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The Characteristics of Generation Z

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The presence and cooperation of different age groups within the labor market is not only an interesting and unprecedented situation, but it is also a challenge for different groups of people: managers, human resources specialists, and co-workers. The youngest generation – called Generation Z – was born and raised in completely different circumstances than the other, older generations. Although representatives of Generation Z have only just joined the labor market, there are already opinions and characteristics of them. The aim of this paper is firstly to gather and analyse different opinions and characteristics of Generation Z present in the literature. The second aim is to verify those opinions and characteristics with a sample group of Generation Z representatives by asking them which of those opinions and characteristics they identify with. The results of the presented research may be useful for all those who interact with the youngest generation in the labor market.

Although every human is an individual, there have already been many attempts to make generalizations and define different groups of people. One of the results of generalization is the creation of the term of “generations”. Generations are defined as an identifiable group that share birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). Mannheim brought crucial input to the development of the term “generation”, highlighting the fact that the phenomenon of generations is one of the basic factors contributing to the origin of the dynamics of historical development (Mannheim, 1952, p. 320).

Spending lives under equitable conditions (e.g., economical, historical), being exposed to the same events (e.g., cultural, environmental), and being impacted by similar technologies may influence people enough that they think, make decisions, and behave in a similar way.

It should be highlighted that defining generation boundaries is problematic. To date, most research into generational differences has been conducted in the US, UK, and Canada (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008,

p. 892). Meanwhile, because of the significance of the issue – its influence, for instance, on the economy, labor market, and organizations’ marketing strategies – emerging new generations and their characteristics are considered with interest all over the world. Age and generation differences and management is and will be even more a necessity for enterprises operating in the environment and economy (May, 2015, pp. 104–106),

At least five different generations are identified in the modern world:

- The traditionalists (Silent Generation or the Greatest Generation), born between 1928 and 1944, who value authority and a top-down management approach,
- The Baby Boomer Generation, born between 1945 and 1965, who tend to be workaholics,
- Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979, a generation who is comfortable with authority and view the work-life balance as important,
- Generation Y, born between 1980 and 1995 and who generally grew up in prosperity and have technology savvy,
- Generation Z, born after 1995 (Cilliers, 2017, pp. 189–190).

However there is no consensus in the area of defining abovementioned generations’ age range (Aniszewska, 2015, p. 3; Bednarska, Grobelna, 2017, pp. 109–110; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomałowska, 2014, p. 407; Steinerowska-Streb, Wziątek-Staśko, 2016, p. 80), Generation Z seems to be the most problematic in defining its age range, and it is still not so well examined, as it is the youngest generation on the labor market.

Generation Z – age range and characteristic in the literature

Generation Z age range varies considerably. In table 1 examples of different ranges are provided.

It should also be highlighted that another generation follows Generation Z, known as the Alfa gen-

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Table 1. Z Generation age range – literature review

Age range	Author(s)
born 1990 or later	Świerkosz-Hołysz (2016, p. 441); Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska (2014, p. 407); Wiktorowicz and Warwas (2016, p. 22); Wojtaszczyk (2013)
between 1990 and 1999	Half (2015)
between 1991 and 2000	Tulgan (2009, p. 5)
between 1993 and 2012	White (2017)
between 1993 and 2005	Turner (2013, p. 18)
after 1995	Opolska-Bieleńska (2016, p. 37); Ensari (2017, p. 53); Dudek (2017, p. 144)

Source: author's findings.

eration – people born after 2010 (Csobanka, 2016, pp. 66–67, Stunża, 2017, p. 88).

None of previous generations have as many terms as Generation Z, for example: iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Post Millennials, Facebook Generation, Switchers, “always clicking”. Generation Z is also known as:

- C Generation – this expression comes from: “connected”, as its representatives are “connected to the internet”; “computerized”; “communicating”; “content-centric”; “community-oriented”, “changing” (as it is said that this generation likes changes) (Świerkosz-Hołysz, 2016, p. 440; Hysa, 2016, p. 389; Dudek, 2017, pp. 144–145),
- R Generation – this expression comes from Responsibility generation (Csobanka, 2016, p. 67).

