

GEN Z VALUES AND THEIR PREFERENCES FOR A CHANGING LABOUR MARKET

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Purpose: This article is about the Gen Z generation's expected values in the labour market. The generation referred to as 'Anti-Millennials' grew up in an environment full of technology and constant access to the internet, which has influenced their expectations of the workplace. On the one hand, they have good technological skills and stand out for their ability to learn independently. However, on the other hand, they have difficulties with long-term commitment and are sometimes impatient. The article aimed to help Gen distinguish their central values towards the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative method was chosen to carry out the study (through short interviews). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility in the questions and enabling participants to share their thoughts freely. A group of 194 participants from Poland, who are at the undergraduate stage, was selected for the study. Qualitative methods such as content analysis and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data.

Findings: As the research indicates, their central workplace values are flexibility, work-life balance, teamwork, creativity and innovation. If employers want to have a loyal workforce and avoid incurring the cost of searching for new employees, they need to pay attention not only to the level of pay but also to adapt working conditions to the needs of Gen Z.

Research limitations/implications: Qualitative research has allowed us to get closer to the values Gen Z representatives mentioned to understand their expectations better.

Practical implications: Understanding the values of Gen Z will help employers in the industry sector, like other sectors of the economy, to effectively communicate and retain them in the workplace.

Social implications: The research refers to the work value Gen Z, which can help to understand this generation of workers and help them to find their way in the changing labour market.

Originality/value: This is the first research of its kind to include a group of people born between 2003 and 2006 who are just starting their careers.

Keywords: Gen Z, value, labour market, industry, Poland.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Gen Z is entering the labour market in an era of rapid change with a global pandemic that has changed the rules in the world of work (Lev, T., 2022). The labour market is now intensifying not only with traditionally high staff turnover but also with the increased departure of older workers (BB generation) (Goh, Lee, 2018). The changes taking place mean that we have more and more research on Gen Z and their expectations of working life.

This generation, known as 'iGen' or 'Zoomers' (Twenge, 2017, 2023), is distinguished by their unique characteristics and preferences. In the context of this article, their most apt term is "Anti-Millennials" (Lanier, 2017). This name aptly indicates quite different expectations and values than the Millennials had. Unfortunately, GenZ entering the labour market had a lot of negative experiences, especially related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were one of the leading groups in society who lost their jobs at that time (e.g. tourism sector, industry) (Goh, Lee, 2018; Leung et al., 2021).

Much of the information and predictions about this generation have not been confirmed (Mărginean, 2021). Gen Z did not want to grow up quickly in a world entirely of change, and some of them are having great difficulty finding their way in a changing world (Mărginean, 2021). Gen Z grew up in a digital age in which social media platforms significantly impacted their perceptions of the world and their perception of self-worth (Haykal et al., 2024). Thanks to the world of the internet, they have much information and are afraid of constant change (Bencsik et al., 2016). Although these generations are characterised by high skills in technology and self-learning, they demonstrate low commitment to the organisation and a negligible ability to persevere in long-term tasks (Bencsik et al., 2016; Chillakuri, 2020; Lev, T. 2022).

The global pandemic and the changing rules of labour markets have accelerated the need to understand Gen Z's expectations. In this article, work values, which allow organisations to better respond to the needs and expectations of employees and enable them to address them with a working design that is both efficient and effective, have become the focus of this article (de Boer et al., 2021). Intrinsic work values refer to the actual tasks and fulfilment in doing work, including helping others or doing demanding work. External work values, on the other hand, refer to what we get out of work (rather than what we put into it) and include pay, recognition and job security (Maloni et al., 2019).

This article aims to identify the central workplace values distinguished by GenZ representatives in Poland. The following research questions will accompany such a stated objective:

RQ1: What values are important to Gen Z representatives when choosing a workplace?

RQ2: What does GenZ expect from their future workplace?

RQ3: Does gender influence GenZ representatives' preferences when choosing a workplace?

