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Work Values from the Perspective of Different Generations

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to identify differences in work values among four generations who may work together simultaneously. The central question was whether belonging to a specific generation influences recognized work values. The article presents the results of a survey conducted among students and their family members, representing diverse generations of employees. The sample comprised 396 respondents from the Baby Boomer, and Generations X, Y, and Z cohorts. Work values were assessed using the Work Values Inventory scale developed by Manhardt (1972). Descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests were employed for analysis. The results indicate that work value dimensions are generally important to respondents, as all average scores exceeded 5 points on a seven-point scale. The analyses also revealed significant differences between the generations examined. However, the purposive sampling method limits the representativeness of the results, which cannot be generalized. Furthermore, respondents within the same generations varied in age, which may have influenced their approach to work values. Differences in professional backgrounds among respondents could also impact their recognized work values. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into generational differences in work values, contributing to the development of effective age-specific workplace policies adapted to the specific characteristics of generations of employees. It offers empirical evidence on differences in work values across generations.

KEYWORDS: work values, generations, intergenerational communication, human resource management (HRM)

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STRESZCZENIE

Wartości pracy z perspektywy różnych pokoleń

Głównym celem badania było ustalenie różnic w wartościach pracy pomiędzy czterema pokoleniami pracowników, które mogą pracować razem w tym samym czasie. Podstawowym pytaniem, na które starano się odpowiedzieć w badaniu, było to, czy przynależność do określonego pokolenia może mieć wpływ na uznawane wartości pracy. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania przeprowadzonego wśród studentów i członków ich rodzin reprezentujących różne pokolenia pracowników, które zrealizowano w 2023 r. Próbę stanowiło 396 respondentów z pokoleń: Baby Boomers oraz X, Y, Z. Różnice w wartościach pracy pomiędzy tymi pokoleniami analizowano za pomocą skali Manhardta (1972). W analizie danych wykorzystano statystyki opisowe i testy nieparametryczne. Wyniki badań wskazują, że wymiary wartości pracy dla respondentów mają istotne znaczenie, gdyż wszystkie otrzymały średnie wartości powyżej 5 punktów w siedmiopunktowej skali. Analizy wykazały także, że pomiędzy czterema badanymi pokoleniami istnieją istotne różnice w wartościach pracy. Celowa metoda doboru próby oznacza, że wyniki badania nie są reprezentatywne i nie można ich uogólniać. Respondenci z tych samych pokoleń różnili się wiekiem, co mogło mieć wpływ na ich podejście do wartości pracy. Badane osoby mogły również mieć różne doświadczenia zawodowe, co także może wpływać na wyznawane wartości pracy. Dostarczając wglądu w różnice pokoleniowe w wartościach pracy, badanie może się przyczynić do sformułowania skutecznych polityk związanych z wiekiem, dostosowanych do specyfiki pokoleń pracowników. Badanie dostarczyło dowodów empirycznych na temat różnic w preferowanych wartościach pracy między pokoleniami.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: wartości pracy, pokolenia, komunikacja międzypokoleniowa, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi (HRM)

1. Introduction

The concept of time is closely linked to the term “generation.” As Karl Mannheim (1992/1993) emphasized, the specificity of each generation lies in the fact that its members experience the historical dimension of social time in similar ways. Therefore, the category of generation is time-bound, as each generational cohort is defined by the time when it is formed, when it becomes a working generation, and finally, the passing generation (Lenz, 2011). Generations are groups of people who share similar experiences over time, but they also overlap with other generations that emerge, develop, and fade away at different points, even though they share

a portion of the same time. Each generation has “its own time,” during which it experiences similar events, facts, or phenomena. One of these phenomena is work.

The results of many empirical studies show significant differences in the preferred values across generations (Twenge, 2019; Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021), including values related to work. Research carried out as part of the European Values Study (Halman et al., 2022) shows that subsequent generations increasingly disagree with the idea that pursuing a professional career is necessary to develop personal talent. Almost 80% of respondents from the Silent Generation agreed with this statement, while 65% of Generation Z did. However, other studies suggest that differences in work attitudes and values are not statistically significant (Deal, 2007; Hart, Schembri, Bell, & Armstrong, 2003; Jurkiewicz, 2000).

