

GENERATION Y- EVALUATION OF COMPETENCIES' POTENTIAL. STUDY OF EMPLOYEES IN POLAND

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Abstract:

Results of the Study of Human Capital in Poland, which have been carried out since 2010 by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, confirm the shortage of competencies on the Polish labour market. As many as 79% of employers have experienced difficulties in finding candidates possessing suitable skills. Those employers indicated deficits in the following competencies: (i) professional competencies- connected with activities undertaken in a particular profession (approximately 50% of employers indicated shortages in this area); (ii) self-organisation competencies- these can be characterized as a general motivation for work (25% of employers highlighted the area); (iii) interpersonal competencies- people skills and teamwork (15% of employers indicated deficits in this area). Apart from the above deficits, low level of employees' commitment is becoming a considerable problem. In the period when generation Y, whose needs and point of view differ from those of generation X's, has been entering the labour market and due to employees' ageing, improvement of competencies and jobholders' commitment currently pose the most pressing challenges for the management and HR departments. Generational changes can be clearly seen in the area of values. Generation Y holds family and work-life balance in high regard. The Y's are characterized by high pragmatism, lack of authorities, focus on personal development, relatively low loyalty towards the employer as an institution but high loyalty towards colleagues. The present paper details results of studies regarding self-assessment of competencies' potential. The research sample consisted of 106 employees aged 22-32. Respondents assessed their knowledge, skills and the level of commitment and work satisfaction. In addition, they indicated their preferred values. On the basis of the study's results, an attempt was made to establish guidelines for human resources management.

Keywords: competencies, competencies' potential, generation Y, employees in Poland

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are three generations present on the labour market: the baby boomers (the post-war demographic boom generation)- people born between 1943/45-1964¹, generation X and generation Y. Generation X consists of people born between 1965-1979/80. This group entered the post-modern social arrangement characterised by consumerism and the growing role of media as an opinion-making body. Labour market was difficult for the Xs. Frequently, they were forced to accept positions below their qualifications. It was only at a later stage of their lives when they became familiar with computers and the Internet. At that time, they also experienced globalisation, which necessitated further adjustments. Generation Y, also called the Millennials, constitutes the baby boom generation of 1980s. It encompasses people born between 1980/81 and 1995/96². The Y's value independence and individuality. They focus on their own life success and are certain of achieving it at the same time. The Y's have also got a passion for technology, whose use they have mastered. They also belong to numerous social networks, both real and virtual. The Y's live life to the fullest, they are characterised by multitasking and are bored easily (Sieńkowska, 2009). K. Best concluded that the Y's strike employers as „hard to manage and demanding” as well as impatient and reluctant to wait for a promotion or other privileges connected with professional experience³.

There are numerous characteristics associated with values, preferred behaviour models and personal traits associated with generation Y.

The values include: autonomy, individualism, indifference and short-sightedness. The actual values which arise from research analyses include: satisfactory life, expression of oneself, being informed, drive towards objectives, aspiration to give life and work a meaning, work-life balance (Spinoza, Ukleja, Rusch, 2011).

The literature of the subject features numerous descriptions of the Ys' social functioning. The Millennials are considered as following changes and regarding employment sustainability as negligible (or at least less important than in case of other generation groups) (Hart, 2006). Moreover, the Ys exhibit high requirements as regards professional environment. They expect swift and positive feedback on their activities and do not cope well with criticism (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Significant personal features of the Ys include egocentrism, narcissism, egoism and individualism (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell & Bushman, 2008, Twenge Zhang, Im, 2004). At the same time, it is emphasized that the Ys prefer team-work, they are goal oriented, multitask well and make good use of modern technologies in work environment (Shih & Allen, 2007). The Millennials expect the organization to develop opportunities for professional growth, life-long learning and use their talents fully (Kim et al., 2009, Morton, 2002). If these conditions are not met, the Ys make easy decision regarding change of employment.

In accordance with 2010 Johnson Controls study, 34% of the Y's expect to work in the same place for 1-2 years, 57% of them consider the 2-3 years' perspective. Working flexibly and having the opportunity of deciding about work hours is preferred by 56% of the Millennials.

