Retention of Generation Y in Hungarian Public Service

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Abstract

The article discusses challenges of retaining young people in public service. Is it possible to have a new generation of public servants, who choose this profession even for a lifetime? In search of the answer literature of generation theories, generation management and retention management is reviewed and influencing factors of a generation membership and retention are synthesized. Empirical research results of a survey with over 1300 responders among Hungarian public servants are shown from which an identity profile of Generation Y public servants is sketched and proposals are made for long-term retention strategies. Outcome of the research suggests generational approach to be introduced in public service human resource management in order to support more effective retention management and to better understand possible generational differences instead of relying on false assumptions.

Keywords: generation Y, human resource management, staff retention, public service

Introduction

Public service organizations in Hungary have been facing serious challenges recently in the so called „war for talent" on the national labour market. One of these challenges causing headaches for HR professionals and managers of public administration bodies is retention of especially those employees that belong to younger generations.

We all experience generational differences in our everyday social lifes and our workplaces, which is the reason that this topic is being permanently discussed in popular press and different media items. Unfortunately, much of literature on generations is just based on observations, beliefs, myths, stereotypes, false and contradictory assumptions instead of empirical research findings. Also there is a significant amount of literature questioning the legitimacy of generational theories, whereas a few researchers justify that younger employees have different demands, attitudes and characteristics from the elder and an increasing number of private sector companies are considering generation management as a strategic issue. Even if we reject the existance of „generations" as categories based only on the common years of employee's birth we will still struggle with conflicts at work that derive from the different „generational identities" of employee groups. These generational indentities are influenced by

collective values, memories, norms and other factors, which might as well mean different expectations from work.

Is it possible to have a new generation of public servants, who choose this profession even for a lifetime? Is „job-hopping" attitude of Generation Y something we need to get used to? Is it true that without competitive salaries there is almost no chance to retain young people int he public sector? In order to answer these questions I propose introducing a „generational approach" in the research of strategic human resource management in the Hungarian public service, because we lack results and evidence on this field, however we face the challenges detailed above. Research outcomes might be especially remarkable since legal framework of public service employment is currently fundamentally changing in the country.

My aim is to do a short literature review on generation theories, generation management and retention management and then to present some results of my empirical research among over 1300 Hungarian public servants from different governmental institutions all over the country. Based on my results I draw an identity profile for Generation Y public servants in Hungary and I make proposals for their better engagement.

1. Generational theories

Without going deep into historical or ethimological research of the word „generation" and explaining its meanings starting from the works of the Greek Aristotle, I only focus on shortly summerizing the most important findings and trends of generational theories in this study that have emerged from the 1950s century, based on Karl Mannheim's work. He described generation as a kind of social location: individuals sharing a common year of birth having a common location in the historical process, being limited to special experiences influencing their thoughts. Generational theory was later expanded by „collective memories" suggesting that events and changes experienced during youth are especially memorable and therefore these seriously affect their values, attitudes, expectations. These memories can only be interpreted in a social and cultural setting since due to media and individual conversations they may not be recalled exactly the same way. In the past decades more cultural factors were added to those that influence generations like music preferences and fashion, film starts, lifestyle and cultural symbols, as well as technology. Recently, the theory of generational identity has also appeared, which means a self-definition of membership in a generation, together with some emotional and value significance to the individual. (Ng – Parry 2016)

According to this theory, generation provides a source of social identity into which a person can categorize himself when identification is required with similar others. Recent contributions approached generational identity in organizational settings, where it was shown to be distict from but related to age-based identity. Joshi and colleagues found generations as

representations of temporal succession which might operate as perceptual and behavioral frames in an organization. Newest researches outline a dynamic social-ecological model of generational identity in the workplace influenced by the interaction of factors on various levels like the smaller working group, the organization the extra-organizational environment and the society. (Lyons 2019)

1.1 Factors influencing membership in a generation

Today it seems evident that sharing a common birth year does not already mean that individuals also share a generation since there are many other determining factors of belonging to a generation. I found it important for my further empirical research to sythesize all these influencing factors including external and internal circumstances. Figure 1 illustrates that belonging to a generation may be affected by all but not necessaraly by all of these factors and that factors are do related to each other. I do not suppose that all of the factors are of the same weight but I am convinced that the more of these factors are considered when categorizing someone into a generation the more appropriate will the result will be.
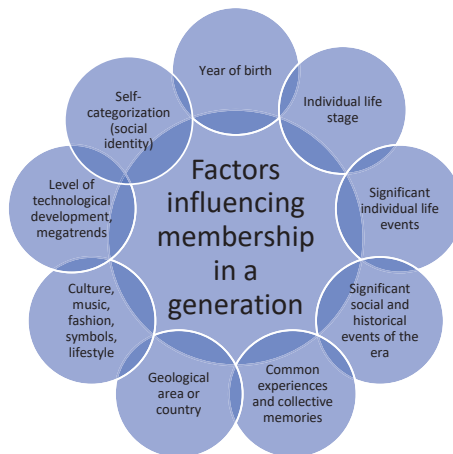

