population mobility from countries with less favourable economic, social or social conditions). It is important that employers work with the employees at intention to sustainability and trying to create optimal conditions not only for their employees but also for employees who have left their jobs. According to Herzka and Zatrochová (2009) outplacement je the term unknown for most Slovak enterprises. The current global business environment makes country-specific changes significantly affect the functioning of more independent economies in the past. Business management often has to respond to the situation and the influence of factors from the external environment, which they are unable to influence, and often have to respond by unpopular measures such as redundancies. Since the economics and the functioning of businesses influence each other, often go through the same waves of problems they must face, whether they are about the shortage or surplus of employees.

The main objective of the research was to analyse the potential need and usefulness of providing support to dismissed employees within outplacement in the Slovak industrial enterprises.

Three research questions have been set up to meet the main goal of the paper and analyse the current state of the outplacement issue.

**RQ1:** What is the current state of dismissal and leaving employees of the Slovak industrial enterprises?

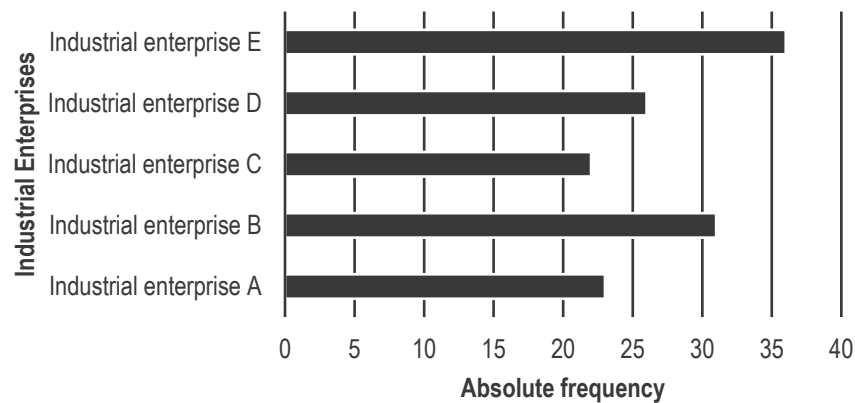
**RQ2:** What is the current state of awareness and use of outplacement programs in the Slovak industrial enterprises?

**RQ3:** What is the current state of interest from employees' side of the Slovak industrial enterprises in outplacement programs?

### 2.2 Data collection and data collection tool

The questionnaire survey was conducted in the period: 09th February 2019 to 13th April 2019. The research was carried out by physical distribution of the questionnaire to selected five industrial enterprises operating in the Slovak Republic. 40 questionnaires were distributed to each of the five industrial enterprises, with a total of 200 questionnaires distributed. The total number of returned and correctly completed questionnaires was  $n = 138$  pieces, so the authors of the paper can declare that the chosen data collection method was successful because of a 69 % return. In terms of size, the industrial enterprises can be classified as large industrial enterprises. In determining the size of the business, only the criterion of the number of employees (251 to 500 employees) was taken into account. The geographical area of industrial enterprises activity is limited to the territory of Western Slovakia. All five industrial enterprises did not want to publish their trade name. So far, for this reason the authors of the paper have decided to introduce the designation: industrial enterprise A to industrial enterprise E. In the Figure 1, it can be seen the absolute number of respondents divided by individual industrial enterprises.

Fig. 1: Graph of absolute number of respondents by enterprises



Source: own elaboration, 2019

The best return on correct and fully completed questionnaires was recorded for industrial enterprise E, where up to 36 out of 40 distributed questionnaires were usable. On the other hand, the worst result in questionnaire usability was reported for C, where only 22 out of 40 distributed questionnaires were obtained.

An exploratory questionnaire with its title (Outplacement Questionnaire) was constructed for the purpose of the paper. The questionnaire consists of 8 questions. The first three questions can be considered as socio-demographic, where the authors of the paper have asked what kind of job the respondents do (employees of industrial enterprises), the second is oriented on the sex of respondents and the last socio-demographic question concerns to the age of respondents. The second set of questions are the questions that are geared towards finding out the current state of outplacement programs use and five questions have been raised for the purposes of this section. The questions have been developed by the human resources experts within the VEGA project and can therefore be considered valid and usable for research purposes.

### 2.3 Description of the research sample

138 respondents took part in the questionnaire survey, classified as: administrative staff and production staff. Up to 70 % (96 employees) of respondents can be classified as production employees. The second group consists of 42 employees (30 % of respondents), who are considered to be administrative employees in terms of employment. The respondents (employees of industrial enterprises) who participated in the questionnaire survey were divided into two groups by gender. Gender representation of respondents was as follows: 74 males, which is in percentage 53.62 %, females 64 responders, which is in percentage 46.38 %. The authors of the paper appreciate positively that despite the random distribution of questionnaires, it was possible to secure almost the same number of male and female respondents. In the Table 1, it can be seen the distribution of respondents by gender and by job.

