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„Y Generation” on the contemporary labour market – dark fiction or completely new quality?

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, more and more persons are holding a university graduation diploma. Moreover, more and more often we get across the idea of a meritocratic society according to which social positions depend on contributions, education, abilities, skills, talent. It is often assumed that the life success of an entity depends on his/her individual achievements and not on social origin. In the situation when a new wave of labour force is entering the market, so called Y Generation, new challenges and expectations crop up both on the part of employer and young employees. In this paper – after a synthetic analysis of a presentation of general features of new generation employees, selected odds and threats have been presented that the Y Generation brings to the market.

Y GENERATION – GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC

On the global labour market, currently and simultaneously there are four generations. The oldest, and at the same time the least numerous generation are traditionalists, so persons born before 1945. Some representatives of the traditionalists, even after reaching the retirement age, are still working. The second generation is a very numerous group, the so called *Baby Boomers*, so persons born in the period between the end of the World War II and 1964. Third generation are persons born between 1965 and 1979, and are called the X Generation. Currently, they often occupy managerial positions and decide about directions of companies development. The fourth generation – the youngest – is called the Y Generation (table 1). It should be noted that every generation may contribute other features, skills, and competences to the organisation.

Table 1. Generations participating in the global labour market at the beginning of the 21st century

Generation's name	Dates of birth	Age in 2010
Traditionalists	1922–1945	65+
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	44–64
X Generation	1965–1979	29–45
Y Generation	1980–	less than 31

Source: elaborated based on rynekpracy.pl on the grounds of Manpower.

Analysis of statistical data delivered by Eurostat (2007) indicates that almost 1/3 of the entire population – in exact, 30% of the European Union (UE-27) citizens – are persons born after 1979. In Poland, the interest is higher by approx. 5%. This situation looks similarly also in Australia (30% of population are young persons in the age up to 29 years-of-age) and in the USA (26%) (chart 1).

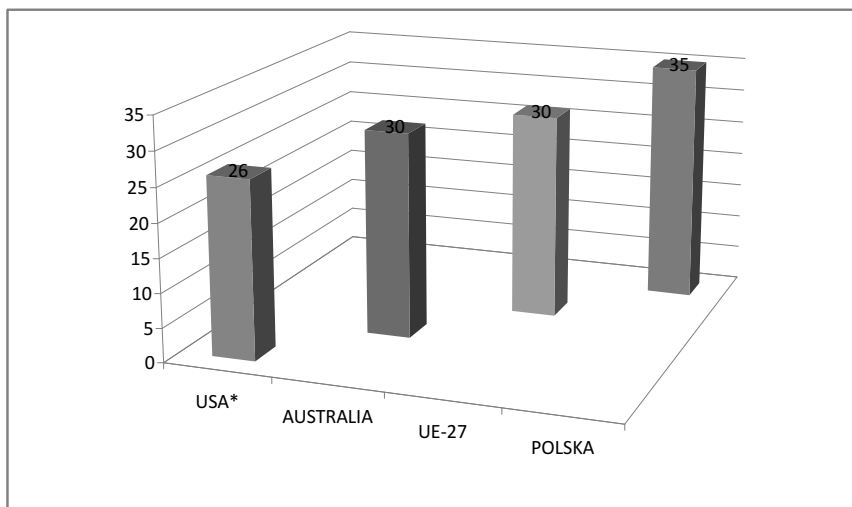


Chart 1. Participation of persons in the age up to 29 in the total population in UE-27, Australia, USA, and Poland in 2007 (%)

* data for the year 2000 („Census” in the USA is carried out every 10 years)

Source: elaborated based on www.career-journal.com

The Y Generation is a generation born in the 80s which was brought up in the world of globalised economy, surrounded by mobile phones and the Internet¹. The majority of young people belonging to this generation cannot imagine

¹ Other names used in relation to the Y Generation is the „Millennium Generation”, „next generation”, „e-generation”, and „flip-flop and i-pod generation”.

their lives without the mentioned inventions. Based on the analysis of the report produced in 2009 by the company of Gemius in Poland, almost 90% (more exactly 87%) of persons in the age of 16–24 and almost 60% of persons in the age of 25–34 are using the Internet. In the older age groups, this interest was gradually decreasing (50.1% of persons in the age 35–44 are using the Internet, in the age group 45–54 only 34.9%, and only 11.5% in the age group of 55 and over are using the Internet – chart 2).

