IMPORTANCE OF MANAGEMENT PARTICIPATION
IN EMPLOYER BRANDING FOR GENERATION Z

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Purpose: To determine whether Generation Z people expect to participate in various forms of participation in corporate decision-making.

Design/methodology/approach: The survey was conducted on a sample of 256 people in 2024. The sample includes people born after 1996 (234) of whom 128 are working and 106 are not working. The number of respondents born before 1996 is 22 of whom 18 are working. The survey was built on YES/NO (1/0) responses. In addition to the label, the survey asked 2 series of 23 questions each. The first concerned a positive perspective of employees' expectations of the work environment. The respondent was asked to indicate the five most important perspectives on the provision of work for them. The second was about the negative perspective of employees' expectations.

Findings: The results on the empowerment item indicate that the concept is not known and interpreted rather intuitively. Statistical analysis of r-Pearson correlations showed a correlation between year of birth and the ability to participate in decision-making processes and influence on work time organization as factors important to Generation Z.

Research limitations/implications: The research sample is not representative (large imbalance between representatives of generation Z and those born before 1996). The conclusions formulated can only be an indication, not a paradigm. The survey was constructed based on 0/1 responses, which has its interpretive limitations. The cognitive value is limited to people with higher education.

Practical implications: The results obtained can provide clues on how to shape the company's image from the perspective of participation in decision-making activities among Generation Z.

Originality/value: The article is addressed to researchers dealing with employee expectations, employee value proposition and practitioners shaping: working conditions, EVP, EB and recruiting generation Z employees. The article sheds light on the difference in the importance given to elements of participation in company management by employed and unemployed people with greater or lesser professional experience.

Keywords: management participation, empowerment, employer branding, generation Z.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Employer branding (EB) is the totality of an organization's activities, aimed at current and potential employees, aimed at improving the attractiveness of the employer, as well as supporting the strategic goals of the organization (Kozlowski, 2012). Thus, it becomes an important task for management to create a so-called "employer value proposition - EVP". One of these propositions could be the inclusion of employees in the management of the company, which should be accompanied by the ability of employees to influence decisions in the company. It is worth pointing out here the importance of empowerment, which is an extension of earlier theoretical currents in management science like participative management or labor enrichment. Empowerment is a concept that involves providing employees with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, delegating both rights and responsibility for their work, but also ensuring that they have the opportunity to acquire and enhance their knowledge, abilities and skills (Pytel-Kopczynska, 2019).

The specific characteristics of generation Z (e.g., loyalty dictated by meeting their expectations or willingness to change jobs in the absence of favorable resolutions for themselves) but also their needs (including a desire for development, participation in problem solving, control over decisions that affect them, or the ability to go beyond their assigned roles) seem to confirm the validity of treating participation in management, including empowerment, as a tool for employer branding in this generational group.

Research problem: Is the exposure of opportunities for employees to participate in activities related to participation in decision-making processes relevant to corporate branding. The problem posed in this way leads to the formulation of the goal, which is to identify whether people from generation Z expect to participate in various forms of participation in corporate decision-making. And from there, 2 main and two auxiliary hypotheses were derived.

Hypothesis A: Generation Z shows more interest in participation in business management than the earlier generation (born before 1996).

Hypothesis B: Working people show more interest in participation in business management.

Hypothesis B1: Working people from Generation Z show more interest in participation in enterprise management.

Hypothesis B2: Working people from generation earlier than Z show more interest in participation in enterprise management.

In-depth data analysis and r-Pearson correlation analysis were used to verify the hypotheses. Such a wide range of methods used is due to the specifics of the study and the nature of the research sample. The correlation analysis seemed insufficient because a significant portion of the responses were shared by both groups of respondents (in extreme cases, the correlation was 0), which means that a statistically significant relationship will not appear.

Questions about respondents' interest in participation in governance can be identified by referring to several survey questions (variables), these include:

- Participation in decision-making processes.
- Empowerment.
- Participation in meetings.
- Formal expression of opinions.
- Informing on important issues concerning the operation of the company.
- Influence on the organization of work time, as a form of autonomy in decision-making.

