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Employees of Generation Y – Their Profile Based on Research Results[1]

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Abstract
By 2025, representatives of Generation Y, the so-called Millennials, will have constituted 75% of the total workforce in the world. Numerous studies pertaining to the generation's characteristics paint a picture of an exceptional generation, one which is troublesome to HR managers. Due to the emergence of several studies associated with Generation Y employees, frequently journalistic in nature, an attempt at the characterisation of the generation's competence potential was made. The current paper presents results of self-reports of 634 Polish Generation Y employees.

Keywords – Generation Y, demography of Generation Y, competence potential of Generation Y, engagement of Generation Y employees, values of Generation Y employees.

Introduction

Demographic changes create a diversified, multi-generational labour market. Organisations became a meeting grounds for representatives of three consecutive generations: the post-WW II demographic boom generation (Baby Boomers), Generation X, and Generation Y, the so-called Millennials. By 2025, the Ys will have constituted 75% of the total workforce in the world. Their entry onto the labour market, professional activity, functioning as subordinates, co-workers, and managers are closely observed and reported. The majority of media information on the Ys consists of general observations, and is not based upon reliable research. As a consequence, a picture of an exceptional generation emerges, one which is troublesome to HR managers. It is expected that the issue will become increasingly significant due to the fact that Generation Y employees' engagement is low and they lack motivation for hard work. They are also characterised by a relatively low loyalty towards employers as an institution, but high loyalty towards their colleagues. Work does not constitute a value for them. They are creative and innovative, but at the same time capricious and praise-hungry, focused on team-work, but manifesting considerable deficits in social skills. The Ys are proficient with new technologies, but do not cope well with excessive amount of information, etc. However, a question arises: what is fact and what a media myth? The present paper contains results of a study encompassing

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634 professionally active representatives of Generation Y. Exploratory character of the study allows a profile of such young workers to be developed. It constitutes a further contribution to the discussion of distinctness/exceptionality of Generation Y employees.

Polish Generation Y – a handful of facts

Generation[2] Y, also known as the Millennials, is a generation of the demographic high of 1980s (those born between 1980/81-1995/96)[3].

The fact that the generation is better educated (at least in a formal sense) than the previous ones, ought to be acknowledged. This claim is supported by the following: changes in the number of university students in 1990–2011, and net enrolment ratio[4]. In 1990/91 academic year, there were 390,409 thousand university students. In 2000/01 academic year, the number increased to 1,584,804, and in 2010/11 reached 1,841,251. At the same time, the net enrolment ratio in higher education increased from 9.8 in 1990, to 38.8 in 2000 and 40.6 in 2011 (Ministry of National Education, abbrev. MEN in Polish, p. 5).

The fact that in mid-1990s, the number of men and women holding a university degree was almost identical is noteworthy. Later on, the number of university graduates among women soared three-fold, whereas among men only two-fold. As a consequence, in 2009, the number of women graduating from universities amounted to 24% of the total population of people aged 25–64, and was 6.7 percentage points higher than that of men.

Growing educational and professional activity of women (especially in the past 10 years) resulted in the average age of first birth rising from 23.7 to 27.0, i.e. increasing by 3 years (in 1990 the average age of first birth was 23). In addition, the average at first marriage shifted from 20–24 to 25–29 years of age, with the share of 42% (men and women in total) (in 1990, the share amounted to 20% and in 2000 to 28%).

Representatives of Generation Y bear fewer and fewer children (the tendency has remained unchanged since 1990s). Fertility rate is less than 2, whereas the optimal ratio ensuring sustainable demography is between 2.1–2.15.[5] In 2012, the ratio amounted to approximately 1.3, which denotes that for every 100 women in reproductive age (15–49 years of age) there were 130 children born (Central Statistical Office of Poland, abbrev. GUS in Polish, 2015, pp. 1–23).

