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## Generation Z in the Labour Market - Contestation or Adaptation?

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The main goal of the article is to identify the level of awareness of Z generation (representatives of the second-year students of master's studies of the University of Economics and Business in Wrocław) regarding the structure of demand for specific professions and specialties in the labor market and to identify factors that have a decisive impact on retaining young employees in the company.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The investigation involved the revision of relevant literature and conducting own research. The presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques and research tools. The authors conducted their research using a questionnaire, which contained closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria with a 4-point scale. The questionnaire was followed by a metric, enabling the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Then, as part of the adopted research methodology, the data analysis method was used. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical study. The empirical part is based on the results of the survey conducted in the first quarter of 2020 on the sample of 271 representatives.

**Findings:** The results showed that the youngest generation of employees aims for employment stability, they have an 'idea for themselves' that will allow them to meet the needs that are important to them. The findings should help managers in Polish companies not only understand young employees but also facilitate the orientation of the young Z's in the labor market in reaction to the existing working and employment conditions.

**Originality/Value:** The research results shall contribute to the debate on the kind of employees the young people from Generation Z shall become and whether and how they shall differ from representatives of previous generations. It should be noted that there is a difference between what Generation Z declares and what they really need. Paradoxically, despite the great openness of Generation Z to changing their workplace, the vast majority of them is also looking for the security of having it.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, labour market, HRM.

**JEL Classification:** M54, J21, J24.

**Paper type:** Research article.

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## 1. Introduction

The BB, X and Y generations of employees already functioning in the labor market get accompanied by the youngest cohort of employees representing generation Z. Many of them are still in the process of education, but increasing numbers of them are entering the labor market and starting their professional careers. Generation Z are the people born between 1990 and 2010 (Friedrich *et al.*, 2010; Bassiouni and Hackley, 2014; Lanier, 2017; Sanalan and Taşlıbeyaz, 2020).

There are more than 2 billion young people representing Generation Z worldwide. They make up about 30% of the world's total population – and are projected to make up about 27% of the workforce by 2025 (Koop, 2021). Generation Z is definitely less numerous than Generation Y in Poland, which affects the supply in the labor market.

The discussed generation, like the previous ones, does not live in isolation. Like the previous generational cohorts, Z's were born and entered adulthood in a specific social, economic and historical context (Bulut and Maraba, 2021). This context influences value systems, attitudes and views of young people, their behaviour in the labour market, as well as expectations towards their first employers.

Generation Z enters the labor market characterized by the lowest level of unemployment in the times of the free-market economy and completely different opportunities that were not available to previous generations. For example, they have more opportunities to combine education and work compared to Generation Y. This way, many young graduates have more professional experience than their predecessors. This can make young Z's feel quite confident in the labor market, which makes them even picky about their employers (Defratyka and Morawski, 2019).

On the other hand, paradoxically, the aforementioned certainty is accompanied by a series of fears and anxieties. The young people realize that a university degree is not enough to get a good job and that their advantage over peers will be determined by a set of advanced cognitive, social, emotional and digital competences desired by employers (Bughin *et al.*, 2018). They are aware of instability of employment in the labor market, of the fact that the employment is marked by precarization, and that their first steps in the labor market will rather consist in skillfully juggling many part-time jobs and jobs for which they have too high competence (Messyasz, 2021; Bessant, 2018).

It is very important for managers of increasingly generationally diverse human resources to gain knowledge about the next generations entering the labor market. It is vital for building the policy of attracting, but above all retaining these employees for longer in a given organization. With this in mind it seems valid to know about the orientation of the young Z's in the labor market situation, their reaction to the existing working and employment conditions (adaptive or constative), as well as the factors that they take into account while choosing their first employers.

The main goal of the article is to identify the level of awareness of Z generation representatives regarding the structure of demand for specific professions and specialties in the labor market and to identify factors that have a decisive impact on retaining young employees in the company.

The applied research methods are two-fold. The literature posed a theoretical foundation for undertaking own empirical research, in order to better understand and grasp the problem. In the theoretical part the applied method consisted in analyzing Polish and foreign literature. In the empirical part the authors used the results of the own survey.

The study was conducted in Q1 2020. The selection of the research sample was deliberate due to the authors' interest in the profile of people who are representatives of generation Z. The respondents were master's students of the Wrocław University of Economics just before graduation. Their opinions, declarations and awareness of the issues considered in the article, regarding the value of work and related expectations, can be treated as mature and thoughtful.

