EXPECTATIONS AND INVOLVEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GENERATION Z – CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

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Purpose: The purpose of the article is to characterize Generation Z in terms of expectations towards work and employers, and to identify manifestations of commitment declared by representatives of this generation.

Design/methodology/approach: A review of the literature in the area in question was conducted, and the results of a survey of people representing Generation Z at the University of Economics were analyzed. To identify the manifestations of commitment, the concept of W.A. Kahn. The selection of people for the study was purposive, i.e. people with a length of service of no more than five years were studied.

Findings: Managers who adhere to transactional leadership may find it challenging to meet the expectations of Generation Z. It is crucial to understand that members of this generation are quick to leave a job that doesn't allow for experimentation and learning from mistakes. The Zetas' preference for quick results with minimal effort may be difficult for older generations to embrace. Representatives of generation Z, whom we surveyed, declared a high level of commitment. We explain such results by the fact that our respondents are in a period of fascination with having their first job. Unlike other authors, we conducted our research after the pandemic period, which affected the attitudes of employees of the youngest generation.

Research limitations/implications: A limitation of our study is the acquisition of results from students at only one university and the small research sample. Our research was a pilot study. In the first instance, we wanted to validate the research tool.

Practical implications: Since in 5 years there will be more than 50% of such employees, it is important to know their attitudes and expectations towards work for effective human resources management.

Originality/value: Knowing the expectations and reasons why the younger generation engages in work can be useful in the personnel decision-making process of various actors, e.g. leaders, managers, and recruiters. The results can also be inspiring for those dealing with employer branding strategies.

Keywords: generation Z, expectations, commitment.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

It is very important to understand what motivates and engages the youngest generation in the labor market. Attributes of motivation and engagement are important elements of leadership, and understanding how to influence them is important for companies. McCracken, Currie and Harrison (2016) see a contemporary opportunity to achieve a competitive advantage by attracting young talent. To this end, according to the researchers (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Niemczynowicz et al., 2023) today's managers and leaders must shape a work environment that suits the new ways and habits of the youngest employees. As Pichler and colleagues (2021) point out, understanding Generation Z is critical to gaining a competitive advantage and is essential to business success. The researchers point to the uniqueness of Generation Z in terms of how it can be harnessed to achieve organisational goals.

The purpose of the article is to characterize Generation Z in terms of expectations towards work and employers, and to identify manifestations of commitment declared by representatives of this generation.

A review of the literature in the area in question was applied, and the results of the company's survey, conducted with a group of people representing Generation Z, were analyzed. To identify the manifestations of commitment, the concept by W.A. Kahn was used.

2. Generation Z's expectations of work and employers

Generation Z are those (born after 1993) raised in the era of digital technology (Euromonitor International: Strategy Briefing, 2011), which has become their identity (Singh, Dangmei, 2016) and enables them to function from anywhere at any time. Generation Z, unlike its predecessors, does not know a world without a computer, phone, Internet, etc. Therefore, it is not surprising that Generation Z expects to work with technology (Deloitte, 2019) or aspires to work in IT (Stansell, 2019).

Zetas living an online life want to be socially connected to everyone, even their boss (Gabrielova, Buchko, 2021), while at the same time impairing their ability to make interpersonal connections in the real world, more often communicating via text, emoji and video than face-to-face (Jabłońska, Billewicz, 2016).

Representatives of Generation Z know how their professional development should proceed; they would like to develop a staggering career quickly, and effortlessly, without having to build it in small steps. Zets' loyalty is dictated by their employer's fulfillment of their expectations (Klaffke, 2014). The Deloitte global millennial survey 2019 showed that Generation Z needs immediate gratification for a job well done in the form of promotions and career advancement

opportunities. The study suggests that young people's expectations of rewards may affect the retention, motivation and engagement of Generation Z (Barhate, Dirani, 2022).

Zetas demonstrate the need for development. A study of students at the Częstochowa University of Technology revealed that 62% of them took a job during their studies to grow professionally and gain new experiences (Gajda, 2017). Representatives of Generation Z highly value companies that allow them to learn quickly, develop their creativity, and gain new competencies and experiences. They believe that responsibility for career development should be shared (Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017). At the same time, they do not care about the stability of work, they seek diversity, escape from routine, are willing to go on foreign internships, want to change and improve established processes and try new methods of work.