Figure 1: Factors influencing membership in a generation

Source: own compilation based on various sources

These results are important for further empirical research since today's organizations employ multiple generations and belonging to a generation may as well influence an individual's values and attitudes towards a public service organization and its leadership culture, as well as his career expectations.

1.1. Classification of generations

Most articles on generational research include classifications of generations based on year of birth but we could see above that the topic is too complex for this simple method of classification. It is also problematic because time intervals of birth years for the different generation groups are not uniform in literature. Examining many sources I came to the conclusion that there are abour 1-10 years overlapping between groups defined in articles. It is also questionable how can a person born 31th December be so much different from someone born 1th January the next year if we consider such strict year-based grouping. Some sources even mention generation cusps, like for example „Xennials" who can not really self-categorize themselves as members of either Generation X or the Millenial generation. (Taylor 2018)

Still in order to have a general classification based on biological age I designed the groups below for futher research (Table 1). My method was examining a significant amount of literature and considering the earlierst and latest start and end years of intervals then counting averages.

Table 1: Classification of generations based on year of birth

Generation	Year of birth	Age in 2020
Lost generation	1880-1899	
„Interbellum" generation	1900-1914	
Veterans	1915-1929	over 91 years old
Silent generation	1930-1944	90-76 years old
Baby Boomers	1945-1964	75-56 years old
Generation X	1965-1980	55-40 years old
Generation Y	1981-1995	39-25 years old
Generation Z	1996-2010	24-10 years old
Generation Alfa	2011-	less than 9 years old

Source: own compilation based on various sources

I have to outline that even a multisourced and systhesized classification like mine above may be 36agyar36zed36ty I it is based on the most widespread „western classifications" of generations, which is questionable in other countries of the world even inside Europe. A Czech study calls attention to that a single generation group may cover two very different historical eras in eastern 36agyar36z countries: for example Generation Y includes the last years of the communist regime and also the first independent years. Therefore some members of the Millenials may have very different memories depending on their year of birth was before or after 1989. (Fischerová 2018) However, I believe that not even the oldest members of the group of Generation Y in Hungary have significant memories of the communist era since most of their middle childhood and youth have already been spent after the change of regime. Researches also emphasize that young people entering the labour market in the early 1990s could fastly develop careers in Hungary but those who have only become firstly employed

around the global economic crisis in 2008 may have very different attitudes and expectations from work. (Hack-Handa – Pintér 2015)

There are other examples of specific generational distinctions that are related to a country's own economic and social circumstances. In some Chinese sources we can find three (red guard, modern realist, global materialist) or four generations connected to the era of social reform, the republic, the consolidation and the cultural revolution. (Sarraf 2019a) They often call the young generation „ken la zu", who are staying long with their parents having no family, which is caused by the unbalanced sex distribution as a result of the policy of one child per family in the country. In Japan young people who do not mind future and only live in the moment are called „yutori sedai" meaning „relaxed generation". Even in Europe young generations are called and grouped differently like for example in Greece, where the economic crisis was critical and many young people were unemployed or applied for low wages, people were called the „Generation of 500 euros" or in Spain they called them „Mileuristas". Significant events like the terrorist attacks of 2001 had serious effects on Norvegian young people who are therefore often called „Generasjon Alvor" (serious generation) or for example in Poland „Pokolenie JPII" is the name of the 37agyar37zed for which the death of polish pope John Paul II was a determining life event. (Lyons 2016)

1.2 Criticism of generational theories

Generational theories receive lots of criticism not only related to problematic classifications but also because of lack of scientific evidence. Some researchers declare that the phenomenon we sense as generational differences mostly derive from the longer life span of people and the faster changes and innovation in the world. We experience more changes during our lifetime than people did before and many generations live together in the same era. Changes affect all generations and everyone is an individual, which is of more importance than generational membership. We may make a mistake by trying to solve complex problems if we only try to explain them by generational differences. We would need better understanding by more detailed analyses, although too complex studies may not help us either. (Nemes 2019)