The research conducted is as relevant as it is theoretical and practical. Through an in-depth analysis of their value and impact on the professional environment, you contribute to a better understanding of labour market dynamics and how to manage talent effectively. Understanding the value of GenZ to employers will help attract (in recruitment, familiarisation with organisational culture, etc.) as well as retain talent from this generation. This research also contributes to the academic literature on Gen Z and their value in the workplace in Poland. Through the analysis of their expectations and preferences, existing research on intergenerational dynamics in the labour market will be complemented. It may also contribute to inspiring future research on the impact of technology and organisational culture on employee satisfaction with Gen Z. It also lays the groundwork for further research on the long-term impact of Gen Z values on organisations.

The structure of the paper is as follows: after introducing the research topic, the next section presents the characteristics of Generation Z employees based on the literature review. The next section concerns the materials and methods used in the empirical analysis. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis. The last section is a discussion and a set of main findings.

2. Background for analysis

2.1. Characteristics of Generation Z employees

Answers are often sought to questions about what the new generation is like and how they will behave in the labour market. The literature distinguishes seven main factors that have influenced the formation of the GenZ generation. These are: changes in demographics and life expectancy, the global culture of affluence, the technology in which this generation grew up, the demand for information, the means of education and learning, and the shift to a network of online friends (McCrindle, 2018). GenZ representatives are called 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) who speak a specific digital language in the workplace (Bencsik et al., 2016; Parks, 2020). The main characteristics of this generation are: responsive, pragmatic, seeking continuous and immediate interaction, consider themselves experts with technological skills, have high expectations of technology, strive for independent learning and are comfortable in digital and virtual environments (they have been using technology since childhood) (Chillakuri, 2020; Racolța-Paina, Irini, 2021; Lev, T.A., 2021; Lev, T., 2022). They are practical and intelligent rather than smart and like to lead because they are courageous (Bencsik et al., 2016). This generation favours innovation and rapid change (Kouloopoulos, Keldsen, 2014) because they care about flexibility, creativity and a desire to experience different workplaces (Lanier, 2017; Seemiller, Grace, 2018). This is a generation that respects social diversity and seeks authenticity (Francis, Hoefel, 2018). The literature accentuates that these expectations differ

according to gender (Grow, Yang, 2018). However, other characteristics of this generation, such as honesty, decency, humour and being judgmental, cannot be forgotten either (Seemiller, Grace, 2018). It is also worth adding their tendency to be more impatient (Bencsik et al., 2016) and difficulty focusing their attention for extended periods (Titko et al., 2020). These traits are particularly externalised in their approach to meetings, gatherings, or work that requires much effort and focus. In representatives of this generation, there is also a noticeable lack of restrictions regarding the location of the workplace and the ease of accepting long geographical distances or different time zones in the work they do (Seemiller, Grace, 2018).

In adulthood, GenZ representatives value secure work and financial stability and prefer to work for large companies, often choosing the public management sector. According to research, they choose work that reflects their passions and seek informal and relaxed environments where they can have their own well-defined office space (Mărginean, 2021). Also at work, they feel the need to bond with colleagues and freely express their opinions (Mărginean, 2021). However, to engage them at work, employers must learn how to talk to them effectively and help them fit into the community and organisational culture (Bencsik et al., 2016).

In summary, Gen Z brings new values and expectations to the labour market, resulting from their unique experiences and environment. Their pragmatism, flexibility, and desire for authenticity present a challenge but also an opportunity for employers. Understanding these characteristics and adapting the organisational culture to meet the needs of Gen Z will be key to building engaged and motivated teams in the future.

2.2. Gen Z's preferences for the workplace

Gen Z's values encompass a wide range of work expectations. Research indicates that this generation pays much attention to intrinsic values like personal development and extrinsic values like job stability (de Boer et al., 2021). This generation wants to work in companies whose values match their own, and they can feel pride and fulfilment in their work (Goh, Lee, 2018). When looking for a job, Gen Z individuals analyse and learn about employer values (Zhang, Gowan, 2012).