The acceptance of high variability and instability in careers and the need to achieve results quickly, including those related to development (Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017), makes having any job insufficient for the Zetas. For Generation Z, what matters is passion, the most important thing is to do things you love and to which you can devote yourself fully and happily (Gocłowska, 2019). Mahmoud (2021) emphasizes that Generation Z is more motivated to do work that involves the possibility of personal satisfaction. Barhate and Dirani (2022) speak in this context of an increase in intrinsic motivation when the team and supervisor recognize the Zetas' contributions and implement their ideas.

Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) argue that Generation Z looks at leadership issues in a different way than previous generations. Aggarwal et al. (2020) point out that people from Generation Z are more inclined to the concept of "working with" rather than "working for". In practice, this means that its representatives prefer working in a team and with a leader, rather than one that involves being subordinate to a hierarchical manager. In their view, Generation Z is more open to good relationships with co-workers and leaders than other generations. Dobrowolski, Drozdowski and Panait (2022) indicate that Generation Z is more intrinsically motivated to achieve their goals and therefore prefers a different leadership style. In this context, Riksen and Spies (2023) point out that Generation Z values certain interpersonal qualities (soft skills) in their leaders more than previous generations. They are referring, for example, to communication or relationship-building skills. Generation Z prefers a transformational leadership style, a leader who creates a positive and inclusive culture, demonstrates a high level of emotional intelligence, provides constant mentoring (Pietroń-Pyszczek, Borowska, 2022), is committed, is highly competent and promotes equality (McGaha, 2018). According to Ernst and Young research, regardless of gender, Generation Z expects work-life balance. Men and women reported almost equal expectations in terms of flexible working hours, acquiescence to absenteeism motivated by the need to pursue personal interests, and opportunities to work remotely (Barhate, Dirani, 2022). Fodor and Jäckel (2018) indicated that organizations that promote and promise work-life balance are more likely to attract and retain Generation Z employees.

3. Commitment as a desirable attitude of employees

One of the most widely analyzed models of organizational attachment by researchers is Meyer and Allen's concept, which distinguishes three components of attachment: affective, persistent and normative attachment. Other researchers pay attention to the psychological aspect of this relationship, defining commitment as a psychological state that mediates the influence of work resources and individual resources on organizational performance (Balducci et al., 2011). Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2014) adds that commitment is an expression of positive valuing of the organization with all its dimensions and a manifestation of the employee's positive attitude toward work. Sharma and Anupama (2010) emphasize the joy with which an engaged employee performs his or her tasks, pointing out that engagement is a reflection of an employee's positive perception of the work, as well as the conditions under which it is performed, perceptions of the organization and others working. In addition, several studies indicate that engagement is related to work efficiency and productivity (Bakker, Bal, 2010). Practical manifestations of commitment include a high level of diligence in completing tasks, showing initiative, a high degree of focus on assigned tasks, as well as performing work duties with passion and enthusiasm and a sense of pride in work (Bednarska, Małkowska, 2014).

Engagement can be defined in multiple ways. This study uses the concept of William Kahn (1990), who describes engagement as a certain state through which an individual expresses himself both physically, emotionally and cognitively while performing tasks. Involvement, in his view, refers to engaging one's self in the performance of a work role and the degree to which it is fulfilled, as well as in relationships with others, striving to accomplish tasks in physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions while achieving the effect of being preoccupied with work. Kahn outlined three components of personal involvement in work. These are meaningfulness, safety and accessibility. By meaningfulness, he refers to activities performed that give employees a sense of utility and importance. Meaningfulness can also be traced back to reciprocal relationships with co-workers or customers, which create emotional bonds and build an awareness of appreciation. The second factor is psychological security. This is the state in which we feel safe showing our true self to others without fear of negative consequences. This type of security is ensured when our interactions with others are open and we feel supported in our interactions with each other, we jointly adhere to organizational norms, and the leadership style of people in the organization is supportive, explanatory and responsible. Positive group structure processes also take place. The third factor discussed is psychological accessibility, by which we mean the degree of physical, mental and emotional inclusion in an activity.

4. Research methodology

We developed a survey form. The survey was prepared in MS Forms. The selection of people for the survey was purposive, i.e. people with work experience of no more than five years were surveyed. In this article we present the results of a pilot survey we conducted among students of the Wroclaw University of Economics. It was assumed that 150 students would take part in the survey, however, only 54 students returned the questionnaire. Not all questionnaires were complete and the final results concern 47 respondents.

