Generational Differences In Attitudes Towards Work And Career: A Systematic Literature Review On The Preferences Of Generations X, Y And Z

Olivier Fuchs

CBS International Business School, Bahnstrasse, Germany

Leonard Fuchs

Rheinische Hochschule Koeln, Schaevenstr, Germany

Emma Lorenz

Technische Hochschule Koeln, Claudiusstr, Germany

Abstract: This article aims to delve into and analyse the generational differences in attitudes towards work and career as well as expectations and preferences around the workplace, with a focus on Generation X, Generation Y (millennials), and Generation Z (centennials). It explores the evolving dynamics of the workforce landscape and discusses the implications of both technology changes and the findings from the sources used for this article for organizations and HR practices. For this, it uses the approach of a systematic literature research (SLR), using recognised databases for academic sources on work attitudes, values and preferences around career and workplace of different generations, then filtering the findings according to best practices for SLRs. By examining a diverse range of sources by generation it provides insights into how each of these generations perceives work, related values, personal development and advancement. Looking first into work-related values and attitudes, this research discusses generation-related aspects and presents a comparative overview by generation, then looks into the different expectations and preferences around the work environment and career opportunities, structured by the most important topics as identified and culminating in a tabular synopsis of the main priorities by generation. This is followed by a presentation of the recommendations for HR practices and management as contained in the sources. The study sheds light on challenges and opportunities stemming from distinct generational perspectives. It also shows, however, that current research on these differences is sometimes contradictory and that culture and other factors play an equally important role, putting into perspective how companies can understand mixed workforces and the new entrants in order to attract and retain talent. As organizations strive to build inclusive and effective teams, the results may serve as an indicator, but it is also important to understand the caveats stemming from this research and the increasing importance of psychological contracts.

Keywords: Generational differences, work attitudes, career expectations, workplace design, flexible work, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Millennials, Generation Z, Systematic literature review

I. INTRODUCTION

As the workforce comprises individuals from different generations, it is crucial to understand the unique attitudes towards work and career that each generation holds. The purpose of this article is to synthesize and analyse existing literature on generational differences in work-related values, attitudes and career expectations. Starting with discussing the parent generation of Baby Boomers, now about to leave the world of labour, the focus will lie on Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, a mix of which form most of todays' workforces and with a growing population of the newest generation, already forming over 20% of the total and expected to lead to a "youth bubble" (Bhalla, Tiwari, & Chowdhary, 2021).

Understanding and managing this mix as well as the new entrants into the labour market is widely held to be a major management challenge, also because of the gap between expectations and what organisations can offer (Maioli, 2017) and the rapid changes in the work environment, and also the changes in ways to communicate and learn (Berkup, 2014; Dwyer & Azevedo, 2016). By examining various academic sources, this paper therefore aims to elucidate the varying perspectives each generation brings to the workplace and to uncover the work values and attitudes as well as the evolving career aspirations and workplace requirements of each generation. This allows to discuss the implications of these differences for employers, HR professionals, and organizations. Demographic developments thus make employers face an employee-dominated market in which a better understanding of these implications may lead to an advantage in the "war for talent" (Skýpalová, Stojanová, Troger, & Caha, 2023).

However, while many sources find generational differences to be marked and stable (Garg & Mahipalan, 2023; McCrindle, 2018) and generation Z again markedly different from the one before (e.g. Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2009; Pichler, Kohli, & Granitz, 2021; Zhong, Zhang, Wei, & Chang, 2024), sources differ on where these differences lie, and some even challenge the concept of generational differences at all or believe other factors such as culture to be more important. On top of that, increased flexibility, a topic much discussed around generational differences in expectations around workplace design, also became part of normality, not least through COVID-19 (Atti et al., 2022). This research will therefore examine where sources tend to agree, where they do not and which additional factors need to be taken into account when attempting to understand the expectations of todays' mixed workforce.

After presenting the methodological approach, we present work-related values and work attitudes of the different generations and establish a comparative table. The study then presents and discusses the ensuing generational differences in expectations on career and the design of the work environment, leading to a discussion on implications for employers.

II.   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The aim of this study is to compare work attitudes, values, the approach to careers and preferences around the workplace of different generations. When looking at this, the currently most common definitions, described in detail in the following section, will be used. As the "baby boomer" (born before 1965) generation is about to leave the labour market and the current workplace has largely been shaped by generations X and Y (Mangelsdorf, 2015), understanding the development until now as well as the aspirations and values of the newest generation on the labour market, the post-1996 generation Z, is likely to be beneficial to both the HR practices in companies and the management.

This study's purpose was served by a systematic literature review (SLR), the aim of which is to understand where current research stands and what can be learned from it (Briner &

Denyer, 2012; Feak & Swales, 2009). This includes identifying areas requiring further research. The approach was designed following recommendations from several sources on SLR conduction (Fink, 2019; Fisch & Block, 2018; Guba, 2008; Ridley, 2012). Using the web scraping tool Octoparse and excluding the amply available but not necessarily high-quality grey literature sources, the authors independently screened websites of major academic publishers such as Scopus, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, the Web of Science and Researchgate, followed by an additional, manual research where sources could not be accessed by the tool (mainly because of paywalls). The reference lists from the search results were also used for further investigation. The keywords used were the aspects named in the title by generation, using the "AND" command, e.g. "Workplace preferences" AND "generation X", also using similar wording like "workplace expectations" or "workplace design".

With some caution against an overly restrictive selection of the available literature (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), more than half of the results were excluded and about 130 publications retained. About 20% of the total were double hits, out of the remainder, articles were excluded on the basis of a number of criteria, the most prominent of which having been too strong a focus on specific regions or industries. We had the impression that many of these articles addressed very specific cultural aspects which did not allow generalisation but did not address this limitation clearly. Where we felt otherwise, we retained the studies for further use, also in order to be able to assess the importance of cultural differences in the context of this study. We also focused on articles which, when dealing with one specific generation, were contemporary with it. Finally, we tried to assess the quality of the results. We believe that the choice of databases screened and the focus on academic publications was already ensuring a high level of quality, but also looked at the number of citations, according higher value to citations in high-impact journals.

III.   THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, THEIR WORK-RELATED VALUES AND WORK ATTITUDES

It is important in a SLR to start with a clear description of the objects under study (Waigandt & Lothringer, 2011). We will thus start with a definition of the generations since World War II, including some general information on typical attitudes and values according to the literature. It is important to note that most current organisations have workforces comprising all four of the generations as currently defined in most sources, adding its specific expectations and demeanour (Rathi & Kumar, 2023), with characteristics which can be quite distinct, as can be communication styles and means (Chareewan, Grunhagen, Pološki Vokić, & Dlačić, 2020; Coulter & Faulkner, 2014), together with an increase in individualism (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Assignment to a generation is based on the year of birth and is shaped by influences such as parents, peer group, media, economic and social events. Generations are people born within a similar environment and developing similarities, and a major factor in the change of the workplace is technology, from which also

derive special knowledge and skills. However, values and the design of personal and work life also show sometimes marked differences between generations (J. Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Thus a generation can show similar characteristics and behaviours and values, but the age boundaries are not rigid cut-off dates but fluid, and change comes gradually (W. K. Campbell, Campbell, Siedor, & Twenge, 2015; Hauke Holste, 2012; J. M. Twenge, 2010).

