

EXPECTATIONS TOWARD EMPLOYERS OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ENTERING THE LABOR MARKET

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Purpose: The paper aims to test the tool – the EmpAt scale to analyze how young professionals who enter the labor market perceive employers and what are their expectations towards them. The paper is another part of the discussion on employer value proposition and its adjustment to the expectations of young talents.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was carried on in a group of Czestochowa University of Technology and the University of Applied Science in Nysa students who attend a Business English bachelor full-time course. The research included the methodology called the EmpAt scale.

Findings: The research revealed that the students' preferences towards potential employers are mainly related to the economic value of their potential job, followed by the development value (including satisfying needs regarding confidence, career-enhancing, and opportunities for further development). When individual factors are analyzed, the most important for students are: gaining career-enhancing experience, job security within the organization, and a fun working environment.

Research limitations/implications: The study's main limitation can be indicated in its limited sampling, but the research population is also limited (150). The sample though meets statistical restraints, and the methodology may be implemented to research other groups of Gen Z representatives.

Practical implications: The results of the study may add some new information to the discussion of Gen Z expectations towards employers, especially in the context of tailoring employer value propositions that this group can find appealing. Businesses, including local entrepreneurs, searching for specialists, should find any voice in discussion on expectations of their potential employees beneficial.

Originality/value: The paper is related to the discussion on employer branding and its very different dimensions. Its originality can be analyzed mainly through the group it is aimed at. Young professionals entering the labor market should not be perceived as a homogenous group and each research that is aimed at a specific part of it can add some value to the discussion on the upcoming shape of the labor market. Also, the EmpAt scale used for the research was not widely discussed in Polish literature, so combining the specific research group with the method makes the research valuable and original.

Keywords: young talents, employer value proposition, the EmpAt scale.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Generation Z representatives have been looked into from many perspectives as ones who will shape the future of businesses, societies, and different types of communities very soon. Their characteristics, discussed from various points of view enable companies and different kinds of organizations to prepare for new internal and external customers who, as brought up in very different circumstances and influenced by very different factors to the range that is not fully discovered yet, will create a reality far different from the present one.

Although the representatives of Gen Z are nowadays mostly researched as potential customers (i.e. Salim et al., 2024; Ghouse et al., 2024; Scoti, 2024; Bailey et al., 2024; Meyerding, Ahrens, 2024; Seyfi et al., 2024), some researchers have also discussed their behavior in the work environment (Ozkan, Solmaz, 2015; Schroth, 2019; Perses, 2019; Ly-Le et al., 2024; Seyfi et al., 2024) or expectations towards potential employers (e.g. Osorio, Madero, 2024; Lssleben, Hofman, 2023; Sillero, 2023; Karasek, 2022). Their role in the labor market is crucial for companies to be recognized, especially as employers have been analyzed as a key group of stakeholders of organizations since their role was defined by R.E. Freeman, the author of the stakeholder theory who stated that “the key thing for an organization is to create value not for the organization's owners (shareholders), but for the organization's stakeholders” (Wierzbic, 2024, p. 649). That perception of employees' significance for organizations fosters various discussions on employees and patterns of their behavior. The deeper they are recognized, the more effective the internal marketing efforts can be, and generally management of these groups becomes more efficient.

Recently, as the discussion on employer branding has arisen, employees are also perceived as representatives of attributes related to an organization as an employer. Employee advocacy as an element of employer branding is perceived as a tool to support talent acquisition, attract shareholders, and increase the self-perception of employees. Another related concept – the EVP (employer value proposition) defines employees not only as target markets of the strategy but also as brand members, co-creators, influencers, and representatives (Kozłowski, 2016; Näppä et al., 2023; Benazić, Ruzić, 2023). In consequence, employees are set not only a competitive advantage of a business by their skills and involvement in the job they perform, but they have become perceived as a medium of communication with external audiences.

Recognition of Gen Z representatives' attitudes towards employers has become so important mainly because the generation who enters the labor market is expected to outnumber baby boomers at work soon. At the moment, they set 24% of the global workforce to rise to 30% in 2030 (Osorio, Madero, 2024). Different tools are used to reach that goal (Caputo et al., 2023), and one of them is the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005), which was tested in the study to analyze expectations toward potential employees of groups of young professionals.

2. Method

The research was conducted in groups of students participating in the Business English bachelor programs at the Faculty of Management at Czestochowa University of Technology and the University of Applied Science in Nysa. In total, 73 students filled in the questionnaire – 41 representing the CUT, and 32 representing the UAS, studying at the second (39) and the third (34) year. The sample meets the desired statistical constraints (confidence level of 95%, 5% margin error).

