
Diversity at Work Place: Building the Commitment of four Generations

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Abstract:

Purpose: Nowadays we have four generations attempting to collaborate, Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z. Each one of these generations brings different expectations, needs and motivations and a different approach to work in the workplace and has a different level of commitment to work. We do experience multiple generations on our staff and the diversity in our organizations is not going away anytime soon. The main purpose of this article is to identify the level of commitment of employees representing four various generations, BB, X, Y and Z.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We began our research by a review of the literature on the subject, both in Poland and abroad. The authors also conducted their own research. The applied testing techniques and methods were selected based on the intended purpose of the work and the formulated research questions. In order to obtain answers for the research questions, an empirical, quantitative research method was used. The technique used within the indicated method was CAWI - Computer Assisted Web Interview. The research tool was the "WIFI" engagement questionnaire (W - Well Being, I - Information, F- Fairness, I - Involvement) created by Sarah Cook, modified and adapted by the authors of this article. Finally, it contained 25 closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria.

Findings: The obtained results made it possible to draw conclusions in relation to each of the four generations. The level of involvement of the oldest generation in the labor market - Baby Boomers is the lowest among all the surveyed generations. On the other hand, workers from the Gen Xers are the most involved in the workplace.

Originality/Value: Our paper contributes to the latest insight into commitment of four generations. The authors of this article are aware that it would be worthwhile to conduct the study in a dynamic perspective, i.e., in a more extended working period, which would allow, to identify the level of commitment during Covid-19. We already have research results that show that Baby Boomers are less engaged and satisfied when working remotely.

Keywords: Multigenerations, generational diversity, building commitment.

JEL Classification: M54, J21, J24.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

Diversity management is currently a relevant and extremely important topic in the human resource management process in many organizations. It is particularly important due to the current problems that enterprises face with regard to the age, culture or gender diversity of employees. Building employee commitment is a very important area that undoubtedly poses a huge challenge for HR practice. Building commitment is important because of two aspects, the work efficiency of employees and the productivity of the organization. It brings measurable benefits both for the company by increasing the efficiency of operations and for the employee himself, because it is associated with a sense of satisfaction and a sense of belonging.

It is worth emphasizing that an effective approach to the process of building employee commitment is currently crucial for enterprises which more and more often face the lack of internal motivation to work among employees and their burnout. The situation of the lack of commitment of employees and the need to build it has gained importance with the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. Many organizations were forced to apply the remote working mode or a hybrid working mode, which significantly affected the level of employee commitment. In the indicated area, a research gap has appeared regarding the adaptation of commitment building and management practices through the commitment of employees who are generationally diverse these days.

Considering the above, this article is devoted to the subject of building commitment of employees belonging to different generations. It has a theoretical-empirical character. The purpose of the theoretical part is to put the issue of building commitment in a broader context of multigenerationality. The authors of the article referred here to the theoretical achievements of foreign and Polish literature. The purpose of the empirical part is to identify the level of commitment of employees who are representatives of different generations.

The authors conducted an analysis and assessment of the level of employee commitment. They also attempted to provide guidance to managers on how to effectively build the commitment of employees representing different generations. The research was conducted in the first half of 2021 and used an empirical, quantitative research method, which is surveying. The studied sample consisted of employees who represented four different generations, Baby Boomers, X, Y and Z.

2. Literature Review

The approach and the assessment of importance of employees for the success of an enterprise has evolved significantly in recent years (Kmiotek, 2012: 285). According to the experts in human resources management, the commitment of employees has become one of the most important tasks and challenges in today's enterprises (European HR Best Practice Report, 2011). The current labor market is highly

competitive, so it seems crucial for an organization to achieve a lasting advantage over other organizations by having a loyal team of employees. This loyalty is manifested in the attitudes of employees, based primarily on commitment, which seems to be extremely important from the point of view of the company's efficiency and innovation (Jawor-Joniewicz, 2016: 39).

There are many definitions of commitment in the literature on the subject. According to W.A. Kahn, commitment is "the connection between the identity of employees and their professional roles. Through commitment people act and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally while performing professional roles" (Kahn, 1990: 894). The literature also defines commitment as "the satisfaction and enthusiasm of the individual towards work" (Harter and Schmidt, 2002: 269). Employee commitment is manifested through an interest in work, motivation to make efforts, and aspirations to do the job as well and efficiently as possible (Armstrong and Taylor, 2016: 245). Alfes (2010) and his co-authors point out that employee commitment is about "being positively present while doing work by willingly putting in intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful relationships with others" (Alfes *et al.*, 2010: 5).

