


The Recruiting Process as an Attractiveness Factor: How Do Companies Manage to Position Themselves Competitively as Employers?

Jennifer Schietzel-Kalkbrenner¹^a, Niklas Petelkau²^b, Dominic Strube²^c and Christian Daase³^d

¹*Berufliche Hochschule Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany*

²*Hochschule Wismar, University of Applied Sciences, Technology, Business and Design, Wismar, Germany*

³*Institute of Technical and Business Information Systems, Otto-von-Guericke University, Magdeburg, Germany*

Keywords: Recruiting Process, Onboarding Process, Employer Branding, Skills Shortage, Human Resources Strategy, Workforce Potential.


Abstract: The question of how companies manage to position themselves as attractive employers is one of the most important strategic challenges for the future of all companies in times of demographic change and the associated and constantly growing employment gap on the labor market. As various studies show how important the right design of recruiting processes can be for this, the article is dedicated to the question of how a conscious design of recruiting can support companies in combating the shortage of skilled employees, especially in relation to Generation Z. The aim is to provide science-based recommendations to companies that consider the current zeitgeist and are intended to make companies question their own approach to recruiting. The theoretical foundations were developed as part of systematic literature research. More in-depth and up-to-date findings were obtained through two expert interviews and an online survey of Generation Z. The results show that companies need to do more today than they did a few years ago. A successful recruiting process should build on a strong employer branding foundation and should be taken to a more personal level. This includes knowing the expectations of candidates on the job market and authentically presenting yourself to the outside world as an attractive employer. In addition to honest insights into the company through its own employees as brand ambassadors and the implementation of the latest trends, such as mobile applications, the onboarding process is particularly important. This begins directly with the signing of the contract and is ideally characterized by the consideration of professional and social integration. This is becoming increasingly important, especially for younger employees in today's world.


1 INTRODUCTION


Demographic change has been posing challenges for politicians and companies for several years now. In particular, the growing employment gap on the labor market due to the declining number of people in the labor force is a problem. In the period from 2020 to 2035, a loss of 7.2 million people in the labor force is projected – and this for Germany only. A higher labor force participation of women and older people as well as the migration of foreign skilled employees are


much-discussed solutions, but according to the Institute for Employment Research, these would only mitigate the negative effects (Fuchs et al., 2021).

Even today, companies are unable to fill vacancies or have difficulty filling them. According to current forecasts, around two million jobs will remain unfilled in Germany in 2023, which would result in a loss of value-added amounting to EUR 100 billion. In addition, skilled employees will be needed particularly in future-relevant occupational fields such as the energy sector, but these are in short supply

^a <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3782-4963>

^b <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4691-4049>

^c <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3017-5189>

^d <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4662-7055>

in many places (German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 2021). Against this backdrop, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to demonstrate their attractiveness as an employer. Young employees in particular, including Generation Z, have a wide range of expectations of their employer. Among other things, they demand sustainability, digital structures and a timely approach via digital communication channels such as professional networks. This makes it necessary for employers to meet these needs and requirements. Apprentices in particular should be a core issue from a company's perspective, as a large number of training places remain unfilled. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of vocational orientation at schools, which is intensified in particular by the increasing number of apprenticeships. During the corona pandemic, extracurricular career guidance programs were also canceled, so that existing information gaps have grown further (u-form testsystem, 2023).

Although the figures have recovered slightly since 2021, the number of open training places is higher than the proportion of applicants. Compared to 2021, the number of open training places increased by nine percent to 68,900, while the number of unplaced applicants fell by just under eight percent to 22,700. These figures make it clear that training companies in particular are facing the challenges described above (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2023). The recruiting process is of central importance in this context. Candidates' first impressions of the potential employer should be deliberately designed in order to leave a professional impression on candidates (Hausmann and Braun, 2021).

successful, this will result in additional work for existing employees and rising recruiting costs in the short term. In the medium and long term, a lack of personnel jeopardizes the continued existence of a company and leads to restrictions in innovation and competitiveness (German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 2023).

Based on these findings this research aims on answering the following research question (RQ):

RQ: How can a conscious design of recruiting support companies in combating the shortage of skilled employees, especially in relation to Generation Z?

In connection with this main research question, the aim is also to answer which factors make recruiting processes attractive from the perspective of candidates, especially representatives of Generation Z. Therefore, the article presents the findings from two expert interviews, which provide practical

insights into the labor market and internal company challenges.

2 METHODOICAL IMPLEMENTATION

The following section deals with the systematic analysis of the design of the phases of the recruiting process presented in fig. 1 from a scientific perspective.

