

EXPERIENCING INCLUSION BY THE GENERATION Z – OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

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Purpose: The article was written within the framework of the research task of the project “Quality and risk of employee experience management under conditions of sustainable development”.

Methodology: A self-survey was conducted among working people of Generation Z regarding their experience of inclusion in the workplace. Using the Climate for Inclusion Scale, their perception of inclusion in the area of employment and integration of differences was diagnosed. Their dominant positive modules of experiences were established.

Findings: Inclusive workplaces determine employee experience. The majority of respondents perceived their workplaces as inclusive, viewing the climate of inclusion in the areas of employment and integration of differences positively. They rated highest the companies' commitment to hiring a diverse workforce and meeting individual employee needs through flexible benefit programs. Intergroup relations in companies characterized by respect and trust scored the highest. The majority of respondents experienced workplace inclusion positively in all modules, where the sensory module was dominant, followed by the social and emotional ones. Half of those surveyed valued inclusion and diversity in the workplace as the most important. Opportunities included broadening mind by sharing different experiences, increased awareness and understanding of others, greater commitment to work, loyalty, and countering stereotyping. The main threat of inclusion in organizations was seen as promoting people not on the basis of competence, results obtained but belonging to a particular minority group in order to meet certain Inclusion & Diversity metrics.

Research limitations: The study was ad hoc and exploratory in nature. Due to the small size of the study group, it is not possible to generalize the results.

Practical implications: The research findings may be useful for anyone interested in adopting a new perspective on the management of Generation Z employees, based on experience economics.

Social implications: It influences modern human resource management practices in organizations.

Originality: It builds awareness of the sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, relational experiences of Generation Z employees regarding inclusion.

Keywords: inclusion, Generation Z, human resource management, employee experience, employee experience management, inclusion & diversity.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Inclusion in the workplace can involve opportunities and threats to human resource management. To date, studies have examined, among other things, the use of diversity and inclusion in the workplace in achieving business goals (Jozefowicz, 2017), the impact of inclusivity on employees in organizations (Dudek, 2023), the role of inclusivity in building resilience in organizations (Winnicka-Wejs, 2024b). What is missing, however, is a description of the experience of inclusion and its risks from the perspective of representatives of the youngest generation currently active in the labor market, that is, Generation Z (born 1995-2010) (cf. demarcation of generational cohorts, Klesta, Korpula, Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2024, p. 205), which is characterized by an open, assertive attitude towards others (Lipka, 2017, p. 53), and they take diversity for granted (Warwas, Wiktorowicz, Jawor-Joniewicz, 2018, p. 31; Lavinskaya, Korombel, 2023, p. 16).

The topic is relevant not only because of the diagnosed research gap, but also because of the timeliness of the subject of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI - diversity, equity, inclusion) in the conditions of sustainable development (cf. Sadowska, 2021) and a new perspective on the development of human resource management in the era of the experience economy employee experience management (Lipka, Król, 2021; Lipka, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b; Lipka, Waszczak, 2024a, 2024b; Król, Karczewska, 2024; Winnicka-Wejs, 2024a).

The purpose of the article is:

- to determine the perceived climate of inclusion in the organization by representatives of Generation Z in the area of employment conditions and integration of differences,
- to diagnose the modules of experiences (sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, relational) of Generation Z regarding inclusion,
- identification of opportunities and threats of inclusion in the workplace.

The article has cognitive value for the development of knowledge of management science and quality in the field of human resource management. Its originality is related to building awareness of the sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, relational experiences of Generation Z employees regarding inclusion.

2. Research methodology

For the purpose of the study, research questions, research hypotheses and a survey questionnaire were formulated, using scales available in foreign literature for measuring inclusion (cf. Table 1), which were translated into Polish, using a five-point Likert scale from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree (cf. Tables 3, 4).

Table 1.*Research questions, research hypotheses, sources of measurement scales*

No.	Research question	Research hypothesis	Question number in the survey	Source
1.	How does Generation Z experience and live through inclusion?	Generation Z representatives see their workplaces as inclusive, viewing the climate of inclusion in the area of employment and integration of differences positively.	Question 1 (9 items) Question 2 (11 items)	Dimension 1: Foundation of equitable employment practices – Climate for Inclusion Scale (Nishii, 2013). Dimension 2: Integration of differences – Climate for Inclusion Scale (Nishii, 2013).
2.	What are the dominant positive modules of experiences of representatives of the Generation Z regarding inclusion?	Positive emotional and social modules of experiences of inclusion by representatives of Generation Z are dominant.	Question 3 (modules: sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, relational)	Relational module - Workplace Social Inclusion Scale (Pearce, Randel, 2004) Other modules - own items based on (Lipka, 2022)
3.	What are the opportunities and threats of inclusion in the workplace?	Representatives of Generation Z consider inclusivity a key value. In their view, inclusion in the workplace brings more opportunities than threats.	Questions 4, 5	Concepts of Inclusion & Diversity (Pearce, Randel, 2004; Shore et al., 2011) Generation Z values (Lipka, 2017; Warwas et al., 2018; Ławińska et al., 2023)

Source: own elaboration.

