

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE MEANING AND VALUE OF WORK: AN ATTEMPT AT EXPLANATION USING STRAUSS-HOWE GENERATIONAL THEORY

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Purpose: What is the meaning and value of human work? This article attempts to answer this question from the perspective of different generations: employees representing Generation X and Y (Nomads and Heroes) and primary school students, representing late Z and Alpha generations (Artists and Prophets). The research problem addressed in this article is the perception of the meaning and value of work. The aim is to compare this between young and adult individuals (static dimension of the research) and to attempt to understand and explain the different ways of perceiving the meaning and value of work (dynamic dimension of the research).

Design/methodology/approach: Differences in the perception of the meaning and value of work between generations are explained using the Strauss-Howe generational theory, which introduces a dynamic perspective for understanding generational differences. The research material for the analysis was collected through surveys conducted between 2019 and 2022, as part of the NCN project no. 2013/09/D/HS4/02701. Methodological triangulation was applied in the data analysis process: quantitative analysis showing differences between generations and qualitative analysis explaining these differences.

Findings: The constructs of work perception among young people and adults are based on different value systems. Adults more frequently use an 'outward' narrative to describe the meaning and value of work (what their work gives to the world), whereas young people use an 'inward' narrative (what work gives to them).

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation lies in the assumptions adopted in Strauss-Howe's generational theory. Future research could attempt to replace the proposed by Strauss and Howe circular movement with a spiral movement, thereby seeking the driving forces behind this movement, manifested in generational differences.

Practical implications: HR practices in diversity management.

Social implications: Better understand different social groups (generations) attitudes.

Originality/value: An original approach is the adoption of the category of values rather than attitudes in the analysis to explain generational differences and implementation historical background in explanation work value differences between generations (dynamic approach).

Keywords: perception of work, generational differences, Strauss-Howe generational theory, meaning and value of work.

Category of the paper: research paper, general review.

1. Introduction

Studies that consider the category of generation or the age of employees constitute important area of exploration in the social sciences, including management sciences. In the last two decades, interest in the topic of generations, age, and aging at work has significantly increased (Rudolph, Zacher, 2022, p. 3). This is partly due to ongoing changes: demographic changes (an aging society) and economic (changing demand for and supply of labor), resulting in people working longer (Hertel, Zacher, 2018). This brings together in the labor market representatives of different age groups (generations), with different values, attitudes and preferences.

In research on generations and age at work, two trends can be observed: one focuses on understanding the specificity and characteristics of populations of similar age¹, while the other focuses on comparative analysis that shows and explains differences between generations. This study fits into the second trend of research, which in management sciences is manifested in so-called diversity management.² In general, comparative studies are static in nature, i.e. they compare different characteristics of different generations at a given moment. Using Strauss-Howe's generation theory, which takes into account the historical context that shapes the value system and attitudes of coexisting generations in different ways (depending on the stage of the life cycle the generation is), comparative analysis can be given a dynamic character. The aim of the presented article is to compare the perception of the meaning and value of work by young and adult individuals (static dimension of research) and to attempt to understand and explain the different ways of perceiving the meaning and value of work (dynamic dimension of research). The first part of the article briefly discusses the categories of age and the concept of generation. The next part introduces Strauss-Howe's generational cycles theory. Subsequently, the results of the conducted comparative studies are presented, and the differences of how different generations perceive work are explained.

¹ For example, Generation Y (Winter, Jackson, 2016; Andrałojć, Ławrynowicz 2012), Generation Z (Iorgulescu, 2016), or Generation Alpha (McCrinkle, 2020). Nevertheless the approach that adopts a lifespan perspective is gaining popularity recently. It is worth emphasizing here the difference between the so-called lifespan approach and the lifecourse perspective. The first has been developed in the field of psychology (mainly from the work of Baltes, 1987) and highlights the various needs of an individual throughout their life cycle, while the second perspective has been developed in sociology and focuses mainly on the social (historical) context in which the individual lived (work initiated by Karl Mannheim). These are complementary theoretical frameworks aimed at understanding the individual and group/institutional influences on human development (Rudolph, Zacher, 2022, p. 6). Both approaches are used to analyze the phenomenon of "successful aging at work," defined as "the proactive maintenance or adaptive recovery (after a decline) of high levels of ability and motivation to continue working among older employees" (Kooij et al., 2020, p. 345).

² Within which, besides generational diversity (associated with age diversity) (Wojtaszczyk, 2016), cultural, ethnic, religious, gender differences, and the so-called neurodiversity are also studied.

2. Generation as a social concept

Generation as a social phenomenon became a subject of interest in the early 20th century (during the interwar period). The first works emerged thanks to Karl Mannheim, Wilhelm Pinder, and José Ortega y Gasset. In Poland, this topic was undertaken in the post-war period mainly by Maria Ossowska, Jan Garewicz, and Barbara Fatyga (Folta, 2020, pp. 23-26). The concept of generation is crucial to understand social and cultural changes that shape employee attitudes.

