

MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS OF REMOTE WORKING – A GENERATION Z PERSPECTIVE

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Purpose: This article aims to present the results of a survey on young people's views on remote working concerning selected aspects of motivation.

Design/methodology/approach: Many employees remember the Covid-19 pandemic period as a forced shift to remote work and a significant experience with all its advantages and disadvantages. After many months of operating in a new professional reality, employers and employees got used to working under new conditions. Still, more importantly, this period marked a new trend in the labour market by opening institutions to this way of working. This issue was addressed in a 2021/2022 student survey. Its main objective was to explore the relationship between young people's remote learning experiences and their preference for remote working. The data were analysed using the STATISTICA software, and the Kruskal-Wallis rank ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U and Pearson's chi-square tests were applied.

Findings: The results show that remote working is becoming increasingly important and that hybrid work is recommended, regardless of whether the demotivating aspects of remote working are known or perceived.

Practical implication: When analysing the percentage distribution of responses to individual questions, it can be seen that respondents' answers on the motivational or demotivational aspects of remote working were mainly in line with the literature. However, an in-depth analysis that considers the significance tests of the differences between the individual independent variables requires a more thorough look at the results obtained.

Originality/value: As Generation Z is entering the labour market it is important information for future employers, as it will be difficult to build a message for this generation that will encourage future employees to work stationary based on rational premises regarding the advantages and disadvantages of remote or hybrid work.

Keywords: Generation Z, remote work, motivation.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

During the pandemic, most companies switched some employees to remote work, mainly without technical, organisational or social preparation. Before the lockdown, remote working was treated as a ‘premium benefit’, aimed at a specific group of professionals and managers, to be used occasionally or in exceptional circumstances. At the time, changing the mindset about remote working seemed impossible. Entrepreneurs themselves repeatedly pointed out the legislative, technical and organisational barriers to implementing this form of work. Spring 2020 led to a real revolution in this area; the need to stay home and isolate led to a massive and rapid technological change. From the first months of the pandemic, remote work became the norm wherever it could be implemented. Employers, protecting the physical health of their employees and fighting for the survival of their organisations, adopted this organisational solution without fully understanding the consequences for mental health and intellectual performance, exposing employees to overload and exhaustion, threatening their well-being, efficiency and productivity (Villa, 2021, p. 15). The advantages and disadvantages of remote working have already been widely analysed and highlighted in the literature. Still, such a massive application of this form of work has never happened before and has revealed the issue’s complexity. Remote working requires many problems to be solved, and many questions to be answered, both on the part of the organisation, the employees and the managers, as this group is mainly responsible for implementing and coordinating remote working solutions. An interesting thread in the debate on this issue is the motivational aspects of the employees. This issue was also addressed in a 2021/2022 student survey. Its main objective was to explore the relationship between young people’s remote learning experiences and their preference for remote working. On the other hand, this article aims to present their views in conjunction with an analysis of selected aspects of motivation.

2. Generation Z’s attitudes towards remote working

There is still a lively debate in the literature regarding the validity and appropriateness of grouping employees by age and the very definition of the term generation. Hence, different authors mention different classifications of generational segmentation concerning the question under analysis (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Bencsik et al., 2016; Bencsik, Machova, 2016; Goh, Lee, 2018; Kirchmayer, Fratricova, 2018; Dries et al., 2008, Lazanyi, Bilan, 2017; Bejtkovsky, 2016; Hejnova, 2015; Cichobłaziński, 2022). The most common division in the literature assumes that the youngest generation operating in the labour market is Generation Z, which includes people born after 1995. While researchers sometimes include those born in

1990, other approaches include only those born in 2000 and later. The generation preceding Z is referred to as Y. It is made up of people born between 1980 and 1994, generation X comprises people born between 1965 and 1979 and the Baby Boomers are the post-war generation born between 1946 and 1964. Despite the academic debate about the validity of these classifications, however, it is an objective fact that today's workplaces are characterised by people of different ages, with different perceptions of certain values and experiences of historical, economic, technological and social change.

By analysing reports and studies (Dolot, 2018; Duffy, 2018; Hijzen, Menyhert, 2016; Lazanyi, Bilan, 2017; Generation Y...; Lyons et al., 2017; O'Boyle et al., 2017; OECD, 2014; Robak, 2017; Singh, Dangmei, 2016; Tulgan, 2013; Zwart, Baker, 2018) on the organisational behaviour of younger workers - representatives of generations Y and Z – it is possible to draw some synthesis from the authors' findings. In doing so, it should be noted that there seem to be the fewest differences between the two generations mentioned. Generation Y is, in a sense, the link between the 'analogue' world as we know it before the 1900s and 2000s and the modern technology-based world of today. In the light of the publications cited, the two generations have in common a strong attachment, even dependence, on modern information technologies and their tools.

