

## WORK EXPECTATIONS ON THE CONTEMPORARY LABOR MARKET FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN – GENERATIONAL APPROACH

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to identify expectations of women active in the labor market from the generation perspective (Generations X, Y, Z).

**Design/methodology/approach:** The presented research comprises results of pilot studies carried out among women in active employment in the contemporary labor market representing the following generations: X, Y and Z, and forms part of a larger research project. The pilot study used an original online survey questionnaire (CAWI) made available to respondents via the survio.com portal. The analyzes were performed using Statistica version 14.0.

**Findings:** The research shows that there exist differences in terms of expectations regarding work among women. The older generation of women focuses on keeping their current jobs, while the younger generations (Y, Z) focus on finding their own professional path. The research shows how much the salary, the type of contract and benefits offered by employers are important among employees, no matter to which generation they belong.

**Research limitations/implications:** The results presented in this paper comprise data collected during pilot studies. They are a contribution to further research in the presented area.

**Practical implications:** The research shows that employers need to develop personalized job offers for specific groups of employees (taking into account their generational affiliation, seniority, experience, stage of professional development).

**Originality/value:** The article focuses on identifying current needs and expectations among women in active employment.

**Keywords:** Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, labor market, employees' expectations.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

### Introduction

Issues raised in this paper are a voice in the discussion on aspects regarding the labor market. The modern labor market is powered by four active generations – Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z, and each of them brings not only their competences and skills, but also a number of expectations

of a varied nature (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2016). They result from experiences and conditions in which these respective generations were brought up, but also from individual needs, values and capabilities. The purpose of the article is to look for an answer to the question of how women's expectations and needs are shaped in the today's labor market, from the perspective of three generations – X, Y and Z – dominant on the market, however living differently. The results presented in this paper show the outcome of pilot studies, forming part of a larger research project.

Issues related to the situation of women in modern labor markets are constantly addressed by researchers (Wilk, 2018; Winkler, 2022; Flaszynska, 2020; Misiak-Kwit, 2020, Melich-Iwanek, 2021), who analyze not only the challenges and fears faced by women in relation to combining professional and social roles (Szyszka, 2015), but also in the context of the professional potential with which they can feed today's extremely dynamic and changeable labor market. The area of women's activity in the professional space is gaining importance, especially since contemporary Europe, and therefore also Poland, is struggling with demographic problems that influence the structure of employment (Gwiazda, 2015; Drela, 2017). Therefore, the question arises not only about who will supply the labor market, how to create employment opportunities for young employees, but also how to use the potential and value of employees among women who, despite their age, are still able to work and at the same time the estimated length of their life is higher than in men (GUS, 2022). Research conducted in this area shows that leaving the labor market is influenced by many factors, such as health condition, uncertainty of maintaining a job, and chronic fatigue. The employer's pressure and the willingness not to take away jobs of young generations is also important (Lucius, Simińska, 2015). This raises significant challenges for employers who, in order to maintain employment in their organizations, will have to create solutions that will attract and retain women for longer.

## **Review of the literature**

The Baby Boomers generation, i.e., the generation of post-war baby boom cohorts, means people who were born between 1946 and 1964. It is the oldest group of employees and the level of activity of this employment group in Poland is among the lowest in the European Union (Chomańkowska, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2018). The BB generation, from being contributors to society, are now becoming consumers of pensions and services. Because of their size in numbers, it has been recognized that aging boomers will pose major challenges for Western welfare states (Slagsvold, Hansen, 2021). The attention of this generation is no longer focused on developing noticeable occupational activity, although some employees of the BB generation still remain active in the labor market and perform various organizational roles. Generation X, which dates from 1965 to 1982, is a generation that is described as one that finds the present

more important than the future. Its members look for quick ways to make money, are ready to take on risks and work for themselves. Individuality is the feature that determines their decisions (Stanišauskienė, Urbonienė, 2018). The literature points out to the fact that Generation X members are firmly established and engaged in their careers and, due to their need for financial security, will be interested in opportunities to advance their careers and earning power (Sandeen, 2008).