Polish Generation Y frequently lives with their parents – 43.5% of people aged 25–34 live with at least one of their parents. The percentage is much higher than the EU average. Following the EU trend, men live with their parents more frequently (50.2%) than women (36.6%) (Central Statistical Office of Poland 2014, pp. 8–9).

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[2] A generation is an identifiable group/cohort of people born in about the same date range sharing similar cultural and life experiences (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

[3] Various sources offer different categorisations of dates of birth. The presented typologies originate from English-language sources, thus may not fit the Polish reality perfectly. As a consequence, caution is advised when considering the generational identity of employees.

[4] The net enrolment ratio is defined as enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population (in case of higher education the official age-group is 19–24 years of age).

[5] The case when 100 women in reproductive age bear 210–215 children on average in a given year.

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Generation Y- work environment

Representatives of the generation value independence and individualism highly. They focus on their personal success and, at the same time, they are convinced they will be successful. Love for technology is also among the characteristic features of the generation. They are proficient with technologies and belong to several social networks, both real and virtual. They live intensive lives, multitask, but become bored easily (Sieńkowska, 2009, pp. 44–45). Having concluded her studies of the generation, K. Best observed that employers perceive them as giving off an impression of being "difficult to manage, needy, demanding", impatient, unwilling to wait their turn for promotion or other privileges associated with professional experience (Espinoza, Ukleja and Rusch, 2011, p. 21f).

Generation Y is ascribed numerous characteristics pertaining to specific values, preferred behavioural patterns and personal features.

Values ascribed to the Ys include: autonomy, individualism, indifference and short-sightedness. The actual values emerging from studies include: satisfactory life, expression of own self, being informed, drive towards accomplishments, drive towards giving sense to life and work, work-life balance (Espinoza, Ukleja and Rusch, 2011, p. 21f).

The literature of the subject features numerous references linked with social functioning of the Ys. Representatives of the generation are perceived as following changes and regarding employment security as insignificant (or at least less significant than the one declared by other generations) (Hart, 2006). Moreover, the Ys manifest high expectations regarding work environment, they are focused on swift and positive feedback of their actions and do not cope with criticism well (Twenge et al., pp. 875–901). Personal features characterising the generation are egocentrism, narcissism, egoism, individualism (ibid., pp. 308–319). At the same time, it is emphasised that in organisations, the Ys prefer teamwork, are results-oriented, multitask well and successfully apply new technologies (Shih and Allen, 2007, pp. 89–100). They expect opportunities for professional development, life-long learning and full utilisation of their talent from organisations (Kim, Knight and Crutsinger, 2009, pp. 548–556). If these conditions are not present, the Ys frequently decide to resign.

The Career Advisory Board from DeVry University commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct an online study *The Future of Millennial Careers* among 1,023 adult Americans (Levit and Licina, 2011). The study was carried out in December 2010 and January 2011. It encompassed representatives of the Millennials (500 respondents) and those responsible for hiring and recruitment (523 respondents). Results indicate the following:

1. Almost half of the Millennials work in professions unrelated to their course of studies (41%).
2. Younger Millennials (21–25 years of age) are more decisive as far as their professional career is concerned than their older colleagues (26–31 years of age). However, the study indicated a shorter life cycle regarding professional decisions than in case of the previous generations.
3. Half of the Millennials do not want to be limited by fixed working hours.
4. According to the Millennials, the most important professional success factors include: conducting meaningful work (30%), high earnings (27%), professional

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accomplishments (24%). Furthermore, challenging work environment (10%), opportunities to express oneself (6%) and high level of responsibility (3%) are also significant. Managers have a slightly different attitude towards professional careers of the young. In their opinion, the following are the chief priorities of the generation: high earnings (48%), high level of responsibility (12%), meaningful work and professional accomplishments (11%).

5. Undeniably, the natural application of the Internet and novel technologies is an asset of the generation. However, their drawbacks include inability to accept criticism, impatience and ineffective communication.