The survey explained the concepts of inclusion and diversity to respondents. A high level of inclusion in the workplace means that employees can participate in a wide range of activities, enjoy respect, feel that they are part of a team, are valued and treated fairly (Pearce, Randel, 2004; Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). Diversity involves valuing and promoting different viewpoints, promoting the inclusion of diverse employees, and the employer countering discrimination based on gender, age, ethnic, national or social origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, language, disability, political beliefs, and social or material status.

The pilot survey, which aimed, among other things, to improve the tool from a substantive and technical point of view, was conducted in the 4th week of 2025, and the relevant survey took place in the 5th week (from 27.01.2025 to 02.02.2025). The link to the survey was provided via a Google form, noting that the target group of the survey is people born between 1995 and 2010.

An occasional sample was used - it was made up of easily accessible people (students and seminarians) and the snowball method - a request was sent to acquaintances among lecturers about spreading the link among Generation Z individuals (Babbie, 2013). The original study conducted was ad hoc and exploratory in nature.

3. Characteristics of the surveyed Generation Z employees

Twenty-three people took part in the survey. The surveys were filled out correctly, all closed questions were answered, as a result of which no survey had to be rejected. The structure of the respondents who took part in the survey is summarized in in Table 2.

Table 2.

Structure of respondents by gender, year of birth, size of enterprise

Respondents' particulars		Distribution of answers
Gender	Woman	16
	Man	7
Year of birth	1995-2000	12
	2001-2005	11
	2006-2010	0
Size of enterprise	Micro (< 9 employees)	2
	Small (10-50 employees)	2
	Medium (51-250 employees)	3
	Large (> 250 employees)	16

Source: Own elaboration.

The survey was filled out by Generation Z people working mainly in junior specialist positions (for example: junior specialist; junior production planning specialist; junior customer relations specialist; junior forecasting scenario analysis specialist;), specialist (for example: specialist; logistics specialist; Operation Support Specialist; process specialist; administrative specialist; Customer Journey Specialist). The survey group also included three managers (including: Project Manager, Deputy Manager of the Economic Department in the Restructuring Office), two assistants (clerk/assistant), one accountant, and two interns.

Respondents represented a variety of industries, including: IT, Automotive, Education, E-commerce, High-Tech, Audit, Public Administration, Research, Construction, Administration, Law & Economics/Non-Financial Data Reporting, Steel, Food, Manufacturing, Banking.

4. Perception of inclusion in the area of employment conditions, integration of differences in the organization

A diagnosis of Generation Z employees' perceptions of inclusion in the area of employment conditions and integration of differences in the organization was made using the "Climate for Inclusion Scale" (Nishii, 2013). Table 3 shows the results on the dimension of fair employment practices, and Table 4 shows the area on integration of differences.

Table 3.

Perceptions of inclusion in the area of employment in the organization by surveyed Generation Z employees

Items from question 1	1*	2	3	4	5
The company is committed to hiring diverse employees across the organization.	3	2	3	6	9
Employment practices in the company are reliably implemented.	2	2	8	4	7
The company has a fair promotion process.	2	5	5	5	6
My company's performance review process is fair.	0	5	5	4	9
Individual employee needs are met through flexible benefits programs.	0	4	4	7	8
The company invests in the development of all employees.	4	6	3	2	8
The company's employees receive "equal pay for equal work".	4	5	6	6	2
The company provides safe ways for employees to report complaints.	3	4	2	5	9
Employees can count on fair performance evaluation.	0	2	8	5	8

* 1 – I definitely disagree, 5 – I definitely agree.

Source: own elaboration.

The data in Table 3 shows that respondents are most positive about hiring diverse workforce and meeting the individual needs of employees through flexible benefit programs. They are least positive about the company's investment in the development of all employees and their receiving equal pay for equal work.

Table 4.

