

PREFERENCES OF GENERATION Z AT THE BEGINNING OF PROFESSIONAL CAREERS ON THE EXAMPLE OF POLISH AND CROATIAN STUDENTS

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Purpose of paper: This research paper examines the expectations of Generation Z (Gen Z) in relation to today's labor market in a case study sample comparing peers from Poland and Croatia. This article aims to analyze this generation's unique expectations, values and aspirations for the workplace. An additional goal of the article is to identify differences and similarities between Gen Z representatives in Poland and Croatia and to propose new model of HR dedicated for Gen Z.

Design/approach: In order to achieve the intended purpose, a quantitative survey was conducted on Polish and Croatian management students. The article consists of 3 parts. The first deals with the theoretical context - as a brief review of related literature to recognize Generation Z in a brief description of the local (Polish and Croatian) labor market context. The second part includes a brief assumptions of the adopted methodology and presentation of research results related to the recognition of careers and workplace expectations of Polish and Croatian Generation Z on a preliminary research sample. The last part is the conclusions and an attempt to conceptualize our own proposal for a new HRM model for this new, non-examined so in depth generation.

Practical implications: The study's primary outcomes revealed that Generation Z members value job security and financial stability, exhibiting a preference for employment within large corporations. Despite being commonly referred to as those proficient in digital technology, they must establish solid interpersonal connections with their colleagues and express their thoughts and opinions openly. Despite the cultural variations and various national identities, the representatives of Generation Z from Poland and Croatia had very similar outcomes regarding their aspirations and perspectives. Therefore, it can be deduced that the most recent cohort of individuals joining the workforce in the surveyed student population possesses a perception of a widespread and consistent comprehension of their occupational obligations.

Social implications: There can be assumed some implications of the findings for employers, policymakers, and educators in both countries. Provide insights into how organizations can better attract, retain, and support the career development of Generation Z in light of their unique expectations, in particular in a lack of social competency in perspective of employers.

Findings: This study offers empirical evidence that supports the prevailing notion of Generation Z as a universally homogeneous cohort about their attitudes and behaviours within the workplace context.

Originality/value: Comparing the expectations of the Polish and Croatian Generation Z entering the labor market could offer a valuable contribution to the field of cross-cultural studies, labor market research, and generational dynamics. Here are some potential points of originality and value for such presented results of research: cultural differences in work values between Poland and Croatia, educational systems and career preparedness, technological influences by how technology, digitalization, and connectivity have influenced the expectations of Generation Z in both countries, implications for employers and policymakers in both countries in proposition of 10 factors approach to new model of HCM dedicated to expectations of Gen Z.

Keywords: Generation Z, Human Capital Management, Labour Market, Expectations, HRM, Poland, Croatia.

Category of the paper: research paper, conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide an overview of the main findings and conclusions of the study comparing Generation Z expectations toward the labour market between Polish and Croatian students. Generation Z refers to a cohort of individuals who exhibit common characteristics regarding their birth years, life experiences, and cultural influences. The contemporary generation that has garnered significant interest from researchers and practitioners is Generation Z. The term "they" refers to individuals born in 1995 and onwards who exhibit a distinct trait of digital nativism and possess distinctive attributes Stillman & Stillman (2017). This study aims to understand how Generation Z differentiates itself from preceding generations, particularly in its ideals, attitudes, and actions towards the labour market.

The transition of Generation Z from education to the labor market has sparked interest among researchers and employers alike. Understanding the expectations of this cohort is crucial for organizations seeking to optimize their recruitment and retention strategies (Deloitte, 2018). This research paper aims to identify the critical expectations of Generation Z in the contemporary labor market. Such knowledge will let us analyze the factors influencing Gen Z's career choices and workplace preferences. Thanks to such an approach, it is possible to explore the implications for organizations and propose strategies to meet the expectations of Gen Z employees. Finally, it provides an opportunity to reinvent a new H.R.M. model dedicated to supporting Generation Z at the first stage of their careers in the labor market.

The youngest employees are commonly called a Snow-Flake Generation, Homeland Generation, Digital Natives, iGeneration, Always Clicking Generation, C Gen (connected), Online Generation, Com Generation, Gen Tech, or App Generation (Grow, Young, 2018; Dolot, 2018; Agarwal, Vaghela, 2018; Diaconu, Dutu, 2020). These tables indicate specific

characteristics of this young population. They are susceptible, insecure about their surroundings, hiding behind technology, the most critical link to the world, which they do not want to enter, staying in their comfort zone and preferably in the family home, and not taking on responsibilities and challenges.

