

## GOOD CSR PRACTICES AIMED AT EMPLOYEES AS ASSESSED BY GENERATION Z

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**Purpose:** The objective of this article is to evaluate selected CSR activities of companies aimed at their employees by potential Generation Z employees.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This article is of theoretical and empirical nature. The implementation of the presented assumption was possible through a critical analysis of the source literature and the performance of primary research of an exploratory nature. The research methodology was based on a two-stage action.

**Findings:** The presented results allowed first of all to notice that in the evaluations of CSR activities of potential employees from Generation Z, the features attributed to people from this generation are often visible. At the same time, it can be seen that their main needs speak through their preferences: to be well prepared for their work, to receive support from experienced employees, to be able to maintain a balance between work and private life and to be able to develop individually.

**Research limitations/implications:** The study has limitations, such as a small, unrepresentative sample and a limited set of practices assessed. A continuation of this type of exploration should also include analyses of intergenerational differences in preferences or compositions of new initiatives currently expected by potential employees.

**Practical implications:** The article highlights the importance of carrying out this type of studies. A set of basic conclusions may serve as a prelude to the preparation of recommendations for employers who plan to work with a group of young people. The choice of specific internships probably depends on the age of the employees, but other determinants should not be overlooked either. It also often makes sense to personalise offers.

**Social implications:** This article addresses the broad issue of CSR. Its intention was primarily to draw attention to the legitimacy of modifying, adjusting, the relevance of CSR activities of enterprises for a group of potential employees from Generation Z.

**Originality/value:** The article presents the current results of the primary research conducted in 2023.

**Keywords:** sustainability, corporate social responsibility, CSR, employee-focused CSR practices, Generation Z.

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

## 1. Introduction

Today's globally recognised drive to spread the idea of sustainable development –SD –finds its expression in various activities of states, governments, NGOs and business. Businesses, specifically companies, more or less consciously undertake a range of activities that are part of an ambitious plan to balance human development. At the level of enterprises, as organisations with limited resources, sustainable management of human resources is often of particular importance. In this sense, taking care of employees in a broad sense also contributes to the achievement by business of the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda (<https://www.unesco...>; <https://kampania17celow...>), such as, among others: ensuring a safe and healthy life, decent work, supporting lifelong learning, education and encouragement of sustainable lifestyles, eliminating unfair practices, promoting ethical attitudes and behaviours or striving for universal well-being. A practical tool for the efficient and structured inclusion of enterprises in the promotion of the need for sustainable development, taking into account social aspects, is the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR (Fedotova, Bocharova, Rachwal-Mueller, 2023; Kwarcińska, 2018). Its assumptions take into account three main spheres, i.e. economic, social and environmental. In the social aspect, which includes employee practices, it is important to pay attention primarily to working conditions, social protection as well as social dialogue, occupational health and safety or development and training in the workplace. Within the framework of socially responsible behaviour towards employees, which should contribute to the creation of decent and safe working conditions for them, companies can apply a diverse set of measures, aimed at employees. Their selection is conditioned by a number of factors, such as the age of the employees, their length of service, the type of work they do and the financial capacity of the organisation. Examples of ongoing corporate activity towards their employees can be found in the study of companies' social reports, also known as sustainability reports. These reports make it possible, so to speak, to keep track of companies' actions in this area and, at the same time, indicate the wide spectrum of possibilities for employers to influence their employees, otherwise beneficial from the point of view of both the employee's and the company's interests (Kwarcińska, 2021). An analysis of the importance of specific CSR solutions in terms of the benefits obtained from them can therefore be made by current employees of the organisation, but an equally interesting conjecture, reaching into the future perspective in terms of possible possibilities for modifying the set of activities directed at employees, is the analysis of evaluations of these current initiatives by potential young employees, who are distinguished by a number of other characteristics in addition to their age (Opolska-Bieleńska, 2018, p. 351). In this dimension, a research gap has been recognised and therefore, in this article, a set of current CSR activities of companies aimed at employees has been assessed by people from Generation Z who may form, in a relatively short time perspective, a group of internal stakeholders of these organisations as well. It is commonly

assumed that Generation Z individuals are those born between 1997 and 2012 (Wojtoszek, 2023, p. 174; Pokolenie..., 2023, p. 3).