Tab. 1: Respondents by gender and job classification

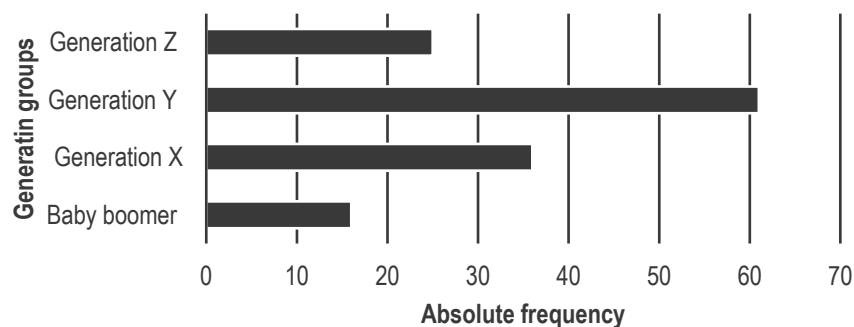
Job classification / gender	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency [%]
Administrative employee - men	11	08.00
Production employee - men	63	45.65
Administrative employee - women	31	22.45
Production employee -women	33	23.90
<b>Sum</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: own elaboration, 2019

The Table 1 shows that the most numerous groups of respondents are men in the position of production employee, while the least numerous groups consist of men in the administrative position. The findings are consistent with the nature of the work most often performed in the industrial enterprises.

The last question related to the description of the exploratory sample is the age of the respondents. Employees of industrial enterprises reported their age to the date of the questionnaire distribution which was subsequently recalculated according to the chosen classification of generational groups. The following classification was used for the conversion: Baby boomer generation (1946 to 1960), generation X (1961 to 1980), generation Y (1981-1995) and generation Z (1996 to 2010). The Figure 2 shows the distribution of industrial enterprises employees on the basis of generational representation and gender.

Fig. 2: Generational groups and gender – respondents



Source: own elaboration, 2019

From the evaluation of the representation of respondents according to their respective generational group, it was proved that the generation group Y (61 respondents) is the largest generational group.

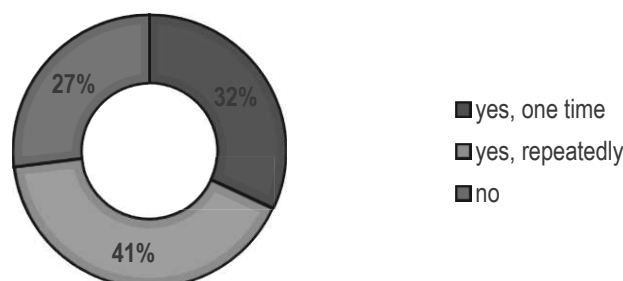
### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the third part of the paper, the authors of the paper have analysed the selected research questions using selected statistical methods and available exact programs of MS EXCEL and at the same time interpret the results of realized analyses. The evaluation of individual outplacement research questions with age diversity through generation groups can be seen below.

#### 3.1 Evaluation of the research questions

The first research question that was focused on the current state analysis of the outplacement programs issue was: (RQ1: What is the current status of dismissal and leaving employees of the Slovak industrial enterprises?) In the Figure 3, it can be seen a graphical respondents' responses representation.

Fig. 3: Respondents – and experience with redundancy



Source: own elaboration, 2019

The most numerous answers to this question was the respondents' answer, yes repeatedly, which was identified by 41 % of the respondents, while the least numerous answers were no, which was reported by

only 27 % of the respondents. From this it is clear that industrial enterprises employees without filtering results in most cases (73 %) were in a situation where they had to leave their jobs.

Another research question in the paper that the authors of the paper decided to evaluate was: (RQ2: What is the current state of awareness and use of outplacement programs in the Slovak industrial enterprises?) In order to better evaluate the considered issue, the authors of the paper have decided to divide the respondents' answers according to the respondent's generation groups who participated in the research. The results can be seen in the Table 2.

