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## THE MOTIVATION OF DIFFERENT EMPLOYEE GENERATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE SPA INDUSTRY\*

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**Abstract.** The spa industry is one of the sectors of economic activities that react sensitively to natural, political, economic, legislative, and social changes. Even today, in the era of digitization, it is challenging to find the possibility of replacing human labor. Their live work realizes the preparation of the facilities and the offer of the services themselves. Social contact is essential to maintain the high quality of services provided in the spa, which requires high staff engagement. Employees create a real business relationship with the customer. This study's primary goal is to identify the motivation preferences of different employee generations in spa industry. The research methods used in the paper are general theoretical methods of scientific knowledge - induction, deduction, analysis, comparison, synthesis of available bibliographic sources, and scientific abstraction for generalization of results. Furthermore, we used the methods of descriptive statistics. The survey was an essential source of information. We tackled spa industry employees in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

**Keywords:** employee motivation; retention; generation X; generation Y; generation Z; baby boomer generation; workforce; Covid; SPA industry

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## 1. Introduction

The spa industry is a set of activities of specific infrastructure and human resources in the fields of knowledge and practice, which are focused on the knowledge of natural healing resources and the implementation of techniques and procedures for the treatment of various somatic, psychosomatic and psychological problems. The spa industry aims to prevent and cure human diseases, regenerate powers, and relax. It is associated with the use of the power of natural healing resources and the beauty of the natural and compositional cultural environment. Spa services require high employee commitment. Their diligent work implements the preparation of the facilities and the offer of the services themselves. Employees create a real business relationship with the customer. It is necessary to fulfill the substantive side of the business, to provide the means to produce the service. The quality of personnel determines the success of the valorization of inputs and resources of production. The quality of personnel is mainly their qualifications, ability to adapt to requirements, and motivation to produce quality goods or services (Ližbetinová & Hitka, 2016; Popescu & Surcel, 2017; Lee et al., 2022). A capable and competent worker should be broadly educated (Senkova et al., 2016); education must not only be narrowly specialized but must also focus on developing associated skills in modern times. These abilities and competencies are individual characteristics that reflect a person's expression in particular situations and behavior. If a person is competent, it is because abilities act together. Using knowledge, abilities, and individual skills at the right moment guarantees the solution of a problem situation, position, or function (Dale & Robinson, 2001; Lyu & Liu, 2021). Education and the associated quality of human potential have an important role in tourism. In this regard, Baum, Amoah, and Spivack (1997) state that the human factor is one of the crucial points in the tourism supply. We include creativity - the ability to break with established dogmas, to bring about the possibility of unusual combinations of thought processes that have not been used before, facilitating surprising solutions among the core competencies of tourism personnel (Suwannarat, 2021; Vu et al., 2021). The ability to work independently is also important - it represents coherent work in a given position and awareness of a clear goal of a satisfied customer. To use the acquired information in a focused and planned manner to make decisions and solve the situations and problems encountered (Ibrahim et al. 2022). Collaboration with colleagues and work units - is essential in tourism services as it is collective work. Transferring individual skills to group work processes is extremely important. Common thoughts, opinions, and ideas combined with a common goal mean effective teamwork. Critical thinking is the most valued quality of today's managers. The ability to think to develop ideas critically is a unique competitive advantage for a company. Critical thinkers are the most valued capital of a company as they bring innovative thoughts and ideas. The ability to evaluate and justify is the ability of an employee to systematically and factually evaluate the results of their work, joint work, and other people's work, using adequate weighting. Developed learning skills are thinking in context and a systematic approach to learning. This ability seems to be the most important for the future, given the constant changes and rapid development of the world around us (Vu, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Performance is the ability to perform and persevere as performance needs to be given consistently throughout the work or increased. A high-performing employee makes good use of his time and the resources entrusted to him, adding value to the enterprise. The innate ability to communicate is not only the active transmission of information but also the ability to listen and understand. Good communication is the basis for solving problems and conflicts that arise. In management positions, it is necessary as it is associated with delegating tasks. Responsibility is a characteristic of employees who approach tasks conscientiously and successfully try to bring them to a solution or goal. It is about adhering to the rules, regulations and standards that are in place in the company and taking care of entrusted objects, company information, customers, colleagues, or superiors. The ability to solve problems that arise comes to the fore at the most difficult times. This type of employee prevents financial or material losses and is an added value to the company (Penalba-Aguirrezabalaga et al., 2021). The person can analyze the situations that arise and make the right decision. Although the behavioral patterns we discussed should be universal, the scientists claim that motivational drivers are different for different generations (Mahmoud et al., 2020a, 2020b; Timilsina et al., 2021). Below we will discuss the peculiarities of different generations' attitudes (see Findings section).

