

Work Motivators for Members of Generation Z: A Quantitative Research in Poland*

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Abstract

The competitiveness of a modern organisation is determined by the attitudes and behaviours of its employees. The effective achievement of set goals is possible thanks to the commitment of the people employed in the organisation, which is why it is particularly important to identify the factors that motivate them to perform their duties. A review of the literature reveals a lack of research on the work motivators of Generation Z in Poland. These are people who are currently entering the job market and who have significantly greater digital skills than previous generations. This is particularly valuable in Industry 4.0.

The aim of this article is to identify key motivators for work among employees from the perspective of surveyed members of Generation Z in Poland. This was achieved through a literature review, a survey, statistical analysis and interpretation of obtained results. The limitations of the research were the deliberate selection of the sample, which included only students or graduates of economics programmes in Poland who were representatives of Generation Z. Such a sample selection limits the possibility of generalising the conclusions to the entire population.

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the following factors are particularly important for the members of Generation Z surveyed: a friendly atmosphere at work, good relations between employees, and opportunities for self-fulfilment. They place great importance not only on transparency of the remuneration system, career development paths, and promotion opportunities, but also on freedom of action, praise, and recognition from their superiors.

Keywords: motivation, motivating to work, motivators for Generation Z

Introduction

An organisation is an open system oriented towards its environment and characterised by dynamism. The process of managing an organisation should amplify its ability to operate flexibly, which is a prerequisite for developing a competitive advantage (Brzeziński 2014). Adapting to change requires a departure from established patterns of operation, which results in the development of business models oriented towards the requirements and expectations of stakeholders. The impact of an organisation on society and the natural environment is becoming increasingly important (Ghobakhloo et al., 2024). Its development is determined by the competencies of its employees in terms of their orientation towards change and innovation, their ability to utilise new technologies, and their ability to create, coordinate and effectively use intelligent systems (Williamson, 2024). An organisation should be capable of technological, market and social transformation (Backman, 2023). This means that human resources should be a key component of the strategy, determining the organisation's innovation, resilience and capacity for sustainable development (Alviani et al., 2024). This requires not only digital transformation, but also, for example, the creation of a culture that determines the effectiveness of business processes (Łukasiński, Bińczycki and Dorocki, 2021, pp. 66–69). The working environment should be not only safe but also comfortable

for employees. It is important to properly select factors that motivate them to work and influence their level of commitment to the tasks assigned to them. This means that the workspace must be continuously and comprehensively improved (Villarouco et al., 2012, pp. 203–224), taking into account the biomechanical, physical and psychological needs of employees (Koirala and Nepal, 2022, pp. 273–288).

This is particularly important in the case of Generation Z employees, i.e. those born after 1995 (Messyas, 2021; Tomaszuk and Wasiluk, 2023, p. 84). They are members of a new generation whose expectations differ significantly from previous generations in terms of their approach to work, communication style and perception of professional success. Members of Generation Z are characterised by their integration with technology, which allows them to adapt their skills more quickly to the development of new tools and working methods (Świerkosz-Hołyś, 2016, pp. 442–443). Access to new technologies from an early age, the ability to use digital tools, the ability to navigate the internet effectively, analyse data, program and use various communication platforms make them particularly valuable employees. Nowadays, technological skills are essential in many industries, especially those where remote working and virtual workspaces are preferred (e.g. digital marketing, e-commerce, project management) (Stankiewicz-Mróż, 2020, pp. 53–54). Personal and social competences, such as the ability to establish interpersonal relationships and work in a team, are also considered important. Currently, online communication has gained popularity among Generation Z, which may hinder their direct interactions (Ławińska and Korombel, 2023, pp. 17–18).