The students of the Business English course were chosen for the study because they represent some specific characteristics that make them unique and worth close analysis. First of all, they mostly have some work experience and they have worked in sectors of the economy related to the course of their studies (tourism, education, etc.) so their work experience is not only the way to provide them with some extra money to cover costs of living but it can also be interpreted as job experience enriching their knowledge and experience for further jobs.

Moreover, they represent the segment of the economy that has been recently affected by modern technological development. The knowledge of tools, access to international sources of information, skills in AI tools usage, and growing up in the internet environment make that group of young professionals competitive in the market that has been constantly growing since online retail has been ever-increasing, e-commerce share has reached 20,1% of total global retail sales (Statista, 2024) and 57% of clients shop internationally (PayPal, 2022). At the same time, as global research by CSA Research indicates, 65% of customers prefer the content in their native language, 73% expect product reviews in their languages, and 40% would not buy in other languages (DePalma, O'Mara, 2020). In consequence, the market of translation strongly orientates toward machine translation post-editing (MTPE) (Mracznny, 2024) which increases Gen Z's chances in the labor market due to their digital nativeness.

The research was conducted in the form of an online survey. The questionnaire included 31 questions divided into four parts:

1. General questions regarding previous work experience (closed, warm-up questions).
2. Questions following the Berthon et al., (2005) EmpAt scale to research 25 items in 5 dimensions of employer attractiveness.
3. Open questions concerning expectations towards employers and factors associated with satisfaction with job.
4. 2 metric questions (year of study and university)

and it was distributed among students by sharing the link to the questionnaire.

The 25 factors indicated by Berthon et al. (2005) were translated into Polish, but also in the questionnaire, the original versions of the items were left due to the fact, that students participating in the study could easily read the original versions which enabled a better understanding of the original scale. Although some authors (Eget et al., 2019; Benazić, Ružić,

2023; Caputo et al., 2023) translated the scale, keeping the English version of the scale, in the case of Business English students, was reasoned and reduced the risk of possible misunderstanding of questions. Following the methodology, the Likert scale was used to research the perception of elements indicated in the EmpAt.

3. Results

As assumed, the students mostly have some job experience. 16,4% haven't worked so far, but the rest have worked. Nearly one-third of students used to have one employer, 20% had two employers, and the rest had three employers or more.

Most of the students performed jobs not related to their field of study, so far. Only every fourth's job was associated with their major.

When asked to what extent their last job met their expectations (a scale from 1-10), the average rating was 6,26.

4. To what extent did your last job meet your expectations?

66 odpowiedzi

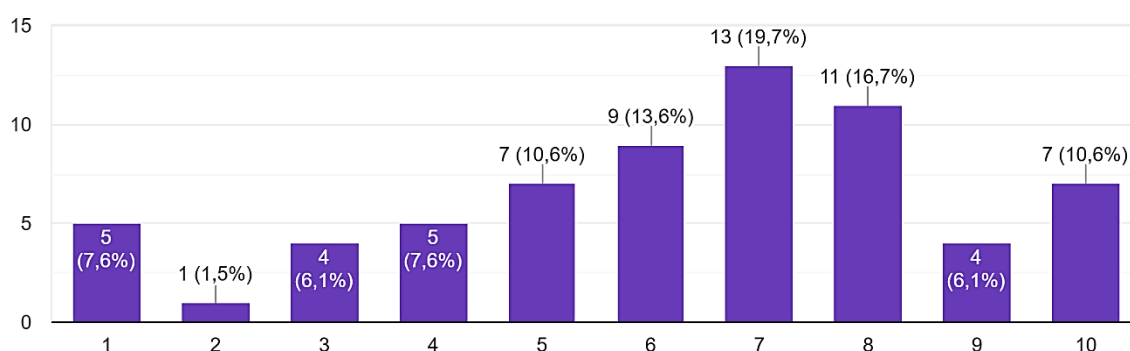


Figure 1. The answers to the question regarding the level of satisfaction from previous jobs.

Source: retrieved from: Google Forms on 10.10.24.

To deepen the discussion on that topic the students were asked (in open question) to provide their own opinion on former places of work, and to indicate which factors influenced their job satisfaction. Among the most frequent answers, the payments were shown the most frequently, followed by good relations with colleagues and a good atmosphere at work.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the students were asked how important different factors of employer attractiveness were to them. They were provided the 1-7 Likert scale to indicate the significance of the factors. The calculated averages from their responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.*Average rating of importance of analyzed factors of the EmpAt scale*

