
The Value of Work in the Life of Representatives of Generation Z – Autotelic or Instrumental?

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Barbara Chomątowska¹, Iwona Janiak-Rejno², Agnieszka Żarczyńska-Dobiesz³

Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to recognize the meaning of professional work and work values which are particularly important to second year students of master's studies of the University of Economics and Business in Wrocław who are representatives of Generation Z.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The investigation involved the revision of relevant literature and conducting own research. The presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques and research tools. The authors conducted their research using a questionnaire, which contained closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria with a 4-point scale. The questionnaire was followed by metric, enabling the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Then, as part of the adopted research methodology, the data analysis method was used. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical study. The empirical part is based on the survey results conducted in the first quarter of 2020 on 271 representatives.

Findings: Definitely the described generation significantly differs from other generations in the labor market. Generation Z understands the role and importance of work in their lives in a completely different way, rather instrumental than autotelic. The research also provides that the Gen Z value system is based on striving to realize oneself, not necessarily in the work environment, but within the framework of their passions and interests. The findings should help Polish companies, leaders to understand Generation Z.

Originality/Value: The research results shall contribute to the debate on what kind of employees the young people from Generation Z shall become and whether and how they shall differ from representatives of previous generations. It is difficult to evaluate the characteristics of the Generation Z representatives as they are just entering the labor market. Managers, however, need this knowledge to best prepare for their entering of the work environment.

Keywords: Generation Z, work values, meaning of professional work, HRM.

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¹Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław, Poland, barabara.chomatowska@ue.wroc.pl;

²Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław, Poland, iwona.janiak-rejno@ue.wroc.pl;

³Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław, Poland, agnieszka.zarczynska-dobiesz@ue.wroc.pl;

1. Introduction

Generation Z (C-connected, communicating, content-centric, computerized, community-oriented, always clicking) is the latest cohort which started to involve in many different domains of the life. An increasing number of Z-ers are graduating from schools and universities and are already entering, or will soon enter the workforce (Friedrich *et al.*, 2010). They are gradually joining the older generations already functioning in the labor market i.e., Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. As in the case of every previous generation entering the labor market, also in relation to Generation Z, questions arise about what they are, what kind of employees they will be and how to manage them? It should be noted, however, that an increasing number of various types of studies on Z-ers emphasize that they differ in many respects from the previous generations. In this respect the interest in building knowledge about the youngest generation is very high.

It is important for decision makers, who see Gen Z-ers is in the process of joining the professional workforce, to comprehend their characteristics, expectations, priorities, values and aspirations concerning work. It is only by better understanding Generation Z that organizations can develop strategies and policies that will ensure a productive, profitable and collaborative environment in the future, one that better takes into account this newest generation's needs and outlook (Tang, 2019; Suomäki *et al.*, 2019; Iorgulescu, 2016; Lyons and Kuron, 2014;). The article aims to recognize the meaning of professional work and work values which are particularly important to representatives of Generation Z. Although the study focuses on only one of the many characteristics of Z-ers, it contributes to the debate on what kind of employees the young people will become. The meaning of work and the work values they appreciate most are related to the person's career orientation and behavior in the work situation, including job performance, turnover, absenteeism, and job satisfaction (Sverko and Vizek-Vidovic, 1995).

2. Work as a Value in Human Life

In the life of every person there are values which are lived for and which make him realize himself in various areas of his functioning. Undoubtedly work is one of such values constituting the basic area of human activity. It occupies a majority of time, generates economic and socio-psychological benefits and costs, and is closely linked to other domains of life. It is central to human existence, providing the necessities for life, sources of identity, opportunities for achievement, and determining authority within a larger community. Professional work offers the full range of human experiences, including satisfaction and joy as well as disappointment, regret and despair (Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2009; Kuchinke *et al.*, 2011).

One of the work properties is the fact that through the process of work a person can satisfy his many needs. Work, in fact, has long ceased to be treated only as a source of obtaining the means necessary for survival, or in terms of the possibility of

gaining social privileges. It is generally recognized that the time spent at work, professional contacts, the realization of entrusted tasks, offer the opportunity to fulfill various human needs, not only indirectly with the help of financial resources obtained in exchange for work, but also directly through the fact that the work itself creates circumstances that allow these needs to be met.

The perception of work as a natural way to earn a living, as well as to establish contacts with people or acquire a prestigious status, makes it a so-called instrumental value. However, if work gives a person a chance to raise his own value, a sense of satisfaction with what he does, to broaden horizons, when it is liked and valued by the employee and is an independent source of his satisfaction, then it is treated as a value in itself and referred to as an autotelic value. The basic condition for the chances of evolving work into an autotelic value is the employer's attention to the needs of the employees, accurate reading of these needs, understanding the mechanism of links between the realization of the company's goals and satisfying the interests of people employed in it (Bejma, 2015).