The topic of generations is related to the issue of age. Age can be understood in various ways. Primarily, as chronological age (resulting from the date of birth). Additionally, as functional age (considering physical health and cognitive abilities), organizational age (taking into account the length of service in a given organization), life phase age (defined by family status), or subjective age (resulting from how an individual feels) (Rudolph, Zacher, 2022, p. 22). Psychologists suggest moving away from the category of ‘generation’, at the same time pointing out that comparative studies between ‘young’ and ‘older’ employees, taking into account chronological age, deserve attention (Rudolph, Zacher, 2022, p. 22)³. In addition, next to gender and ethnicity, chronological age is one of the most important characteristics used for social comparisons and social (self-)categorization.

The concept of ‘chronological generation’ is associated with chronological age, understood as a specific group of people born at a given time. In the theory of generations, Mannheim distinguished between potential generation (following generation in a biological sense) and actual generation (having an awareness of its own distinctiveness—a cultural phenomenon) (Wojtaszczyk, 2016, p. 32; Folta, 2020, p. 24, after: Mannheim, 1952, p. 299). The connecting factor between potential and actual generations is significant historical and social events that shape the consciousness of a given group (Wojtaszczyk, 2016, p. 32). According to Karl Mannheim, a generation is a group of people born in a certain generational location (time and place) (Folta, 2020, p. 24, after: Mannheim, 1952, p. 292). Mannheim emphasized in his theory that experiences jointly lived by individuals at a specific time influence the shaping of their values, views, beliefs, and attitudes, known as the ‘spirit of the age’. A similar definition of generation, referring to the socio-cultural context, is presented by Barbara Fatyga: *a generation is a group of people growing up in a specific socio-cultural situation* (Folta, 2020, p. 26, after: Fatyga, 2005, p. 195) and Maria Ossowska: *a generation is a group of people with common attitudes determined by jointly experienced historical events* (Ossowska, 1963, p. 51)⁴.

³ Research conducted in the fields of social psychology and sociology on social identity and self-categorization meta-theory indicates that people use chronological age to categorize others and themselves into distinct social groups (e.g., ‘younger workers’ and ‘older workers’) (Hornsey, 2008).

⁴ Ossowska, in her definition, emphasizes attitudes, while Mannheim focuses on the value system.

Chronological generation category provides the basis of widespread division into the baby boomers (born approximately between 1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y (Millennials) (1981-1995), Generation Z (the Snowflake Generation)⁵ (1995-2009), Generation Alpha (also known as Generation Glass, Upagers, Global Gen, Multi-modals) (2010-2024)⁶, and yet unborn Generation Beta (2025-2030) (McCrindle, 2020)⁷. Generation Alpha is currently the youngest demographic cohort following Generation Z and the first to be born entirely in the third millennium. The report "Understanding Generation Alpha" (McCrindle, 2020) highlights the main characteristics of this generation. The most important from the perspective of shaping the value system and worldview are:

- Communicating with the environment through social media,
- Finding authorities among influencers on TikTok or YouTube,
- Engaging in fewer social interactions,
- Experiencing FOMO (fear of missing out) as opposed to JOMO (joy of missing out)⁸.

One might wonder whether these characteristics are unique to Generation Alpha or can be found in all cohorts living in a specific time marked by the rapid development of new technologies, consumerism, and social atomization. A partial answer to this question can be found in Strauss-Howe's generational theory.

3. Strauss-Howe generational theory

William Strauss and Neil Howe, similar to Karl Mannheim, 'embedded' the generation in specific socio-cultural conditions. However, they believed that there is a feedback loop between the historical context (specific socio-cultural conditions in which people are born, raised, and grow) and the generation. This means that, on one hand, the context shapes the generation, but the generation also shapes history. According to them, this occurs cyclically, following

⁵ The Snowflake Generation refers to people born in the 1990s and early 2000s. The unusual name is derived from Chuck Palahniuk's book 'Fight Club'. It includes a line that resonates with many members of this generation: *You are not special. You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake.*

⁶ The name refers to the first letter of the Greek alphabet and comes from the results of a survey conducted in 2008 by the Australian consulting agency McCrindle Research. Its founder, Mark McCrindle, chose the first letter of the Greek alphabet because he wanted to emphasize the beginning of a new cycle following Generation Z (Brown, 2020; McCrindle, 2020).

⁷ In the literature, there are many other classifications of generations. For example, Polish sociologists distinguish the Kolumbowie generation, the John Paul II generation, the Ikea generation, the Second Poland generation, the Thaw generation, the March '68 generation, the Solidarity generation, and the '89 generation (Wojtaszczyk, 2016, p. 32).