For a better understanding of Generation Z and its digitization, it should be highlighted that “they were born in the 1990’s and raised in the 2000s during the most profound changes in the century who exists in a world with web, internet, smart phones, laptops, freely available networks and digital media” (Singh, Dangmei, 2016, p. 2). There is an opinion that “this generation is about to spend their youth and adult years in an era of economic and social renewal” (Sidorcuka, Chesnovicka, 2017, p. 809).

Specialists highlight the fact that Generation Z can function in both the real and virtual worlds. They can easily switch between these two worlds, as they perceive them as complementary to one another (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2014, p. 407). The consequence of this circumstance is that representatives of Generation Z can easily source and check the information they need. They also quickly share information with others. Communication processing among them is continuous, as they use wide variety of communication devices or social media. “The active social media users have many contacts and they mainly live their everyday relations through these channels (personal meetings are also important to them, however, keeping the online contacts have an equally important role)” (Csobanka, 2016, p. 68). Generation Z uses differ-

ent mobile devices, they comment on reality, the environment, and the surroundings they live in, they manifest their opinions and attitudes using Twitter, blogs, and internet forums, and they share photos (Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat) and films (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat). Facebook can be used for all of abovementioned activities. Generation Z not only uses the content of the Internet, but they also create and control it (Hardey, 2011, pp. 750–753).

It is emphasized by researchers that “due to applications that support multitasking, being precise or being able to concentrate, memorize something in the long term” has become more difficult for Generation Z (Tari, 2011, after: Csobanka, 2016, p. 69).

The literature on the subject of Generation Z also points to characteristics suggesting that representatives of this generation would like to achieve a spectacular professional career immediately, without any effort. It is difficult for them to face the vision of long lasting professional career development by means of small steps. These are people who look for a job not only in their closest surroundings, but all over the world, as their characteristic features are mobility and knowledge of foreign languages. What constituted a threat for older generations is an object of fascination and experimentation for Generation Z. They do not care about stability at work; they easily change their workplace, looking for versatility and to escape from routine. They are the most educated and sophisticated generation ever (Hysa, 2016, p. 390, Steinerowska-Streb, Wziętek-Staśko, 2016, pp. 81–82). Young people consider self-employment as a way of professional activity, especially because they consider it as better paid and as giving a sense of independence (Pocztowski, Buchelt, Pauli, 2015, p. 19).

On the basis of a literature analysis, Generation Z (probably due to its young age and limited presence on the labor market) is much less frequently described and characterized in professional literature than other generations. This is a generation that (depending on quoted age brackets) has already entered the labor market or is just entering it (having their first job, internship), or is studying and not working yet.

Research methodology and characteristics of the research sample

The research subject is an attempt to obtain answers to the following questions: What kind of generation is Generation Z? How does it characterize itself? Which descriptions existing in professional literature are those that this generation identifies with? Are new technologies really an indispensable element of their lives? Are a fast career and lack of loyalty towards their employers their characteristic features?

To achieve this goal, an inquiry into the professional literature was conducted, which served as a theoretical basis for the empirical analysis. To obtain information from primary sources, empirical research was also conducted. The study was carried out as a survey. A questionnaire was used as the tool for collecting the data (Babbie, 2004, pp. 206–207). It contained closed-ended questions. The research made use of classic tools, including a questionnaire prepared in paper form and (because of the nature of examined respondents) an Internet questionnaire (Andrałojć, 2006, p. 109).

The study was carried out in cooperation with Grupa ATERIMA, a Polish employment agency, delivering recruitment services. The research was conducted between May and July, 2017, in Poland.

1162 respondents took part in the research. The majority of them (72%) were women. The respondents' age group still needs to be described more precisely. Referring to the differences in defining the age brackets for Generation Z described above, the research adopts the widest age brackets; that is, people born in 1990 and later (implying that the sampling was purposive). There are two reasons for this decision. The first one is that the widest definition gives us an opportunity to observe characteristics of people who – because of their age – have already had a few years of job experience, so their opinions may be based on their practical observations and experience. The second reason is that it is possible to compare answers between representatives born in 1990–1995 and after 1995 (as year 1995 seems to be a line in much of the research: Opolska-Bieleńska, 2016, p. 37; Ensari, 2017, p. 53; Dudek, 2017, p. 144) and check if they differ somehow.