Generation Z is commonly defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s. Growing up in the age of technology, Gen Z is characterized by its digital nativism, global outlook, and emphasis on individuality (Twenge, 2023; Stillman, Stillman, 2017; Sholz, 2020; Jaytissa, 2023; Ozkan, Solmaz, 2015; Pavlić, ukić, 2019; Priporas et al., 2017). Recent above indicated studies suggest that Gen Z values meaningful work, career growth, and a healthy work-life balance. This generation is also known for its tech-savviness, expecting workplaces to leverage advanced technologies and provide a flexible and collaborative environment. Recently, in the literature, the topic of Generation Z, which has not taken part in the business community, answers the question of what kind of worker is waiting for the managers in the future on the studies being done (Barhate, Dirani, 2021). Gen Z's expectations in the labour market are shaped by a desire for job security, financial stability, and a preference for big companies (Mărginean, 2021). Gen Z-ers appreciate a secure job and economic stability and prefer working for big companies.

The most important criteria for Gen X candidates are predominantly social. They prioritize a positive team atmosphere and supportive relations with colleagues and superiors, with a focus on the "how" of work rather than the "what" (Zehetner, Zehetner, 2019). The working atmosphere, the latest technology, and benefits packages are also important factors for them (Bieleń, 2020). Firms and organizations should consider development reports on adjustments to generational change in the labour market. Gen Z talents expect a fun work environment, a positive team atmosphere and supportive relations with colleagues and superiors. There are gender differences in these expectations, with women prioritizing a fun work environment and work-life balance, while men prioritize career advancement and job security (Lassleben, Hofmann, 2023). A study applied to university students showed that Generation Z will participate or participate in the labour force shortly before their expectations differ from other employees (Ozkan, Solmaz, 2015).

Croatian Perspective

Research on the Croatian labour market and Generation Z reveals several key findings. Chareewan et al. (2020) highlight differences in career goals and work expectations between Generation Y and Generation Z, with a gender moderation effect. They found that females of Generation Y showed significantly higher career goals than males of the same generation.

Pavlić and Vukić (2019) further explore the decision-making styles of Generation Z, finding gender differences in recreational, hedonistic, price-value-conscious, and impulsive behaviours. They find female appears to be more recreational and hedonistic, less price-value conscious and less impulsive than the male gender. Jakšić and Rogic (2019) discuss the

challenges and opportunities for older workers in the Croatian labour market, emphasizing the need for more extended labour market participation.

The labour market in Croatia could be more dynamic. Generally, Croatian employees are less mobile than employees in other countries, and organizations need to be more flexible. Therefore, employee retention is an issue that requires a systematic approach because it directly hits organizational productivity and efficiency (Zivkovic et al., 2020).

Lastly, Håkansson and Bejakovic (2020) underscores Croatia's low labour market resilience, attributing it to a lack of labour mobility and skill shortages. They concluded that the Croatian labour market adapts poorly to both recession and the booming economy. The study conducted by Borovac Zekan et al. (2023) emphasises the impact of digitalization on the respondents' environments. They illuminated that, whether in their present workplace or educational institution, it was prominently manifested in various facets. Particularly discernible were its effects on knowledge dissemination, innovative practices, collaborative endeavors, networking initiatives, and modes of communication.

Collectively, these studies emphasize the need for a better understanding of the Croatian labour market and the unique characteristics of Generation Z within it. Thus, the Croatian labor market, which is only reaching the level of the E.U. market in the coming years, may differentiate the attitudes and expectations of the youngest workers entering the workforce in the context of Polish employment conditions and economic development. Moreover, significant differences in the population of both countries may also affect the results of comparative research.

The critical comparison provides a basis for conducting comparative research and presents indicators describing the labour market in both countries. Regarding the overall unemployment rate, the situation in Poland is significantly better than in Croatia, where the overall unemployment rate and the surveyed group are twice as high. However, regarding comparisons presented by G.U.S. (Central Statistical Office) and its Croatian counterpart – Državni Zavod za Statistiku, data regarding the indicators of professional activity for the youngest generation entering the job market are similar. This fact can be considered the basis for conducting comparative research on the selected group of Generation Z. As we can see, there is some differentiation in favor of the labor market conditions in Poland considering the following indicators for the 2022 year (World Bank, 2023; Trading Economics, 2023):

- Croatia - Youth unemployment rate, age group (15-24) – 18.0%.
- Poland - Youth unemployment rate, age group (15-24) – 10.8%.
- Croatia - Youth employment rate, age group (20-29) - 61.00%.
- Poland- Youth employment rate, age group (20-29) - 67.70%.
- Croatia unemployment rate– 6.20%.
- Poland unemployment rate– 5.00%.