⁸ In contrast to the effect of JOMO (joy of missing out) – taking care of one's well-being without the need to follow a continuous stream of stimuli and social activities.

a recurring pattern in history, the so-called secular cycle (*saeculum*)⁹, which lasts from 70 to 100 years (Folta, 2020, p. 26). Analyzing historical events from the 15th century, they identified seven saecula. In this cycle, four phases follow one another: High, Awakening, Unraveling, and Crisis. The transition from one phase to the next is called a Turning, with the final Turning referred to as a Shock, *when after the Crisis, the old order collapses, a new world emerges from the ruins, a new saeculum begins, and the cycle repeats* (Folta, 2020, p. 26)¹⁰. The current stage (called the Millennial Saeculum) began in 1945 and is still ongoing, which could indicate that we are approaching its end, the stage of Crisis, and the Turning in the form of a Shock that will establish a new order¹¹.

In the theory of generational cycles, an important aspect of each phase is the way children are raised. Strauss and Howe indicate that neglected children grow up to become overprotective parents, and ‘spoiled’ children grow up to become selfish parents who neglect their children. Neglected children become overprotective parents, and the situation repeats. In the secular cycle, there are four generational groups. The archetypes of these groups are: Prophets (born during the High phase, coming of age during the Awakening phase), Nomads (born during the Awakening phase, coming of age during the Crisis), Heroes (born during the Unraveling phase, coming of age during the Crisis), and Artists (born during the Crisis phase, coming of age during the High phase). Taking into account the Millennial stage (which is now), it can be observed that Strauss-Howe's archetypes correspond to the commonly accepted generational names (Baby Boomers, X, Y, Z, Alpha)¹². Each of these generational groups experiences each phase of the cycle but at different stages of their lives, which is significant for shaping their value systems and attitudes towards work. Table 1 presents the phases of the secular cycle and their key characteristics.

Table 1.

Phases of the secular cycle and their characteristics

	High	Awakening	Unraveling	Crisis
Upbringing	loosening	neglected	greater care	overprotective
Family	strong	weakening	weak	growing stronger
Differences in gender roles	maximum	fading	minimum	increasing
Ideals	established	discovered	questioned	defended
Institutions	strong	attacked	in decay	established

⁹ Saeculum means *the length of a human life*. Interestingly, according to Strauss and Howe, one secular cycle encompasses two economic cycles. Additionally, secular cycles are often associated with the outbreak of wars (Folta, 2020, p. 26).

¹⁰ How a social system based on communitarian values can be reborn after the Crisis phase and what significance this may have for the perception of the essence and value of work is presented in: Andrałojć, 2023a.

¹¹ This can be confirmed by the crises we have experienced since 2000: the economic crisis of 2008-2009, the Covid pandemic of 2020-2021, and armed conflicts, including the ongoing war in Ukraine since 2021.

¹² It is worth noting that the contemporary Generation Alpha and the one that will follow it (Beta) are already beginning to exhibit the characteristics of the Prophet archetype from the new saeculum stage, which has not yet been named by Strauss and Howe. This generation will most likely grow up in the unique times of the last turning and will be the first generation of the new secular cycle.

Cont. table 1.

Culture	innocence	passion	cynicism	practicality
Social structure	uniform	fragmented	diverse	merging
Worldview	simple	complicating	complex	simplifying
Social priorities	maximum community	increasing individualism	maximum individualism	increasing communitarianism
Greater necessity	do what works	fix the inner world	do what seems right	fix the outer world
Vision of the future	increasingly optimistic	euphoric	increasingly pessimistic	sense of urgency
Wars	restore order	cause controversy	unresolved	total
Children (0-20 years old)	Prophets	Nomads	Heroes	Artists
Adults (21-40 years old)	Artists	Prophets	Nomads	Heroes
Middle-aged (41-60 years old)	Heroes	Artists	Prophets	Nomads
Elderly (61-80 years old)	Nomads	Heroes	Artists	Prophets
Years of the Millennial stage	1945-1964 (Baby Boomers are born) Prophets	1965-1984 (Generation X and "early" Y are born) Nomads	1985-2004 (Generation "late" Y and "early" Z are born) - Heroes	2005 – present (Generation "late" Z and "early" Alpha are born) - Artists

Source: own elaboration, based on Folta, 2020, p. 29.

Strauss and Howe indicate that Artists enter adulthood feeling unfulfilled. Interdependence and pluralism are important to them. They are caring, open-minded, sentimental, and meticulous (1997, p. 98). Prophets enter adulthood as ‘spiritual’. Their inner world, reflection, and values are crucial to them. They are principled, decisive, creative, narcissistic, and ruthless (Strauss, Howe, 1997, p. 98). Nomads, as children (in the 1960s and 70s), were neglected (the era of ‘latchkey kids’) and viewed as hindrances to their parents’ development (Folta, 2020, p. 32). They entered adulthood feeling alienated. Self-sufficiency, competition, freedom, and honor are important to them. They have a pragmatic and solitary management style (believing they can do everything best themselves, making delegation difficult). They are sensible, practical, and unemotional (Strauss, Howe, 1997, p. 98). When Heroes were born and during their childhood and youth (1980-2004), the times were marked by individualization, cynicism, the spread of neoliberal ideology, loss of trust in public and social institutions, the era of ‘culture wars’, and the dissolution of the USSR (soviet Russia) (Folta, 2020, p. 32). They entered adulthood confident in their strength, focused on themselves and their close social group (eg. Family). The external world, community (family), and prosperity are important to them. They have a collegial, expansive management style. They are selfless, rational, competent, but also unreflective, impulsive, and mechanical (Strauss, Howe, 1997, p. 98).

