
Looking for a Fulcrum- Are Preferred Work Values Different for Four Generation Cohorts Co-existing in the Labour Market of Poland?

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to study whether the significant differences in the values appreciated at work exist among surveyed representatives of the generations co-existing on the Polish labor market.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article is based on a critical literature review of the subject and the authors' research. The study was conducted in November 2020 on a sample of 1009 respondents from all over Poland. The research method used was a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire using the Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) technique. The obtained data were then subjected to statistical analysis (mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, Tukey's posthoc test, Bonferroni correction test, Spearman correlation).

Findings: The obtained results showed that regardless of the generational affiliation, the most critical EVP attributes are stability and security of employment, followed by relationships and high compensation and benefits. Although differences between given generation cohorts were confirmed, their emphasis was relatively moderate.

Originality/Value: The need to consider the following was found. The demographic situation in Poland is designated by the process of progressive aging of the society, which results in the simultaneous presence of representatives of four generations of workers on the labor market - Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. Employers must be ready to address the challenges of creating the EVP strategy that can reconcile the requirements of different generations cohorts.

Keywords: Labour market, multigeneration, Employer Value Proposition, work values, HRM.

JEL Classification: M54, J21, J24.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

In order to exist and develop, man needs many different values, and their number, importance, and rank often change throughout their lives. On the other hand, work is the dominant factor in the development of civilization and the natural binder of the formation of societies. As a value, it enables organizing time and diversifying the everyday life of an individual, contacts with other people, building an individual's identity through self-determination, professional development being an integral part of life-long development, defining social status influencing the state of physical and mental health (Krzyżanowska and Stec, 2012). Contemporary trends in the global labor market are characterized, among other things, by a significant diversity of employees in terms of multigeneration. The demographic situation in Poland is designated by the process of progressive aging of the society, which results in the simultaneous presence of representatives of four generations of workers on the labour market - Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. Generational affiliation is believed to have a significant impact on the approach to work, life, and preferred values (da Silva *et al.*, 2016).

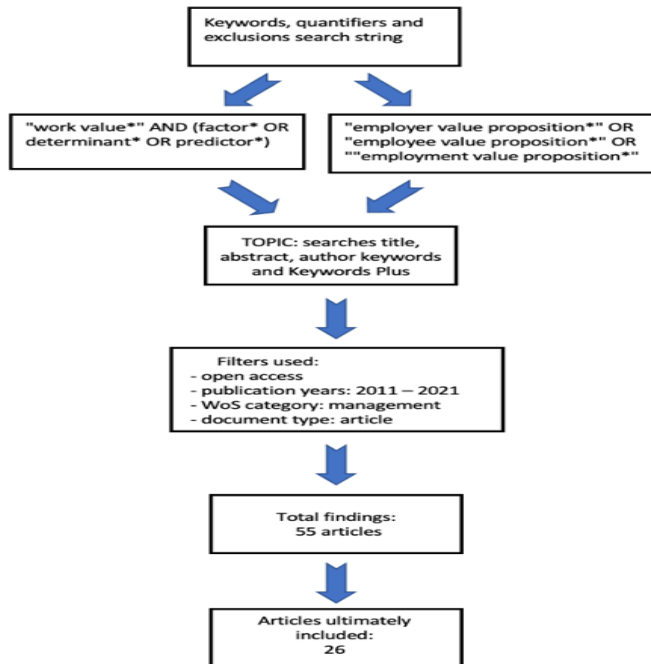
The above factors are considered to create considerable challenges for employers and managers, who should be aware of the impact of the values they offer (EVP) on the recruitment process's efficient course, high retention, employees' commitment, and building generational solidarity. In this article, the authors attempted to show what values are currently most appreciated across the working population in Poland and what differences regarding this issue can be noticed between individual generations of employees.

2. Literature Review

To identify whether the research area of work values and generational differences forms a coherent whole, or one can observe discrepancies and gaps, the authors reviewed the subject literature by searching the Web of Science database, following the procedure presented in Figure 1.

