Anna BARWIŃSKA-MAŁAJOWICZ[1]

GENERATIONAL AFFILIATION AS A DETERMINANT OF CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

During the 20th century, dynamic economic, social, political, historical, and technological changes led to the separation of new generations. Generational affiliation is one of the variables that define human attitudes, and this paper focuses on the problem of generational diversity. The paper includes an attempt to capture the traits of the generations born in the 20th century. Its purpose is to identify the characteristics, values, and attitudes of generations born in the 20th century in relation to professional and social life and provide an overview.

The paper studies the subject literature and utilizes desk research, descriptive statistics, and the collective case study method.

Keywords: generational change, generations born in the 20th century, labor market, features, attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studying the generational change refers to the differences between two consecutive generations with regards to their attitudes, views, values, motivations and aspirations, whereas the conceptual category is of an interdisciplinary nature and *inter alia* draws from scientific disciplines such as economics, sociology or psychology. The generational change becomes visible through an analysis of features characteristic to individual generations. Dynamical changes of economic, social, political, historical and technological nature, taking place in the 20th century, have led to the separation of new generations. These generations are characterized by different attitudes, preferences, worldview, values and methods of communication. This in turn translates to different expectations, attitudes, commitment and motivations towards the labor market and social life.

The purpose of the study is to identify characteristics, values and attitudes of generations born in the 20th century in relation to professional and social life. The subject literature review indicates intergenerational differences, *i.e.*, variations in the characteristics of a given generation compared to others. The objective was achieved with the application of the subject literature studies, the desk research method, descriptive statistics method and the collective case study method.

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[1] Anna Barwińska-Małajowicz, DSc, PhD, Associate Prof., University of Rzeszów, Institute of Economics and Finance, ul. Ćwiklińskiej 2, 35-601 Rzeszów, Poland; e-mail: abarwinska@ur.edu.pl. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0228-1761.

2. GENERATIONAL CHANGE – GENERAL COMMENTS

Within every society the generation gap is shaped by the socioeconomic and cultural events which bear a transforming impact on human life. In the modern world there are several generations that differ in many attributes (for example, attitude to work, attitude towards the employer and co-workers, value systems, motivation, perception of the path of their own professional development or loyalty to their organization)[2].

A review of the literature on the subject allows us to distinguish four generations operating in the modern labor market and five generations in the consumer market. Without entering into considerations on the legitimate use of the conceptual category "generation" (which in the sociological sense has a precise definition (Świda-Ziemba, 2010) this study refers to a division based mainly on demographic criteria (Murzyn, Nogieć, 2015), (Table 1). Notably, this is a conventional division which finds no clear definition in the literature. It also does not reflect a direct generational replacement (about every 20–25 years), but it refers to people born at a similar time and shaped by similar events and experiences, although in the instance of Generation X growing up in Poland this thesis seems to be rather debatable.

The subject literature does not present a uniform opinion on strict dates of birth of individual generations' representatives. For instance, in Polish literature, Hysa (Hysa, 2016) specifies that those born between 1945–1964 are Baby Boomers, Generation X are those born between 1965–1980, while Generation Y are people born between 1981–1994. According to Bombiak (Bombiak, 2016) the bottom birth year threshold of people belonging to Generation X is the year 1964, Generation Y fits between 1980 and 1994, while people born after 1995 are Generation Z. Whereas, Aniszewska recognizes that Generation X covers those born between 1961–1985 (Aniszewska, 2015).

A study of international subject literature also indicates the mobility of birth ranges of individual generations. Berkup (Berkup, 2014) considers that Generation X includes people born between 1965–1979, and Generation Y those born between 1980–1994, while Generation Z are those born after 1995. Meanwhile, Howe and Strauss (Howe, Strauss, 2007) assume the following birth dates: the BB generation: 1943–1960, Generation X: 1961–1981, Generation Y: 1982–2005, and Zemke, Raines, Filipczak (Zemke, et al., 2000) are of an opinion that the BB generation include the birth years between 1943–1960, Gen Xers: 1961–1980, and the Nexters (Generation Y): 1980–2000, while O'Neill (O'Neill, 2010) places Baby Boomers within the range 1946–1964, Generation X in 1965–1978 and the Millennials in years 1977–1997. The time frames covering the time of birth of the representatives of individual generations are variable, depend on an analyzed country, local conditions and the adopted division.