One should pay attention to and comment on the activity level of the respondents taking part in this research – they seem to be active in their lives. The vast majority were students (93%) of different fields of studies: economics (79%), humanities (10%), technology (7%), and nature (1%). At the same time, when it comes to professional activity, the biggest percentage of the respondents researched is employed (45%); the second largest works part-time (physical work or work not connected with further professional development – 29%) and unemployed people constitute 26% of the group. It means that as many as 69% of the respondents study and work at the same time.

It should be highlighted that the study findings should not be generalized, as the structure of the research sample is not representative.

Results and discussion

Analyzing the abovementioned professional activity, it may be observed that the first characteristic of research sample of Generation Z is that, despite their young age, they are already professionally active. This may influence their lifestyle and life decisions and make them more independent and mature. It would be an interesting direction for future research: what is the real impact of such an early professional activity and combining study and work – what are the advantages and disadvantages of this situation for them, as well as for their employers.

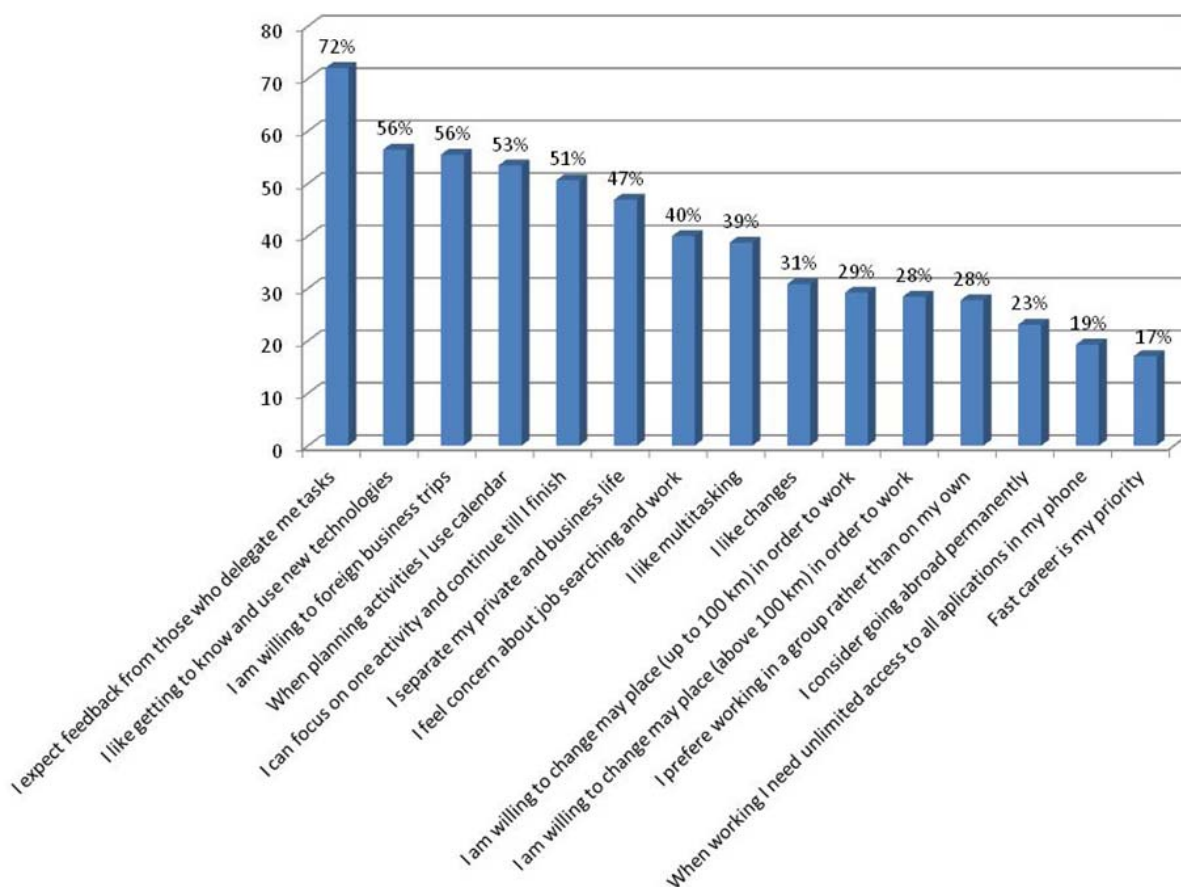
Moving to the crucial part of the research, it should be explained that statements characterizing Generation Z were mostly based on the above quoted literature. Respondents were asked to choose as many characteristics as they identify with out of 15 on the questionnaire.