	Factor	Average
1	Recognition/appreciation from management	5,68
2	A fun working environment	6,12
3	A springboard for future employment	5,07
4	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation	5,40
5	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation	5,27
6	Gaining career-enhancing experience	6,38
7	Having a good relationship with your superiors	4,41
8	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	5,44
9	Supportive and encouraging colleagues	5,45
10	Working in an exciting environment	4,37
11	Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	4,82
12	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	5,66
13	The organization produces high-quality products and service	5,40
14	The organization produces innovative products and services	4,41
15	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	5,93
16	Humanitarian organization – gives back to society	3,95
17	Opportunity to apply what was learned during education	4,89
18	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	4,84
19	Acceptance from coworkers and belonging to the organization	5,66
20	The organization is customer-oriented	4,88
21	Job security within the organization	6,14
22	Hands-on inter-departmental experience	5,30
23	Happy work environment	6,19
24	An above-average basic salary	5,73
25	An attractive overall compensation package (basic salary plus commission plus holiday cash grant plus other benefits)	5,32

The elements analyzed in the EmpAt scale were classified into 5 factors by Berthon et al. (2005, p. 159):

- Factor 1 – interest value – the extent to which potential employees are attracted to potential employees by the exciting work environment, novel work, and use of employee's creativity to produce innovative and high-quality products (factors 10-14).
- Factor 2 – social value – the extent to which a person is attracted to a potential employer that provides a happy working environment, good interpersonal relations, and a team atmosphere (factors 2, 7, 8, 9, 23).
- Factor 3- economic value – the extent to which a potential employee is attracted to an employer that provides a higher salary, job security, compensation package, and promotional opportunities (factors 15, 22, 23, 24, 25).
- Factor 4 -development value – the extent to which potential employee is attracted by satisfying needs regarding confidence, career-enhancing, a giving opportunities for further development (factors 1, 3, 4, 5, 6).
- Factor 5 – application value - the extent to which potential employee is attracted to an employer that gives employees to apply what they have learned, to teach others, in both customer-orientated and humanitarian organizations (Berthon et al., 162) (factors 16, 17, 18, 19, 20).

When the average of different factors is analyzed, in the case of students of Business English course in Czestochowa and Nysa, the different factors reached the following averages:

- Factor 1, Interest value – 4,932.
- Factor 2, Social value – 5,522.
- Factor 3, Economic value – 5,694.
- Factor 4, Development value – 5,56.
- Factor 5, Application value – 4,844.

After conducting factor analysis, the average rates of importance were measured for individual factors. When the individual factors are analyzed, the most important for the students are (in order of importance):

1. Gaining career-enhancing experience (6,38).
2. Job security within an organization (6,14).
3. A fun working environment (6,12).

The factors that are perceived as the less important (out of the defined 25) are: working in an exciting and innovative environment, as well as, having good relations with superiors (although that factor indicated a high level of standard deviation).

The last question of the questionnaire was the open one, and students were asked to indicate what are their expectations towards future employers. Here, the most frequent answers were *respect, understanding, appreciation, and providing possibilities for further development*. Generally, the answers were focused mainly on the personal features of potential employers.

4. Summary and discussion

The students who participated in the study represent a specific group of Gen Z. Although they study, most of them have some work experience and have already cooperated with at least two employers. They usually work using the skills and knowledge they acquire during their studies. The perspectives of Business English specialists are quite optimistic. They use their knowledge regularly and cooperate with people from all over the world. Although Polish representatives of Gen Z have been researched from various perspectives as potential employees (e.g. Mazurek, 2019; Ratajczak, 2020; Kupczyk, et al., 2021; Karasek, 2022), a narrower approach towards researching their expectations seems increasingly substantiated, especially when the study aims to recognize expectations for more effective employer branding efforts. To attract new employees, as research results reveal, not only salaries are important but also elements related to work atmosphere (surprisingly none of the respondents mentioned working conditions). What the students expect from their colleagues and superiors is respect as well as understanding and support.

As mentioned, there are several studies on students aimed at researching their expectations towards potential employers and also their role in a working environment. Literature provides many studies and discussions on that topic but there is a problem of research comparison mainly due to different perspectives from which the topic is analyzed as well as different methodologies. For example, the EmpAt scale, used for that study, although at the beginning created to research some ideal concept of a company, was also, later, decided to be useful for researching potential employees, i.e., students (Caputo et al., 2023), was implemented in research of Czech (Eger et al., 2019), Croatian (Benazić, Ružić, 2023) or Italian (Caputo et al., 2023) students. Nevertheless, any comparison between the results could be interpreted as misuse, due to different samples (sizes and structures) and groups of students represented in the research.

The paper presents the tool that can be used to analyze the attractiveness of employers in the eyes of students, and potential employees. It shows only one perspective of analyzing Gen Z representatives' features as potential employees and opens new opportunities for further research, especially since the topic still requires further research and an interdisciplinary approach.

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