

## ANALYSIS OF GENERATION Z EXPECTATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION

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**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is to identify those aspects of organizational functioning that are not attractive to representatives of Generation Z.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We conducted the survey among 234 students of the Wrocław University of Economics. The sample was purposive, with respondents born after 1996 taking part in the survey. The questionnaire consisted of a section identifying the demographics of respondents, including age, gender, work situation. The main part of the survey consisted of closed-ended questions, where, among the suggested answer options, respondents were asked to indicate the five factors that matter least to them at work.

**Findings:** In our research, we recognized that for young employees it is not important to fulfill such needs as: formal procedures for expressing opinions, functioning of trade unions, outplacement, organizing team-building events or mentoring support.

**Research limitations/implications:** A limitation of our study is the acquisition of results from students at only one university. Our research was a pilot study. In the first instance, we wanted to validate the research tool.

**Practical implications:** Knowing the expectations and reasons why the younger generation is not engaged in work can be useful in the process of making personnel decisions by various actors, e.g. leaders, managers and recruiters. The results can also be inspiring for people dealing with employer branding strategies. Awareness of factors that are not important for Z can lead to taking appropriate actions, including, among others, recruitment, personal marketing or retention programs. The benefits can concern both image aspects and budget savings.

**Originality/value:** Working with Generation Z is becoming a challenge for today's leaders. This generation is perceived as extremely demanding, difficult to cooperate with; Zetas are attributed with a lack of loyalty, a loose approach to work. The value of our article is to look for factors that are irrelevant to building engagement with the younger generation. While other researchers have focused their hypotheses around important/satisfying factors.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, trade unions, outplacement, formal expression procedures, team building events, mentoring, retention.

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

## 1. Introduction

Attracting and retaining talented employees has always been a challenge for companies. Research has repeatedly confirmed that while salary and benefits are important, money alone is not enough to successfully attract and retain qualified personnel, especially in the face of alternative job offers (Aburub, 2020,) and a growing trend of people leaving organizations (Rakic, Zivkovic, 2020,). Organizations are increasingly aware of the key factors influencing the attractiveness of employment (Muster, 2020; Tomaszuk, Wasiluk, 2023). Nevertheless, they often lack effective implementation of this knowledge in practice. The gap between theory and practice is due to the need to adopt a systemic approach, which is becoming increasingly difficult to design and implement in a dynamic business environment. Under these circumstances, the problems of employee retention and engagement are ranked among the most important and urgent issues (Aburub, 2020).

A strategy for retention activities can involve identifying employees who are key to the organization's competitiveness and developing dedicated retention programs for them. In such an approach, the organization creates and develops internal human resources, tailoring retention activities (e.g., development or salary programs) to their needs and expectations (Skowron-Mielnik, Bor, 2015). It is worth asking whether, in the case of representatives of Generation Z, this approach will prove sufficient/justified?

Generation Z, in the view of many employers, is perceived as extremely demanding, difficult to work with, and requiring a change in the management methods previously used. Zetas are attributed with a lack of loyalty, a casual approach to work. All this makes cooperation with the younger generation a challenge for today's leaders. The literature emphasizes that this is a very diverse generation, nevertheless, it is possible to attribute to it some characteristic features such as mobility, flexibility, multitasking, being constantly "online" (Kukla, 2010), openness to new experiences, creativity, among others (Wiktorowicz et al., 2016). It is often heard that the younger generation rejects the cult of work characteristic of earlier generations and treats work as an "add-on" to life, rather than an end in itself.

This results in the need for frequent modification of retention programs. Therefore, it is also important to recognize those factors that - from the perspective of shaping engagement - are perceived as less important. While research typically focuses on the positive aspects of an employer's performance, our goal is to explore areas marginalized by Generation Z.

## **2. Characteristics of Generation Z in the context of expectations from the employer**

Generation Z (born after 1996) are the youngest participants in the labor market. By their general sensitivity, Generation Z is called the snowflake generation. This comparison stems from the Zets' belief in their uniqueness but also their difficulty in accepting criticism about themselves, making it easy to offend representatives of this generation (quite like snowflakes, each of which is different and very delicate) (Konkel, 2023).