Perception of inclusion in the area of integration of differences in the organization by the surveyed employees of Generation Z

Items from question 2	1*	2	3	4	5
In the company, employees feel comfortable being themselves.	0	2	5	6	10
The company is characterized by a non-threatening environment in which people can reveal their "true" selves (e.g., through dress-code, expressiveness).	2	1	5	8	7
Promoting diversity awareness is a priority for the company.	6	5	3	5	4
The company values work-life balance.	2	4	5	5	7
The company respects the differences between people.	0	1	5	9	8
Employees are actively encouraged to take advantage of work-life balance programs.	6	3	6	2	6
The company provides the means to enable employees to effectively resolve conflicts.	2	8	6	3	4
Employees are valued for who they are as people, not just for the work they do in the company.	1	7	4	8	3
Within a company, employees often share information and learn about each other as individuals.	2	3	3	8	7
The company has a culture where employees appreciate the differences people bring to the workplace.	1	5	5	9	3
Within a company, intergroup relationships (between different races, occupational groups, age groups, etc.) are characterized by respect and trust.	2	0	3	8	10

* 1 – I definitely disagree, 5 – I definitely agree.

Source: own elaboration.

On the other hand, the data in Table 4 show that in the area of integration of differences, the respondents perceive positively especially intergroup relations characterized by respect and trust. In their perception, companies respect the differences between people, and they feel comfortable being themselves. However, in their opinion, promoting awareness of diversity is not a priority for companies.

Although there are differences in the assessment of individual statements, when analyzing the indications carefully, it turns out that most of the items were definitely and rather positively evaluated by the respondents. For question 1 of the survey, 5 items out of 9 have more than half of the answers on point scales 4 and 5, and for question 2 of the survey – 7 items out of 11.

5. Modules of Generation Z experience of inclusion

Respondents were also asked to rate their experiences of inclusion in the workplace (see Table 5). The most positive indications were for the sensory module related to visual experiences - “I accept people who look different from me” (19 responses “5 - strongly agree”, 2 responses “4 - rather agree”).

Next, the most positive responses were for the relational (social) module, related to feelings and interpersonal relationships: “I feel accepted as part of the team” (14 responses '5 - I strongly agree', 5 responses '4 - I rather agree'); “I feel included in most activities at work” (11 responses '5 - I strongly agree', 7 responses '4 - I rather agree').

Inclusion and diversity in the workplace evokes positive feelings among respondents (12 responses “5 - I strongly agree”, 4 responses “4 - I rather agree”) and refers to the emotional module.

The other modules: behavioral, intellectual were also positively assessed, however with fewer strong indications. It should be noted that respondents do not feel alienated in their companies.

Table 5.
Generation Z experience modules on inclusion in the workplace

Module of experiences	Items from question 3	1*	2	3	4	5
Relational (social)	I feel accepted as part of the team.	0	2	2	5	14
	I feel included in most activities at work.	0	2	3	7	11
	Sometimes I feel like an outsider.	9	4	2	4	4
Emotional	Inclusion and diversity in the workplace evokes positive feelings in me.	0	1	6	4	12
Behavioral	I am happy with the company's standards for inclusion and diversity.	0	2	6	6	9
Intellectual	Working to promote the inclusion of a diverse workforce is interesting to me.	2	3	6	6	6
Sensory	I accept people who look different from me.	0	0	2	2	19

* 1 – I definitely disagree, 5 – I definitely agree.

Source: own elaboration.

6. Views on the opportunities and risks of inclusion in the workplace

More than half of the respondents indicated that Inclusion & Diversity in the workplace is of key value to them. However, every third person did not have a precise answer in this regard, answering "neither yes nor no".

Table 6.

Structure of the answer to the question: "Is inclusion and diversity in the workplace of key value to you? Please select one"

Range of answers	Number of answers
Definitely yes	5
Rather yes	8
Neither yes nor no	8
Rather not	2
Definitely not	0

Source: own elaboration.

Thirteen comments were obtained on the open-ended question; "What is your opinion on inclusion and diversity in the workplace? In your opinion, does inclusion in the workplace bring more opportunities than threats? What are the opportunities? What are the threats?"

Six people for whom inclusion and diversity are of key importance wrote:

1. "Depending on the specifics of the company it occurs - it's worse on construction sites, for example".
2. "It is difficult for older people to accept the young generation and their behavior".
3. "In my workplace, the boss's relatives are employed in high positions, the headquarters is in Warsaw, and there is only a small branch in Katowice where very few people work. In my work, inclusion would certainly bring more chances. I would definitely feel better in a workplace where there is a high level of inclusivity".
4. "I don't see any threats, definitely only opportunities. Inclusion allows you to broaden your horizons and those of the company by being able to share very different life experiences".
5. "Working with different people you can look at things from a different point of view, but diversity can also confuse the team, such a group can be difficult to manage, the leader must have experience".
6. "I think inclusion is needed in the workplace, it allows you to understand the needs of others, it increases awareness, you can understand others better".