The very first studies in the literature on GenZ accentuate that this is a generation for whom workplace flexibility is very important to help maintain work-life balance (Ozkan, Solmaz, 2015). Employees of this generation are looking for an indulgent workplace that allows for pleasure and social life during working hours (Lev, T., 2022). These are employees who expect work-life balance, teamwork, support, flexibility, commitment, creativity, innovation and a global working atmosphere (McCrindle, Fell, 2020).

For representatives of this generation, it is also important that the workplace is contemporary, uses new technologies, and can show initiative (Bencsik et al., 2016; Berge, Berge, 2019; Christensen et al., 2018). Despite this, they expect to be provided with independence and the opportunity to demonstrate entrepreneurship (Bencsik et al., 2016;

Christensen et al., 2018; Berge, Berge, 2019). Figure 1 shows a synthesised list of GenZ values and expectations identified in the literature.

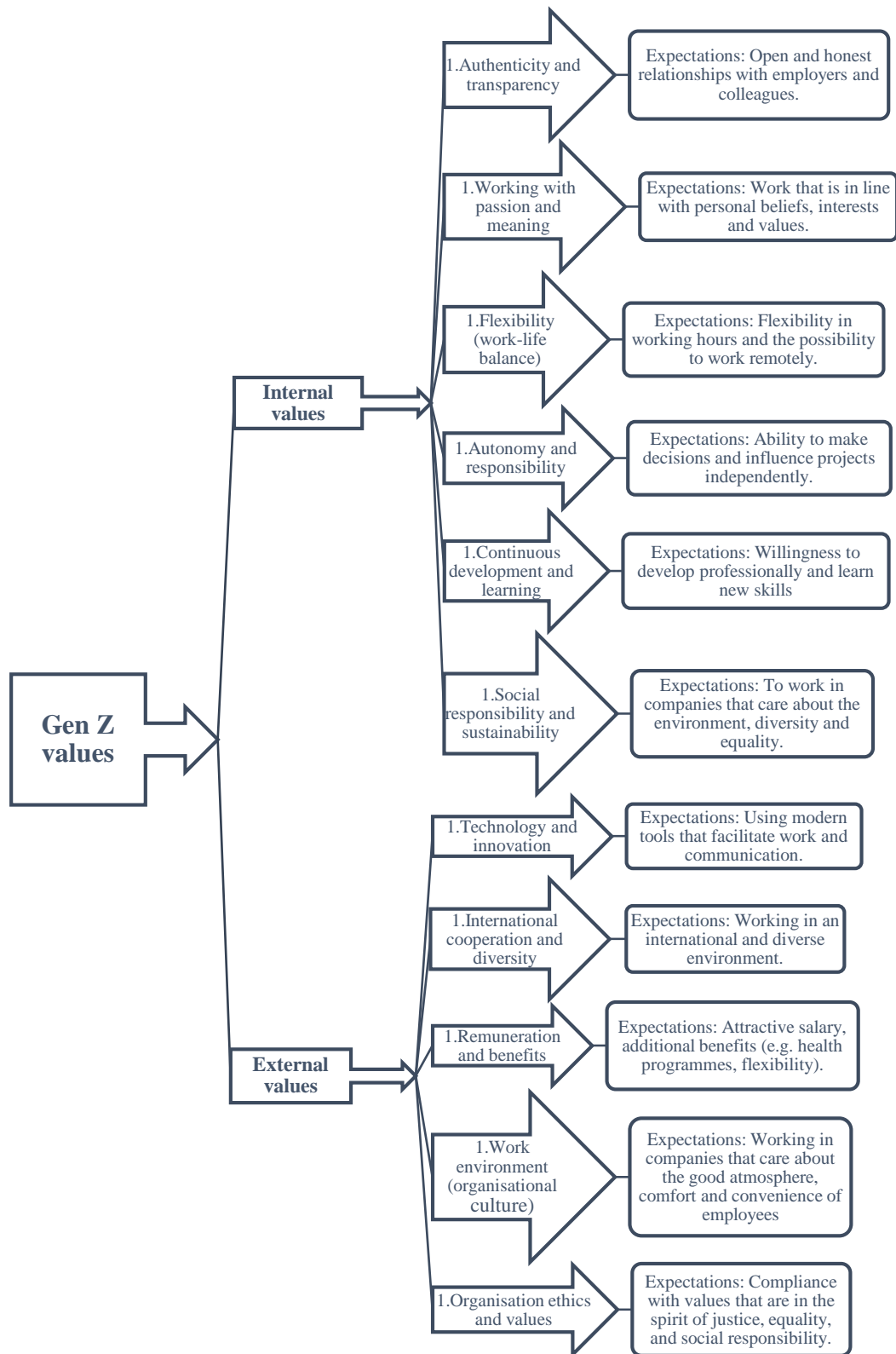


Figure 1. The central internal and external values of GenZ.

Source: own elaboration.

In summary, GenZs prioritise values that reflect their unique experiences and expectations of the labour market. Flexibility, work-life balance, and opportunities for personal development are critical to their success. Gen Z wants to work in companies that share their values, which allows them to feel pride in their work. A contemporary working environment that fosters innovation and creativity is essential to them, as well as the pursuit of independence and entrepreneurship. To successfully attract and engage representatives of this generation, employers need to adapt their approach to their expectations and create a collaborative atmosphere.

3. Materials and Methods

The literature review indicated that Generation Z is entering the labour market in a rapidly changing environment. Their unique values and expectations are crucial for organisations that want to attract and retain young employees. It also indicated what values the literature identifies as necessary for representatives of this generation. However, the literature does not indicate what values are decisive when choosing a workplace in Poland.

This study aims to identify the main values that are important to Generation Z in the context of their future workplace. It focuses on individuals born between 2003 and 2006 who are currently students and have limited work experience.

