

RESILIENCE AND THE WORKPLACE OF GENERATION Z

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the impact of resilience on professional relationships in Generation Z. The emerging psychological difficulties and failure to cope with the expectations set by reality make it necessary to focus on the analysed problem.

Design/methodology/approach: The work uses an original study conducted using the CAVI method. 98 respondents, representatives of Generation Z, took part in it. In parallel to the study, an analysis of the literature on the subject was carried out, presenting the concept of resilience. The obtained results allowed us to draw conclusions and determine trends.

Results: Respondents have a higher level of resilience than expected at work. This can be explained by the fact that the randomly selected sample consists of people who are aware of market requirements, their knowledge, skills and values, and have experience in dealing with difficult situations. In return, they expect remuneration along with other benefits important for their mental well-being. They treat social media as a means of communication, obtaining information and exchanging experiences

Research limitations/implications: This research was an attempt to verify how Generation Z copes on the job market in the context of awareness of their own resilience. Only a randomly selected sample of Generation Z representatives took part in the study.

Practical implications: Strengthening resilience brings many benefits to the company. First of all, it makes people inspired to work more often than motivated, able to respond flexibly to changes and less susceptible to burnout. They will actively seek development opportunities, increasing the scope of their own competences.

Social consequences: The demands placed on companies by young employees can bring profit to both parties, but it requires mutual respect, building relationships and respecting values. This is facilitated by social media, which influence well-being, support in difficult situations, generate self-esteem and help adapt to changes. This ability to constantly share information is the main advantage of the media for Generation Z, creating and promoting their style of functioning.

Originality/value: building awareness of resilience among Generation Z is an important factor in shaping the professional space. It is worth educating young employees by offering development in this aspect.

Keywords: resilience, Generation Z, social media.

1. Introduction

It is increasingly difficult to build one's own resilience when observing the dynamic changes in the immediate environment and feeling the constant influx of countless stimuli while participating in social media. Technological and scientific advancements contribute to improving the quality of life and we are witnessing the acquisition of information about extraterrestrial worlds and the construction of applications that support humans in almost every activity. Simultaneously, alongside these optimistic messages, we observe a decline in the mental strength to cope with daily existence.

Recognizing the need for psychological support for the young generation, it is important to address the phenomenon of resilience in the context of coping with adult life. The aim of this article is to present the impact of resilience on professional relationships among Generation Z. Emerging psychological difficulties and the inability to cope with expectations posed by reality make it necessary to analyse this problem. The hypothesis was put forward that the level of resilience affects the way of coping with professional work among representatives of Generation Z. To verify this, an original study was conducted using the CAVI method, involving 98 respondents from Generation Z.

Parallel to the study, a literature review was conducted to introduce the concept of resilience. The obtained results allowed for drawing conclusions and identifying trends.

2. Resilience – terminological analysis

Discussions about mental resilience began in the 1970s when Rutter studied the psychological adaptation of children after experiencing maternal deprivation. The concept of resilience explains the phenomenon of individuals functioning well despite various life conditions, adversities, or traumatic events (Rutter, 2006, pp. 1-12). In the Polish language, there is no single word that fully reflects the meaning of the English term "resilience". To-date, the definition of mental resilience among researchers has not been standardized. Analysing different approaches to the term, three types can be distinguished:

- The consequence definition refers to the phenomenon where an individual can adapt well and develop even in the face of significant threats (VanMeter, Cicchetti, 2020, pp. 67-73).
- The competence definition indicates the ability to maintain healthy and proper development despite various adverse factors (Masten, 2000, pp. 205-220).
- The process definition refers to mental resilience, where an individual actively adapts and develops in unfavorable circumstances (Slone, Peer, 2021, p. 76).

A holistic view of the term allows it to be understood as: flexibility, robustness, the ability to act in difficult, stressful conditions. The term was introduced to the social sciences lexicon by pioneers of research in clinical experiments, Emma Werner (2000, pp. 115-132), Norman Garmezy (1985, pp. 213-234), and Michael Rutter (2006, pp. 1-12). Discussions around the idea of resilience involve defining the term, its conceptual scope, and operationalization in measurement methods (Luthar, 2000, pp. 543-562).