Thus, these eight variables (along with year of birth and work situation) will form the strict scope of the analysis conducted.

2. Characteristics of generation Z

Generation Z are those born after 1996 (Konkel, 2023). It is indicated that they are more inclined to the concept of "working with" than "working for". In practice, this means that Zetas prefer working in a team and with a leader, rather than one that involves being subordinate to a hierarchical manager (Aggarwal, Sadhna, Gupta, Mittal, Rastogi, 2020). An important value in their lives is self-reliance (Kukla, 2019), and they also attach great importance to the possibility of challenges (White, 2022). Young workers are pragmatic by nature and thirsty to learn, they want to be involved in solving problems and have control over decisions that affect them. Zetas are individualists who are eager to make their own rules, rebelling against some of the phenomena that occur in company cultures. Many times they feel a strong need to modify these cultures in a way that will allow them to spread principles in line with their value system. The aforementioned individualism refers to the "individualism of self-actualization" (from Charles Taylor's model), where self-actualization is understood as the result of loyalty to oneself, not giving in to established patterns (Higher School of Humanitas, 2023). Today's managers should be aware that representatives of this generation are ruthless to those companies that have failed their trust - most of them, wanting to warn their friends, are willing to provide them with negative information about the company's activities (Ławińska, Korombel, 2023).

3. Empowerment as an EB tool to stimulate employees to action

Empowerment can be understood in two ways: as an employee's motivational state or as a management style (Fernandez, Moldogaziev, 2013). In the first, it refers to an employee's beliefs about his or her own position, influence, competence, sense of work and autonomy,

which is indicated to enhance the sense of professional effectiveness (Spreitzer, 2008). The second relates to managerial practices that involve sharing power, resources and information with employees, involving them in decisions (Ahearne et al., 2005). This partnership style of management fosters a sense of agency and responsibility in employees (Kulikowski, 2017). Spreitzer (2008) states that empowerment increases labor productivity (performance) because it makes them go beyond rigidly defined roles and responsibilities to take more innovative actions. Chen and co-authors (2007) emphasize building trust and mutual respect between managers and subordinates. Importantly, empowerment flows into economic profits and promotes improvements in the quality of services provided (Geralis, Terziovski, 2003; Murray, Holmes, 2021) by the company.

4. Methodology

The survey was conducted on a sample of 256 people in 2024. The sample includes people born after 1996 (234) of whom 128 are working and 106 are not working. The number of respondents born before 1996 is 22 of whom 18 are working. The survey was built on YES/NO (1/0) responses. In addition to the label, the survey asked 2 series of 23 questions each. The first concerned a positive perspective of employees' expectations of the work environment. The respondent was asked to indicate the five most important perspectives on the provision of work for them. The second was about the negative perspective of employees' expectations.

5. Research

The first step is to present the results of the in-depth data analysis. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the synthetic results of the analysis conducted.

Table 1.
Synthetic layout of data analysis results by date of birth

Specification	Positive		Negative	
	After 1996 Item = 234	Before 1996 Item = 22	After 1996 Item = 234	Before 1996 Item = 22
Participation in decision-making processes	14%	50%	15%	5%
Empowerment	3%	5%	13%	23%
Attendance at meetings	14%	14%	29%	32%
Formal expression of opinions	1%	5%	47%	55%
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	13%	14%	11%	9%
Impact on the organization of working time	23%	45%	19%	9%

Source: own study.

Table 1 shows the results on the expectations of respondents, divided into those born before 1996 and those born after 1996. The percentages reflect the proportion of responses in each group. The columns include the values of positive (significant importance) and negative (insignificant importance) responses.

Table 2.
Synthetic layout of data analysis results by employment status

Specification	Positive		Negative	
	I don't work Item = 110	I work Item = 146	I don't work Item = 110	I work Item = 146
Participation in decision-making processes	11%	21%	17%	11%
Empowerment	1%	5%	16%	12%
Attendance at meetings	16%	12%	21%	35%
Formal expression of opinions	0%	2%	49%	46%
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	16%	10%	8%	13%
Impact on the organization of working time	16%	31%	23%	15%

Source: own study.