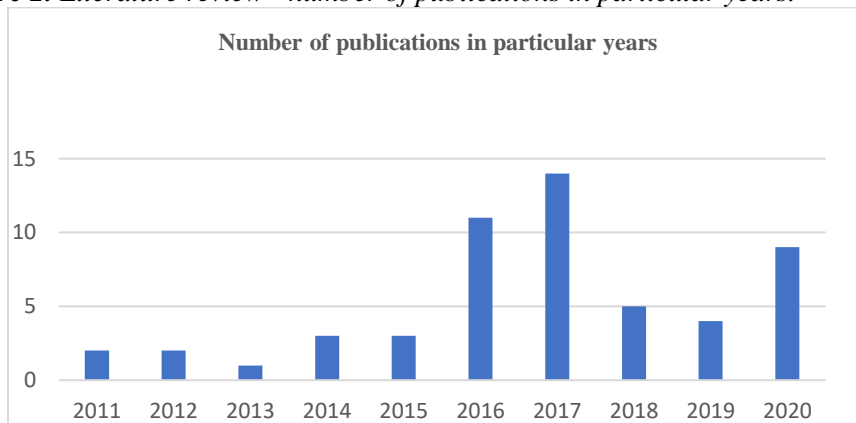
The obtained search results were analysed regarding the number of publications in a given year and a given country, as presented in Figures 2 and 3. It became apparent that interest in this field in the last decade reached a peak in 2017, then decreased, to rise again in 2020. The SARS-Covid-19 pandemic has set new realities for work and possible shifts in works values hierarchy, potentially resulting in a growing concern about how organizations should adjust their HRM practices to these new circumstances. As shown in Figure 3, only two articles out of 55 were written by Polish authors. Keywords and Keywords Plus frequency were investigated and presented as a word cloud in Figure 4.

Figure 1. Literature review procedure.



Source: Own creation.

Figure 2. Literature review - number of publications in particular years.



Source: Own creation.

3. Theoretical Background

Based on the literature review, the authors concluded that research on age diversity in teams and organizations suggests that it can positively and negatively impact organizational performance (de Meulenaere *et al.*, 2016), and research results are not unequivocal. As far as benefits are concerned, generational diversity potentially

Surkis (Ros *et al.*, 1999), work values involve what an employee wants out of work. Hence, work values represent assumptions about gratifying objects, behaviors, and situations at work while guiding and determining employees' behaviors and interactions. Lee and Yen (2013), work values are "an extensive part of the individual system of values. They are responsible for expressing personal preferences concerning different qualities of the professional environment." Work values seem to be essential for the process of identification and commitment (White and Bryson, 2013), as explained by Sutton and Selznick (1958), organizations that establish a solid value system promote staff members commitment to those values and the company itself.

Understanding employee value systems and their impact on carrier choices, whether to stay in a company or leave, proved to be a part of building sustainable competitive advantage. Numerous studies have been devoted to person-environment fit (P-E). In the subject literature, "fit" is principally referred to as the unity between a person and their environment, which occurs when their qualities are congruent (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). "It is a multidimensional concept, consisting of the fit person-job, person-organization, person-group and person-supervisor" (van den Ouweland and van den Bossche, 2017). Values-job fit describes the level of congruence between work values and job characteristics, or in other words - what one values and what job offers (Perry *et al.*, 2012). Employers face a continuous challenge to find, attract, recruit and retain individuals with a requisite set of competencies.

On the other hand, employees constantly reassess what their company has to offer, compared to other potential employers and individual's changing expectations. In order to win this game, organizations have to establish and maintain consistent and reliable Employer Value Proposition (EVP), persisting for the whole period of employment (Rzemieniak and Wawer, 2021). EVP can be defined as the value or benefit an employee perceives to gain or experience by serving as a member of an organization or their employer (Heger, 2007). It is represented by a set of attributes recognized as valuable inside the organization and outside of it, making people choose one employer over another. The benefits offered under EVP should provide the employer's brand with a competitive advantage, similar to the unique selling proposition providing such an advantage on the consumer market (App *et al.*, 2012).

Using EVP, a company makes a promise that arouses convictions and hopes among candidates and staff members. These promises and resulting convictions - if fulfilled and maintained - create a perceptive and mutual psychological contract between employer and employee (Rousseau, 1995). To best serve the purpose, EVP must contain economic, functional, and psychological benefits (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).