Most sources use the following names and dates for the four generations the labour market has seen since 1946: Baby boomers (born 1946-1964, sometimes 1960 is given (Rathi & Kumar, 2023)) defining their own identity through work, with little differentiation between job and "life" (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Generation X (born 1965-1980), on the other hand, prioritises promotions over salary increases, is relatively loyal to employers and "works to live" (Hauke Holste, 2012,p.21; Weerarathne et al., 2023), financing the more important side to life through working. People belonging to Generation Y, also called "millennials" (born 1981-1995), on the other hand, are said to be more ready to switch employers, would change employers for a pay rise or promotion and are challenging to engage (Singh, Chaudhuri, Sihag, & Shuck, 2023; Weerarathne et al., 2023). For this generation, work blends with life again, both temporally and spatially, but the two are still seen as being distinct, with a need to find a balance (Hauke Holste, 2012; Ruthus, 2014). Members of Generation Z (born 1996-2010 or 2012), sometimes also iGen or "centennials", do not seem to wish to work less or are any less interested in careers at work than earlier generations, rather, they want to be as free as possible to decide when and where to work (Maloni, Hiatt, & Campbell, 2019; Scholz, 2014).

However, not all research around generational differences finds the stereotypes to apply and many values are shared by all generations (e.g. Zaharee, Lipkie, Mehlman, & Neylon, 2018). This might be due to corporate or regional cultures overlaying generational specificities, or to the fact that they might simply not always exist (James Weber & Urick, 2023; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). Generations might also better be defined differently from what is used in this study in non-western cultures (Ghosh & Chaudhuri, 2009; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2024). Generational differences as the basis for recommendations for leadership is also challenged (Rudolph, Rauvola, & Zacher, 2018) and some findings around one generation might equally apply to others (e.g. Saxena, 2023; Yunos & Din, 2019). The following sections will therefore delve into the details of what has been found on different generational attitudes in order to understand on which aspects most sources agree and which remain contested.

On top of that, generations influence corporate cultures, but they are also influenced by it (Lyons & Kuron, 2014), and characteristics also vary along a generation's life cycle (Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015) or gender and even marital status (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023; Ueda & Ohzono, 2013). There are also differences amongst people in different professions (e.g. Hampton & Welsh, 2019), although this might be due to the fact that people with certain traits and values tend to choose their career paths in a way similar to people with the same values, such as for instance nurses or teachers. Thus, because of these many not generation-related

influencing factors the findings presented below will have to be taken with a pinch of salt.

A. BABY BOOMERS

While this generation is about to leave the world of employment, many aspects of the current workplace have been designed for and by it. It is therefore useful to include it in the examination of work-related values. Indeed, literature related to baby boomer values and preferences is rare, most sources define it as the starting point of comparing research and look at this generation in order to compare it to later ones (Gibson et al., 2009).

The 'baby boomer' generation got its name because of the significant increase in the birth rate after World War II which ended abruptly with the so-called pill bust abruptly ending this baby boom (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Boomers experienced both the late effects of the Second World War through behaviour of and narration by their parents as well as the times of economic recovery and strong economic growth (Hauke Holste, 2012). The moon landing, the women's movement and the Woodstock festival were formative events for this generation (Adams, 2000), and attitudes toward work differ from those of earlier generations (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998), even if some sources find differences fuzzy, especially with the following generation X (S. M. Campbell, Twenge, & Keith Campbell, 2017).

Members of the Boomers are characterised by a performance-oriented attitude, a search for permanence and a career orientation. They value justice, teamwork, discussions and a structured work style, but are sensitive to criticism. Nevertheless, they are willing to sacrifice and show a positive attitude towards work (Prawitasari, 2018; Ruthus, 2014). Baby boomers often show little balance between work, private and family life, as work is central to them. They show high work ethics and show a desire to pursue a successful career and meet societal expectations, although career advancement opportunities are less important than for later generations, possibly due to a comparably high level of loyalty to their employers (Gibson et al., 2009; Mencl & Lester, 2014). They also have an intrinsic motivation to produce high-quality work (Mangelsdorf, 2015; J. M. Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Furthermore, they accept authority and value job security, but may change jobs within the same sector or industry.

Baby boomers are competitive, eventually even workaholic, disciplined, loyal and quality-conscious (Gibson et al., 2009; Hauke Holste, 2012; Ruthus, 2014). They normally see hard work as a prerequisite for rewards and subordinate their own needs (Hesse, Mayer, Rose, & Fellinger, 2019). Boomers also seem to be good and thorough learners, going beyond the obvious and diligent and successful in knowledge application, thus compensating for shortcomings around dealing with new technology as compared to younger colleagues (Ransdell, Kent, Gaillard-Kenney, & Long, 2011).

B. GENERATION X

Members of Generation X were significantly influenced by events such as the fall of the iron curtain and the Chernobyl

accident as well as the start of globalisation (Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008; Mangelsdorf, 2015). Despite the protesters of 1968 having been Baby Boomers, it is the next generation who take the motivation of Hippies further and set themselves apart from previous generations and question traditional values such as marriage, work, faith and family. (Hauke Holste, 2012; J. M. Twenge, 2010; J. M. Twenge et al., 2010). There is less literature on generation X than on the following ones, but most sources see its members as independent, pragmatic and flexible, value flat hierarchies and a work-life balance at work. Generation X sees work as a means to an end and rejects authoritarian leadership. (Hauke Holste, 2012; Ruthus, 2014). Hard work is, however, considered necessary for them to lead a comfortable life (Hesse et al., 2019). although these characteristics may also vary with culture (James Weber & Urick, 2023).

Unsurprisingly, many of generation X values are similar to the ones of the generation before (Mencl & Lester, 2014; Stiglbauer, Penz, & Batinic, 2022), still endorsing social values such as making friends at work (S. M. Campbell et al., 2017) and less leisure oriented than following generations (J. M. Twenge et al., 2010), although more than Boomers, giving more importance to a balance between work and family (Gibson et al., 2009; Lee, Lim, Seo, & Kwak, 2022). This generation is the first to actively strive for work-life balance, a concept then taken further by the next generation (R. M. Fuchs, Morales, & Timana, 2022).

The work ethic of Generation X is characterised by creativity, pragmatism, independence and structure, but weaknesses such as scepticism, nagging and a lack of assertiveness are also apparent (Hauke Holste, 2012). People of this generation prefer direct communication and an inventive style, need concise information and do not value a formal style. Feedback and rewards are essential, freedom is more important than money or titles and social responsibility is valued in organisations (Kuron et al., 2015). Members of this generation value clarity and meaningful work, a fact they also like to reflect (Akar, 2020; Stiglbauer et al., 2022). They also seem to be more customer oriented than other generations and value fairness highly (Skýpalová et al., 2023).