To recapitulate, it can be stated that representatives of the Ys are perceived as:

– Educated people (at least in a formal sense) and swift-learners, which enables them to easily adapt to changes.
– Practical and pragmatic.
– Entrepreneurial, creative and innovative, which stems from the daily experience of competition. They are focused on detecting and exploiting emerging opportunities.
– Tolerant, aware of the environment they live in, focused on relationships, valuing friendships.

The fact that each group, including a generational one, is diversified, ought to be highlighted. Such diversification results in the emergence of doubts regarding the published characteristics. The research results presented in the paper constitute a small step towards objectification of knowledge of employees representing Generation Y.

Generation Y – respondents' competence potential

The study encompassed 1,365 respondents. 634 representatives of Generation Y were selected from among them. The premise that the Ys are represented by people born between 1980 and 1995 was embraced. Respondents' age average amounted to 29.4 (min. 21, max. 35). The sample was dominated by women (333 women, 53% of all respondents). At the time of the study, 34% of respondents occupied lower-level positions, 59% were specialists, and 7% managers.

The study was conducted from March to December 2015. It was of exploratory character. The survey questionnaire consisted of 6 sections (competences, improvement of competences, engagement/motivation, health/well-being, satisfaction, values hierarchy, cognitive style) and demographic questions. All scales scored satisfactory Cronbach's alpha in pilot research (score above 0.7).

For the purpose of the study, the following premise was made – an employee's potential consists of both characteristics and competences of a particular worker, i.e. their: 1) health/well-being, 2) general and professional knowledge, 3) practical skills, 4) motivation for work and permanent personal development, 5) values.

When assessing the significance of knowledge of various aspects of organisations' operations, respondents assessed knowledge of cultural differences in business as the least significant (M=2.84, SD=1.128). Expert knowledge associated with their work seems to be the most important for them (M=4.64, SD=0.656). It was also the area respondents improved the most (M=3.98, SD=0.951).

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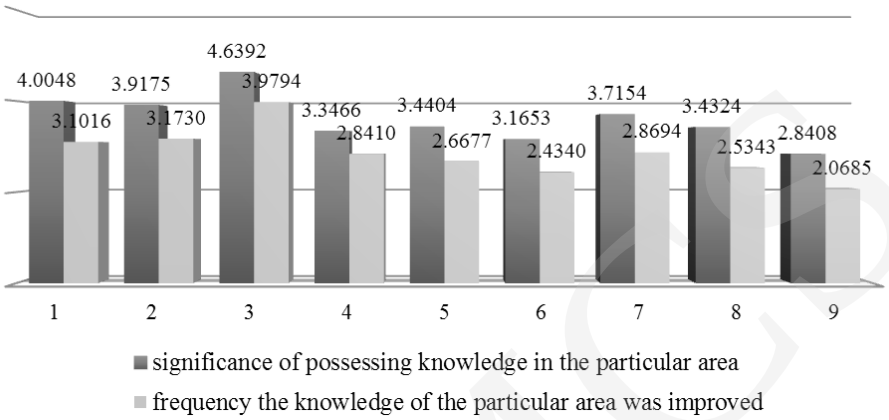

Figure 1. Self-reports on the significance of knowledge and frequency of its improvement

Legend:
1- knowledge of company's/ organisation's operations
2- knowledge of trends in the sector and market
3- expert knowledge associated with work
4- expert knowledge disassociated from work
5- knowledge of management methods and techniques
6- knowledge of environment protection
7- knowledge associated with the application of novel ICT at work
8- knowledge of project management methods
9- knowledge of cultural differences in business
Source: own study

In order to assess skills critical from the perspective of respondents' professional functioning, a list of 15 skills was designed. Respondents were requested to indicate the significance of possessing a particular skill and frequency in which they improved it. The most significant skills in the view of respondents' reports are compiled in Table 1.