3.2 Age Diversity

Age diversity in a workplace is mainly considered in generations, generational differences, and potential conflicts. The construct of generations has been widely studied and defined by many researchers, yet there is still disagreement over the idea

itself and its usefulness in practice. Some scholars, like Giancola, suggest that "the generation approach may be more popular culture than social science" (Giancola, 2006), or at least its gravity is overstated in research (Costanza *et al.*, 2012). There are two main approaches to generations - cohort-based and sociology-based. According to the former, *generation* is defined as an "identifiable group (cohort) that shares birth years, (social) location and significant life events at critical development stages" (Kupperschmidt, 2000) or a group of individuals who have common experience from entering the system at the same time ((Joshi *et al.*, 2011; Parry and Urwin, 2011).

The cohort-based approach suggests that generations have definite cut-off points related to specific birth years and are homogenous to a considerable extent to show noticeable similarities that are relatively stable and measurable (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). In Poland, cohorts are mainly referred to as Baby Boomers (born 1947 - 1963), generation X (Gen - Xers, born 1964 - 1979), generation Y (Millennials, born 1980 - 1994) and generation Z (Gen-Zers, born 1995 - 2010), following the division suggested by Rogozińska-Pawelczyk (2014), and Smolbik-Jęczmień (2017). Drawing on sociology-based approach, first proposed by Mannheim (McCourt, 2012), generation subsistence is viable due to five features of our society, new partakers in the cultural process are emerging, former participants are continually disappearing, members of a generation can partake in only a temporally limited section of the historical process, so cultural legacy has to be conveyed, the passage from one generation to another is unceasing (Kollmann *et al.*, 2020).

While confronting the above two approaches, it can be seen that according to the latter, sharing a birth year is far less than sharing a generation membership. From this angle, generation is an instrument an individual uses to make sense of their own life within the historical context and construes others' behaviors (Foster, 2013).

Conflicting views on generational affiliation make studying generational value-based differences in a workplace problematic. Nevertheless, some scholars propose that generational differences in work values impact the multiple dimensions of HRM, such as recruitment (Grojean *et al.*, 2014; Jurkiewicz, 2000), training and development (Berl, 2006), rewards, and working conditions (Carlson, 2004) and can cause considerable conflicts within an organization (O'Bannon, 2001). Conversely, Constanza and Finkelstein (2015) criticized such an approach heavily, emphasizing little empirical proof backing generational differences, while alternative explanations of those differences were many. Along with that, there was not enough grounded account of the reason for generational differences occurrence and support for the efficacy of any actions taken to remedy those differences (Kollmann *et al.*, 2020).

An interesting theory was proposed by Harrison and Klein (2007). They suggested that whether age diversity will positively or negatively impact organizational performance depends on the nature of this diversity. According to (de Meulenaere *et al.*, 2016), there are two distinct age distributions, age variety and age polarisation. Age variety is described as heterogeneous ages prevailing in an organization (Klein

and Harrison, 2007). The climax of age variety is a rectangular age distribution, illustrating the situation when there is an even division of employees for each virtual age group. Age polarisation describes the separation of the workforce into distinct homogenous age subgroups. The former is believed to weaken age-related differences as each employee acts as an overpass across relatively inconsiderable divergence in values amidst their neighbors in the age distribution (Wegge *et al.*, 2012). The latter is expected to trigger adverse outcomes as there are no intergenerational bridges and value gaps between isolated age groups become salient (Carton and Cummings, 2012).

Based on the analysis of the literature in the given research area, the authors identified the following research gaps:

- the results obtained by the authors of previous studies are not consistent
- a negligible number of publications from the studied area presented by authors from Poland

The research was designed and conducted according to methods explained in the following parts of this paper.

4. Research Methodology

The research was conducted in November 2020 on a sample of 1009 respondents from all over Poland, using a diagnostic survey and carried out by the CAWI technique. For this part of the study, the authors stratified respondents by their birth dates: Baby Boomers, born 1947 - 1963, generation X born 1964 - 1979, generation Y born 1980 - 1994, and generation Z, born 1995 - 2010. Interviewees were asked to rank 23 work values, chosen priorly by a group of 5 experts - 2 HRM managers, an HR Business Partner, an owner of a successful hiring agency, and a business coach. Once all the questionnaires were complete, the studied values were divided into three categories, drawing on Ambler and Barrow's (1996) idea. To make the study more detailed and potentially richer in findings, each of the three categories was split into smaller subcategories, and to each of those subcategories, the most representative values were matched, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Division of EVP attributes adopted by the authors.