The idea that different generations of employees may have different approaches to work values is not new (Robbins & Judge, 2012). Due to socioeconomic changes and population ageing, four generations may work together in the same workplace: Baby Boomers (aged 56 and over), Generation X (43–55 years old), Generation Y (24–42 years old) and Generation Z (23 years and younger).¹ The main distinction criterion between these generations is age, although the periods that generation falls within are defined differently by researchers, because other characteristics are also used as criteria for generational affiliation (Marzec, 2023). The age difference in a team working together can be 40 years or more. This is why today’s teams in companies are multigenerational. It should also be emphasized that contemporary working teams are diverse in terms of age and managing them involves reconciling differing education, experiences, and values (Burke, 2015; Burton, Mayhall, Cross, & Patterson, 2019). The differences and uniqueness of employees from various generations are also the subject of analyses by Polish researchers, who point out that managing a multigenerational team is a challenge for both managers and employees (Chomątowska & Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013).

The main problem addressed in this study was to identify the differences in work values between four generations who may work together simultaneously. This is crucial for human resource managers, team leaders, communication departments and those who manage multigenerational employees. Understanding work values is also important to recognizing

1 Researchers struggle to determine the age ranges for subsequent generations. Various ranges can be found in the literature (e.g., Twenge et al., 2010; Kukla & Nowacka, 2019; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, Cewińska, Lubrańska, Oleksiak, & Striker, 2019; Muster, 2020). The authors of the presented research assumed that Baby Boomers are people born between 1955–1968, Generation X – 1969–1980, Generation Y – 1981–1999, and Generation Z – 2000 and later.

motivators at work and the specific behaviors of employees (Dick, 2019). The purpose of the research was to analyze work values by age and, as a result, examine changes in attitudes toward these values across different generations present in the labor market at the same time. Although their value hierarchies and attitudes toward work were shaped at different times and circumstances, the study aspired to answer the question whether belonging to a specific generation can impact recognized work values.

2. Development of the theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Work values: the framework of the concept

The issue of values is of interest to researchers from various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and management sciences. Each of these fields offers different approaches to values. Sociologists argue that society builds social systems based on values and the norms resulting from them (Marody, 2021). For social psychologists, values are a type of individual's attitudes that influence actions (Allport & Veernon, 1931). Research on the meaning of values carried out by Shalom H. Schwartz (2006) led him to identify six basic features of all values: (1) Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect; (2) Values refer to desirable goals that motivate action; (3) Values transcend specific actions and situations; (4) Values serve as standards or criteria; (5) Values are ordered by importance relative to one another; (6) The relative importance of multiple values guides action. Values are cognitive representations of people's challenges: biological needs, social interactions, and demands made by social groups and institutions (Marody, 2021). This approach to values, as an essential element of individuals' lives within society, allows us to analyze the issue of changes in values resulting from internalization processes that influence their actions. This means that values can vary depending on the individual's acceptance of a social group that sets the framework for their actions. Therefore, values play an important role in guiding human behavior (Marody, 2021).

In the 1970s, Ronald F. Inglehart (1977) observed differences in the values of older and younger generations, while also pointing out the process of value transformation from materialistic to post-materialistic, a shift associated with economic prosperity. He believed that the younger generation is raised under different conditions than their parents and grandparents, which leads them to be guided by different sets of values (Inglehart,

1977). Therefore, in the contemporary era of economic, technological and political changes, generations of employees are also guided by different values.

It should be emphasized that some studies show no significant differences in work values between generations (e.g., Deal, 2007; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Dick, 2019). These findings support the assumption that attention at work one should be given to the individual values of employees, which are shaped by their education and upbringing, with generational affiliation being just one of many factors that can influence work values. However, in contrast, other studies have showed that, for example, Generation Z presents values related to work that are different from those of previous generations (Pauli, Guadagnin, & Ruffatto, 2020).