A qualitative method was chosen to carry out the study (Creswell, Poth, 2016) through short interviews with individuals from the cohort. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format (Kvale, Brinkmann, 2009), allowing flexibility in the questions and enabling participants to share their thoughts freely. The interviews focused on the following research questions:

- What values are most important to participants when choosing a job?
- What do they expect from their future workplace?
- How do they see their ideal workplace?

The data collected was then transcribed and analysed for the main themes and patterns. A group of 194 participants from Poland, who are at the undergraduate stage, was selected for the study. The structure of respondents by gender was as follows: 52.6% female and 47.4% male (102 females and 92 males), reflecting the structure of society by gender. Most of them did not have full-time employment, and their work experience was limited to casual work or internships.

Qualitative methods such as content analysis and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data (Creswell, Poth, 2016). This allowed the identification of critical values and GenZ expectations of jobs. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews in which participants were asked to list the values that matter to them in the workplace. The identified values were

classified into five categories and then compared regarding gender differences. Values were analysed both in terms of their number and their importance for job satisfaction. Content analysis was carried out by:

- Identification of values: Values mentioned by interview participants were identified and classified.
- Gender comparison: Differences in values between men and women in each category were explored.

Use of thematic analysis: Themes were extracted based on the most frequently mentioned values.

Content and thematic analysis of the workplace values data collected from men and women identifies significant discrepancies in the value priorities of the two groups. The results of this research may be crucial for understanding how diverse perspectives on work shape work experiences and satisfaction levels and for identifying areas where organisations can implement changes to better meet the needs of their employees, regardless of gender. These differences and their potential impact on workplace performance in the context of gender equality and organisational effectiveness will be discussed.

4. Results

First, a content analysis of the respondents by category was undertaken. Table 1 presents the results for the management category.

