



GENERATIONS X, Y, Z IN THE JOB MARKET: WHAT DRIVES THEIR MOTIVATION?

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The exponential and at the same time discrete or “leap” nature of technological advancement in the last decades of the previous century has become a source of profound civilizational changes, both in economic, psychological, and sociological terms. Dorota Kubacka-Jasiecka and Piotr Passowicz identified the following as the most significant change processes:

- changes in the natural environment caused by human activities;
- freedom of travel, including migration;
- changes in the lifestyle of modern individuals and ways of functioning of entire societies;
- transformations in the methods and forms of communication (mainly electronic communication) [1, p. 171].

The pace and dynamism of these changes deepen generational differences, which are now more pronounced than ever before. These differences are evident even within shorter periods than the conventionally understood span of a single generation, previously marked by a 20-year gap. Nowadays, 20 years is a period during which many more age groups with diverse needs, behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes towards authority emerge. To simplify the narrative, the author referred to these groups as generations.

The literature identifies four generations currently dominating the job market: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. However, researchers are not unanimous when it comes to the exact generational boundaries, especially regarding Generation X.

Baby Boomers are people born between 1946 and 1964, the offspring of the Silent Generation, who entered adulthood during the interwar period and World War II. Many Baby Boomers are no longer professionally active. This generation represents the post-war population boom. In their approach to work, they are characterized by the ability to make great efforts, not only to achieve goals but also to retain their jobs. They tend to adopt conservative attitudes towards change, which is a source of stress for them. Routine can have a motivating significance for Baby Boomers.

Generation X, born between 1964-1979, 1980, 1982, or 1985 (depending on differing researcher views), currently dominates the job market. They are often described as “living to work,” considering work an end in itself. They identify



with their employers and are loyal. However, they find it harder to adapt to change and tend to be critical of multitasking. Due to their age, many current managers belong to this generation. Generation X bridges the gap between the routine of Baby Boomers and the unpredictability of Generations Y and Z. As a variable and diverse group, they represent individuals with varied experiences and backgrounds, embedded in a rapidly changing reality.

The next generation, called Generation Y (from the English question "Why?"), includes those born between 1980 (or 1985) and 1994. They are also known as Millennials or Echo Boomers. What differentiates Generation Y from X is their mindset, expressed by the idea that they "do not live to work but work to live." They expect flexibility from employers, an individualized approach, and a clear vision of career development.

Studies by Lily Guthrie [2] and Anick Tolbize [3] present interesting comparisons of differences in work attitudes among generations up to Generation Y. However, it is essential to note that these are based on American data, while generational differences should also consider variables specific to each country.

The youngest group analyzed in this article is Generation Z, people born after 1995. This generation is just entering the labour market but stands out for not having a memory of times when the Internet was not widely available. Generation Z are "digital natives." Sometimes, they are also called the "C" generation – from the English word "connected." They are multitaskers and omnipresent. They are always online, engage in multiple conversations simultaneously using smartphones, and can browse websites, play games, and watch TV shows at the same time. They balance social interactions outside the virtual world with a constant online presence.

The contemporary environment is overstimulated and multidimensional [3]. All generations function in it, but Generation Z feels most comfortable in this space. However, unlike older generations, the abundance of stimuli causes concentration issues and overall distraction [4].

The following data comes from a study titled "Work Motivation Across Generations – 2023/24 Edition," conducted under the supervision of the Author in collaboration with the Economic Section of the Scientific Circle of Students and Graduates of the Greater Poland Academy of Social and Economic Sciences in Środa Wielkopolska. The data was collected using the CAWI method (Computer-Assisted Web Interview). The survey form was placed on a dedicated website created for the project. The survey was conducted between October 31, 2023, and June 30, 2024, collecting a total of 460 valid responses. The majority of respondents were women (68.9%) and individuals from Generation Z (43.0%), with the remaining generations represented as follows: Generation X (35.2%), Generation Y (21.7%). The largest proportion of respondents were white-collar workers (31.7%), followed by manual workers (22.4%) and independent specialists (22.2%).



In Table 1, a comparison of generations in terms of motivating factors for work is presented. The analysis showed that, compared to Generation Z, respondents from Generations X and Y were more motivated by job satisfaction, respect from employers and colleagues, achieved results, a sense of responsibility for the job, and impact on the company’s development. A supportive atmosphere, contact with people, and recognition from superiors and colleagues were more motivating for Generation X respondents than for Generation Z, while working conditions and the possibility of career development were more motivating for Generation Y than for Generation Z.

