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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF THE YOUNGEST GENERATION IN THE LABOR MARKET

Aneta KUŹNIARSKA[1*], Izabela STAŃCZYK[2], Marek KUNASZ[3]

[1] Jagiellonian University, Krakow; aneta.kuzniarska@uj.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-2786-2781
[2] Jagiellonian University, Krakow; izabela.stanczyk@uj.edu.pl, ORCID: 000-0002-1496-130X
[3] University of Szczecin, Szczecin; marek.kunasz@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1577-0425
* Correspondence author

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to attempt to analyze employee engagement in the context of age, seniority, education, and occupational group, and on this basis, to formulate research problems for further broader scientific research.
Design/methodology/approach: The research was conducted among 193 respondents from the youngest generation in the labor market, who completed a prepared survey questionnaire. The standardized Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) tool was used.
Findings: As the survey results indicate, respondents from the youngest generation in the labor market indicate a fairly high level of engagement. The generational change in attitudes toward observing working hours and the emphasis on fulfilling one's private life means that these employees do not get carried away with extreme emotions in the workplace, if they find it interesting and challenging, they are able to work longer.
Practical implications: These results provide guidance to employers on how to create jobs to increase the engagement of young workers in particular. It is important to pay attention to the attractiveness and complexity of tasks that, at the same time, are also challenging for the younger generation**.**
Originality/value: The use of a standardized worksheet makes it possible to compare the results with other surveys. What provides an added value are tips for employers and HR specialists on how to organize workplaces in order to increase employee engagement
Keywords: absorption, dedication, engagement, UWES, vigor**.**
Category of the paper: research article.

1. Introduction

Low levels of employee engagement are now a worldwide problem, with some even indicating that there is an engagement crisis (Mann, Harter, 2016). Engagement is crucial to the success of any organization, it means that employees are motivated, satisfied and active, which leads to higher productivity, better quality of work and greater loyalty to the organization.

With competition in the labor market intensifying and changes in the business market accelerating, the importance of engagement is increasing even more - organizations that can create favorable working conditions and motivate their employees can gain a competitive advantage faster and increase their chances of maintaining it. One of the measures and evidence of the effectiveness of motivational activities undertaken in organizations resulting from the process of shaping employee attitudes and behavior is precisely the level of employee engagement (Armstrong, 2009). Achieving the expected high level of engagement is based mainly on identifying employees with the organization through working relationships based on stability, shared responsibility or participation in decision-making, referring to a wide range of needs, professional and personal goals of employees (Stachowska, 2018). Some researchers indicate that job engagement is positively correlated with job satisfaction, organizational engagement, or civic behavior (Saks, 2006). It can be positively influenced by benefits, fair treatment by the management, results and feedback, the characteristics of the job itself (Abraham, 2012) or satisfaction with assigned tasks and responsibilities (Garg, Dar, Mishra, 2018). These elements provide a supportive environment to the employee, and so, for example, employees whose work is constantly enriched and made challenging feel compelled to become more involved. Open and supportive working relationships are a source of psychological security for employees, which, as a consequence, provides the opportunity to do new things, and in addition, when an employee is convinced that the organization cares about their well-being, they try to fulfill their responsibilities to the organization with greater engagement (Saks, 2006). An additional source of engagement is the perceived support from the supervisor, a broad sense of fairness and friendly working relationships (Jin, McDonald, 2017; Jin, McDonald, Park, 2016; Smythe, 2012).

2. Theoretical Approaches to Employee Engagement

The term "engagement" can be used when employees are interested in their work, have a positive and sometimes even enthusiastic attitude toward their work in their work environment, demonstrate voluntary behavior and are motivated to achieve high performance (Armstrong, Taylor, 2016). Employee engagement is multifaceted - it can be viewed as a state, behavior or disposition, and is associated with perseverance, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm and even pride. As a state, it relates to organizational dedication, participation and satisfaction, as a behavior it manifests itself in innovative and proactive attitudes, as a trait it is evident by conscientiousness and having an autotelic personality (Macey, Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004).