The subject literature review indicates intergenerational differences, *i.e.*, variations in the characteristics of a given generation compared to others (Lipka, 2017), yet, it also points to the differences in the features and attitudes of the members of the same generation, depending on their geographical allocation. This is the case, for example, between the Baby Boomers (BB) generation from Poland and the USA. The baby boom representatives' approach to work and their perception of the world definitely bears a mark of the time of their up-bringing, which was the communist era. They are characterized, among other things, by suspicion, distrust, lack of tolerance for differences, creation of a "grey civic

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[2] In the instance of generations X or Y, although they are not constituted as generations, one can hardly talk of their actual common value system of a common identity (Jasiewicz, 2020/2021).

mass", justice understood as equality of wealth distribution, climbing up the career ladder gradually without skipping any levels etc. (*Alfabet pokoleń*, http). In contrast, the priorities of the BB generation in the US include work and subsequent promotions. They are incurable career-oriented materialists. The political and social determinants in which they grew up resulted in their strong focus on individual needs, with a propensity to optimism and idealism. Work and personal sacrifice were their path to their financial success (*Zarządzanie pokoleniami w organizacji,* http; Twenge, et al., 2010; Glass, 2007).

The circumstances in which the members of different generations were becoming adolescents cannot be ignored in an analysis of their attitudes, behaviors and motivations. Poland developed at a completely different pace than the Western Europe countries or the United States. Therefore, comparing the attitudes of a US boomer with a Polish boomer may lead to overplaying, a distorted image being generated, it may even seem grotesque. Additionally, most of the terms regarding the division of generations have been derived from Western sociology.

The findings of research conducted by INSEAD Emerging Markets Institute, Universum and the HEAD Foundation on the representatives of three generations: X, Y, Z are evident of the fact that people considered to be the members of one generation but functioning in two different countries simultaneously may (to a greater or lesser extent) differ in terms of views, behaviors and attitudes as well as their features and preferences (Bresman, Rao, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to be aware that the diversity within generations also arises from the individual characteristics of its members.

3. GENERATIONS BORN IN THE 20TH CENTURY – DIVERSITY OF FEATURES, VALUES AND ATTITUDES

It is important to understand the phenomenon of generations and the differences among them because those generations, featuring diverse features, "clash" in the modern world (on the labor market, on the consumer market, etc.), which is a great challenge for numerous organizations, it is reflected in work relationships, affects the scale and the structure of demand for specific goods and services. Notably, due to the complexity of this problem, the characteristics hereinbelow are presented in a simplified form and may not be applied to identify individuals representing various generations.

The **Generation of Traditionalists** (Silent Generation, Veterans, Seniors, Matures or Radio Babies) was highly affected by the historical period of their professional activity (the time of the second world war and the post-war changes of a political, cultural, social and economic nature). This generation functioned in the conditions which strongly determined how they perceive work, professional career and the value system. The members of this generation are perceived as "one organization people", their professional paths usually involved one workplace, and the work style was based on discipline, while the fundamental business life principle involved respect for the boss and fulfilling work commands in a subordinate manner (Crampton, Hodge, 2009). It is a subpopulation to whom work itself constituted a value, a generation with respect for legal and organizational norms, strongly devoted to tradition and authority as well as attached to ethics and moral principles. The Silent Generation prioritized sense of safety, particularly in financial terms (Berkup, 2014; Sprague, 2008), conscientiousness, loyalty to tradition, commitment, strong sense of obligation, acceptance of a formal work style (Maksymowicz, Mamak-Zdanecka, 2014).