Generation Z, which is entering the job market, exhibits characteristics that fit well with the working conditions of companies operating in Industry 4.0 (Bieleń and Kubiczek, 2020). This mainly refers to young people's ease in using digital devices and tools as well as the Internet. Members of Generation Z treat the real and virtual worlds as one. They are proficient in foreign languages, mobile and open to different cultures, which makes it much easier for them to look for work in different parts of the world. They are not afraid of challenges and changes, which, unlike older generations, do not pose a threat to them, but attract their attention and stimulate their desire to experiment. They like to work in groups, are multitasking, want to improve existing processes and are eager to use new working methods (Hysa, 2016, pp. 389–390). In the long run, these characteristics will enable and significantly improve their integration and functioning in the job market (Bieleń and Kubiczek, 2020).

The success of an organisation is closely linked to effective human resource management. For an organisation, the best employees are those who are highly motivated and do not require additional incentives. In practice, however, most employees need external support from the organisation in order to perform their duties effectively. The issue of employee motivation, although very important, is often underestimated and treated superficially in organisations (Roslon, 2020, p. 332). That is why it is all the more worthwhile to take a closer look at this issue here.

The aim of this article is to identify key motivators for work among employees from the perspective of Generation Z members surveyed in Poland. The aim was to answer the research question: what factors have a key impact on the level of employee motivation to work? The objective was achieved and the research question answered by reviewing the literature, conducting a survey and interpreting the results obtained. This may serve as a basis for developing recommendations for organisations and their managers, not only to improve existing motivation systems, but also to prepare for upcoming changes in the work environment.

Literature Review

The origins of the term **motivation** can be traced back to the Latin verb *movere*, meaning to move. Therefore, to **motivate** is, simply put, to move someone to action (Nieżurawska-Zajac, 2023, p. 19). Motivation can therefore be understood as an individual's willingness to put energy into their activities and the need to demonstrate their achievements (Rajput, 2011, cited by Ghaffari et al., 2017, p. 93). Pinder explains this issue in the context of work. He argues that motivation to work is a set of internal and external forces that prompt a person to undertake work-related activities, while influencing their duration, manner of implementation, chosen goal and level of commitment (Pinder, 2008, cited by Velghe et al., 2024, p. 5).

Both in the literature on the subject and in management practice, two types of motivation are most commonly identified: **internal** and **external motivation** (Zukowska, 2017, pp. 421–422). **Internal motivation** is self-motivation. An internally motivated person undertakes various activities because they are interesting to them and they find joy and satisfaction in them. Achieving this state does not require external rewards or punishments, which translates into the long-term nature of this form of motivation. A person's internal level of motivation depends on the satisfaction of psychological needs, mainly: autonomy, competence and relationship building. The need for autonomy is expressed in the desire to make independent decisions and the feeling of being in control of one's own life. The need for competence is related to possessing key skills, while relationship building satisfies

the need to form meaningful relationships with others (Bandhu et al., 2024). In contrast to internal motivation, **external motivation** is triggered by external stimuli in the form of rewards and punishments given for a well/poorly performed task or for not taking action. External motivation is classified into two types: **controlled motivation** (taking action solely to avoid anticipated punishments or receive rewards) and **integrated motivation** (performing actions that provide both external benefits and the development of interests and personal satisfaction) (Bandhu et al., 2024). In another approach, external motivation takes a **positive** or **negative** form. **The concept of positive motivation** involves the use of positive incentives to increase the willingness to perform specific activities. It is based on stimulating and strengthening the internal motivation of employees and directing their efforts towards achieving set goals. Enthusiasm in pursuing a goal increases when the promised reward is closer and more likely to be obtained. Thanks to positive motivation, employees have the opportunity to better satisfy their needs. **Negative motivation** exploits the human defensive response to a state of danger. The fear of an anticipated punishment or loss of reward results in mobilisation to act, which translates into achieving the desired work results (Lipka, 2010, cited by Żukowska, 2017, p. 423).

People's attitudes and actions are driven by motivation. Its level is important because it determines the results achieved, as stated in Birch's law. When the level of motivation is too high, it causes excessive emotional stress, hinders action and increases the frequency of mistakes. Too low a level also fails to produce the desired results. Moderate motivation, on the other hand, brings the greatest benefits. Its influence allows us to deal efficiently with difficult problems (Mazur, 2013, cited by Krajewska, 2019, p. 32).