A study carried out in 2010 by Mr. Youth and Intrepid revealed that approximately one third of the Millennials in UK and USA indicated the “need for change” as the chief reason for changing jobs. This was an even stronger motivator than the desire for higher earnings and positions.

The 2010 Career Edge study revealed that 80% of job applicants from generation Y form their opinion about the employer on the basis of information available on the Internet. The majority of the Millennials (73%) perceive reception of feedback from their superiors as the main indicator of the quality of work.

On the commission of the Career Advisory Board from DeVry University, Harris Interactive conducted an online „*The Future of Millennial Careers*” study. It encompassed 1023 American grown-ups and ran

¹ Various sources present different categorisations as far as age is concerned. It is noteworthy that the presented typologies originate from foreign sources, thus may not fully reflect conditions in Poland. Consequently, caution is advised when approaching the subject of generational identification of employees.

²http://wyborcza.pl/1,111537,10808651,lks__igrek__zet__czyli_generacje_vs__technologie.html, (accessed on 15.03.2012)

³<http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/ciekawostki/dokad-zmierza-generacja-y,1,3630670,wiadomosc.html> (accessed on 8.06 2012)

from December 2010 to January 2011. The study's objects consisted of 500 employed Millennials and 523 people responsible for staff sourcing. The results of the study revealed the following:

1. Approximately 50% of the Millennials work in professions detached from their university studies (41%).
2. Only 28% of staff sourcing managers indicated suitable education as the key success factor on the labour market. In case of the Millennials, the proportion was higher and amounted to 40%. Such tendency was present in young females (21-25 years of age) more frequently than in men.
3. Young Millennials (21-25 year-olds) are more decided about their professional career path than their older colleagues (26-31 year-olds). However, the study revealed lower permanence of such decisions than in case of the previous generations.
4. half of the Millennials do not want to be limited by fixed working hours.
5. The Millennials consider the following three as success factors: meaningful work (30%), high earnings (27%), professional achievements (24%). Further success factors include: challenges (10%), opportunity to express oneself (6%) and high level of responsibility (3%). Managers exhibit a slightly different attitude towards professional career than young people. In their opinion, the following factors are considered the most significant by the Y's: high earnings (48%), high level of responsibility (12%) and meaningful and professional achievements (11%).
6. Their ability to use the Internet and novel technologies are an undeniable asset of the generation. On the other hand, inability to face criticism, impatience, inefficient communication are among their disadvantages, which is highlighted by representatives of both groups.

To recapitulate, it can be stated that the Y's are frequently (Sheahan 2005):

- Educated (at least possessing formal education) and fast learners, which influences their ability to adapt to changes,
- Practical and pragmatic,
- Resourceful, creative and innovative, which is the result of daily experience with competitiveness. The Ys are focused on making use of available opportunities.
- Tolerant and aware of their environment, relationship oriented, value friendship and fellowship.

The above features may constitute a source of strengths for an organisation or become a hindrance in fulfilling its objectives.

2. EMPLOYEES' COMPETENCIES' POTENTIAL

The literature of the subject contains numerous definitions of the term competencies (Shippmann et al., 2000). The term is used in HR psychology, law, clinical psychology and career counselling. The term's meaning is very much context-dependent.

Competencies are frequently understood as knowledge, skill and motivation; professional habits and skills applied for achieving professional objectives (Green, 1999) or knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics associated with high quality of work in a particular position (Mirable, 1997). Another understanding of the term encompasses knowledge, skills and attitudes pertaining to working in particular organisation's conditions (Befani, 2004;. Silvestri et al., 2005). Knowledge is a collection of information and rules useful in work. Skills allow employees the realisation of defined and particular tasks. Skills can be specific (applying to a particular work) or general, useful in various professional situations. Attitudes pertain to the employees' positive attitude towards the organisation, co-workers and work itself.

For the purpose of the present paper, the term competencies encompasses the following:

- it can be understood as the opportunity and skills for achieving a particular result or a result on a particular level (skills for realising particular tasks or objectives);
- it pertains to applying knowledge/ qualifications and ability to act;
- it is conditioned by individual areas of knowledge, skills, motives, personal features and values;
- it is manifested in the ability to react to a particular situation accordingly.