The authors of the article conducted a diagnostic survey using the authors' survey questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed among 344 respondents aged 21-25. Out of the returned 286, the number of 271 questionnaires were selected for the final analysis (n=271). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data shown in the article is based on the responses/declarations of the surveyed.

The sample was differentiated according to gender and the field of education associated with the completion of the first degree of undergraduate studies. Women accounted for 50.6% (n=137) and men for 49.4% (n=134) of the surveyed population, respectively. Taking education into account, nearly half of the respondents declared economic education - 49.3% (n = 133), every fourth of them technical - 24.4% (n = 66), respondents of other faculties constituted - 26.3% (n = 71)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>*This research is a continuation of the previous one on the approach to work of the Z generation, which were presented in the article "The value of work in the life of representatives of Generation Z – autotelic or instrumental (Chomątowska, Janiak-Rejno, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2021).*

## 2. Methodology

For the purposes of this article the following research questions were formulated:

*RQ 1: What is the level of awareness of Z generation representatives regarding the current structure of demand in the labor market?*

*RQ 2: Which factors determine to the greatest extent that young people stay in the organization for longer, and which are relatively less important?*

*RQ 3: What attitudes and behaviors of Z generation are characteristic of their activity in the labor market?*

*RQ 4: To what extent gender is a statistically significant criterion in the scope of the issues analyzed?*

Presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques and research tools. For the purposes of this article, an empirical, quantitative research method was used, which was a diagnostic survey using the surveying technique. The research tool was a questionnaire. It contained closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria with a 4-point scale<sup>6</sup>. The survey ended with a metric that enabled carrying out a socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Then, as part of the adopted research methodology, the data analysis method was used.

Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical evaluation. For each question, the compatibility of distribution was calculated with the chi-squared compatibility test. Subsequently, in order to determine the strength of discrimination of given answers against others within a given question (indication of those answers that are statistically dominant in comparison with others at the level of statistical significance  $p < 0.05$ ), CCPCA (*Centroid Class Principal Component Analysis*) and GPCA (*Gradient Class Principal Component Analysis*) were carried out (Topolski, 2020a; 2020b).

The CCPCA method is a variation of the classical principal component analysis. The difference between them is that the rotation of factors is made for quantitative data according to the centroid classes, and in the case of nominal data according to the distribution function of the conditional probability distribution for all variables occurring in the question under consideration. In GPCA analysis, in order to better determine the decision limit, the axis of rotation is optimized using the stochastic gradient method. The models used allowed to obtain consistent results.

## 3. Results

By examining the attitudes and behaviors adopted by representatives of generation Z as current or future participants in the labor market, the first question in the

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<sup>6</sup>The application of a 4-point scale was aimed to avoid the central tendency error.

questionnaire of the survey concerned their interest in this market. More than a half of them declared that they do not monitor the situation in the market on ongoing basis (52.4%). Analyzing the gender criterion in the obtained results, it is concluded that gender is not a statistically differentiating criterion ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.459$ ;  $p = 0.498$ ). The continuation of the above question was an attempt to identify the level of awareness of respondents regarding the current structure of demand for specific professions and specialties in the Polish and European labor markets.

Analyzing the results obtained in the context of the European labour market, it is found that more than a half of the respondents say that they "do not have" or "do not have at all" (43.9% of indications) knowledge in this area (11.1%). The results concerning the Polish labour market are slightly different. In this case, only every fifth respondent claimed having "rather no" (16.2% of indications) or "does not have at all" (4.4% of indications) of such knowledge. This may indicate the current interest of the surveyed participants primarily in the domestic market.

However, as in the first question addressed to the respondents, the criterion differentiating the surveyed population, which was gender, turned out to be statistically insignificant (respectively for the European market  $\text{Chi}^2 = 4.105$ ;  $p = 0.255$ ; for the Polish market  $\text{Chi}^2 = 3.471$ ;  $p = 0.325$ ).

Another multiple-choice question concerned the sources of information that respondents usually use when looking for knowledge about the situation in the labor market. Taking into account the analysis of the discriminatory power for the answers indicated in the question, it is stated that the respondents source information primarily from social networks (84.9%), from acquaintances, family, friends (77.5%) or rely on personal contacts in the workplace (68.3%). Discussion forums play a relatively smaller role in this respect - they are used only by every third respondent (32.8%), the regional press (27.3%) and specialist press (19.6%). The extent to which the examined person agrees with the indicated sources of information does not depend on gender statistically significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Chi-square test statistics of responses to the question: "Where do you get information about the situation in the labor market?" depending on the gender of the respondents.