The above data indicate that the Polish job market has a more favourable organizational environment and conditions for starting a professional career. An important research question in this context may be whether this fact is reflected in different expectations and motivations to start a professional career by Gen Z in Poland and Croatia.

Polish Perspective

Kawka (2018) emphasized the need to indicate contemporary directions and tools to organise the architecture of the personnel function in the New Economy Organization. His study (Kawka, 2021) has shown that despite their cultural differences and nationalities, the results of Generation Z's Polish and Croatian representatives are very similar in expectations and attitudes.

Generation Z attempts to assert their perspectives on the functioning of organisations and their notions on professional careers. The main implications related to research findings about attitudes and expectations of Polish Z-ers are as next.

Employees of the new economy transfer their passions, hobbies, and interests into the realm of professional values (Rudawska, Szarek, 2014). When entering the workforce, they choose a work environment that offers flexible working hours, utilitarian use of modern technologies for digitized data transmission and personal contact transmission, work in a home office mode, or participation in international projects associated with a high degree of globality and mobility.

The new economy generation expects employers to apply the latest technologies to all aspects of professional life, friendly, often informal close contact with superiors, in flat, matrix, and project organizational structures. Generation Z employees are characterized by a higher level of education and proficiency in foreign languages (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2014). The youngest cohorts entering the Polish job market, in terms of the overall population share, compared to other groups in a given society, are the most highly educated professional generation (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2015). Young people entering the job market today are specialists in multitasking projects, easily adapting to changes, though they are incredibly impatient individuals. They do not identify with the employer, brand, or workplace, as it is just a stage in their development (Gadomska-Lila, 2015). To engage the youngest employees, the following could be beneficial (Robak, 2018; Różańska-Bińczyk, 2022)

- Tools and methods promoting high flexibility and mobility at work.
- A social communication system based on the need for constant feedback.
- Implementation of teamwork methods, functioning in virtual and network teams.
- Shaping a work climate based on an informal atmosphere.
- Flexible solutions for professional development.
- Promotion of work-life balance practices.
- Adequate high compensation, especially in terms of non-monetary components.

- Reducing power distance in collaborative, good relationships with superiors.
- Activating tasks that utilize multitasking.
- FOMO problems.

To summarize what has been indicated so far, Generation Z, the demographic cohort following the millennials, is entering the job market with unique expectations and priorities. Growing up in a time of rapid technological advances, economic uncertainty and heightened social awareness. Although some attempts have been made to address this issue, there is still a need for a deeper understanding of nature of career preferences and characteristics of Generation Z at the beginning of their careers. A comparative study on the example of Polish and Croatian students.

2. Findings

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions and expectations of Generation Z's work. For this purpose, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire for 187 university students of management in Poland, Gdansk (101) and Croatia, Split (86). The questionnaire consisted of three parts, using the organizational behavior scale used in the author's previous research (Kawka, 2021), i.e. the P.A.S.Z model – original author job satisfaction scale (Borowska-Pietrzak, 2023), Herzberg model (1965) or Kolodinsky approach (Kolodinsky et al., 2008), and the scale for assessing the value of success at work based on the models of Eby, Butts, Lockwood (2003) and Firkowska-Mankiewicz (1997).

The study examined the career preferences and expectations of Generation Z members in Poland and Croatia in 2022 and 2023. A quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze data from a representative sample of students from both countries. The structured questionnaire assessed participants' attitudes towards job security, financial stability and career preferences, expectations of the work environment, the role of technology in life and work, mobility and social attitudes. The 3-step questionnaire included closed sentences to gain comprehensive insight into their perspective.

A total of 186 university students from Poland and Croatia took part in the study. The sample was not evenly distributed between the two countries, but there were similar pools in each country, especially in terms of gender. Participants in the survey were between the ages of 20 and 25, representing Generation Z in both similar categories.

