

## ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR GEN Z REMOTE WORKERS – RESEARCH RESULTS

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**Purpose:** The article's primary goal is to identify the most important values in the life of representatives of Generation Z after their experience of remote work in an uncertain time of COVID-19 pandemic and critical competencies essentials at home-office.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The authors conducted a diagnostic survey with a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was carried out using the CAWI method. It was filled in by 310 respondents who represent Generation Z, are professionally active and worked remotely during the pandemic. Frequency and percentage statistics and descriptive parametric were applied in the statistical evaluation.

**Findings:** The research results showed that, in Gen Z-ers' opinion, they need specific competencies to be effective in remote work. They indicated the most important ones: the ability to use remote technologies and manage their own time, independent problem solving, self-motivation and commitment.

**Research limitations/implications:** The authors intend to continue the research carried out in the discussed topic, as well as in the field of adaptability to remote work of other three generations, i.e., Y, X and BB. Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is important to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.

**Practical implications:** Human resource managers are challenged to develop the competencies necessary for effective work in a virtual environment. It is also a guideline for which areas employees need support and appropriate training policy.

**Originality/value:** Our paper contributes to the latest insight into essential competencies for Gen Z in remote work. Managers need this knowledge to manage young employees from the Z generation best and ensure their effectiveness while working remotely.

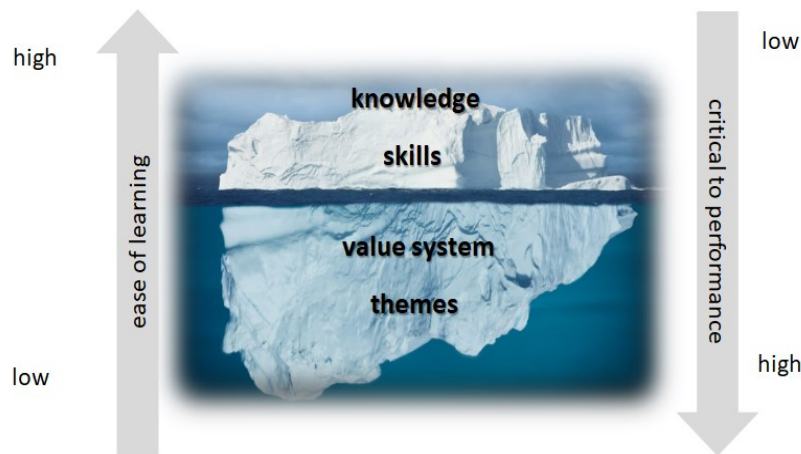
**Keywords:** Generation Z, remote work, competencies, life value.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic initiated a revolution in work systems in most companies. Due to lockdown and restrictions, many were forced into remote working arrangements, which created many challenges and opportunities (Eurofound, 2020). Consequently, remote work is expected to continue at a higher percentage than before the pandemic, although lower than the numbers at its peak (Shifrin, Michel, 2022). Research from McKinsey Global Institute (Lund et al., 2021) estimates that 20-25% of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week in countries with advanced economies. Other studies suggest more significant numbers will engage in a hybrid model, averaging two remote workdays per week (Lund et al., 2020). There is an urgent need to understand better how to influence the effectiveness and efficiency of the work provided under these conditions. It is necessary to consider both positive and negative experiences from this period. A fundamental issue in this context would be identifying the competencies necessary to succeed when working outside a traditional office environment. It is worth emphasizing that the primary and executive competencies needed in stationary work are insufficient to effectively provide remote work (Sawatzky, R., Sawatzky, N.J., 2019). Additional competencies are necessary to enable effective work performed remotely (Wang, Haggerty, 2009). As emphasized by Jeran (2016) and Ślęzak (2012), traditional forms of work differ significantly from remote work, including heterogeneous workplace, multidimensional flexibility related mainly to the way of performing tasks, or constant contact of employees via ICT with the enterprise and other team members.

It is hard to define the concept of competence (Page, Wilson, 1994). Sajkiewicz (2002) perceives competencies as a set of knowledge, skills, value system, personality, and interests that, developed in the work process, lead to the results desired by the organization. Figure 1 shows the main components of the construct, which are competencies. The employee's value system occupies a special place among the indicated components. It is the foundation for creating and describing the competencies expected by employers. It creates employees' views and ways of thinking, shaping their attitudes and habits and, consequently, more or less desirable behaviors and work results.