In a broader sense, resilience has been defined as a dynamic process reflecting relatively good adaptation despite experiencing threats or traumatic events (Sameroff, Rosenblum, 2006, pp. 116-124). This process includes the interaction of a spectrum of risk factors, vulnerabilities, and protective factors (Craig, 2003, pp. 1-11). Resilience can be understood as a positive or protective process that reduces maladaptation in individuals experiencing adversity (Greenberg, 2007, pp. 139-150). In one of his latest works, M. Rutter (2006) emphasized the interactive nature of the resilience phenomenon. It is a concept that considers both exposure to a range of significant threatening factors and relatively good mental health despite these factors. Many studies have shown that mental resilience can help individuals maintain a relatively stable and healthy physiological level in traumatic or stressful environments, which is crucial for coping with stress and improving mental health (Labrague, 2021, pp. 1893-1905). Therefore, mental resilience is the ability to cope with difficult, stressful, and traumatic situations while maintaining or restoring normal functioning (Ungar, 2019, pp. 441-448).

Summarizing the above considerations, for the purposes of this article, the definition of resilience is adopted as the ability to adapt to changes occurring in our environment, the way of coping with stress. It helps prepare for and get used to the unknown and unexpected. Resilience is primarily related to caring for wellbeing and inner balance in the face of challenges and the ability to quickly recover in a crisis (<https://gromar.eu>, 16.01.2024).

Individuals with high mental resilience are usually more optimistic, perceive difficulties as experiences, focus on personal strengths, accept constructive criticism, build close relationships with others, develop social skills, and have emotional awareness (Ryff, 2013, pp. 10-28). This can be seen as overlapping with emotional intelligence, as the ability to be flexible and resilient among the traits influencing the handling of negative stress effects. Recently, most publications have focused on topics related to research on mental resilience aspects associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and PTSD, as well as the molecular biology and genetic basis of mental resilience (Su, Yi, Chen, Xiao, 2023, pp. 465-481). Mental resilience is significantly correlated with a higher level of life satisfaction (Zheng, Huang, Fu, 2020, pp. 1323-1332).

3. The essence of resilience in existence

The workplace is an environment that undergoes changes for various reasons and at different intervals. There can be many reasons, but stress caused by change factors is considered the most common. However, it is interesting that some people easily cope with difficulties, achieving success, while for others, it leads to changing jobs. The variation in how people react to stress factors is due to resilience – flexibility in functioning in the face of adversity. This enables a positive attitude toward work, problem-solving, and maintaining motivation for further action. Consequently, it translates into the ability to effectively regulate thoughts and emotions, perceiving difficult situations as opportunities rather than personal threats. People with high resilience see adverse circumstances as an inherent part of life rather than an obstacle (Karwowska, 2022). High employee resilience brings real benefits, fostering not just inspiration for work.

Summarizing the theoretical considerations on resilience so far, it can be stated that this dynamic process, reflecting the adaptation of an individual to the environment despite difficulties and threats, largely depends on us. Our flexibility in accepting changes, attitude towards unpredictable situations, novelties, or lack of stability are skills that shape the level of resilience. Implementing actions in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility, introducing benefits in the area of flexible working hours, sports activities, organizing training, and promotion opportunities make the employee independent and happy not only at work but also in personal life (Opolska-Bielańska, 2021).

A factor strengthening or perhaps creating psychological difficulties for Generation Z is the understanding and seeking of support in social media. Self-esteem is built based on the digital world – a direct connection with social media. This virtual world provides reinforcement, serves as a starting point for comparisons, which translates into self-esteem and frustration (Klimczyk, 2021, pp. 41-55).

Social media activity can lead to lack of patience, the need for instant gratification, lack of focus, making people demanding, creative, and engaged in actions taken. Research confirms that intense use of social media increases stress, procrastination, and problems with emotion regulation. This is confirmed by periodic FOMO reports (Jupowicz-Ginalska, 2023).

An important problem is the development of online contacts. The relationships built online are increasingly fluid, transitory, and new relationships result from a single click. New technologies facilitate connections, but in reality, they promote clearly distorted relationships (Ma, Fang, 2023). This translates into self-aggression or aggression towards others. Being in the world of digital contacts causes emotional unpreparedness for building real relationships and coping with failures in risky situations. Growing up in an increasingly individualistic and polarized social context has not contributed to the development of flexibility and adaptability to changes in the environment. The cult of instant gratification and getting what one wants at all costs seems to be a constant element of behavior today (Lemańska, 2023).