Some criticism focus on methodological problems of research since the conclusions mostly rely on cross-sectional studies that fail to distinguish between generational and age or period (life stage) effects. (Ng – Parry 2016) Longitudinal research would be the best way to analyse whether people belonging to the same generation stick to their values and attitudes even after 10-20 years of time or these values rather depend on their current age or life/family status. Very few of these studies are known which show that the difference of work values between generations statistically exists and these differences are not so significant. (Krahn – Galambos 2014) Constanza and colleagues examined more than 300 empirical studies on generational differences at the workplaces and they conluded that distinction between generations can not

be properly, scientifically justified and they proposed more complex reasons behind differences (Costanza 2012). Woodward and colleagues come to similar conclusions after a systematic source analysis of 50 empirical studies out of which only 17 found clear differences between generation groups and 31 studies found both differences and similarities (Woodward 2015).

Unfortunately, it is true that since the topic has become present in popular media more and more beliefs and stereotypes are available for reading instead of scientifically proved research. This is the reason why today even those kind of books are published for leaders that help them to manage generational prejudice. (Stewart et al 2017) For me these are all reasons why further empirical research of this topic is needed in order to answer critics and fix negative effects of wrong stereotypes spreading as public opinions.

2. Generation management

Differences between people's expectations from work have existed for long but technological development and other changes on the labour market are now 38agyar38zed38ty their effects. Cooperation of people of different generations is now crucial since they are working together at organizations so it is a challenge for HR professionals and leaders to properly motivate all of them and make them satisfied without risking the charge of age discrimination. Changes in organizational culture is sometimes unavoidable as well as introducing new methods for job design, knowledge management and so on, which is the reason today „generation management" is emerging to be a new HR function. (Dajnoki-Héder 2017). However it is important to note that generation management does not equal to age management, which is a field of human resource management that focuses especially on aging (senior) employees their expectations and their efficient employment. (Walker 2005)

There is no single definition for generation management in Hungarian literature. Summerizingly, generation management is defined as a management technique which considers generational differences and consciously builds on them when coordinating an organization's operations to achive goals. The tools of generation management are elements of strategic, integrated human resource management. (Belényesi et al 2019) This is a new HR function that serves the effective cooperation between different generation groups at the workplace, knowledge management as well as 38agyar38zed and retention of young people. (Szabó 2017)

Many researchers state that successful HR management is only possible if we identify and understand generational differences and their effects on organizational performance because this way we can effectively manage the relationships of employees and motivate higher performance. Leaders of the organization need to pay attention to generational diversity in different workforce characteristics and select the best management style. Employees of differens generations may prefer independence rather than autocratic leadership, while some

may need quick and frequent feedback. When it comes to learning some may prefer the traditional classrooms while some prefer e-learning. It is crucial to understand these differences and properly put together working groups in order to exploit their diversity, energies and increase creativity. (Sarraf 2019b)

According to Biggs and colleagues in order to achieve a kind of intergenerational 39agyar39, generational intelligence is a key issue. It is the competence that makes one able to act with understanding life status and social characteristics of others. It would be important to realise that our generational identity is a factor of our social interactions. (Biggs et al 2011) Most probably providing a floor for open and honest discussion on the topic inside an organization may already support better understanding of each other and unlearning wrong stereotypes regarding generations. (Lyons 2016)

A research from 2014-2015 of mtd Consulting Group defined a „Multigenerational Workplace Index" which evaluated 121 Hungarian organizations from the aspects of generational awareness, incentives for younger end elder, multigenerational and age management and generational diversity. Their conclusion was that the lack of generational awareness in HR policies may be a growing source of conflict in many organizations. 59% of the replying organizations do not consciously manage different generations and most of them do not analyse possible different generational needs, only a few of them dealt with the expectations of younger employees. On the other hand more than 90% of them found it a legitimate expectation from employees that the organization should consider their generational characteristics. (Tardos 2017)

Based on to the CRANET

[1] database Hungarian researchers did a comparative study that found many organizations having aimed strategies and programs especially for younger and elder employees. One of their conlcusions were that young people are in the focus of most organizations practices in those countries that are extremely struggling with aging population and HR systems in these countries do not seem to be conformed to the real age distribution of employees. (Balogh – Karolinyné 2018)

According to Statnické a possible implementation process of generational diversity management in organisations includes the following seven steps:

-   formation of generational diversity steering committee
-   provision of possible future scenarios
-   formulation of vision and mission

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[1]CRANET database: Cranfield Network on International Human Resource Management was launched in 1989 as a collaboration of over 40 universities and business schools from all around the world. They carry out a regular international comparative survey of organizational policies and practices in comparative Human Resource Management and provide results for the members.