An employee's potential is a sum of features and competencies of a particular employee i.e.:

- health,

- skills,
- general and specialist knowledge,
- practical skills,
- morality,
- motivation for work and personal growth,
- gained experience
- behaviour satisfying requirements of the surrounding environment in new professional situations.

The total of all employees' potentials constitutes the company's potential. Therefore, attracting employees possessing highest potential lies in companies' best interests. In addition, developing a system of investment in employees aiming at a constant improvement of qualifications and employees' potential, which constitute a strategic resource of an organisation, seems vital.

3. EMPLOYEES' COMPETENCIES- EMPLOYERS' REQUIREMENTS

Surveys carried out among employers by the Warsaw School of Economics, American Chamber of Commerce in Poland and Ernst & Young lead to the development of a standing regarding competencies expected from university graduates. The TOP 10 of the core competencies expected from university graduates, apart from foreign languages skills, includes the so-called soft skills e.g. personal, interpersonal and basic managerial skills. The following belong to the soft skills: effective communication, open-mindedness towards learning and development, commitment, team-work, prioritisation, ethics, responsibility, work organisation skills, time management, flexibility and adapting skills. These competencies can be considered as universal and expected from any university graduate regardless of their area of studies.

The TOP 10 of the required competencies does not include the so-called hard/ professional knowledge. It may be attributed to the fact that employers assume the graduate possesses high or very high level of general and specialist knowledge at minimum. In addition, employers assume they will provide advanced, work specific knowledge themselves. What seems to be the most important to employers is the graduates' potential, their attitude (passion, commitment, willingness to work and will to learn) and soft skills required at work (Competencies and Qualifications ..., 2012).

The results of the aforementioned study reveal the greatest competence gap (difference between the significance of a competence seen by an employer and the level of its possession declared by university graduates) in the area of prioritisation (-1,14 points, 25%), work organisation skills (-1,09 points, 25%), self-evaluation i.e. awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses (-1,03 points, 25%); effective communication (-0,95 point, 20%), ability to form and solve problems (-0,84 point, 19%), team working (-0,81 point, 18%), commitment (-0,8 point, 18%) and project management skills (-0,8 point, 21%).

The competencies evaluated the highest by employers include: open-mindedness towards learning (4,31 on average), ability to cooperate with people representing various backgrounds, countries, cultures, religions, age groups and sexual orientation (4,19 on average), IT skills (4,18 on average), foreign languages skills (4,12 on average) and logical thinking (4,03 on average). When we take into account the fact that score 5 represents the highest value, the above scores seem to be high

Competencies evaluated the lowest include: self-evaluation, understanding of one's own strengths and weaknesses (3,12 on average), sector specific knowledge reflecting current requirements of the company (3,12 on average), project management skills (3,03 on average), negotiation skills (3,00 on average), professional experience (2,69 on average) (Competencies and Qualifications ..., 2012, pp.10-15).

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- professional competencies- connected with activities undertaken in a particular profession (approximately 50% of employers indicated shortages in this area),

- self-organisation competencies- these can be characterized as a general motivation for work (25% of employers highlighted the area),
- interpersonal competencies- people skills and teamwork (15% of employers indicated deficits in this area).

4. STUDY RESULTS- GENERATION YS' SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES' LEVEL

4.1. The sample group

The study encompassed 162 people. Out of the total number, 106 members aged 20 to 31 were selected. Age average amounted to 26,3 (min. 21, max. 31). The sample was dominated by women (65 females amounting to 65% of participants). All respondents were involved in undergraduate, graduate or doctoral studies and worked full time.

The study was conducted in November and December 2014 and was of pilot character. The study's objective was to test the research tool. Therefore, no hypotheses were formed and the study was considered as exploratory.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 6 parts pertaining to competencies, their improvement, commitment/ motivation, health/mood, satisfaction, values, cognitive style and a section referring to personal information. Study results enabled the reliability of individual scales to be determined. Results satisfying the Cronbach's alpha (0,7 upwards) are presented below.