Work may be perceived as either an autotelic or instrumental value. Research among Polish employees indicates that work is increasingly treated instrumentally, as a means of material advancement (Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021). Other research also shows that the recognition of work as a central value in human life is linked to generational divisions (Kittel, Kalleitner, & Tsakloulou, 2019; Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021).

2.2. The value of work in different generational cohorts: hypotheses development

Generations are conceptualized and presented in different ways in the literature, but they are often analyzed as homogeneous groups with similar features, including values, especially in comparison to other generational cohorts. Mannheim (1992/1993) emphasized that intragenerational heterogeneity is associated with significant differences between different generations. This approach allows for the analysis of differences between generations because each cohort is born during a specific time period and forms its experiences, practices, and values during its formative years.

Values are defined differently by scholars. For the present research, the authors adopted Schwartz's (1999) definition, which stresses that values are desirable concepts that guide individuals in selecting actions and evaluating people. Work values are defined as the principles and convictions that reflect people's preferences and priorities at work (Sousa & Colauto, 2021). They are related to the work environment and significantly impact individual expectations of work in general. A review of the literature reveals various typologies of work values (e.g., Ginzberg, Ginzberg, Axelrod, & Herma, 1951; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999).

In the field of management, some researchers point to the differences in values between generations of employees (Kukla & Nowacka, 2019).

This issue has become even more important as managing multigenerational teams becomes a significant challenge for human resources management (HRM) due to the growing diversity of employee age groups that work together in the same organization. Consequently, an important task for contemporary managers is to find HRM methods and tools that, despite existing differences in the values and attitudes of employees, allow them to fully use the potential of all generations of employees to achieve organizational goals (Ciach & Jędruszkiewicz, 2019). One way of achieving this ambitious objective is by the strengthening of intergenerational cooperation, through teamwork, mentoring, joint training, or intergenerational communication and education.

The presented study focuses on four generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The literature review reveals that researchers not only use different typologies of work values in their analyses but also use different research tools. Additionally, factors such as the research period, professional groups, and region make it difficult to establish a common hierarchy of work values for each generation. Therefore, it is challenging to clearly indicate a set of characteristic work values for a specific generation. However, it is necessary to highlight several key features that allow one to specify research hypotheses and to select a tool that allows for comparison of the work values typical for different generations that are working together in the same real time period.

Baby Boomers are a large generation that, due to the period in which they came of age (the postwar development years), tend to have a positive attitude toward work as an autotelic value, their professional careers, and seek meaning in their work (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). For Polish employees of this generation, due to huge political and economic changes they experienced throughout their careers, work has represented an opportunity to acquire security and comfort (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

Generation X came of age during the rise of mass media, the development of pop culture, globalization, and high living standards. As a result, values such as independence, adaptability, and resilience are particularly appreciated by this generation. They value a balance between work and personal life, and demonstrate a positive attitude towards teamwork and loyalty in professional relationships (Robbins & Judge, 2012). For Polish generation X, their values and behaviors have been shaped by significant societal changes, including the political system, the education system, or the labor market transformations. This generation experienced the challenges of systemic change and faced high unemployment in the 1990s (Dolińska-Weryńska, 2016). Consequently, they place a high value on status and independence while showing a strong commitment to their organization.

Generation Y values independence in the workplace (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), places importance on financial success, is self-confident and aspires to be self-sufficient (Robbins & Judge, 2012). However, the differences between countries and cultures can be significant here. For instance, for the Generation Y in India, while extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of work are important, they differ among Malaysian, Brazilian, and German employees (Naim, 2020). Another characteristic of this generation is their need for clear direction, immediate feedback, and consistent managerial support (Dick, 2019). In Poland, these are young workers who benefit from system changes, technological advances, and educational reforms only know about the former regime from their parents (Dolińska-Weryńska, 2016). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that they show a strong attachment to the values of competence and personal growth.

