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Expectations of generation Y connected with shaping the work-life balance. The case of Poland

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Abstract

Research background: Entering of generation Y into the job market causes many interesting insights for both researchers, who analyze the specifics of this generation, as well as practitioners of modern organizations' management. Despite some differences in the characteristics of generation Y, the authors involved in this issue agree that generation Y is focused on education and development with simultaneous desire to maintain a balance between work and personal life. More often than older generations, they are willing to use the various programs, offered by their company, supporting reconciliation of professional and personal life.

Purpose of the article: The aim of the article is to present issues concerning the functioning of the representatives of generation Y in the labor market with particular emphasis on the issue of balancing professional work and personal life.

Methods: The conducted research aimed to analyze the opinion of representatives of generation Y about the expectations associated with their professional work with special emphasis on creating a balance between work and personal life. In order to obtain answers to the research questions, the methods of diagnostic survey and questionnaire technique were used. To complement the obtained data, the additional qualitative research unstructured interviews were conducted. The researches were conducted in Poland, at one of the technical universities in the Silesian voivodeship.

Findings & Value added: Respondents have confirmed the hypothesis that for their generation balance between work and personal life is very important. The collected respondents' opinions showed the image of flexible employment as a good way to reconcile work and other obligations, which gives the ability to have multiple sources of income. It is a good solution especially for young people and people entering the labor market. The results of the conducted interviews pointed to a number of factors which in the opinion of young workers are important values in life and are related to the maintaining work-life balance.

Introduction

The fact there are more and more representatives of young workers from generation Y appearing on the labour market makes employers recognize and take into account their expectations and needs when managing the staff. Attracting these workers, actions tailored to support their commitment to work and keeping them in a company constitute challenges that individuals managing contemporary organizations have to face. In this situation, the way of functioning of generation Y representatives in the context of social and economic aspects of the labour market is worth becoming familiar with.

Special attention is drawn by a specific category of young people who are students ending their education at higher schools and their situation encourages research. After many years of studies they are about to confront their ideas and plans for their professional future with the reality of the labour market. However, in elaborations describing predispositions and needs of young workers entering the labour market little attention is paid to their expectations concerning shaping the work-life balance. This issue is particularly important as it refers to the values the representatives of the young generation tend to pursue and in the effect it constitutes a factor that not only distinguishes them from the staff from older generations, but also significantly determines their behaviour on the labour market.

The aim of this paper is to present the issues connected with the functioning of the generation Y representatives on the labour market with the particular emphasis on balancing professional work and personal life. The presented discussion based on sociological approach to the social category represented by generation Y refers to both interesting and extremely current issue of balancing work and personal life. The empirical part contains results of carried out surveys and interviews by means of which the opinions of the representatives of the generation Y concerning their expectations associated with their professional work and shaping the balance between work and personal life are analysed. The presentation of author's own research results is preceded by the presentation of key terms connected with

this issue. That is why the main features of the generation Y and the importance of work-life balance are briefly described.

Characteristics of the generation Y in the context of the work-life balance issue

Elaborations available in the literature on the subject indicate that generation Y is different from earlier generations in terms of mentality, perception of the world and of themselves, and the way they work and the sense of achievement (see: Pink, 2009, p. 2; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009, pp. 91–103; Hardey, 2011, pp. 749–751). Although researchers do not agree about the date of birth of their representatives, it is often assumed that they are people born after the year 1980. The fact that they grew up in a specific environment had an impact on the values they follow and their expectations as to the reality that surrounds them. On the one hand, personal and affiliate values (happiness, love, friendship, family life), and on the other hand, work treated as a condition for successful life and source of satisfaction constitute pillars of the internal world of the representatives of generation Y. Representatives of generation Y are associated with higher flexibility and bigger openness to change, readiness to learn and reluctance towards long-term commitments, and those features are believed to be connected with the necessity to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Representatives of the generation Y are educated, know foreign languages and new technologies. At work they are characterised by their ease of functioning in multicultural environment, establishing cooperation and team actions and the need for close contact and the feedback from their superiors. What is important, despite high expectations concerning the remuneration and appreciation of the results of their work, representatives of the generation Y to a greater extent than other generations pay attention to the conditions and to the process of achieving success and are less willing to sacrifice other spheres of life in favour of work (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007, p. 526).