4.2. Presentation of the study's results

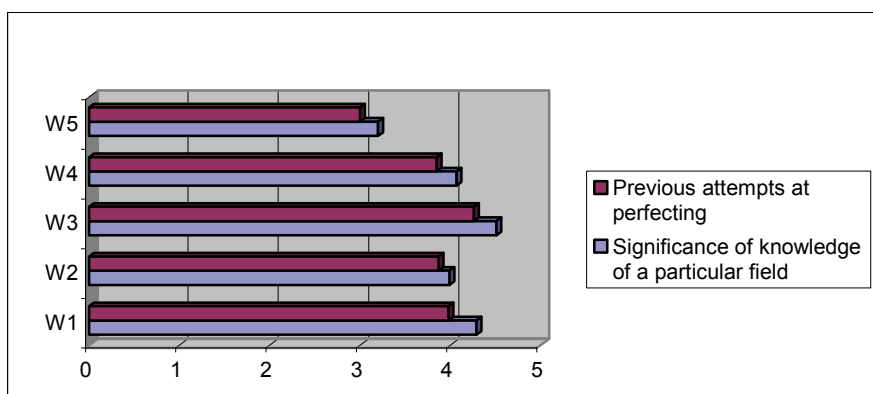
Employees' potential encompasses both features and competencies of a particular employee i.e. his/her:

- health/ mood,
- general and specialist knowledge,
- practical skills,
- motivation to work and constant personal growth,
- values.

In accordance with studies by Jelonek, Antosz, Balcerzak-Raczyńska conducted in 2014, students consider their level of competencies to be higher with every passing year. They are particularly proud of their computer and Internet skills as well as interpersonal skills.

While carrying out the self-assessment of various aspects of business activity, respondents considered knowledge pertaining to environment protection as the least important (M= 3,20, SDc = 0.597). Specialist, job-specific knowledge was considered as the most significant (M= 4,51, SDc =0,676). In addition, such knowledge was being perfected by respondents most frequently (M=4,26, SDc =0,769)

Figure 1: Knowledge of various fields- respondents' self-assessment



Explanation:

W1-knowledge of business operations

W2- knowledge of market trends

W3 – specialist and job-related knowledge

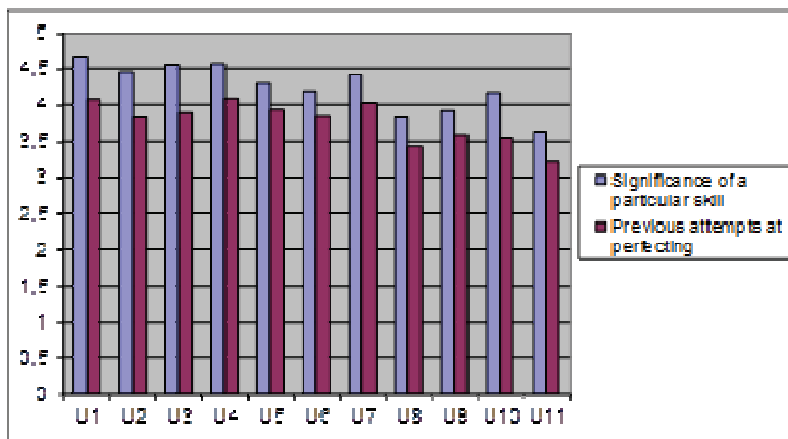
W4- knowledge of management methods and techniques

W5- knowledge of environment protection

Source: own study

A list of 11 skills was developed in order to evaluate skills fundamental for respondents from the point of view of their professional activities. Respondents were invited to indicate the possession of individual skills and assess the frequency they attempted perfecting these. All skills were evaluated as significant (average of 4,0 upwards). Project work (M=3,64, SDc = 0, 3,64) and leadership and exerting influence (M=3,83, SDc =0,806) were assessed the lowest.