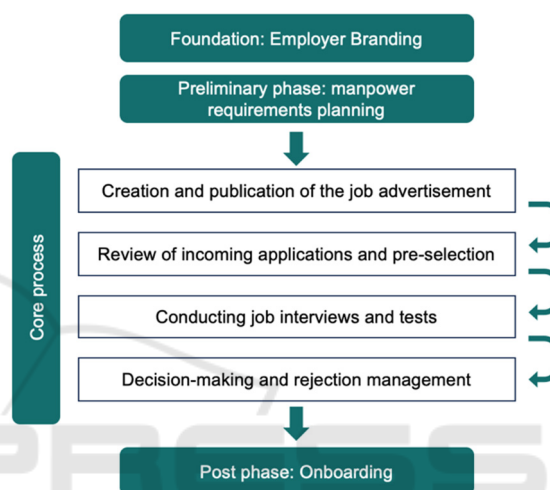


Figure 1: The recruiting process (Hausmann and Braun, 2021).

In this context, the phases "Review of incoming applications and pre-selection" and "Decision-making and rejection management" are not considered. This is due to the fact that the two phases only have a comparatively low potential for increasing employer attractiveness in relation to the recruiting process due to the lack of visibility by applicants (Breaugh and Starke, 2000).

The recruiting process is divided into several phases, starting with the preliminary phase of personnel requirements planning. This is where the current and future need for employees is identified, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative requirements planning covers the required number of employees, while qualitative requirements planning focuses on skills and qualifications. The creation of a detailed requirements profile forms the basis for the job advertisement.

The core process of the job advertisement involves writing the job advertisement, whereby the precise formulation and consideration of content such as the job description, requirements profile and

company presentation are of particular importance. The duration and channels of the advertisement also play a role.

The screening of incoming applications and pre-selection form another core process. This is based on the previously defined criteria of the requirements profile, whereby information from the personnel requirements planning facilitates the review of the application documents. Qualifications, the type of cover letter and the overall impression of the application are taken into account.

Conducting interviews and tests is another central process in which selection interviews provide in-depth information and knowledge is verified. Detailed preparation for employers and applicants is crucial. Tests, practical tasks as in the assessment center and trial work are used for a comprehensive assessment.

This is followed by decision-making and rejection management, whereby the selected candidate is informed by the manager and rejection management is carried out for applicants who are not selected.

The follow-up phase of onboarding begins after the contract has been signed and is aimed at the professional and social integration of new employees. This includes getting to know the team, familiarizing them with areas of responsibility and familiarizing them with company processes. The entire process aims to attract qualified specialists, integrate them successfully and thus contribute to the company's long-term competitiveness.

In addition to theoretical aspects, two expert interviews were conducted to analyze current situations in companies. The first expert interview was conducted with a personnel consultant in order to gain an overall assessment of current developments in the area of recruiting on the entire labor market. In the second expert interview with a recruiter, current challenges and internal company efforts and developments were discussed (Negrin et al., 2022).

The expert interviews were evaluated in the form of a qualitative content analysis based on (Mayring, 1994). The aim of the analysis procedure is to summarize, explain or structure texts, which is to be ensured by a systematic, rule-based approach to text analysis. The structuring procedure was used to analyze the expert interviews. A specially created category system and associated guidelines served as examples and coding rules to concretize the individual categories. The material from the expert interviews was thoroughly reviewed and assigned to the appropriate categories. These assignments and unassigned text components were then evaluated, which led to the refinement of the categories.

Through this iterative process, the categories were gradually refined in order to gradually identify the essential material components (Mayring, 1994).

In the interview, the participants emphasized the variety of reasons that motivate employees to change employers. In addition to private factors, monetary incentives and the desire for professional satisfaction play a decisive role. For Generation Z in particular, social integration and an appealing, uncomplicated job application are of great importance. The labor market has changed considerably, with employees increasingly willing to change jobs. Companies are facing various challenges such as inadequate employer branding and problems in the selection process. The interviewees recommend greater involvement of existing employees, authentic communication and a target group-oriented design of the recruiting process, adapted to the expectations of Generation Z. Above all, open and honest communication and prompt feedback are crucial. The respondents see recruitment consultants as a supportive partner for companies in order to better understand the needs of candidates and optimize the recruiting process.