**Figure 1.** Competency Ice-berg model.

Source: own work based on Baron-Puda, M. (2012). Projektowanie strategii rozwoju kompetencji pracowników przedsiębiorstw produkcyjnych. *Zarządzanie Przedsiębiorstwem, Vol. 4*, p. 2.

Concerning remote work, virtual competencies are of particular importance. Wang and Haggerty (2011) theorize that individual virtual competence (IVC) is a new and distinct capability that individuals require to perform effectively in their organizations. They also suggest that IVC is vital and stands in contrast to those necessary in a co-located setting. Specifically noted were competencies that relate to technology, motivation, and self-efficacy. Virtual competencies were the subject of research even before the pandemic. The growing interest in remote work after its outbreak has intensified this tendency (e.g., Tsareva, Omelyanenko, 2020; Krasnova, 2021).

The article's authors refer to the value and problem of the competencies necessary for success as a remote worker from the perspective of the youngest employees, born between 1990 and 2000 - referred to in the literature as the Z generation (Tulgan, 2016). They are entering the workforce with higher numbers every year<sup>1</sup>. According to the authors, such an orientation of considerations is justified. It can provide valuable information to employers and employees who face challenges in managing remote work for employees of various ages. The more so because the knowledge on this subject is quite limited.

Gen Z was born in the digital age, grew up during the technological explosion, and has never experienced a world without the internet or social media. They are the first truly digital native generation (Lanier, 2017). It significantly influences their value system, life experiences, and outlook. Z-ers appreciate work-life balance and flexibility in the workplace. They expect flexible solutions from employers in the field of forms of work organization, including enabling them to provide work in the form of remote work (Kantar TNS, 2018; Kopertyńska, 2020). Many young Z-ers were forced into remote work just as they started their professional lives (Bruner, 2021). They began their professional careers in purely remote work environments and had no chance to live the working life they dreamt of during college. They do not experience the in-person onboarding, networking, and training they typically expect when working in a company (Kantar TNS, 2018; Chillakuri et al., 2018). The article's primary goal is to identify

the most important values in the life of representatives of Generation Z after their experience of remote work in an uncertain time of COVID 19 pandemic and critical competencies essentials at home-office.

## 2. Methods

For the purpose of this article, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. Which of the analyzed values are the most important for Generation Z, and which are relatively less critical?

RQ2. Which employee competencies are the most important and relatively less necessary in remote work in the opinion of the Z Generation?

RQ3. Which of the analyzed values and competencies are consistent and interrelated?

The presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques, and research tools. For the purposes of this article, an empirical, quantitative research method was used, which was a diagnostic survey using the surveying technique. The research tool was a questionnaire. It contained closed questions in the form of a disjunctive cafeteria and a 5-point interval ordinal scale. The survey ended with a metric that enabled carrying out the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Then, the two data analysis method was used as part of the adopted research methodology. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics and descriptive parametric were applied in the statistical evaluation. In addition, as part of the conducted research, one of the statistical methods of factor analysis was used, namely principal component analysis (PCA) and variable correlation analysis. The survey was conducted in the 1st quarter of 2022. It was filled in by 334 respondents who represent Generation Z, are professionally active and worked remotely during the pandemic. As many as 310 questionnaires were selected for the final analysis ( $n = 310$ ). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data shown in the article is based on the responses/declarations of the surveyed. The sample was differentiated according to gender - 71.6% were women. Additionally, every third of the representatives of the youngest generation works in the service sector (32.9%). Most of the surveyed people live in a large city (61.3%), and the majority do not have children (88.4%) (Table 1).

**Table 1.***Descriptive statistics pertaining to the research sample*

Sample differentiation criterion		n	%
Gender	Female	222	71.6
	Male	88	28.4
Business sector	Commerce	20	6.5
	Production	26	8.4
	IT	38	12.3
	Service	102	32.9
	Education	14	4.5
	Medicine	12	3.9
	Other	98	31.6
Residence	Country	54	17.4
	Small town (population below 20k)	30	9.7
	Mid-size town (population between 20k – 100k)	36	11.6
	Big city (population over 100k)	190	61.3
Children	Yes	36	11.6
	No	274	88.4

Source: own work based on conducted research.