Figure 2: Significance of various skills- self-assessment



Explanation:

U1- Workload management

U2- Coping with changes

U3- Coping with stress

U4 – Self-development management

U5 – Interpersonal communication

Source: own study

U6- Conflict solving

U7 – Cooperation/ team-work

U8- Leadership/ exerting influence

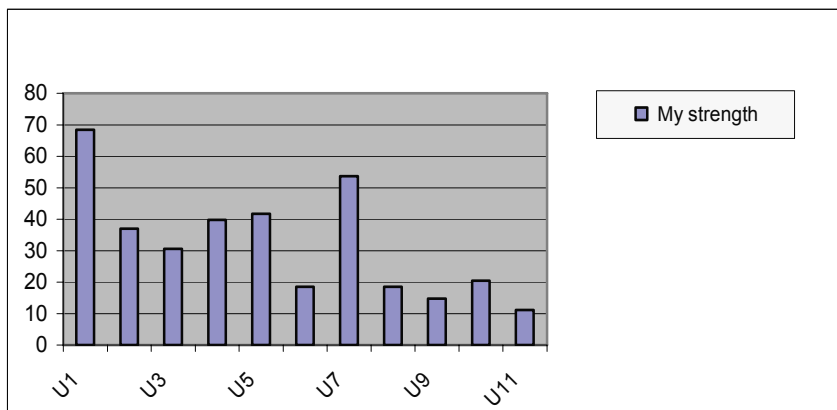
U9 – Application of novel ICT

U10- Foreign languages skills

U11- Project work skills

All of the skills were evaluated as significant and all of these have undergone perfecting. The greatest gap between the significance of the skill and attempts at its improvement can be seen in foreign languages skills. In addition, the gap is also visible in coping with stress and coping with changes skills. Study results reveal that, in respondents' opinion, each of the 11 skills requires improvement. Moreover, respondents are of the opinion that improvements which have already been made are insufficient. The need for further improvements can also be inferred from the analysis of respondents' opinions regarding their strengths in the area of skills.

Figure 3: Skills considered as strengths



Explanation:

U1- Workload management

U2- Coping with changes

U3- Coping with stress

U4 – Self-development management

U5 – Interpersonal communication

U6- Conflict solving

Source: own study

U7 – Cooperation/ team-work

U8- Leadership/ exerting influence

U9 – Application of ICT

U10- Foreign languages skills

U11- Project work skills

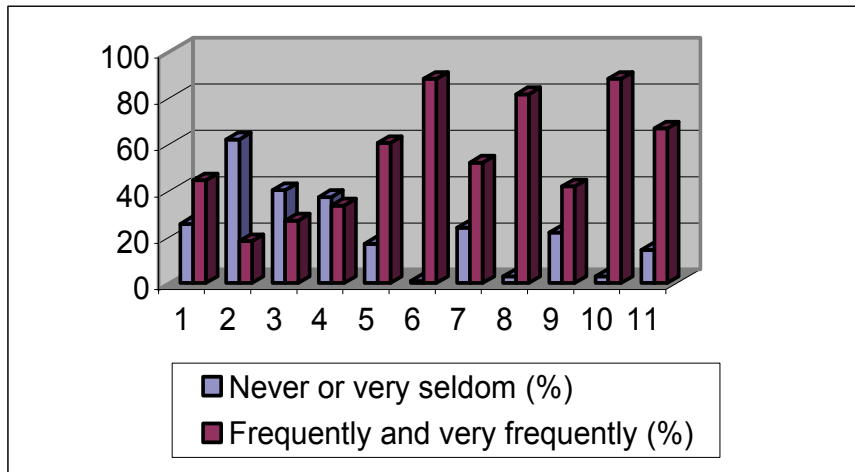
The majority of respondents (68,5%) indicated workload management as their core strength. Cooperation/ team-work were indicated by 53,7% and interpersonal communication skills by 41,7% of respondents. Project work skills were indicated by mere 11%. In addition, the fact that only 14,8% of respondents selected application of ICT as their strength seems puzzling. The fact is even more surprising when we realize that respondents represented the children of the Internet, smartphone and tablet era. This may have arisen from the fact that respondents might have decided that such application is associated with e.g. programming skills.

At this point, contrasting respondents' self-assessment with employers' opinions may be beneficial. Employers frequently indicated that the Y's lack interpersonal workload management skills. Respondents' self-assessment of these skills paints a dissimilar picture. The phenomenon may be explained by the fact that 25% of employers indicated the Y's lacked skills allowing them to properly assess their strengths and limitations.