This generation is distinguished by multitasking, freedom in the use of modern technologies, the ability to quickly search and process information. A large proportion of its representatives are fluent in at least one foreign language and have a high degree of both professional and spatial mobility. Zetas are creative, communicative and able to work in a group (Muster, 2020). Zetas believe in diversity, value equality and the absence of broad discrimination (organizational, social, etc.). They are quite optimistic, driven by personal ambitions (Dadić et al.). Gocłowska points out that for the Zetas it is passion that matters most, the most important thing is that they can do things they love and to which they can devote themselves fully and happily. For Generation Z, work and career are not a priority, an end in themselves; rather, they are a means of realizing non-work goals and values that are important both in their private lives and in their social activities (Higher School of Humanitas, 2023). Generation Z adheres to the principle that if not this job, then another. Thus, if working conditions do not meet their expectations, they do not hesitate to leave. They consistently pursue this attitude, looking for organizations that meet their expectations (Śliwińska). Their approach is dominated by pragmatism and unscrupulousness. Mahmoud and colleagues (2021) point out that work should enable Zetas to achieve personal satisfaction, which, according to Zylowska (2022), is strongly correlated in this group with the importance of leisure time (for regeneration and rest from work), since fatigue and routine in the long term can lead to job burnout, which this generation explicitly avoids. When choosing a workplace, Zetas pay attention to the management style adopted in the organization. Their specific expectations and perceptions of the labor market force managers to make significant changes (primarily internal) to meet these demands and become an attractive employer for them (Kotter et al., 2022).

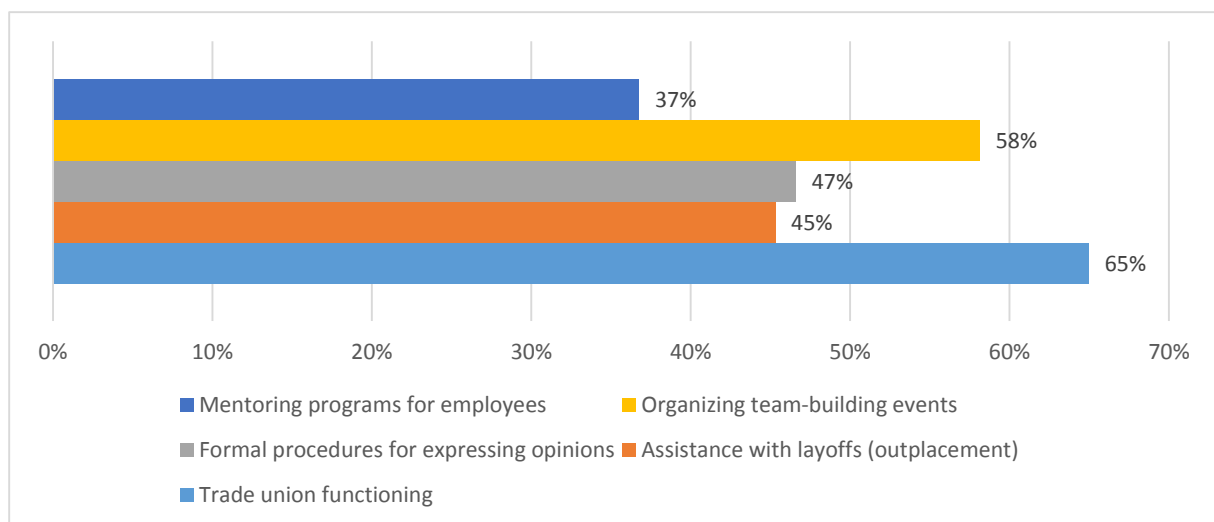
## **3. Methodology**

We conducted the survey among 234 students of the Wrocław University of Economics. The sample was purposive, with respondents born after 1996 taking part in the survey. They were students of the Faculty of Production Engineering (part-time, first-year graduate

studies). Women accounted for 72% and men for 28% of the respondents, 45% of the respondents were not economically active, 55% were working. The survey was prepared in MS Forms. The questionnaire consisted of a section identifying the demographics of respondents, including age, gender, work situation. The main part of the survey consisted of closed-ended questions, where, among the suggested answer options, respondents were asked to indicate the five factors that matter least to them at work. Among these factors were: Safe and sanitary working conditions; Wages adequate to the duties performed; Employment protection; Protection (security) of social benefits; Training at the employer's expense; Good atmosphere in the workplace; Efficient flow of information "top-down", "bottom-up"; Empowerment; Equal treatment; Influence on the organization of working time; Assistance from superiors and co-workers; Health benefits at the employer's expense; Functioning of labor unions; Assistance with layoffs (outplacement); Transparent rules for promotion; Formal procedures for expressing opinions; Adaptation programs for new employees; Organizing team-building events; Informing on important issues concerning the functioning of the company; Participation in decision-making processes; Organizing meetings, gatherings with the crew; Providing assistance to employees in difficulty; Mentoring programs for employees.