C. GENERATION Y/MILLENNIALS

Generation Y (born 1981-1995) is the first generation grown up in an at least partially digitalised world (Ransdell et al., 2011). Formative moments were the advent of the information age and social media, the financial crisis of 2008/9 as well as the Iraq war and "war on terror" (Mangelsdorf, 2015; J. Weber, 2024). It is said to be tech-savvy, multitasking, inventive, tolerant, goal-oriented and self-confident, but also shows imbalance, volatility, addiction to feedback and a high intensity of care, even across cultures (N. Arora & Dhole, 2019; Egerova, Kutlák, & Eger, 2021; Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012; Ruthus, 2014; Suad & Al-Muscati, 2017). However, many sources see clear similarities between millennials and Generation X or even Boomers (S. M. Campbell et al., 2017). Many values such as liking to be involved in decision making or security and stability are shared (Mencl & Lester, 2014; Pasko, Maellaro, & Stodnick, 2021), and so are good work atmospheres where people are

being valued and treated fairly (Skýpalová et al., 2023). Values around sustainable organisational development and some basic needs are similar across all generations (Kristia, 2023; Stiglbauer et al., 2022) and generation Y also shares a penchant for flexibility with the later generation Z (Waworuntu, Kainde, & Mandagi, 2022).

Other results see marked differences, with for instance very strong importance accorded to social bonding at work, possibly due to a higher number of millennials having grown up as children of divorced parents (McCrindle, 2018). Work serves for self-fulfilment, (J. M. Twenge et al. (2010) even call them "Generation Me", an epithet which, however, Ransdell et al. (2011) reserve for generation Z). Generation X might on average have found more meaning in their jobs (Akar, 2020) and compared to them, generation Y needs more stimulation (Stiglbauer et al., 2022)

In addition, the power relationship between employer and employee has shifted in this generation in favour of the employee. Members of this generation also prefer a participative style of interaction and quick information retrieval via search engines (Yap & Badri, 2020). They accept authority only on merit and their style is informal (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós, & Juhász, 2016), also around communication (Cabell et al., 2022; Hafshah, Najmaei, Mansori, & Fuchs, 2022). Feedback is of great importance and should be available immediately. They seek fulfilling and challenging work, and being able to work with other talented and creative people is motivating (Yap & Badri, 2020).

Due to social and educational developments, Generation Y has a large amount of choices, which can lead to a lack of orientation and creates pressure to exhaust all possibilities (Ruthus, 2014). They are also influenced by social values emerging during their youth, e.g. social responsibility and economic and environmental sustainability (Jasrotia, Darda, & Pandey, 2023), although other studies find them to favour altruistic values less than Generation X (J. M. Twenge et al., 2010). Generation Y individuals are willing to work hard, but they also want their work to remain compatible with their personal needs and preferences and not to be subjected to corporate dictates (P. Arora & Arora, 2022). Indeed, being allowed to contribute to decision making increases job satisfaction more than job security (Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020). They strive for professional fulfilment and reject previous employer expectations such as constant availability. Individual needs are prioritised, however, as they age, stable values develop and become increasingly important (Kuron et al., 2015). Development prospects and management style with the potential employer are crucial for them (Hesse et al., 2019; Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Members of this generation also strive for a work-life balance and often mix their private and professional lives, being more independent, informal and fun-loving than their predecessors (Gibson et al., 2009; Lowe et al., 2008; Sruk, 2020). A management position is no longer the primary career goal and there is a demand for working hours to be adapted to personal needs. Job hopping might ensue (Holtschlag, Masuda, Reiche, & Morales, 2020). Generation Y prioritises life over work and considers career secondary, and they are also more difficult to motivate than earlier generations (Mahmoud, Reisel, Grigoriou, Fuxman, & Mohr, 2020). When

managing, they do it a less authoritarian and more social way than their predecessors. Generation Y demands flexible working hours so that there is enough time for family and friends (Hesse et al., 2019; Kuron et al., 2015; Ruthus, 2014), but this is also seen as typical for the next generation.

D. GENERATION Z/CENTENNIALS

Generation Z is the youngest generation in the labour market and already accounts for nearly a quarter of the population in Europe and the USA (Pichler et al., 2021; Randstad_Deutschland, 2021) and as much of the workforce by 2025, which leads to an ever growing amount of research around it (Pham et al., 2024). Although members share many characteristics with Generation Y (e.g. Bencsik et al., 2016), there seem to be differences. For instance, they have a higher level of education on average (Dolot, 2018), exhibit new behavioural patterns (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Mahmoud, Fuxman, Mohr, Reisel, & Grigoriou, 2021; Schroth, 2019) and develop new patterns in attitude and communication (Raslie & Ting, 2021). Formative moments were the financial crisis of 2008/9, the Arab Spring and the increased need of climate protection (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim, 2021; Mangelsdorf, 2015; J. Weber, 2024). Climate change and environmental protection needs, while not new topics and also important to earlier generations, are a topic which lead to increasingly green consumer behaviour which they also would like to see with their employers (Najmaei & Wach, 2024; Průša & Sadílek, 2019; Tsevreni, Proutsos, Tsevreni, & Tigkas, 2023).

Other important differences in personal experiences might be the increasing number of people growing up with separated parents and/or patchwork families (McCrindle, 2018) and increasingly protective parents (Schenarts, 2019) as well as less time spent outside and more on electronic devices, which might also lead to health issues (Setko, Bulycheva, & Setko, 2019). Together with the fact that through electronic communication they can limit their contacts to people with similar ways of thinking, a thinking which might not be reflected by reality, uncertainty and lack of direction may ensue (Peters & Grünewald, 2024).

Generation Z has less work experience than their predecessor generations when they enter the labour market. In 2002 in Germany for instance, 30% of 15-17 year olds already had a job or apprenticeship, while in 2018 this was only true for 19% of the new generation (Schroth, 2019). They are also still young, and results like the good balance between social and moral value as opposed to personal values and a more pronounced pro-social attitude compared to the one of their predecessors, wishing to make a contribution (Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017; J. Weber, 2024), may just be traits of adolescence.

Titko, Svirina, Skvarciany, and Shina (2020) find that the value system of members of generation Z over time "matures" towards professional development and other research shows them attaching higher value to cognitive and instrumental work values rather than altruistic ones (S. Arora, Dubay, & Vyas, 2020). There might also be gender differences: Silva and Carvalho (2021) see that social values import but women show higher work values in all dimensions. Values also depend on the type of job people chose or are working in:

nurses for instance placed higher import on altruism than on prestige (Hampton & Welsh, 2019), and cultural aspects also make generalisation difficult (de Boer, Bordoli, Dallmann, & Hengshen, 2021).

Generation Z individuals grew up during the most profound changes in digital technology ever, with virtual and physical worlds co-existing in many areas (Dolot, 2018). They are tech savvy and smart technology consumers who have high expectations and skills and could transform industries (Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Yunos & Din, 2019). On the downside, some find that they are more impatient than millennials when it comes to expecting feedback (Bhalla et al., 2021; Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Maioli, 2017), career management (Dolot, 2018; Skýpalová et al., 2023), lose concentration more quicky and may learn in a different and potentially slower way than older generations (Dolot, 2018; Holopainen & Suslova, 2019; McCrindle, 2018).

Leadership is important to generation Z, with a special emphasis on transformational leadership which is helping to build intrinsic motivation, in both online and physical work environments (O. Fuchs, 2023; Lee et al., 2022). Resonant leadership and the leaders' general behaviour provides stimulus, drives performance and is an important part of workplace attractiveness (Gaan & Shin, 2023). While not tolerant of authoritarian environments, members of this generation look for mentors (Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Mărginean, 2021; Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2024), eventually even with supervisors helping with personal matters (Waworuntu et al., 2022), which links into findings around families working less well than in earlier generations (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019; McCrindle, 2018). It remains open, however, how much these phenomena are cultural rather than generational traits.