### 3. Results

The first question addressed to respondents concerned their values and life priorities. Twenty of them were analyzed. The respondents assessed them on a 5-point ordinal scale, from 1 to 5, where 1 is an unimportant meaning, and 5 is a very important meaning. Table 2 presents the main descriptive statistics: mean, standard deviation, and median.

**Table 2.***Descriptive statistics of the importance of values and life priorities – ranking of importance*

Place in the ranking	Values/life priorities	Mean	Standard deviation	Median
1.	Family	4.66	0.68	5.00
2.	Happiness	4.62	0.69	5.00
3.	Health	4.55	0.70	5.00
4.	Freedom	4.52	0.71	5.00
5.	Friends	4.47	0.75	5.00
6.	Free time	4.35	0.74	4.00
7.	Development	4.26	0.75	4.00
8.	Responsibility	4.25	0.78	4.00
9.	Commitment	4.20	0.78	4.00
10.	Relationships with other people	4.20	0.89	4.00
11.	Tolerance	4.19	0.91	4.00
12.	Persistence	4.10	0.85	4.00
13.	Empathy	4.08	0.93	4.00
14.	Work-life balance	4.04	0.91	4.00
15.	Cooperation	3.94	0.85	4.00
16.	Care for the environment	3.65	1.01	4.00
17.	Compassion	3.59	0.98	4.00
18.	Work	3.43	0.87	3.00
19.	Spirituality	2.57	1.34	2.00
20.	Religion	2.30	1.28	2.00

Source: own work based on conducted research.

When analyzing the indications concerning the analyzed value categories, a relatively high agreement of the opinions obtained can be observed. As many as 14 obtained average values of at least 4.0, proving a wide range of values essential for the youngest generation of employees. It is worth emphasizing, however, that taking into account the median value (5.0), the most important for the respondents turned out to be the following of them: family, happiness, health, freedom, and friends. Free time and the related work-life balance, development, responsibility, commitment, relations, tolerance, perseverance, and empathy are slightly less important than the above. Interestingly, work as a value is relatively less important than the other values (mean = 3.43; median = 3.0). For Gen Z-ers, spirituality and religion are relatively the least important.

Another issue subject to the study was the recognition of the respondents' opinions on the legitimacy of having particular competencies needed for remote work. The authors asked the respondents whether, in their opinion, it was possible to talk about the so-called 'Home office personality'. As many as 2/3 (67.7%) of them answered the question in the affirmative, nearly every fourth person (23.9%) indicated the answer 'I do not know', and only one in ten denied it (8.4%). The above question continued to indicate the importance of the analyzed competencies and other conditions predisposing the employee to remote work. Similarly, as in the case of the value test, an evaluation scale from 1 to 5 was used, where 1 means an invalid competence and 5 is a very important one. Table 3 presents the ranking of the importance of individual competencies.

**Table 3.**

*Descriptive statistics of the importance of competencies and other conditions predestining an employee to work remotely – ranking of importance*

Place in the ranking	Competences/conditions	Mean	Standard deviation	Median
1.	Ability to use remote technologies	4.27	1.08	5.00
2.	The ability to manage your own time	4.25	1.05	5.00
3.	Independent problem solving	4.03	1.12	4.00
4.	Self-motivation and commitment	3.88	1.18	4.00
5.	Willingness to learn	3.86	1.16	4.00
6.	Openness to changes	3.86	1.11	4.00
7.	Family situation	3.81	1.18	4.00
8.	Living conditions	3.77	1.23	4.00
9.	Action-oriented	3.65	1.12	4.00
10.	Not postponing tasks for later	3.64	1.23	4.00
11.	Results orientation	3.61	1.09	4.00
12.	Coping with stress	3.56	1.12	4.00
13.	Work ethic	3.35	1.20	3.00
14.	Assertiveness	3.35	1.10	3.00
15.	Experience	3.31	1.19	3.00
16.	Relationships with colleagues	3.04	1.22	3.00
17.	Identification with the company	2.79	1.32	3.00

Source: own work based on conducted research.