Motivation in turn, combined with planning, organising and controlling, forms a set of four main management functions that complement each other and thus influence its effectiveness (Paszkievicz and Wasiluk, 2022, p. 242). Motivation improves the effectiveness, efficiency and productivity of employees, which in turn promotes the achievement of the organisation's goals. If employees are not properly motivated, managing them requires more time, effort and constant supervision. It can also lead to conflicts and general disorganisation within the company (Piotrowska, Puchała, 2012, cited by Krajewska, 2019, p. 31). Accurate motivation of employees to act gives the manager the opportunity to recognise and utilise their organisational potential. However, this task is very demanding for managers, as the ability to motivate others is not innate but acquired. In order to develop it, it is necessary to change existing practices (Osuch, 2012, cited by Krajewska, 2019, p. 32). It is important for managers to show interest in their employees themselves, their needs, goals and dreams (Snopko, 2014, cited by Nieściór, 2024, p. 29).

Results of the Study

In order to identify work motivators important to Generation Z members, an online survey was conducted in October 2025. The CAWI (*Computer Assisted Web Interview*) technique was used for this purpose. The survey questions were developed based on a review of the literature on employee motivation. It was assumed that Generation Z in Poland consists of people born after 1995. The sample selection was purposeful, as the respondents were members of Generation Z who are currently studying economics at universities in Poland. The selection used limits the possibility of fully generalising the results to the entire Generation Z population in Poland.

316 people took part in the survey. 45.3% were women, 52.2% were men, and 2.5% did not answer this question. All respondents declared that they were currently studying. 41.8% of respondents are also currently employed on a full-time or contract basis, and 4.7% run their own business. Among those who are both studying and working, 46.3% (147 people) hold specialist executive positions, 42.9% hold auxiliary executive positions, and 10.9% hold managerial positions.

In order to determine the importance of individual motivators for respondents, the arithmetic mean and coefficient of variation were used, which allows the degree of variation in the variable to be determined. The coefficient value is expressed as a percentage. A coefficient value below 30% indicates low variation and, therefore, high consistency in the responses.

In order to conduct the survey, questions were prepared based on a review of the literature. Respondents were asked to indicate 10 motivators that they believed had a key influence on their willingness to work for an organisation. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key motivating factors for work in the opinion of respondents

Motivating factors	Number of responses	Distribution [%]
friendly atmosphere at work, good relations between employees	271	85,76
opportunity for self-fulfilment	216	68,35
the opportunity to pursue meaningful work that has a visible impact on the environment	199	62,97
clear remuneration system (salary ranges, bonus criteria)	196	62,03
opportunity to gain experience, preparation for running your own business	182	57,59
flexible working hours	176	55,70
freedom of action for employees, trust from superiors, praise and recognition from them	168	53,16
opportunity to build personal/business relationships/contacts	159	50,32
good location of the workplace, easy commuting	159	50,32
benefits (e.g. company car, social packages) and privileges (e.g. priority access to company services, right of first refusal to purchase company shares)	157	49,68
opportunities for development and continuous improvement, development discussions (mentoring/coaching)	151	47,78
interesting tasks and projects, the opportunity to implement creative ideas supported by the organisation's openness to innovative solutions	135	42,72
choice of working arrangements (stationary/remote/hybrid)	122	38,61
clear career path, opportunity for rapid advancement	121	38,29
competitive remuneration	119	37,66
social status (position and prestige associated with work)	100	31,65
ergonomic workstation ensuring comfort	98	31,01
regular feedback, periodic colleague/management evaluation surveys	82	25,95
automation of monotonous work, working with new technologies (e.g. AI, IoT, IIoT)	70	22,15
alignment between the organisation's and the employee's worldviews	66	20,89
the opportunity to participate in organised team-building activities, corporate events and business trips	66	20,89
the ability to work in a style that suits the individual employee (e.g. audiovisual, kinetic)	44	13,92
outplacement (assistance in finding employment after redundancy)	43	13,61
gamification at work (combining work with elements of games)	26	8,23
the possibility of bringing pets to work	19	6,01
company daycare centre for employees' children	15	4,75