- formation of strategy
- performance of the diversity audit
- definition of the organizational goals applaying generational diversity management
- generational diversity management implementation

(Statnické 2017)

3. Staff retention

Staff retention is defined in different ways in literature. Practically it means maintaining a moderate level of turnover in the organization, especially among the most valued employees and also managing a high level of congruence between organizational and individual values resulting in a high level of engagement. Retention may include strategies, policies and other instruments, activities aimed at making employees stay with the organization. Moreover, in a dynamic environment staff retention strategies and solutions may as well change from one day to another. (McKeown, 2002) To put it simple, staff retention is just doing different things to motivate colleagues to stay with the organization as long as possible. (Hom – Griffeth, 1995)

Scientific research of the topic roots from the time when researchers and psichologists began to 40agyar40z causes that influence employees interests regarding work and opportunities. Most of the literature from the early era focuses on influencing factors, rather than human resource management practices. (Bibi et al 2016) Before the 1970s it was normal to spend a lifetime working at a single employer. Rising number of employees changing their workplaces only appeared later, together with the term „staff turnover" and 40agyar40zed40t retention policies appeared as necessary management tools to solve related issues. Holistic approach of retention firstly rose in the 1980s when solutions were no longer limited to compensation management and financial incentives but considering other demands of employees ranked higher on the Maslow-pyramid. (McKeown, 2002) Until the new 40agyar40zed researchers began to investigate not only the reasons of staying but also the reasons for leaving the organizations and it was concluded that these reasons are often each others opposites. Recently, an employee (or talent) retention strategy implements various HR functions like onboarding, career-orientation and career-management, motivation, compensation and individual learning and development. By today we might as well consider „retention management" as a new HR function. (Dajnoki – Héder, 2017) Recent trends show us that some companies even employ „retention specialists" who support leaders in the organization in continuous performance improvement of talents and decreasing costs of turnover. New methods of employee engagement are evolving that focus on new needs and career expectations of employees, considering their current and changing life stages. Retention is getting more difficult considering tendencies like „gig economy" among younger employees, which means the preference of parallely run shorter work contracts or different

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projects and positions instead of traditional full-time employment in a single organization. (Singh 2019)

It is a fact that economic, social and technological changes have shifted traditional careers out of sight for younger generations. Researchers say that modern careers are protean since individuals are now taking charge of their own careers and develop their skills to improve employability and they also boundaryless meaning that they are increasingly mobile across organizations, geography and mindsets. It is observed by researchers that stability and job security is no longer the norm when it comes to careers (Ng – Parry 2016) Evidently, not only job satisfaction and organizational engagement are 41agyar41z now by researchers but new theories have appeared like for example job embeddedness. The scope of researches expanded to the relationships between the individual and the organization, the relations between turnover and organization performance, the influence of HR professionals on mass turnover and the influence of different HR practices on good and bad performance leavers. (Hausknecht et al 2017)

3.1 Factors influencing staff retention

In order to have a successful retention strategy, firstly it is important to investigate the reasons for leaving and staying, current morales and job satisfaction levels by exit interviews, „retention interviews" and 41agyar41zed surveys. (Armstrong, 2006) Any decisions and actions ought to be based on proper date achieved by for example the above mentioned methods instead of personal impressions or doing panic reactions. The most effective is to find out, to analyze and then to solve the root causes of decreasing employee satisfaction. (Branham 2005) Cloutier defines four strategic areas of development for successful retention:

- positive communication of the vision, values and operation policies of the organization to engage employees,
- transparent and inclusive organizational culture that supports diversity of staff,
- recruitment of staff who meet the demands of the offered job,
- offering training and self-development opportunities for the employees. (Cloutier et al 2015)

Christeen defined eight factors of retention: management, supporting work environment, social support and development opportunities, self-determination, compensation, proper workload and work-life balance. (Kossivi, 2016)

Based on reviewing literature I collected all possible factors influencing staff retention and grouped them into four:

- turnover intention (and its complex indicators)

- cultural, social and physical environment in the workplace
- HR management strategies, policies and tools applied
- personal characteristics