When analyzing the obtained values of three statistical measures, it is stated that the respondents rated the highest two, namely the ability to use remote technologies and manage their own time (median = 5.0). In their opinion, only slightly less important are such competencies as independent problem solving, self-motivation and commitment, readiness to learn, openness to changes, orientation to action and results, not postponing tasks, and coping with stress (mean = what least 3.5; median = 4.0). There are also additional conditions here, such as housing and family situations.

In deepening the research, factor analysis using principal component analysis (PCA) was used in further analysis. Based on it, components were distinguished for individual features of the questionnaire concerning the categories of analyzed values and competencies. Tables 4 and 5 show the results analyzed above with calculated factor loadings. The factors were distinguished based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues > 1) and the scree plot. This way, the number of components and the features included in its structure were determined. In this analysis, the criterion of a factor load of > 0.5 was adopted. In other words, the respondents who rated one of the above-stroke features also rated the others high. Correspondingly, component C1 consists of such features as relationships with people, cooperation, friends, happiness, and free time; component C2: work, development, commitment, and persistence; component C3: empathy, tolerance, and concern for the environment; component C4: religion and spirituality. A similar analysis was carried out about the potential competencies of the so-called 'home office personality', which allowed determining the components of C5 (they are formed by as many as 13 analyzed features, except 4 of them, which make up the C6 component: identification with the company, ethical behavior, attitude to social contacts and the level of assertiveness). Then, Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) measuring the reliability of the adopted scales was calculated for the selected features.

**Table 4.**

*Main components of factor analysis according to the importance of life values and priorities*

Life values/priorities	Component			
	C1 $\alpha = 0.811$	C2 $\alpha = 0.703$	C3 $\alpha = 0.657$	C4 $\alpha = 0.906$
Work	-0.173	<b>0.592</b>	0.016	0.246
Family	0.470	0.096	0.091	0.431
Health	0.477	0.111	0.230	0.187
Compassion	0.126	0.100	0.610	0.423
Religion	0.047	0.056	0.058	<b>0.908</b>
Spirituality	-0.024	0.051	0.232	<b>0.859</b>
Work-life balance	0.436	-0.052	0.428	-0.020
Empathy	0.352	0.011	<b>0.682</b>	0.203
Freedom	0.430	0.184	0.234	-0.328
Relationships with other people	<b>0.739</b>	0.141	0.086	0.088
Cooperation	<b>0.635</b>	0.095	0.073	0.108
Development	0.219	<b>0.632</b>	0.169	-0.118
Tolerance	0.184	0.331	<b>0.661</b>	-0.125
Friends	<b>0.682</b>	0.080	0.305	-0.015

Cont. table 4.

Happiness	<b>0.737</b>	0.143	0.124	-0.172
Free time	<b>0.727</b>	0.289	-0.015	-0.056
Commitment	0.333	<b>0.766</b>	0.093	-0.020
Responsibility	0.150	0.835	0.138	0.103
Persistence	0.266	<b>0.747</b>	0.091	0.005
Care for the environment	0.023	0.152	<b>0.720</b>	0.114

Source: own work based on conducted research.

**Table 5.**

*Main components of factor analysis according to the importance of competencies and other conditions predisposing the employee to work remotely*

Competencies/conditions	Component	
	C5	C6
	$\alpha = 0.905$	$\alpha = 0.417$
Self-motivation and commitment	<b>0.634</b>	0.263
Not postponing tasks for later	<b>0.578</b>	0.468
Action-oriented	<b>0.612</b>	0.452
Results orientation	<b>0.581</b>	0.376
Identification with the company	0.098	<b>0.730</b>
Experience	<b>0.564</b>	0.335
Work ethic	0.401	<b>0.593</b>
Independent problem solving	<b>0.807</b>	0.178
Willingness to learn	<b>0.758</b>	0.284
Openness to changes	<b>0.775</b>	0.249
Ability to use remote technologies	<b>0.865</b>	0.121
The ability to manage your own time	<b>0.881</b>	0.156
Coping with stress	<b>0.677</b>	0.343
Relationships with colleagues	0.124	<b>0.812</b>
Assertiveness	0.460	<b>0.578</b>
Living conditions	<b>0.570</b>	0.415
Family situation	<b>0.525</b>	0.483

Source: own work based on conducted research.