Source: Own study

The information presented in Table 1 shows that the most important motivating factor for Generation Z respondents is the atmosphere and good relations between employees in the organisation, as indicated by as many

as 85.76% of respondents. Organisation managers must also pay attention to the possibility of ensuring self-fulfilment for employees (68.35%). This means that the Generation Z representatives surveyed care about the opportunity to develop in a good atmosphere. Respondents also care about doing work that gives them a sense of purpose and has a positive impact on the development of their environment (62.97%). They expect their employer to provide a transparent remuneration system (62.03%), opportunities to gain the experience and preparation necessary to run their own business (57.59%), flexible working hours (55.70%), and trust and recognition from managers (53.16%). A significant proportion of Generation Z respondents, as many as 50.32%, considered personal or business contacts and the location of the organisation to be important.

Respondents were also asked to rate on a scale from 1 (completely unimportant) to 5 (very important) the impact of individual motivators on their decision to take up a job or their commitment to their work (Table 2).

Table 2. The significance of work motivators in the opinion of Generation Z respondents – analysis by gender

Motivating factors	Arithmetic mean				Coefficient of variation [%]			
	A	F	M	N	A	F	M	N
friendly atmosphere at work, good relations between employees	4,5	4,7	4,4	4,3	17,3	13,7	19,7	16,6
opportunity for self-fulfilment	4,2	4,5	4,0	4,1	22,4	17,5	25,6	20,2
the opportunity to pursue meaningful work that has a visible impact on the environment	3,5	3,8	3,2	4,0	30,2	23,9	34,7	18,9
clear remuneration system (salary ranges, bonus criteria)	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,3	31,3	26,6	34,4	45,8
opportunity to gain experience, preparation for running your own business	4,1	4,1	4,0	3,9	21,0	19,8	22,0	21,5
flexible working hours	4,4	4,6	4,3	4,3	19,2	16,4	21,1	24,4
freedom of action for employees, trust from superiors, praise and recognition from them	4,0	4,1	4,0	3,9	25,3	23,1	27,1	29,1
opportunity to build personal/business relationships/contacts	3,2	3,3	3,1	3,4	33,9	31,7	35,9	31,4
good location of the workplace, easy commuting	4,1	4,2	4,1	3,9	23,2	21,8	24,4	21,5
benefits (e.g. company car, social packages) and privileges (e.g. priority access to company services, right of first refusal to purchase company shares)	3,6	3,8	3,5	3,1	27,1	25,6	27,9	26,7
opportunities for development and continuous improvement, development discussions (mentoring/coaching)	4,0	4,2	3,8	4,0	24,5	19,7	27,8	26,7
interesting tasks and projects, the opportunity to implement creative ideas supported by the organisation's openness to innovative solutions	4,2	4,3	4,0	4,5	20,8	19,1	22,3	11,9
choice of working arrangements (stationary/remote/hybrid)	3,8	3,9	3,7	3,5	26,6	25,0	27,4	37,4
clear career path, opportunity for rapid advancement	4,1	4,3	4,0	4,3	23,6	20,7	25,5	27,4
competitive remuneration	3,9	4,1	3,8	4,1	27,5	23,5	30,7	24,0
social status (position and prestige associated with work)	4,0	4,1	3,9	3,9	24,2	23,0	25,4	16,5
ergonomic workstation ensuring comfort	3,6	3,7	3,5	4,0	27,4	27,5	26,7	32,7