In accordance with Polish studies, only 14% of Poles in 2013 were involved in some form of education and expressed the willingness to continue their studies or trainings. In addition, 21% of respondents did not express the intention to undertake or continue their education and 8% expressed the intention despite not being involved in any trainings. However, the majority of respondents (57%) had not undertaken education or trainings in the previous year and did not intend to do so in the nearest future.

The present study featured university students, which automatically makes them members of the active pursuers of education group. In addition, all respondents indicated additional forms of improvement they applied. 88% of respondents indicated learning while working and use of the Internet as the most frequently utilized forms of improvement. Moreover, 81,4% improved by observing their surroundings. Respondents rarely declared improvement with the assistance of a mentor or coach (62%). Moreover, 40% of them declared they very rarely or never use information originating from the career path in the organization.

Figure 4: The most and least frequently used means of improvement (%)



Explanation:

1. workshops, trainings
2. coaching, mentoring
3. information originating from periodic performance appraisal
4. career path in the organisation
5. assistance of the superior and colleagues
6. learning while working
7. experiences related to job changes
8. observation of the surroundings
9. reading literature
10. internet
11. information originating from people outside the work circle

Source: own study

Young people depend chiefly on their direct superior when improvement of professional competencies is considered ($M=4,30$, $SDc=,837$). Moreover, they see their own responsibility for the organization ($M=2,66$, $SDc =1,251$) and the improvement of their competencies ($M=2,92$, $SDc =1,234$) as less significant.

While attempting the evaluation of the overall employees' competencies' potential by assessing its individual elements, questions regarding the preferred values arose. Values are a reference point for choices and decisions made. Therefore, they constitute a source of attitudes, norms and behaviours. In accordance with the above, actions of an individual are motivated by the person's free will and freedom [Schwartz, 2006, Meglino, Ravlin, 1998; Olson et al., 1996]. Consequently, values define which needs are to be fulfilled and the order it is done in. They influence the selection of objectives and means of achieving these. Therefore, values heavily influence an individual's life plans. In addition, values direct aspirations, set actions in motion, influence the assessment of self and one's own actions. By doing so, they decide on satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an individual's achievements and develop a system for expressing a person's cohesion as regards time and situation. Moreover, values exert considerable influence upon the organisation's decision making processes, selection of actions to invest time and energy in [Jin, Drozdenko, 2010; Posner, 2010]. Therefore, they influence the level of commitment and employees' achievements.

Respondents were invited to indicate which of the 18 values were important and most important to them. A values' hierarchy was developed on the basis of the selection. It is noteworthy that professional values (income, authority, independence, achievement, work-life balance, responsibility) were selected less frequently than general values. Respondents indicated honest life, health and family happiness as the most important ones. A table detailing respondents' selections is presented below.

Table 1: Respondents' values hierarchy

Honest life	83,3% (important or the most important)
Health	79,6% (important or the most important)
Family happiness	79,6% (important or the most important)
Security	51,9% (important or the most important)
Work-life balance	46,3% (important or the most important)
Integrity	45,4% (important or the most important)
Respect of others	38,0% (important or the most important)
Peacefulness	37,0% (important or the most important)
Responsibility	31,5% (important or the most important)
Income	31,5% (important or the most important)
Good relations with colleagues	28,7% (important or the most important)
Achievements	26,9% (important or the most important)
Intellectual stimulation	20,4% (important or the most important)
Independence	19,4% (important or the most important)
Tolerance	18,5% (important or the most important)
Adventurousness	17,6% (important or the most important)
Natural environment	8,3% (important or the most important)
Authority	8,3% (important or the most important)

Source: own study

Results of a worldwide study of employees' commitment carried out by Aon Hewitt (Święcicka, 2014) indicated that the Millennials express the lowest level of commitment (56%) when compared with the Baby Boomers (66%) and the Generation X (60%). In order to be able to benchmark the Polish study of the Generation Y, a scale allowing to determine the level of respondents' commitment was developed.