Skill	N	No feedback	M	SD
Own work management	627	7	4.6348	.60530
Learning	625	9	4.5424	.65916
Coping with stress	628	6	4.5191	.65228
Creative thinking	628	6	4.4666	.70122
Interpersonal communication	628	6	4.4188	.74592

Table 1. The most significant skills

Source: own study

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Respondents indicated the following as the least significant: cooperation with representatives of other cultures (M=3.290, SD=1.071), and leadership and leveraging (M=3.496, SD=1.028). Respondents' reports on competences improved the least frequently are compiled in Table 2.

Table 2.
Skills improved the least frequently

Skill	N	No feedback	M	SD
Cooperation with representatives of other cultures	628	6	2.3185	1.15353
Leadership, leveraging	625	9	2.6224	1.22794
Cooperation with members of the opposite sex	628	6	2.9490	1.33555
Conflict-solving	625	9	2.9936	1.16298

Source: own study

A detailed specification regarding the significance of particular competences and frequency of their improvement is presented in Figure 2.

All skills have undergone improvement. However, in each case, a discrepancy between the significance of possessing the skill and the level of its improvement was present. Research results reveal that, according to respondents, each of the 15 skills requires improvement, and hitherto activities in this respect have been insufficient. The necessity of additional activity in skills development seems to be emphasised by the analysis of reports pertaining to the evaluation of strengths regarding skills.

The greatest percentage of respondents (63.4%) indicated organisation of own work as their strength, 44.9% pointed to learning and 42.6% mentioned cooperation with various age groups. Coping with stress was indicated as a strength by 36% of respondents and swift adaptation to new conditions by 35%. On the other hand, only 3.1% of respondents mentioned cooperation with representatives of other cultures as their strength, 8.1% indicated leadership and leveraging, 13.6% mentioned management of their own career and 12.4% perceive foreign language skills as their asset. It is worth contrasting such results with the evaluation conducted by employers, who indicated deficiency in Generation Y employees regarding interpersonal skills and organisation of own work. However, respondents' self-reports seem to contradict such claims. Organisation of own work, cooperation with various age groups and interpersonal communication attracted high scores (34.2%). The phenomenon may be explained by the fact that 25% of employers indicated the generation's incapability to conduct a proper self-assessment – representatives of the group seem to be unable to grasp their strengths and limitations (Competences and qualifications…).

According to Polish studies, in 2013, only 14% of Poles were actively pursuing education, i.e. were participating in various forms of education and trainings. Exactly 57% of respondents did not participate in any forms of education and did not plan to become involved in courses or trainings (Szczucka, Turek, Worek, 2014).

All respondents of our study indicated additional forms of improvement they were involved in. As much as 81.2% of respondents mentioned learning in the course of

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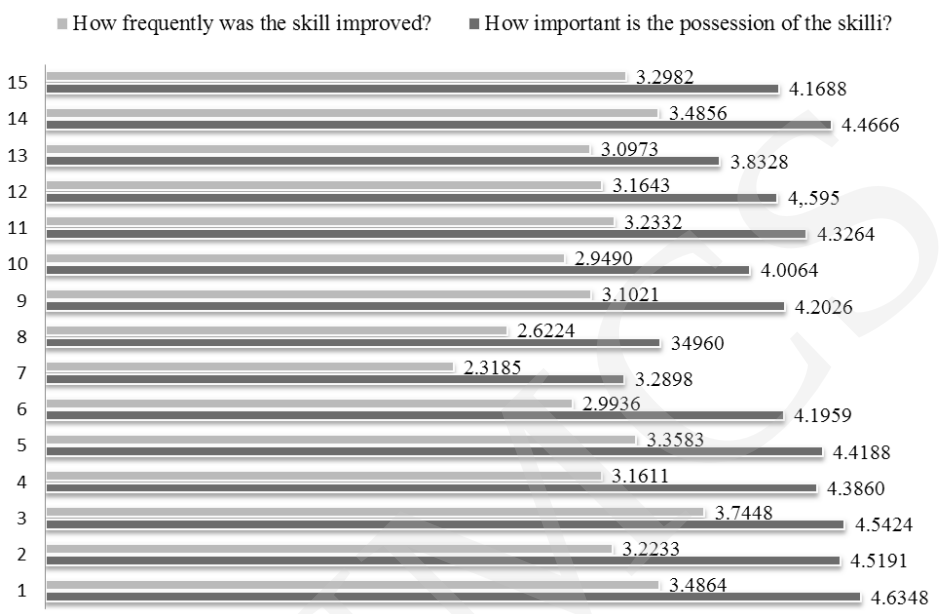