As the results indicate (figure 1), the most important characteristic of this sample of Generation Z representatives is feedback from someone who delegates tasks to them (72%). It is clearly visible that young people, using the Internet, especially social media, have gotten used to “liking” different things, commenting on reality, evaluating what they buy and use, where they spend time, etc. They have gotten used to expressing themselves. They give feedback, but they also expect feedback and perceive the communication process as bidirectional. There is another important aspect of this particular result. Expectation of feedback seems to be of great value to this generation. Two important characteristics of young people are that they need to learn a lot (as a result of a lack of experience) and that they make mistakes. Openness to feedback is a crucial element of every development process. However, there is an interesting potential direction for further research: how does Generation Z understand feedback? Are they open for developmental areas and constructive, but critical, information?

For more than half of the research sample, new technologies seem to be part of their day-to-day environment – Generation Z representatives like to know and use them (56%). However, this doesn't mean that a majority of them need unlimited access to all the applications on their phone when working (instead only 19% of them do). Generation Z has been characterized as mobile, but according to the results of this research, their mobility is rather doubtful. Although more than a half of the research sample is willing to take foreign business trips (56%), they are not so willing to relocate (up to or above 100 km from their current home) for work (29% and 28%, respectively). On the other hand, 23% are considering moving abroad permanently. It is hard to say whether that is a significant percentage or not. Although it is the minority, if almost a quarter of 27 year-olds and younger people in Poland had suddenly gone abroad, it would be certainly a loss for the country. It should be highlighted that although Generation X was perceived

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Figure 1. Characteristics of Generation Z representatives



Source: author's findings.

as reluctant to move, Generation Y was described as willing to this engage in this kind of change (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013a, p. 91). Nevertheless, Polish representatives of Generation Y are less mobile than they are in other countries (e.g., in the rest of Europe and North America) (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013b, p. 231). It is possible that Polish members of Generation Z are also not so willing to move.

Generation Z perceives itself as well organized – more than half representatives taking part in this research (53%) declared that, when planning activities, they use calendars and that they can focus on one activity and continue until it is finished (51%).

The fact that 40% of Generation Z representatives feel concern about their job search and their work may come from the abovementioned fact that the childhood of Generation Z was spent during an economic crisis – they could observe people (maybe even parents or other family members) losing their jobs or even their businesses. According to the conducted analysis, respondents who are not professionally active feel more concerned about the job search.