Generation Z, currently entering the labor market, is often stereotyped for their strong ties to virtual reality (Dick, 2019). They are versed in information technology, often using it intuitively (Rogozińska-Pawelczy et al., 2019). This generation primarily wants to meet their needs and values in the workplace, prioritizing values such as personal development, freedom and empowerment, stability, achievement at work, and authentic social relationships (Pauli, Guadagnin, & Ruffatto, 2020; Kukla & Nowacka, 2019). Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that this generation shows the strongest attachment to the work values they prioritize.

Considering the literature that deals with the issue of work values and analysis of generational differences, the following hypotheses can be formulated, i.e.:

- H1: There are significant statistical differences between the generations of Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z in the preferred work values.
- H2: Generation Z shows the strongest attachment to preferred values at work.
- H3: Baby Boomers show the strongest attachment to the values of comfort and security.
- H4: Generation X shows the strongest attachment to the values of status and independence.
- H5: Generation Y shows the strongest attachment to the values of competence and growth.

The significance of differences (H1) refers to the statistical significance of the differences between the mean in the preferred work values of the examined generations (p values less than 0.05).

3. Empirical study

3.1. Research method

Considering that values influence the actions undertaken by an individual, and their internalization is influenced by both the discourse and the specificity of the time in which people develop their beliefs and that changes in the values they profess are generationally diverse, it can be assumed that there is a hypothetical relationship between generation belonging and the recognized work values. Therefore, to test the hypotheses posted, the survey was carried out from April to July 2023 using the purposive sampling method.

To examine generational differences, the sample encompassed students (both full- and part-time working) of majors related to extensive use of information technology, representing Generation Z and their family members constituting Generations Y, X, and Baby Boomers. The authors hypothesized that, since the Generation Z's lives are heavily centered around the use of technology (Kukla & Nowacka, 2019), it would be possible to identify differences between this generation and older generations of employees. The study was carried out among students at the University of Economics in Katowice and at the University of Silesia in Katowice.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	No.
<i>Position:</i>	
executive	84.10%
managerial	15.90%
Average age (years)	41.58 years
Average seniority (years)	17.98 years
<i>Generations:</i>	
Generation Z	22.50%
Generation Y	24.70%
Generation X	37.60%
Baby Boomers	15.20%
<i>Educational level:</i>	
Master's degree	28.80%
Bachelor's and engineering degrees	19.70%
Secondary education	41.20%
Vocational education or lower	10.30%

Source: own developed.

After data cleaning and the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires, the final sample included 396 respondents, with 57.6% women and 42.4% men. Further details about the final sample and individual respondents are provided in Table 1.

Key demographic information about the respondents was applied, i.e. gender, educational attainment, position, and seniority. This information was obtained with single items.

Work values were measured using the Philip J. Manhardt scale (1972), also known as a Work Values Inventory. It consisted of 21 items grouped into three dimensions: comfort and security, competence and growth, and status and independence. It encompassed 25 job characteristics and respondents indicate how important it is to them to have a job with each of these characteristics. The scale was revised by John P. Meyer, Gregory Irving and Natalie J. Allen (1998) to measure post-entry work experiences. They defined the following 21 items for the value and experience measures: A. Comfort and security: regular routine at time and place of work, job security, clear rules and procedures to follow, leisure time off the job, comfortable working conditions; B. Competence and growth: meeting and speaking with many other people, intellectual stimulation, originality and creativeness, social contribution by the work you do, satisfaction of cultural and aesthetic interests, development of knowledge and skills, development of own methods of doing the work, feeling of accomplishment, change and variety in duties and activities. C. Status and independence: advancement to high administrative responsibility, opportunity to earn a high income, supervising others, working independently, other people's respect, working on problems of central importance to the organization, responsibility for taking risks. In the research discussed, a seven-point scale was adopted. Cronbach's α for the scale of values at work was 0.86.

3.2. Study results

To test the proposed hypotheses, descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests were conducted. Data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0. In the first step, four generations of employees were identified: Generation Z (up to 23 years), comprising 22.5% of the sample; Generation Y (24 to 42 years), comprising 24.7%; Generation X (43 to 55 years), comprising 37.6%; and the Baby Boomers (56 years and older), comprising 15.2% of the sample.