Figure 2.
Self-reports on the significance of possession of skills and frequency of their improvement

Legend:
1- Own work organisation
2- Coping with stress
3- Learning
4- Own career management
5- Interpersonal communication
6- Conflict-solving
7- Cooperation with representatives of other cultures
8- Leadership, leveraging
9- Cooperation with various age groups
10- Cooperation with members of the opposite sex
11- Swift adaptation to new conditions
12- Mobilisation to long-term work
13- Conducting both own and others' work
14- Creative thinking
15- Foreign language skills

Source: own study

work as the most frequent form of improvement. The same percentage of respondents indicated the exchange of information with colleagues as a form of learning. Over 70% of the Ys indicated the Internet and online sources as a form of improvement. More than 60% of respondents mentioned observation of the surrounding environment, exchange of information with superiors (64.8%) and participation in courses and trainings (63.8%) as improvement methods. Young people perceive opportunities for improvement in work with a mentor or a coach (12.4%) and information contained in periodical assessment (23.7%) the least frequently.

When aiming at the evaluation of employees' competence potential via the assessment of its components, questions pertaining to the preferred values were posed. Values constitute a reference point for the choices and decisions made, thus become the source of attitudes, norms and behaviours. Activities of an individual result from voluntariness and independence. Therefore, it can be claimed that values enable decisions regarding objectives and means of achieving these to be made i.e. decisions

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regarding the individual's life plans (Schwartz, 2006; Olson, Seligman and Zanna, 1996; Stankiewicz and Moczulska, 2013). Values channel aspirations, motivate, influence self-assessment, perception of own activities and, as a consequence, impact the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with accomplishments, develop a system crucial for the individual's integrity in time and situation. Values also have a considerable effect upon decision-making in organisations and the choice of how much time and energy is spent on some actions (Jinand Drozdenko, 2010, p. 342). Thus, they influence the level of engagement and results achieved by employees.

Respondents were requested to indicate which of the 18 values are the most significant or very important to them. A hierarchy of values emerged as a result of the reports' analysis. The fact that professional values (responsibility, intellectual stimulation, authority, professional honesty, autonomy, achievements) were indicated less frequently as the most significant or very important than general values, seems noteworthy. According to respondents, honest life, family happiness and health are the most important values. The detailed specification of respondents' self-reports is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Respondents' hierarchy of values

Value	N	% of N
Honest life	520	82.0%
Family happiness	519	81.9%
Health	348	54.9%
Serenity	277	43.7%
Affluence	218	34.4%
Respect of others	212	33.4%
Life full of adventures and thrills	155	24.4%
Tolerance	151	23.8%
Natural environment	124	19.6%
Good relations with colleagues	107	16.9%
Work-life balance	106	16.7%
Security	103	16.2%
Achievements	98	15.5%
Autonomy	94	14.8%
Professional honesty	54	8.5%
Authority	45	7.1%
Intellectual stimulation	43	6.8%
Responsibility	31	4.9%