It is emphasised that for workers from this age category such issues as the choice, options and flexibility — relating to work, financial issues and living conditions are very important. Changes and diversity are regarded by them as particularly important in every aspect of functioning. They are very willing to change their place of employment and to take up a job in a company that ensures them friendly atmosphere and the possibility to realise their own plans connected with self-development. Because of the fact that their professional work is not the only source of satisfaction for them, they

desire to spend their free time realising their own hobbies (Tyler, 2007, pp. 40-48). As they do not want to feel limited by their work, they appreciate employers with flexible approach to working hours, thanks to whom they will be able to reconcile professional and personal life. The importance of relations with the family and with people they are close to and the realisation of their own passions cause that they particularly appreciate the balance between work and other spheres of life.

In literature we may find various approaches to the notion of work- life balance. Balance between work and personal lives is described as an ability to join work with other aspects of human life, such as home, family, social activity and interests (see: Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003, p. 513; Visser & Williams, 2006, p.14; Robak, 2014, pp. 267–274). It occurs when work do not overtake the private live, and vice versa — when non-work life is not developed at the expense of working. Therefore, Kirchmeyer (2000) claims that work-life balance, is an equal distribution of time, energy and engagement in all the areas of life in a way that you achieve satisfaction in all of them. Very often the essence of the work- life balance is a state in which an individual deals with a potential conflict between the requirements connected with his/ her engagement in work and leisure, giving the sense of prosperity and fulfillment. Clark (2000, pp. 747–770) perceives work-life balance as satisfying and efficient functioning, both at work and at home, with a minimal conflict between the roles. A type of conflict dominant in literature is a work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, pp. 77–82).

Looking for work-life balance refers to the workers' ability to decide how much time, where and when they will devote to the activities, respectively connected with work and personal lives. The possibility of using the autonomy in the same area is referred to the issue of general life quality and promoting of the quality of work and its conditions (see: Robak & Słocińska, 2015, pp. 138–148; Robak *et al.*, 2016, pp. 88–95).

Research methodology

The carried out research being strictly connected with issues of entering the labour market by generation Y aimed to analyse the opinion of students on their expectations connected with their professional future especially shaping the balance between work and personal life. Last semesters of university studies are specific for students who make decisions about their specialisations and start to crystallise their professional careers then. The perspective of entering the labour market provokes reflection on the future work

and also on the experience they have already gained at paid jobs during their studies.

In the research it was assumed that keeping the balance between professional life and personal life belongs to one of the priorities of generation Y. That is why the issues under research referred to the following questions:

- What are respondents' expectations for their professional future?
- How important is it for the respondents to maintain the balance between work and personal life after they start their jobs?
- Would the respondents like the balance between the professional sphere and a private one to be the same as in case of their parents?
- What do the respondents think about working overtime?
- What do the respondents think about flexible employment?
- How do the respondents evaluate the possibility of achieving the balance between professional life and successful personal life?

In order to gain the answers to the above questions the methods of diagnostic survey and of a questionnaire with the use of the anonymous auditorium questionnaire were applied. 183 correctly completed questionnaires were selected from all the received surveys, and they constituted the basis for the analysis presented in this paper.

In order to complete and extend the scope of obtained data, qualitative research in the form of interviews was applied. Three focus group interviews were carried out, in which the total of 32 people took part. The choice of the group discussion as a research method was determined by the fact that it allows to obtain additional information that are revealed in the interaction of participants of this type of research. The research material under analysis was obtained both through surveys and interviews in January 2017.

Research results

Data obtained from 183 students of full-time courses and extramural courses of Czestochowa University of Technology were used in the analysis of the carried out surveys. There were 56 women and 127 men at the age from 22 to 32 among the respondents. All the respondents were from the second-cycle degree and they already possessed diplomas of engineering and of the first-cycle degree programme completion. They studied at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science (147 persons) and at the Faculty of Management (36 persons) on 5 fields and 10 specialisations. Detailed data concerning the sex, age, and the field of studies of the respondents are in Table 1.