Generation BB is a generation of demographic explosion, also rather focused on a professional career at one company than a mobile professional path. A review of available literature shows that this group employees display recognition for authorities, firm attitudes and behaviors, patience, responsibility and weighing their words (Hysa, 2016), as well as seeking to provide themselves with stability and safety of employment (Smola, Sutton, 2002; Hart, 2006; Polus, 2019). Their immense advantage is a very strong level of work commitment, in accordance with the principle: "live to work" and their slogan is "Thank God it's Monday" (Berkup, 2014). Moreover, literature describes this group as idealistic, optimistic and most loyal as well as attached to their organization (Hart, 2006; Becton, et al., 2014). They are capable of sacrifice and disciplined. They have no interpersonal communication problems (Kuczerska, Smoląg, 2018).

As already mentioned earlier, there are marked differences between the BB generation functioning in a country such as Poland (a country subjected to the communist dictatorship following the second world war) and the USA. We shall inspect in a more detail some of those differences primarily arising from diverse political and economic conditions in both countries, at the time of greatest activity of this generation. Members of the Polish BB generation were brought up and were adolescents at the time when work was an autotelic value, at the time when work ethos created by socialism prevailed. After the collapse of this system, they continued to be professionally active, thus participating in the system transformation and the market economy formation (Sytek, 2013). Focused on continuous activity and professional development, they sought stability and a regular salary. Due to the fact that they gained their professional experience during the communist period, they are driven by a great need to create a safe living area. At the same time, they are perfectly aware of their efforts to achieve success. They demonstrate efficiency and capability of overcoming difficulties. They always put a lot of effort in their tasks and are able to follow technological advancements for this purpose, which is also forced by the fact that the time of their professional activity coincides with the industrial society evolving into a post-industrial society and the society of knowledge. The BB generation employees demonstrate regard and respect for the hierarchic order of an organization, the position and professional status as well as professional and academic titles (Maksymowicz, Mamak-Zdanecka, 2014). They were often forced to redefine their professional roles in the face of the expectations and the requirements of the modern labor market, however they tend to be less creative than the younger generations, which sometimes impedes pushing their professional interest forward. By way of comparison, among the traits commonly observed among the BB generation operating in the USA, it is also important to mention hard work, aimed at making a living ("they were born to achieve the American dream and they tried to make it happen" (*Who are the Baby Boomers?,* http)), while the American conditions in which the cult of work formed were very distant from the socialist conditions familiar to the Polish boomers. Many American BBs grew up in very disciplined and well-organized households, which taught them respect for work and shaped their present identity. Moreover, independent thinking, self-confidence built on hard work, a need to be successful due to time and effort committed to build a career are typical to them. In addition, they are resourceful, ingenious, target-oriented, disciplined, they can settle many problems on their own. They are willing to observe social norms and at the same time they are capable of expressing their opinions firmly if they decide that something breaches their personal values or perspectives. Their operations are driven by self-improvement and personal development and their attitudes and views were shaped by the events and processes including the Vietnam War

(1955–1975), civil rights movements (1954–1968), cold war, fast technical progress, space exploration (*Who are the Baby Boomers?,* http; *8 Important Characteristics Of Baby Boomers eLearning Professionals Should Know*, http).

Generation X is defined by the socioeconomic determinants typical to the period of economic uncertainty, high unemployment rates, inflation, redundancies or high divorce rates (Becton et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2007). The most important trait of Generation X is great uncertainty, in effect representatives of this generation, regardless of their location in the world, appreciate stabilization and gathering resources. This corresponds with their attitude towards work, as what they appreciate most is continuous and stable employment, while the main factor motivating them to work is the level of remuneration, although a good atmosphere at work is also important. People representing Generation X value highly independence and free time (Ryś, http). As already mentioned, they find stabilization highly valuable, which does no mean they do not accept changes. On the contrary, they usually cope quite well, yet, they prefer working in peace. They also appreciate teamwork and knowledge. They often work many years at one company and identify with it. They are ambitious and professional, they put a lot of emphasis on family and professional success achieved with their hard work. On the one hand, this generation is characterized by a sense of meaningless, skepticism, pessimism void of illusions, uncertainty, fear of losing the positions achieved, isolation from social affairs, lack of trust in the state and aversion to politics; on the other hand, they are characterized by workaholism (the generation working from dawn to dusk, although rejecting the rat race and excessive consumerism), a strong work ethic and loyalty to their profession (Wojtaszczyk, 2016; Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2014). They tend to be called outsiders. Notably, while personality and identity of Gen Xers growing up in the USA or Western Europe was shaped by commercials, this generation in the socialist countries (such as Poland at that time) did not have access (or had a very limited access) to many goods and services or new development trends, which created in them a sense of inferiority and triggered a plethora of complexes (Wojtaszczyk, 2016) (such as "inferiority complex towards the West. Everything coming from there was automatically better") (Godziński, http).