Employee engagement is a complex and multidimensional concept described in various ways in the literature. It may be understood as a multifaceted construct including cognitive, emotional and behavioral components, or as a positive state of dedication and willingness to work (Sun, Chanchai Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Engagement is also defined as an attitude toward work involving knowledge about the organization, emotions toward its values and goals, and behavioral orientation toward the company (Juchnowicz, Kinowska, 2018). Many authors link engagement with identification with the organization and the use of employees' competencies to achieve its goals (Juchnowicz, 2010; Pocztowski, 2018). It is associated with willingness to exert additional effort and act beyond required standards (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014; Mrówka, 2010). Engagement may also involve strong psychological bonds with the organization and active participation in its development (Bańka et al., 2002; Skowron-Mielnik, 2014). It can also function as a mechanism influencing employee and organizational performance (Truss et al., 2011) and is conceptually distinct from traditional work attitudes (Herscovitch, Meyer, 2002), with roots in the idea of expressing oneself physically, cognitively and emotionally in work roles (Cook, Wall, 1980; Kahn, 1990).

3. Shaping employee engagement

As research to date indicates, increasing employee engagement can have a positive impact on maintaining a productive workforce, reducing turnover (McCarthy, Moonesinghe, Dean, 2020), organizational and individual performance, including employee satisfaction, increased productivity and profitability (Bakker, 2017; Kidron, Vinarski Peretz, 2018). The more the employees are confronted with positive work experiences and daily interesting demands, while having access to sufficient resources, the greater the work engagement. Complex tasks at work, demanding customers as well as time pressures can be a positive challenge when they receive sufficient support from co-workers and supervisors, have decision-making freedom and can use the skills they have acquired (Bakker, 2017).

The factors influencing employee engagement levels include, among others, their identification with the organization, which allows them to understand and create the organization's goals, a sense of impact on the effectiveness of actions, stability related to a strong desire to stay in one job, and passion arising from the work being performed. (Kaczyńska, Kałuziak, Stankiewicz-Mróz, 2015).

Building employee engagement is influenced by factors that depend on both the employer and the employee. Some of them are presented in table 1.

Table 1.
Factors affecting employee engagement that depend on both the employee and the employer

	CATEGORY	FACTORS AFFECTING ENGAGEMENT
FACTORS DEPENDENT ON THE EMPLOYER	career development	The organization enables learning and development opportunities for employees. The employee has the possibility of promotion in the future. Satisfaction with learning opportunities. Company assistance in identifying skills helpful for development. Managerial support in the employee's career.
	identification with the organization	The company shares financial success. The employee treats the goals of the department as their own. The company fosters a sense of participation in success. The employee is satisfied with their involvement in the decision-making process. The employee is proud of the quality of their work.
	a rewarding work environment	The organization offers a positive, enjoyable work environment. Employees receive recognition for their contributions. The employee feels encouraged to seek newer solutions. The supervisor has the skills to motivate employees. The employee is empowered to make necessary decisions in their work.
FACTORS DEPENDENT ON THE EMPLOYEE	personal	age gender interpersonal relations health condition competencies personal desire for development the need for self-actualization family situation housing situation
	work-related	type of work performed (mental, manual) nature of work - routine work, creative work autonomy at work type of position held organization of work schedule organization's personnel policy: • opportunity for development • clear criteria for promotion • use of an appropriate incentive system
	relational	interpersonal relations in the organization adaptation to the organizational culture employee-organization relationship

Source: own elaboration based on: (Borkowska, 2014; Roberts, Davenport, 2002; Smarżewska, 2018).

To increase employee engagement, regular communication with employees, especially regarding organizational goals and the role of employees in achieving them, as well as work-life balance can also be used (Revuru, Bandaru, 2024).

Croston (2008) and Smythe (2012) identify slightly different factors shaping employee engagement (fig. 1).