90,7% of respondents took up a paid job already during their studies. It means that very many students, including those from full-time programmes, can boast professional experience in front of their future employees, the fact which significantly increases their chances on the labour market (Vinogradov, 2017, p. 50). However, only 45,2% of them specified the carried out work as matching the profile of their education (mainly students of Computer Science and Mechanics and Machine Construction) Students who took up paid jobs were most often employed on the basis of the contract of specific work/ contract of mandate (53,6%) and employment contract (27,1%) and the others (19,3%) worked without any official agreement with the employer. Most of people who declared they worked and studied at the same time (54,8%) stated that their job was not connected with their education profile (trade, gastronomy, giving private lessons, construction and renovation services, work in agriculture and gardening), and it mainly gave financial benefits and not professional practice.

The survey started with a question about students' expectations connected with their future careers. Each respondent could choose the answer from a selection of suggestions or indicate his or her own one. High income most of respondents look forward to (80,3% of answers) was at the first place. Professional work is to be based on stable employment (71,6% of answers) that matches their interests (66,1% of answers). What is very interesting, however, from the point of view of the analysed problems, maintaining the balance between work and the non-work life was indicated by slightly fewer respondents (65% of answers). It means that young people who are about to enter the labour market want to have well paid jobs, but not at the expense of time for them and their families. Respondents are also interested in having good relations with colleagues in the future (58,5% of answers), and in achieving professionalism in their jobs (42,6% of answers) and also in carrying out creative and developing work (30,6% of answers). Respondents paid less attention to the fact if their employment matches their education profile, or not (26,2%) and to achieving high positions in their jobs (18% of answers). Professional trainings (14,8% of answers) and non-wage benefits (10,4%) did not receive so much recognition by respondents. While every fifth respondent took into account running his own business (20,2%) in the future. Only some of the students under research were interested in working abroad (4,9%), as they believed they would find a well-paid and attractive job in their country.

In order to check the significance of work-life balance for generation Y in the questionnaire respondents were asked to answer how important it would be for them to maintain balance between the requirements of work and personal life. The respondents confirmed the thesis that for their gener-

ation work-life balance has a significant meaning, as 53% of them stated that it is very important for them and 42,1% indicated it as important (Figure 1). It also turned out in the research that the women who took part in it attached special meaning to the work-life balance, as 64,3% of them evaluated the meaning of this issue as very big and the others as big. Highlighting the importance of this issue by women in the research can mean that they are aware of potential difficulties in fulfilling different roles in life and especially in reconciling family duties and professional ones.

In order to compare the expectations for the work-life balance of generation Y with the situation of the preceding generation the respondents were asked if they would like to achieve a similar balance between professional sphere and personal life as their parents. According to the obtained data 57,9% of respondents gave a negative answer to this question. What is important, not fewer than 42,6% of them want to be less involved in professional life in comparison to the work of their parents. Only 15,3% assumes that they will work more than their parents.

Focusing on the issue of the amount of time the respondents would like to spend on professional work after the graduation, the respondents were asked to address the issue if according to them the standard 40 hour working week is an appropriate amount of working time. Although 72,1% of respondents confirmed that they want to work for the amount of time, almost every fifth respondent (18%) would like to spend less time on professional career. The fewest respondents (9,9%) believe that in the future they will spend on their professional work more time than the standard 40 hours per week.

Analysing the opinions of respondents regarding the relation between the time spend on work and that spent outside work a number of questions relating to this important issue were used. When respondents were asked if their free time is more important for them than additional working hours (overtime), most of them marked the answer that they fully agree with it (35% of checked options) or rather agree (29% of checked options). Only 9,2% of respondents were of opposite opinion. However, it should be noted here that every fourth respondent did not have any opinion on this subject. The answers concerning the issue of the acceptance of performing professional duties beyond the official working time also indicate that the respondents attach great importance to personal life. More than half of the respondents (55,7% of checked options) claimed that they do not agree to work professionally during the additional time- over the standard working time. However, interestingly, students were asked if they would accept the promotion with higher pay if it meant longer hours at work — they were no longer so willing to defend the time for private life. Almost every second

respondent (48,6%) would agree to spend the additional time on work if this was connected with promotion to a higher position and higher salaries. Many respondents could not define their position on this issue (29,5%) and 21,9% of respondents would not agree to longer hours at work even if it was connected with promotion. The summary of the received answers concerning the working time and its relation to the time spent outside work is presented in Figure 2.