#### 4. Results

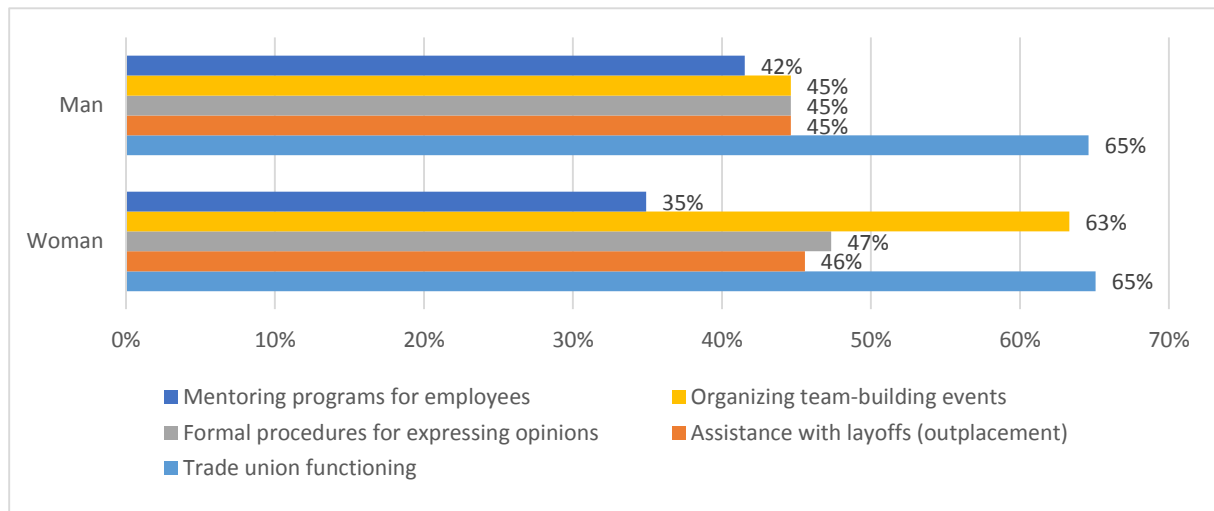
Respondents were asked to identify the workplace expectations that matter least to them. As can be seen in Figure 1, these factors included: functioning of unions (65%), organizing team-building events (58%), formal procedures for expressing opinions (47%), assistance with layoffs (outplacement) (45%), mentoring support (37%).



**Figure 1.** Factors that matter least to respondents.

Source: own study.

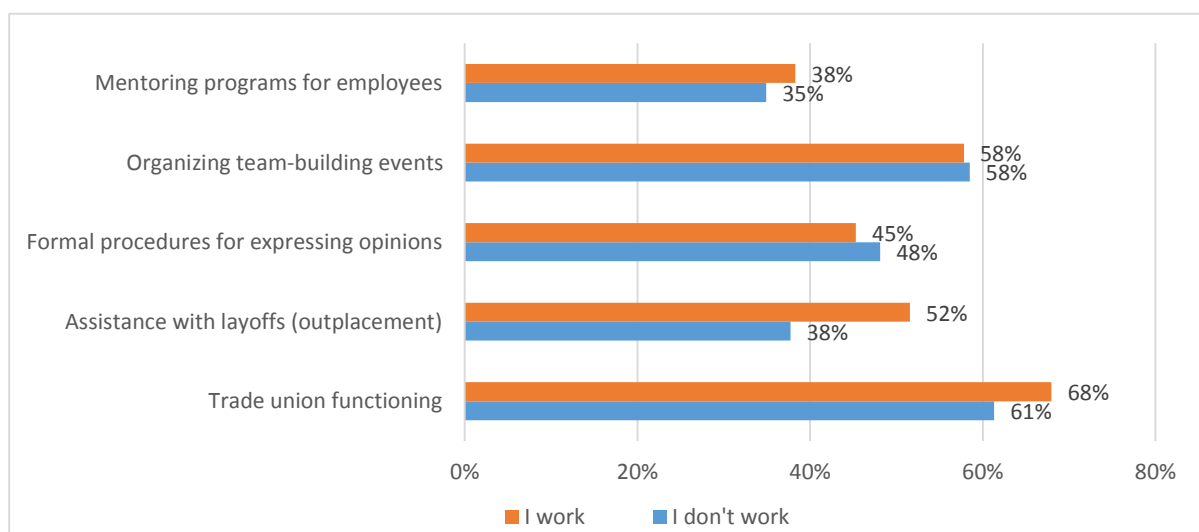
As can be seen in Figure 2, the least attractive to respondents of both sexes turned out to be the functioning of trade unions (indicated by 65% of women and men). Organizing team-building events was indicated as unimportant more often by women (63%) than by men (45%). Formal procedures for expressing opinions and assistance with layoffs received indications at a similar level in both groups (about 45%). Slightly more men (42%) rated the importance of mentoring as unimportant than women (35%).