One could summarize that Generation Z is a social group bearing the consequences of the pace of life, information overload, and lack of stability, which translates into decision-making problems and fear of disapproval.

4. Resilience and job changes in Generation Z – own research analysis

In considering the idea of resilience among Generation Z, a pilot survey was conducted from 20 October 2023, to 20 January 2024, using the CAVI method. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The group was random, comprising 98 people – 64 women and 34 men, aged 19-26.

The questions covered three aspects: declared mental state, attitude towards professional work, and the role of social media in life.

Assessment of the mental state began with an evaluation of well-being. Most respondents rated it as variable (52.1%). This may indicate a lack of stability in self-assessment and emotional lability, which should not be confused with flexibility and life accommodation. An optimistic result is reflected by 34.4% of respondents who defined their well-being as good and 8.3% as very good – a total of 42.7% positively assessing their well-being. The obtained results are presented in figure 1.

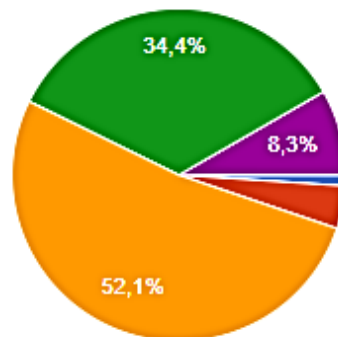


Figure 1. Self-assessment of respondents' well-being.

Source: own elaboration.

Next, the impact of stressful situations on well-being was assessed. As a result of self-diagnosis, the following distribution of answers was obtained: 57.3% assess the impact as significant compared to 40.6% as moderate. Only 2.1% state it has no significance for their well-being (figure 2).

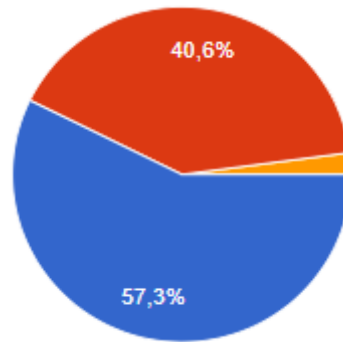


Figure 2. Assessment of the impact of stressful situations on well-being.

Source: own elaboration.

This confirms the significant impact of difficult situations on well-being and related functioning, translating into reactions. This is evidenced by the answers obtained to the question about specific behaviors in stressful situations (figure 3). Among the response options (multiple choice), both activating and introverted behaviors were included.

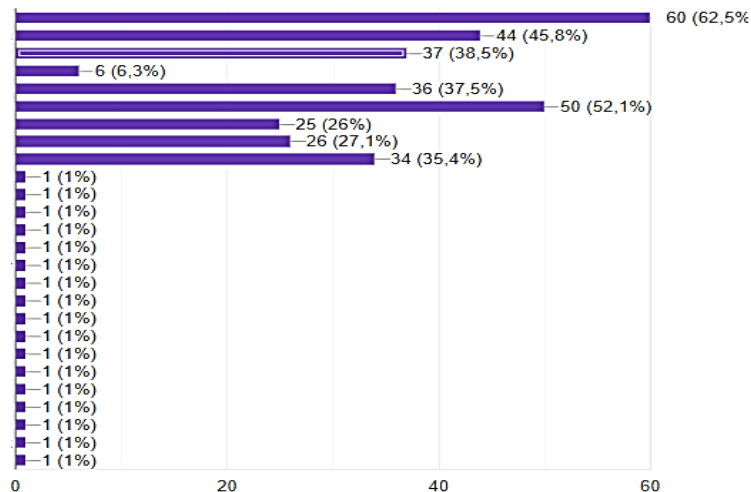


Figure 3. Preferred behaviors in difficult situations.

Source: own elaboration.

Among the responses, introverted behaviors dominated – listening to music indicated by 62.5%, "shutting oneself off" 52.1%, "going to sleep" 45.8%. Physical activity varied and oscillated around the responses: "meeting with friends" (37.5%), "going to a disco" (6.3%).

Aggressive reactions were reported by 26%, swearing 35.4%, and using substances 27.1%. This constitutes a high percentage of negative reactions to difficult situations.

This illustrates that in a difficult, stressful situation, we prefer to be alone, which may result from social alienation and the inability to cope with emotions.

Self-esteem is crucial for assessing well-being and adaptive abilities. For this purpose, respondents were asked for a self-diagnosis of self-esteem (figure 4). Positive self-assessment responses dominated ("high" 42.7% and "very high" 9.4%).