4. Methodology

Research in management sciences focusing on generational differences primarily analyzes variations in individual attitudes towards work, measured by factors such as satisfaction levels or engagement (Clark, Oswald, Warr, 1996; Wojtaszczyk, 2016, p. 31; Zalewska, 2009), or differences in preferences regarding the workplace or working conditions (Iorgulescu, 2016). The literature distinguishes three types of work attitudes, which are connected to the perceived essence and value of work: 1) punitive, where work is considered a 'necessary evil', an unpleasant obligation; 2) autotelic, where work is a value in itself, and perceived as a pleasure; 3) instrumental, where work is seen as a means to achieve other goals, such as self-development or building relationships with others (Wojtaszczyk, 2016, pp. 30-31, after: Czerw, 2013, p. 221). These attitudes are shaped by fundamental beliefs and perceptions of work, reflecting an individual's value system.

Thus, it should be noted that values are primary to attitudes and shape them (Winter, Jackson, 2016, p. 2000). Values also play a crucial role in guiding behavior and shaping work motivation (Kinger, Kumar, 2023, p. 204). As fundamental cognitive beliefs, values reflect *evaluative standards related to work or the work environment, through which individuals discern what is 'right' or assess the significance of their preferences* (Dose, 1997, pp. 227-228). The widely used classical taxonomy of work outcomes by Elizur (1984) distinguishes instrumental (extrinsic) values related to the material consequences of work (e.g., salary, career development) and cognitive (intrinsic) values (e.g., interesting work, autonomy, learning opportunities). Later concepts expanded the list of values in the work outcomes taxonomy to include promotion opportunities, influence, a sense of power, involvement in decision-making, altruistic values (e.g., doing things for others), and social values (e.g., positive relationships with supervisors and colleagues) (Johnson, 2002). In this article, I analyze various perspectives on the essence of work (what work is for an individual) and the value of work (what makes work perceived as important/valuable), which together constitute the perception of the meaning of work. By overlaying this ontological-axiological concept of work with the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), a theoretical model of the perception of the meaning of work was developed (Table 2)¹³, forming the basis for empirical study.

¹³ The original version of which was discussed in: Andrałojć, 2015.

Table 2.
The model of work meaning perception

		Cultural dimension of work	
		Individualism	Collectivism
Ontological-axiological dimension of work	Punitive value (duty)	Work is earning money (economic necessity) – category 1	Work is fulfilling a social duty arising from an internal need or social pressure (social necessity) – category 2
	Autotelic value (pleasure)	Work is self-fulfillment, passion, interests, a way to take a break from daily duties, enrich one's life, a value in itself – category 3.	Work is a way to help others, do something important for others or the environment – category
	Instrumental value (investment)	Work is the development of competencies (gaining experience, skills, knowledge) or career advancement (investment in human capital) – category 5	Work is about relationships with other people: meeting people, forming relationships, finding friends - building a social network (investment in social capital) – category 6

Source: own elaboration, based on Andrałojć, 2015, 2023b.

Research on generational differences in the perception of work shows that generations significantly differ in preferred values and patterns of thinking (Kwiecińska et al., 2023, p. 95). The in-depth qualitative analysis conducted in this article highlights the areas of these differences, and the adopted Strauss-Howe generational cycles theory helps explain the sources of the observed differences.

The research, was conducted between 2019 and 2022 among employees and final-year primary school students who were 14 or 15 years old at the time of the study. Responses from 764 students and 550 employees were analyzed¹⁴. The students are representatives of the late Generation Z and Alpha (Artist and Prophet Archetypes). This group was named ‘Young’. The employees were aged 24-56 at the time of the study. They are representatives of Generations X and Y – the Hero and Nomad Archetypes. This group was named ‘Adults’.

In the presented analysis, only a part of the research material collected as part of a broader project was used. The following questions were analyzed:

1. How important are various aspects of life to you?
2. What should work be for people?
3. How useful is work in a specific profession (30 professions were studied) to society?
4. Which profession is the most useful and why?
5. Who would you like to be in the future and why? (this question was only for students).

The first three questions were categorized responses and formed the basis of the quantitative comparative analysis identifying differences between generations. The last two questions were open-ended and were subjected to qualitative analysis, involving the identification of categories describing the value of work.