Considerable changes in the labor market were brought by the two youngest generations – Generations Y and Z, which today attract the attention of employers (Moczyłowska, 2018; Hetig, 2019; Stanimir, 2020; Allard et al., 2007). In the literature, the image of Generation Y is highly different from that of previous generations (Kraus, 2017). Generation Y, also known as the Millennium generation, born between 1981 and 2000, has already entered the labor market with full power. Its representatives have their own distinct set of values, beliefs, work styles, attitudes, and preferences with regard to seeking employment. Their entire childhood and adult life is a period of innovations, therefore technology is something that strongly determines how they function (Calloway, 2018). The youngest, but already active in the labor market generation includes members of Generation Z, whose way of functioning in the labor market is significantly different from all previous generations. People born after 2000 grew up during the global digital revolution (evolution of the Internet, popularization of Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, mass propagation of e-learning, e-commerce, tablets, smartphones). There is no doubt that these innovations have had a great impact on the lifestyle and needs of this generation. Currently, Generation Z, instead of looking at a world full of new opportunities, is looking at an uncertain future. Many of members of this generation will live in the Industry 4.0 era, which will require a transformation of the world market to meet the new needs with regard to the type of their behavior, consumer culture, values, and mentality (Entina et al., 2021). It is the members of this generation that are nowadays the greatest challenge for many organizations, by bringing changes that redefine the to-date methods of managing, organizing and planning work, building loyalty schemes, commitment, cooperation, but also asking questions about the meaning and value of work in the modern world.

There is a strong diversification of age groups observed on the labor market, which means significant generational differences, demonstrated in attitudes towards work and professional career (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013). Expectations regarding work depend on many different factors, such as individual needs, work ambitions and aspirations, skills and predispositions of a given person, but also beliefs and ideas about oneself (Wronowska, 2015; Sak-Skowron et al., 2017; Myjak, 2019). In their negative aspect, they can also be an expression of what the environment expects from a person and what the pressure is directed at. They will be manifested through acts, activities or attitudes, to a large extent shaping the way employees will think about the employer and what they will look for within specific structures. Expectations of employees can and certainly will change together with the changing labor market, economic and social situation, but also with changes happening in their own lives related to, for example, age,

predispositions, new social and family roles. As pointed out by B. Sajkiewicz, what is important is to notice differences in employees' goals resulting from the fact that they belong to different generations. The author draws attention to the identification, analysis and description of differences in the ways of acting, effectiveness, learning abilities, and perception of issues important for a company also in expectations of employees coming from different age groups (Sajkiewicz, 2016). The analysis of the literature shows that the young generations, i.e., Y and Z, are perceived by employers as taking too much for granted, who in their pursuit for understanding of themselves and their needs are not afraid of crossing borders and asking questions about how the employers can contribute to their own development on various levels (Gajda, 2017; Nikonowicz et al., 2019; Kopertyńska et al., 2014). Satisfaction from work from the perspective of the young generations (Y, Z) is associated with a sense of independence, flexible working time, respect and conviction about being someone special (Kawka, 2018). R. Muster points out that the generation of people who enter the labor market will actively create the culture of the organization, instead of just adapting to already existing norms and values (Muster, 2020).

The way of perceiving one's own work and related expectations is completely different in the case of the older generations (BB, X), which are characterized by stability, expectation of job security, lack of requirements in the area of taking up new challenges. The literature also indicates high loyalty to one employer (Dolińska-Weryńska, 2016). The BB generation is considered as characterizing with low work and geographical mobility, they are seen as supporters of a traditional career who want to pursue it preferably with one employer and, what is also worth paying attention to, have problems with defining their own expectations. In turn, for Generation X, work is a value in itself, a change of job is considered as a need, and training enables stabilization of employment (Hysa, 2016). However, what should be underlined here is that perceiving employees' expectations only through the prism of what generation they belong to gives a lot of place for abuse, including in particular creating stereotypes. This may lead to searching in a given group of employees of features and expectations that they actually do not have. In this context, in today's market realities, it is useful to ensure that personalized job offers and development paths are built on the basis of needs and expectations of a given employee, so as to use the potential of an individual as accurately as possible.