Our research sought to identify in which attitudes and behaviors the respondents' commitment is manifested. To this end, the following statements were presented to the respondents, on which they were asked to take a position:

1. I am highly focused on the task (cognitive involvement).
2. I do my work with passion, enthusiasm (emotional involvement).
3. I am characterized by a high level of activity in various spheres of the organization's activities, including the desire for development (physical involvement).
4. I have a positive attitude towards the organization I work for and the work I do (identification involvement).

As the research sample was unrepresentative, we do not generalize the results obtained to the entire Z population.

5. Discussion

All respondents answered in the affirmative to the question "Are you engaged in your work". Such a result stands out from the results of other authors studying the relationship between the age of employees and factors affecting engagement; according to which the least engaged are usually employees up to 25 years old (Dziopak-Strach, 2018). The average level of engagement increases in subsequent age brackets, reaching the highest level in employees of pre-retirement age (Juchnowicz, 2010); Lewicka, 2017). This is confirmed by a study by Kordbacheh, Shultz and Olson (2014), which shows that representatives of older generations are characterized by higher levels of engagement at work. The younger generation, the researchers point out, has low levels of intrinsic motivation, which explains the low level of commitment. In contrast, Lapointa and Liprie-Spence (2017) found that employee engagement is correlated with seniority. Nancherla (2013) corroborated these results, indicating that engagement increases with lengthening seniority in the workplace; according to a study by Juchnowicz (2014), employees show the highest level of engagement in their first year of employment.

The distribution of responses regarding specific types of engagement is shown in figure 1.
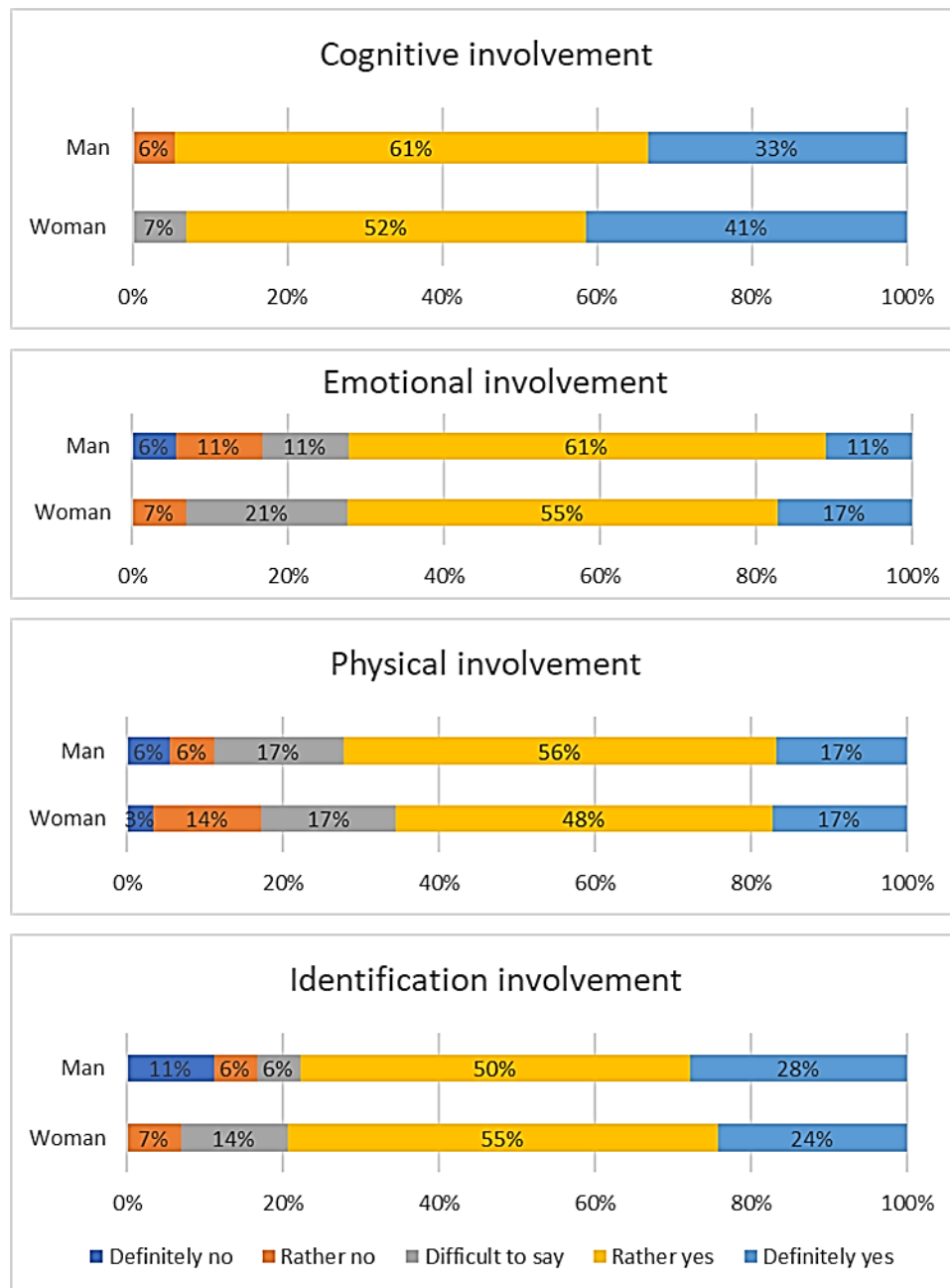
Figure 1. Respondents' stated commitment.