Economical attributes	Rational attributes			Emotional attributes	
Material goods	Security	Development	Convenience	Social responsibility	Relationships
high remuneration	job security, stability of employment	promotion opportunity	flexible working hours	the company's activities for the local community, charity	good atmosphere, relationships
benefits	work-life balance	the company's support for professional development	possibility of working remotely	the company's care for the natural environment	sense of influence on the development of the organization

		sense of autonomy	no need for frequent business trips		
		trainings in accordance with ones' needs	easy commuting		

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the identified research gap, four hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There are significant differences regarding the selection of EVP attributes in the studied group of respondents.

H2: There are significant differences in the choice of EVP attributes depending on the generational affiliation.

H3: There are significant differences regarding the selection of the EVP attribute subcategory in the studied group of respondents.

H4: There are significant differences in selecting the EVP attribute subcategories depending on the generational affiliation.

To test the above hypotheses, the data obtained in the research survey was subjected to statistical analysis following the below assumptions:

- variables were calculated according to the following formulas (where PX_Y relate to corresponding sections in the research questionnaire):
 - Material goods = $(P1_6 + P1_21)/2$,
 - Security = $(P1_7 + P1_15)/2$,
 - Development = $(P1_4 + P1_11 + P1_2 + P1_5)/4$,
 - Convenience = $(P1_12 + P1_13 + P1_17 + P1_18)/4$,
 - Social responsibility = $(P1_23 + P1_22)/2$,
 - Relationships = $(P1_9 + P1_20)/2$,
 - Economical attributes = Material goods,
 - Rational attributes = $(Security + Development + Convenience)/3$,
 - Emotional attributes = $(Social\ responsibility + Relationships)/2$.
- For qualitative variables, the hypotheses were verified by ANOVA. When the differences were significant, Tukey's post-hoc test was used. For quantitative/ordinal variables, the significance of the Spearman correlation was calculated.
- The Bonferroni correction was applied: the significance level was set at $0.05 / 3 = 0.017$ when the attributes were weighed, and $0.05 / 6 = 0.008$ for the subcategories.

5. Results

After testing all the hypotheses respectively, the authors obtained the following outcomes.

H1: There are significant differences regarding the selection of EVP attributes in the studied group of respondents.

In Table 2 the average ranks for the attributes are presented.

Table 2. Average ranks for attributes.

Variable	Attributes	n	M	SD	p	etasq
Rank	Economical attributes	1009	4.01	0.69	<0.001	0.03
	Emotional attributes	1009	3.78	0.70		
	Rational attributes	1009	4.04	0.50		

Source: Own creation.

Following statistical analysis assumptions, for significant differences multiple comparisons test was performed. The Difference column shows the difference between the mean ranks (Attribute 2 - Attribute 1), and the p-column presents corrected p-values.

Table 3. Comparison test results. *Source: own elaboration*

Attribute 1	Attribute 2	Difference	p
Economical attributes	Emotional attributes	-0.22	<0.001
Economical attributes	Rational attributes	0.03	0.641
Emotional attributes	Rational attributes	0.25	<0.001

Source: Own creation.

Conclusion: Emotional attributes are rated as less important than the others. Hypothesis supported.

H2: There are significant differences in the choice of EVP attributes depending on the generational affiliation.

Middle ranks divided by generation are presented in Table 4, followed by their graphic illustration in Figure 5.