**Figure 2.** Factors that matter least to respondents - gender perspective.

Source: own study.

Figure 3 takes into account the perspective of labor activity. As can be seen, both working and non-working respondents indicated the low importance of the functioning of labor unions (68% of working and 61% of non-working) and the organization of social events (58%). Interestingly, more working respondents (52%) indicated the low importance of outplacement than non-working respondents (38%). The need for mentoring and formal expression of opinions received similar indications in both groups.



**Figure 3.** Factors that matter least to respondents - perspective of work situation/activity.

Source: own study.

## 5. Discussion

Numerous studies emphasize that Generation Z are people who place personal life goals above career. They expect that work will not hinder them from achieving these goals, but, on the contrary, will support them. A study by the Institute for Labor Market Analysis (2023) reads that the most valued values in their lives are happiness (62%), family (60%), the opportunity to pursue passions (56%), ecology (51%), independence/freedom (51%), health (44%) and love (37%). Zetas expect employers to understand their life priorities, share their value system, and support them in non-work activities (social, civic or charitable). As you can see, these are values not directly related to the professional sphere. It seems that building their commitment should be accompanied by integrating these values with different areas of professional activity. Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomętowska (2014) indicate that more than 50% of the young people surveyed do not want to work in corporations, "get stuck in them", "be absorbed by them". A report by the Higher School of Humanitas (2023, p. 10) says that among the factors that can discourage a Zetka from taking up employment in a company, the incompatibility of the company's mission with the job candidate's personal values (63%) is an important one. Only the answer "unclear job profile" received more indications (71%). This was followed by the answers "high competition" (43%), lack of information about working conditions in the job advertisement (40%) and negative opinions about the organization (33%).

In our research, we tried to capture aspects of the organization's functioning that were not of interest to the Zetas. These included: formal procedures for expressing opinions, the functioning of unions, assistance with layoffs, organizing team-building events and mentor support. Generation Z seeks employers with whom they can realize visions that are in line with their values, and their ideas and solutions are implemented, which fosters their growth (Kincentric, 2022). However, they prefer direct contact with their superiors instead of formal procedures. According to the report "Zoomers at Work", (Piotrowska) they want to be heard, have a say in reality and discuss their work face to face, with 18% of respondents indicating that a good relationship with their supervisor leads them to stay with a company for more than two years.

### Trade union functioning

The low level of respondents' interest in the functioning of trade unions, we have established, is surprising in the context of reports of growing awareness of the need for them; labor law expert and deputy chairwoman of the Labor Protection Council at the Polish Parliament Barbara Godlewska-Bujok (2024) says that "there is a visible revival around this topic; young people in particular are moving toward unions and believe more in their sense and strength". Representatives of Generation Z are increasingly joining unions because they want to be treated as partners, do not agree with violations of rights and assertively do not accept

everything imposed on them by their employer. People employed in services, trade, e-commerce often join nationwide trade unions, which, according to the cited expert, is a consequence of the servitization of the economy, the high percentage of young people among service sector workers, the spread of contracts other than the labor contract. The need for union protection is evident among young workers on digital platforms (e.g., couriers, food deliverers, translators, copywriters); gaming workers have also established their own union (pracuj.pl). Against this background, how can we explain the indications of our respondents? Perhaps it is due to a lack of negative experiences in relations with employers, insufficient education about the role of trade unions in enforcing employer obligations, and limited awareness of the causal power and potential effectiveness of these organizations in holding employers accountable for their promises.