The literature on the subject indicates commitment in the form of (Boshoff and Mels, 2000: 258-259):

- organizational involvement,
- involvement in work,
- involvement in matters related to the superior,
- involvement in the profession.

One of the forms of shaping employee commitment is management by involvement. This is a model of shaping professional activity created in the nineties of the twentieth century. Juchnowicz (2010) describes management through engagement as an outcome of the evolution of basic management models, i.e., the traditional model based on wage motivation, the model of interpersonal relations related to satisfying social needs and the model of human resources.

The essence of the model of management through involvement is a comprehensive and dynamic system of influencing employee commitment consisting of a set of activities, based on internal motivation, which are to affect interpersonal and intergroup relations based on common goals and values, as well as cooperation and joint responsibility (Juchnowicz, 2010: 115-118). The model rests on the assumption that if employees understand the meaning of their work and will be able to manage it, they will develop increased commitment and a sense of organizational belonging. Management by involvement engages partnering with employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2016: 253).

We deal with an increasing diversity of human resources in society and in organizations these days. One of the dimensions of diversity is the age of employees

and their multigenerationality (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019: 95). Currently, age management or management of employees who are representatives of different generations is becoming an indispensable element in the process of managing many organizations. The development of this concept is primarily influenced by demographic changes in the world and also in Poland. These include, among others, the ageing of the population, reduced birth rate or a slow outflow of so-called baby boomers from the labor market (Warwas and Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2016: 23).

The concept of age diversity of employees appears in the literature on the subject under the concept of intergenerational management. Terms such as "multigenerational" and "intergenerational" management are also used interchangeably. The aim of intergenerational management is "to create a working environment friendly to employees of different ages and positions and corresponding to the individual needs of all team members" (Woszczyk and Warwas, 2016: 42). Intergenerational management is based on distinguishing generations in society and choosing methods of managing them adequate to their needs and expectations.

Giddens and Sutton present a generation as "the totality of individuals born and living at the same time. Belonging to a generation is determined not only by the year of birth, but also by the community of experiences shaped by a specific society" (Giddens and Sutton, 2012: 1084). Four coexisting generations of workers can be identified in the labor market today (Table 1).

Table 1. Generations in the labor market

GENERATION	CHARACTERISTICS
<i>Baby Boomers</i> (1945-1964)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trust in managers, • respect for authorities, • the need to belong, • the need for security and stability of employment, • the need for prestige, appreciation and recognition, • independence, optimism and commitment, • identifying a professional position with self-esteem, • willingness to sacrifice family, social contacts and free time for work.
<i>Generation X</i> (1965-1979)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loyalty to the employer, • diligence, patience and conscientiousness and duty, • entrepreneurship and creativity, • high orientation towards self-development, • independence of action, • conscientiousness and duty, • orientation towards achieving the set goals, • caution in action and skepticism, • categorization and hierarchy of tasks, • reluctance to perform many duties at the same time.
<i>Generation Y</i> (1980-1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requiring constant stimulation for work, • preference for working in a team, with the simultaneous need

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for independence, • preference for the task-based work system, • high flexibility in action and openness to change, • ability to make decisions under time pressure, • the need for work-life balance • the need for development, quick rewards and adequate remuneration, • willingness to improve in both professional, as well as personal life.
Generation Z (after 1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low loyalty towards the employer, • focus on one's own affairs, • claimability, • expecting a flexible personnel policy, • preference for an informal way of communication with the supervisor, • choosing to work with access to modern technologies, • getting on well in working in multicultural teams and international enterprises, • problems with persistent implementation of tasks and organization of own work, difficulties with teamwork, • impaired skills in direct communication and setting interpersonal contacts in real world.

Source: Own research based on Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2019; Nieżurawska-Zajac, 2020; Leoński et al., 2020; Chomątowska, Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013; Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017; Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska, 2020; Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017; Suwa, 2014; Gałaj, 2014; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2016; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska, 2014.

Generational diversity management has a positive influence on both the organization and employees by improving the interpersonal communication process, promoting openness and sharing knowledge and experience. The generational diversity policy also increases employee commitment (Nieżurawska-Zajac, 2020: 138-139).

3. Research Methodology

This article aims to identify the level of commitment of employees representing different generations. For the purpose of achieving the aim, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: What level of commitment do the representatives of individual generations exhibit?

RQ2: Which of the surveyed generations is the most and which is the least committed?

RQ3: In which aspects (fairness, participation, well-being, information) do the surveyed employees show a high level of commitment, and in which medium or low?

RQ4: How should employee commitment be shaped, taking into account generational differences?