Each person holds a specific attitude towards work. It can be defined as a relatively permanent determination of the importance of work in an individual's life, a belief in the positive or negative role of work, and specific behaviors associated with this belief (Morin, 2004; Sverko and Vizek-Vidovic, 1995; Gałdzicki, 1988). The concept of generations is very closely tied to the idea of individual meaning of work and work values differences (Tang, 2019; Smith, 2015). The generation can be defined as a group of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural context, who experience the same formative experiences and develop unifying commonalities as a result. Each generation's location in history limits its members to a specific range of opportunities and experiences, provides them with "collective memories" that serve as a basis for future attitudes and behaviors, predisposes them to a certain mode of thought and action, and restricts their range of self-expression to certain predefined possibilities throughout their lives (Lyons and Kuron, 2014).

The above individuals differ in a way of thinking and behaving in work and daily life. Each generational cohort has unique attitudes, values and habits, so exploring, using and fusing the knowledge, which represents the characteristics of a generation, is crucial for those who manage the human resource (Iorgulescu, 2016).

3. Representatives of Generation Z in the Labor Market

Gen Z-ers, despite there is some nuance in the age range as a rule, they were born after 1990 and lived their adolescent years after 2000 (Friedrich *et al.*, 2010). Generation Z differs from previous generations in terms of attitudes, preferences and perception of the world. Such factors as motivation and the way of communication are also characteristic and specific to this group. The analysis of this generation is further complicated by the fact that the young people frequently exhibit opposing traits. For this reason they are also referred to as the „generation of paradoxes”

(Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomałowska, 2016). Generation Z grew up in very good conditions and at times of universal prosperity. They were strongly supported by their parents in the process of education and in the beginning of an adult life. In this regard, they are said to be the best educated generation in the labor market. This, however, has not protected Z-ers from problems they have to face while moving from the education system into the labor market. This generation is characterized by an extremely low level of independence and their dependence on parents (Gałąj, 2014).

On the other hand, the care and protectiveness of their parents has resulted in the formation of strong family ties, which results in the fact that people of this generation are reluctant to become independent and leave the family home (Wiktorowicz *et al.*, 2016). Generation Z values access to information and communication that is possible from anywhere in the world at any time (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomałowska, 2016). They are the first generation of digital natives. Many of them do not remember life without internet. Their affinity with the technologies sets them apart from previous generations. Technology has not only shaped the way they live and work, but also created a whole new set of beliefs, fears and aspirations. These values, in turn, will affect their approach to the global challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Among their work-related needs, one can distinguish the desire to be independent and the focus on self-realization, which is associated with passions and interests. Their motto concerning work is "work should be a passion". This confirms that workers of this generation need a work-life balance (Jeruszka and Wolan-Nowakowska, 2020). They are also open to new experiences and exhibit very high innovation. The process of learning and training follows the "just in time" principle, which means that the representatives of this generation want to know everything and have everything immediately. They have a Google reflex and can find answers at the tap of a screen. No waiting. They ask Google and Siri questions that past youth generations asked their parents.

Their approach to professional career is also far from traditional, they would like to be promoted, but they are not interested in consistently climbing their career ladders (Wiktorowicz *et al.*, 2016). In addition, this generation is characterized by a strong motivation for achievement, the need for quick gratification and immediate feedback. They insist on responses from social media, games or friends and desire them instantly.

4. Methodology

The applied research methods consisted of two parts. The study of literature posed a theoretical foundation for undertaking own empirical research, in order to better understand and grasp the problem. In the theoretical part the applied method consisted in analyzing Polish and foreign literature. In the empirical part the authors

used the results of the own survey. The research was conducted in Q1 2020. The selection of the research sample was deliberate due to the authors' interest in the profile of Z generation representatives. Respondents were the students of master's studies at the Wrocław University of Economics and Business just before graduation. Their opinions, declarations and awareness of the issues considered in the article, regarding the value of work and related expectations, can be treated as mature and thoughtful.

The authors of the article conducted a diagnostic survey using their own survey questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed among 344 respondents at the age of 21-25. Out of 286 returned, the number of 271 questionnaires were selected for final analysis (n=271). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data shown in the article is based on the responses/declarations of the surveyed. The sample was differentiated according to gender and the field of education associated with the completion of the first degree of undergraduate studies - Women accounted for 50.6% (n = 137), and men 49.4% (n = 134) of the surveyed population, respectively. Taking into account education, nearly half of the respondents declared economic education - 49.3% (n = 133), every fourth of the surveyed declared technical background - 24.4% (n = 66). A similar percentage were respondents of other domains – 26.3% (n = 71).