¹⁴ More on the methodology of the research conducted among employees can be found in: Andrałojć, 2023b.

5. Meaning of work in Young and Adults opinion - results

Declared life values are presented in Figure 1. The essence of work is presented in Figure 2. Respondents answered the question ‘What should work be for people’ by rating fifteen different answers on a Likert scale (from 1 to 5)¹⁵, which were defined based on the model of the work meaning perception (Table 2). The results of the averaged responses obtained for the Young and Adult groups are presented in Figure 1. They are ordered in ascending order based on the average rating given by the Young group.

For the Young, work has an autotelic value: self-fulfillment (interests, passions) – marked on the chart as number 4(3) and instrumental value: development of competencies – 8(5) and career advancement – 9(5). Adults rated the instrumental value related to competency development the highest – 8(5), followed by the autotelic value manifested in self-fulfillment – 4(3) (individualistic perspective) and meeting new people – 10(6) (communitarian perspective). Both the Young and Adults rated categories related to duty or social necessity the lowest – marked on the chart as numbers 2(2) and 3(2), as well as categories related to social relationships aimed at finding a permanent partner – 12(6).

The differences between the Young and Adults in the perception of what work should be are as follows:

- The Young were less disagreed with the statement that work is a duty to society – category 3(2), and that work is a way to find a permanent partner – category 12(6).
- Adults rated only two categories higher than the Young: work as a way to do something important for others – 6(4) and a value in itself – 15(3), though the differences were not significant.
- The Young agreed much more than Adults with the statement that work is a way to do something important for the environment – 7(4), which may reflect the growing ecological awareness among young people.
- The Young agreed more than Adults with the statements that work is a way to take a break from daily duties – 13(3), a way to diversify one's life – 14(3), a way to advance a career – 9(5), and a way to develop oneself – 8(5), with the last two categories being rated relatively high.

¹⁵ 1 meant definitely should not be, 2 – rather should not be, 3 – neither yes nor no, 4 – rather yes, 5 – definitely yes.