Figure 2 shows items of the four categories of influencing factors. These findings are to be used for my surveys, interviews and further empirical researches.
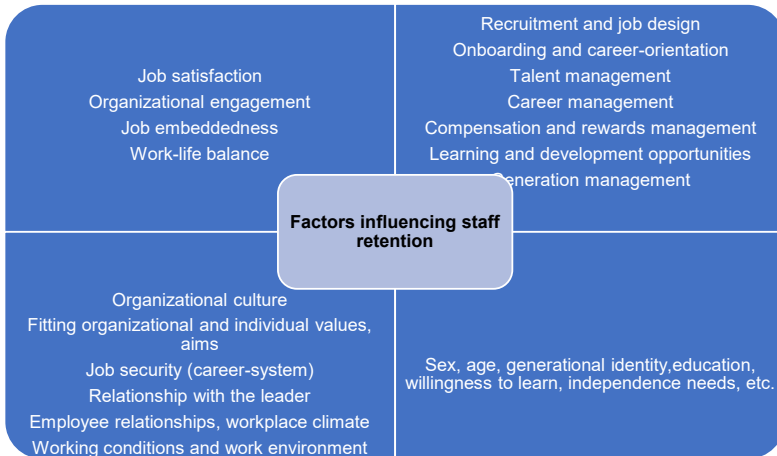
Recruitment and job design
Onboarding and career-orientation
Talent management
Career management
Compensation and rewards management
Learning and development opportunities
Generation management

Job satisfaction
Organizational engagement
Job embeddedness
Work-life balance

Factors influencing staff retention

Organizational culture
Fitting organizational and individual values, aims
Job security (career-system)
Relationship with the leader
Employee relationships, workplace climate
Working conditions and work environment

Sex, age, generational identity,education, willingness to learn, independence needs, etc.

Figure 2: Factors influencing staff retention
Source: own compilation based on various sources

3.2 Retention of public servants

Effective staff retention is important for practically every organization but it is especially crucial in public service, where most public organizations traditionally offer even life-term employment and expect serious engagement from professional public servants. In fact, the so-called career-based employment system of a country's civil service is kind of a special retention policy, which offers a secure and guaranteed employment as well as promotion and therefore stability for employees until their retirement, who choose public service as a profession. This might be an attractive factor for a certain target group of job seekers and career stability is still considered an advantage of public sector over private sector in a few countries (Krasna 2010). According to the Eurofound 5 survey on work conditions in the European union it seems like people employed in public administration feel more secure than those working in private sector companies. (Duran et al. 2013).

However, we have to declare that the traditional, purely career system no longer exists in 42agyar42z civil services anymore and comparative advantages of public service are

43agyar43zed43t decreasing as expectations of high performance and effectiveness of this sector are getting higher and higher and for example in most 43agyar43z countries civil servants can now be fired in case of poor performance. (Demmke – Moilanen 2012) The elements of the two traditional types of civil service employment systems (career-based and position-based) are being interchanged today creating „hybrid systems" in order to improve performance so the simple distinctions between the two are not appropriate anymore. Few countries still have largely career-based employment system but most member states are now mixing elements and include more position-based elements (open competition for job vacancies based on competencies, merit-based promotion, training is related to individual needs, etc.). (Kuperus – Rode, 2016)

Regarding staff retention in public administration it is also important to note that people who decide choose a career in public service might have different values from others. Researches show that looking for public professions are often motivated by a special sense of mission, the interest in the 43agyar43zed43ty and social value of tasks. It is an important factor for some people working in public sector to engage with the unique mission and values of an organization like ensuring the country's security, representing a country, helping or providing more effective services for citizens. (Krasna 2010)

4. Methodology of empirical research

I concluded an electronic survey among Hungarian public servants open from 23 January 2020 to 7 February 2020. I contacted heads of HR departments of 26 Hungarian public administration organizations including ministries and governmental offices all around the country, which employ over 500 public servants each. Out of about 40.000 officials employed at these organizations I received 1338 answers altogether. There was neither any obligation nor any remuneration for participation in this survey so all respondents were volunteers.

The true response rate of this sample is impossible to determine as the exact number of staff is confidential and it is changing day-to-day and also I did not have authority to directly contact officials, so my request was forwarded to the colleagues by the heads of each organization's head of HR department. Compared to previous surveys related to this topic among government officials I value the number of responses relatively high.

I also concluded almost 100 personal interviews with civil servants working at my own office asking them a set of fixed questions in order to extend my research with more qualitative data. These results are not included in this study because I am planning to include all my results only in my doctoral thesis.

5. Responders of my survey

According to my classification of generations based on biological age in this study (Table 1) 165 (12,3%) of responders were Baby Boomers, 743 (55,5%) of them belonged to Generation X, 412 (30,8%) of responders belonged to Generation Y and 18 (1,3%) of responders were Generation Z. 59,1% of responders had at least one child under the age of 18.