Source of information	Chi <sup>2</sup> test statistics
social networks	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.742; p=0.076
discussion forums	Chi <sup>2</sup> =5.477; p=0.103
regional press (incl. on-line)	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.233; p=0.085
specialist press	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.747; p=0.095
acquaintances, family, friends	Chi <sup>2</sup> =7.772; p=0.121
contacts in my workplace	Chi <sup>2</sup> =8.654; p=0.154
other	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.233; p=0.072

**Source:** Own work based on conducted research.

Further questions concerned whether young people know the current requirements of employers and whether they have an understanding of the work and pay conditions offered by employers. Taking into account the adopted method of discriminatory power analysis, it is concluded that the respondents, regardless of gender, are in the vast majority aware of the current requirements of employers towards employees (86.4%;  $\text{Chi}^2=1.71$ ;  $p=0.635$ ), as well as have an understanding of the work and pay conditions currently offered by employers (75.6%  $\text{Chi}^2=6.743$ ;  $p=0.081$ ).

Continuing the above research thread, respondents were asked to respond to several statements regarding potential employers. Taking into account the adopted research methodology, it is stated that respondents most often at a statistically significant level agree with only two opinions, i.e., breaking legal standards in the area of employment completely discredits the employer, in relations with the employer one should be open in expressing one's opinions and expectations. As for the other statements, the respondents' opinions were more diverse (Table 2).

However, it is worth emphasizing the relatively high frequencies of indications "*I rather agree*" in relation to the other assessment criteria, which may indicate the lack of unambiguous opinions in the analyzed area. In addition, the majority of the youngest generation of employees is open to changing jobs, emphasizing that it is a prerequisite for professional development (the percentage of indications of the answer "*definitely and rather agree*" – 61.3%), which requires experience from several workplaces (70.8%). In their opinion, this is the natural course in the current conditions (83.4%).

Therefore, as this group of employees declares, they are not attached to the workplace, it is more important for them to gain experience (56.8%). They also allow the possibility of changing their place of residence due to work (69.3%), or even going abroad in search of the desired job (58.0%). Therefore, if they don't get what they care about most at work, they give it up (77.1% respectively). In view of the above, it is stated that work is only one of the factors conditioning the life of the young generation. This is a factor that they can manage themselves on ongoing basis, adapting it to their individual needs and expectations.

Despite the declared, relatively high openness of the youngest employees to changing their workplace, most of them are also looking for the security of having it. Nearly every fifth of them (19.2%) "*strongly agreed*" with the statement that employee development is possible only in conditions of employment stability, and almost every second "*rather agreed with it*" (46.5%).

The analysis of the above statements taking into account the criterion of gender did not distinguish any of them as statistically significantly differentiating the declarations of women and men.

**Table 2.** Response statistics and the Chi-square test (taking into account the gender of respondents) regarding the question: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements."

Statements		strongly agree	rather agree	rather disagree	strongly disagree	Chi <sup>2</sup> test statistics
Changing the workplace is a prerequisite for professional development	n	46	120	91	14	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.734 p=0.435
	%	17.0%	44.3%	33.6%	5.2%	
Changing the workplace is a natural course of things in modern conditions	n	88	138	39	6	Chi <sup>2</sup> =1.335 p=0.721
	%	32.5%	50.9%	14.4%	2.2%	
It is better to have a permanent job for a longer period of time	n	74	142	45	10	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.272 p=0.518
	%	27.3%	52.4%	16.6%	3.7%	
Professional development requires experience from several workplaces	n	78	113	66	13	Chi <sup>2</sup> =4.983 p=0.173
	%	28.9%	41.9%	24.4%	4.8%	
I allow the possibility of going abroad in search of the job I want	n	66	91	73	41	Chi <sup>2</sup> =1.765 p=0.623
	%	24.4%	33.6%	26.9%	15.1%	
I allow the possibility of changing the place of residence due to work	n	73	115	66	17	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.957 p=0.398
	%	26.9%	42.4%	24.4%	6.3%	
I'm not attached to the workplace, experience is more important to me	n	58	96	25	23	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.880 p=0.413
	%	21.4%	35.4%	34.7%	8.5%	
* Violation of legal standards in the field of employment completely discredits the employer	n	166	73	25	7	Chi <sup>2</sup> =1.415 p=0.702
	%	61.3%	26.9%	9.2%	2.6%	
Even a trivial failure of the employer to comply with labour law means that you should look for another workplace	n	51	105	90	25	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.093 p=0.553
	%	18.8%	38.7%	33.2%	9.2%	
Employee development is possible only in conditions of stability of employment	n	52	126	74	19	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.634 p=0.452
	%	19.2%	46.5%	27.3%	7.0%	
If I don't get what I care about most at work, I give it up	n	70	139	57	5	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.336 p=0.506
	%	25.8%	51.3%	21.0%	1.8%	
* In relations with the employer, you should be open in expressing your opinions and expectations	n	105	142	19	5	Chi <sup>2</sup> =3.072 p=0.381
	%	38.7%	52.4%	7.0%	1.8%	

**Note** \* - statistically significant variable ( $p < 0.05$ ) is distinguished by its distributive against other not marked responses.