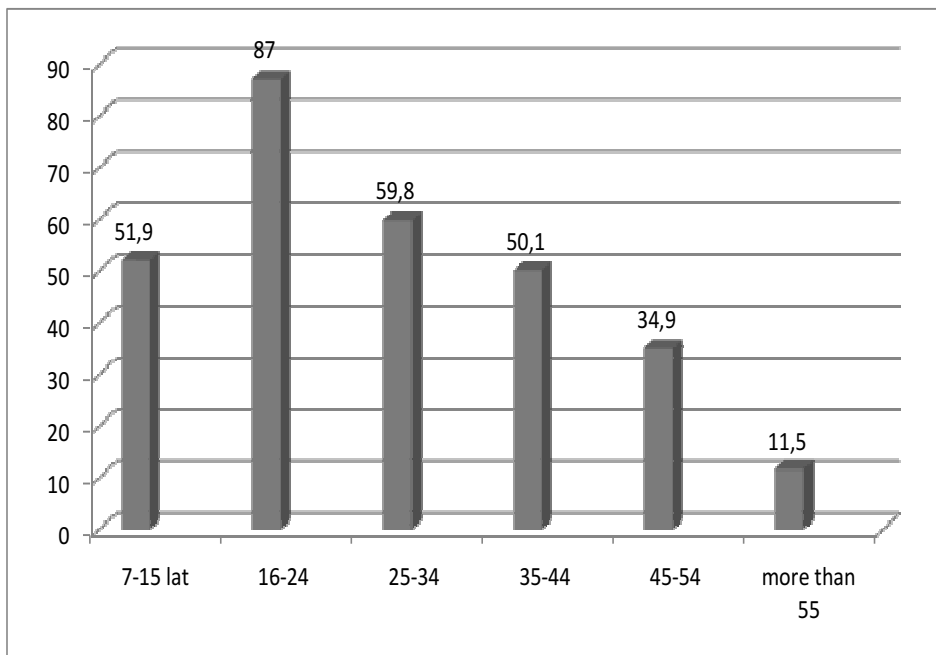


Chart 2. Interest of persons using the Internet according to the age group in 2008/2009 (in %)

Source: [Polski..., 2009].

According to results of tests, included in the already mentioned report of the Gemius company, within the past couple of years the time spent in the Internet has been systematically increasing in every age group, where the most amount of time for surfing the net was devoted by young people of 15–24 years-of-age, hence persons of the Y Generation (chart 3).

Persons born after 1979 are the first generation without any territorial limitations in communication. This generation is used to a high life standard. They have friends in the most remote parts of the world which for them changed into a global village. Young and educated people, entering the labour market after

the *Baby Boomers* generation and *X Generation*, present the life and work style opened for changes; they are mobile, are excellent in new technologies, and use them in their professional and personal lives.

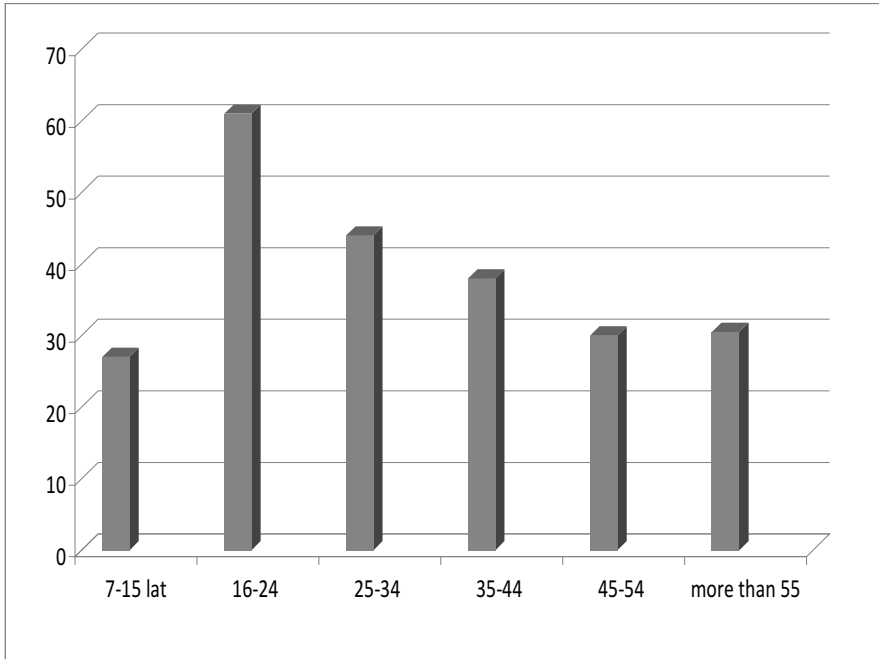


Chart 3. Approximated time of using the Internet according to the age groups (in hours)

Source: own elaboration based on [Polski..., 2009].