In addition to the results of the expert interviews, the findings of an online survey have been incorporated into the recommendations for employers to optimize their recruiting process. The questions are based on the findings already obtained from the literature research and the expert interviews and therefore provide deeper insights into the needs and wishes of Generation Z towards employers as well as their experience with recruiting processes.

3 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The following analysis refers to generation representatives aged 16 and over. The population N therefore comprises all people born in Germany between 1996 and 2007. According to figures from 2020, this number amounts to around ten million people in Germany.

The number of participants in the online survey was 255. Two participants answered the control questions incorrectly and were therefore excluded from the sample. 50 participants could not be assigned to the previously specified age range of Generation Z and were therefore also excluded. This results in a total sample n comprising 203 representatives of Generation Z.

The online survey consisted of an introduction, a main part with questions in five sections and a short acknowledgement. The introduction informed the

participants about the purpose of the survey, the anonymity of the answers and the estimated completion time of five to ten minutes. The main part included sections on socio-demographic characteristics, job advertisements, application processes, job interviews and onboarding. The questions were grouped thematically to make it easier for participants to focus. The final question allowed participants to share positive experiences in the recruiting process.

Table 1: Confidence Regarding Salary Expectations.

Question	Response Option	n	in %
Confidence in Salary Negotiations	Very confident	34	16.75%
	Rather agree	118	58.13%
	Neutral	27	13.3%
	Rather disagree	18	8.87%
	Not confident	6	2.96%
Correlation: Work Experience and Confidence in Salary Expectations	Rank correlation (Spearman)		0.2111
Correlation: Interview Experience and Confidence in Salary Expectations	Rank correlation (Spearman)		0.0553

The results shown in table 1 indicate, that the value 0.2111 indicates a positively significant correlation between work experience and confidence in salary negotiations. This implies that with increasing work experience, confidence in salary negotiations tends to rise. The value 0.0553 shows no significant correlation between interview experience and confidence in salary expectations. This suggests that interview experience is not significantly associated with confidence in salary negotiations.

It is important to note that due to the small sample size, the interpretability of the correlation coefficient is limited. Participants showed mixed opinions about the use of HR consulting services. Referring to Table 2, a group of 70 (34.48%) and 37 (18.23%) participants showed agreement, while 45 (22.17%) and 28 (13.79%) were rather skeptical. A total of 23 (11.33%) participants were undecided.

Direct contact by the employer proved to be effective in arousing the interest of the majority of participants. Approximately three-quarters, 73 (35.96%) and 82 (40.39%), respectively, indicated that their interest would increase strongly or very strongly. Regarding the openness of the social environment towards certain professions and dealing

with negative experiences of family members, friends and acquaintances in the application process, a significant proportion of participants agreed with the statement that negative experiences in their close environment would deter them from applying.

Participants' feedback regarding mandatory cover letters and their impact on employer attractiveness was mixed. A small majority agreed (43; 21.18%) or somewhat agreed (68; 33.5%), while 45 (22.17%) were undecided, and 22 (10.84%) and 25 (12.32%) participants (somewhat) disagreed.

Table 2: Results on the Use of Headhunter Services and Direct Employer Contact.

Question	Response Option	n	in %
Use of Headhunter Services	(Rather) Agree	107	52.72%
	Undecided	23	11.33%
	(Rather) Skeptical	73*	35.96%*
Direct Employer Contact	Strong Interest	73*	35.96%*
	Very Strong Interest	82*	40.39%*
	Neutral	23	11.33%
	Low Interest	22	10.84%
Handling Negative Experiences in the Application Process	(Rather) Agree	135*	66.5%*
	Undecided	45	22.17%
	(Rather) Disagree	47	23.15%
Influence of Mandatory Cover Letter on Employer Attractiveness	(Rather) Agree	111	54.67%
	Undecided	45	22.17%
	(Rather) Disagree	47	23.15%

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4 RESULTS

The participants who had positive onboarding experiences were asked about particularly positive aspects. The answers of the 29% of participants who had a special experience were divided into six categories: "Onboarding on the first day", "Onboarding in the first few months", "Applicant management", "In the selection process", "Contact outside the central application process" and "General characteristics of the process". The positive experiences include aspects such as social integration on the first day, support programs in the first few months, transparent applicant management, presence of the line manager in the selection process, diverse contact opportunities outside the central process and recruiting process. Clear structures and communica-

tion of the corporate culture throughout the entire process are also important.

Based on the surveyed expectations of Generation Z in recruiting, the following recommendations can be made:

Personal Recruiting:

- Focus on interpersonal relationships.
- Authentic presentation of the corporate culture with photos, videos and interviews.
- Get to know the team in person before accepting.