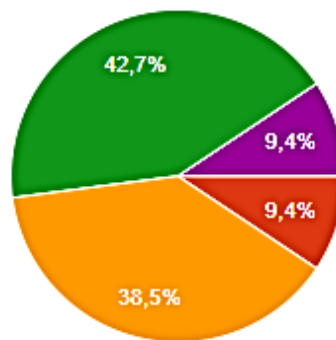


Figure 4. Self-esteem assessment according to respondents.

Source: own elaboration.

This generalized self-assessment influences mood and behavior. It can be assumed that it will translate into the level of resilience, determining flexibility and adaptation to changes (figure 5).

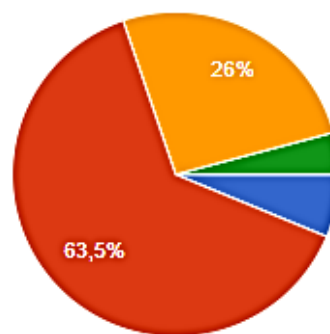


Figure 5. Flexibility and adaptation to changes.

Source: own elaboration.

Verifying well-being assessment through questions about individual functioning proved that in the case of the original study, respondents positively diagnose their adaptation to difficult situations. They assess their well-being as good, and this thinking accompanies them in everyday life. They cope differently with stressful situations, influenced by well-being, self-esteem, and adaptation to changes.

The next thematic block concerned professional activity. The comparison of mental state assessment with the attitude towards work aimed to verify the impact of resilience on coping in this area.

This part of the study began with defining what work means to the respondents. The options provided a wide range of answers. They were generated based on the author's previous article (Opolska-Bielańska, 2021, pp. 143-152). Among the possible answers, the results were: "exclusively a space for earning money" (12.5%); "a space for earning money and other benefits" (85.4%); "a space for social contacts" (69.8%); "a break from everyday life" (27.1%); "a space for realizing dreams" (27.1%); "a space for self-development" (27.1%); "a space for relaxation" (6.3%).

Among the responses, those related to money and other benefits, as well as social contacts, dominated. This confirms the assumption that work for the young generation is not solely about monetization but the essence of social relations and educational activities.

If work is not only an economic value, then it was appropriate to ask about the way of thinking about work. 46.9% of respondents had a positive perception of their workplace, while 34.4% viewed it neutrally. They value salary 76 %, knowledge of tasks and duties 68.8%, peace 62.5%, and mental well-being 54.2%. The distribution of responses confirms that Generation Z employees value salary as a reward for knowledge and skills, knowledge of tasks and duties, certainty, peace, and mental well-being as elements of life stability. This confirms the assumption that balancing work and personal life is valuable for Generation Z. They are not employees who would sacrifice their personal life for work. They work to perform tasks in which they are competent and to receive adequate remuneration and other benefits. They prefer to work in a social space rather than at home, even though it is convenient. When looking for job, they pay attention to salary, atmosphere, company location, personal development opportunities, flexible working hours (figure 6). These factors confirm the importance of independence and mental well-being for this generation.

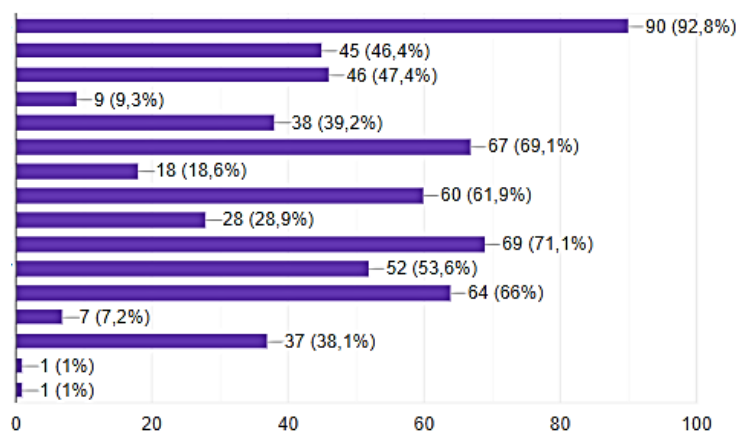


Figure 6. Important factors when choosing a job.

Source: own elaboration.