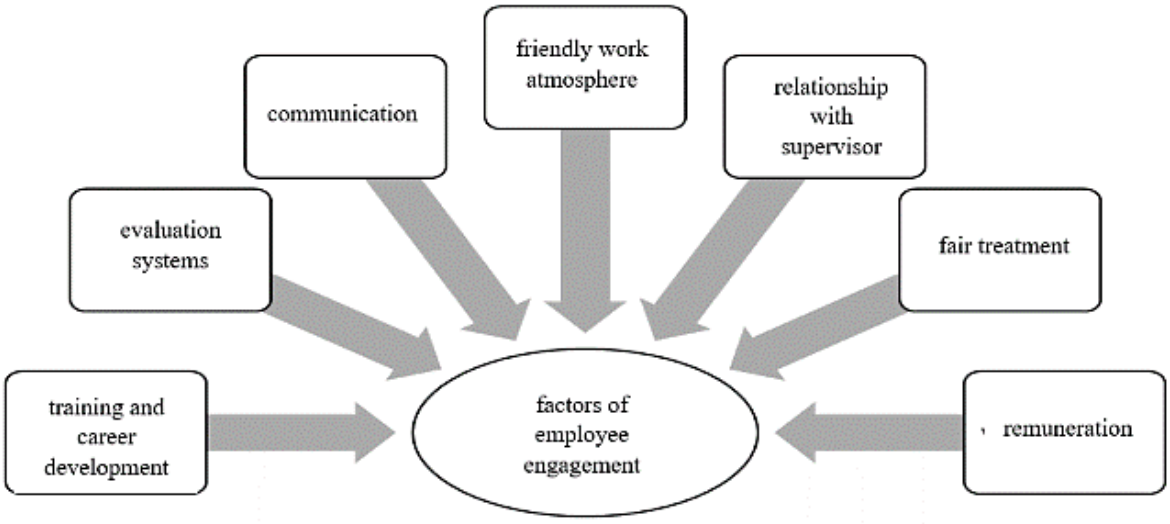

Figure 1. Factors affecting employee engagement.

Source: own elaboration based on: (Croston, 2008; Smythe, 2012).

The benefits of employee engagement serve as an incentive for organizations to make efforts to increase it not only through directly motivational means such as remuneration or benefits, but it is suggested that a caring HRM system can bring high benefits (Boon, den Hartog, Lepak, 2019; Cooper-Thomas, Xu, Saks, 2018; Saks, 2022). This system is designed and implemented to meet basic psychological needs of employees, improve their physical and mental health, provide assistance in learning, development, and achieving success, and generally improve well-being (Houghton et al., 2015). It is indicated that a lack of engagement is evident in the case of poor leadership and low levels of trust in relationships between managers and subordinates (Pech, Slade, 2006), which leads to a crisis in relationships between managers and subordinates (Kmiotek, 2013).

There are four main groups of factors that are potential underlying causes of employee disengagement (Pech, Slade, 2006; Widodo et al., 2025):

1) External environmental factors: instability and uncertainty.
2) Psychological factors: lack of sense of purpose, identification, trust, feeling of being undervalued, unfulfilled desires, sense of injustice, lack of interest, stress and anxiety.
3) Organizational factors: restructuring, inadequate conditions, poor management and leadership, bureaucratic red tape, insufficient resources, acceptance and tolerance of poor performance, complexity of work.
4) Other factors: substance abuse, competency issues, laziness, illnesses, interpersonal problems.

High employee engagement can lead not only to positive effects, but can also have negative consequences such as overwork (Borkowska, 2014), burnout and workaholism (Bakker, Albrecht, Leiter, 2011; Macey, Schneider, 2008) and leaving the company (Kmiotek, 2013). The phenomenon of low employee engagement is not always due to mistakes on the part of the organization and managers, and therefore the actions taken may not always be sufficient. It may turn out that the causes may stem from other factors, beyond the organization itself.

4. Research methodology

The broadly used *UWES-17* scale was used to measure employee engagement. It includes the following three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004). The survey questionnaire prepared based on the UWES-17 also included quite broad metric data, including: gender, education, length of employment, occupation, company size, industry in which it operates, and also the way of performing work (online, stationary, hybrid). All elements were evaluated by respondents on a 6-point Likert scale (from never = 1 to always = 6).

The study covered representatives of the youngest generation in the labor market. After rejecting incomplete questionnaires, a total of 193 responses were obtained, which were then subjected to statistical analysis. Researching Generation Z's engagement is crucial so that companies can take appropriate measures to retain them and retain their valuable skills (Lee et al., 2021).

5. Results

First, the level of engagement of respondents was analyzed based on the percentage values of the given answers, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Engagement levels for all respondents

	ITEM No	ITEM	never	very rarely	rarely	occasionally	very often	always
VIGOR	1.1	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	2%	4%	7%	32%	49%	6%
	1.2	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	1%	7%	8%	35%	41%	8%
	1.3	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	7%	13%	16%	26%	33%	5%
	1.4	I can continue working for very long periods at a time	4%	4%	9%	25%	47%	11%
	1.5	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally	2%	5%	12%	20%	46%	15%
	1.6	At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well	1%	6%	7%	16%	40%	30%

Cont. table 2.