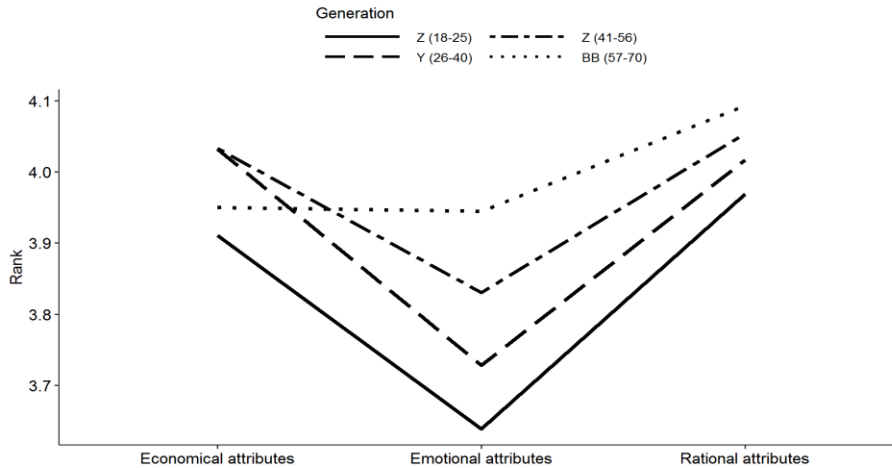
Table 4. Middle ranks divided by generation. *Source: own elaboration*

Variable	Generation	n	M	SD	p	etasq
Economical attributes	Z (18-25)	101	3.91	0.71	0.270	0.00
	Y (26-40)	404	4.03	0.70		
	Z (41-56)	374	4.03	0.68		
	BB (57-70)	130	3.95	0.63		
Emotional attributes	Z (18-25)	101	3.64	0.67	0.001	0.02
	Y (26-40)	404	3.73	0.71		
	Z (41-56)	374	3.83	0.71		
	BB (57 - 70)	130	3.94	0.64		
Rational attributes	Z (18-25)	101	3.97	0.46	0.200	0.00
	Y (26-40)	404	4.02	0.53		
	Z (41-56)	374	4.05	0.48		

	BB (57-70)	130	4.09	0.44		

Source: Own creation.

Figure 5. Graphic illustration of middle ranks divided by generation.



Source: Own creation.

Conclusions: Emotional attributes are assessed differently by people from different generations, as shown in Figure 5. Table 5 also presents a significant difference between Generation Z and Baby Boomer and between the Millennials and Baby Boomers. Taking a general look at the findings, most likely the relationship is that the older the generation, the more critical the emotional attributes. However, it should be considered that the older generations also perceive the other attributes as more important. Hypotheses supported.

Table 5. Difference between Generation Z and Baby Boomer and between the Millennials and Baby Boomers regarding emotional attributes.

Generation 1	Generation 2	Difference	p
Z (18-25)	Y (26-40)	0.09	0.652
Z (18-25)	Z (41-56)	0.19	0.067
Z (18-25)	BB (57-70)	0.31	0.005
Y (26-40)	Z (41-56)	0.10	0.173
Y (26-40)	BB (57-70)	0.22	0.011
Z (41-56)	BB (57-70)	0.11	0.372

Source: Own creation.

H3: There are significant differences regarding the selection of the EVP attribute subcategory in the studied group of respondents.

Below are the average ranks for the subcategories (Table 6) and the results of post-hoc tests (Table 7). The Difference column lists the difference between the mean ranks, the p-column shows the corrected p-values.

Table 6. Middle ranks for the subcategories.

Variable	Subcategory	n	M	SD	p	etasq
Rank	Security	1009	4.41	0.63	<0.001	0.13
	Social responsibility	1009	3.53	0.93		
	Relationships	1009	4.04	0.64		
	Development	1009	3.94	0.64		
	Material goods	1009	4.01	0.69		
	Convenience	1009	3.76	0.62		

Source: Own creation.

Table 7. Post-hoc test results. *Source:* authors' own elaboration.

Subcategory 1	Subcategory 2	Difference	p
Security	Social responsibility	-0.88	<0.001
Security	Relationships	-0.37	<0.001
Security	Development	-0.47	<0.001
Security	Material goods	-0.40	<0.001
Security	Convenience	-0.66	<0.001
Social responsibility	Relationships	0.51	<0.001
Social responsibility	Development	0.41	<0.001
Social responsibility	Material goods	0.48	<0.001
Social responsibility	Convenience	0.23	<0.001
Relationships	Development	-0.10	0.011
Relationships	Material goods	-0.03	0.907
Relationships	Convenience	-0.29	<0.001
Relationships	Material goods	0.07	0.192
Relationships	Convenience	-0.18	<0.001
Material goods	Convenience	-0.25	<0.001

Source: Own creation.

Conclusion: Only the differences between Material Values and Relationships and Development are not significant. Hypothesis partly supported.