The predominant purpose of the article is recognize the meaning of professional work and work values which are particularly important to students who are representatives of Generation Z. For the purposes of this article the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1. What are the life values of future employees belonging to generation Z?

RQ 2. What is the role and importance of work in the value system of representatives of generation Z?

RQ 3. Which work related values are most important to generation Z and which are relatively less important to them?

The presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques and research tools. For the purposes of this article, an empirical, quantitative research method was applied in the form of a diagnostic survey using the questioning technique. The research tool was a survey questionnaire. It contained closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria with a 4-point scale⁴. The questionnaire was followed by metric, enabling the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Then, as part of the adopted research methodology, the data analysis method was used. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical study. For

⁴The use of a 4-point scale was primarily aimed at avoiding the so-called central tendency error.

each question, the compatibility of the distribution with the uniform distribution was calculated by the chi-squared compatibility test. This was followed by CCPCA (Topolski, 2020a) and GPCA (Topolski, 2020b) analyses in order to determine the strength of discrimination between the answers in question and other answers within the question. The analyses allowed to obtain answers which, compared to others, are statistically dominant significantly at the level of statistical significance of $p < 0.05$.

The CCPCA method is a variation of the classical principal component analysis. The difference between them is that the rotation of factors is made for quantitative data according to the centroid classes, and in the case of nominal data according to the distributives of the conditional probability distribution for all variables occurring in the question under consideration. In this way, the probability value can be determined beyond which a given feature occurs statistically significantly more often ($p < 0.05$) compared to other categories of responses. Therefore, a division is made into results that are significantly distinguished in a given question and those that do not stand out on the principle of dominant. GPCA analysis is the same as CCPCA, however, the axis of rotation is optimized using the stochastic gradient method to better determine the decision limit. The applied models allowed to obtain consistent results.

5. Results

The first question addressed to respondents concerned their values in life. Eight values important in human life were analyzed. Considering the strength of discrimination of the answers obtained against the background of other answers, the following life values proved the most important for the respondents (Table 1), family, relationships with friends, free time, the opportunity to pursue passions, interests.

Table 1. Statistics of responses to the question „How important are the following values in your life?”

Values		4 – very important	3 – important	2 – not really important	1 – unimportant
work	n	64	179	25	3
	%	23.6%	66.1%	1.1%	1.1%
*family	n	237	29	3	2
	%	87.5%	10.7%	1.1%	0.7%
*free time	n	160	106	5	0
	%	59.0%	39.1%	1.8%	0.0%
material resources	n	101	149	20	1
	%	37.3%	55.0%	7.4%	0.4%
*relations with friends	n	172	87	9	3
	%	63.5%	32.1%	3.3%	1.1%
professional development opportunities	n	111	141	19	0
	%	41.0%	52.0%	7.0%	0.0%

spiritual development, religion	n	31	77	105	57
	%	11.5%	28.5%	38.9%	21.1%
* opportunity to pursue passions, interests	n	129	134	0	1
	%	47.6%	49.4%	2.6%	0.4%

Note: * - statistically significant variable ($p < 0.05$) is distinguished by its distribution (distributive) compared to other undetermined responses

Source: Own work based on conducted research.

In the next question, respondents were asked to express their opinions on eight statements concerning the value of work. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics with discriminatory power analysis for the answer to the question asked. The respondents most often agree with the statements:

- Work is a necessity, because one has to have the means to live;
- Work is part of life, so I want to do what gives me satisfaction;
- Work is a source of income that gives a certain standard of living and the opportunity to pursue interest.

Table 1. Statistics of responses to the question: „To what extent do you agree with the following statements about work as a value?“

Verified statements		4 -yes	3 – rather yes	2 – rather no	1 - no
* Work is a necessity, because one has to have the means to live	n	165	80	19	6
	%	61.1%	29.6%	7.0%	2.2%
Work is not a sense of life, other things are much more important	n	124	88	52	7
	%	45.8%	32.5%	19.2.%	2.6%
* Work is part of life, so I want to do what gives me satisfaction.	n	176	85	7	1
	%	65.4%	31.6%	2.6%	0.4%
* Work is a source of income that gives a certain standard of living and the opportunity to pursue interest.	n	217	41	9	0
	%	81.3%	15.4%	3.4%	0.0%
Work allows to realize ambitions, gain prestige.	n	152	102	9	6
	%	56.5%	37.9%	3.3%	2.2%
Work enables me to develop personally.	n	147	108	12	2
	%	54.6%	40.1%	4.5%	0.7%
Work is only one of the ways of earning money, in the current conditions there are many such opportunities.	n	92	108	60	8
	%	34.3%	40.3%	22.4%	3.0%
Work is a good in itself, through working a person serves others and becomes "better".	n	52	116	66	35
	%	19.3%	43.1%	24.5%	13.0%
I work because it is necessary, other things are more important to me.	n	50	92	100	26
	%	18.7%	34.3%	37.3%	9.7%

Note: * - statistically significant variable ($p < 0.05$) is distinguished by its distribution (distributive) compared to other undetermined responses.