DEDICATION	2.1	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	2%	5%	7%	26%	42%	18%
	2.2	I am enthusiastic about my job	-	5%	8%	25%	42%	20%
	2.3	My job inspires me	6%	7%	18%	23%	30%	16%
	2.4	I am proud of the work that I do	3%	5%	7%	28%	40%	17%
	2.5	To me, my job is challenging	5%	7%	11%	26%	35%	16%
ABSORPTION	3.1	Time flies when I'm working	1%	2%	5%	20%	51%	21%
	3.2	When I am working, I forget everything else around me	4%	5%	14%	31%	41%	5%
	3.3	I feel happy when I am working intensely	3%	7%	10%	27%	41%	12%
	3.4	I am immersed in my work	2%	5%	7%	23%	51%	12%
	3.5	I get carried away when I'm working	11%	20%	25%	28%	13%	3%
	3.6	It is difficult to detach myself from my job	7%	14%	21%	35%	21%	2%

Source: own elaboration based on research findings.

As indicated by the results of the research, respondents from the youngest generation in the labor market demonstrate a fairly high level of engagement - except for two scale factors - *I get carried away when I'm working* (3.3) and *It is difficult to detach myself from my job* (3.6), which occur rather sporadically or rarely, all other factors are rated as occurring with a high frequency, some even more than 50% of respondents.

In the next stage, the average level of engagement was calculated for all respondents (UWES-17). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Average assessment of the level of engagement for all respondents

	ITEM No	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
VIGOR	1.1	4.39	1.01
	1.2	4.34	1
	1.3	3.77	1.35
	1.4	4.4	1.15
	1.5	4.47	1.15
	1.6	4.8	1.17
DEDICATION	2.1	4.56	1.1
	2.2	4.65	1.04
	2.3	4.11	1.38
	2.4	4.46	1.19
	2.5	4.28	1.31

Cont. table 3.

ABSORPTION	3.1	4.82	0.94
	3.2	4.15	1.15
	3.3	4.34	1.18
	3.4	4.54	1.06
	3.5	3.21	1.28
	3.6	3.54	1.22

Source: own elaboration based on research findings.

The lowest-rated factor among the respondents was element 3.5 of absorption, which received an average score of 3.21.

Due to the increasing importance of work-life balance, the average score for element 3.6 at the level of 3.54 does not come as too much of a surprise for the respondents coming from the younger generation. The generational shift in approach towards adhering to working hours and emphasis on private life seems to have an influence on the obtained result.

As for the study of the standard deviation values carried out by the authors - their high level says that the values of the variable are strongly dispersed around the mean that is, there is high variation, while low values of this measure indicate low dispersion of values (low variation). In the conducted study, the highest dispersion was found for the element:

- 2.3 (My job inspires me) – deviation level 1.38.
- 1.3 (When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work) – deviation level 1.35.
- 2.5 (To me, my job is challenging) – deviation level 1.31.

In this study, there was no variation in responses for item 1.2 (At my job, I feel strong and vigorous). There was a slight variation for 1.1 and 3.4.

The next stage of the study was to examine the average rating of vigor, dedication and absorption levels by different occupational groups (see Table 4).

Table 4.
Levels of vigor, dedication and absorption for various occupational groups

	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
VIGOR			
All respondents	193	4.36	
Manager	41	4.37	1.14
White-collar worker	114	4.36	1.14
Blue-collar worker	38	4.36	1.14
DEDICATION			
All respondents	193	4.42	
Manager	41	4.44	1.2
White-collar worker	118	4.42	1.2
Blue-collar worker	38	4.44	1.19
ABSORPTION			
All respondents	193	4.1	
Manager	41	4.11	1.13
White-collar worker	118	4.1	1.14
Blue-collar worker	38	4.1	1.14

Source: own elaboration based on research findings.

The average ratings of the engagement components presented above do not show significant differences in terms of the relationship with belonging to a particular professional group. The averaged result shows differences at the general level encompassing all respondents when comparing vigor, dedication, and absorption, where the highest average was recorded for dedication (4.42), followed by vigor (4.36) and absorption (4.1) respectively. The differences in the average levels of engagement between different occupational groups are relatively small, generally not exceeding the standard deviation. Nevertheless, a particular pattern was observed in which the lowest level of engagement in all professional groups is visible in the dimension of absorption.

At a further stage of the research, the respondents' metric data was analyzed. It turned out that the previously planned study of the correlation of respondents' answers with their level of education would not be purposeful because 87% of respondents had a university degree. A similar situation occurred in the case of work experience - 81% of respondents had not worked for more than 3 years. Therefore, correlation studies were conducted between individual respondents' answers in relation to each other, using the pairwise approach.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used in the analysis of the research conducted. This is an indicator whose value ranges from -1.0 to +1.0 inclusive, and reflects the degree of linear dependence between two sets of data. The greater its absolute value, the stronger the linear relationship between the variables (0 - indicates no linear relationship, 1 - indicates a positive relationship, and -1 indicates a negative relationship between the characteristics). Extreme negative deviation means that the higher the value of one variable, the lower the value of the other, while extreme positive deviation means that both values will increase or decrease synchronously. A value of 0 indicates a complete lack of relationship between the variables (Iwasiewicz, Paszek, 2004; Śleszyński, 2020).