They are well prepared to manoeuvre across areas connected with the global economy and cultural variety. In majority, they are ambitious, confident, and are often individualists who prefer to maintain balance between their work and family life. They are tolerant and open for another life style, other culture, other ideology. They often form societies (in majority virtual) with which they maintain an active communication. They know their worth on the labour market. However, in opinions of the employers, they lack loyalty and professional ethics with a simultaneous excessive self-confidence.

According to results of tests of Alpharec company: “Y Generation in Poland, at a larger scale than anywhere in Europe, presents features of the X Generation. Such features acknowledge work, first of all, as a way of earning money and most importantly expecting a relevant remuneration” [divante... (http)].

Y GENERATION AS A CRUCIAL POTENTIAL FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

The characteristic feature of the Y Generation is another way of perceiving work, than hitherto. Representatives of this generation do not place work in the most important place. They treat it rather as a mean for implementing other, more important objectives; among them, they enumerate establishing a happy family, development of themselves and their passions. They want to work but not their entire lives. They have a very well prepared art of auto-presentation. They set up their own business activity very eagerly. They are characterised with innovativeness, ease in accessing information, and are task-focused, but at the same time they are able to verify their knowledge in variable sources. As has already been mentioned, they place crucial attention to their private life, expecting a large freedom and flexible labour hours. Due to the fact that for the Y Generation, the flexible time of work and possibility to utilise multimedia tools for work's performance are very important, it is legitimate to introduce a task-based manner of calculating remunerations.

Representatives of the Y Generation are able to carry out the same task in a shorter period of time than as it would be required for representatives of the previous generation (at the same time maintaining high quality of labour), where time saved in this manner shall be intended for implementation of own passions and development of interests. Good knowledge of new technologies (Internet and mobile phones) impacts positively on their efficiency. They are able to carry out a couple of things simultaneously. They value a good atmosphere in their work, whereas, they feel bad when getting across the so called “rat race”. They are, in fact, oriented towards teamwork, but at the same time individual approach is important for them [Smyrgała ([http](#))].

Higher efficiency is impacted also by an unwillingness to conduct small talks in the company they are working in, wherefore, they are able to carry out their tasks more quickly. Whereas, from the employer they expect the indication of objectives and they treat their superiors as equal employees; yet, with higher competences.

Results of tests of the International Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the counselling company of Mercer named *Pokolenie Y: Świadomość potencjału (Y Generation: Realising the potential)* carried out among the Y generation working in the area of finances, indicate that the majority of respondents is content from their current work, but at the same time worries that companies they are currently employed in do not ensure sufficient opportunities of professional development in the future [*Pokolenie...* ([http](#))].

The obtained results of tests may be treated as an essential clue for employers (and, not only from the area of finances) to recognise professional ambitions of the youngest generation of employees and to put attention on an available carrier path making it possible to fully use the skills from their main professional sector and related areas. In a reverse situation, employers need to be aware of the risk of losing well-educated, talented, and creative employees.

The opinion of Jamie Lyon of ACCA confirms the importance of Y Generation employees potential that they bring to the labour market together with their education, qualifications, skills, and personality: “the report proves that the Y Generation is a generation featuring an above-average sense of own value and self-confidence, which values safety and stability of employment, but is not afraid of changing the employer in case of lack of content from personal development and remuneration conditions. ACCA and Mercer, however, consider that it may offer many skills not utilised up to this point; its representatives just need to be given a chance for development on respective positions” [*Pokolenie...* ([http](#))].

Aims of the Y Generation employees for continuous development and application of innovative solutions win in the confrontation with routine of employees. However, it should be underlined that representatives of the Y Generation are not workaholics.

To sum up, it is worth to consider which behaviours will permit employers to maintain the Y Generation representatives in their companies. The following are the most important actions in this respect:

- establishment of a good atmosphere at work,
- permitting flexible working hours and full utilisation of multimedia tools for implementation of professional tasks; teleworking,
- positive impact on development of employees' passions (providing trainings, language courses, post-graduate studies),
- application of interesting motivational systems, social schemes adjusted to the age (e.g. sport packages, cinema, integration events),
- individual approach, where the employer shall motivate an employee for work, together with an obligatory reception of constructive feedback regarding any and all actions undertaken by young employees,
- respective organisation of a dynamic career path, together with introducing new forms of remuneration (e.g. task-based manner of calculating remuneration, flex benefits),
- ensuring balance for employees between their work and private life,
- for the Y Generation an employer is attractive if in his job offers he places professional development in the first place.

Y GENERATION EMPLOYEES – THREATS

In the opinion of many employers, as well as labour agencies, Y Generation employees do not place large attention to the long-term connection with an employer. Decisively, for them, more essential is the sphere of private life, hence as has already been mentioned they are expecting flexible working hours, opportunities to change their employment relationship from full-time to part-time, and even the possibility to depart for a year for holidays.