The issue of flexible employment is particularly important with respect to the issue of balancing work and non-work life. Due to this fact, questions revealing opinions on this issue were also used in the questionnaire survey. According to the obtained data respondents highly appreciate companies offering flexible working hours, as 80,1% of them gave positive answers to this issue. Most respondents (59,9% of choices) would appreciate the fact that they could work professionally at home. Almost every second respondent (49,5% choices) would accept work in compressed working week (e.g. 10 hours of work daily and then three days off). However the style of professional functioning also had numerous opponents (27,3% of checked options). Opinions of the respondents on flexible employment are illustrated on Figure 3.

In the end the respondents were asked how they assess the possibility of striking the balance between work and successful personal life. Respondents turned out to be optimistic on this issue, as no less than 96,2% of them believed that they would succeed in balancing these two major spheres of life in the future. The respondents showed lower degree of optimism when asked about the evaluation of their future effectiveness at work and in personal life (Figure 4).

In order to complete and extend the scope of obtained data, qualitative research in the form of interviews was applied. The conducted focus group interviews were to lead to the analysis of the respondents' opinions concerning their expectations connected with shaping the balance between the professional sphere and their private life after graduation and starting a new job. Three focus group interviews were carried out, in which the total of 32 people took part- 14 women and 18 men. The interviewees were aged from 25 to 28, and they were at the last year of their master studies. The common feature of all the interviewees was that they belonged to generation Y and were in the same situation connected with graduation from the higher school and entering the labour market.

The interviewees were asked questions concerning the following issues:

- How do the interviewees imagine ideal balance between work and a personal life?
- What are the factors that may negatively affect work-life balance?

- Who can assist respondents in shaping work-life balance and how?
- Are the respondents willing to work additional hours, and if yes, what would make them spend additional time at work?
- What are the respondents' expectations concerning shaping the relationship between work and personal life after graduation and starting permanent work?

Thanks to the research material gathered during the interviews, it was possible to complete the data obtained in the survey with the views that extended the scope of information on selected issues of the analysed subject. According to the interviews, the respondents believe that in case of an ideal balance between work and personal life the degree of the commitment to work and the amount of time spent on working allow for good functioning in personal life. The separation of work from personal life is important for them. This division was defined as the lack of the need to complete professional activities at home and as distancing themselves from professional issues in private life. There were individuals among the interviewees who have pointed out that the right work-life balance is connected with working time flexibility that allows to realise themselves in both spheres of life, that is in professional life and in private one. Some of the women stressed the fact that proper relationship between the professional and personal life is when personal life and all such significant matters connected with it as family, friends and individual interest are more important than work.

When asked about the factors that may adversely affect the work-life balance respondents mentioned, among others: working overtime (especially without prior warning the worker of this necessity), work at the weekends or shift work, long commuting time and also carrying out additional professional activities at home. In their opinion, employers' pressure concerning the performance, inappropriate relationships with colleagues or generally stressful work may contribute to shaking work-life balance. Moreover, the desire to earn more and to make big money in a short time may put pressure that hampers the process of shaping the right balance between those spheres of life.

All the interviewees agreed that it is mainly the closest family that should assist them in skilful shaping work-life balance. Some of them also indicated that in the future they hope to receive support from their supervisors and labour law. Interestingly, although maintaining work-life balance was of significant value for all the interviewees, the majority of them would be willing to work overtime. Additional remuneration enabling higher standard of living was most often given as one of the reasons for taking up additional work. Some of the respondents claimed that they would spend

more time on professional sphere than it is officially required, if the job they had matched their interests and enabled the realisation of pursued objectives or contributed to personal development

When asked about their expectations concerning shaping the relationship between work and personal life after graduation and taking up a permanent job, respondents answered briefly that they would like their professional life not to influence their private life too much. After finishing work they want to have time for their families and interests. Interviewees believed that work should not be taken home, and professional issues should be left at work and not transferred to private life.