## Research methods

The purpose of the research was to identify work expectations in a group of women representing Generations X, Y and Z. An analysis was carried out to see which aspects related to employment are particularly important for employees from respective generations. Research issues were presented in the form of questions:

1. What aspects are of particular importance in the current workplace from the perspective of women representing Generations X, Y, Z?
2. Which employment-related aspects have impact on the willingness to change jobs from the perspective of women representing Generations X, Y, Z?
3. What are the biggest professional challenges from the perspective of women representing Generations X, Y, Z?

The results presented in this article are pilot studies carried out as part of a larger research project. The research took place in February-March 2023. The data was collected using a proprietary online survey (CAWI), which was developed for the purposes of this research and published on the survio.com portal. The survey was distributed to the respondents via social networking sites, i.e., LinkedIn and Career Offices of universities in Poland. Only fully completed surveys were taken into account in the analyses. The pilot study involved 10 women from Generation X (5.10%), 35 from Generation Y (17.86%), and 151 from Generation Z (77.04%).

## Analysis and discussion

According to the pilot studies carried out, work expectations from the perspective of women representing Generations X, Y and Z are very similar, although the literature points out to much greater differences. Members of Generation X paid particular attention to aspects related to stability of employment, i.e., a permanent contract and salary (90% of respondents), atmosphere at work (40% of respondents), development and career opportunities (20% of respondents), and finding meaning in the work they do (20% of respondents). Among the representatives of Generation Y, the results are similar – stability of employment (80% of respondents), atmosphere at work (48.57% of respondents), and development and career opportunities (25.71% of respondents) are of key importance. On the other hand, among members of the youngest generation currently working on the market, i.e., Generation Z, what is particularly important is atmosphere at work (64.90% of respondents), stability of employment, i.e., a permanent contract and salary (64.24% of respondents), and development and career opportunities (29.80% of respondents). Detailed data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.***Aspects important at work from the perspective of women from Generations X, Y, Z*

	X		Y		Z	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Stability of employment – a permanent contract and salary	9	90	28	80	97	64.24
Atmosphere at work	4	40	17	48.57	98	64.90
Team/manager relations	0	0	2	5.71	18	11.92
Development and career opportunities	2	20	9	25.71	45	29.80
Promotions	0	0	1	2.86	9	5.96
Bonuses	1	10	5	14.29	21	13.91
Employment flexibility (remote and/or hybrid work)	1	10	5	14.29	35	23.18
Finding meaning of the work you do	2	20	5	14.29	14	9.27
Possibility of development in the area of my choice, pursuit of my own professional interests	1	10	2	5.71	20	13.25
Trust between me and the team/manager	1	10	3	8.57	6	3.97
Kindness and understanding that I get at work	0	0	3	8.57	23	15.23
Acceptance I feel from the team/manager	0	0	3	8.57	19	12.58
Other (what?)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: own elaboration.

The results analyzed in this area show that the expectations towards work among members of Generations X and Y are the same. The only difference is among members of Generation Z, who pay attention to the atmosphere at work in the first place, although it should be noted that the difference between the assessment of the atmosphere at work and the stability of employment (contract + salary) is small. The reasons for such answers can be sought by analyzing the current economic situation in Poland. A period of high inflation, economic slowdown, and thus much greater uncertainty in terms of employment in organizations, difficulties in finding or changing a job may convince respondents to keep, above all, work stability in this uncertain period on the market. In these circumstances, other aspects may be of definitely less importance, although it is worth noting that members of Generation X also paid attention to finding meaning in the work they do (20% of respondents), which allows concluding that the soft aspects related to functioning at work and considering it as satisfactory are still important to them, although not decisive in the assessment of employment conditions. Members of Generation Z consider the atmosphere at work as particularly important, which to a large extent coincides with the results of research presented in the literature devoted to this subject. Younger generations tend to look for a job that will not only let them earn, but also feel good in a much wider dimension.