Table 1.
Category - Management

Value	Women	Men
Good organisation	12	-
Good manager	11	-
Social responsibility	-	5
Good governance	-	4

The results indicated that effective management and structured work organisation are essential for women's job satisfaction, with women showing a particular preference for a supportive work environment and clear task organisation. Women are more likely than men to emphasise high-quality management, which includes access to mentoring and career development opportunities. These elements are seen as critical motivators, providing them with a sense of job security and stability. Men, on the other hand, while also attaching importance to

organisational goals and work structure, are more focused on issues related to social responsibility and ethical standards of organisational performance. Such values can be an essential element of their commitment and motivation to work.

Regarding the impact of values on job satisfaction, women prefer a work environment that provides strong structural support and enables them to complete tasks efficiently based on a clearly defined work organisation. Conversely, for men, job satisfaction appears to be more dependent on consistency with organisational goals, the ability to meet social responsibility challenges and the achievement of measurable results. Notably, women show a more substantial interest in interpersonal relationships and work organisation, while men are more likely to emphasise the importance of innovation and operational efficiency as key motivational determinants.

These differences in values may be due to the different social and cultural expectations that shape the professional attitudes of the two genders and influence their different perceptions of the role of work in their personal and social lives.

The second category subjected to content analysis was working conditions. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Category - Working conditions

Value	Women	Men
Good atmosphere	27	16
Fair pay	23	19
Balance between life and work	14	-
Flexibility	-	10

Values related to job satisfaction vary by gender, which has important implications for organisations in human resource management. Women strongly prefer a work environment that fosters collaboration and emotional support. Their job satisfaction is closely linked to the balance between remuneration and responsibilities and to a work atmosphere that enables positive interactions and interaction with colleagues. In line with these values, women particularly value an environment that offers the flexibility to better combine work and personal responsibilities, including time for family. In addition, job stability and opportunities for career development, including training programmes and promotion, are crucial to their long-term job satisfaction. These values indicate that women not only expect adequate remuneration for their work but also seek a work environment conducive to their personal and professional development.

Men, while also valuing fair remuneration for their work, are more focused on flexibility and work standards. For them, mental well-being in the workplace is just as important as remuneration, which can manifest itself in a preference to avoid excessive tension and stress. Men also value an excellent working atmosphere, although, compared to women, they do not attribute such a central role to it. Instead, they are more concerned with flexibility in working hours, allowing for better work-life balance control. Additionally, men value high professional standards and professionalism in their tasks, which is an essential element of their sense of satisfaction and professional value.

Comparing the preferences of the two groups, it can be seen that both women and men value fair pay and a positive working atmosphere. However, women show a stronger work-life balance expectation and job satisfaction depends more on emotional and organisational support at work. Conversely, men place more emphasis on flexibility and standards of professionalism, which, in their case, is an important motivational factor.

From an organisational perspective, these values differences should be considered when designing human resource management policies. Organisations should strive to create a working environment that offers fair remuneration and promotes work-life balance, especially in the context of women's expectations. Creating such conditions will foster higher job satisfaction and employee engagement, regardless of gender.

The third step of content analysis was analyzing the workplace relationships category. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Workplace relationships category

Value	Women	Men
Estimate	27	9
Good relations with the team	24	18

Professional relationships based on mutual respect are a crucial element affecting women's job satisfaction. Women particularly emphasise the importance of being treated with dignity, which they see as the foundation of a positive working atmosphere. A supportive environment conducive to building positive interpersonal relationships significantly increases job satisfaction. Women expect to be treated respectfully, contributing to their sense of security and value in the organisation. Therefore, Good interpersonal relationships and a sense of fairness and tolerance are essential elements of job satisfaction.

Men also value interpersonal relationships, but their approach may be more pragmatic and oriented towards collaborative team effectiveness. Although respect is essential for men, the more functional side of interaction, related to achieving organisational goals and team effectiveness, plays a key role. For them, interpersonal relationships are meaningful but do not have such a dominant impact on job satisfaction as for women.

Comparing these differences, both groups recognise respect as a fundamental element of good workplace relationships, but women place more emphasis on values such as tolerance, fairness and mutual support. While valuing respect, men focus more on collaborative effectiveness and achieving common goals within the team.