Table 1

Comparison of generations in terms of work motivation factors

Dependent variable	Generation X			Generation Y			Generation Z			(2)	2	
	Mean rank	<i>dn</i>	<i>QR</i>	ean rank	<i>dn</i>	<i>QR</i>	ean rank	<i>dn</i>	<i>QR</i>			
Salary	226.46	.00	.25	46.48	.00	.00	25.74	.00	.0 0	.99	.370	0.01
Necessity of sustenance	225.65	.00	.00	41.86	.00	.00	28.73	.00	.0 0	.08	.583	0.01
Job satisfaction	258.17 _a	.00	.00	46.54 _a	.00	.00	99.76 _b	.00	.0 0	0.99	0.001	.04
Respect from employer and colleagues	249.25 _a	.00	.00	41.21 _a	.00	.00	09.75 _b	.00	.0 0	.56	.008	.02
Achieved results (outcomes, goals)	252.66 _a	.00	.00	43.68 _a	.00	.00	05.71 _b	.00	.0 0	3.79	.001	.03
Working conditions (e.g., flexible hours, comfort)	238.71 _{ab}	.00	.00	52.54 _a	.00	.00	12.65 _b	.00	.0 0	.75	.021	.01
Supportive atmosphere (e.g., understanding supervisors, teamwork)	245.21 _a	.00	.00	43.16 _{ab}	.00	.00	12.07 _b	.00	.0 0	.38	.025	.01
Sense of responsibility for work performed	269.55 _a	.00	.00	54.46 _a	.00	.00	86.45 _b	.00	.0 0	3.30	0.001	.10
Influence on the development of the company (organization)	257.90 _a	.00	.00	46.91 _a	.50	.00	99.80 _b	.00	.0 0	0.69	0.001	.04
Opportunities for professional development (gaining knowledge and experience)	239.53 _{ab}	.00	.00	51.58 _a	.00	.00	12.46 _b	.00	.0 0	.51	.023	.01
Interaction with people	253.49 _a	.00	.00	37.30 _{ab}	.00	.00	08.26 _b	.00	.0 0	1.66	.003	.02
Additional bonuses	232.36	.00	.25	36.58	.00	.00	25.91	.00	.0 0	.51	.776	0.01
Social benefits package	241.13	.00	.00	45.07	.50	.00	14.44	.00	.0 0	.47	.065	0.01
Recognition from supervisors	247.55 _a	.00	.00	42.70 _{ab}	.00	.00	10.39 _b	.00	.0 0	.84	.012	.02
Recognition from colleagues	259.65 _a	.00	.00	33.53 _{ab}	.00	.00	05.12 _b	.00	.0 0	6.73	0.001	.03
Promotion opportunities	230.08	.00	.00	41.52	.00	.00	25.28	.00	.0	.06	.588	0.01



Ability to achieve life goals	238.94	.00	.25	41.32	.00	.00	18.13	.00	.0 0	.25	.197	0.01
Job stability and security	238.76	.00	.00	40.77	.00	.00	18.56	.00	.0 0	.14	.208	0.01
Employer-funded courses and training	229.31	.00	.00	35.91	.00	.00	28.74	.00	.0 0	.23	.893	0.01
Team-building events	224.98	.00	.00	41.55	.00	.00	29.44	.00	.0 0	.05	.592	0.01
Opportunities for self-realization	238.55	.00	.00	44.17	.00	.00	17.01	.00	.0 0	.99	.136	0.01
Financial independence	219.90	.00	.00	52.79	.00	.00	27.92	.00	.0 0	.28	.118	0.01
Motivating organizational culture	243.05	.00	.00	40.36	.00	.00	15.26	.00	.0 0	.08	.079	0.01

Note: H – Kruskal-Wallis test statistic; IQR – interquartile range; Mdn – median; p – test probability; η^2 – eta-squared, effect size. Values in columns that do not share a subscript letter differ at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Source: Own research

The analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between generations regarding the overall level of work motivation, indicating that, regardless of generational affiliation, the respondents' motivation levels were similar. The results provide an interesting insight that can be related to well-known motivational theories in the literature, laying the groundwork for further research areas.

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