Respondents were also asked what would make them change jobs. Members of Generation X chose the salary as being of key importance (90% of respondents). This aspect was considered the most important by all surveyed groups (X, Y, Z). Additional benefits, such as training, courses, certificates, are also important (50% of respondents), and so is the possibility of changing the scope of duties (20% of respondents). In the case of Generation Y, salary is also the most important factor determining the willingness to change jobs (94.29% of respondents). Other important factors indicated by them include the possibility of flexible work (remote or hybrid work – 17.14% of respondents), change in the scope of duties (14.29% of respondents),

and the possibility to change the boss (14.29% of respondents). In the case of these two groups, i.e., Generations X and Y, the willingness to change the scope of duties draws attention, which raises the question of how duties are formulated, to what extent they are adapted to the person's capabilities, skills, competences, but also ambitions and professional aspirations, and finally, to what extent they fit to the current stage of their career. It may be expected that one of key aspects for female employees at a more advanced stage of their career will be, on the one hand, the possibility to perform new, more challenging roles (such as managerial roles) or quite the contrary – roles adapted to other duties required of them at this stage of life (especially in the case of members of Generation Y, who at this stage of their lives may be intensively involved in building a private life (the roles of a mother, wife), which will not necessarily be that important for members of Generation X, whose current age is about 58 years for the oldest ones and about 41 years for the youngest ones. In the case of representatives of Generation Y, attention was also drawn to the willingness to change the boss (14.29% of respondents), which also prompts questions about how teams are managed and who performs managerial roles – what leaders are promoted by organizations and, in the end, how they are assessed by employees. Members of Generation Z, similarly to respondents representing Generations X and Y, pay particular attention to the salary (82.12% of respondents), benefits including training, courses, certificates (45.70% of respondents), and flexible work options (remote, hybrid work – 31.3% of respondents). Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Factors that have impact on the willingness to change jobs in the perspective of women from Generations X, Y, Z*

	X		Y		Z	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Possibility of obtain a higher salary	9	90	33	94.29	124	82.12
Possibility to change the scope of duties	2	20	5	14.29	26	17.22
Possibility to change the boss	0	0	5	14.29	9	5.96
Possibility to work on a flexible basis (remote work, hybrid work or other model)	0	0	6	17.14	47	31.13
Possibility to work abroad	0	0	3	8.75	17	11.26
Possibility to set up own business and becoming self-employment	1	10	2	5.71	30	19.87
Possibility to change the contract to a long-term one	1	10	2	5.71	22	14.57
Possibility to work in a corporation	0	0	1	2.86	6	3.97
Additional benefits (training, courses, certificates)	5	50	4	11.43	69	45.70
Other (what?)	0	0	Higher position		Work without time pressure and stressful atmosphere; Meaning of work; Nothing	

Source: own elaboration.

During the research, respondents were also asked about the biggest challenge for them today in work-related terms. The results show how important it is to match relevant employment conditions and benefits to the stage of one's career. Member of Generation X focus their attention on the possibility of receiving a higher salary (70% of respondents), keeping a job (40% of respondents), and building relationships in the team (30% of respondents). Especially the issue of building relationships in the team raises the question of what diversity management in the team looks like and how it is implemented in practice. The problem of cooperation between representatives of different generations is stressed by many researchers (cf. e.g., Sidor-Rządowska, 2018; Waligóra, 2018; Bojarczuk et al., 2018). This research shows that this problem may have a much broader context in practice. The greatest challenge for representatives of Generation Y is professional development (40% of respondents), finding their own professional path that will be consistent with their expectations and skills (37.14% of respondents), the possibility of receiving a higher salary (37.14% of respondents), keeping a job (20% of respondents), and working on the basis of a permanent contract (employment contract – 20% of respondents). This result suggests that at the stage of intensive career development, which definitely takes place at this age, there may be issues related to building one's professional identity and creating one's own career path. These are questions about who I am, in what direction I want to develop, what I am looking for in terms of work, what my work prospects are. The youngest generation active in the labor market, i.e., Z, focuses primarily on finding their own professional path (49% of respondents), which is also consistent with the stage of their professional development. It is an intense time of searching for answers to questions about who I want to be, how I want to work, what will bring me true fulfillment. As the second important aspect, this generation indicated the possibility of obtaining a higher salary (30.46% of the respondents) and professional development (21.85% of the respondents). Detailed results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*Work-related challenges in the perspective of women from Generations X, Y, Z*