**Source:** Own work based on conducted research.

Aiming for employment stability by the youngest generation of employees was reflected in the next question about the most desirable form of employment.

Considering the adopted method of analyzing the results obtained, it turned out to be an *employment contract for an indefinite period* (Table 3). Other forms of employment included in the survey such as a *fixed-term employment contract*, a *commission contract / specific task contract* or even *self-employment* are definitely less attractive for the respondents.

**Table 3.** Response statistics and the Chi-square test (taking into account the gender of respondents) regarding the statement: „My most preferable form of employment is:”

Form of employment		yes	rather yes	rather not	not	Chi <sup>2</sup> test statistics
* <i>employment contract for an indefinite period</i>	n	198	52	14	7	Chi <sup>2</sup> =3.862 p=0.277
	%	73.1%	19.2%	5.2%	2.6%	
<i>fixed-term employment contract</i>	n	37	97	80	54	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.325 p=0.097
	%	13.8%	36.2%	29.9%	20.1%	
<i>commission / specific task contract</i>	n	26	30	81	132	Chi <sup>2</sup> =8.492 p=0.037
	%	9.7%	11.2%	30.1%	49.1%	
<i>self-employment</i>	n	100	57	50	62	Chi <sup>2</sup> =10.015 p=0.018
	%	37.2%	21.2%	18.6%	23.0%	

**Note** \* - statistically significant variable ( $p < 0.05$ ) is distinguished by its distributive against other not marked responses.

**Source:** Own work based on conducted research.

The commission / specific task contract is the preferable form of employment with statistical significance ( $\text{Chi}^2=8.492$ ;  $p=0.037$ ) more often in men (27.6%) than in women (14.10%). Additionally, self-employment is indicated as an appropriate form of employment ( $\text{Chi}^2=10.015$ ;  $p=0.018$ ) significantly more often in men (67.1%) than in women (49.6%).

The last aspect of the research was to identify factors determining the potential length of work of the youngest employee in a given company. According to the respondents, the length of cooperation with a potential employer significantly depends on, satisfactory earnings adequate to competences and the results of work, opportunities for personal development, good atmosphere at work and more competitive job offers (Table 4). Analyzing the above factors, against the gender criterion, it is found that men significantly ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 9.589$ ;  $p = 0.022$ ) more often (42.1%) than women (24.8%) declare: *I will work until the company resigns from me.*

#### 4. Discussion

Generally, the young generation has a relatively low level of awareness of the current structure of demand in the labour market. While they relatively poorly monitor what is happening in the market, they have sufficient knowledge in the field of professions and specialties desired by employers.

**Table 4.** Response statistics and the Chi-square test (taking into account the gender of respondents) regarding the statement: „How long I will work in the company depends on:”

Factors		yes	rather yes	rather not	not	Chi <sup>2</sup> test statistics
Employment stability – employment contract for unspecified period of time	n	89	95	72	15	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.565; p=0.087
	%	32.8%	35.1%	26.6%	5.5%	
* Satisfactory earnings adequate to competences and the results of work	n	187	77	7	0	Chi <sup>2</sup> =3.71; p=0.156
	%	69.0%	28.4%	2.6%	0.0%	
* Opportunities for personal development	n	138	111	21	1	Chi <sup>2</sup> =2.412; p=0.491
	%	50.9%	41.0%	7.7%	0.4%	
until the company resigns from me	n	33	57	96	84	Chi <sup>2</sup> =9.589; p=0.022
	%	12.2%	21.1%	35.6%	31.1%	
* Good atmosphere at work	n	134	110	24	3	Chi <sup>2</sup> =5.542; p=0.136
	%	49.4%	40.6%	8.9%	1.1%	
* More competitive job offers	n	139	111	20	1	Chi <sup>2</sup> =3.208; p=0.361
	%	51.3%	41.0%	7.4%	0.4%	

**Note** \* - statistically significant variable ( $p < 0.05$ ) is distinguished by its distributive against other not marked responses.