Source: own study.

As can be seen, the percentage of positive responses "rather yes" and "definitely yes" prevailed in both groups of respondents. Gender did not clearly differentiate respondents' indications. Cognitive involvement was declared by 94% of men and 93% of women, emotional involvement by 72% of men and the same number of women, physical involvement by 73% of men and 65% of women, and identification involvement by 78% of men and 79% of women.

The highest percentage of indications - in the group of women and men - was recorded for cognitive and identification involvement. Noteworthy are the indications especially in the group of women (93% and 79%). It is worth citing at this point the results of a study by Lipińska-

Grobelna and Ciesielska (2018), which aimed to check whether representatives of four generations, analyzed by gender, contrast with each other taking into account the intensity of such attitudes as commitment to professional activity and attachment to the organization. When asked about the level of commitment to work, women from Generation Y were found to be the most committed, while those from the Baby Boomers generation were found to be the least committed. As it seems this may be due to the generational changes taking place, young women seem to be far from replicating the patterns of women of earlier generations, who for the sake of the family gave up work and career fulfillment. Indeed, the process of reevaluating work is the domain of women of younger generations, who are turned more towards career realization, and further down the road towards starting a family. In the same study, women from the oldest generation were also found to be the least emotionally and identifiably attached to the organization, compared to representatives of generations Y and Z. This type of attachment, according to the authors, is accompanied by the belief that work allows for the realization of plans and the achievement of goals, and the lack of experience among women of the Baby Boomers generation in this area, results in weaker attachment and preoccupation with work than in younger groups.

It is worth taking a closer look at respondents' high indications of identification commitment (79% women, 78% men). According to (Kincentric Polska, 2022) research, the pandemic and its aftermath have caused young employees (before the age of 25) to feel more connected to their workplace. The willingness to stay in the organization has increased the most in this generational group (an increase of 11%, about 5% in other groups). The reasons are attributed to the streamlining of decision-making processes and the shortening of the distance between Zetas and management. At the same time, only 50% of them feel involved by their employer; they feel no influence over what happens in their companies. In this context, Jagielska (2023) points out that Generation Z representatives are looking for an atmosphere conducive to work, support for professional development, but also - and this is particularly important - opportunities to prove themselves. At the same time, Lipiński and Koczy (2023) point out that generation Z does not feel attached to their profession. This means that if they do not find their current job in a particular company or even industry satisfactory, they decide to change without hesitation.

It is therefore worth considering ways of retaining young people in the organisation. Pichler and colleagues (2021), in their proposed DITTO model (an acronym for diversity, individualism, teamwork, technology and organisational support), point out, among other things, that Generation Z is more open to diversity than other generations, so promoting diversity can be part of making the workplace more attractive and counteracting the phenomenon of silent departures.

In the case of emotional involvement, there was the same response rate in both groups (72%). Only men chose the answer "definitely not" for this type of involvement. According to Eagly and Wood (1999), men are more likely than women to focus on tasks and achieve success while overlooking the emotional sphere (a culturally reinforced tendency).

An employee's affective attachment to the organization has a positive impact on the development of employee creativity and innovation (Borkowska, 2014). As a result, positive interpersonal relations, low turnover and staff absenteeism increased work efficiency or loyalty to the company are observed. It is not a matter of the employee adjusting and revealing only those emotions that are consistent with the professional role, but of developing positive emotions of the employee towards the company, so that they lead to personal attachment and emotional identification with it. The employee's relationship with the organization can then be interpreted as a series of interactions in which both parties mutually respect each other's needs and expectations, clarify in action their powers and rules of conduct (Adamska-Chudzińska, 2015). This acquires special significance, especially about the analyzed generation. Having any job is insufficient for Generation Z. What matters is passion, doing things one loves (Gocłowska, 2019), what matters is the possibility of achieving personal satisfaction (Mahmoud et al., 2021). On the other hand, for the Zetas, "work is not an end in itself," it is a means to an end of self-development, so the ability to become emotionally involved seems important in this generational group.