The study adopted the following ranges to indicate the strength of the correlation (identical for negative and positive results):

- from 0 to 0.2 - very weak correlation,
- above 0.2 to 0.4 - weak correlation,
- above 0.4 to 0.6 - moderate correlation,
- above 0.6 to 0.8 - strong correlation,
- above 0.8 to 1 – very strong correlation.

The relationships between successive elements of the UWES research tool were examined.

Table 5.
Results of the correlation study

	1.1	*1.2*	*1.3*	*1.4*	*1.5*	*1.6*	*2.1*	*2.2*	*2.3*	*2.4*	*2.5*	*3.1*	*3.2*	*3.3*	*3.4*	*3.5*	*3.6*
1.1	1																
1.2	0.98	1															
1.3	0.93	0.93	1														
1.4	0.99	0.94	0.88	1													
1.5	0.94	0.87	0.81	0.98	1												
1.6	0.71	0.65	0.45	0.80	0.86	1											
2.1	0.95	0.93	0.80	0.97	0.96	0.88	1										
2.2	0.92	0.90	0.75	0.95	0.96	0.91	1.00	1									
2.3	0.91	0.91	0.84	0.92	0.91	0.75	0.93	0.92	1								
2.4	0.96	0.95	0.81	0.96	0.94	0.84	0.99	0.99	0.93	1							
2.5	0.96	0.96	0.84	0.97	0.96	0.83	0.99	0.98	0.96	0.99	1						
3.1	0.90	0.84	0.70	0.95	0.97	0.94	0.98	0.98	0.86	0.95	0.95	1					
3.2	0.98	0.97	0.96	0.96	0.91	0.62	0.91	0.87	0.93	0.92	0.94	0.83	1				
3.3	0.99	0.97	0.90	0.99	0.96	0.78	0.98	0.96	0.94	0.98	0.99	0.93	0.97	1			
3.4	0.97	0.91	0.84	0.99	0.99	0.84	0.98	0.96	0.89	0.96	0.96	0.97	0.92	0.98	1		
3.5	0.18	0.30	0.51	0.06	-0.03	-0.43	-0.03	-0.08	0.23	0.02	0.07	-0.22	0.33	0.13	-0.02	1	
3.6	0.63	0.73	0.83	0.52	0.41	0.01	0.45	0.40	0.63	0.51	0.55	0.27	0.74	0.59	0.44	0.86	1

Source: own elaboration based on research findings.

Most of the obtained results of the correlation study showed a very strong correlation. However, a very weak correlation was observed in the following situations:

- individuals feel full of energy while performing their tasks, but without displaying any particular emotions,
- employees can work longer, are mentally resilient to emerging difficulties, perceive their work as meaningful, take pride in it, view work as a challenge, and work intensively, but do not let themselves be carried away by emotions - either positive or negative,
- individuals perform their tasks even when the environment is not conducive to it.

6. Conclusions

Referring to the analyzed research results, it can be said that young people are engaged in their work. This is evidenced by a high average rating in the indicated areas. Young people perform their work in which, above all, they see meaning, which is a challenge for them, and they are proud of it. They carry out tasks full of energy, sometimes disregarding inconveniences. Contrary to the group of factors developed by Peach and Slade (Peach, Slade, 2006), it can be stated that:

- External factors are not fully perceived by young people in the labor market - this is related to their potential for rapid career mobility.
- Psychological factors - the sense of purpose in the tasks being performed is important, at the same time there is identification with the organization and pride in work.

- Organizational factors - the complexity of the work and the length of work hours are not factors that reduce engagement.
- Other factors - 61% of respondents claim to be mentally resilient when performing tasks and are not carried away by emotions - positive or negative - at work.

These results provide guidance for employers on how to create workplaces that increase employee engagement. It is important to pay attention to the attractiveness and complexity of tasks, which at the same time present a challenge for the younger generation.

Research designed in this way should be continued in the future. The research group should be expanded to include older individuals with longer work experience. The industry in which respondents perform their tasks may also be significant.

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