When analyzing the obtained results, it is stated that the reliability of the components apart from C6 is relatively high. Table 6 presents basic statistics for the selected components. Table 7 presents the correlation coefficients between the identified components.

**Table 6.**

*Statistics for selected factors*

Basic statistics	Components					
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Mean	21.59	15.99	11.93	4.86	49.50	12.54
Standard deviation	2.97	2.37	2.20	2.50	11.15	3.66
Median	22.00	16.00	12.00	4.00	52.00	12.00
Minimum	11.00	8.00	5.00	2.00	13.00	4.00
Maximum	25.00	20.00	15.00	10.00	65.00	20.00
Skewness	-0.97	-0.61	-0.68	0.50	-1.60	-0.32
Kurtosis	0.69	0.39	0.11	-0.80	3.23	-0.05

Source: own work based on conducted research.



**Table 7.**

*Pearson's r correlation coefficients between components relating to the values and life priorities*

			Components			
			C1	C2	C3	C4
Components	C1	r	1	<b>.398**</b>	<b>.421**</b>	0.047
		p		<0.001	<0.001	0.558
	C2	r	<b>.398**</b>	1	<b>.351**</b>	0.106
		p	<0.001		<0.001	0.189
	C3	r	<b>.421**</b>	<b>.351**</b>	1	<b>.232**</b>
		p	<0.001	<0.001		0.004
	C4	r	0.047	0.106	<b>.232**</b>	1
		p	0.558	0.189	0.004	
** correlation significant at the level of 0.01 (two-sided), * correlation significant at the level of 0.05 (two-sided).						

Source: own work based on conducted research.

Analyzing the correlations between successive components, it can be concluded that at a moderate level, people who value relationships with people and friends, cooperation, free time, and happiness (component C1) will also moderately value work, learning, commitment, and perseverance (component C2) ( $r = 0.398$ ) and empathy, tolerance, and care for the environment (C3 component) ( $r = 0.421$ ). On the other hand, people who rated work, learning, commitment, and perseverance higher (component C2) will also rate the importance of values such as empathy, tolerance, or caring for the environment higher (component C3) ( $r = 0.351$ ). In turn, respondents who value religion and spirituality (component 4) will value empathy, tolerance, and care for the environment (component 3) more ( $r = 0.232$ ). It is worth emphasizing the strong mutual connection of the components C5 and C6 relating to the competencies under study. It means that the respondents who highly rate the importance of such competencies as focus on results, company, tasks, and the level of commitment will also rate the importance of identifying with the company, work ethics, relations with colleagues, or assertiveness higher ( $r = 0.677$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

## 4. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the trend that remote work and its associated technologies will be a transformative force for many organizations over the long term (Hadidi, Power, 2020). Gen Z-ers respondents quickly adapted to the new work mode dictated by the pandemic situation. Moreover, as they declared in previous authors' research, their commitment and the efficiency of work performed in remote conditions remained at the same level and even increased. Additionally, respondents reported other positive experiences related to working remotely. These include increased trust in the employer who did not apply

ongoing control but relatively large freedom, independence at work, and the possibility of a flexible combination of private and professional duties (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2022).

Answering the first research question regarding the fundamental values and life priorities of Gen Z, it is worth emphasizing that respondents highly appreciated the importance of the majority of the analyzed values. The most important, however, were: family, happiness, health, freedom, and friends, and slightly less important: free time and the related work-life balance, development, responsibility, commitment, relations, tolerance, perseverance, and empathy. In the context of the above, it is worth noting that the authors obtained comparable results on life values in the previously conducted own research (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2021). Particular attention should be paid to the coherence and consistency of young employees regarding the identified hierarchy of values. Interestingly, work as a value is relatively less important than the other values. Young people do not treat work as a critical value, rather instrumental than autotelic, and are not ready to devote more time to it. The Gen Z value system is based primarily on pursuing self-fulfillment, not necessarily in the work environment, but as part of passions and interests, spending time with friends, and striving to be happy.