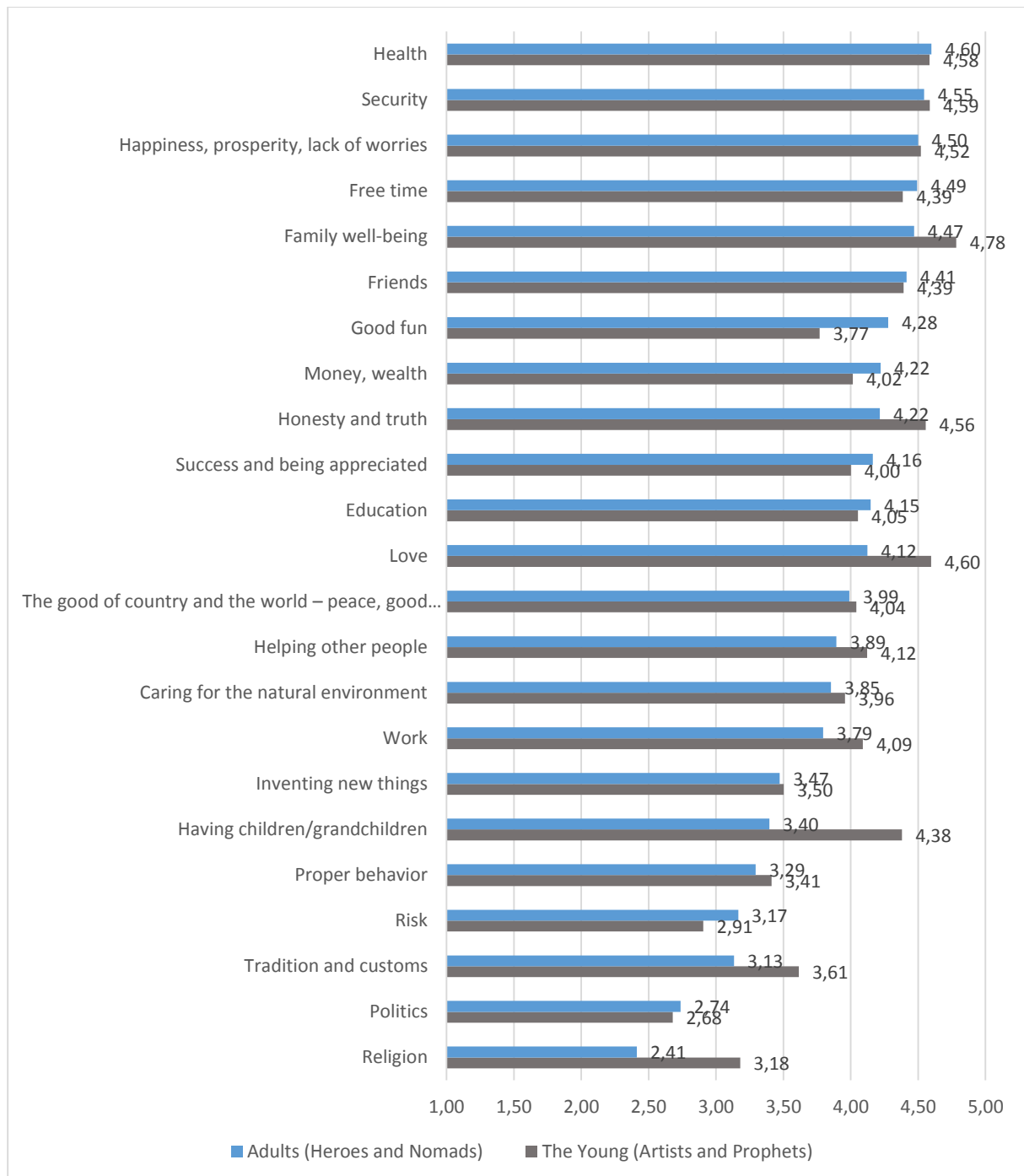
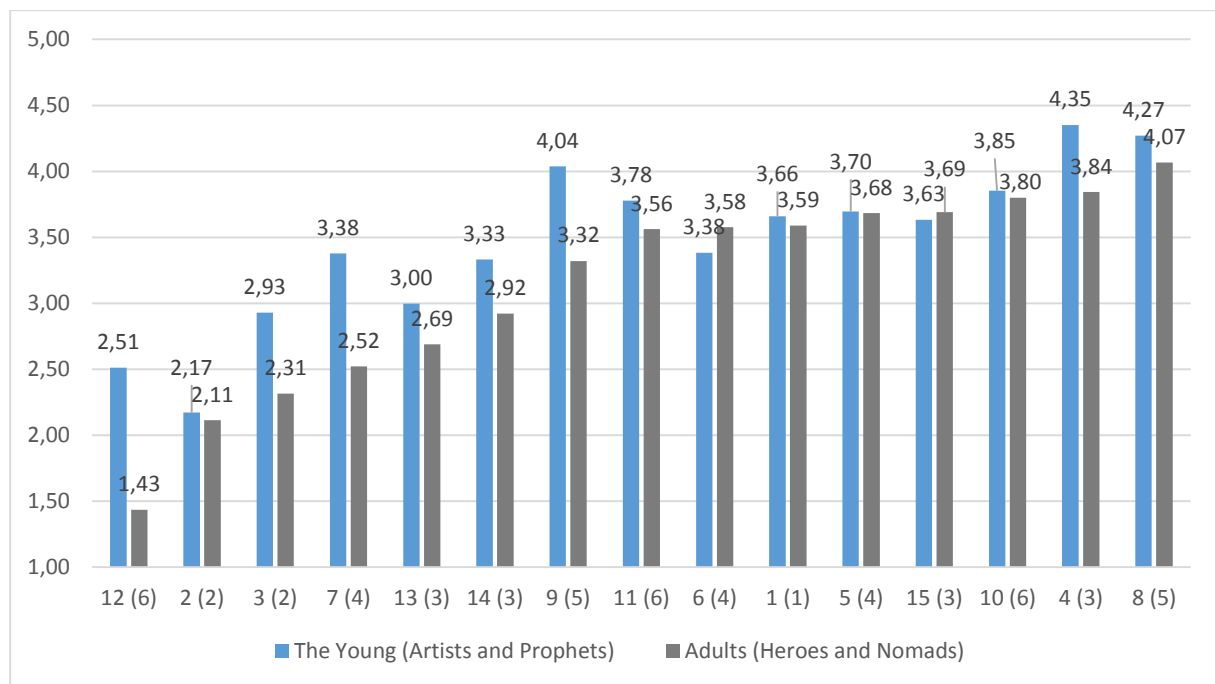


Figure 1. Average ratings of life values.

Source: own elaboration.



1(1) Economic necessity – one has to work to earn money, to support oneself and/or one's family.

2(2) Social necessity – one has to work because it is expected by other people/environment.

3(2) Duty to society – fulfilling a civic duty.

4(3) Self-fulfillment – pursuing one's interests and passions.

5(4) A way to help others – through work, one helps other people.

6(4) A way to do something important for others.

7(4) A way to do something important for the natural environment.

8(5) A way to develop oneself – gaining and developing competencies (skills, knowledge).

9(5) A way to advance a career – opportunities for professional advancement.

10(6) A way to meet new people.

11(6) A way to form relationships with others – work helps to create a group of friends.

12(6) A way to find a husband/wife, a long-term partner.

13(3) A way to take a break from daily household duties.

14(3) A way to diversify one's life.

15(3) A value in itself.

The numbers in parentheses indicate the category from the model of the perception of the essence and value of work – Table 2.

Figure 2. What should work be?