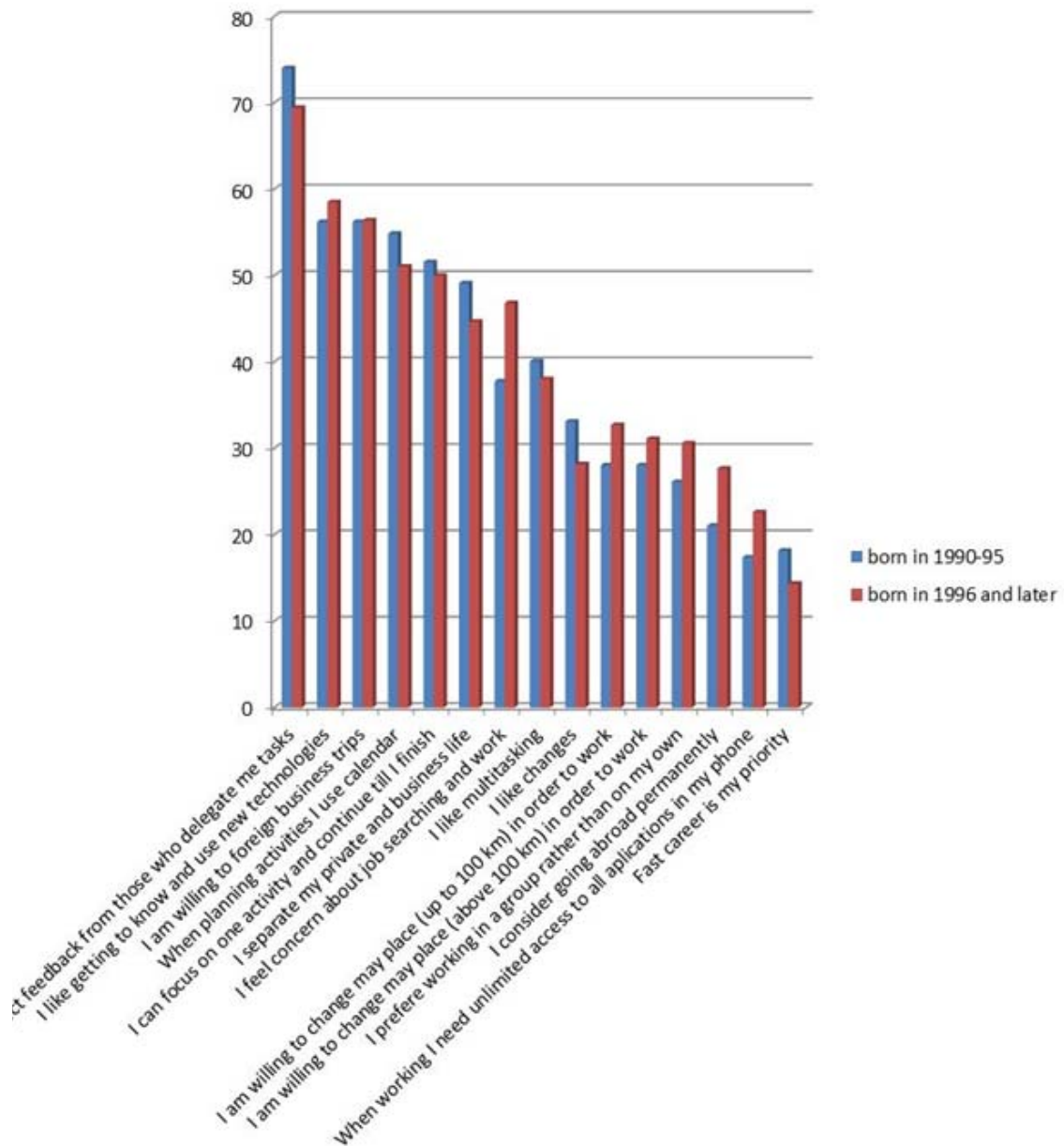
It should be highlighted that Z Generation's priority of having a fast career is a myth. Only 17% of people taking part in this research agree with this statement, and this was the most rarely chosen one. Almost half

of the respondents separate their private and business lives (47%), and only 31% like change – these characteristics may handicap a fast career. The fact that young people live in both the real and digital worlds has already been emphasized. Facebook is the most common social media among young people and is usually used to share information about their private lives (e.g., hobbies, personal activities, free time). This may be the reason that young people are not as focused on their career – they may be more focused on their personal interests. This direction would be an interesting aim of further research.

As there are different ideas about the age range of Generation Z, the abovementioned characteristics were also analyzed in two other age range categories: representatives born between 1990 and 1995 and those born after 1995 (figure 2).

Although there are no big differences between these two age range groups, the results seem to be important. The younger generation seems to be more mobile (in the younger group, willingness to change place in order to work or going abroad permanently is higher). The younger group of respondents more often feels concern about the job search and their work, and they seem to be even more interested in new technologies and having access to them. They

Figure 2. Characteristics of Generation Z representatives in two age range categories: those born between 1990 and 1995 and those born in 1996 or later



Source: author’s findings.

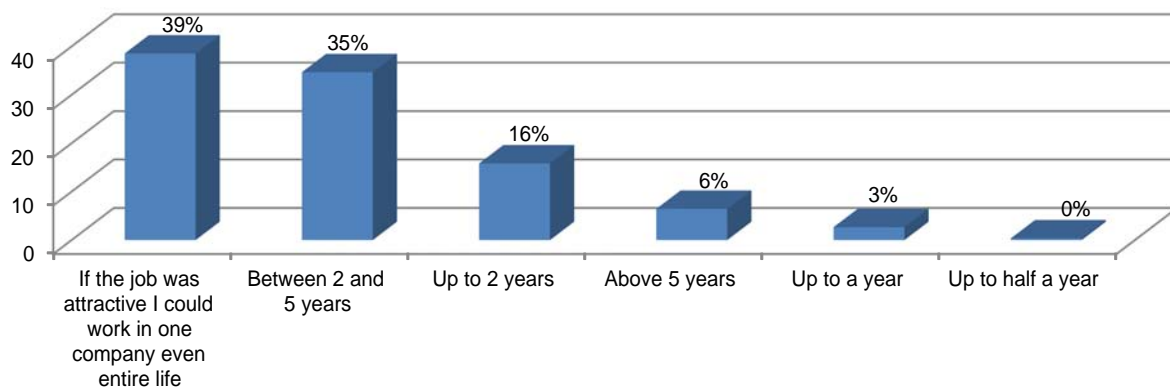
are also more eager to work in a group, rather than on their own. For the older group in the research sample, feedback is even more important. The older group seems to be better organized: they claim that they plan activities using a calendar and can focus on one activity and continue until they finish.