Table 2 illustrates the expectations of respondents by working and non-working, and Table 3 relates the relationship of the variables of employment status by age group to the variables describing expectations of participation in decision-making processes.

Table 3.
Synthetic layout of data analysis results by age group employment status

Specification	After 1996				Before 1996			
	Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative	
	I don't work Item = 106	I work Item = 128	I don't work Item = 106	I work Item = 128	I don't work Item =	I work Item = 18	I don't work Item = 4	I work Item = 18
Participation in decision-making processes	11%	16%	18%	12%	0%	61%	0%	6%
Empowerment	1%	5%	16%	11%	0%	6%	25%	22%
Attendance at meetings	16%	12%	20%	36%	25%	11%	50%	28%
Formal expression of opinions	0%	2%	48%	45%	0%	6%	75%	50%
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	16%	10%	8%	14%	25%	11%	25%	6%
Impact on the organization of working time	16%	28%	23%	16%	25%	50%	25%	6%

Source: own study.

Table 3 shows detailed results on the expectations of Generation Z respondents, broken down by working and non-working. Thus, for example, participation in decision-making processes is significantly more important to working people in the group born after 1996, with a difference of 4.3%. The situation is reversed when expressing an opinion about the

irrelevance of the variable. The second part of this table shows the same pattern of variables but for those born before 1996.

Another research method used in the study is the r-Pearson correlation method. In this study:

- Year of birth, 1996 and later years designation 1, before 1996 designation 0.
- Work situation (current). Working designation 1, not working designation 0.

It should be noted that correlation analysis considers the relationship between variables. It does not identify the significance or numerosity of responses. Table 4 shows the obtained results of the correlation analysis for the entire sample.

Table 4.
The r-Pearson correlation matrix for the variables in the entire sample

| | r Pearson`s | r Pearson`s |
| | | Situation Professional |
IMPORTANT	**Birth year**	**(current)**
Impact on the organization of working time.	-0.148*	0.166**
Attendance at meetings.	0.000	-0.068
Participation in decision-making processes.	-0.272***	0.137*
Formal expression of opinions.	-0.096	0.095
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations.	-0.007	-0.090
Empowerment	-0.017	0.123*
UNLESS		
Impact on the organization of working time	0.071	-0.108
Attendance at meetings	-0.020	0.153*
Participation in decision-making processes	0.081	-0.091
Formal expression of opinions	-0.045	-0.032
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	0.018	0.077
Empowerment	-0.076	-0.057
comment * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001		

the highlights in the table indicate a significant correlation.

Source: own study.

The strongest correlation was observed between year of birth and participation in decision-making processes. The r-Pearson coefficient is -0.272, which means that with 99% certainty, those born before 1996 consider it important to participate in decision-making processes. The correlation is slightly weaker between those who are working and participation in decision-making processes.

Table 5 shows the results of correlations in age groups with their work situation and work environment factors important and unimportant.

Table 5.
The r-Pearson correlation matrix for age groups in the working/non-working category

IMPORTANT	Situation Professional (current) r Pearson`s After 1996	Situation Professional (current) r Pearson`s Before 1996
Impact on the organization of working time	0.144*	0.194
Attendance at meetings	-0.063	-0.156
Participation in decision-making processes	0.062	0.471*
Formal expression of opinions	0.084	0.103
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	-0.088	-0.156
Empowerment	0.124	0.103
UNLESS		
Impact on the organization of working time	-0.089	-0.261
Attendance at meetings	0.178**	-0.184
Participation in decision-making processes	-0.088	0.103
Formal expression of opinions	-0.028	-0.194
Keeping you informed about important issues concerning the company's operations	0.103	-0.261
Empowerment	-0.075	-0.026

the highlights in the table indicate a significant correlation.

Source: own study.