Centennials are "digital natives" and are also called the "app generation" (Bhalla et al., 2021). Their open attitude towards digital technology is about to change the way people communicate in the workplace (Hidayat, Tjandra, & Herawati, 2023; Pichler et al., 2021; J. Twenge, 2023) or even work, e.g. through the use of new tools such as artificial intelligence (Chan & Lee, 2023). Unlike older generations, these individuals tend to socialise increasingly digitally: one study found that Generation Z communicates about 74% digitally and only 26% in person (Schroth, 2019). Social bonding remains important, however, and generation Z likes to work in teams (Chillakuri, 2020; Iorgulescu, 2016; Mărginean, 2021) and still values face-to-face communication (Shorey, Vyugina, Waechter, & Dolev, 2024). This generation can be effectively addressed by building emotional connections through multidimensional authentic content. Visual formats such as videos or images are more effective than pure text. In addition, guerrilla recruiting proves to be particularly successful with this target group (Mangelsdorf, 2015).

Generation Z employees also wish to take advantage of new technological potential for shaping the workplace, such as remote work (Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017), despite of the fact that this might impede communication and well-being (Atti et al., 2022). Interestingly, this generation seems to be aware of potentially negative aspects of technology through disruptive communication habits (Janssen & Carradini, 2021; Shorey et al., 2024) and the stressful implications of an

"always on" mentality (Atti et al., 2022), although they cope with such challenges much better than their predecessors (Cvenkel, 2020). However, digitalisation is motivating, especially when well prepared and introduced (Dziubek, Fuchs, & Schwarz, 2022), and social media use and policies are important with them (Zhong et al., 2024). They embrace virtual teamwork and find social media content and influencer opinion important (Bhalla et al., 2021).

Members of the centennials are found to be very individualistic but also to embrace diversity (Pichler et al., 2021): Generation Z puts more emphasis on issues such as diversity, equality and inclusion than previous generations (Bhalla et al., 2021), and equality for all people and fair treatment of all is a high priority for 91% of its members. The quality of an employer is thus not only judged by its products, but also by its ethics and social impact. For this and other reasons, Generation Z employees are seen as less loyal than earlier generations (Schroth, 2019). However, while some might be job hoppers, loyalty and performance increase with job satisfaction (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020) and the lack of loyalty in this generation is also challenged by results such as that 39% of respondents stating that working lifelong for just one company is attractive (Dolot, 2018). In addition to that, such tendencies can change: millennial loyalty was also challenged but perceived disloyalty was then seen to decrease over time (Holtschlag et al., 2020).

Long term orientation still exists and is important (Schenarts, 2019), but employer branding makes a difference. Money and career and personal development rank high , but so does meaningful work (Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Chillakuri, 2020) and company social responsibility and reputation attract as much as workplace design and career opportunities (Lukić & Lazarević, 2023; Vieira, Gomes da Costa, & Santos, 2024). However, despite a preference for relaxed environments, centennials are a comparatively security-minded generation (Solina, Shatnawi, Ocampo, Martinez, & Garcia, 2024), so achievement orientation, stability and job security as well as a "fair" or even generous compensation still matter (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019; Iorgulescu, 2016; Mărginean, 2021).

Generation Z would like to "make a difference" (Grace & Seemiller, 2024). On the other hand, centennials demands more flexibility and freedom from their employer as well as a clear separation of work and leisure. They strive to be able to work from anywhere and place great value on transparency (Chillakuri, 2020; Scholz, 2014; Solina et al., 2024; Vieira et al., 2024). This leads to an increased demand for remote and flexible work in order to achieve a good work-life balance (e.g. Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Janssen & Carradini, 2021) and shapes expectations on career and work environment, of which more in the following section. Before, however, we present a final comparison on the findings on work values and attributes of the different generations.

E. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Striving for a meaningful presentation of an overview of the results on work values, we aim to present what most sources agree upon. Some contradictory results have been mentioned above, but we believe it was possible to establish this overview, similar to earlier summaries (e.g. Berkup, 2014;

Gibson et al., 2009; Lowe et al., 2008; McCrindle, 2018; Ruthus, 2014; J. Weber, 2024). The result is a table of formative situations and events and work values and attitudes for the four generations under examination.

A word of caution is appropriate, however: as discussed above, despite the fact that significant differences can be found (Kwiecińska, Grzesik, Siewierska-Chmaj, & Popielska-Borys, 2023; Mahmoud, Berman, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2023), these findings can only illustrate tendencies and similarities between the generations may predominate (Cucina, Byle, Martin, Peyton, & Gast, 2018; Garg & Mahipalan, 2023). Gibson et al. (2009) for instance found very similar main values for Boomers and generations X and Y, such as family security, health, honesty and responsibility, and even loyalty did not lose much importance. While some studies take their results as face value, most acknowledge that attitudes and expectations observed also may depend on other factors than just the generation, up to different personal experiences (Cabell et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2008), and there may also be gender related differences (Kaifi et al., 2012; Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020) as well as the cultural ones already mentioned.

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y, Millennials	Generation Z
Born	1946-1964	1965-1979/80	1980/81-1995	1996-2010/12
Formative events	Woodstock, moon landing, women's liberation, post-war rebuilding	Cold war, 1970es oil crisis, advent of mass media, AIDS, fall of the iron curtain, globalisation	The information age, the internet and search engines/Google, social media, Iraq war and "war on terror", 2008/9 financial crisis, inflation	Increased globalisation, global warming, climate issues, Arab spring, Ukraine War, terrorism and the formation of new "iron curtains"
General characteristics and values	Idealistic, conscious of status, demanding, interested in self-determination, quality conscious, balance risk and security, value justice and discipline	More critical and less loyal than "boomers" but career oriented and motivated by material gain. Many similar traits but increasingly individualistic, rational and pragmatic	Value openness and tolerance, adaptive and open to change and technology, mobile, flexible and productive, yet demanding. High-maintenance employees to whom social bonding is important	Social and moral values are important, but so is personal well-being. Worried about climate change and increasingly "green" in habits and decisions. Embrace diversity. Security conscious
Main technological innovation	PC, Video recorders	Mobile phone, Walkman, CDs	iPod, Smartphone, Google, social media, DVD and Blue Ray	Artificial intelligence, entertainment on demand (Spotify, Netflix, ..)
Socialisation	Scarcity, post-war build-up	Prosperity, caring parents	"Latchkey" kids, information overflow, increasing number of nonstandard environments	World at their fingertips, even more nonstandard families, much time online and so less time outside and with sports
Stage of (work) life	The last of this generation start preparing to leave the world of employment. Dependent on the individual but on average they feel ageing effects but are still willing and able to work. Conscient of the value of experience	Between the fullness of working life and starting to think about retirement. Self-confident and productive	In the middle of their working life, having achieved success but still see a large part of their career before them and willing to invest in it. See many choices	In the early days of their careers or just starting (yet, already about 25% of the workforce)
Importance of work	Work is part of life, part of an individual's identity, high work ethics	The first generation to talk about work-life balance. Work to live	Able to mix private and business life seamlessly. Self-fulfilment is important and living becomes more important than working	Want work to fit seamlessly into their private life without dominating it. Happy to sacrifice income for quality of life
Loyalty	Workaholics, career oriented, like permanent arrangements	Loyal if motivated, more changing of jobs, however. OK if considered necessary. Entrepreneurial	Job security loses, flexibility and self-fulfilment gain in importance. Distrust company structures. Entrepreneurial. Job changes are expected	Apparently better than purported by many sources, happy to stay with employers providing to their needs. Employer branding is also important
Career management	Used to strongly regulated advancement with only little training an support provided. Competitive, however	Like flexible careers and choice. Strive for regular promotion, career management is part of work	Quick changes possible, more short-term orientation. Promotion and status remain important, but careers are more of an opportunity than a must. Willing to take risks	Content and purposeful working as well as work-life balance and flexibility are more important than careers, without, however, making advancement unattractive
Attitude towards authority and decision making	Question authority but accept it when good reasons given, accept rules, albeit less readily than prior generations	More sceptical than their parents but not questioning the need for leadership or leaders	Accept authority if it has earned their respect. Dislike bureaucracy. Like working in teams	While potentially rebellious, accept and sometimes look for authority in an increasingly VUCA world. Want to contribute, expect transparency and also like teamwork
Leadership and professional development	Leading comes with experience and age	Flexible and ardent learners, embrace informal structures but expect clear communication and leadership	Like training with fun but expect companies to provide development opportunities. Accept being led but like and provide a social type of leadership	Good leaders motivate them. Do not like authority but are looking for mentors. Need constant stimulation. Unclear as of yet how they lead
Feedback and incentives	Do not value feedback highly, sometimes may experience it as a disturbance. Prefer income and promotion/status	Actively demanding feedback, salary and status are still important but individual freedom and license to design the workspace for oneself becomes important. Fairness-oriented	Expect frequent if not constant feedback, look for overall job satisfaction and challenging tasks. Meaningful work and status through (creative) achievement are important	Ambiguous attitude towards feedback, which however they are impatient to receive. Want "fair" compensation supporting their lifestyle, especially motivated by flexible workplace designs and working hours