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents were also asked to assess the social value of work in 30 professions. Both the Young and Adults gave the highest social value rating to the doctors – see Figure 3. In the top ten professions indicated by both groups were also firefighter, nurse, police officer, lawyer, and university professor. However, it should be noted that in the top ten professions valued by Adults were also teacher, preschool educator, and car mechanic (the Young rated teachers and preschool educators quite low), while in the professions valued by the Young, soldier, psychologist, and cook were included. It is interesting that the social value of the politician's work was rated the lowest by Adults (position 30/30), while in the Young's ranking, this profession got 19 position out of 30. Professions that were rated significantly differently by the Young and Adults are marked on Figure 3 with an arrow.

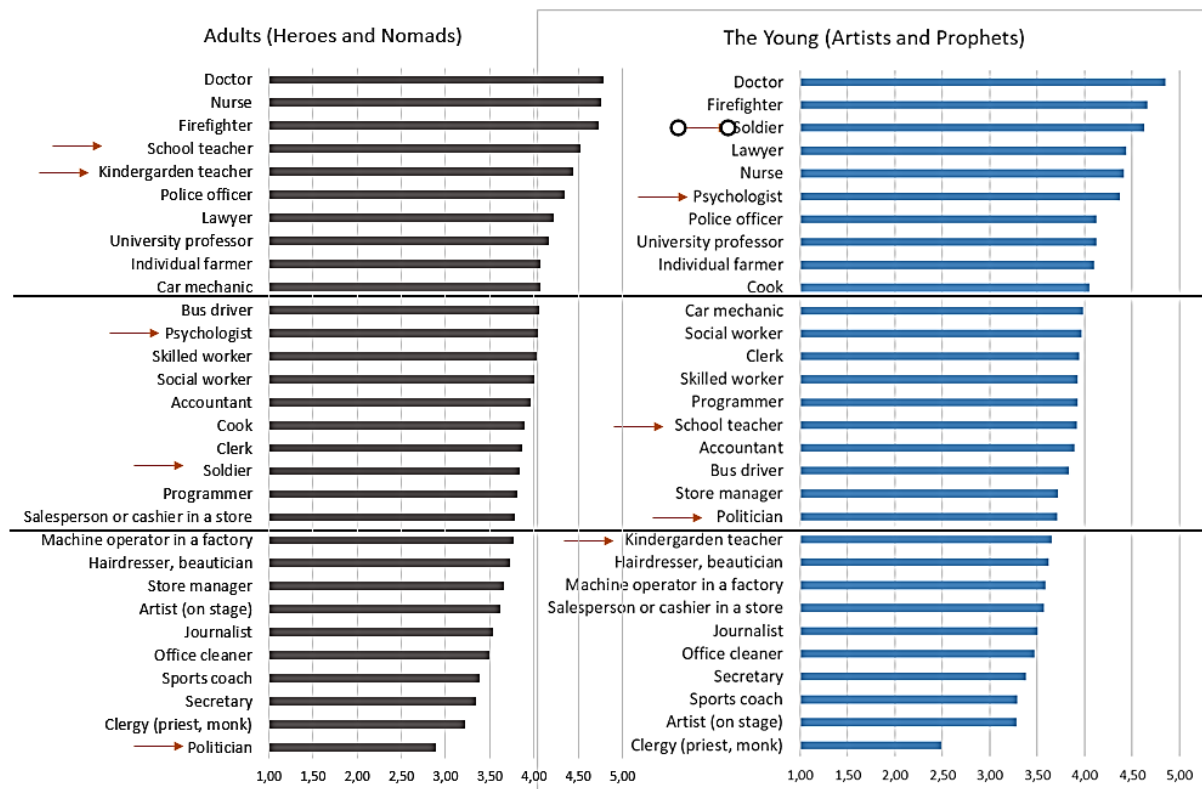


Figure 3. Social value of work – ranking of professions in the opinion of the Young and Adults.

Source: own elaboration.

In the open-ended question where respondents were asked to choose the most socially valuable profession, both Adults and Young most frequently selected the doctor (42% of Adults and 41% of Young). Additionally, Adults often chose the teacher (9.5%) and kindergarden teacher (9%). The Young, on the other hand, pointed to the psychologist (12%), soldier (12%), and politician (5%). Among the categories explaining the choice of a given profession (thus describing what social value of work means to the respondent), the dominant ones were: protection of life and health, provision of food, and ensuring safety. For Adults, the category describing the social value of work also included the creation of knowledge and influencing social development, while for the Young, it included order and internal harmony. Adults more often used the ‘outward’ narrative, such as: ‘gives to the world’, ‘helps people’, whereas the Young used the ‘inward’ narrative, such as ‘gives me’, ‘helps us’¹⁶.