71,3% of responders were women and 25,2% were men, whereas 3,5% did not want to share their sex. 16,9% lived in the capital, 37,7% in a city with county rights, 25,4% lived in other cities and 17,3% of responders lived in villages. 84,6% had a bachelor's degree or higher and 13,3% had high school degree as highest education. Almost 90% worked in a governmental office, less than 5% worked in other public service institutions, while 4,5% did not answer this question. 80,3% of responders were employees (junior, senior),14% were middle managers and also 20 top managers answered the survey.

More than one third of responders had been working at the same organization for more than 10 years, 12,3% had been working there for 7-10 years, 21,3% for 4-6 years, 18,1% for 1-3 years and 10,8% for less than 1 year.

Most of the responders (almost exactly one third of them) had worked in SME or as self-employed before his or her current role, 26,4 % of responders had worked in bigger corporations before and 23,5% of them had already worked at a governmental office.

6. Results and discussion

According to the responders 85,6% of them could imagine a long-term (at least 5 years) employment in a Hungarian public administration organization and only 5,9% of responders do not seem to plan to work for that long (or to work at all) in public service. It was interesting to see that the non-response group for this question was quite high since 114 people did not want to share opinion about this issue.

I also asked for the longest period of time that they would spend with a single employer during their career in case the employer perfectly fits his or her expectations. It was 44agyar44zed that this question refers to the organization/employer itself and not spending time in a single position forever. The results were somewhat surprising for me since 58,4% of responders answered that they would even spend their whole career at that single employer if everything is alright. Of course it was a very theoretical question since we do not know if such an employer exits and some responders had already been over much of their careers. It would need further analysis to see about how many years are left of the careers of thos people who voted for the life-long stay at one employer.

More than 100 people said they would stay 16-20 years and more than 10% said that they would stay a maximum of 11-15 years. Almost 200 responders would only stay 7-10 years and surprisingly there are 87 people who would stay for between 1-6 years even if the employer perfectly suits their needs. Again it would need further analysis to see whether they are real „job-hoppers" or they are just close to retirement.

As for the most important three factors that would make them stay with so long at the employer 59% chose appropriate basic salary, 57,2% chose good relationship with colleagues and 42,5% chose job security and stability out of a list of 17 factors given for choice. The factors given in the survey were based on previous theoretical research detailed in the literature summary of this article. Other most voted factors were the following: good relationship with the manager and proper leadership culture (31,8%), challenging and creative tasks (17,3%), flexible work conditions like home office (16,4%), good other benefits like cafeteria (12,7%), effective work arrangements like balanced workload (12,3%) and recognition of excellent performance (10,3%). Only 64 responders out of all answered that the societal value of work was in the three most influencing factors of staying and very few responders chose for example ergonomic and modern work environment (17 votes), gaining international experiences (11 votes) and individual talent management or mentoring (5 answers). These results do not necessarily mean that these factors would not be important but they are definitely not in the three most important ones. The figure below compares the distributions of votes between factors among Generation Y respondents and all respondents.
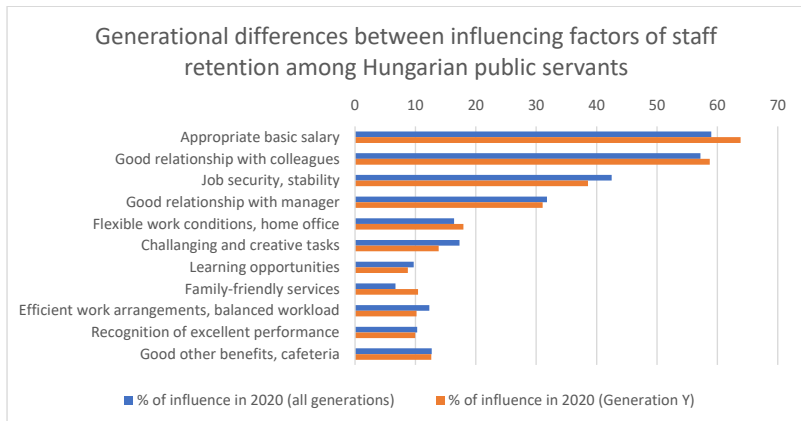

Figure 3: Generational differences between influencing factors of staff retention among Hungarian public servants
Source: own compilation from own survey results

Analysing the results more in depth it is notable that for the respondents who belong to Generation Y a few factors are slightly more important when it comes to long-term staying with the employer if we compare their answers to answers of all generations. These factors are basic salary, relationship with colleagues, flexible work conditions and family-friendly services. Almost all the other factors observed seem to be less important or very similarly important compared to the big whole (including themselves).