The intention of the research was first and foremost to draw attention to the sensibility of modifying, adjusting and adequacy of CSR activities for the group of young employees as it is primarily the age of the employed and their length of service that can determine the selection of initiatives addressed to them. In order to pursue the objective of the article, a primary survey was conducted, consisting of the evaluation by potential employees from Generation Z of selected CSR activities of enterprises addressed to the employed.

The structure of the article includes, first, a theoretical part containing a review of the literature on CSR and its employee aspect, emphasising its interdependence with the idea of sustainable development, and indicating the current output of publications in the area of the connotation of these issues with the context of Generation Z. Then, in the exploratory part, the article presents the research methodology and also presents the results of the primary research. Finally, discussion and conclusions are included and a summary is formulated.

## **2. The concept of CSR as a tool for the implementation of sustainable development in the context of labour aspects –a review of the source literature**

An expression of practical involvement of enterprises in the implementation of the idea of sustainable development is also taking into account the concept of corporate social responsibility as part of their activities. This is because the issues of responsible management of contemporary organisations are taking on the character of universal standards that are part of the context of promoting this idea. According to some authors, "CSR is the response of the second economic sector to the challenges posed by the principles of sustainable development" (Gadomska-Lila, Wasilewicz, 2016, p. 303). The consonant nature of the idea of sustainable development and the concept of corporate social responsibility is often emphasised by drawing attention, within the framework of defining CSR, to the legitimacy of taking into account three aspects, i.e. economic, social and environmental (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2012, p. 29). In these dimensions, the organisation undertakes, as it were, to accept responsibility for its activities and decisions. Thus, a socially responsible enterprise recognises the consequences of its actions in various fields of activity, accepts the obligation to absorb any negative impact and additionally has a positive impact on its environment.

The implementation of the CSR concept in an enterprise can take various forms and involve different groups of responsibility called stakeholders. One of these is the organisation's employees. The basic normative provisions relating to employee issues within the CSR concept can be found, among others, in international documents such as the OECD Guidelines for

Multinational Enterprises, the Global Compact principles as well as norms and standards with a more concrete, functional meaning for the implementation of the concept, placing specific requirements on organisations, such as the ISO 26000 Standard and the SA8000 Standard. Workforce issues (Kwarcińska, 2019) addressed in the OECD Guidelines occur at least in the areas of disclosure of information, human rights, employment and labour relations (OECD Guidelines...; Makuch, 2011, pp. 10-14). However, the most important of these seems to be the one treating employment and labour relations. The provisions in this area emphasise both freedom of association, the right to negotiate collective agreements, the effective abolition of child labour, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour and the abolition of discriminatory practices in employment and occupational activities. The Global Compact Principles, on the other hand, draw attention to issues relating to labour issues in terms of the promotion and protection of human rights, freedom of association and the need to eliminate all forms of forced labour and to take action to abolish child labour (Kietlinski, Reyes, Oleksyn, 2005, pp. 152-153). The ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility standard, a set of practical implementation guidelines, also covers employee relations in its scope and draws attention to: respect for human rights including, inter alia, the avoidance of situations that threaten these rights, participation, complaint handling and discrimination, and labour practices, and within these, employment and labour relations, working conditions and social protection, social dialogue, occupational health and safety, human development and training in the workplace (ISO 26000 Standard...). Also, the SA8000 standard –Social Responsibility relating directly to labour aspects considers corporate social responsibility issues in relation to, among others: child labour, forced or compulsory labour, health and safety, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, discrimination, labour discipline, working time, remuneration (SA8000 standard).