## **2. Objective and methods of work**

The right leader and manager are needed to awaken the above-mentioned desired qualities. Motivating employees in the spa industry is essential in terms of constant contact with the guest. Properly motivated employees are ready to work at the required intensity and performance. We can encourage employees in two ways. First is the reason itself, where people seek work that fulfills their motives and needs; the primary motivating factor is money to meet the standard of living. The second form of motivation is motivation by the management of the enterprise. The primary motivational tools in modern society are the creation of good interpersonal relations and fair treatment of all employees in all areas of employment policy.

The present study aims to identify the motivation preferences of different employee generations in the example of spa industry based on the analysis of data from a questionnaire survey.

We conducted a questionnaire survey in four joint-stock companies engaged in offering spa services from December 2021 to January 2022. The questionnaire was developed based on the employers' requirements to determine employee satisfaction as an essential feedback tool for creating a suitable motivational environment for developing the required competencies and staff stabilization. We evaluated the data using descriptive statistical methods, comparison, and synthesis. For our study, we present selected questions.

## **3. Findings**

Important identifying feature of the sample was age. There are four generations of employees in the labor market, each with a different value orientation, loyalty to the employer, willingness to work extra hours, etc. In our survey, we captured the clash of all four generations of employees. The issue of motivation of different ages has been dealt with by many authors in their works (Smola & Sutton 2002; Arsenault, 2004; Kyles, 2005; Burke & Ng, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2009; Chou, 2012; Ng et al., 2017; Fritsch et al., 2018; Hanafi et al., 2020; Angel, 2022; Moskvina, 2022).

The Baby Boomer generation is the generation born in the post-war period. Baby boomers were characterized by attitudes that changed or re-evaluated the definitions of traditional values. This generation was about continuity between the older and the following demographic cohort. Boomers are associated with their privilege. Many grew up in a period of rising prosperity following the massive postwar subsidies to housing and education in Europe and North America. This generational group in their era was profiled as the wealthiest, most active, and most physically fit compared to previous generations. They were the first generation to both expect and grow into better times. Indeed, this generation was reaching peak income levels, had convenient access to food and clothing, was programmatically working towards retirement, and recognized what the mid-life crisis brings. Their behavior toward a consumerist way of life is regularly criticized for inadequacy. Some members of this generation are still active in the labor market.

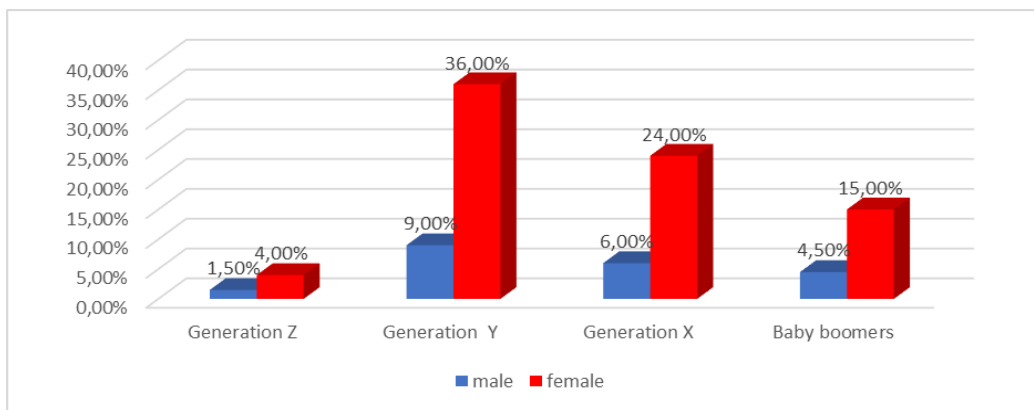
Members of Generation X were children who grew up in a period of shifting social values and were sometimes nicknamed "kids with a key around their necks" because of a lack of adult opportunities for supervision. This lack is due to changes in generational cohabitation, the increase in divorce rates, and the rising proportion of employed mothers prioritizing work careers over home-based childcare. These individuals were also referred to as the "MTV Generation" in adolescence and emerging adulthood due to their influences. They have been characterized as lazy, cynical, and disaffected individuals. In middle age, they are active, happy, and achieve work-life balance, according to research findings. This demographic cohort has been attributed to strong entrepreneurial tendencies.