regular feedback, periodic colleague/management evaluation surveys	4,4	4,4	4,3	4,3	20,2	19,6	20,6	24,4
automation of monotonous work, working with new technologies (e.g. AI, IoT, IIoT)	4,0	4,0	4,1	3,5	24,4	25,3	23,2	34,1
alignment between the organisation's and the employee's worldviews	4,2	4,4	4,1	3,8	21,0	18,9	22,4	23,6
the opportunity to participate in organised team-building activities, corporate events and business trips	4,1	4,3	4,0	4,1	23,1	21,5	24,3	24,0
the ability to work in a style that suits the individual employee (e.g. audiovisual, kinetic)	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,6	26,5	27,6	25,5	29,3
outplacement (assistance in finding employment after redundancy)	2,8	2,7	2,8	3,4	40,9	39,7	42,4	31,4
gamification at work (combining work with elements of games)	3,4	3,6	3,2	3,9	33,3	30,2	36,1	16,5
the possibility of bringing pets to work	2,4	2,6	2,3	2,5	52,8	50,1	54,9	56,6
company daycare centre for employees' children	2,3	2,5	2,1	3,0	58,0	53,0	62,8	43,6

Key: A – all, F – female, M – male, N – non specified

Source: Own study

Most of the factors identified during the literature review and included in the survey were rated above 3.0 on a scale of 1 to 5 by the respondents. Once again, the following factors received high ratings: a friendly atmosphere at work, good relations between employees, the opportunity for self-fulfilment, a clear remuneration system, a transparent career path and the possibility of rapid promotion. In the group of the ten most important motivators, only the expectation of a clear career path and the possibility of rapid promotion ranked higher than the desire for benefits (average score of 3.8), with an average score of 4.2. The other motivators that were previously considered the most important by respondents were again among the top 10, with an average score above 4.0. There are no significant differences between the responses of men and women. Apart from competitive remuneration, automation of monotonous work (working with new technologies) and gamification at work, women rate the importance of the motivators identified and evaluated in this study higher.

When analysing the obtained coefficient of variation, it can be observed that for most motivators that scored above 3, it is below 30%. This indicates a high level of agreement among respondents. The responses of women show greater consistency than those of men. Only in the case of motivators such as the possibility of working in a style appropriate for a given employee, competitive remuneration and automation of monotonous work (working with new technologies) were the responses given by men more consistent.

Based on the results obtained from the survey, it can be concluded that motivators that scored above 4.0 on average and had a coefficient of variation below 30% are very important to the surveyed group, consistent with their needs and expectations. This should serve as a guideline for organisation managers and be reflected in the incentive systems they develop in modern enterprises. Members of Generation Z are entering the job market and often combine work with studying and acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to pursue their chosen career path. Nevertheless, when performing their assigned tasks, they expect a good atmosphere, opportunities to establish relationships, gain experience and achieve self-fulfilment. Flexible working hours and the location of the organisation are also important to them, as these factors help them achieve their goals.

Discussion of Results

For members of Generation Z, autonomy at work, the ability to make decisions in cooperation with a leader who can not only manage projects, but also support and motivate them, act as a guide, inspiring development, offering constructive criticism are particularly important (Muster, 2020, pp. 143–144). In addition to compensation, the analyzed generation considers management attitudes and behaviors, as well as relationships with other employees, to be important (Gochangco and Ocenar, 2024). They expect dialogue, self-reliance or recognition of their contribution to the task (Gaidhani, Arora, and Sharma, 2019). They are motivated to keep going by receiving rewards for a task well accomplished (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019).

Organizations need to create the necessary conditions for their independent development. Flexible working hours, humanization of work are considered essential to motivate members of generation Z and engage them in the implementation of tasks (Muster, 2020, pp. 143–144). It is important for them to be able to self-organize and use their individual predispositions. They expect opportunities to experiment, test new solutions, create the conditions necessary for the development of creativity, which promotes the implementation of innovations (Calek, 2021, pp. 106–107).

The period when Generation Z was growing up was a time of rapid technological change, accompanied by the development of the digital economy, and therefore the digital competencies of employees. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that social and emotional competencies are equally important. It is essential to establish professional relationships or effectively build teams based on trust and cooperation (Moczyłowska, 2023, pp. 105–106). It is necessary to form the ability to work in a team, carry out the assigned role, ensure effective communication. Thus, the manager should not only supervise the execution of tasks by employees, but, first of all, be a mentor, providing substantive and emotional support to those employed (Moczyłowska, 2023, pp. 155–157). Organizations should provide their employees with opportunities for personal and professional development (Gochangco and Ocenar, 2024).