The fulfilment of these social obligations by companies can take the form of a variety of measures aimed at employees. These are often a source of additional, non-financial benefits for employees. Among other things, they can contribute to a sense of recognition, appreciation or, ultimately, comfort at work, and a positive perception of the employer as an attractive place to work. This is also of particular importance for potential applicants, who, through the prism of these supplementary elements of the working environment, even sometimes only subtly distinguishing a particular employer, make the decision to be employed and/or to continue working there. The issues presented represent an extremely interesting yet unrecognised area of inquiry by researchers. A review of the latest source literature covering issues related to CSR and the context of the Z generation made in the BazEkon database (<https://bazekon.uek.krakow.pl>) according to the 2018-2024 selection and keyword selection criteria: CSR and Generation Z allowed only three publications to be identified. Of these, one referred to Generation Z in the context of their decisions as consumers (Pawlak, Dziadkiewicz, 2019), the second, emphasised the importance of CSR in the context of human resource development and the use of the competences of the young generation (Sobotka, 2019),

and the third addressed the perception of the CSR concept by the young generation (Gajda, 2020). Due to the narrowed set of publications relating directly to the primary keywords, it was decided to broaden the selection of keywords and, alongside CSR, the following was indicated as a keyword in the same time frame: employees in the company. This resulted in a compilation of seven articles. Based on the analysis of their contents, one can notice first of all the theoretically and empirically very diverse approaches by contemporary researchers to employee issues in the implementation of the CSR concept (Marcinkowska, Sawicka, 2023; Grzesiuk, 2023; Piwowar-Sulej, Cierniak-Emerych, Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2022; Vveinhardt, Sroka, 2020; Berniak-Woźny, Wilks, 2018; Szarek, Pachciarek Hubert, 2018; Zaleśna, 2018). Some of the specified publications take into account the results of empirical studies indirectly related to the topic of this article. Nevertheless, the literature review conducted convinces that the topic addressed in this article is up-to-date and allows to fill the gap in terms of combining issues related to employee aspects of the CSR concept and the issue of their perception and evaluation by Generation Z.

### 3. Research methodology

The methodology of the research conducted for this article was based on a two-stage exercise. In the first stage, examples of CSR activities of companies directed at employees were identified, and then in the second stage, they were assessed, in terms of their significance for potential employees of Generation Z. Exemplifications of socially responsible practices directed at employees were taken from a dozen or so social reports, also known as sustainability reports, available at [www.rapotyzyr.pl](http://www.rapotyzyr.pl) submitted as part of the 12th edition of the Social Reports competition by various organisations. The reports selected for analysis were assigned to the following three areas of company activity: construction and real estate - four reports were studied from this area, energy - seven reports were considered, and finance - nine reports were considered. A set of examples of activities structured according to the areas of company involvement is presented in the table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Examples of companies' CSR activities directed at employees structured according to the area of involvement*

<b>Involvement area</b>	<b>Examples of initiatives</b>
Employment planning	Cooperation of organisations with schools and universities. Presence of the organisation on social media and specialist websites.
Implementation	Initial training in the organisation. Support from experienced staff.
Health	Medical care packages for the employee and his/her family. Sports card for the employee and his/her family. Additional life insurance package.

Cont. table 1.

Education and development	Organisation and/or funding of in-house, online training by the organisation. Organisation, financing and funding of language learning courses. Financing and funding of studies and postgraduate studies.
Work-life balance	Reducing working time. Flexible working hours. Provision of work from home. Supporting employees' passions.
Communication	Face-to-face meetings with supervisors and other employees in the workplace. Videoconferencing. Outing, integration meetings. Newsletters. Information available on the organisation's website.
Employee satisfaction	Employee satisfaction survey. Competitions for employees. Picnics for employees and their families.
Employee volunteering	Assistance programmes implemented by the organisation. Involvement in charitable activities.

Source: own compilation based on social reports submitted as part of the 12th edition of the *Social Reports* competition, <http://raportypoleczne.pl/>, 14.02.2019.

In the second stage of the study, the selected activities were evaluated by potential employees from Generation Z. For this part of the study, a paper survey was prepared containing examples of company activities and 94 students studying management and logistics at the University of Szczecin, were asked to rate each of these initiatives on a five-point scale in terms of their importance, relevance to the respondents. The results of the survey were then analysed and, in order to compare students' evaluations, arithmetic averages were calculated for individual initiatives, which allowed them to be sorted from those considered relatively most important by the respondents to those considered relatively least important.

#### 4. Results of primary studies

The results of the survey of potential Generation Z employees showed, above all, that all employee-directed activities were relatively important to them. The spread between the highest and lowest mean was 2.1. Ordering the results of the ratings of the importance of individual activities to potential employees from Generation Z according to the mean first made it possible to single out the ten activities considered to be relatively most important. Their ranking according to average value is shown in Figure 1.