Table 1: Overview of generation-related aspects relating to work values and attitudes

IV. GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN EXPECTATIONS ON CAREER AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Within the context of the reservations discussed above, each generation brings distinct perspectives to the workplace, shaped by historical events, technological advancements, and societal changes. These also translate into expectations around the meaning and the shape of the working life. While important from generation X on, the focus of many sources increasingly lies on aspects around flexibility and a good balance between income, private and professional life. Before looking into generational differences in detail, there is, however, the need to take a closer look at what aspects of flexibility there are and how work-life balance may be defined.

A. THE CONCEPTS OF FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

When flexibility in the work environment is addressed, most sources treat the aspects of flexible working times and a choice of location as free as possible. Frequently, there are no further definitions, allowing for interpretation of what the authors and their sources of data meant specifically. This cannot be clarified ex-post, but it when investigating this topic, it is important to note that flexibility is not the same for everyone and can take numerous forms. While choice of location is clearly part of the "flexible" (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021; Itam & Warrier, 2023), remote and hybrid work for instance can be shaped differently, even within one company (Y. Bal & Bulgur, 2023). Time related flexibility can also mean flexibility within an employment contract or flexibly designed contractual arrangements (Spurk & Straub, 2020). How exactly flexibility around time and location looks has therefore to be determined for every case under investigation and differences between employees' and employers' views need to be understood.

While there is ample discussion on time and location, content in the sense of job enrichment or free choice of topics has been treated at best cursorily in most sources on generational differences. However, it has its place in discussions around the future of work such as "New Work" (Bergmann, 2019), and content is an important aspect and prone to show generational differences, for instance around the issue of how sustainably a company acts or how interesting tasks are (Lukić & Lazarević, 2023; Stiglbauer et al., 2022). One may infer from this, that diversity, change or a wide variety of tasks form part of workplace flexibility. The triangle of workplace flexibility which needs to be managed thus looks as follows:
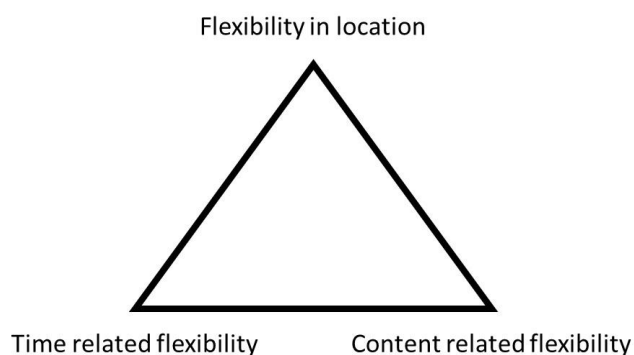

Figure 1: The triangle of workplace flexibility

Flexibility might be asked for, but it is not necessarily beneficial to employees (e.g. Kim, Park, An, Yun, & Yoon, 2023; Kortsch, Rehwaldt, Schwake, & Licari, 2022; Peijen & Gerards, 2023) nor are the effects on motivation and performance always clear (Curzi, Fabbri, & Pistoresi, 2020; Dziubek et al., 2022; Santiawaty & Erawanto, 2022). The "always on"-mentality associated with working from home, for instance, may lead to stress (Atti et al., 2022), and the potential drawbacks of extensive electronic communication also need to be managed (Bailenson, 2021).

This links into the topic of Work-Life balance which also needs to be examined further. Addressing this issue mostly implies that managing a potentially stressful job and ensuring

sufficient quality time for family or friends is challenging (Chen, Liu, Chen, & Zeng, 2024). It is supposed to support employees in splitting their time and energy between work and the other aspects of their lives they deem essential. This may include community participation, personal growth and a multitude of personal activities. Employers are supposed to institute processes and policies as well as a culture which supports employees in managing to achieve their personal balance (Heathfield, 2019).

What a good balance is may be a matter of perception rather than a system of time allocation (Haar, 2013). Next to age or generation, gender, the number of household members, marital status, education and even length of tenure with the present employer influence how the personal situation is being assessed (Bogićević-Milikić, Aleksić Mirić, & Janicijevic, 2023; Franken et al., 2023). Depending on personal expectations, which in part seem to be generational, the aspects of flexibility discussed above are supposed to contribute to achieving the desired work-life balance, bearing in mind that, as discussed, being able to work remotely does not necessarily help, let alone create happiness (Rehwaldt & Kortsch, 2022).

B. EXPECTATIONS PRESENTED AROUND THE CONCEPT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

Especially around the description of expectations of members of generation Z, the employee-employer relationship is increasingly described with relation to the concept of the psychological contract, and more specifically the changes related to the digital era which influences expectations (Coetzee & Deas, 2021). A psychological contract means an unwritten, intangible agreement between an employee and their employer, encompassing expectations and understandings as well as informal commitments defining their relationship in addition to any written agreements that make up their relationship (Rousseau, 1989). As long as employees experience their psychological contract as equally balanced, they tend to perform at least according to employers' expectations. If, however, employees believe that there is a breach in their psychological contract and their expectations of fairness are not met, they may feel under-appreciated and demotivated (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim, 2021; Seemiller & Grace, 2017), an occurrence of which employers might even be unaware of. Employees may tend to „redress the balance" through reduced commitment if they believe employers not to have fulfilled their part in the exchange process (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000).