Summing up the results of surveys and interviews it must be stated that the research assumption that keeping the balance between professional and personal life constitutes one of the priorities for generation Y was confirmed. The comparison of the information presented here with the results of other studies concerning the opinion of students and graduates of higher schools on their expectations regarding their future jobs show numerous similarities in obtained data. The fourth edition of research titled *First steps on the labour market. Leaders of the future* (2015), made by the consulting company — Deloitte, can serve as an example. According to this survey, the opportunity of professional development and learning new skills serve as main factors determining the choice of a given job in case of students and young graduates. Next in the order were attractive remuneration, work-life balance and good atmosphere at work. When asked about career plans, most respondents answered that they would like to occupy managerial positions in the organizational hierarchy, and only every fourth of them had in mind the highest positions in the hierarchy. However, bad atmosphere at work, insufficient growth opportunities, too low salaries, and the lack of appreciation at work were given as main reasons for changing the employer. Presented research and other analyses (compare Baran & Kłos, 2014, pp. 212–216; Ostasiewicz & Zawadzki, 2016, pp. 102–110) relating to the functioning of generation Y on the labour market shed additional light and complement the issues mentioned in this elaboration, the content of which was limited by the volume of this paper.

Conclusions

As it is shown in the research, the expectations of generation Y concerning the professional future mainly refer to high income, stable employment that matches the workers' interests and work-life balance. The research confirmed that maintaining the balance between the requirements at work and

personal life would constitute one of the priorities for them in the future. As employees they want to spend less time on professional life than their parents, as free time is more important for them than additional working hours. However, employers may rely on their strong commitment (including extended hours) to the realization of tasks matching their interests, and also in case of promotion involving higher salary. The importance the representatives of generation Y attach to balancing work and personal lives has also another aspect connected with high assessment of companies offering flexible working hours. The representatives of generation Y under research believe that they will be able to strike a proper balance between work and successful personal life and function effectively in both key areas of life.

Taking into account the presented results of research and elaborations in the literature on the subject, it can be concluded that the commitment to work of the employees from generation Y and preventing them from changing the employer depend not only on the support of their professional development, offering them interesting and well-paid employment or good atmosphere in the team, but also from enabling them to maintain work-life balance. In this context, all the activities taken up by employers in order to support their workers in keeping the work-life balance and facilitating them in performing their family roles, realisation of their own passions and their own life style become increasingly important (Cappelli, 2002, pp. 103–112). Some of the employers recognizing the expectations of young workers try to meet their expectations by offering them different types of initiatives, developing programs for them and, above all, establishing such organisational culture that supports work-life balance. The range of possible initiatives (advisory, educational) which are intended to help in maintaining the balance between work and private life is wide, but to a large extent it depends on the approach the managerial staff in organizations have to their subordinates, and on the activity and the involvement of employees themselves.

However, it should be emphasised that the analysis of the needs of workers through the prism of which generation they belong to, although it provides many valuable information, it is certainly not sufficient. Expectations of individual representatives of generation Y can vary considerably, as it is in the case of the approach and commitment to work and in the case of the amount of time spent on working and private life. Therefore, in order to effectively identify individual objectives and preferences of workers related with shaping the work-life balance, it is necessary to cultivate good relations between workers that are based on open communication and trust.

Another factor limiting the research results is obtaining information on the analyzed topic only from students. The opinions of representatives of

the Y generation who have several years of professional experience could complement the obtained results and create a broader picture of the studied issues. Moreover, it would be cognitively very interesting to compare students' expectations regarding balancing work and personal life with the opinions of young employees experiencing the realities of their professional functioning.