The characteristics of Generation Y differ depending on each region's social and economic status. In the broader sense, this cohort is marked by a favorable attitude towards communications, media, and digital technologies.

Their upbringing has been marked by a more liberal approach to politics and economics in much of the world. The effects of this environment on them are contested. The great economic crisis that began in 2007 has significantly impacted this generation because it has affected them to the greatest extent. It has caused historically high levels of unemployment, leading to speculation about the possible long-term economic and social damage to this generation.

Generation Z is the first social generation that did not experience life before the internet and was given access to portable digital technology from an early age; despite not necessarily being digitally literate, its members have been nicknamed "digital natives." The adverse effects of the time spent in front of screens are most pronounced in the adolescents of this generation. Compared to previous generations, members of Generation Z in developed countries have a stronger tendency towards good manners, restraint, and risk aversion. Compared to their predecessors, they are slower for their age, have a lower propensity for teenage pregnancies, and are less likely to consume alcohol, but not necessarily addictive drugs. Teenagers seem more focused on achieving academic degrees and job perspectives, prioritizing them over immediate satisfaction of needs. Despite initial misgivings, they are much better than the generations of the 1960s in this regard. On the other hand, this generation is prone to sexting, i.e., sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or videos for incomprehensible reasons.

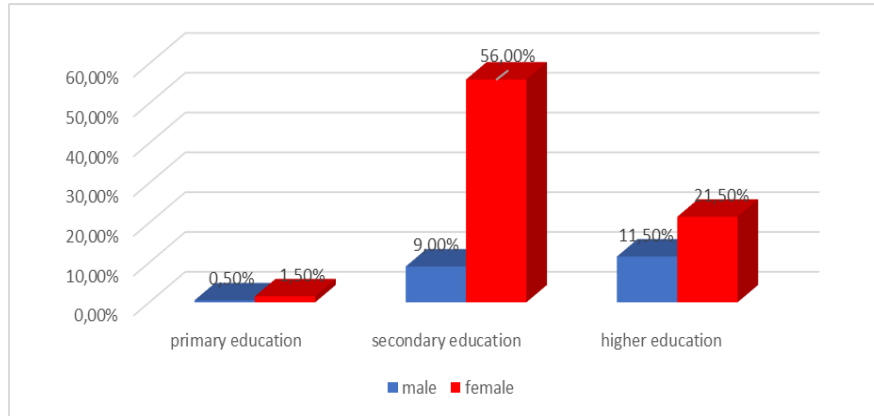
The issue of preferences and differences across generations has been studied by many authors (Hill 2002, Bergh & Behrer 2012; Kudins, 2022). However, there is no consistency across generations, so the distribution of generations and the timing may be reported differently by different sources. As noted above, the traditional division of ages originated in the Americas. Research on the generations has mainly concerned their relationship to and use of modern technologies. For our survey in spa facilities, we defined the ages of the generations as follows, in line with the authors: baby boomers aged 56 and over, Generation X aged 46-55, Generation Y aged 26-45, Generation Z aged 18-25. In our survey sample, the largest generation was Generation Y (45%). The results are shown in the following Figure 1. More women are working in the spa segment (79% of respondents in our survey) than men (21% of respondents) due to the jobs in demand and the low average salary.