The analysis showed that respondents generally rated the examined values highly. The mean overall rating of work values was 5.14 on the 7-point scale (median 5.18) (Table 2). The highest rated value was comfort and security (mean: 5.17, median: 5.20). However, the scores for the examined values were generally at a similar level.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of work values

Variables	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Range	Minim.	Max.
Comfort and security	5.17	5.20	0.64	3.80	3.00	6.80
Competence and growth	5.13	5.22	0.91	6.00	1.00	7.00
Status and independence	5.11	5.14	0.84	5.14	1.86	7.00
Values at work (overall)	5.14	5.18	0.62	4.65	1.95	6.60

Source: own developed.

Further analysis of the work values across different generational groups revealed greater variation in the evaluations (Table 3). It should be noted that there are differences in the ratings of values among the examined generations of employees. Generally, ratings of all values were highest in Generation Z, and the lowest in the Baby Boomers, the oldest generation. Among all the values, competence and growth received the highest ratings from Generation Z (mean: 5.43).

Table 3. Mean of values at work for generations examined

Variables	Generation Z	Generation Y	Generation X	Baby Boomers
Comfort and Security	5.35	5.17	5.10	5.09
Competence and Growth	5.43	5.13	5.11	4.74
Status and Independence	5.32	5.12	5.03	4.96
Values at work (overall)	5.37	5.14	5.08	4.93

Source: own developed.

To examine the differences in the rating of the values across generations, the homogeneity of variance was first checked using Levene's test, followed by an analysis of the normality of the distribution of overall work values and specific values using the Shapiro-Wilk's test (at $p = 0.05$). The results showed that the distribution of the variables was not normal.

In the next step, the comfort and security values were analyzed. Since the variable distribution was not normal, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to assess whether the differences in the average ratings of this value among the examined generational groups were statistically significant. The analysis revealed that, at the 0.05-significance level, generational affiliation was a significant factor that differentiated the ratings of comfort and security (Table 4).

Table 4. The significance of differences between the average rating of comfort and security in the generations examined: results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

Null hypothesis	Test	Test statistic	Sig.	Decision
The distribution of the value of comfort and security is the same across generations of employees	Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test	11.384	0.01	Reject the null hypothesis

Note. The significance level is 0.05; Asymptotic significances are displayed.

Source: own developed.

Subsequently, a post hoc test for nonparametric comparison was performed to analyze the significance of differences in the dimension of comfort and security between the generations surveyed (Table 5). The results obtained indicate statistically significant differences in the ratings for this dimension between Generation X and Generation Z (Table 5).

Table 5. The results of post hoc nonparametric comparisons between the generations examined: dimension of comfort and security (pairwise comparison)

Sample 1–Sample 2	Test statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Generation X – Baby Boomers	–.974	17.414	–0.056	0.955	1.000
Generation X – generation Y	15.055	14.813	1.016	0.309	1.000
Generation X – generation Z	48.911	15.258	3.206	0.001	0.008
Baby Boomers – generation Y	14.080	18.670	0.754	0.451	1.000
Baby Boomers – generation Z	47.937	19.025	2.520	0.012	0.070
Generation Y – generation Z	33.856	16.677	2.030	0.042	0.254

Note: Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0,05.

Source: own developed.

In turn, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests also showed significant differences in the ratings of competence and growth in the generations examined (Table 6). Consequently, post hoc nonparametric comparisons in the examined were carried out also.

Table 6. The significance of differences between the average rating of the value of competence and growth in the generations examined: results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

Null hypothesis	Test	Test statistic	Sig.	Decision
The distribution of the value of competence and growth is the same across generations of employees.	Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test	18.094	<0.001	Reject the null hypothesis

Note. The significance level is 0.05. Asymptotic significances are displayed.

Source: own developed.

The results of nonparametric post hoc comparisons suggest significant differences in the competency and growth scores between Baby Boomers and Generation Z, as well as Generation X and Generation Z (at $p = 0,057$).