From an organisational perspective, these findings suggest that it is necessary to promote team-building programmes and provide interpersonal communication training that addresses employees' diverse needs and expectations. Creating an environment that promotes respect, tolerance and fairness, especially for women, while prioritising collaborative effectiveness for men can significantly improve job satisfaction in organisations.

The next step of content analysis was the analysis of personality category. Table 4 shows results of this analysis.

Table 4.
Category - personality

Value	Women	Men
Professional development	40	17
Inspiring work	12	9

Women at work strive for self-fulfilment and seek inspiration, treating professional development as an integral part of their job satisfaction. For them, work should motivate, stimulate creativity, and enable self-expression. This approach is linked to their pursuit of personal and professional goals beyond work's purely functional aspects. While equally committed to professional development, men focus more on achieving specific professional goals, which are often more measurable and results-oriented. Although they also value development, their career goals are more oriented towards individual success and achieving specific tasks, which may lead to differences in career attitudes compared to women.

The comparative analysis in the fourth category reveals that both groups value career development. However, women focus more on personal fulfilment and finding inspiration at work, while men emphasise individualism and achieving specific results. Women clearly emphasise the need for work that not only provides them with opportunities for development but also a source of inspiration, which can significantly impact their overall job satisfaction.

In terms of impact on job satisfaction, organisations should offer appropriate career development opportunities and mentoring programmes to employees of both genders that consider the differences in motivations and needs of the two groups. Women may feel a more vital need for inspiration and self-fulfilment at work, which should be considered when designing organisational career development policies. Providing such opportunities promotes job satisfaction and increases employee commitment and loyalty.

The fifth category, other values, was the subject of the content analysis. The results of the analysis of values other than the four indicated so far are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.
Category - other work values

Value	Women	Men
Corporate image	13	-
Own business	-	9

Women show a more substantial interest in working for organisations with a positive image, linked to their preference for social and ethical values in the workplace. For women, a company's image that reflects its commitment to social responsibility, sustainability and caring relationships with its employees is crucial. Such values can significantly influence their career decisions, as working for an organisation with a positive image can foster a sense of professional satisfaction and fulfilment.

In contrast to women, men are more likely to perceive entrepreneurship as a preferred career path, placing more importance on autonomy, professional risk, and the ability to shape their own careers. Entrepreneurship, understood as running one's own business or being active within more independent professional structures, is often, for men, the key element that defines their career aspirations.

A comparison of preferences in the fifth category shows that women are more likely to choose organisations with a positive image, which may be an important factor influencing their career satisfaction. Conversely, men show more interest in owning their own businesses, which is in line with their desire to be independent and achieve their own career goals.

Understanding corporate image values is critical for organisations that want to attract and retain talent, especially women. Organisations that effectively communicate their positive image can increase their attractiveness in the labour market, contributing to higher employee satisfaction and engagement.

Differences in value priorities between women and men significantly impact their job satisfaction. Women place more emphasis on interpersonal relationships, work atmosphere, and organisational values, while men are more likely to focus on aspects related to social responsibility and entrepreneurship. Understanding these differences is crucial for organisations seeking to improve employee satisfaction and optimise the working environment, considering both groups' specific needs.

5. Tapping into research findings

Differences in value priorities between men and women significantly impact their job satisfaction, and understanding these differences is critical for organisations seeking to increase employee engagement and loyalty. In order to effectively align their HR strategies with the needs of both genders, organisations should take the following actions:

- Invest in managerial training to improve management skills and employee support to increase management effectiveness and team satisfaction.
- Promoting work-life balance, especially for women, with greater emphasis on flexibility and the ability to balance work and life responsibilities.
- Building interpersonal solid relationships through team-building programmes and communication training will help create a positive working atmosphere that fosters collaboration and engagement.
- Offering career development opportunities that consider the differing needs of women and men, including mentoring programmes that support self-realisation and achieving specific career goals.
- Paying attention to the company's image is particularly important for women. They are more likely to choose organisations with a positive image, which affects their satisfaction and loyalty.
- Creating a supportive working atmosphere by fostering a culture of respect, cooperation, and tolerance within the team, which improves interpersonal relationships and fosters trust.
- Offering mentoring and training programmes to help employees develop their skills, which not only attracts talent but also retains valuable employees.
- A balanced working model that allows for flexible working hours and remote working options is significant for women, allowing them to better combine work and private life responsibilities.
- Transparency in remuneration allows employees to understand the remuneration structure and increases the sense of fairness within the organisation, contributing to higher job satisfaction.