An in-depth analysis of quantitative data has not yet been performed. The results presented in the article are a presentation of preliminary process, based on a simple comparison of the average results of the indicated scales. The presented results will be used next year in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to enhance and recognize more complex findings related to expectations of Gen Z in beginning of professional career activities.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize participant responses. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent before participating in it. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants' responses were maintained throughout the study.

The Factors determining career preferences as the attitudes and values of Gen Z.

The first part of the questionnaire, built on P.A.S.Z.'s proprietary tool for measuring job satisfaction attributes (Borowska-Pietrzak, 2023), consisted of 40 sentences describing a set of organizational attitudes and behaviors (see Table 2). The purpose of this part of the tool was to identify and attempt to scale a multidimensional assessment of Generation Z's statements of behavior in the workplace. The surveyed students were asked the following question: Do the given sentences describe you - rate if you agree with these sentences? The scale has been used like follow:

Table 1.
Questionary and Anchored scale of first part of questionnaire

Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Table 2.
Claims as the factors determining career preferences

Questions as the factors determining career preferences		POLISH GEN Z	CROATIAN GEN Z
		average score	
1	I prefer to specialize in depth in one specific area	3,38	2,89
2	I don't like people influencing my decisions	3,83	3,95
3	I prefer to work alone than in a team	3,25	3,05
4	It is not a problem for me to work with people who think differently as me	3,46	3,47
5	At work, I'm only interested in focusing on my own task	3,67	3,74
6	I believe that IT technology is indispensable and necessary for my life	4,25	3,89
7	I am always open to changes and will flexibly adapt to them	3,63	3,58
8	I am a confident person and always know what to do	3,50	3,21
9	I speak foreign languages well	3,29	3,16
10	It would not be a problem to be a colleague of my boss at work	4,00	3,74
11	I try to solve my problems on my own	4,33	3,84
12	I am a mentally resilient person and not afraid of anything	3,25	2,95
13	Navigating the world of technology is not a problem for me	4,25	3,74
14	I care deeply about my career	4,42	3,79
15	Studying will allow me to achieve a career and expect high salaries	3,58	4,00
16	I don't like to be criticized	3,63	4,26
17	I am not afraid to take challenges and risks in my decisions	3,42	3,21
18	I have no problem being open with people older than me	3,96	3,84
19	I would like to make a lot of contacts with other people at work	3,54	3,95
20	My goal is to be very good and professional in my learned specialty	4,33	4,05
21	I overcome all difficulties with ease	3,42	2,79
22	I would like to start a family soon	2,38	2,37
23	It is not a problem for me to work anywhere in the world	3,21	3,68
24	I think my peers are too overprotective	2,96	3,26

Cont. Table 2.

25	I'm not afraid to say what's on my mind	3,50	3,53
26	I would like to continue my education and formal learning after graduation	3,00	3,74
27	I believe that IT technology is the basis of today's work	4,54	4,21
28	I can only count on myself in life and work problems	2,79	2,68
29	After graduation, I will want to move out of the house	4,42	3,84
30	I look for knowledge and news only on the web	2,92	3,32
31	The diversity of behavior, and people's preferences is obvious	4,67	3,42
32	I'd rather talk to someone else via a mobile app than face to face	2,25	2,95
33	I expect constant feedback on myself	2,38	3,16
34	I prefer the company of people my age	2,88	3,42
35	I would like to leave the place where I live after graduation	2,33	3,53
36	I have my close friends and I can always count on them	3,96	3,79
37	I feel that I am always right in what I say and do	2,75	3,37
38	I'd rather write my opinion on the Internet/text message than tell a person directly	1,88	2,32
39	I believe that at work it should be easy and pleasant	2,46	4,11
40	I'm looking for professional challenges related to world travel	2,75	4,26

Source: on own research data.

Taking the scale values to pre-value the responses, it can be assumed that responses whose mean was above 4.00 can be interpreted as a significant value for the surveyed pool of students, i.e. they identify with the given statement as a determinant of their career start. Similarly, responses whose mean was below 2.00 may suggest a lack of identification of the surveyed group with the given examples of behaviour in the work environment.

A synthetic assessment of the comparisons of response values shows relatively high similarities in the responses of both Polish and Croatian students. The correlation coefficient between the responses of Poles and Croats was +0.6, indicating a significant overlap in the trends of the results. It can be assumed that, in principle, the attitudes and expectations regarding their behaviour at the beginning of their careers declared by the groups of young workers from both countries are similar.