At the same time, the Zetas believe that one of the prerequisites for maintaining health, wellbeing and satisfaction with life and work is maintaining the right relationship between the professional and private spheres. For them, work-life balance means having more opportunities to develop and pursue their passions (Zespół Instytutu Nauk o Zarządzaniu i Jakości Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas, 2023). Ławińska, Korombel (2023) indicate that Generation Z representatives would like to work in companies where the atmosphere is friendly, stress levels are low, raises are realised at least once a year, employment is stable and secure and working hours are flexible. In addition, Zetas want to do work that is in line with their interests and that will guarantee them a sense of meaning.

The need to correlate the interests of the zetas with the tasks at hand seems to relate to the research of Achmad and colleagues (2023), which showed that Zet talent development has a positive impact on job satisfaction, which in turn has a positive impact on Generation Z employees' intention to stay with the company.

The last type of involvement analyzed was physical involvement, associated with high levels of activity in various spheres of the organization. The young generation has quite high demands on the employer related to a pro-environmental attitude. This is a generation that is well aware of the problems of climate change, and social inequality; these issues are important to Zats. According to Różańska-Bińczyk (2022), Generation Z's expectations include support from superiors for their environmental activities, financial rewards for environmental achievements, fringe benefits (green benefits) for environmental protection, and subsidized participation in events supporting environmental activities. Representatives of Generation Z, for example, actively participate in volunteering. According to the study "Volunteering in organizations", the largest percentage of volunteers (9.5%) were young people aged 15-24, who treat helping as an investment in their future. An example is the Fundacja DKMS (2017),

which in 2016 received the support of nearly 10,000 young volunteers who were actively involved in organizing Marrow Donor Days. Again, the motivation for volunteering was not only to help others but also to take care of their future and competence. For Generation Z, which is particularly concerned with personal development, volunteering is a chance to gain hands-on experience. This is also confirmed by research conducted by Lubrańska and Zawira (2017), which investigated, among other things, the motives for engaging in volunteering by generation. Representatives of early adulthood (22-30 years old) indicated primarily: self-development, helping another person, and meeting new people.

6. Summary

Survey of Generation Z employees, including: antecedents of their application, it seems necessary if the application takes into account certain forecasts according to which it is analyzed until 2028. 58% of the global staff will be Zetas. Given that only half of them feel engaged by their employer; they do not feel they have an impact on what happens in their companies (Kincentric Polska, 2022), he challenge for managers should be to review the management approaches used so far. Engagement must be actively stimulated by the employer. The notion that Zet will be engaged 'on its own' without appropriate stimulation must be abandoned.

Expectations of Generation Z can be a challenge for managers especially those who prefer transactional leadership. In the context of building a loyal workforce, one should be aware that job stability is not what representatives of this generation care about. They easily give up a job where there is no permission to experiment and learn from mistakes. From the perspective of older generations, it may be difficult to accept, characteristic of the Zetas, the expectation of quick results with relatively little effort.

The representatives of Generation Z we surveyed declared a high level of commitment. We explain such results by the fact that our respondents – whose tenure was usually less than a year or between 1-2 years – are in a period of fascination with having their first job. Unlike other authors, we conducted our research already after the pandemic period, which affected the hierarchy of needs and expectations of people of all generations. Probably, the sudden shift to remote work mode, social alienation, and the risk of losing one's job, caused by the worsening economic performance of companies, have also revised the attitudes of workers of the youngest generation.

The highest percentage of indications - in the group of women and men - was recorded for cognitive and identification involvement. Of the types of involvement analysed, emotional involvement and physical involvement were less frequently declared.

A limitation of our research is the acquisition of results from students at only one university and the small research sample. When considering future research directions, it is worthwhile to look for correlations between the education profile and the declared expectations of the employer and the factors of engagement at work. Future research should focus on in-depth analyses of the diversity of the group analysed. It can be assumed that the function held (managerial, executive), the characteristics of the company in which they started their career (industry, business, capital, size) may be factors that differentiate young people's expectations and commitment.

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