	X		Y		Z	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
finding a job	0	0	5	14.29	64	14.38
keeping a job	4	40	7	20	27	17.88
changing a job	1	10	3	8.57	26	17.22
finding one's own professional path (a job consistent with one's expectations and skills)	2	20	13	37.14	74	49
professional development	2	20	14	40	33	21.85
building relationships in the team	3	30	5	14.29	12	7.95
building relationships with the manager	1	10	1	2.86	3	1.99
receiving a higher salary	7	70	13	37.14	46	30.46
receiving a permanent contract (employment contract)	2	20	7	20	19	12.58
finding meaning in one's work	1	10	2	5.71	27	17.88
trust in the employer	0	0	3	8.57	18	11.92
Other (what?)	0	0	0	0	Nothing; Finding a job that inspires and brings joy; Resilience	

Source: own elaboration.



The results presented in this article indicate aspects that may significantly influence attitudes towards work and women's professional satisfaction. Analyzes developed by a team of researchers from the Polish Institute of Economics and presented in the report *The situation of women in Poland from a socio-economic perspective* from April 2023 clearly show that the level of women's employment is moderate compared to the European Union, and at the same time the data indicate that Poland belongs to 1/3 countries with the lowest level of women's employment (Polish Economic Institute, 2023), which only proves that undertaking research in this area may be significant in the context of shaping job offers, taking into account the perspective of professionally active women. As M. Christoph and E. Krause point out, women, when thinking about choosing a career path, still focus mainly on traditional career patterns, the aim of which is to maintain stability, fixed working hours and combine social and professional roles (Christoph, Krause, 2019), which is also confirmed by research presented in this work. On the other hand, the modern labor market offers great opportunities to pursue career paths that build independence, self-reliance and flexibility, as exemplified by own business activities. However, research shows that there are significantly fewer self-employed women than men (Turczak, 2017), which is surprising because the level of education of women in Poland is higher than that of men, and yet there is no tendency to start their own companies. In the opinion of A. Broniszewska and B. Ślusarczyk, starting their own company for women is often easier than obtaining a higher managerial position in another company. This work model is also a way to combine family and professional responsibilities (Broniszewska, Ślusarczyk, 2017), therefore it is worth promoting entrepreneurship among women, regardless of generational affiliation.

## Summary

The results of the pilot studies presented in this paper, although having some weaknesses resulting, for example, from the size of the surveyed groups, point out to the need to continue and deepen research in the presented area. The research results show how important it can be to match employers' benefits and expectations to needs, abilities, but also concerns of female employees at a given stage of their career. During the research, it was observed that although expectations between representatives of respective generations differ to some extent, there are also many common aspects that remain important regardless of the generational affiliation. In the context of the research, the present social and economic situation can be of particular importance, as it is characterized by high uncertainty, unpredictability of employment, and thus prompting to ask questions about how safe and stable a given workplace is. At the same time, the results show the picture of female employees, especially among members of the younger generations (Y, Z), as looking for their own place in the work sphere. The question of how to

create jobs that merge expectations of employees and employers, building on the one hand satisfaction among employees and, on the other hand, business value for the organization, is still open.

The issue of employing women is an important problem in the social, economic, economic and psychological dimensions and largely influences the shape of today's labor market. For this reason, it is important to continue research in this area, covering various aspects of this issue in order to create new solutions for both employees and employers. Research considerations worth focusing on in the future should include, among others, how to stimulate and create entrepreneurship, especially among representatives of young generations, for whom flexibility and independence in the area of professional functioning may be important while simultaneously fulfilling social roles (mother, wife). It also seems important to conduct research considerations on the issue of using the potential of women aged 50-60+, which will be of significant importance, especially in the context of demographic problems from which Poland is not immune.

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