1. Initial training within the organisation
2. Support from experienced employees.
3. Flexible working hours.
4. Organising, financing and subsidising language learning courses.
5. Medical care package for the employee and his/her family
6. Organisation and/or financing of on-site and online training by the organisation.
7. Presence of the organisation on social media and specialised websites.
8. Employee satisfaction survey.
9. Provision of work from home.
10. Face-to-face meetings with supervisors and other employees in the workplace.

**Figure 1.** The most relevant CSR activities of companies targeting employees according to their assessment of their importance to potential Generation Z employees.

Source: own compilation based on primary research results.

Analysing the information presented in Figure 1, it can be concluded that the respondents considered the organisation's initial training courses to be relatively the most important activities aimed at employees, among the examples suggested. Next in order of importance, taking into account the average of the respondents' indications, were the following: Support from experienced employees; Flexible working hours; Organising, financing and subsidising language learning courses; Medical care package for the employee and his/her family; Organisation and/or financing of on-site training and online training by the organisation; Presence of the organisation on social media and specialised websites. Relatively less important, i.e. indicated further down according to the average indications of the respondents, were activities related to Employee satisfaction surveys; Provision of work from home; Face-to-face meetings with supervisors and other employees in the workplace. Moreover, an analysis of the other averages, not included in Fig. 1 activities, allowed to conclude that the following activities were considered by the respondents to be relatively least significant, decreasing according to the mean value: funding and financing of studies and postgraduate studies, reduction of working hours, additional life insurance package, information available on the organisation's website, support for employees' passions, away meetings, integration meetings, competitions for employees, assistance programmes implemented by the organisation, involvement in charity activities, sports card for the employee and his/her family, video conferences, cooperation of the organisation with schools and universities, picnics for employees and their families, newsletters.

It is also worth mentioning that a detailed analysis of the ratings of individual activities according to the highest percentage of their indications as being the most significant in the areas of involvement set out in Table 1 made it possible to note that in the group of activities relating to employment planning, as many as 47 per cent of the interviewed potential employees from Generation Z considered the organisation's presence in social media and specialist Internet websites to be very significant. What is even more noteworthy is that in the set of activities related to onboarding, i.e. activities such as initial training at the organisation and support from experienced employees, both of these activities were considered very important by the vast majority –70 per cent and 63 per cent respectively –of Generation Z respondents. In terms of

health care, the activity related to the provision of a medical care package for the employee and his or her family received the highest rating, with 49 per cent of respondents considering it very important. In the group of initiatives related to education and development, the highest percentage of respondents –46 per cent –considered it very important to them to organise, finance and subsidise language courses. In the next set of activities in the area of work-life balance, the relatively highest proportion of respondents –56 per cent –considered flexible working hours to be very important to them. In the area of communication, on the other hand, as many as three types of meetings and information transfer, i.e. face-to-face meetings with superiors and other employees in the workplace, away meetings, integration meetings, and information available on the organisation's website, were rated as being of very high importance by young respondents and received the same, albeit relatively low, 24 per cent appreciation. In the section relating to employee satisfaction, the largest proportion of respondents –28 per cent –identified the employee satisfaction survey as an activity of high importance.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The inclusion of employee issues within the framework of the contribution of business to the implementation of the idea of sustainable development (<https://kampania17celow.pl/agenda-2030/>) underlines the importance of the need for companies to care, in the broadest sense, for their employees. This peculiar care for employees is linked to the issue of responsibility and, in this context, the convergence of the implementation of the idea of sustainable development –SD with the concept of corporate social responsibility –CSR, which is also recognised as a tool of the SD initiative, is revealed (Fedotova, Bocharova, Rachwal-Mueller 2023). Within the framework of translating the ideological, macroeconomic assumptions of SD into the dimension of microeconomic practices, the CSR concept provides a proposal for structuring the reference to labour aspects and indicates the possibilities of building responsible, sustainable and ethical relations with co-workers. It thus forms an instrument with which organisations can efficiently engage in the creation of a sustainable world. The dimension of practical activities of companies in this area is very diverse and often takes the form of specific initiatives aimed at employees as their internal stakeholders. The task of such activities is, first and foremost, to draw attention to and respond to the interests, needs and expectations of current employees, but it should not be forgotten that there are also potential employees who are willing to cooperate with a particular employer. Among them, there is also a group of young people from Generation Z with needs and expectations appropriate to their age and characteristics (Opolska-Bielańska, 2018, p. 351, Pokolenie..., 2023). The issue considered in this article was how to evaluate the CSR currently proposed by companies to their



employees in the context of recommending their wider promotion or possible modification to better suit, for potential Generation Z employees.