When asked about the profession they would like to pursue in the future, the Young indicated: programmer/computer scientist (10.6% of responses), psychologist (8%), doctor (5.3%), mechanic (5%), and cook (4.5%). Other professions in order of frequency included: lawyer, athlete, veterinarian, police officer, architect, actor, hairdresser, graphic designer,

¹⁶ A more detailed qualitative analysis by identifying various categories describing the social value of work is presented in: Andrałojć, 2023b.

photographer, soldier, coach, translator, beautician¹⁷. The work that the Young wanted to do is associated with helping others, fulfilling dreams and interests, bringing joy (to oneself and others), doing what one already knows how to do easily and effortlessly, discovering new things, fulfilling ideals and higher social good, continuing family professions, and earning money. These categories reflect autotelic values (both in individual and communitarian dimensions) and instrumental values (particularly in the individual dimension). In their motives of choice, pragmatism can be seen (earning money, continuing a profession, minimizing effort) as well as the pursuit the higher ideals (helping, fulfilling dreams, vocation, doing something one loves).

6. Discussion and further research

In the presented analysis – both in life values and in the perception of the work meaning – signs of the times related to the Crisis phase are manifested on one hand, and the generation differences can be observed on the other hand. There are values that are associated with specific life phases, regardless of the historical context, eg. development, money, and fun are characteristic of young people, while family, having children, love, truth, tradition, and customs gain significance with age. However, the argument regarding the life stage does not dismiss the concept of generations per se (i.e., traits based on the life stage may exist within generations, but the life stage alone is not a sufficient basis to define a generation) (Winter, Jackson, 2016, p. 2000). Differences visible in different age groups of society can result from the life stage and, as Strauss and Howe (similarly to Mannheim and Ossowska) argue, the socio-cultural context in which these age groups entered different life stages (especially adulthood), shaping their value systems.

Referring to presented in the article characteristics of different generational archetypes and the traits accompanying the phase of entering adulthood, it can be explained why the Young value the work of psychologists, soldiers, and politicians more than Adults do. They want to change the world, fulfill a civic duty through work, and not only give something to the world (help), but also take care of their own development, inner peace, and harmony. Nomads and Heroes, through their pragmatism and rationalism, reinforce established, mainstream management patterns. Prophets and Artists, on the other hand, bring deeper reflection, intuition, and create new paths, discovering new perspectives.

¹⁷ Other indications include individual professions, among which the interesting ones are: virologist, sports commentator, criminologist, copywriter, detective, tattoo artist, forester, astronaut, microbiologist, navigator, diver, tiler, traveler, flight attendant, and rewilding specialist (who "will be responsible for reforesting urbanized areas").

Taking into account the various characteristics of the discussed generational archetypes, the greatest differences are between Nomads, who are in middle age and hold managerial roles in organizations during the Crisis phase, and Artists, who enter the labor market during the Crisis phase. Their perception of reality is based on completely different value systems. Nomads experienced the collapse of real socialism and were enthralled by capitalism. Artists do not share, and even criticize, the values of the aggressive capitalism of the 1990s. They want to work less. Not only do they value their free time more, but they also know how to fight for it¹⁸. As a result of such significant ideological clashes, a crucial turning point occurs between the phases of the cycle (the Shock), when the established 'world order' is questioned, and a completely new system is created.

The years during which the research was conducted (2019-2022) are, according to the Strauss-Howe theory, the Crisis phase (which began in 2005). The noticeable return to communitarian values may confirm the hypothesis of entering the final turning point. Perhaps in the near future, we will experience significant changes in the labor market aimed at creating a new order. The initiators of these changes will be the Artist and Prophet.

The generational cycles theory proposed by Strauss and Howe has its limitations. First, it is criticized for lacking solid empirical evidence to support the cyclicity of generations. Many conclusions were based on subjective historical interpretations, which can be selective and not always objective (Furedi, 2013). Additionally, this theory generalizes the traits of entire generations, which can lead to stigmatization and oversimplifications that do not reflect the actual complexity of society (Mackay, 2002). This theory has a deterministic approach, ignoring the impact of unpredictable factors and events that can significantly alter the course of history. The pace of social, technological, and economic changes in the contemporary world may make classical generational cycles less predictable. Globalization, digitalization, and other contemporary phenomena may affect how generations are shaped and function. Considering this limitation future research could attempt to replace the proposed by Strauss and Howe circular movement with a spiral movement, thereby seeking the driving forces behind this spiral shift. It would mean, that each subsequent Crisis (from the generational cycles theory) is a different crisis but results from similar social processes as previous ones. What is the 'force' driving the spiral motion? What role do generational differences play in this social movement? The larger the differences, the faster the transformation? Or maybe deeper? These questions remain open and could constitute an interesting area of research in the future.

¹⁸ An example of a rebellion against overwork can be seen in new trends in the labor market, such as the so-called quiet quitting popularized on TikTok (rejecting the idea of doing more than what is required at work, taking care of free time, and harmony – it involves diligently fulfilling one's duties without going above and beyond) or the snail girl trend (a trend spread by young Generation Z girls that involves slowing down the pace of life, avoiding social pressure, and striving for harmony with oneself and the environment).

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