The *Gen X Today* project[3] shows that Gen X described in the 1990s as rebellious, lost, vain, with no future, gained in confidence, broke free from the burden of expectations and created a meaningful life. And in the past two decades its representatives pioneered vast social changes. As regards the research context Generation X (constituting a fourth of global population) was mostly ignored in the past two decades, the research focused rather on the generations entering the labor market, *i.e.,* Y or Z.

Generation Y is a generation born in the 1980s and who grew up in the world of globalized economy, surrounded with mobile phones and the Internet. Most Young people in this generation cannot imagine life without those inventions. They are often described as having a lot of self-confidence which, together with a high level of consumption needs, makes them perceived as demanding. They are typically quick to learn and open to changes, highly mobile, reserved towards authorities and prefer flexible working time and a work--life balance.

A characteristic feature of Generation Y is a different way of approaching work than it was the case with previous generations. Representatives of this generation do not prioritize

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[3] The project included research with 1,200 adult respondents living in 21 countries all over the world (Kurz, Guerrier, 2016).

work. They treat it rather as a means to achieve other, more important goals, among which they list having a happy family, self-development and following their passions. They want to work, but not throughout their entire life. They have a very well-developed art of auto-presentation. They set up their own business eagerly. Innovation, ease at accessing information and a task-oriented attitude are their typical characteristics. They are able to obtain any necessary information from various sources simultaneously. As mentioned earlier, they pay particular attention to private life, expecting a lot of freedom and flexible working hours.

The Generation Y representatives are able to perform a task within a shorter period of time than the previous generation representatives would need (with equal work quality maintained) and they spend the saved time to fulfil their passions and develop their interests. Good command of technology (the Internet and mobile phones) bears a positive impact on their efficiency. They can multitask. They appreciate good work atmosphere and they are uncomfortable when they need to face the "rat race". Despite being teamwork-oriented, they also value individual approach. Their higher efficiency is also affected by reluctance to chat at work, therefore they are able to perform their tasks faster, they treat their superiors as equals who hold a broader range of competences.

Generation Z is a generation well acquainted with new mobile technologies (the Internet, mobile applications, virtual reality). They are also referred to as Generation C. The name is derived from the word connected – representatives of this group are online all the time. This term can also be associated with other epithets, *i.e.,* content-centric, computerized, community-oriented, changing. Members of this group are characterized by strongly developed digital skills and a pragmatic approach to life. They display an entrepreneurial spirit and at work they value independence, mobility and availability of remote work. Their distinguishing features are: creativity, versatility or flexibility, but on the other hand also low motivation to work, uncompromising nature and idealism (Cichorzewska et al., 2015). They value acting with transparency, autonomy and personal freedom and those elements are non-negotiable when they engage in work (Bascha, 2011). At the same time they are pragmatic and realistic, they are aware of their own limits, they do not posses an unreserved belief in themselves.

The characteristics of the five generations, mainly oriented at the attitudes and behaviors within professional life, was compiled in Table 1 as key words, however, it does not constitute a closed catalogue of traits typical to individual generations.