Literature studies on remote working indicate a wide range of terminology on the subject (Slazak, 2012, p. 220; Nilles, 2003, p. 21; Pyöriä, 2011). This leads to difficulties in comparing research findings. In the reality of Polish companies, the term 'remote work' was somewhat offensive. In Polish labour legislation, only telework was and still is used (Krzyżanowska, 2020) (at the end of 2022, there is still talk of a draft law regulating only remote work). However, it should be noted that under the current special law provisions, the employer has the right to delegate an employee to work remotely, but it is not a form of work available on request (Cichobłaziński, 2022).

Villa (2021, pp. 12-13) offers an exciting perspective on the topic analysed, focusing his reflections on the term 'smart working', using it to refer to work done away from the office. Smart working is the result of an agreement between employer and employee; it concerns the optimisation of workstations, the voluntary delegation of responsibility and authority, the renunciation of control and classical supervision during work, and the ability to self-motivate and self-organise work.

Comparing the situation of the collective experience of remote working during the pandemic to the concept of smart working, it should be noted that this situation, firstly, was not the result of a decision by employees. Still, a necessity linked to the regulation, according to which the employer directed the employee to perform tasks from home. Secondly, it highlighted all the disadvantages of remote working:

- the boundary between home life and work life became blurred,
- problems of exclusion or voluntarily placing oneself outside the professional community have emerged,

- problems of misaddressed productivity have increased,
- participation and involvement decreased with physical distance,
- there was a work overload, so-called digital piecework,
- additional reporting and control procedures were introduced to replace direct managerial oversight,
- excessive focus on technical and formal aspects of work, depriving it of meaning and context, etc.

However, this way of working and learning (which was almost inaccessible before the pandemic) has also offered some positive aspects, especially for young people:

- accelerated digital literacy,
- skills development and the opportunity to make extensive use of digital tools as a natural environment, which has given them an edge in their new work situation,
- convenience and freedom to perform tasks,
- savings in commuting time and costs associated with working away from home,
- inability to directly supervise the employee.

It seems interesting that after the lockdown, employers mainly stated that working this way brings more losses than benefits. Remote work or working in a so-called hybrid system became more popular, especially among Generation Z workers. As part of this model, some organisations give employees the freedom to choose where they work; others determine the proportion of home and office work, while others organise work by dividing teams (Tarnawska, 2020). However, employers state that remote work affects the impact of existing motivational systems, leads to the loss of social ties, the so-called ‘social glue’, and significantly weakens the impact of non-material incentives, and to some extent, the effect of material ones (Czarnecka, Słocińska, 2016).

3. Methodology

The research results presented in the study are part of a quantitative survey conducted among young people (Generation Z and Generation Y) in late 2021/early 2022. The study presents an excerpt from the findings on selected aspects of motivation in the context of remote working.

The study was conducted using quantitative research methods, employing a survey technique. The technique was chosen due to the possibility of direct contact with the respondent. The survey covered young people (representatives of generations Z and Y) studying at various faculties and from the Silesian Voivodeship. For this group of educated young people,

their professional skills make it possible to use forms of remote working or hybrid work in the future.

The research tool used was a standardised questionnaire consisting of closed statements. A Likert scale was used for responses (Babbie, 2004, p. 192). The research tool (questionnaire) is authoritative and was formulated by members of the research team - employees of the Department of Applied Sociology and Human Resource Management at the Faculty of Management of the Czestochowa University of Technology. The questionnaire was validated (Cronbach, 1995; Czakon, 2014) using Cronbach's Alpha index, which confirmed the internal consistency of the tool ($\alpha = 0.9338$).

The STATISTICA programme was used to process the results of the study. Non-parametric tests were used to assess the significance of differences in analysed variables: Mann-Whitney U test (UMW), Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA test (AKW), and the Chi-square test. The publication of A. Stanisiz (2006, pp. 369-391) was used to analyse the statistics obtained. Several statistical hypotheses were adopted to analyse the study results regarding the presence of significant differences in respondents' statements due to their characteristics. Only statistically significant relationships will be presented in the study.

4. Findings

A total of 226 students took part in the survey. According to the criteria indicated earlier for dividing by generation, the distribution of respondents in the study group is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of the study group according to Generation Z definition categories

	Born in 1990 and after %	Born in 1995 and after %	Born in 2000 and after %
Generation Z	89.82	83.19	29.20
Others	10.18	16.81	70.80
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: survey results.