H4: There are significant differences in the selection of the EVP attribute subcategories depending on the generational affiliation.

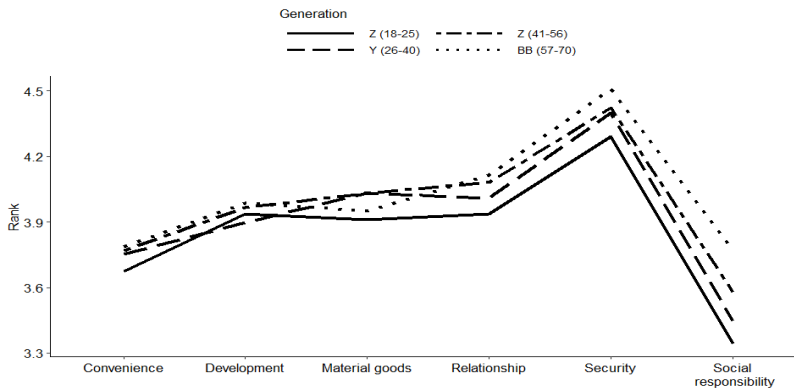
Table 8 presents middle ranks divided by generation, followed by their graphic illustration in Figure 6.

Table 8. Middle ranks divided by generation. Source: authors' own elaboration.

Variable	Generation	n	M	SD	p	etasq
Material goods	Z (18-25)	101	3.91	0.71	0.270	0.00
	Y (26-40)	404	4.03	0.70		
	Z (41-56)	374	4.03	0.68		
	BB (57-70)	130	3.95	0.63		
Security	Z (18-25)	101	4.29	0.77	0.072	0.01
	Y (26-40)	404	4.40	0.64		
	Z (41-56)	374	4.42	0.59		
	BB (57-70)	130	4.51	0.54		
Development	Z (18-25)	101	3.94	0.55	0.365	0.00
	Y (26-40)	404	3.90	0.67		
	Z (41-56)	374	3.97	0.67		
	BB (57-70)	130	3.98	0.54		
Convenience	Z (18-25)	101	3.68	0.56	0.530	0.00
	Y (26-40)	404	3.75	0.67		
	Z (41-56)	374	3.77	0.60		
	BB (57-70)	130	3.79	0.58		
Social responsibility	Z (18-25)	101	3.34	0.88	<0.001	0.02
	Y (26-40)	404	3.45	0.96		
	Z (41-56)	374	3.58	0.94		
	BB (57-70)	130	3.77	0.79		
Relationships	Z (18-25)	101	3.94	0.67	0.076	0.01
	Y (26-40)	404	4.01	0.65		
	Z (41-56)	374	4.08	0.63		
	BB (57-70)	130	4.12	0.62		

Source: Own creation.

Figure 6. Graphic illustration of middle ranks divided by generation.



Source: Own creation.

Conclusions: Social responsibility is assessed differently by people from different generations. The table below shows a significant difference between the 18-25 and 57-70 generations and between the 26-40 and 57-70 generations. Looking broadly at the results, most likely the relationship is that the older the generation, the more

critical social responsibility is. However, it should be noticed that older generations also perceive the other subcategories as more critical. Hypothesis supported.

Table 9. Significant differences between Z-BB and Y-BB generation cohorts.

Generation 1	Generation 2	Difference	p
Z (18-25)	Y (26-40)	0.11	0.735
Z (18-25)	Z (41-56)	0.24	0.097
Z (18-25)	BB (57-70)	0.43	0.002
Y (26-40)	Z (41-56)	0.13	0.183
Y (26-40)	BB (57-70)	0.33	0.003
Z (41-56)	BB (57-70)	0.19	0.170

Source: Own creation.

6. Discussion

The demographic situation in Poland is characterized by progressive aging of the society, in which the proportion of economically active to inactive people changes very quickly in favour of the second group, causing severe consequences for the entire economy. Based on the data of the Demographic Yearbook, the largest group in Poland are representatives of the oldest BB generation - 31%, followed by generation X - 26%, generation Y - 22%, and the youngest generation Z, including people over 15 years old - 21% (Statistics Poland, 2019).