**Figure 1.** The age structure of respondents  
*Source:* own processing based on survey results

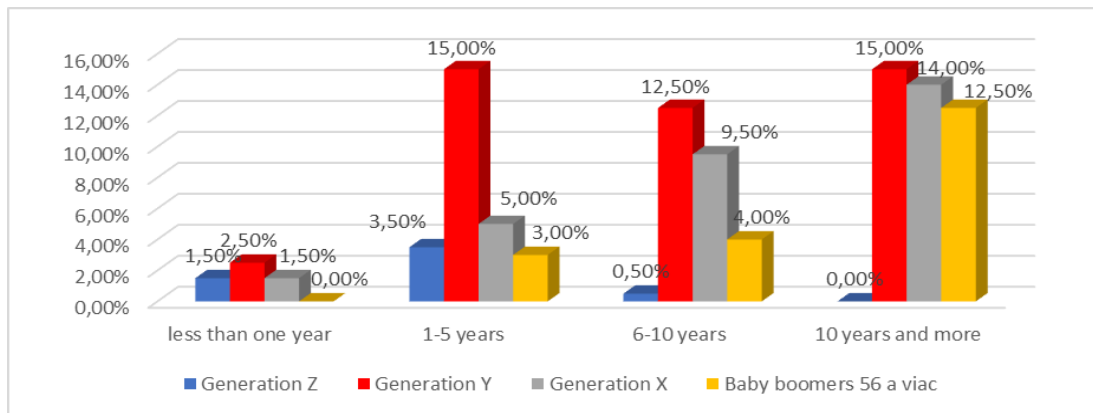
Education is a process in which an individual acquires knowledge and skills and develops their abilities so that they are primarily employable in the labor market and can realize job offers. Preparing the workforce is quite demanding because of the constantly changing conditions that affect the production of goods and services and thus also affect the requirements of the force. We assumed that most employees in the spa sector have a high school education (65% of respondents) which is also based on the need for the positions. These respondents

mainly work in housekeeper, physiotherapist, nurse, and receptionist positions. 33% of the respondents have a university education and primarily work in physiotherapist, doctor, supervisor, and facility manager positions.



**Figure 2.** The educational structure of respondents  
*Source:* own processing based on survey results

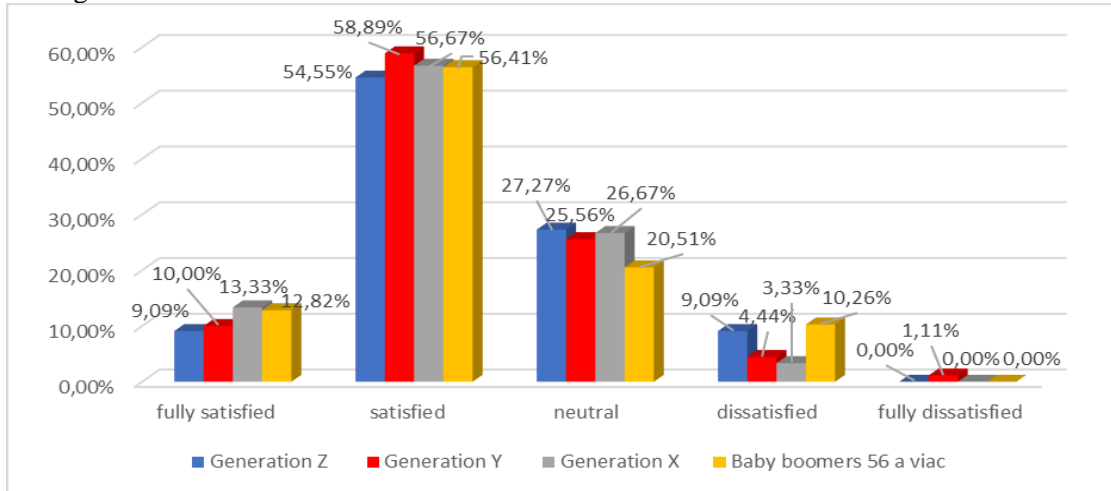
The number of years of work for an employer reflects the employee's loyalty to the employer and is particularly characteristic of older generations. Younger generations are not as loyal to their employers, so it is necessary to create motivation programs to stabilize the younger generation of employees. It is noticeable that Generation Z members have worked for employers for the least number of years. This generation is a precarious workforce, and its stabilization and recruitment programs will need to be addressed from a sustainability perspective.