In order to obtain answers to such research questions, an empirical, quantitative research method of surveying was used. The technique used within the indicated method was CAWI - Computer Assisted Web Interview. The research tool was the "WIFI" engagement questionnaire (W - Well Being, I - Information, F- Fairness, I - Involvement) created by Sarah Cook, which, however, was modified and adapted by the authors of this article. Finally, it contained 25 closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria. Respondents were asked to indicate an answer adequate to the extent to which they agree with a given statement according to a 4-point scale, where: *1 means strongly disagree, 2 - rather disagree, 3 - rather agree, 4 - strongly agree.*

The indicated questions corresponded to five research areas that are crucial from the point of view of building and strengthening engagement among employees. The first four parts dealt successively with issues such as fairness, involvement, well-being and information. The fifth area was designed to measure the commitment rate of respondents.

The surveying that took place in the first half of 2021 consisted of the main part and the metric. The research group consisted of 167 people representing four generations of employees. Baby Boomers accounted for 7.2% of those surveyed. Among the respondents there were also 29.9% of employees from generation X, as well as 31.8% of people from generation Y and 31.1% of respondents from generation Z. Most of the surveyed employees, i.e., 68.9% are women and 31.1% men.

4. Results

The respondents' answers obtained as a result of the research process enabled transformation of written answers into numerical values according to the mentioned scale. All average respondent scores for 25 statements, taking into account the overall average of respondents, as well as the average score of respondents from all four surveyed generations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Average score for each statement

STATEMENT	OVERALL AVERAGE	GENERATION'S AVERAGE			
		BB	X	Y	Z
1. I receive appropriate training and development activities to do my job well and have enough opportunities to develop my skills, knowledge and behaviors/competences.	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.5
2. I am satisfied with the career opportunities that exist in my company	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.2	2.5
3. The company appreciates and helps develop the talents of employees.	2.3	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.4

4. I receive appropriate remuneration and additional benefits for my work	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.7
5. My supervisor together with me analyzes my performance and results during individual meetings at least once every six months	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.4
6. My immediate supervisor makes me feel that my work is appreciated.	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6
7. I feel properly involved in the decision-making process.	2.4	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.2
8. My supervisor listens to my opinions and takes them into account in his actions.	2.6	2.1	2.8	2.8	2.5
9. Teamwork is supported in my team.	2.7	2.3	2.7	2.8	2.8
10. I am encouraged to develop new working methods.	2.5	1.8	2.7	2.5	2.4
11. My immediate supervisor takes care of me.	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.7
12. I am not overloaded with work. I have a work-life balance.	2.4	1.7	2.3	2.5	2.4
13. My work is inspiring and ambitious.	2.5	2.3	2.8	2.6	2.3
14. The company cares about the health and well-being of employees.	2.3	2.7	2.3	2.3	2.4
15. The value system in force in the company appeals to me.	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.4
16. Communication within the company is effective.	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.2	2.5
17. I receive on time all information required to do the job properly.	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.5	2.5
18. I have confidence in the people managing the company.	2.6	2.9	2.6	2.5	2.6
19. I understand the company's vision well and know the values of the organization	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.6	2.8
20. I understand what is expected of me in relation to my position.	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1
21. I am proud to work for my company.	2.7	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.6
22. I would recommend this company to other people as a good place to work.	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4
23. I care about the future of the company.	2.9	3.4	2.9	2.9	2.6
24. I would recommend that friends and family do business with this company.	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.4
25. For the good of the company. I am ready to work beyond expectations.	2.5	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.2

Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted survey.

In addition, the average score for each of the studied aspects was calculated. As part of the respondents' overall performance, *information* area was rated the best (average 13.4) and the *fairness* aspect the worst (average 11.8). All five aspects of the study indicate the average level of engagement of the respondents. A detailed summary of the respondents' performance level for each area is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Level of engagement of respondents with regard to the studied aspects

ASPECT	GENERAL AVERAGE	GENERATION'S AVERAGE			
		BB	X	Y	Z
FAIRNESS	11.8	11.1	11.8	11.2	12.5
PARTICIPATION	12.9	10.9	13.4	13.3	12.6
WELL-BEING	12.3	11.8	12.5	12.4	12.2
INFORMATION	13.4	13.8	13.9	12.8	13.5
COMMITMENT	13.1	14.7	13.6	13.1	12.2

Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted survey.

The answers provided by the respondents made it also possible to calculate the overall result and determine the level of commitment of the surveyed employees. The overall commitment score for all respondents averaged 63.5³ and indicates an average level of commitment among respondents. With regard to the results of each of the surveyed generations, it can be concluded that generation X is the most committed (average 65.2), and the least generation of Baby Boomers (average 62.2). In contrast, the level of commitment of Generation Y averaged 62.7 and Generation Z 62.9.