The main conclusion that emerges from the analysis of the survey results presented concerns the importance for the young people interviewed, compared to other selected activities, of initial training and support from experienced employees. This seems to be in line with the characteristics of realism attributed to this generation and also partly the expectation of feedback after each task performed (Opolska-Bielańska, 2018). It is noticeable, therefore, that these are individuals who are aware of the necessity of their professional preparation and who expect instruction, support in completing tasks and possibly confirmation that they are doing the job properly.

An interesting conclusion of the research may also be the observation that the respondents rated the importance of using flexible working hours relatively highly. This means that it is important for them to have a kind of work-life balance. This is confirmed by other research results (Pokolenie..., 2023, pp. 4, 8), according to which people from Generation Z particularly value the possibility of reconciling work with private life and emphasise the value of family and the possibility of pursuing passions.

It should also come as no surprise that the relatively high rating of the importance for the surveyed young people of the activities of enterprises related to employee development in the form of organising, financing and subsidising language learning courses and initiatives concerning the organisation and/or financing of onsite training and e-training. As confirmed by a literature study (Marcinkowska, Sawicka, 2023), people from Generation Z value CSR activities affecting their development. This is definitely a positive symptom especially in the context of the value of lifelong learning and the need for continuous competence adaptation (Sobotka, 2019).

Another conclusion relates to the relatively high ranking of importance for potential employees of the action of providing a health package for employees and their families. It turns out that, despite their young age, Generation Z people appreciate the value of their own and their family's health and want to protect it. They are therefore aware of the benefits for the employee of such a package and, according to the 2018 survey (Zaleśna, 2018), the expectations of potential job candidates focus primarily on the benefits for themselves.

Probably for similar reasons –recognised benefits –respondents from Generation Z also attributed relatively high importance, through high ratings, to the activities of companies related to employee satisfaction surveys and offering the possibility to provide work from home. Referring to the first of these activities, it can be considered that the employer's interest in the job satisfaction of the person employed by them makes the employee feel noticed and important, and this is not without significance for young people. On the other hand, considering the second initiative as so important is probably related both to the trait of young people concerning the desire to maintain work-life balance, but also perhaps to their sense of independence and the desire to build several careers in parallel (Opolska-Bielańska, 2018, p. 351).

The last conclusion which, according to the author, deserves to be singled out concerns the area of business engagement related to workforce planning in the broadest sense. Based on an analysis of the results of young people's assessments of this area, it is noticeable that they overwhelmingly attribute more importance to the organisation's presence in social media and specialised online portals than to its cooperation with schools and universities. This is not a major surprise, but rather a confirmation of what should also be emphasised at the end of this discussion, that the people surveyed represent a generation that, like no generation before it, has functioned to such an extent in the world of virtual information, news, opinions, contacts and, increasingly, work. However, they do not yet completely dismiss the importance of face-to-face meetings with superiors and other employees in the workplace, as evidenced by the relatively high appreciation of such initiatives.

## 6. Summary

In conclusion, it can be seen, first of all, that in the evaluations of CSR activities of potential employees from Generation Z, the characteristics attributed to people from this generation are often visible. At the same time, it can be seen that the following needs speak through their preferences: to be well prepared for their work, receive support from experienced employees, be able to maintain a work-life balance and develop individually. A collection of these basic conclusions can serve as a prelude to preparing recommendations for employers who are planning to work with a group of young people. The choice of specific practices probably depends on the age of the employees, but other determinants should not be overlooked either. It also often makes sense to personalise offers. However, there are limitations to the study, such as the sample size being too small and unrepresentative and the narrow range of placements. A continuation of this kind of exploration should also include analyses of intergenerational differences in preferences or the composition of initiatives currently expected by potential employees.

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