Schaufeli's (Schaufeli et al. 2002) theories served as the theoretical basis for the development of the commitment's level evaluation scale. Schaufeli's approach defines commitment as a total of three elements: vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor is understood as experiencing high level of energy and psychological endurance at work. It is also associated with the will to work despite problems and obstacles. Dedication denotes enthusiastic work and experiencing its significance and pride of the opportunity to carry it out. Absorption is associated with the feeling of total focus and deep involvement in work which can be coupled with an unnatural feeling of swift flow of time. It is noteworthy that commitment in such understanding is seen as a particular cognitive state rather than an attitude or an employee's beliefs.

In order to carry out commitment's assessment, Halbesleben (2003) defines commitment as the opposite of professional burnout. Falcone (2006) states: "engagement is a state of emotional and intellectual commitment to an organization or a group. An engaged employee is fully involved in his work and is enthusiastic about it."

In Falcone's understanding of the term, commitment is defined as employee engagement. In addition, terms job involvement and commitment to an organization, which are featured in the literature of the subject, were also taken into account. Some researchers treat these terms as interchangeable (Falcone, 2006, McCashland, 1999, Miles, 2001, Harter et al., 2002), others see them as completely different (Kahn, 1990). A common element for all the definitions of commitment is the fact that the term entails a release of energy which enables the employee to excel at work. It is noteworthy that this occurs from within the employee. The energy release is not a short-lived impulse but its influence can be felt for a period of time.

In addition, Kahn differentiates between commitment and intrinsic motivation to work.

Respondents, young Polish employees, exhibit low level of commitment: employee engagement- $M=3,59$, $SDc = 1,136$, commitment to organization $M=3,4$, $SDc =0.853$, job involved $M= 3,48$ $SDc =1,223$. Such approach may be due to the fact that they perceive their current workplaces as temporary and ones likely to change upon their graduation. Low level of commitment is coupled with

low level of work satisfaction, which may be the reason behind the commitment level. Satisfaction is understood as “the level of positive or negative disposition occurring in the course of activities carried out in particular social and physical environments” (Gros 2003, p. 115). Studies in the field of psychology and management frequently associate satisfaction with behaviours expected from employees. Results of empirical studies in this regard are inconclusive, thus it is difficult to indicate the character, direction or intensity of interrelations. However, it can be inferred that a satisfied employee is also more efficient and committed. On the other hand, whether it is the employee’s satisfaction enabling him/her to work better or the fact that the satisfaction originates from the employee’s productivity remains to be determined. It is certain, however, that the greater the satisfaction the more likely the employee is to exhibit pro-community behaviour in the organisation. The table below depicts the self-assessment level regarding 4 work aspects which may be considered as elements composing work satisfaction.

Table 2: Work satisfaction

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Physical conditions of work	106	1	5	3,70	1,016
Economic aspects of work	106	1	5	3,12	1,144
Interpersonal relations	106	1	5	3,85	,944
Activities and tasks	106	1	5	3,49	,959

Source: own study

5. CONCLUSION

Generation gap constitutes an attractive and popular subject. Numerous studies pertaining to characteristics of various generations and the way social functioning is influenced by these have been elaborated. However, the fact that majority of these studies are not based on reliable research and data, but formed as a consequence of observations and generalizations is noteworthy. Undeniably, defining the significant differences between generations and whether these influence one’s functioning in a workplace would be interesting from a cognitive point of view. Results of the present study constitute an element of a broader research project whose objective is the identification of generation gap’s differences as regards competence potential. The authors of the study expect to formulate recommendations for human resources management in diversified organizations on the basis of the project.

Making conclusions on the basis of the presented results may meet two limitations: size of the sample and its representativeness. The sample was relatively small (106 respondents) and was not representative. As a consequence, results can only be interpreted in the context of this particular sample.

Respondents carried out self-assessment of knowledge and skills fundamental from the professional activities’ point of view. In addition, they indicated means of perfecting the competencies, evaluated the level of their commitment/ motivation, health/ mood, satisfaction with work and selected preferred values.

Concluding, shortage of competencies indicated by employers is not reflected in respondents’ self-assessment. Respondents constantly strive to improve their skills and supplement knowledge. However, the low level of commitment coupled with low work satisfaction may be a cause for concern. As a consequence, further in-depth research in the field is required.

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