Understanding the values that women and men ascribe to different aspects of work allows organisations to better align their human resource management strategies with their needs. By doing so, organisations can not only increase the job satisfaction of their employees but also strengthen their commitment and loyalty, which will contribute to organisational success in the long term.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Generation Z employees pay attention to intrinsic values such as job satisfaction and personal development and extrinsic values such as remuneration, recognition and job security. Gen Z prefers working environments that foster collaboration, creativity and innovation. They expect employers to be able to communicate effectively with them and to support them in integrating into the organisational culture. Because of their characteristic need for immediacy and impatience, organisations need to adapt their approach to managing young workers in order to engage them effectively. The differences in value perceptions between men and women are also an essential aspect employers should consider in their recruitment and management strategies. Gen Z is a generation that values authenticity, diversity and continuous development, which is crucial for the future of the labour market.

Generation Z is entering the labour market during major social and technological transformations (Bencsik et al., 2016; de Boer et al., 2021; Haykal et al., 2024). Gen Z is the first truly global generation, growing up in an uncertain and complex environment that determines their view of work, learning and the world (Bencsik et al., 2016). The overriding value for this generation is work-life balance, as confirmed by research (Berge, Berge, 2019; Lev, T.A., 2021; Lev, T., 2022). In the workplace context, the value of employee-organisational fit encompasses multiple dimensions, including person-organisational fit, person-supervisor fit, person-job fit, and person-occupation fit, which is still poorly researched (Maloni et al., 2019). The lack of this match can negatively affect attitudes towards work and job satisfaction (Maloni et al., 2019).

Although research interest in Generation Z is growing, many areas still require further research. We know this generation's expectations of work, but it is worth exploring how long-term employment affects their values and attitudes. Understanding these aspects will help employers better tailor their talent management strategies and create a work environment conducive to young employees.

In terms of professional values, there are clear differences between women and men that significantly impact their job satisfaction. Women place more emphasis on aspects related to interpersonal relationships and the atmosphere in the workplace, while men are more likely to indicate the importance of social responsibility and entrepreneurship. Understanding these differences is crucial for organisations that want to improve the satisfaction of their employees. The analysis pointed to the need for employers to tailor their offerings to the specific needs of both genders, which can result in better outcomes for both employees and organisations. This is particularly relevant for sectors such as industry, where men dominate the workforce and the role of women is increasing every year.

The study's results show significant differences in the career priorities of women and men. Women show a stronger interest in values related to interpersonal relationships and work-life balance, while men focus on work flexibility and social responsibility. These differences may be relevant for the design of HR policies that take into account the specific needs of both genders in terms of work organisation.

In the context of interpersonal relationships, there are some universal values for both men and women, but also differences in what they consider most important. For women, emotional connections, support, and understanding are often key. They value communication, closeness in relationships, security, and stability. Men, on the other hand, often place more emphasis on independence, achievement and recognition. For them, aspects related to respect and partnership are also important, as well as the opportunity to express themselves in terms of personal ambitions. Of course, these differences are not absolute and depend much on each person's experiences and values. Shared communication and understanding of the needs of both parties are key to building healthy relationships.

The data collected provides valuable information about employees' expectations of the workplace. Organisations should consider these differences when developing human resource management strategies and employment policies. Adapting the work environment to meet different needs can lead to higher job satisfaction and greater engagement for all employees. In the context of future research, further research is recommended to understand better the impact of these differences on long-term employee retention and engagement.



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