Table 7. The results of post hoc nonparametric comparisons between the generations examined: value of competence and growth (pairwise comparison)

Sample 1–Sample 2	Test statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Baby Boomers – Generation X	40.754	17.487	2.331	0.020	0.119
Baby Boomers – Generation Y	47.192	18.748	2.517	0.012	0.071
Baby Boomers – Generation Z	80.476	19.104	4.213	<0.001	0.000
Generation X – Generation Y	6.437	14.875	0.433	0.665	1.000
Generation X – Generation Z	39.722	15.322	2.593	0.010	0.057
Generation Y – Generation Z	33.285	16.746	1.988	0.047	0.281

Note. Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05.

Source: own developed.

With regard to the last dimension that is the status and independence, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant differences in the ratings of these values in the generations examined (Table 8).

Table 8. The significance of differences between the average rating of value of status and independence in the generations examined: results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

Null hypothesis	Test	Test statistic	Sig.	Decision
The distribution of the status and independence value is the same across generations of employees.	Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test	8.573	0.036	Reject the null hypothesis

Note. The significance level is 0.05; Asymptotic significances are displayed.

Source: own developed.

Nonparametric post hoc comparisons revealed significant differences in status and independence between Generation X and Generation Z (Table 9).

Table 9. The results of post-hoc nonparametric comparisons between the generations examined: value of status and independence (pairwise comparison)

Sample 1–Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Baby Boomers – Generation X	4.751	17.471	0.272	0.786	1.000
Baby Boomers – Generation Y	20.741	18.731	1.107	0.268	1.000
Baby Boomers – Generation Z	45.218	19.087	2.369	0.018	0.107
Generation X – Generation Y	15.990	14.861	1.076	0.282	1.000
Generation X – Generation Z	40.467	15.308	2.644	0.008	0.049
Generation Y – Generation Z	24.477	16.731	1.463	0.143	0.861

Note. Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05.

Source: own developed.

Finally, an analysis of the overall evaluation of the value dimensions was performed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results indicated significant differences in the overall value ratings among the generational groups (Table 10).

Table 10. The significance of differences between the average ratings of overall work values in the generations examined: results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

Null hypothesis	Test	Test statistic	Sig.	Decision
Distribution of the overall value at work the same across generations of employees	Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test	22.136	<0,001	Reject the null hypothesis

Note. The significance level is 0.05; Asymptotic significances are displayed.

Source: own developed.

The results of the post hoc test showed significant differences in the overall work value ratings between Baby Boomers and Generation Z, as well as between Generation X and Generation Z (Table 11).

Table 11. The results of post hoc nonparametric comparisons between the generations examined: overall value at work (pairwise comparison)

Sample 1–Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Baby Boomers – Generation X	28.144	17.501	1.608	0.108	0.647
Baby Boomers – Generation Y	44.958	18.763	2.396	0.017	0.099
Baby Boomers – Generation Z	83.803	19.119	4.383	<0.001	0.000
Generation X – Generation Y	16.814	14.887	1.129	0.259	1.000
Generation X – Generation Z	55.659	15.334	3.630	<0.001	0.002
Generation Y – Generation Z	38.845	16.760	2.318	0.020	0.123

Note. Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05.

Source: own developed.

The analyses confirmed significant statistical differences between the four generations in recognized work values. The results support the positive verification of hypothesis H1. Hypothesis H2 was also positively verified, as the results show that Generation Z respondents were the most attached to the examined work values. However, the hypotheses H3, H4, and H5 were rejected because Generation Z exhibited the strongest attachment to all dimensions of the work values. It is worth noting that only some differences between Generation Z and other generations in the assessment of the values were statistically significant. The analysis of the differences between generations also revealed that the most distinct differences were between generation Z and Baby Boomers, as well as generation Z and generation X. In contrast, the differences between Generations Y and Z were not statistically important, which indicates their similarity in terms of assessing the importance of the work values studied.