**Figure 3.** Years worked in spa institutions  
*Source:* own processing based on survey results

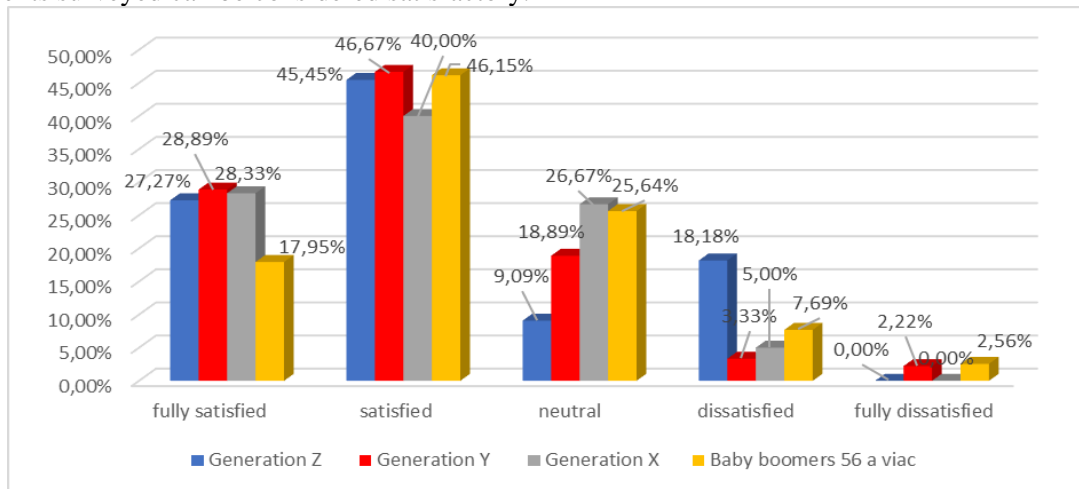
Furthermore, in our survey, we were interested in the satisfaction of the different generations with the working conditions and working environment, which of course, has a significant influence on the stabilization of the workforce in the future. Generation Z is the least satisfied, which may also result from the overall value orientation of young people in this generation. They do not see a perspective for themselves in these institutions and may find the work boring. Surprisingly, Generation Y is quite satisfied and is currently the largest generation in the spa industry. This share is mainly explained by the fact that these are primarily women who are mothers and are comfortable working in these facilities, mainly because of family care. The spa facilities are located in less densely populated villages, so commuting could also cause a problem in finding employment in a competitive environment. Surprisingly, the Baby Boomers (10.26%) are relatively dissatisfied, the workers employed by the

employer for the most extended period and are therefore a stable workforce. Exploring the reasons for dissatisfaction among this generation would require a deeper analysis. It may also be a case of fatigue from the stereotype of the environment and the post-covid situation. This is a generation whose children are already becoming independent, relationships are breaking down, and they may appear disillusioned with life. The results are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Generations' satisfaction with working conditions and working environment  
 Source: own processing based on survey results

Communication with employees is an essential factor affecting employee performance and the quality of service provided in this sector. From our findings, it is evident that members of Generation Z are the most dissatisfied with communication (completely dissatisfied and dissatisfied together 18.8%). Again, this may be a generational issue to different value orientations among young people and other ideas about the guidelines for the work to be done. This generation is typical in that most of their communication is done in the online space. They are more focused on applications and, possibly, do not understand communication from senior managers. This problem is also evident in other employers, so it needs more attention. Overall, however, the level of communication in the establishments surveyed can be considered satisfactory.

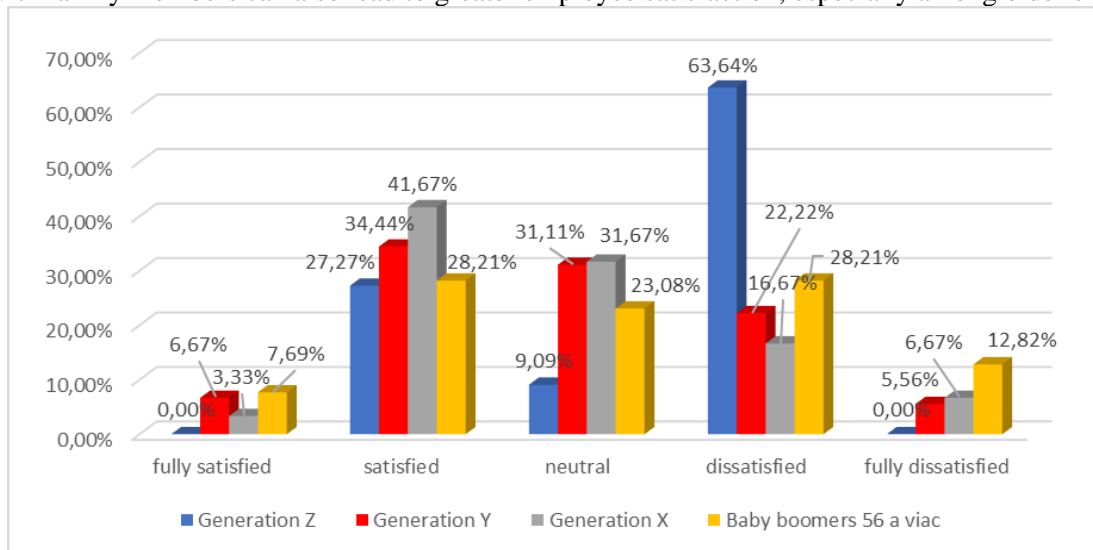


**Figure 5.** Level of satisfaction with the quality of communication with the supervisor  
 Source: own processing based on survey results