Since the most common distinction made between generations in the literature shows 1995 or 1990 as the year in which Generation Z can be mentioned, it is assumed that Z is the dominant demographic group in the study group in the research results.

50.44% of the respondents were female and 48.23% male (3 persons - 1.33% did not indicate their gender). 86.72% of the respondents indicated they had experience with remote learning, while 12.83% had no experience (1 person did not comment). Concerning work experience, the majority of respondents - 86.28% confirmed having such experience, while 13.27% negated having such experience (1 person did not indicate anything). 48.67% of the respondents had the experience of working remotely, while 50.88% had no experience of

this type of work (1 person did not indicate anything). When asked which form of work they would prefer in the future, respondents most often chose a combined form of work - 50.00% - followed by on-site work 35.40%, and remote work was selected by only 12.39% of respondents (2.21% did not comment on this question). Concerning the issue analysed in the study, a group of indicators was selected that represent respondents' opinions on the motivational aspects of remote work:

- A. Not conducive to maintaining adequate work readiness.
- B. There are various 'distractions' (barking dog, children, train noise, etc.).
- C. Gives greater freedom/independence.
- D. Allows better concentration on work.
- E. Is mainly based on self-motivation.
- F. Makes it more difficult for employees to motivate each other.
- G. Negatively affects earnings.
- H. Makes it difficult to evaluate employees fairly.

The indicators presented were analysed in terms of the variation in respondents' statements in relation to independent variables such as:

- I. age;
- II. gender
- III. distance learning experience
- IV. work experience
- V. work experience in remote work; VI. with work experience in distance work;
- VI. preferred form of work in the future (stationary, hybrid, remote).

Respondents' answers were distributed as follows regarding indicators related to specific aspects of motivation (Table 2).

Table 2.

Percentage distributions of responses in relation to individual indicators

Indicators	Answers %						total
	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
A	12.39	14.60	26.99	22.57	17.70	5.75	100
B	5.31	6.64	11.95	28.76	42.92	4.42	100
C	2.65	3.10	11.50	31.86	47.79	3.10	100
D	12.39	15.49	29.20	19.47	19.03	4.42	100
E	0.88	3.98	11.95	32.74	45.58	4.87	100
F	4.87	13.27	23.01	24.34	29.20	5.31	100
G	24.78	18.14	31.86	7.52	4.87	12.83	100
H	8.41	12.89	23.01	26.11	20.35	9.29	100

1-strongly disagree; 2-somewhat disagree; 3-neither agree nor disagree; 4-somewhat agree; 5-strongly agree.

Source: survey results.

Non-parametric tests were used to assess the significance of differences between the variables analysed. The distribution of results is presented in Table 3 - the table shows only statistically significant differences, which allows us to reject the null hypothesis H0 that there

are no differences due to the grouping variable, and to accept the alternative hypothesis H1 that there are such differences.

Table 3.

Statistical test results for independent variables and selected indicators

Indicators AKW/UMW test at the assumed significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Independent variables					
	I	II UMW	III	IV UMW	V	VI AKW
A				p = 0.0466		p = 0.0001
B				p = 0.0319		p = 0.004
C						p = 0.0019
D						p = 0
E		p = 0.0212				
F					p = 0.0369	
G						p = 0.0033
H						

UMW - Mann-Whitney U test; AKW - Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA test.

Source : survey results.

When asked for their opinion on whether remote working prevents adequate work readiness, the majority of respondents (40.27%) confirm the existence of such a problem; it should be noted that 26.99% of respondents hold the opposite view. The answers to this question differ according to having professional experience and the preferred way of working in the future. Among those with no work experience, the proportion agreeing or disagreeing was evenly distributed, while the largest group, 36.67%, could not determine their opinion in this area. Concerning those with work experience, 43.08% of respondents agreed with the statement that remote working is not conducive to maintaining work readiness, with 27.18% disagreeing. Among those who preferred stationary work, the group in whose opinion remote working is not conducive to sustaining work readiness prevailed (57.50%). With regard to those who prefer remote or hybrid working in the future, no particular pattern was observed.

The vast majority of respondents (71.68%) confirmed that remote working is associated with various types of distractions. Here, respondents' answers were similarly differentiated by their work experience and preferred future working style. Those with work experience mostly (75.39%) agreed that it is more challenging to fight distractions when working remotely. Still, a similar pattern, although not as significant, was observed among those without work experience. As with the previous indicator, only the preference for doing stationary work in the future significantly conditioned the respondents' responses, confirming increased concentration difficulties in remote working situations.