4. Conclusions and Limitation

The main contribution of this research is the empirical evidence it provides for generational differences in work values among the employees studied. The research presented indicates that the dimensions of work values specified on the Manhardt scale significant to respondents, as all the average scores exceed 5 on a seven-point scale. The results confirmed the strong attachment of young employees to the values of comfort and security, competence and growth, in addition to status and independence (e.g., Ciach & Jędruskiewicz, 2019). Only the generation of Baby Boomers indicated a rating below 5 on two dimensions: competence and growth, and status and independence, which resulted in a total rating below 5 points.

Statistically significant differences in work values, were observed between generations for all three dimensions. In the comfort and security dimension, a notable disparity between Generations X and Z was found. Identifying the reasons why these two generations differ significantly in this dimension requires in-depth analyses based on other research methods. In competence and growth dimension, significant differences emerged between the Boomers and Generation Z, as well as, to a slightly lesser extent, between Generations X and Z. The pronounced gap between the oldest and youngest generations present in the labor market should not surprise researchers because the oldest generations have rather different expectations at the end of their professional lives. If there is a significant difference between Generations X and Z, this should be the subject of further research, as these are largely the generations of parents and their children, which leads us to conclude that parents and children have different approaches to work values. However, the relatively high ratings of the competence and growth by Generation X representatives confirm the aspiration, indicated by the researchers, for the reliable fulfilment of professional duties, characteristic of this generation (Dolińska-Weryńska, 2016). A similar statistically significant difference occurs between Generations X and Z in the ratings of the status and independence dimension. In this case, to explain this difference, one can recall the traditional conflict of generations, which may be the reason why the younger generation seeks independence from parents, also in the sphere of professional work, and strives to gain its own status in this area of life (Appelbaum, Bhardwaj, Goodyear, Gong, Sudha, & Wei, 2022).

The research also shows that each generation exhibits distinct preferred work values. The study examined four generations who might work professionally simultaneously. The differences found allow us to conclude that time understood as a specific historical period has an impact on the generational approach to work. Each cohort shaped its values in a different period, under often different socioeconomic systems and circumstances, resulting in different approaches to the value of work.

The study offers some practical conclusions for managing multigenerational teams. Contemporary management practice shows that in an era of workplace diversification, which is accompanied by demographical changes and the ageing of society in many developed countries, a standardized HRM approach that overlooks the values and needs of specific employee age groups is less effective. Nowadays, various generations of employees often meet at the same workplace. However, they grew up in different socioeconomic conditions that shaped their hierarchy of values, work attitudes, and behaviors (Marzec, 2023; Kukla & Nowacka, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial for contemporary HRM managers to foster work

environments adapted to the specific values of different age groups. It entails the need to adjust HRM tools to meet the specific needs of various generations of employees. Generation Z's strong attachment to workplace values suggests that job characteristics need to be designed specifically for this group of employees in a way that matches their specific values in order to retain them in the organization, simultaneously enhancing their motivation and commitment. Similarly, high evaluation of the value of competence and growth of Generation X suggests that opportunities for professional development should be provided for this group of mature workers, which is particularly important in view of the ageing workforce and the need to maintain the long-term employability of mature workers (Finsel, Wöhrmann, & Deller, 2023).

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the purposive sampling method means that the results of the study are not representative and cannot be generalized. Respondents from the same generations differed in age (within one cohort, there might be a person 10 years younger or older than the other), which may have influenced their approach to the value of work. The people surveyed could also have started their professional careers at different times in their lives, they could also have changed industries, positions, or organizations, and such experiences probably influence their recognized work values. Another limitation results from the difficulty of conducting similar research on other samples, because the time differs in socio-political terms, and this factor may also be important in the approach to preferred work values. Lastly, the influence of culture on values, including work values, should be considered. Sociologists emphasize that values are a component of culture that, through socialization, influences the adoption of values by social groups, probably including generational cohorts. It should also be added that intergenerational communication and information sharing are very diverse across the generations examined.

In summary, as organizations experience growing generational diversity, adapting HRM practices to the specific values of different age groups, as suggested by the study suggests, should be a key component of managing age diversity and fostering an inclusive workplace.

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