On the other hand, the detailed analyses of the individual items from this part of the survey are fascinating, but they indicate some differentiation between the two nationality groups. For the Polish representatives of Gen Z (the result in the table highlighted in green with red font), the most descriptive of their attitudes include the following:

1. The diversity of behavior, and people's preferences is obvious – rank 4,67.
2. I believe that IT technology is the basis of today's work – rank 4,54.
3. I care deeply about my career – 4,42.
4. My goal is to be very good and professional in my learned specialty – rank 4,33.
5. I try to solve my problems on my own – rank 4,33.

Similarly, for their Croatian peers, the most representative attitudes seem to be like:

1. I don't like to be criticized – rank 4,26.
2. I'm looking for professional challenges related to world travel – rank 4,26.
3. I believe that IT technology is the basis of today's work – rank 4,21.
4. I believe that at work it should be easy and pleasant – 4,11.
5. My goal is to be very good and professional in my learned specialty – rank 4,05.

As it can be seen from the comparative calculation above, only two statements overlap as the most important for the Polish and Croatian students surveyed. Recognizing the importance of IT technology in their lives and basing their careers on the chosen specialty they are studying. For Polish Gen Z, the dominant attitude is to appreciate the diversity of the work environment and to take care of their own careers and rely on themselves at work. Croatian peers emphasized a reluctance to criticize and a very stereotypical (which is not confirmed among Polish students) approach - the job is supposed to be easy and fun, and preferably it should be related to world travel. By the way, the rather low score in this two areas for Poles indicates confirmation of the widely used description of Gen Z - Homeland Generation. Young Poles don't care about leaving their hometown like young Croats do. The biggest differences between the two nations' responses were in factors #31 and #39. In the case of item no. #31, Polish Generation Z takes the issue of diversity and tolerance very seriously, which, as an average level achieved by their Croatian counterparts, seem to be less exposed. However, for young Croats, the key issue that most distinguishes Polish responses, as indicated in the previous paragraph, is the emphasis on staying within their comfort zone of easy, light, and enjoyable work associated with fun.

Interesting insights can be derived by analyzing the lowest indications from this part of the questionnaire. Behaviors that will least characterize attitudes at the beginning of their professional career in the Polish job market were indicated also almost the same by the Croatian surveyed students:

1. I'd rather write my opinion on the internet/text message than tell a person directly – rank 1,88 for Poles and rank for Croats – rank 2,32.
2. I'd rather talk to someone else via a mobile app than face to face – 2,25 for Poles and rank for Croats 2.95.
3. I would like to leave the place where I live after graduation – rank 2,33 for Poles and rank for Croats – 3,53.
4. I would like to start a family soon – 2,38 for Poles and rank for Croats – 2,37 (the lowest level obtained for them).

The above comparison indicates several interesting implications. It does not confirm, in this specific surveyed group (which may be due to the fact that these are graduates of management and business faculties), the limitation to social contacts only through social media. Furthermore, it confirms that the surveyed group consists of very young individuals, and in this generation, they generally do not consider starting a family. They express a desire to extend their comfort zone - being single and without family commitments is considered natural.

The expected values in the workplace as a desired motivation system

The second part of the study consisted in recognizing Generation Z's declarations about the potential values they expected in the first stage of work as a desirable motivational system (see Table 3). The individual elements of this tool were designed based on assumptions anchored in two models, the old and the newest. The first is Herzberg Motivation Theory (1965),

and second is approach described by Kolodinsky, R., Giacalone, R. and Jurkiewicz, C. (2008). It consisted of 20 sentences describing a set of various organizational aspects of the motivation system intended for new generations, such as Y or Z. The surveyed students were asked the following question: "Evaluate the following values that you expect from your workplace". A scale has been used like that:

Table 3.

Anchored scale of second part of questionnaire

Completely irrelevant	Not important	I have no opinion	It's important	The most important
1	2	3	4	5

Table 4.

The expected values in the workplace

	Expected values in the workplace	POLISH GEN Z	CROATIAN GEN Z
		average score	
1	Friendly and sociable relationship with the supervisor	3,79	3,58
2	Durable and loyal attachment to the employer	2,71	3,84
3	Tolerance and diversity	3,92	4,47
4	Flexibility and diversity of tasks	3,88	4,42
5	Work Life Balance	4,88	3,84
6	Independence and autonomy of action	3,88	4,21
7	Friendly and relaxed atmosphere with other colleagues	4,04	4,47
8	Online work	3,50	3,37
9	Using mobile technology at work	3,92	3,37
10	Stability and a sense of security	4,00	4,16
11	Changing work environment and task challenges	3,21	3,47
12	Ambitious, complex uncommon tasks	3,42	3,53
13	Get rich quickly by working	4,17	3,68
14	Realizing your own passions and hobbies at work	3,58	4,11
15	Multiculturalism	2,71	3,89
16	Multitasking	3,42	3,95
17	Group project work	2,67	3,58
18	Continuous development and improvement	4,33	4,05
19	High salary adequate to the requirements	4,63	4,05
20	A well-known and prestigious employer brand	2,42	3,16

Source: on own research data.