Expectations vary amongst generations, and expectations are defined by formative elements (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim, 2021). For instance, Boomers and generation X may be more motivated by the social atmosphere in their work environment, whereas Generation Y is more motivated by job content and career opportunities. It seems that fair organisational policies are particularly important to generation X, and providing rewards seems mostly unrelated to work outcomes (Lub, Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2015). This appears to change with generation Y and Z, as does the overall importance of the psychological contract. Generation Z seems more prone to being demotivated by what they perceive as

imbalances and, as employers mostly belong to a different generation, they need to put effort into understanding their young workforces' interpretation of the psychological contract in order to stay attractive (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim, 2021). This can encompass a wide variety of typical expectations, from generation Z preferences for a more sustainable approach to business in general (Jasrotia et al., 2023; Kristia, 2023; Najmaei & Wach, 2024) to very specific workplace related preferences such as for employers making sure to always use the latest technologies (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). The expectations of digital natives, however, are not obvious and might be misinterpreted, especially as earlier generations interpret certain aspects of workplace design differently (Deas, 2021; Pasko et al., 2021).

C. CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND WORKPLACE PREFERENCES

This section presents the findings on expectations around career and workplace structured by topics several sources on which have been found and the sources used found generational differences. It then closes with what seems to be the main priorities of generations X to Z. Baby Boomers, being 60 years or older, while still willing and able to learn (Ransdell et al., 2011) seem to have arranged themselves with their situation and do not expect their careers to change much anymore (Bhalla et al., 2021; Zaharee et al., 2018).

a. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER GOALS

Generational differences extend to career aspirations. Generation X values stability, long-term relationships with employers, and steady advancement opportunities (Akar, 2020; Bennett, Pitt, & Price, 2012; Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020), but also places emphasis on work-life balance and personal fulfilment (Adams, 2000). Despite the focus on topics such as flexibility, a classic career with advancement and promotion paired with praise, increased status and compensation remains at least one of the main motivators throughout the generations (de Boer et al., 2021; Pasko et al., 2021; Zaharee et al., 2018). The question of decreasing loyalty towards employers has been raised (e.g. Schroth, 2019), but also challenged (Dolot, 2018) and it has yet to be proven that this phenomenon exists at all.

Some find differences, e.g. career advancement opportunities being most strongly valued by generation Y (Mencl & Lester, 2014) or more by generations Y and Z than by earlier generations (Stiglbauer et al., 2022), but overall differences are fuzzy and career is also important for generation Z (Lukić & Lazarević, 2023). They also expect clear career plans (Maioli, 2017), and Dolot (2018) argues that generation Z would like to achieve their goals with no effort and that it is difficult for them to face the vision of long-lasting professional career development by means of small steps, but this might also be related to the young age of the people under scrutiny. The fact remains that career opportunities are important to all, and are closely correlated with intention to stay (Handayani & Herwany, 2019).

Generation X appears to be more likely to work for larger companies or found their own businesses (S. M. Campbell et al., 2017), but the underlying goals remain similar for all. For millennials, professional development opportunities ranked amongst the three most important criteria for job attractiveness (Lowe et al., 2008; Throckmorton & Gravett, 2007), and around this topic as well, it is found that the latest generation in the workplace agrees (Stiglbauer et al., 2022). At least around this, generational differences may thus have been exaggerated (Zaharee et al., 2018).

b. MANAGEMENT STYLE AND FEEDBACK

Generation X accepts classic forms of management and value reliability and clarity more than other stimulation. Millennials are seen as more challenging to motivate and lead (Mahmoud et al., 2020), but quality leadership and management is important to all (Zaharee et al., 2018) and generations X and Y seem to respond best to transformational forms of leadership (Lee et al., 2022). Both the generations Y and Z value feedback more highly than their predecessors, ideally immediate (Bhalla et al., 2021; Maioli, 2017), and wish for transparent methods of communication and management (Dolot, 2018; Egerová, Komárková, & Kutlák, 2021; Lowe et al., 2008). They value not only the feedback but also close supervision (Bulut & Maraba, 2021), but millennials especially also value having a say in their employers decisions (Pasko et al., 2021). On the other hand, generation Z also seems to like a clear setting of tasks presented crisply (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019), and even accepts – and uses – leading via digital communication, provided it is clear (Hidayat et al., 2023).

Generation Y wishes for supportive and available supervisors (Waworuntu et al., 2022) and the relationship with their managers is key to the level of engagement of millennials (Lowe et al., 2008), Generation Z, however, seem to like to be even closer to their supervisors, also including personal matters into the communication (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Overall, the challenge for managers, especially regarding the time to be spent with individual employees, appears to increase with the generations.

c. FINANCIAL REWARDS

Extrinsic values such as a high salary may have peaked with generation X but stays strong throughout (J. Twenge, 2023; Vieira et al., 2024). Some sources find other aspects rating higher than salary, e.g. job security or praise (Pasko et al., 2021), but most see it on top of what makes a job attractive, such as Lowe et al. (2008), J. M. Twenge (2010) and P. Arora and Arora (2022) for generation Y. While there are results suggesting that it does not come on top of the criteria for generation Z (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019), it does for many other studies, up to the point where sources disagree with the finding that money was most important for generation X and see the latest generations value it even more (Stiglbauer et al., 2022).

However, all generations look for an attractive compensation package, they just shape it differently, (Cvenkel, 2020; Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020; Pasko et al.,

2021). On the other hand, these differences can also be attributed to culture, situation in life or hierarchy level attained. Labour agreements become less important (P. Bal & Doci, 2018), and while they include a number of benefits beyond salary there are many not covered by such agreements. A challenge for companies might be that rewards beyond salary and standard packages, e.g. special healthcare benefits, gain in importance in the eyes of the (potential) workforce (Cvenkel, 2020; Zaharee et al., 2018), which in turn might increase the cost of personnel administration.

d. WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY

A good work–life balance was shown to have a significant relationship with intrinsic motivation for all generations (Lee et al., 2022), with generation X focusing on having enough time for the family (Gibson et al., 2009) and the later ones increasingly looking for flexibility, and here especially regarding time and location. While working remotely may also lead to stress and related health issues (Adanaqué-Bravo et al., 2023; Curzi et al., 2020), many studies show that the possibility of working from home or remotely is highly valued millennials and even more generation Z, ideally including flexible working hours (Chillakuri, 2020; Cvenkel, 2020; Skýpalová et al., 2023; Waworuntu et al., 2022). In Germany, for instance, 59% of young employees wish for (more) flexible working schedules and 76% of all respondents saw flexibility in time and location as a shaping element of modern working environments (Randstad_Deutschland, 2021).

What remains open is how much of working hours employees would like to spend outside of the office. If this were most of it, the results would contradict findings that social bonding and teaming is very important to millennials and generation Z (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023; McCrindle, 2018; J. Twenge, 2023). Some results show especially flexible hours as an important expectation (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019; Sruk, 2020; Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017), and these might allow for a flexibility which makes bonding at work still possible. Also, while remote working is named as an expectation, the results on mobility and willingness to travel or relocate are inconclusive (Dolot, 2018).