Digital Communication:

- Set up company accounts in social networks.
- Use of digital channels for insights and job advertisements.
- Active sourcing and investment in career websites.

Transparent Communication:

- Communication of career opportunities, salary and benefits.
- Transparent presentation of salary ranges.
- Highlighting benefits in discussions with applicants.

Appreciation in Onboarding:

- Efficient induction through internal process documentation.
- Emphasis on social integration on the first day of work.
- Appreciation through small gestures and welcome gifts.

Quick Feedback and Transparency:

- Efficient communication between candidates and employers.
- Avoidance of delays and loss of applications.
- Increased transparency through applicant portals.
- Fast feedback, ideally within two weeks of the interview.

The RQ on the targeted design of recruiting for Generation Z is answered as follows on the basis of the results: The recruiting process must clearly communicate career prospects early on, both in job advertisements and in personal exchanges. Good contact with colleagues and managers in the first few weeks of work is crucial. The simplicity and speed of the application process are particularly important for Generation Z, as they prefer digital platforms.

Employers should proactively reach out to potential candidates, including through messaging features on professional networks. Although the expectations of Generation Z do not differ significantly from other generations, adapting the recruitment process to current developments in the world of work offers an advantage for employers as it allows them to address a broader target group (Said, 2022).

Overall, however, it can be stated that the expectations of Generation Z do not appear to differ significantly from those of other generations. Rather, the current developments on the labor market and the associated changes in employee expectations seem to reflect part of the social development. This finding could prove to be an advantage for employers, as although the recruitment process in many companies needs to be adapted to current developments, employers would be able to apply the same processes to a much broader target group than Generation Z.

5 LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Implementing the recommendations for improving recruitment mentioned in the previous section can help to make companies more attractive to Generation Z and retain potential employees during the recruitment process. However, limitations must be taken into account. The study was limited to participants from Germany, so the results are only transferable to other countries to a limited extent. In international companies, the application of such measures should be limited to individual regions, taking cultural differences into account. Generation Z represents only a portion of potential employees, and other generations have different requirements of employers.

The study sample was comparatively small, which limits the generalizability and reliability of the results. Nevertheless, clear language and references in the questions largely ensured validity. It is emphasized that the recruiting process is only one part of the corporate image. In order to increase attractiveness in the long term, companies should analyze the whole process and take measures in the areas of recruiting, marketing and communication. Clear and unambiguous communication is particularly important in order to prevent possible misinformation and misjudgements on the part of potential employees, given the rapid spread of information. Further research should improve the study and the calculations by using a larger population.

REFERENCES

- Breaugh, J. A., & Starke, M. (2000). Research on Employee Recruitment: So Many Studies, So Many Remaining Questions. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 405–434.
- Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung. (2023). *Berufsbildungsbericht 2023*. https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/de/2023/berufsbildungsbericht-2023-kabinettfassung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2
- Fuchs, J., Söhnlein, D., & Weber, B. (2021). *Demografische Entwicklung lässt das Arbeitskräfteangebot stark schrumpfen*. <https://doku.iab.de/kurzber/2021/kb2021-25.pdf>
- German Chamber of Industry and Commerce. (2021). *Fachkräftemangel – mit gravierenden Folgen*. <https://www.dihk.de/de/themen-und-positionen/fachkraefte/beschaeftigung/fachkraeftereport-2021/fachkraeftemangel-mit-gravierenden-folgen--61818>
- German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Ed.). (2023). *Trotz schwieriger Wirtschaftslage: Fachkräfteengpässe nehmen zu*. <https://www.dihk.de/de/themen-und-positionen/fachkraefte/beschaeftigung/trotz-schwieriger-wirtschaftslage-fachkraefteengpaesse-nehmen-zu-89118>
- Hausmann, A., & Braun, O. (2021). *Recruiting in Kulturbetrieben – Leitfaden für die erfolgreiche Personalgewinnung*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Mayring, P. (1994). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/1456/ssoar-1994-mayring-qualitative_inhaltsanalyse.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-1994-mayring-qualitative_inhaltsanalyse.pdf
- Negrin, K. A., Slaughter, S. E., Dahlke, S., & Olson, J. (2022). Successful Recruitment to Qualitative Research: A Critical Reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 160940692211195.
- Said, A. (2022). Impact of Recruitment Processes on Work Turnover & Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*.
- u-form Testsysteme. (2023). *Azubi-Recruiting Trends 2023*. <https://www.testsysteme.de/studie>