Source: Own work based on conducted research.

Deepening the analysis of work as an autotelic value, it is found that as many as 87.5% (n = 237) of young people are not ready to devote more time to work than 8 hours a day. It is also interesting that more than half of the respondents (52.4%; n=142) declared that they do not monitor the current situation on the labor market.

The continuation of the above question was to obtain answers regarding the respondents' indication of the most important values related to work (Table 3). 20 values were verified. According to the analysis of discriminatory power of the answer to the question asked, the most important values related to work for the respondents are primarily: *decent pay, high remuneration, stability of having a job, employment contract for an indefinite period, good atmosphere at work, good relations with colleagues, work - life balance, opportunities to use their competences, appropriate working conditions, unambiguous setting of goals, ambitious tasks, deciding on the way to perform tasks, reward for achieving set goals, feedback on work results.*

Table 3. Statistics of the answer to the question "What work-related values are most important to you?"

Values related to work		4-very important	3- important	2- really important	1- unimportant
* decent pay	n	196	73	2	0
	%	72.3%	26.9%	0.7%	0.0%
* ambitious and diverse tasks	n	166	93	11	1
	%	61.3%	34.3%	4.1%	0.4%
* good relations with coworkers	n	154	106	9	2
	%	56.8%	39.1%	3.3%	0.7%
possibility of self-realization	n	140	120	10	1
	%	51.7%	44.3%	3.7%	0.4%
a sense of meaning in the work done	n	118	132	21	0
	%	43.5%	48.7%	7.7%	0.0%
group membership	n	127	123	21	0
	%	46.9%	45.4%	7.7%	0.0%
work in a creative team	n	84	127	51	9
	%	31.0%	46.9%	18.8%	3.3%
*employment stability	n	174	69	23	5
	%	64.2%	25.5%	8.5%	1.8%
*high remuneration	n	243	27	1	0
	%	89.7%	10.0%	0.4%	0.0%
* employment contract for an indefinite period	n	198	52	14	7
	%	73.1%	19.2%	5.2%	2.6%
* opportunities to use their competences	n	175	88	6	2
	%	64.6%	32.5%	2.2%	0.7%
a leader who motivates to work	n	139	96	46	6
	%	51.3%	35.4%	11.1%	2.2%
* deciding on the way to perform tasks	n	148	111	12	0
	%	54.6%	41.0%	4.4%	0.0%
organizational culture that fosters knowledge sharing	n	123	122	22	4
	%	45.4%	45.0%	8.1%	1.5%

* <i>appropriate work conditions</i>	n	210	51	7	3
	%	77.5%	18.8%	2.6%	1.1%
* <i>feedback on work results</i>	n	139	100	26	6
	%	51.3%	36.9%	9.6%	2.2%
* <i>unambiguous setting of goals</i>	n	184	75	9	3
	%	67.9%	27.7%	3.3%	1.1%
* <i>reward for achieving set goals</i>	n	200	59	11	1
	%	73.8%	21.8%	4.1%	0.4%
* <i>work - life balance</i>	n	178	75	14	4
	%	65.7%	27.7%	5.2%	1.5%
* <i>good atmosphere at work</i>	n	206	58	7	0
	%	76.0%	21.4%	2.6%	0.0%

Note: * - statistically significant variable ($p < 0.05$) is distinguished by its distribution (distributive) compared to other undetermined responses.

Source: Own work based on conducted research.

6. Discussion

Analyzing the role and importance of work in the value system of representatives of generation Z, it is concluded that work as a value occupies a secondary place. Less than every fourth respondent considered it to be a very important value for him (23.6%) and for 2/3 of respondents work is only an important value (66.1%). This perception of the role and importance of work by the youngest generation significantly distinguishes them from the older generations, for whom work was not only a key value in their lives, but also had an autotelic meaning for them. Nearly 40% of respondents do not treat work as a value in itself and they are not ready to devote more time to it and stay after hours.