For some members of generation Z, however, remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic was their first work experience and therefore normality (Atti et al., 2022). They can easily communicate through social and other digital networks (Cvenkel, 2020) and are able and willing to work in virtual teams (Bhalla et al., 2021). One risk with too much working and managing at distance is that it may negatively affect job satisfaction, especially for men, and, predominantly for women, performance (Franken et al., 2023; Wattenberg et al., 2023): On the other hand, job satisfaction gained through work-life balance positively affects millennial's and generation Z's performance (Chillakuri, 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2024).

e. WORKING CONDITIONS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

All generation seem to like working in teams, and collaboration amongst and within teams is important (Garg & Mahipalan, 2023; Lowe et al., 2008; McCrindle, 2018). What remains open is what form of teams the results tell about, but the latest generation is prepared and able to work in virtual teams as well (Bhalla et al., 2021). In general, teams help mainly generations Y and Z in communication and co-operation (Bennett et al., 2012), millennials like collaborative work environments (Calk & Patrick, 2017) and supportive teams are highly valued by the latest generation (Chillakuri, 2020).

A good work atmosphere with a good relationship amongst colleagues is important (Holopainen & Suslova, 2019; Skýpalová et al., 2023), with millennials enjoying more casual working atmospheres than their predecessors, also with an element of fun (Lowe et al., 2008), but they are also looking at other aspects such as whether the working environment is healthy (Cvenkel, 2020). The wish for also being able to have fun at work is shared by generation Z (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) who like informal and relaxed conditions including the possibility of social bonding (Mărginean, 2021). However, there is evidence of significant differences of these findings between genders (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023) and supposedly fun experiences such as office events do not necessarily rank high amongst what attracts young employees (Chillakuri, 2020).

Workplace technology can play an important role in the motivation of employees and current advances in IT such as artificial intelligence may support motivational workplace design (Janssen & Carradini, 2021; Schmid & Dowling, 2020). From millennials on and increasingly so with centennials, expectations around the modernity of the working environment and seamless, electronic communication are high (Chareewan et al., 2020; de Moraes, da Cunha, & Ramos, 2022; Mars-Matzke, 2022). The use of social media by the employer also can have an effect in attracting new talent (Zhong et al., 2024).

f. EMPLOYER IMAGE AND VALUES

The values and related image of employers are another important aspect, but the focus of the topics around these values seems to be shifting. Generations X, for instance, expects fairness and customer orientation as part of their organisations culture (Skýpalová et al., 2023), although fairness also is an important value for generations Y and Z (Cvenkel, 2020; Egerová et al., 2021; Schnetzer, 2021). In general, employer branding becomes crucial as people look at it ever more closely (Mahmoud et al., 2020; Vieira et al., 2024), and given the differences in which aspects of it different generations value most, also a challenge (Lukić & Lazarević, 2023).

Corporate social responsibility issues keep gaining in importance. Already a key topic for millennials, it becomes one of the dominant topics for generation Z (Chillakuri, 2020; Lee et al., 2022) and one of the key determinants of employer branding (Vieira et al., 2024). The latest generation, on

average, thinks very green and expects that from employers as well (Průša & Sadílek, 2019). It values diversity and inclusion and an open corporate culture (Chillakuri, 2020; Grace & Seemiller, 2024) and shows a balance between personal goals and social and moral values, lower than generation X and boomers but higher than with millennials (J. Weber, 2024).

However, what people like and expect most also depends on the job, nurses for instance placing higher importance on social values than others (Hampton & Welsh, 2019). Not all results are conclusive: Egerová et al. (2021) find some greater differences within one generation than across them. Another surprising result was the small significance of corporate image in one study, with only 4% of respondents of generations X to Z naming it as an important aspect (Skýpalová et al., 2023). Overall, the results are thus somewhat inconclusive.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND HR PRACTICES

Understanding generational differences is essential for organizations aiming to foster a cohesive and productive workforce. HR practices, communication strategies, and recruitment efforts should strive to adapt to cater to the preferences of each generation (Egerova et al., 2021; J. M. Twenge, 2010). Leaders need to be prepared (Dwyer & Azevedo, 2016), and this section will first wrap up what seems most important to the different generations, then present the ensuing recommendations for motivation and retention. These recommendations are the ones found in the sources and presented here in an aggregated manner. The deductions of the authors of this study will be presented in the conclusion section.

A. MAIN PRIORITIES OF THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

The following table will aggregate the results discussed above in an attempt to show what values and design aspects of the workplace are the most important for each of the generations under review. Not all sources present rankings, but while some do explicitly, others imply importance by discussing certain aspects at length or underlining the importance of others. Thus, the importance of the aspects was not only determined by number of occurrences of certain expressions and concepts but also by a – subjective – judgement by the authors based on their understanding of the intention of the authors of the sources used. Some preferences and expectations are apparently highly important to all the generations and are shown as such in table 2.

However, the results do not correspond to those of all of the sources. For instance, Pasko et al. (2021) find job security the most important criterion for all generations, whereas Cvenkel (2020) sees it as most important for generation Y and others for generation Z (e.g. Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Mărginean, 2021). Nevertheless, these contradictions and differences in rankings are mostly marginal, and a recognisable pattern across all sources exits. This can be presented in an overview showing at least tendencies which can be useful to know for employers.

Generation	Main preferences and expectations	Also important
All	• Attractive financial compensation package • Good work atmosphere • Quality leadership (not defined uniformly across generations)	• Fairness (albeit tremaining vague) • Being allowed to participate
X	• Security and long term relationship with employer • Company stability • Advancement opportunities • Employer customer orientation	• Work-life-balance • Personal fulfilment opportunities • Social bonding at work • Supportive environment (also around new technology)
Y	• Career opportunities, status and prestige • Job security • Meaningful and satisfying job content • Opportunities for skill development • Leadership providing purpose and mentoring	• Working in teams • Supportive work environment (leaders and colleagues) • Flexibility, especially regarding working hours, also allowing for periods permitting some recreation • Independence and freedom in work related decisions • Bonding and fun at work
Z	• Flexible working sjupporting good work-life balance • Working in teams and environments permitting social interaction and collaboration • Job security • Opportunities for learning and gaining diverse experience • Modern technology, digital environment • Supportive teams and superiors providing quick feedback	• Brief and concise communication • Meaningful work • Employers respecting CSR and green goals • Personal connections and fun • Clear career opportunities and plans

Table 2: Overview of the main generation-related expectations and preferences around the workplace

B. BUILDING ATTRACTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Organizations can tailor HR strategies to cater to the distinct needs and expectations of each generation. Implementing flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and continuous learning opportunities can create a harmonious work environment that supports the values of all generations (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Well-tailored organisational policies, including communication and feedback methods, and an attractive reward system, appeal to talent (Egerová et al., 2021) and it is possible to build an environment catering to the different types of employees' needs, thus increasing attachment to the employer and reducing attrition (Holtschlag et al., 2020).

Regarding career opportunities and compensation, the priorities discussed above indicate that these aspects are important to all, and whole some generations value clear career paths, job security, prestige or certain benefits more than others (Maioli, 2017; Pasko et al., 2021; Stiglbauer et al., 2022), comparatively attractive remuneration packages help building a positive employer brand (Monteiro et al., 2020). However, as there are some generational differences – and it is unlikely that all employees want exactly the same package – certain elements of a remuneration system should be tailored to the needs of different groups (Gaidhani, Arora, & Sharma, 2019; Pasko et al., 2021; J. Twenge, 2023), offering for instance the possibility to trade flexibility for income or advancement. When it comes to understanding these groups and their wishes, including potential new hires, Mahmoud et al. (2020) suggest letting people from the same generation communicate with them.