Unfortunately, I was not able to do a longitudinal research on this issue, which would provide the most valid answers regarding how influencing factors may change or not change over time and whether generations stick to their characteristics over time. In order to at least predict these changes I asked what public servants think about the three most important factors influencing their stay 10 years from now? It is important to note that 16,3% of responders answered that he or she is not going to work 10 years from now, so there was a necessary decrease in the number of votes for all answers to this question but still I assumed I could be able to identify tendencies in shifts of emphasis from the present status. In fact, the results were only slightly different regarding the most important factor: 2,4% less people chose appropriate basic salary giving it a little less priority and job security decreased by 3% as well. The most significant drop was in number of votes of good relationship with colleagues, which decreased by almost 17% and good relationship with the manager also dropped by 10%. Still, there were factors which received more votes than for the previous question. There was a remarkable shift of emphasis on to flexible work conditions (by 3,6%) and a slight shift of emphasis to recognition of excellent performance (1%) family-friendly services (1%) and good other benefits (0,9%).

If we compare answers of Generation Y to the who we can state that in 10 years of time family-friendly services (by 7,5%), flexible work conditions (by 4,6%) are predicted to become more important as well as job security, recognition of performance and other benefits, whereas the influence of salary or learning and development opportunities will not likely to change at all. The results would need further and more detailed analysis but we may suppose that these changes are more related to the development of life stages (Generation Y may plan to have children and family in 10 years of time) and this way some of the current differences that are often reffered to as generational differences may as well soften in time.
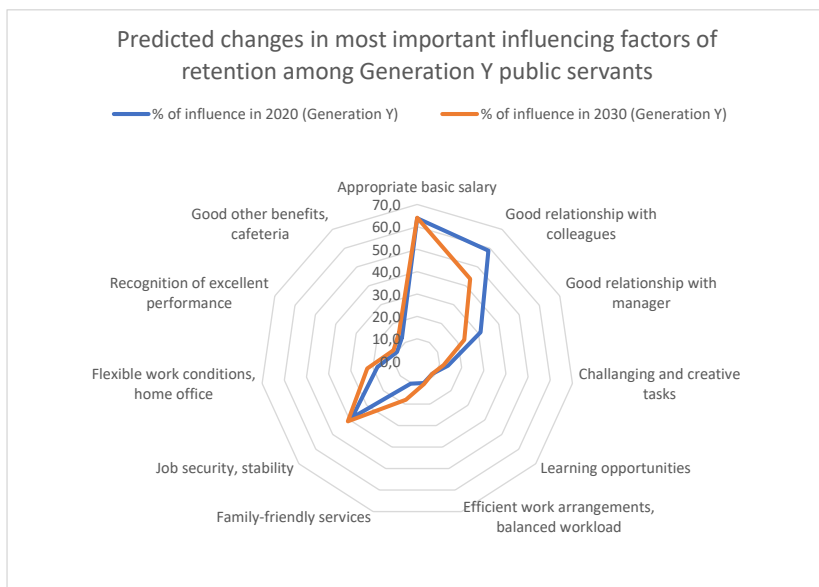
Figure 4: Predicted changes in most imported influencing factors of retention among Generation Y public servants

Source: own compilation based on own survey results

7. The profile of Generation Y public servants in Hungary

I had an open question on what are the first characteristics that come to mind regarding Generation Y. I received lots of text answers, which I decided to analyse by word counting to see which were the most commonly used adjectives and whether those were mostly positive or rather negative ones. My aim was to draw a kind of identity profile of Generation Y public servants in Hungary, which would includes the opinion they have about themselves and also the opinion of public servants, who belong to other generations.

Members of Y generation wrote altogether 3383 words out of which 85,84% were keywords and 14,16% were 1-2 lettered common words that I did not take into account. Later I also excluded lots of words with no relevant meaning, pronouns, dates, numbers. Finally I summed up the count of words with the same meaning but in different forms like „technology" and „technological" or „flexible" and „flexibility". Members of other generations wrote altogether 9767 words out of which 84,66% were keywords and I followed the same process as described above. The profile was put together from the most frequent words being grouped into characteristics and influencing concepts.