6. Discussion

In our research, we wanted to show what meaning the Zetas ascribe to empowerment. As it turned out, this concept was not fully understood or known by the respondents. More often, they pointed to other response options that are close to epowerment, but do not fully capture its meaning. Among them, were: the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes; participation in meetings; the opportunity to formally express opinions; to be informed about important issues concerning the company; and to influence the organization of time. The most frequent indications were the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and influence on the organization of work time.

In studies by other authors, such as Sladek and Grabinger (2014), we read about a slightly different set of Zet needs related to management participation in the broadest sense. They mention the need to listen to Generation Z representatives; to provide immediate feedback; and to offer their representatives a flexible work schedule (coinciding with our research). The authors point out that managers who are open to constructive conversations with Zetas, while taking their suggestions into account, will gain the loyalty and respect of representatives of this generational group. Also, White writes about the validity of informing the Zetas and holding routine meetings to communicate to them how their work is evaluated. The study reads that 40% of Generation Z employees expect daily interactions with their boss.

At the same time, according to Sladek and Grabinger (2014), it is also important for managers to be aware of the importance Generation Z places on work-life balance. The authors point out that in order to maintain this balance, leaders should allow young employees to perform some tasks at home. Ulrych (2022) writes about work autonomy, which manifests itself in the ability to plan work independently (when and where), decide how to do it and choose methods (indications received values of 62%, 35% and 40%, respectively). Generation Z expects support from a supervisor, but still values autonomy in decision-making and autonomy in performing tasks. In a study by Defraktyka and Morawski (2019), we read that flexible working hours (27%) are important to the Zetas when choosing a workplace. These issues, particularly related to flexible working hours, are consistent with the results of our research, in which we indicate that working representatives of Generation Z show interest in influencing the organization of working time. It is also worth citing the results of a study by Kincentric Poland (2022), which indicates that Zets appreciate the freedom to choose how they do their work and greater flexibility in their role, understood, for example, as mobility between jobs (68%), and it is also important to match tasks to their skills and needs (57%). They also value it when the organization they work for allows them to experiment and learn from their mistakes (51%) and allows them to develop ideas (40%) with a manager who will encourage them to present their solutions (58%).

Kostro cites business practices to engage younger generation employees in the affairs of the organization. He is referring to giving a sense of influence, providing flexibility in the role or, finally, inclusion in the creation of a "better world," which involves a certain amount of autonomy.

7. Summary

Workers' freedom of action, self-reliance and autonomy are very important elements. An analysis of the literature provides evidence that employees who have the opportunity to do work in small groups show greater loyalty and personal responsibility for each other's commitments, which determines better performance. Companies with highly engaged employees perform better than companies with the most unengaged people - by 54% in terms of employee retention, by 89% in terms of customer satisfaction and by four times in terms of revenue growth (Pytel-Kopczynska, 2019). It is therefore necessary to build a work environment that meets the expectations of employees and at the same time expects and rewards commitment. The cognitive value of the article stems, from its unique approach to the construction of the survey, which asked not only what is important to the respondents, but also what is unimportant. In this way, a picture of essential and non-essential expectations was built.

The data analysis was carried out not only by year of birth, but also by work situation, which highlighted some difference in declared expectations.

The practical value is in answering how to shape the company's image from the perspective of participation in decision-making activities among Generation Z. The leading results indicate that people born before 1996 show a willingness to be involved in decision-making. However, this is not so clear-cut. The survey indicated that working people among those surveyed value their autonomy more, which is expressed in the fact that they want to participate in decision-making processes that directly affect them. They avoid activities they assess as unproductive.

Limitation - the sample is not representative, there is a large imbalance between representatives of generation Z and those born before 1996, hence the conclusions can only be a guide, not a paradigm. The representation of Generation Z is significant subtracting 234 people. The survey was built on 0/1 responses, which has its interpretive limitations. The cognitive value is limited to those with higher education.

Directions for further research should address the possibility of shaping EB in specific groups of recipients of this message. The research shows that in the analyzed area there is a diversity of expectations across both the age of respondents and their employment status.

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