Workplace design is another important factor, and next to meaningful content, all generations like modern environments, although especially generation X might need support when new technology is introduced and might experience stress through changing ways of working (Atti et al., 2022; Bennett et al., 2012). Later generation, however, expect to be able to use new technology and can be motivated by it (Chareewan et al., 2020; Janssen & Carradini, 2021; Lowe et al., 2008). Companies need to understand what technological changes such as AI can improve around working condition and effectiveness, as generation Z is most interested in what such innovations may bring (Gaan & Shin, 2023). Organizations may wish to create flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and opportunities for continuous learning to cater to

the diverse needs of each generation (Chillakuri, 2020; Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). However, there is no standard solution for using technology for more flexibility at work or a better (perceived) work-life balance, so that employers need to manage employees' expectations clearly (Maioli, 2017).

C. MOTIVATION AND RETENTION IN A MIXED GENERATION ENVIRONMENT

Multi-generational work settings in combination with the changes of the environment and related expectations require new thinking and approaches and present new challenges to the employers, who, however, should avoid generational stereotypes and adjust their communication to adjust to changes in the workplace and employee structure (Janssen & Carradini, 2021). Willingness to exchange knowledge across age groups and experience may lead to a competitive advantage in the labour market (Dolot, 2018), and understanding the different preferences, attitudes and values helps in being able to tailor management measures to generational differences, bearing in mind that they might be subject to changes (Berkup, 2014; Garg & Mahipalan, 2023).

Another leadership challenge is to ensure that generations understand and support each other (Bennett et al., 2012; Chareewan et al., 2020). Older and younger colleagues can learn from each other and even more so if they recognise the advantages of mixed teams. On the other hand, this cross-fertilization demands employees be treated as individuals rather than as a homogeneous group (Skýpalová et al., 2023). Coetzee and Deas (2021) identify a number of themes and recommendations, amongst which using the selection stage for pre-entry socialisation, a human-centred organisation design phase in order to covertly and overtly managing the psychological contract, actively using HR in order to establish a strong employer value proposition and employee experience.

While this, because of differences in company structures and business models, stays relatively generic, it is supported by the need to establish close relationships and an attractive learning environment with a culture of fairness and flexibility, supporting employees to find individual and fulfilling ways to strive for reaching the organisations' goals (Cvenkel, 2020; Lowe et al., 2008). This means offering different options to different generations (Egerová et al., 2021; Pasko et al., 2021). In order to enable the management to cope with the challenges of managing multi-generational teams with different perspectives, bespoke training might be needed for leaders to be able to become "catalysts of change" (Dwyer & Azevedo, 2016).

VI. LIMITATIONS

This section looks at two types of limitations: first the ones concerning the limitations regarding the data, i.e. the body of articles used for this study, followed by the ones pertaining to the study itself. One aspect is that there are many more sources on millennials and generation Z than on their predecessors, which sometimes makes comparison difficult. Adding to that, the fact that values or criteria around preferences and expectations are heterogeneously defined and that most sources omit other influences on preferences than generational aspects leads to a somewhat blurred picture. Important effects such as of culture, gender, work environment or even social strata remain largely undiscussed. While the focus of the research lay on "western" environments and only a small number of sources from other regions had been included, even this focus area is culturally not homogeneous.

A large number of sources only looks at one generation and does not compare it with others or only with the previous one, which also renders comparison difficult. Results like "much" or "very" have only limited significance when not compared. Many articles draw their conclusions from a relatively limited sample (mostly between 50 and a few hundred participants) and/or a specific group of people such as students, teachers or nurses. How far these results may be generalised remains open.

Amongst the main limitations of the present study figures the potential missing out of relevant works on the topic, including the fact that new research is published constantly and keeps growing in number (Pham et al., 2024). No source newer than March 2024 could have been included. The importance of certain aspects and criteria has been assessed based on frequency of occurrence but, as discussed above, also on subjective criteria such as perceived emphasis, and the present study was also not able to answer questions on the relative importance of non-generational factors relevant for work-related values and aspirations.

VII. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This systematic literature review showed, that generational differences can play a significant role in shaping workplace dynamics and expectations, even if they do not necessarily follow the generations as usually defined. Rather, a gradual development becomes visible, which might account for inconclusive results or even sources at least partly contradicting each other. Another phenomenon explaining this may be that generations and their attitudes and expectations develop as their representatives mature.

Albeit not as clear-cut as the definitions of the generations suggest, many sources see generations varying in values, behaviour and preferences and needing to be managed differently (Garg & Mahipalan, 2023; McCrindle, 2018; Pasko et al., 2021). Some recommendations can be drawn, mainly around offering different choices to different groups of people and staying on top of the technological development. Especially the newest generation in the workplace is described as technology-loving, and as high maintenance. On the other hand, when millennials were also a new phenomenon in the workplace, the were described in a very similar way. It may be that generation Z needs more help and stability than at least generation Y, but this also remains to be proven.

It is much stressed how important flexibility is to generation Z and the crucial issue of work-life balance needs to be addressed by offering remote working opportunities, flexible hours and varying job content. For all that, not every job offers itself to such flexibilization, but treating all

employees as individuals and avoiding stereotypes can help addressing such impossibilities (Egerová et al., 2021; Janssen & Carradini, 2021). There are more valued elements to an occupation such as advancement opportunities, mentoring or security so that such apparent disadvantages can be compensated. Few jobs are likely to respond to all what employees would like to have, and over-interpretation of generational differences does not seem likely to lead to competitive advantage for employers. However, employers need to be aware of the fact that the psychological contract appears to gain in importance (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim, 2021; Deas, 2021) and regularly need to check on current employee perceptions around it.

Some generational differences also appear exaggerated and many expectations are shared equally (S. M. Campbell et al., 2017; Mencl & Lester, 2014; Zaharee et al., 2018). Especially generations Y and Z are seen as sharing many values and expectations (Bencsik et al., 2016; de Moraes et al., 2022). On top of that, some findings require further exploration. When generations are found to need immediate feedback (Bhalla et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2008; Maioli, 2017), for instance, it remains unclear how they react to criticism. Also, when surveying students (e.g. S. Arora et al., 2020; Ransdell et al., 2011; J. Weber, 2024) it is uncertain how much any answers are based on either a lack of work experience or adolescent thinking.

On top of these open issues, differences due to other influencing factors need further exploration. The most named are cultural aspects, including corporate culture (Cvenkel, 2020; Schnetzer, 2021; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2024), gender differences (Egerová et al., 2021; Kaifi et al., 2012; Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020) and differences related to the type of job (Akar, 2020; Hampton & Welsh, 2019).

Nevertheless, as organizations strive to build inclusive and effective teams across generations, understanding generational differences can contribute to creating a harmonious and productive work environment. Tendencies around these differences can be discerned, and the insights gained from this review offer guidance for organizations striving to manage a multi-generational workforce effectively. On the whole, the findings may serve as an indicator of what changes in the working values and preferences over time and at the same time is related to generational attributes. However, given the other influencing factors discussed above and the fact that the results of the available sources show differences, a cautionary approach is expedient, not taking any outcomes of a study on generational differences at face value, including those of the present paper. As much as this demands much effort, management and HR administration will still require case-by-case approaches in order to determine what existing and prospective employees need and want and how a company can differentiate itself in the "war for talent".

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