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Annex

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Sex				
Female		Male		
56		127		
30,6%		69,4%		
Age				
22-23 years		24-25 years		26 and more years
76		90		17
41,5%		49,2%		9,3%
Field of study				
Mathematics	Power engineering	Mechanical engineering	Computer sciences	Management
18	14	53	62	36
9,8%	7,7%	28,9%	33,9%	19,7%

Figure 1. Opinions of respondents on the significance of the balance between work and non-work life

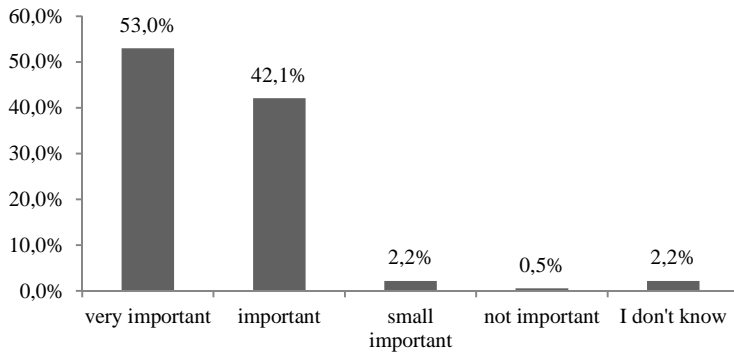


Figure 2. Opinions of respondents on the relation of working time to the time outside work

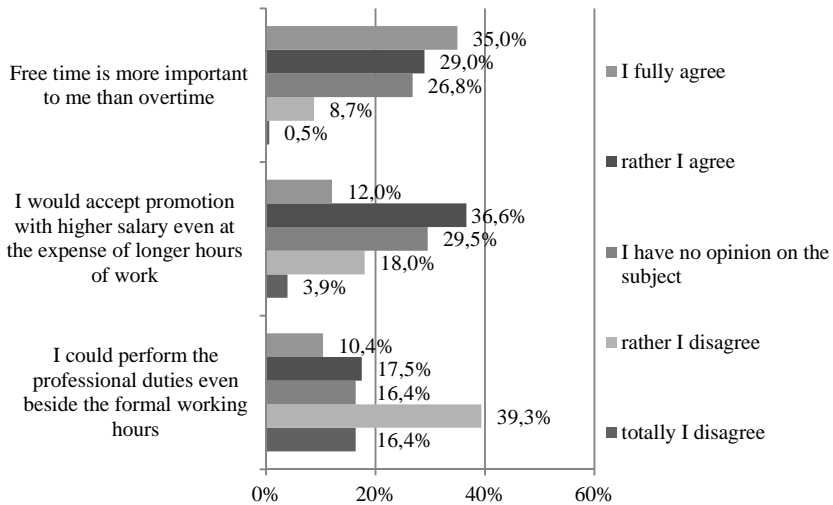


Figure 3. Opinions of the respondents on flexible employment

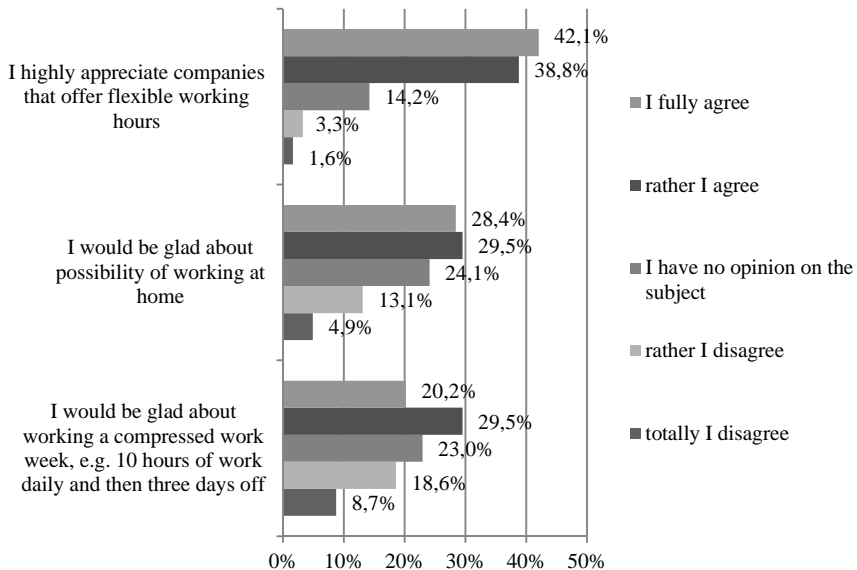


Figure 4. Opinions of respondents on the possibility of reconciling work and personal life and on effectiveness in these two spheres