The ability to adapt to changes at work (figure 7), the speed of acclimatization to a new environment (figure 8), and treating difficult situations as challenges or escapes (figure 9) were to indicate flexibility and mental resilience as the basis of resilience. Analysis of the response distribution indicated a high level of resilience among the surveyed representatives of Generation Z. They show 66 % for good and very good adaptation to changes at work, 77.3% assess that they acclimatize quickly to a new environment, and 74.2% consider difficult situations at work as challenges.

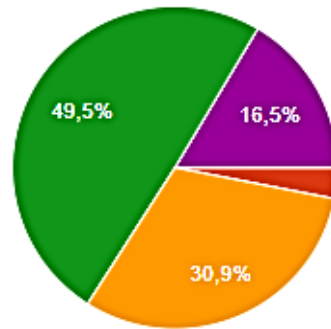


Figure 7. Adaptation to changes at work.

Source: own elaboration.

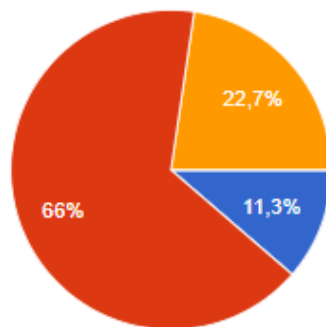


Figure 8. Speed of acclimatization to a new environment.

Source: own elaboration.

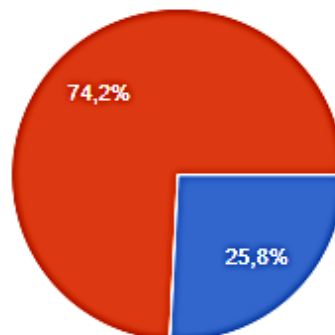


Figure 9. Treating difficult situations as challenges or escapes.

Source: own elaboration.

The final part of the original study included questions about social media in the context of encountered problems.

The first aspect addressed was the indication of the place for job searching. The responses were dominated by "internet portals" 88.5%, "social media" 49%, "company websites they want to apply to" 45.8%, "social networking sites specializing in professional-business contacts" 40.6%. Among the responses, although in single digits, were "from friends", "network of contacts", "job office websites".

The next questions concerned coping with difficult situations through social media activity. Treating them as a means of solving problems was declared by 56.2% compared to 43.7% who do not seek support there. In difficult situations, social media are an escape for 45.8% of respondents, not for 15.4%, and "sometimes" for 39.6%.

The obtained results of the original study confirm the assumptions made in the work, but to a lesser extent than expected.

5. Summary

The aim of the article was to present the impact of resilience on coping with work among Generation Z. It was assumed that they have a lower level of resilience than the original research showed. This can be explained by the fact that the randomly selected sample included individuals aware of market requirements, their knowledge, skills, and value, and having experience in coping with difficult situations. In return, they expect remuneration along with other benefits important for their mental well-being. They treat social media as a means of communication, obtaining information, and exchanging experiences.

Employers hiring representatives of Generation Z should focus on actions that allow for maintaining a balance between private life and work. The process of career advancement and development is being modernized. The company's offer should include opportunities for self-development through a package of dedicated training, employee duties should have meaning and provide satisfaction from the essence of action. It is necessary to create a good atmosphere and organizational culture based on respect, cooperation, and acceptance. The remuneration should be competitive, and if the work can be done remotely, there should be an option to choose.

Strengthening resilience brings many benefits to the company. First of all, it makes people more often inspired to work rather than motivated, able to respond flexibly to changes, and less prone to burnout. They will actively seek development opportunities, increasing the scope of their competencies.

The requirements that young employees impose on companies can bring benefits to both parties, but it requires mutual respect, building relationships, and respecting values. Social media, which influence well-being, support in difficult situations, generate self-esteem, and help adapt to changes, are conducive to this. Therefore, it is not surprising that this is a space for achieving mental well-being, job seeking, and building social contacts. It assumes dialogue, quick response, sharing experiences, and immediate communication. This constant sharing of information is a fundamental advantage of media for Generation Z, creating and promoting a style of functioning.

The applicative value lies in building awareness of resilience among Generation Z as an essential factor in shaping the professional environment. It is worth educating young employees, offering development in this aspect. This study was an attempt to verify how Generation Z copes in the labor market in the context of awareness of their own resilience. It would be necessary to expand the research by measuring before and after education in the area of resilience awareness in the process of one's own existence.

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