The need to accept changing professional and technological realities obliges employees to self-improve. They are eager to use online learning platforms, webinars, or interactive workshops for this purpose (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska, 2016, pp. 203–204). The organization's provision of participation in training and courses, mentoring programs, internships, or project opportunities is important to members of Generation Z. Also, they find access to knowledge resources on the Internet (podcasts, expert blogs) valuable, which promotes their self-education (Bendkowski, 2018). Nevertheless, they expect that an increase in their knowledge and experience will result in opportunities for career advancement. They are highly motivated by the opportunity to use their competencies and talents (Nabahani and Riyanto, 2020).

Representatives of Generation Z are particularly concerned about the work environment. Positive relationships, inclusiveness, diversity, fair treatment and equal opportunities for advancement, or supportive aspects of work culture are of key importance to them (Bhore and Tapas, 2023; Bińczycki, Łukasiński and Dorocki, 2023). They are motivated by an ergonomic workstation that determines the comfort of the work, ensuring human well-being, thus increasing the productivity of the system (Wickens, Gordon and Liu, 1997). Work well-being is reflected in a person's mental and physical state. Failure to provide an ergonomic workplace can result in physical and emotional stress (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Panel on Musculoskeletal Disorders and the Workplace, 2001). The integration of ergonomic and psychosocial strategies determines the improvement of the work environment, the implementation of programs that promote not only workplace safety, but also psychosocial well-being and the development of employees (Chetty et al., 2024). Job well-being should be reflected in productivity levels (Ratnasari et al., 2023). Thus, it is the implementation of incentive programs that condition high levels of commitment and loyalty among Generation Z employees willing to change jobs that poses one of the biggest challenges for organizations (Nieżurawska, 2023).

The ability of members of Generation Z to adopt new technologies, effectively use digital tools significantly increases their competitiveness in the digital economy. In a remote work environment, the following skills are very important: managing information, solving problems using digital tools or communicating with a team (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska, 2016, pp. 198–199). For representatives of Generation Z, it is very motivating to be able to work remotely or hybrid. They work effectively from different locations, adapting to both the requirements of the organization and their own needs. This way of performing work allows them to maintain a work-life balance (Muster, 2020, pp. 133–134). Time management becomes important to effectively and efficiently organize the implementation of assigned tasks (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska, 2016, pp. 203–204).

Conclusion

The research carried out made it possible to formulate important conclusions about the factors motivating members of Generation Z to carry out their duties in the context of the rapidly changing labor market. The results indicate that young employees value above all:

- atmosphere at work, in which important are good relations between employees, conditioning the possibility of sharing knowledge, gaining new experiences, building personal contacts useful in later life,
- the possibility of development, continuous improvement of existing competencies, in which mentoring or coaching are useful), which is conducive to self-fulfillment, performing work that gives a sense of meaning, having a positive impact on the environment,

- a clear remuneration system, competitive salary, providing a clear path of professional development, giving the opportunity for rapid promotion,
- freedom of action for employees, trust from superiors, praise and recognition from them, creating opportunities to gain experience that is useful, for example, when running your own business,
- good location of the workplace, easy commuting, or flexible working hours.

The results of the study confirm that a person's intrinsic level of motivation depends on the fulfillment of psychological needs, mainly: autonomy, competence and the creation of relationships.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the survey conducted has some limitations. The sample selection was purposive and included members of Generation Z, who are students or graduates of economic faculties in Poland. The non-stratified sampling limits the ability to generalize conclusions to the entire population. The survey asked closed-ended questions, which may have hindered the possibility of fully expressing the respondents' opinions. In further research, it would be advisable to include other age groups, such as representatives of Generation Y, or Generation X. It would also be interesting to compare the perceptions of motivational factors among students of different majors. This would allow us to better understand not only the current preferences of Generation Z, but also the processes shaping the job market.

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