The plasticity of the generation category that we deal with today also manifests itself in the possibility of including people into several generation cohorts simultaneously. Belonging to a particular generation cohort may be partly voluntary and result from a subjective assessment and only partly from a specific metric. However, being born in a given year does not necessarily mean identifying with a particular generation cohort. Moreover, the unification of people born in different periods leads to the gradual blurring of the boundaries between particular generation cohorts. Defining generations according to some key does not always mean that all persons identify themselves with their characteristics, which was confirmed by research on the respondents' subjective understanding and the acceptance of belonging to a specific generation (Urlick *et al.*, 2017).

6.1 Results from Hypotheses

This paper explored work values preferred by representatives of four-generation cohorts co-existing in Poland's labor market. The authors investigated whether there are any significant differences as far as the choice of work values is concerned. To study this matter, four research hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis was meant to test if the above differences exist across the whole surveyed group. Work values were partitioned into three main categories: economic, rational, emotional. The results of the statistical analysis showed that emotional attributes are rated as less

important than the others. Economic attributes proved to be the most vital category for the respondents.

The second hypothesis deepened the investigation, as this time, the researched group was divided by generations. The general look at the findings revealed that, most likely, the older the generation, the more critical the emotional attributes. Interestingly, economic attributes are only as important as emotional attributes for the oldest generation and significantly less critical than rational attributes.

In the next step, the three main categories of attributes were split into subcategories: security, social responsibility, relationships, development, material goods, convenience. The third hypothesis once again regarded the differences in preferences across the whole group studied. Security emerged as the most appreciated value, followed by relationships and material goods. The respondents indicated social responsibility as the least important attribute.

Ultimately, the fourth hypothesis was aimed at checking how individual subcategories are assessed by the representatives of the surveyed generation cohorts. The conclusion from the previous hypothesis was confirmed. Regardless of the generational affiliation, security is valued the most. The following two subcategories are respectively relationships and material goods, while social responsibility holds the last place. Nonetheless, along with that general trend, the authors noticed a significant difference between particular generational cohorts regarding social responsibility - the older the generation, the more important social responsibility.

Although the differences among generation cohorts were confirmed in the study, their emphasis is weaker than expected.

6.2 Practical Implications

Employee-organization fit becomes a key element ensuring financial security, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and reducing stress. In order to be successful at work, an individual should share the dominant values of both their colleagues and clients. Employees who cannot adapt to the environment generally leave to find a work environment or culture more in line with their values and beliefs.

According to the report “Randstad Employer Brand 2020” (Randstad, 2020), before the covid-19 pandemic, first place among EVP attributes was unwaveringly occupied by attractive compensation and benefits (74%), followed by stability and security of employment (55%) and good atmosphere (51%). The projections for the future assumed that the above ranking would change in favour of stability and security of employment after the consequences of covid-19 spread become salient. A similar situation occurred in Poland after the financial crisis in 2013, and although both crises have different specifics, they can also have common tendencies. Another important observation was presented in the Labour Market Monitor study commissioned by the

Randstad Research Institute (Randstad, 2019). Nearly 1 in 4 respondents admitted to having worries about their job. The concerns referred not only to layoffs (25%) but, most of all, to reducing remuneration (more than half of the respondents) or even liquidation of the company (16%). The study was carried out just after the announcement of the outbreak of the pandemic. The predictions proposed in the report, along with fears expressed by survey participants, found their reflection in the findings of this research, conducted eight months later.

New business reality and utterly different working conditions necessitate special attention from employers and managers. They should address their staff members' concerns with thought and understanding, ensuring effective communication and support systems. As the second critical set of attributes includes a good atmosphere, relationships, and a sense of influence on the organization's development, companies must create a working environment (presumably mainly virtual) where those needs can be fulfilled. The differences between representatives of generational cohorts do not seem to play a significant role, as all the four cohorts display a similar hierarchy of work values.

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

Given that a questionnaire was used in the study, the results reflect only respondents' crude opinions. That assessment is helpful to grasp the general trends in the working population and consider their direction and significance. In order to better understand the nature of the obtained outcomes, it is necessary to conduct research using qualitative methods, such as individual interviews, focus group interviews, cases studies, or the Critical Incidents Technique. A holistic view of quantitative and qualitative approaches will help to perceive and comprehend the complexity of work values predictors and their impact on career choices across the four-generation cohorts co-existing on the Polish labor market.

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