Due to the same five-point scale, the interpretation of the results in terms of numerical distribution is similar to that in the case of the first part of the survey. Polish students indicated the following values as the most expected actions from the employer in terms of building a motivational offer:

1. Work Life Balance – rank 4,88.
2. High salary adequate to the requirements – rank 4,63.
3. Continuous development and improvement – rank 4,33.
4. Get rich quickly by working – rank 4,17.
5. Friendly and relaxed atmosphere with other colleagues – 4,04.

The factors indicated constitute a quite commonly established set of expectations towards the employer, which can be found in research on the millennial generation. The most important is work life balance which should be paid handsomely and provide a peaceful and comfortable life. This is complemented by a nice, pleasant atmosphere at work, which is a natural extension of functioning in a world devoid of worries, problems and professional challenges. A very interesting analysis of the results are the responses of young Croatians, which largely coincide with the responses of Poles from Gen Z, but we can find two interesting observations here. Most of the high indications, i.e. over 4.00, coincide with the indications of Polish colleagues (i.e. #18, #19 or #7), while the two highest motivational values are definitely higher for Gen Z from Croatia compared to the assessment of Poles. It's about values such as:

1. Tolerance and diversity – rank 4,47.
2. Flexibility and diversity of tasks – rank 4,42.

An exciting result is the comparison of data from the first part of the survey, where for young Poles, tolerance and diversity are their most characteristic attitude. However, for young Croatians who did not indicate this feature in themselves as clearly outstanding in part 1 of the survey - this is what they expect most from an employer. This may result from specific cultural differences or negative experiences in this area from previous attempts to work part-time during studies. The second result (#4) is also puzzling. They are relatively highly marked by the indicator in Part 1 - "My goal is to be very good and professional in my learned speciality" - meaning they want to focus on their specialization. However, they expect interesting, flexible, and diverse forms of work from the work environment. This is an exciting challenge that modern H.R. must face shortly. The factor that most differentiates Poles and Croatians turns out to be the factor of multiculturalism (#15). At the level obtained (level 2.71), it does not matter much for Poles, but for Croatians - in the context of the motivational offer the employer offers - it does. This is a logical consequence of their approach to the issue of diversity management, where Polish representatives of the Zeters generation treat this aspect as an everyday custom in their environment. This brings enormous value to the Adriatic nation (level 3.89).

Factors of professional success by Gen Z

The last part of the study was devoted to identifying the perspective of Generation Z, what may be their professional success (see Table nr 5). The tool was created based on the approach to career success models by Eby L.T., Butts M., Lockwood A. (2003) and Firkowska-Mankiewicz A. (1997). The surveyed students were asked the following question: "What is career success to you? Please put in order from most important to least important the factors of professional success in your opinion. Dedicated scale to operate this part of survey (12 - most important success factor, 1 - least important success factor).

Table 5.
Potential factors of professional success

No.	Factors of professional success	POLISH GEN Z	CROATIAN GEN Z
A.	Opportunities for rapid growth	9,00	7,74
B.	Achieving high performance at work	7,67	6,79
C.	Start your own business without the restrictions of others	7,04	5,58
D.	Work in a very well-known and recognizable company	2,63	5,00
E.	Work in a learned profession	3,25	3,95
F.	Satisfying work that matches my interests	8,63	6,26
G.	Stable work giving a sense of job security	7,50	8,26
H.	Performing work that is consistent with the education	4,33	6,79
I.	Performing a prestigious and appreciated profession	5,71	6,16
J.	High earnings and wealth accumulation	10,00	8,05
K.	Higher education and high professional competence	7,08	5,58
L.	Durable personal contacts, good friendships at work	5,13	8,16

Source: on own research data.