The fact that differences between these two age groups are small means that including people born from 1990 in Generation Z is likely to be justified.

As it is often noted in the literature, people belonging to Generation Z change their jobs frequently, and therefore, the participants of the study were asked to indicate their preferred employment period. The sum-

mary of the answers to this question was unexpectedly different, not only from the commonly expressed opinions about Generation Z, but also from the research presented in the literature. Quite a high number of respondents taking part in this research (39%) claimed that if a job were attractive, they could work in one company for their entire life. It should be highlighted that the way this question was constructed (the only question with an assumption “if the job is attractive”) was deliberate. The aim was to see if the youngest people on the labor market would consider working for one company for their entire life, especially since there are so many opinions about their disloyalty.

Figure 3. The Z generation optimum employment period



Source: author's findings.

It is worth mentioning that the respondents did not get any clues about how to understand the attractiveness of their job, and therefore the answers were based on their intuitive and subjective understanding. This result suggests that it is worth carrying out further research on how Generation Z perceives attractiveness of jobs. The presented results are a part of a broader research in the area of Generation Z. Motivational factors were also an area of interest, but the results of this part of research will be presented in a separate paper in the future. Nevertheless, it seems that in-depth interviews concerning the attractiveness of workplaces would be an interesting direction for further research.

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, there are different (negative) opinions about the youngest people in the labor market. They are considered to be people who cannot concentrate on one thing. The results of this research do not support this observation, but it is also difficult for people to admit to one's own weaknesses. A potential interesting direction of further research (which is planned) is a comparison of the above results to the opinions of the respondents' co-workers, from different generations.

Summary

Although one should never forget that people are different even when they belong to the same age group (Steinerowska-Streb, Wziątek-Staško, 2016), defining people by age range is becoming more and more popular. It probably results from an attempt to understand people whose personality and attitude may be created under different environmental circumstances. Those circumstances are often *signum temporis*, and they do influence people's personality and lifestyles.

In the literature, as well as in business practice, there are different opinions about Generation Z. This research (which cannot be generalized, as the sample is not representative) validates only part of them. It is true that for Generation Z communication is important

– they expect feedback on the results of their work. The research confirms the fact that new technologies are a natural environment for them. Although they are willing to take foreign business trips, they are not so willing to relocate for work. Although it is underlined in the literature that Generation Z is not necessarily loyal to their employers, according to these research results, they are willing to be employed for a longer time by one employer (even for their entire life), but the work needs to be attractive. Surprisingly, for 1162 respondents, having a fast career as a priority is the most rarely chosen characteristic (17%).

It seems that, for successful business cooperation, it is critical to get to know young people and understand them better. Cooperation between the generations is inevitable. Willingness to share knowledge and learn from one another can be advantageous in today's competitive labor market.

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Abstract

Generation Z is going to be an important part of human resources within the labor market. As this generation was born and raised under specific conditions different from the other generations in the labor market (e.g., they have always had ubiquitous Internet access), questions arise about the characteristics of the youngest generation – what are they like? The results of this study, based on 1162 representatives of Generation Z (using questionnaires), show that, for the Generation Z, feedback about the results of their work is a crucial element that they most identify with and expect (72%). Additionally, new technologies are a natural environment for them. In the context of their mobility, they willingly go on foreign business trips, but they are not so willing to relocate for work. Although it is said that they easily change their jobs, according to the research results, they would be happy to be employed for a longer period of time by one employer (even their entire life – 39%), but their work needs to be attractive. A fast career as a priority for Generation Z was the most rarely chosen characteristic (only 17% identify with this statement). The research sample is not representative.

Key words: Generation Z, Generation C, feedback, work-mobility, employment period

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