Tab. 2: Outplacement – respondents by generation groups

Answer / Generation	Baby boomer	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z	Sum
yes	5	12	19	13	49
no	11	24	42	12	89
<b>Sum</b>	16	36	61	25	<b>138</b>

*Source: own elaboration, 2019*

It follows that up to 89 respondents (64.5 %) have never met outplacement yet. From all the generational groups, the generational group Z had the best knowledge of the outplacement concept, with almost 52 % (13 respondents) declaring that they knew the term outplacement. On the other hand, the worst was the baby boomer generation, where up to 68.8 % (11 respondents) said that has not yet met with the term outplacement. It follows from the above that the difference in knowledge of foreign concepts was made by the younger generation. It is important to note that when distributing the questionnaire, the authors of the paper have explained to the respondents what the term outplacement includes. The second part of the research question was focused on identifying whether the industrial enterprises management provides employees with outplacement programs when leaving employment. The respondents only answered the question, if they knew the term outplacement. In the Table 3, there are the results of that question.

Tab. 3: Outplacement – use by respondents

Answer / Generation	Baby boomer	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z	Sum
no	1	3	3	2	9
yes, I used the possibility	4	6	9	7	26
no, I did not use the possibility	0	3	7	4	14
<b>Sum</b>	5	12	19	13	<b>49</b>

*Source: own elaboration, 2019*

So far, it follows that respondents who knew the term outplacement also had a practical experience - 26 respondents (53 %). An important finding is the fact that up to 14 (28.6 %) respondents did not use the outplacement program, even though the former employer provided it. Since employees who have not stated they know the concept of outplacement, the authors of the paper assume, that they have no practical experience with it. The main reason for this is that the term was explained to them when filling in the questionnaire.

The last question dealing with outplacement from the questionnaire was: (RQ3: What is the current state of interest from employees' side of the Slovak industrial enterprises in outplacement programs?). Based on its evaluation, the following Table 4 was constructed.

Tab. 4: Respondents and their opinion to introduce outplacement

Generation / Absolute frequency	Baby boomer / Absolute frequency	Generation X / Absolute frequency	Generation Y / Absolute frequency	Generation Z / Absolute frequency	Sum (absolute / relative frequency)
YES	14	28	52	22	117 / 85 %
NO	2	7	9	3	21 / 15 %
Sum (absolute / relative frequency)	16 / 11.59 %	36 / 26.09 %	61 / 44.20 %	25 / 18.12 %	138 / 100 %

Source: own elaboration, 2019

All respondents answered the question 5. The main reason for this is that the authors of the paper were interested in the fact, if there is interest from employees in implementing outplacement programs into business practice. The table 4 shows that up to 85 % (117) of respondents want industrial enterprises to implement outplacement programs to help redundant workers find or facilitate new job searches. Only 15 % (21) of respondents declared they would not be interested in outplacement programs.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The global business environment creates the conditions for frequent and rapid changes that business management has to respond to, in order to compete with global competition and keep their market position. Demographic changes have caused the labour market to become saturated, and employers must also provide services to their redundant employees to increase their positive image for potential candidates. The presented research results showed that almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents had experience with redundancy and they were once or receptively in position of redundant employee. In terms of sustainability, it is important that, even in difficult situations requiring redundancies, the management approaches this task with care and responsibility, with the implementation and application of outplacement programs in the industrial practice as an example (Kutlák & Taušl Procházková, 2017).

Care for employees, at every stage of the employee's life and thus also dismissal, should be moved to the center of human resources management. Presented research has shown that very few employers provide outplacement programs to dismissed or left employees. Other research and practice have also shown that few companies currently provide some support to their employees when they leave or release (Lorincová et al., 2019; Papulova & Papula, 2015, Vaňová et al., 2018). The authors of the paper recommend to the industrial enterprises management to increase the care of their employees and to show a higher level of responsibility by providing assistance in outplacement programs. Furthermore, the research has shown that employees at different positions (administrative staff or production staff) do not know the concept of outplacement. One of the main reasons for not knowing the term is that employers do not provide that form of assistance to dismissed employees. The research has further shown that the interest of the baby boomers and the Generation Z in outplacement programs is high. The outplacement programs can include various forms of support, active job search assistance, provision of technical equipment, expert HR consultancy, counselling or consulting with psychologists to help clients cope with the challenging times. That is why the authors of the paper again recommend to the industrial enterprises to find out the interest in particular forms of assistance within the outplacement programs and to diversify it according to the requirements of individual generational groups of industrial enterprises employees. The research results showed that if employees had the possibility of outplacement, they also used it. Redundancy is an unpleasant experience, especially for a redundant employee. Negative feelings can cause the employee to not take advantage of the employer's offer for outplacement. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of open and transparent communication with employees and the opportunities offered by outplacement.

The authors of the paper will in further research to deal with the demographic sensitivity to the application of outplacement programs along with the differentiation of results by generation groups. In further research, the authors of the paper want to analyse the reasons for dismissing employees and designing



outplacement programs for employees of industrial enterprises, focusing on different generation groups of employees in the context of age management.

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