Table 1. Generations born in 20th century and selected features within their professional life

Feature	The Silent Generation (Traditionalists, The Greatest Generation)	Baby Boomers (Bb)	Generation X (Post Boomers, Slackers, Lost Generation)	Generation Y (Millennials, Generation Net)	Generation Z (C, Digital Natives, Post-Millennials)
Birth year	Before 1945	1945-1960	1961-1980	1981-1995	After 1995
Aspirations/ Motivations	home ownership / conformity, traditional family values	employment stability and safety / flexibility	work-life balance / autonomy	freedom and flexibility / development-oriented	security and stability / goal-oriented

Table 1 (cont.). Generations born in 20th century and selected features within their professional life

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Main motivators stimulating activity	want to feel needed; strive for financial security	fear of losing job, financial motivation	professional development potential, atmosphere at work	providing feedback, good atmosphere at work, familiarity with a task goal	seeking diversity, escaping routine
Attitude towards work and professional development	Jobs are for life; Work itself is a value; career involving single workplace	Organizational – careers are defined by employers; oriented at professional career at a single company, rarely at a mobile career path	proponents of traditional career; work itself is a value; patiently await promotion or pay rise; loyal towards a profession, not necessarily towards employer	expect fast career; career without boundaries; work is realization of passions and interests and enables further development, as well as private life and work-life balance	desire for immediate, effortless professional career
Employee traits	commitment and attachment to an organization; high sense of duty and responsibility for task performance; attachment to ethic and moral principles; conformity; conservatism	commitment to work; high loyalty towards employer; preference for individual work or cooperation (not rivalry); disciplined; resourceful; goal-centric; need recognition; priority: more important is employer's interest and what they can contribute	humbleness and respect for work; conscientious workers, able to appreciate what they have; need a feeling of sense of undertaken operations; cooperation-oriented,	less loyal towards employers; committed to work if it meets their expectations and satisfies their needs; poor work ethic; no patience, self-discipline; poorer decision-making, demanding and difficulty with direct contact	do not care about stability at work; no loyalty towards their employer; seek diversity; prefer group work; multi-tasking, frequent job changes;
Communication preference	personal interactions, face-to-face, formal letters	Face-to-face, if necessary - telephone or e-mail	Text messaging or e-mail	Online and mobile (text messaging), cloud-based technology	iPhone , facetime

Table 1 (cont.). Generations born in 20th century and selected features within their professional life

Feature	The Silent Generation (Traditionalists, The Greatest Generation)	Baby Boomers (Bb)	Generation X (Post Boomers, Slackers, Lost Generation)	Generation Y (Millennials, Generation Net)	Generation Z (C, Digital Natives, Post-Millennials)
Influencing factors / environment	Office workers; respect for legal and organizational norms	Traditional media, mainly TV; influenced by experts or documented evidence	Personal computer; influence of boss, practicians	digital culture is their natural environment; they cannot function without the Internet, smartphones and tablets; peer influence	nano-computing, 3-D printing, driverless car; prone to influence of celebrities as well as acquaintances (community forums)
Authority	Generation brought up to respect authorities; great worship of authorities and tradition	Respect for authorities and hierarchy	aversion towards authorities, but recognition for supervisors' authority	resistance to authorities' influence, seek "impermanent authorities"	value mentors; respect information more than authorities

Source: Own study based on [Barclays (2013); A. Smolbik-Jęczmień (2014); Fazlagić (2008); Gursoy, Maier, Chi (2008); *What are the traits…*; Kurz, Li, Vine (2018); *8 Important Characteristics…*; https://extension.missouri.edu/extcouncil/documents/ecyl/meet-the-generations.pdf; Gaidhani, Arora, Kumar Sharma (2019); *Encyklopedia Zarządzania…*; Polański (2014); *Pokolenie Y…*].

4. CONCLUSION

A review of the literature on the subject allows us to distinguish four generations operating in the modern labor market and five generations in the consumer market. These generations (Generation of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z) are very different from each other. Each generation has participated in different historical, political, economic, and social events. They have also been participant in more or less advanced technological transformations. Each generation is characterized by different expectations, values, attitudes, motivations, aspirations, skills or way of communication. Representatives of different generations would like to feel satisfied with their work, work in an atmosphere of understanding and functioning in a corporate culture that corresponds to their values and beliefs. Knowing and understanding intergenerational differences determines not only an effective working life, but also a satisfying social life.

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