New technologies used by Y Generation employees, leave them not a lot of time for autonomous thinking and creation of own views; yet, they often consider that if something cannot be found in the Internet then such an item simply does not exist which means this grossly limits their capability of solving problems. Whereupon, the Y Generation is worse with solving non-pattern and non-typical problems in the work place. They often lack interpersonal skills, are not able to conduct conversations, hence it is more difficult to solve everyday conflicts. They often have difficulties in direct contacts (they prefer electronic communication). On-line communication is significantly simpler for them than *face-to-face* communication [Cwalina, 2001, p. 34]. They are reluctant to criticism. They are characterised with a tendency to undertake risk.

They do not search for authorities. They believe that they decide about everything themselves and nobody can impose anything on them. Often, they are characterised with lack of patience, and at the same time they need a continuous stream of stimulus in the form of computer transfer, music and picture. As has already been mentioned, employers often charge them with lack of loyalty, excessive self-confidence, and lack of professional ethics. Surely, they favour more their own comfort and convenience instead of scarifying themselves to the employer. They often do not identify with the company, they leave if another employer offers them a better job, higher salary, better development opportunities. However, according to the report of ACCA and Mercer quoted previously – compared with the common opinion – the Y Generation values highly safety at work, and young employees are ready to leave if they do not see any opportunity for professional development and development of their carrier.

In case they are not satisfied from labour conditions, they assign the fault to the employer against whom they set high requirements. They refer to the amount of remuneration, which is also dictated, frequently, by education, knowledge of foreign languages, and computer literacy. Moreover, they do not perceive that they need to work after hours, and they prefer a part-time job or teleworking which will allow them to prove themselves in other aspects of life.

Towards the employer, they often adopt the claim attitude and require immediate *feedback*, i.e. information about effects of their work. Therefore, they are characterised with the need for continuous feedback and stimulation.

Here, a dilemma takes place whether requirements that they set for their employers are really exorbitant as compared to quality and efficiency they have

to offer. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that in some cases their aspirations are higher than their skills.

CONCLUSION

Further to features the youngest employees bring to the labour market, a thesis is often raised that the new generation shall in the future contribute to substantial changes on the global labour market among which, inter alia, the following is enumerated: decreasing working hours, introducing mini-pensions, or promoting based on emotional intelligence².

The Y Generation is established by talented, ambitious, self-confident persons with large independence, willingness for changes, interest in personal development; persons, who often place their private, family life over their professional life. Employers perceive this often as lack of loyalty towards the company. Such attitude, however, may be interpreted differently: as return to normal life after the „rat race” which we dealt with in preceding years. Among the advantages of the youngest employees are also interesting ideas, new perception of work and an employee, rationalism, and tolerance.

On the other hand, they lack patience, skills in making decisions independently, cleverly, and even boldly. Characteristic features of the Y Generation such as e.g. the grounds of claim against the employer (high payment and extra-payment requirements), placed for one's own comfort and convenience instead of scarifying themselves to the employer, or problems connected with adopting criticism, numerous create problems for the employer. Y Generation employees, for the employers, become an enormous challenge as they need to be talked to differently, the use of arguments should be different than in relation to senior employees, all in order to motivate them for work. It is important to prize behaviours desired from the point of view of companies and establish such a work environment where employees will be treated in a partner-like manner, shall have the opportunity to express their opinion and propose solutions, and most importantly shall be convinced that the company gives them opportunities for personal development.

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² For a more extensive coverage of the topic see: [Jabłońska, ([http](http://))].

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Summary

A general characteristic of “Y Generation” in comparison with the other generations that are present on the global labour market of 20th/21st century was presented in the first part of the paper. In the next stage there were described the main features of the Y Generation in the context of its entering a contemporary labour market. The next part of the paper deals with some selected threats and dilemmas connected with employing the new generation of the employees.

„Generacja Y” na współczesnym rynku pracy – mroczna fikcja czy zupełnie nowa jakość?

Streszczenie

W części początkowej niniejszego artykułu przedstawiona została ogólna charakterystyka „Generacji Y” na tle pozostałych pokoleń uczestniczących w globalnym rynku pracy na przełomie XX i XXI wieku. Następnie krótko scharakteryzowano najważniejsze cechy charakterystyczne dla „Generacji Y” w kontekście jej wejścia na współczesny rynek pracy. W dalszej części artykułu zaprezentowane zostały wybrane zagrożenia oraz dylematy związane z zatrudnianiem opisywanej w artykule nowej generacji pracowników.