### **Assistance with layoffs**

Our research revealed the low importance of outplacement. This alludes to the characteristics of Generation Z described in the literature, which shows that this generation initiates job changes on its own and is not afraid of possible layoffs; it believes that some form of professional activity will always be found. The study "Generation Z at work", conducted on a group of 226 respondents, aged 18-24, reads that 58% of representatives of the surveyed generation (professionally active) predict that they will change jobs at least several times in their careers, 53% believe that they will do several different jobs during their careers, 51% indicate that they do not want to spend their entire career in one job (ARC Market and Opinion, 2024). The literature indicates that educational exchanges have prepared Generation Z for mobility in terms of work as well. Labor migration is natural, and choosing between employment in Poland and abroad is not a problem for young workers (Bartkowski, Pytlak, 2024).

### **Organizing team-building events**

Also, organizing social events has proved unattractive to Zetas. Meanwhile, a study by the Higher School of Humanitas (2023) indicates that, contrary to common stereotypes, Zetas do not avoid building social relationships. On the contrary, it notes the need to establish and develop such ties at work, both in relationships with co-workers and superiors. Experts involved in organizing such events indicate that traditional team-building trips are losing their appeal and do not make sense for a generation that values its time. After all, Zetas expect more personalized and authentic experiences that bring them tangible benefits and give them a sense of purpose (Staszewska), and offer more than just passive participation. They are looking for excitement, adrenaline and true engagement (Eventivo).

## **Mentoring**

The last place in the ranking of least important factors was taken by mentoring programs. Such a result can be explained by the short tenure of our respondents and the willingness of Zetas to change employers frequently, as shown by other researchers (Śliwinska, 2023). In the context of retention, it becomes a challenge to have an adequately prepared workforce that could and was willing to take on this extremely difficult role of being a mentor, as research on the demand of Generation Z representatives for mentoring support (Pietroń-Pyszczek, Borowska, 2022) shows that one in two respondents needs a mentor, and that more than half of all respondents have no knowledge of who could help them realize their own career vision.

## **6. Summary**

The literature primarily presents studies showing what the young generation expects. In our research, we pay attention to those aspects of work that, in the optics of Generation Z, are not conducive to building their commitment. Nowadays, the problem of retaining valuable employees in the organization is observed. Bearing in mind that Generation Z will dominate the market in the coming years, it is worth prioritizing issues related to their retention. After all, as indicated in the literature, their loyalty (considered as the desire to stay in the organization) depends on the satisfaction of their needs. In our research, we recognized that for young employees it is not important to fulfill such needs as: formal procedures for expressing opinions, functioning of trade unions, outplacement, organizing team-building events or mentoring support. Generation Z values freedom, including that related to how to influence decisions in the company. Addressing their needs in this regard, rather than formalized forms of expression, should include greater accessibility to management where face to face opinions can be expressed. It seems that the low ratings of outplacement are due to the young generation's lack of bad experiences with layoffs. On the one hand, they themselves very often change jobs, on the other hand, a large number of representatives of this generation still live with their parents, so periods of unemployment are not so severe, as they can count on family support. Therefore, it is worth continuing research in this area, when the Z generation will have longer work experience and the first negative experiences of job loss. The Zetas also attribute little importance to trade unions. On the one hand, this fact is not surprising, since the heyday of these entities coincided with the functioning of much older generations in the market. Perhaps the expansion of union activities, for example, to include so-called "green aspects" would increase their attractiveness. On the other hand, however, Generation Z tends to be interested in wages commensurate with their duties, which is also known to be a concern for trade unionists. This may suggest that the younger generation does not have full knowledge of the



activities that unions undertake. Interestingly, respondents also gave low marks to organizing team-building events. It seems that if they were to serve the purpose of keeping the Zetas in the organization, it would require management to adopt a different form of organizing them than before. Traditional team-building meetings, it seems, do not fit in with the needs of the younger generation, which is definitely more in need of personalized activities. With regard to mentoring programs, we think that this area would require more in-depth research, as it was characterized by the lowest indications of respondents (it was apparently lower than for the other factors analyzed). At the same time, we read in the literature that the young generation, due to their relatively high dependence, requires help and support in the workplace; the relationship between leader and employee is important, which influences the Zetas' job satisfaction and desire for long-term employment.

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