Basically, the Gen Z value system is based on striving to realize oneself, not necessarily in the work environment, but within the framework of their passions and interests (as many as 97% of respondents' indications, including 47.6%, indicated the importance of "4- very important", 49.4% - "3- important"), their free time ("4"- 59.0%; "3" – 39.1%), spent with the family ("4" - 87.5%; "3" – 10.7%), or friends ("4" – 63.5%; "3" – 32.1%).

In addition, Gen Z treats work not so much in terms of value constituting the meaning of their lives, but rather a permanent element inscribed in their lives (over 60% of respondents said so, indicating the answer "4-yes" (61.1%) and nearly 30% "3- rather yes" (29.6%)). Despite this perception of work, the range of high expectations associated with it is very wide. They refer both to the previously indicated life values, as well as to diverse groups of reported needs, such as the need for security, establishing social relationships, gaining recognition or self-realization. In the opinion of respondents, the content of the work performed should be related to a clearly defined goal that will primarily provide young employees with satisfaction. In addition, the work should enable them to realize their own ambitions, ensure prestige, high independence of the tasks performed and as quick feedback as possible on the results achieved, preferably combined with an almost immediate

reward. At the same time, the same work should be a guarantee of stability of employment, but above all high income, ensuring a certain standard of living and the opportunity to pursue one's own passions. No less important in this context are social aspects for Generation Z, including a good atmosphere at work and relations with colleagues.

In the context of the above research results, it is worth noting that the authors received similar results also in previously conducted research at the Medical University (Chomałowska *et al.*, 2021). They are also significantly supported by studies conducted by other researchers who emphasize the strong individualism of Z-ers, also translating into their expectations of work (Tang, 2019; Jones *et al.*, 2019). Johnson (2017) argues that Gen Z can be described as independent thinkers and financially conservative people who are more worried about the future, as opposed to optimistic millennials. The research conducted by Half (2015) also proves, that pay is the key expectation of the this generation. The view is also shared by Alter (2019), who points out on the basis of his research that financial stability, skills development and the use of professional opportunities are very important for Generation Z. This author also emphasizes the importance and meaning of diversity and inclusion in the workplace for this generation.

Fratrièová *et al.* (2018) examining the motivations for Gen Z work, found that they quickly lose it if they do something they don't like, don't work in a friendly atmosphere, don't have a clearly defined goal, and are overwhelmed by an excess of tasks to complete. On the contrary, the possibility of personal development, good cooperation with others and appreciation for work significantly determine the increase in their motivation. Interesting conclusions also stem from research conducted by Fodor and Jaekel (2018). These authors proved that job satisfaction for people of this generation is determined by the ability to use flexible working time as a factor aligned with their conscious efforts to maintain work and life balance. Such a solution guarantees them not only time for work, but above all free time for the family and for pursuing their own passions. This aspect is also indirectly emphasized by Jones *et al.* (2019), who believe that employees from generation Z need slightly different rules regarding the organization of working time. This is indirectly due to their lower discipline at work compared to previous generations, the need to take short but more frequent breaks, and especially the need to monitor their smartphones almost on an ongoing basis.

7. Conclusions

Generation Z, compared to older generations, understands the role and importance of work in their lives in a completely different way. It is possible that this is a generation that truly understands the importance of work. Although "it is true that man is destined and called to work, yet above all work is for man, not man for work." (John Paul II, 1986). If the order is reversed, the work evolves into a pathology, and one of them is addiction to work, that is, workaholism. The status of

work in a person's life is important, but as the youngest generation of employees emphasizes, not the most important.

Although their attitudes towards work reflect a return to more traditional values in the workplace, such as the desire for a clear career path, job security or financial stability, the youngest employees do not belong to the "old school", but set a different perspective for the employer. Among the values of the Z generation predominate those of hedonistic and individualistic character, and work in their opinion should be mainly a means to their realization. As indirectly conducted research has shown, although the values of Generation Z do not significantly depend on the country, it is worth considering them in this context. The resulting differences can have a significant impact on the importance of work and the expectations associated with it, characteristic of different generations.

Undoubtedly, the described generation significantly differs from other generations in the labor market⁵. It is enough to look at the life mottos of individual generations with the Baby Boomers (1946-1964) who "*Work to survive*", Generation X (1965-1979) who "*Live to work*", Y-s (1980-1990) who "*Work to live*" and with the youngest generation's motto that "*Work should be a passion*" (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2021; Carbary et al., 2016). The presented mottos show the changes, admittedly at a very high level of generality, that have taken place in the attitudes to work.

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⁵*It is worth remembering not to judge young employees due to the differences, because like other generations, they have both advantages and disadvantages.*

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