**Source:** Own work based on conducted research.

However, their interest in this area concerns the Polish labor market only. The level of interest in the European market is much lower. The reasons for this situation can be sought in the pandemic that has lasted for over two years and the associated unpredictability of changes that are currently taking place and will continue to take place in the labor market around the world, putting it under a big question mark. In view of the above, young employees consciously redirected their attention to the domestic labour market, in which, as the research has shown, they have an understanding of both working conditions and the remuneration offered.

Young employees seek information on the current situation in the labor market, and especially on the demand for work there, primarily from social networks, acquaintances, family and friends, as well as their personal contacts obtained in the workplace.

The representatives of generation Z, as confirmed by the authors' research, can be characterized by their great openness in expressing opinions and expectations towards potential employers. What discredits the employer in their eyes is the abuse and violation of legal norms in the area of employment. In addition, according to the research by Firstup company, the youngest employees are skeptical of employers and have limited trust in them. Such a behavior has its roots in the period of adolescence of this generation in times of high disinformation, which they encountered in social media so popular among them. This accompanying skepticism explains their potential caution in the workplace. They are afraid that they will be exploited and that their work will not be important.

Generation Z wants to be convinced that their time and effort put into work are important for the employer. According to a study by Gallup State of the American Workforce, only four out of ten people feel that their work is important. Furthermore, only three out of ten people agree that they have someone at work who supports their development. Authenticity is very important for Generation Z.

Their opinions and suggestions should be listened and appreciated in the workplace. In contact with their employer, they expect responsible, transparent, true and open communication. The youngest employees will appreciate the delivery of information directly to their mobile devices (Gen Z in the workplace..., 2020).

Moreover, they prefer to work in an environment that provides participation, flexibility, collaboration and partnership.

Another aspect that distinguishes this generation in the context of its behaviour in the labour market is the lack of attachment to one employer, which clearly distinguishes this from older generations. It is definitely more important for them to gain experience, even at the expense of changing their place of residence or even going abroad after the pandemic. To sum up, the youngest generation is focused on meeting their own needs and expectations also in the workplace.

This is also confirmed by research conducted in Germany, on the basis of which it is stated that while Generation Z seems to be committed and motivated to work, it is important that they want to work primarily for their professional success, while maintaining a work-life balance (Böhlich and Axmann, 2020). They do not care about longer work in a given company or even industry. If they don't get what they care about most at work, they will certainly give it up. How long they will work with a potential employer depends on many factors.

Lack of the desired remuneration (as shown by PWC research, the financial expectations of young people have increased compared to, for example, last year), opportunities for personal development, a friendly atmosphere at work will result in a change of employer. As they underline, they can do various jobs, but preferably those that provide them with a lot of independence.

Paradoxically, despite the great openness of Generation Z to changing their workplace, the vast majority of them are also looking for the security of having it. This is also confirmed by the authors' research, which proves that the most desirable form of employment is an employment contract for an indefinite period. Similar conclusions result from PWC research, where this form of employment is expected by nearly 3/4 of the young people - in such a turbulent world, the need for job security is growing (Young Poles..., 2021).

The above confirms the general characteristics of the representatives of generation Z, which in the literature on the subject is often presented as uncertain, susceptible to

stress and poorly coping in difficult and crisis situations (Gałaj, 2014; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomałowska, 2016a; 2016b; Wiktorowicz *et al.*, 2016).

Based on the conducted research, it is also concluded that in the scope of the analyzed issues, gender did not turn out to be a statistically significantly differentiating criterion.

## 5. Conclusion

The situation of young people in the labour market results from many different factors, demographic, educational, economic and social. Unfortunately, these are increasingly complex and difficult to predict. The current labor market undergoes numerous turbulences e.g., due to the pandemic and does not "pamper" the inexperienced Z's.

Furthermore, there is no effective information flow between educational institutions and employers and an efficient monitoring system providing labour market participants with information relevant to them. The market is becoming less and less transparent (Sulich, 2016).

Such a market requires even the youngest candidates to have adequate experience and continuously improve competences. This means that young people will face more and more requirements regarding active shaping of their lives, planning for the future and reacting to what the market can offer (Wyn and Woodmann, 2007). It seems that in response to the above, more adaptive behaviors than contestations are observed among the young. Z's mostly accept the existing conditions and skillfully adapt to them.

Importantly, in this uncertain and increasingly competitive labor market, they have 'an idea for themselves' that will allow them to meet the needs that are important to them. The most desirable attitude seems to be the entrepreneurial personality (entrepreneurial self, independent entrepreneur), understood as a project of "inventing oneself", in which people increasingly behave like companies with consistent brands in an increasingly uncertain and competitive labor market (Beck, 2002; Kelly, 2006).

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