Table 2: Identity profile of Generation Y public servants in Hungary

How Generation Y is seen by members of other generations		How Generation Y see themselves	
Characteristics	**No. of words**	**Characteristics**	**No. of words**
Knowledge	125	Development	45
Digital	74	Digital	40
Fast, quick	73	New, novelty	33
Development	71	Fast, quick	32
Modern	59	Flexible, flexibility	29
Self-determination	48	Modern	28
New, novelty	48	Young	22
Young	42	Easy, easily	19
Late	42	Open, openness	16
Addict, addiction	41	Self-determination	16
Free, freedom	40	Practical	15
Flexible, flexibility	32	Knowledge	13
Practical	31	Mobile, mobility	12
Mobile, mobility	31	Impatiant, impatiance	11
Open, openness	29	Free, freedom	11
Self-confidence	29	Online	11
Easy, easily	28	Confident	7
Impatient, impatiance	28	Knowledge	7
Smart	27	Ambitious, ambition	6
Insane, insanity	25	Creative	6
Influencing concepts	**No. of words**	**Influencing concepts**	**No. of words**
Technology, techniques	230	Technology, techniques	120
Computer, computing	161	Computer, computing	38
Mobile phone, Smartphone, phone	92	Career	28
Career	76	Mobile,Smartphone, phone	25
IT	71	Internet	23
Internet	61	IT	20
Information	35	Learning	18
Learning	33	Consumer society	17
Aim, aims	27	Parent, parents	10
Relations, relationship	27	Information	5
Consumer society	25	Money	5

Source: own compilation from own survey results

An important conclusion of this profile is that members of Generation Y do not see themselves much differently than how others see them. Characteristics they found most important are almost the same only the order is a bit different. There is one significant difference, which is that other generations see knowledge as the most important characteristic of Generation Y whereas they do not consider that so significant (it was only the 12th most frequent word in that group). Digital, fast, flexible, modern, new, young, open, easy, self-determination are very often mentioned characteristics in both groups. We can observe that other generations mention more negative characteristics like „addiction", „insane" and „late", while Generation Y considers more positive words regarding themselves like "confident",

„ambitious" and „creative", which are not among the most mentioned adjectives by other generations. Among mostly mentioned concepts there are almost no differences. The most important ones are technology, computer, mobile phones, IT, internet, career and learning. Other generations find aims and relationships important regarding the young but Generation Y do not mention these that many times.

To summarize we can conclude that there are a few specific adjectives describing Generation Y public servants that everyone thinks of when it comes to this generation, even those who belong to the generation itself. Therefore a clear profile of Hungarian public servants can be sketched, which is available for further use for public service human resource management professionals and managers. More detailed results of this analysis is going to be published in my doctoral thesis.

Conclusions

Analysing the evolution of generational theories it is to be conclude that sharing a common birth year does not already mean that individuals also share a generation but there are many other determining factors of belonging to a generation. I synthesized all these determining factors including external and internal circumstances and characthenstics. Belonging to a generation may as well influence an individual's values and therefore attitudes towards a public service organization and its leadership culture, as well as his career expectations. However, generational theories receive lots of criticism for various methodological issues and the lack of clear scientific proof of generational differences and the topic is discussed a lot in popular media. I propose further empirical research of this topic in order to find possible answers to critics and fix negative effects of wrong stereotypes spreading as public opinions.

In order to have a successful retention strategy it is unavoidable to investigate the reasons for leaving and staying, current morales and job satisfaction levels of public servants, which are not commonly used practices in public organizations in spite of the fact that effective staff retention is crucial in public service where even life-term employement is expected from professional public servants. I synthesized factors influencing retention in four categories, which can be used for further research.

From my survey among I received 1338 responds from Hungarian public servants working in public administration organizations including ministries and governmental offices all around the country. I found a few specific adjectives describing Generation Y public servants that everyone thinks of this generation, even those who belong to the generation itself. I sketched a profile of Generation Y public servants in Hungary, which is available for further use for public service human resource management professionals and managers. Another

outcome of my survey was that retention management does not necessarily require methods to be introduced very specifically for Generation Y, since the most important factors that influence long-time stay at the organization are almost the same for other generations as well. Generational differences are likely to exist for example on the field of digitalization and other characteristics but regarding retention the differences rather seem to be age-based or consequences of different life stages and not generations.

I propose expanding flexibility of work at public service employment (supporting the recent changes that were introduced in the act of govermnmental administration for example the regulations on home-office) since flexible work conditions are predicted to become more important factor for all generations (especially Generation Y) in future engagement. Making work arrangements more flexible seem to be the only good direction for the regulatory framework and HR policies as well. Similarly, I propose expanding family-friendly services as well as the recognition of performance (fortunately both of them are already included in the current act of governmental administration). Proper basic salary is important for everyone and it is predicted that its importance will not decrease over time so it seems like it is not something affected by age or actual life stage of public servants.

The most important conclusion I would draw from my research is that generational approach should be introduced not only in the research of public service human resource management in Hungary but also in practice, in order to gain more empirical data and feedback from public servants on influencing factors of retention, to support more effective retention management and to better understand possible generational differences instead of relying on popular stereotypes and assumptions.

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