The last part of the study complemented the attempt to assess Generation Z's preferences for entering the labor market by diagnosing the understanding of career success in their, very fresh, career-starting perception of work. Here, in this case, the scale is a consequence of the forced ranking of the ordered sequence of choices from the indicated manifestations of professional success, where 1 denotes the least significant manifestation of success for the respondents, while 12 indicates the most entrenched pattern of success. Similarly to earlier sections of the survey, in this case, we observe a rather partial than completely fitted overlap of results in the dataset of young workers in the Polish and Croatian job markets. In the perspective of both nations, a manifestation of professional success, according to their declarations, is going to be:

1. High earnings and wealth accumulation for Poles – rank 10,00.
2. Opportunities for rapid growth for Poles – rank 9,00.
3. Satisfying work that matches my interests for Poles – rank 8,36.
1. Stable work giving a sense of job security for Croats - rank 8,26.
2. Durable personal contacts, good friendships at work for Croats - rank 8,16.
3. High earnings and wealth accumulation–for Croats - rank 8,05.

As it can be noticed, there are some noticeable differences here. The only factor that is generally higher for both countries is high wages and wealth accumulation, with significantly higher scores for the Polish survey. An interesting result is the significant difference in the factor: "Durable personal contacts, good friendships at work", which, in the eyes of Polish colleagues, does not deserve to be considered a clear and important manifestation of success. On the other hand, in the perspective of the Croatian youngest human capital, this is the second most important manifestation of career satisfaction. It can be assumed that in the case of Polish Gen Z representatives - our Polish social and cultural assumption of being friendly in the workplace is something unconditionally expected. For Croats, building interpersonal relationships seems to be a very important aspect of the career path.

In the case of negative choices of indicating what they see as a sign of success, the two nations tended to agree. All in all, for us, for university researchers and teachers, a kind of warning sign may be the result indicating that the youngest generation does not identify career success with the factor called “Work in a learned profession”. This is the last level, the lowest rank for both groups of surveys. This gives rise to the assumption that for Generation Z it does not matter what type of profession they can work in. What really matters is that it is well paid, with a pleasant atmosphere, provides a basis for development or matches own interests. Interestingly, Croatian responses were more egalitarian than those of Poles. Although the sample of surveys among Polish students was slightly larger, which may affect the higher degree of dispersion of results, but this is a difference of about 15% in the size of the surveyed groups. To calculate the index of variation, calculate the quotient of the standard deviation from the vector under study to the mean value for the data set. Taking into account the data from all 3 parts of the survey, the indicators are as follows:

Table 6.
Response variation rates for all 3 parts of the tool

Parts of survey	Polish Gen Z	Croatian Gen Z
1. Factors determining career preferences as the attitudes and values of Gen Z	21%	14%
2. The expected values in the workplace as a desired motivation system	18%	10%
3. Factors of professional success by Gen Z	36%	21%

Source: on own research data.

The above results indicate that the responses of the surveyed groups of students from the University of Gdansk and Split are very similar in most areas of manifested attitudes, expectations and perspective on the beginning of their careers. On the other hand, the dispersion index unequivocally shows that the group of students from Croatia is more consistent and convergent in their responses. Polish students were more diverse in providing answers. This may be a result of the fact that in the examined sample, the Polish Gen Z was, on average, slightly older by 1.5 years (more master's degree students) compared to the population from Split. However, as a principle, the main direction and trend of responses to the majority of questions and issues provided the basis for proposing a relatively consistent picture of Generation Z and attempting to define their career preferences at the beginning of their professional careers.

The knowledge obtained regarding preferences, attitudes, and expectations at the initial stage of entering the job market should be utilized to enrich HR practices and serves as a good starting point for attempting a new perspective on the architecture of HR processes related to the youngest generation. The last part of this article will be dedicated to these considerations.

3. Practical and research implications

The key findings proposed on the basis of the analysis of the results obtained can form the basis for the adoption of a new model of human capital management aimed at attracting, retaining and motivating Generation Z in the modern work environment. Despite the emerging small but noticeable differences between peers from Poland and Croatia, the presented results indicate a global, homogeneous and very similar mechanism of expectations and perspectives on the beginning of their emerging career path on the labor market.