Remuneration is one of the most effective tools to motivate and stabilize employees. The spa industry is a labor market sector that belongs to the tourism industry. We know that the level of remuneration in this sector is

relatively low and cannot compete with that of the industrial sectors. Moreover, this sector has been the most affected by the anti-pandemic measures. Wages in the tourism industry ranged from €623 to €1,582 in 2021, depending on the job position, while the average salary in accommodation and food services was €688.

A well-defined remuneration strategy stabilizes the workforce and improves the organization's performance. It must often balance potentially conflicting objectives. For example, it may be necessary to reconcile the seemingly contradictory efforts to be externally competitive and internally fair. In our survey, there was considerable dissatisfaction in remuneration among all generations, but most of all among Generation Z, where not a single respondent indicated complete satisfaction, while up to 63.64% of respondents were dissatisfied. From the perspective of stabilizing the future workforce, we consider this to be a significant problem. We would recommend addressing this as a strategic issue for individual organizations. The remuneration system includes monetary and non-monetary benefits, so it would be advisable to look for opportunities in the non-monetary remuneration mode in particular. For example, a so-called cafeteria system could be developed where employees could choose their benefits. The total rewards package should be designed so that employees understand the total value of the remuneration they receive and not just the piecemeal elements of it. The system should attract, retain and develop the best talent. The benefits of this approach are that it enables them to contribute to the success of the company, that it facilitates their work-life balance, and helps them to care about their family. It is necessary to look for, e.g. flexible employment opportunities, especially since the younger generation sees leisure time as a reward, i.e., to create a different organization of working time. And bonuses concerning the use of spa services together with family members can also lead to greater employee satisfaction, especially among older employees.



**Figure 6.** Employee satisfaction with the remuneration system

Source: own processing based on survey results

We could not present all the survey findings in the present study, so we have selected only some exciting areas. It seems that it is necessary to investigate employees' opinions not according to the classical age structure but rather according to their belonging to particular generations, which have their specific value orientation and as it seems to be different across the generational spectrum. We assume that such an approach can be more effective in setting up systems for remuneration, stabilization, and motivation of employees. However, new methods often meet resistance from generations of managers who are essential members of older generations and cannot understand the changes that take place as part of generational change.

## **Conclusions and further discussion**

Expectations of different generations are a frequently discussed topic among recruiters, managers or business owners.

Each of the generations has a different approach to work, which employers can use to their advantage to avoid unnecessary problems. We focussed on how the motivation of different generations differs in the labour market. The aim is to find recommendations on how to motivate them to better work performance, how to retain a qualified workforce, or how to attract new employees.

In our research we examined spa sector, which is specific to the irreplaceability of human labour. The spa business is widely spread, since it is common practice for hotels to offer wellness services. Labour productivity presents a match between labor input and output in the form of service.

The managers intend to create an efficient and fair system that will objectively assess the range of work in terms of the service provided. This is the most critical task of stabilizing and motivating the workforce.

Our research showed that generation Z shows significant dissatisfaction, if to compare with other age groups, is more demanding overall. Despite the fact that members of this generation are often inexperienced and also have an unrealistic idea of financial remuneration in the current labour market, the amount of salary is the most important thing for them. It is important to note that they are proficient in social media communication, but less skilled in face-to-face communication, as confirmed by the results of our survey.

The shortage of employees accentuates topicality of the research. Taking into account the obtained results, it is inevitable to introduce elements of digitalization in this sector shortly. For example, self-service reception desks, chatbots for satisfaction assessment, and communication applications can increase the quality of service.

However, human work in this segment will be non-substitutable, so it will be necessary to rethink the current remuneration systems, stabilization, and motivation to meet customer requirements.

The results and findings of this study can serve as a basis for further research activities in the field of motivation of different generations of employees. Future research should focus on the expectations and willingness of different generations to adjust their labour market expectations, or it would be interesting and enriching to compare international analyses within this generation. The analysis could also be extended to include the expectations of the youngest generation, the Alpha generation, who will be entering the labour market. We anticipate that its perception will be the most different of all generations and the market itself will have to adapt to this.



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