To sum up, the results of the survey obtained during the research process answered the research questions posed. In addition, they enabled the formulation of conclusions and created the opportunity to develop recommendations for human resource managers regarding building the commitment of generationally diverse employees.

5. Discussion

The overall commitment score of respondents remains at an average level for both the four aspects studied and the commitment rate. It is worth noting that in a large part of the questions, about half or most of the respondents chose the answer *rather disagree* or *strongly disagree* with the statement given.

Therefore, it can be said that a significant percentage of employees participating in the study showed a low level of commitment. From the results obtained, it can also be concluded that the elements of commitment building that are based on fairness are the least implemented in enterprises. Within this area, the problem arises on the basis of managers supporting the development of employees' talents, as well as creating training opportunities.

This leads to the conclusion that the process of developing employees' competences is overlooked or insufficiently implemented by many organizations, which

³A score of 74 or more means that the level of commitment remains above average; 54-73 indicates an average level of commitment, 1-53 may indicate that the level of commitment remains below the average.

significantly reduces the commitment level on the part of employees. Another problem in this part of the questionnaire appeared with regard to the analysis of employees' performance. This may lead to the conclusion that respondents do not feel that the employee evaluation process is carried out in an effective and fair manner or that the companies employing them do not use this important element of human resources management at all. In contrast the highest average score was received for the information aspect, which may prove that the communication process in the organizations employing the respondents is quite effective. It is worth emphasizing, however, that although this area achieved the best results compared to the others, the result regarding the information aspect still indicates an average level of respondent commitment.

The results of the conducted research process enabled drawing conclusions also with respect to the four studied generations. The level of commitment of the oldest generation in the labor market – Baby Boomers is the lowest of all the surveyed generations. By contrast, the most committed are the respondents representing Generation X.

The obtained results suggest that every company that faces problems of insufficient commitment of employees should carefully verify current solutions and practices in this area, with the aim to effectively build the commitment of employees whose level of commitment is low or medium.

At the same time, for those employees whose level of commitment is satisfactory, companies should take measures to strengthen, stimulate and maintain this state of affairs. As the employee commitment may change over time, companies are recommended to constantly measure it and immediately react to adjust commitment building practices accordingly. It is also important for companies to be aware that the level of commitment is influenced by individual needs of employees, which to some degree, are shaped by values corresponding to the age of employees and the generation they represent.

General activities and the system of building commitment of employees regardless of their age should primarily concern the implementation of such human resource management processes as: employee assessment, motivation and remuneration, as well as the development of employee competences. It is also important to ensure proper interpersonal communication and organizational culture. A good atmosphere in the workplace founded on respect and diversity is another factor that fosters commitment. It is also worth taking care of charismatic and inspiring leadership in the organization, which can have a real impact on employee commitment.

6. Conclusion

Commitment building is an extremely important process that determines the success of human resources management, as well as the proper functioning of the entire

organization. Even so, the problem of effective building, maintaining and strengthening employee commitment is observed today. On the one hand, companies are increasingly dealing with the lack of internal motivation to work among employees as well as their burnout.

On the other hand, the management of diversity, and especially the generational diversity of employees is becoming a very important element of management in the organizations. This is particularly important due to the increasingly frequent problems related to age non-uniformity in enterprises. The popularization of such practices is also fostered by the social policy prevailing in the twenty-first century that promotes tolerance and acceptance of diversity, which may imply the need to adapt human resources activities in organizations to individual characteristics and values of employees.

According to the authors of the article, the success of building employee commitment depends to a large extent on the proper analysis of employees' needs, as well as on the knowledge and skills of managers in terms of effective implementation and delivery of these practices. Any company that faces problems of insufficient commitment should carefully verify the current solutions and practices in this area.

The conducted research and the resulting conclusions and recommendations could improve the work of many companies facing the commitment level problems. Owing to the concluded empirical survey companies may adapt their incentive tools to the age of employees with the aim to build employee commitment.

Taking into account the fact that employees' commitment is not constant but changing in time, the authors of the article consider running a longitudinal study which they believe could provide extremely interesting conclusions. It would give the opportunity to observe the surveyed employees over time. It seems interesting because the research analyzed in this article took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which undoubtedly affected the employee commitment level.

Many enterprises at that time applied a remote or hybrid mode of operation. It would therefore seem reasonable to repeat the research using the same tools after the pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, when work in many organizations returns to the normal mode.

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