In the case of significant differences between the results for Polish and Croatian Gen Z, it was indicated which of the following 10 factors is potentially more applicable to the given cultural and social conditions of the both two Slavonic studied countries (Chareewan et al., 2020; Kawka, 2021; Stillman, Stillman, 2017):

1. **Meaningful Work and Purpose:** Gen Z is driven by a desire to impact the world and contribute to something meaningful positively. They seek employment that aligns with their values and allows them to make a difference. This translates into a preference for companies that demonstrate social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and ethical practices.
2. **Work-Life Balance:** Gen Z prioritises a healthy work-life balance and values flexibility in their work arrangements. They are less inclined to adhere to traditional all day hours schedules and prefer work environments that offer remote work options, flexible hours, and unlimited paid time off.
3. **Continuous Learning and Development:** Gen Z is a highly adaptable and tech-savvy generation, constantly seeking opportunities to learn and grow. They value companies that invest in their employee's professional development and provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.
4. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Gen Z is the most diverse generation in history and expects workplaces to reflect this diversity. They are drawn to companies that promote DEI initiatives, foster inclusive cultures, and value different perspectives.
5. **Transparency in Compensation and Benefits:** Gen Z values transparency in compensation and benefits packages. They want to understand their earning potential, career progression opportunities, and potential employers' comprehensive benefits.
6. **Technology Adoption and Innovation:** Gen Z is accustomed to using technology all their lives and expects workplaces to be technologically advanced. They are drawn to companies that embrace innovation, utilise technology effectively, and provide modern tools and equipment.
7. **Effective Communication and Feedback:** Gen Z craves open and transparent employer communication. They value regular feedback, clear expectations, and a collaborative work environment.

8. **Entrepreneurial Spirit:** Gen Z is unafraid to take risks and pursue their ventures. They are attracted to companies that foster an entrepreneurial spirit and support those with innovative ideas.
9. **Social Responsibility and Sustainability:** Gen Z is deeply concerned about social and environmental issues. They are drawn to companies prioritising sustainability, engaging in ethical practices, and giving back to the community.
10. **Authentic Leadership and Mentorship:** Gen Z values authentic leadership and seeks mentors to guide and support. They appreciate leaders open to feedback, encouraging collaboration, and empowering their teams.

4. Originality/value

As noted in the introduction to the research section, there is no in-depth statistical study of the collected material in the text, so the present proposal should be treated as a kind of hypothetical assumption, which the authors wish to further explore and develop with more sophisticated statistical tools.

Based on a preliminary interpretation of the results from the applied research model, 10 areas were singled out that form the foundation of such a modern approach to understanding this new, different, fascinating, but difficult generation (Kawka, 2021). For each area, a brief description of the meaning of the sub-function was offered. This may constitute the added value of the research and its originality, pointing to trends and directions for building a new approach to human capital management - based on the idea of a balanced approach of including the youngest, difficult, but very necessary, generation Z in the work processes.

5. Contribution

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both Polish and Croatian employers and policymakers. To effectively attract, engage, and retain Generation Z employees, employers should prioritize creating meaningful and purposeful workplaces that align with the values and aspirations of this generation, regardless of which country they come from. In this case, comparative research is alternative when it comes to the generation that comes from two different, but identical - Slavic countries.

Furthermore, fostering a continuous learning and development culture is essential to provide ample opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, enhancing employee growth, and fostering long-term retention. Moreover, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is crucial to cultivating a workplace that reflects the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of Generation Z. Additionally, ensuring transparency in compensation and benefits packages is vital to attracting and retaining top talent by clearly communicating earning potential, career progression opportunities, and comprehensive benefits. Furthermore, embracing innovation and technology adoption is essential to providing modern tools and equipment, fostering an environment that encourages creativity and technological advancement, and aligning with the tech-savvy nature of Generation Z.

Cultivating authentic leadership is also crucial to creating a culture where leaders are open to feedback, encourage collaboration, and empower their teams to contribute meaningfully to the organisation's success. To prepare for the future labour market and support the aspirations of Generation Z individuals, policymakers should invest in education and training programs to develop a skilled workforce equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet future demands. Furthermore, implementing policies and initiatives that promote entrepreneurship is essential to provide resources, support, and mentorship to encourage innovation and business creation among Generation Z individuals, fostering economic growth and prosperity.

Moreover, encouraging and supporting sustainable business practices is crucial to align with the values of Generation Z by creating incentives and regulations that promote environmental protection and social responsibility. Fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour market is essential to address systemic barriers and promote equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background or demographics, ensuring a fair and just labour market for the future. By addressing the expectations and aspirations of Generation Z, employers and policymakers can collaboratively create a more attractive, sustainable, and equitable labour market for the future, one that aligns with the values, priorities, and talents of this emerging generation.

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