Searching for an answer to another question relating to essential and relatively less necessary competencies in remote work, in the opinion of the Z Generation, the research showed that specific competencies become particularly important. Most of them agree with the statement that employees should have a certain predisposition to work remotely. Moreover, in the opinion of most of them, one can even speak of a 'home office personality', within which selected competencies acquire special meaning in the face of remote work. Although respondents grew in the era of digitization, they are aware of their competence deficits in this area. They expressed it by defining the meaning of the ability to use remote technologies as the most important. Young people's second most crucial competence is the ability to manage your own time. Gen Z-ers realize that the Internet is a strong distraction, distracting them from their professional responsibilities. Therefore, for the Z generation, self-motivation and staying motivated while working from home are significant challenges. Moreover, it is worrying that the work ethic, identification with the company, and relations with colleagues obtained relatively the lowest values.

Answering the last research question about the strength of the connection of the analyzed components, it is stated that while the relationships between the components concerning competencies are strong, the strength of the correlation of the components related to the values and life priorities of Gen Z-ers is at a moderate level.

While there is a lack of research on the Z generation in terms of the remote competencies they desire, we can find considerations on the competencies of people working remotely in the literature on the subject. According to Haggerty and Wang (2009), employees must have specific competencies, including virtual self-efficacy, virtual social competencies, and the ability to use virtual media to work remotely effectively. In turn, Lönnblad and Vartiainen (2012) focused on new forms of work and ways of organizing work related to remote and

mobile work, with work in virtual and global teams, communicating through advanced ICT systems. These authors distinguished and divided competencies into three groups: personal competencies of employees and leaders, specific competencies of leaders, and team competencies. Moreover, Sawatzky, R. and Sawatzky, N.J. (2019) indicated communication, self-direction, self-motivation, discipline, critical thinking, taking the initiative, being trustworthy, flexibility, and empathy as necessary for the success of a remote worker. Similar lists of competencies necessary during remote work can also be found in business reports and publications (Jabra, 2021). It is worth noting that the desirable competencies proposed by the authors mentioned above refer to the remote employee without considering the perspective of his or her generation. However, it is difficult to say whether the indicated criterion is essential at this stage. At the moment, however, one may be tempted to say that, on the one hand, a remote employee's competencies will be important regardless of their generation affiliation. On the other hand, it is also possible to identify such competencies that will be specific and characteristic only for a given generation. Bearing in mind the results of the research conducted by the authors of this article, in the case of the Z generation, such competencies are, e.g., the ability to manage your own time and self-motivation and commitment, independent problem solving, and not postponing tasks for later. Generation Z, often presented as susceptible to various distractors, will undoubtedly need much support in these competencies.

## 5. Summary

The transition to a remote work format is the most relevant topic of the current year and subsequent years. In changing working conditions, employees need appropriate competencies. The ones that will allow them to be successful as remote workers. In this article, the authors focused on identification by representatives of Generation Z, the most important values in their life after the experience of remote work in an uncertain time of Covid-19, and competencies essentials at home-office. It is worth emphasizing that Gen Z-ers appreciate the remote working model. They have become convinced of a home office, even "choked" with its advantages, and many of them cannot imagine working in a different form of work. The possibility of remote work is a decisive factor in choosing an employer. Young people wonder whether returning to work at the company's headquarters will remove the privileges so vital for them related to the home office (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2022).

As the presented research results show, young people, believe that to be effective and fully benefit from remote work benefits, they need specific competencies. They considered the most important: the ability to use remote technologies and manage their own time, independent problem solving, self-motivation and commitment. Therefore, human resource managers are challenged to develop the competencies necessary for effective work in a virtual environment.

It is also essential to determine which areas employees need support and appropriate training policy. Regarding the youngest employees, it is important to find a way to help Gen Z-ers grasp what they prefer and expect during remote work. Knowledge of the competencies they need to work in this environment will allow not only to define the requirements for job candidates but, above all, to manage these competencies. It is the foundation of a building and strengthening the motivation to work and the commitment of young employees and a way to unlock the full potential of the new way of working.

The authors of the article intend to continue the research carried out in the discussed topic, as well as in the field of adaptability to remote work of other three generations, i.e., Y, X and BB. Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is important to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.

## Acknowledgement

The project is financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland under the programme "Regional Initiative of Excellence" 2019-2022 project number 015/RID/2018/19 total funding amount 10 721 040,00 PLN.

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