Source: own study

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Results of a global study of employee engagement conducted by Aon Hewitt Consulting, *2015 Global Trends in Employee Engagement*, revealed that the global employee engagement indicator reached 62 percentage points in 2014, which was merely 1 percentage point more than in 2013. In G20 countries, the indicator remained unchanged and amounted to 61% (Święcicka, 2015). Studies by Wołpiuk-Ochocińska (2015, pp. 72–84) indicated that the level of engagement varies for employees of different age. Younger employees (22.62 age average) exhibit a lower than average level of work engagement, which, according to the author, suggests they experience lower attachment to the particular work and lower enthusiasm associated with it than middle-aged employees (M=44.04). Research results reveal that, when compared with experienced employees, young workers manifest statistically significant, lower level of general work engagement, energy and preoccupation with work (Wołpiuk-Ochocińska, 2015, pp. 72–84). Consequently, the study of Polish Generation Y employees features scales which may serve as a basis for drawing conclusions regarding respondents' engagement.

The theoretical basis for the scales aiming at work engagement's assessment was a premise offered by Schaufeli (et al. 2002, p. 72f). The premise presents engagement as consisting of three components: employees' experience of vigour when working, dedication to work and absorption. Vigour is manifested in experiencing a high level of energy and mental resilience at work, which facilitates fulfilment of responsibilities despite difficulties. Dedication denotes enthusiastic performance of duties, experiencing the feeling of significance of one's work and taking pride with it. Absorption pertains to the feeling of full concentration and immersion in work, which may be accompanied by the feeling of time passing unnaturally quickly. The fact that such an approach to engagement positions itself in the cognitive domain, is noteworthy. Engagement results in employees' energy being released and in them performing duties in a way beyond the required minimum. Such performance emerges of the employees' own will. Moreover, the survey questionnaire contains statements which enabled evaluation of the commitment to the organisation. Meyer and Allen's (1991, pp. 61–89) premise served as the theoretical basis for the evaluation. They described 3 domains of employees' ties with their workplace which define their intention of leaving the organisation or a remaining a part of it.

Respondents of the study, young Polish employees, manifest a relatively low level of engagement: work engagement M=3.71, SD=0.644, commitment to organisation M=3.46, SD= 0.811. Low scores in organisational commitment may justify the claim that the Ys do not form strong attachments with the organisation and perceive their workplace as temporary.

Low level of engagement is accompanied by a low level of job satisfaction. Satisfaction is understood as "the level of positive or negative well-being emerging as a result of particular actions in specific physical and social conditions" (Gros, 2003, p. 115). Respondents scored their satisfaction with interpersonal relations at a workplace at the highest rate (M=3.85, SD=0.944). Satisfaction with economic work conditions received the lowest score (M=3.12, SD=1.144). Average scores for satisfaction with physical conditions at work, duties and responsibilities, received a relatively low scores as well (M=3.70, SD=1.016 and M=3.49, SD=1.959). The literature of psychology and

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management frequently associates satisfaction with employees' behaviour. Whether a satisfied employee performs better, or their productivity is the source of satisfaction, remains to be determined. However, it is clear that the increase of satisfaction boosts the probability of employees exhibiting pro-community behaviour in the organisation. As a consequence, results emerging from the study are far from optimistic.

Conclusion

Coexistence of various generations in organisations requires actions utilising their diverse features, attitudes towards work, requirements, aspirations and expectations. Representatives of Generation Y studied by the author of the present paper consist of predominantly young people at the onset of their professional careers. However, their low level of engagement, low job satisfaction and low level of personal responsibility for undertaking actions regarding competence improvement, are a cause for concern. On the other hand, despite respondents' assessing their skills highly, the fact that they declare willingness to undertake pro-development actions ought to be highlighted. A relatively small sample poses certain restrictions on drawing conclusions from research results. However, the fact that some characteristics (e.g. low engagement) discussed in literature became evident in the present study is noteworthy. Therefore, further studies aiming at the description of the individual generations, as well as the identification of cross-generational differences, seem valid (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998). The present results ought to be taken into account while designing and implementing HR practices regarding motivation, awards and rewards, training, development of contracts which psychologically take various values' hierarchies into consideration, value of work in general and its individual elements and requirements associated with career development.

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