Regarding the statement that remote working gives greater freedom and independence, 79.65% of respondents agree. For this indicator, statistically significant differences in responses were observed as to which type of work they prefer in the future. 85.71% of those who prefer remote working in the future, 87.61% of those who prefer hybrid working and 65% of those who prefer stationary working agree with the analysed statement.

Respondents were also asked whether they think remote working allows them to concentrate more on their work. 38.5% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 27.88% disagreed. These opinions depend on the type of work preferred in the future, i.e. those who prefer working in a stationary position mostly disagree with the statement analysed (50%). In contrast, those who prefer remote or hybrid work confirm that remote work favours concentration on work (46.43% and 49.56% respectively).

Another indicator is that remote working is mainly based on self-motivation. A whole 78.32% of respondents agree with this statement. Interestingly, this indicator depends on gender. Women are much more in agreement with the statement (84.21%) than men (71.56%).

Respondents were then asked whether remote working makes it difficult for employees to motivate each other. The majority, 53.54%, agreed with this statement. Responses were influenced by remote working experience. Those without such experience were much more likely to agree with the analysed statement (61.74%) than those with remote working experience (45.46%).

Another indicator referred to whether remote working negatively affects earnings. The majority of respondents (42.9%) disagreed with this statement. Their opinions were conditioned by their preferred form of work in the future. Those favouring the form of remote or hybrid work strongly disagree with this statement, while respondents preferring remote work are mostly indifferent.

The last indicator examined is related to the statement that remote working hinders the process of fairly evaluating employees. Most respondents agreed with this statement (46.46%); however, there was no difference in opinion according to any of the independent variables analysed.

5. Discussion

When analysing the percentage distribution of responses to individual questions, it can be seen that respondents' answers on the motivational or demotivational aspects of remote working were mainly in line with the literature. However, an in-depth analysis that considers the significance tests of the differences between the individual independent variables requires a more thorough look at the results obtained.

An in-depth analysis of the issues at stake should begin by noting that, contrary to the expectations of the researchers designing the survey, the remote learning experience had no impact on respondents' opinions on remote working. Nor did the experience impact their preferred form of work in the future. This leads to two speculations: the students surveyed had already done some work while studying remotely, which influenced their opinions to a greater extent, or the respondents separated the experience of learning remotely from working

remotely. However, both activities relied on similar technological solutions and could follow a similar format. Job preferences were much more influenced by having work experience (Chi-square NW $p = 0.01879$, $\alpha = 0.05$; Chi-square Pearson $p = 0.00281$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and having remote working experience (Chi-square NW $p = 0.00704$, $\alpha = 0.05$; Chi-square Pearson $p = 0.01079$, $\alpha = 0.05$). This is an important consideration as the preference for the future form of work - remote, hybrid or stationary - determines the answers to the questions on motivation. It seems that respondents can consciously analyse the motivating and demotivating aspects of remote working and, regardless of their colloquial or professional knowledge of the subject, choose a particular form of work, considering that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. In turn, their attitude to a specific form of work influences their evaluation of selected motivational aspects. A particular exception to this is the indicator concerning self-motivation as a critical aspect of remote working concerning which women seem to be somewhat more aware than men. This may be because when working from home and performing a great deal of housework, they have to constantly mobilise themselves to focus on work tasks. It seems that the demotivating aspects of remote working mentioned in the literature are not significant for most of the young people surveyed, perhaps due to the characteristics of the group studied. They are mostly young people without personal commitments, highlighting the disadvantages of remote working. In addition, they may associate remote working with a form of work that is least disruptive to their current lifestyles, where they already spend a large part of their time on virtual activities. However, it may come as a surprise that the most favoured form of work is hybrid work, which is a compromise between the interests of employees and employers, trying to balance the negative aspects of fixed and fully remote work.

6. Conclusions

The limitations of the study are primarily related to the selection of the sample. It seems that extending the study group to the other two generations could give greater insight into the specificity of generation Z with regard to remote work. The results of the presented research suggest that among the representatives of generation Z, supporters of remote work will choose it because it is the closest form of work to them - trivializing "we like the songs we already know best". It is important information for future employers, as it will be difficult to build a message for this generation that will encourage future employees to work stationary based on rational premises regarding the advantages and disadvantages of remote or hybrid work. Due to its topicality and range of occurrence, the problem should, in the opinion of the author, continue to be researched and developed.

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