People who ticked "neither yes nor no" in the previous question about the key value of inclusion and diversity left the following five comments:

1. "In my opinion, there are more opportunities, people who feel good in the workplace and know that they are accepted can perform their tasks with more peace of mind and commitment".

2. "In my opinion, inclusion in the workplace has a number of benefits, equal involvement of employees in projects, in team activities and treating them with respect, will certainly bring long-term benefits resulting from the sense of comfort that employees will feel as a result. This state of affairs can translate into greater involvement of employees in performing their tasks and discourage them from changing their workplace only because of financial issues, because the environment also matters (although of course much less), because it is in the workplace that we spend 1/4 or even most of the day. However, I see neither opportunities nor threats in initiating diversity in the workplace, a properly functioning organization should not be based on beliefs relating to religion, origin, etc. but only on the person's experience, personal culture and approach to work. Other issues should not be any starting point for the recruiter when selecting a candidate for the position, and co-workers should not be guided by prejudice at work about the above-mentioned issues on diversity".
3. "There are chances that actually valuable and good employees will not be rejected in a job or promotion because of diversity, the risks are such that people who stand out with some religious/cultural aspect will be promoted not because of the quality of their work or the value they bring to the team, but because of the above-mentioned diversity".
4. "Inclusion is important, but I don't spend time on diversity".
5. "Inclusivity in the workplace allows us to confront reality with stereotypes and to combat stereotypes. Inclusivity should mean equal opportunities, but unfortunately it happens that instead of competences, it is more important to achieve the "target" of a given gender or race minority".

Two people who negatively assessed the value of inclusion and diversity expressed the same opinion on an open question, writing down the following comments:

1. "An employee should be employed on the basis of their competence and character. Hiring to be "diverse" resembles a zoo, and as a person who would be hired only for the sake of my appearance/orientation or anything else, I would feel like a PR tool. In my opinion, a more transparent recruitment process should be introduced to explain to everyone why they were or were not hired".
2. "The opportunities are obvious: freedom, equality, less stress, and the threat is to promote people in given positions "by force" only because of belonging to a minority, so that it looks good in the statistics".

7. Conclusion

Positive and inclusive workplaces are one of the determinants specific to employee experience (Lipka, 2024, p. 44). They have the following attributes: flexible work time and space; an inclusive and diverse community that gives employees a sense of fairness; support for work productivity through appropriate organization, processes, as well as tools; adequate evaluation of employees, showing them appreciation, and appropriate compensation (Nuernberg, 2023, p. 64).

The results of the company's own empirical survey of working Generation Z showed that the majority of respondents perceived their workplaces as inclusive, viewing the climate of inclusion in the areas of employment and integration of differences positively. Considering fair employment conditions, they rated highest the companies' commitment to hiring a diverse workforce and meeting individual employee needs through flexible benefit programs. On the other hand, with the criterion of integration of differences, the highest positive scores were when stating that intergroup relations in companies are characterized by respect and trust.

Experiencing inclusion is associated with feeling safe, trusted, accepted, respected, supported, valued, fulfilled, engaged and authentic in their work environment, both as individuals and as members of specific identity groups (Ferdman et al., 2009, after DeHart-Davis et al., 2023, p. 501). In the study group, the majority experienced workplace inclusion positively in all modules: relational, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, and sensory. The sensory module related to visual experiences turned out to be dominant, followed by the social module relating to interpersonal relationships, then the emotional module with positive feelings.

The value of inclusion and diversity in the workplace was of key importance to half of the Generation Z employees surveyed, with those who expressed an opinion on inclusion identifying more opportunities than threats. Among the opportunities, they included: broadening mind by sharing different experiences; increased awareness and understanding of others; greater commitment to work and tasks; loyalty; and countering stereotyping. Some of them drew attention to the occurring in practice the phenomenon of promoting people not on the basis of competence, results obtained but belonging to a particular minority group in order to meet certain I&D metrics, which they assessed negatively as a threat.

Due to the small size of the study group, it is not possible to generalize the results to all of Generation Z. Financial and time barriers determined the course of the research proceedings thus affecting the limitations of the empirical study, which was intended to be rather ad hoc and exploratory. This article was mainly intended to highlight the concept of *Employee Experience Management* in relation to the youngest employees (Generation Z) and their experiences of inclusion in the workplace. It should be emphasized that inclusion in the workplace is not only coherent with the idea of *Employee Experience*, but also corresponds to such a megatrend

shaping the global labor market as diversity and inclusiveness (Sidor-Rządkowska, Sienkiewicz, 2023, p. 31).

Further research should focus on diagnosing the modules of experiences of Generation Z in terms of other constructs/values, as well as the development of a new perspective on the management of Generation Z employees, taking into account the assumptions of experience economics and Employee Experience Management.

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