

Young HRM professionals' perception of supportive work environment – identifying expected changes in employment settings

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Abstract

Purpose – The main aim is to present young HRM (Human Resource Management) professionals' (GenZ representatives) expectations towards a supportive work environment (SWE) and to identify organizational changes required to bridge existing and expected workplace settings.

Design/methodology/approach – This exploratory study is based on individual in-depth interviews with 19 young HRM professionals.

Findings – The results show that relationships in the workplace are crucial for creating SWE. Respondents have clear expectations towards superiors who should be diversity-aware, trustworthy and supportive. They perceive relationships with peers not only in terms of occupation but expect organizations to create opportunities to create non-work bonds. Respondents appreciate flexibility, reflected in their preferences to work in a hybrid model, which supports work-life balance. Offices should be redesigned to provide employees with quiet spaces for enhancing concentration. Respondents also claim that organizations do not pay sufficient attention to work design and structuring, which results in overtime.

Practical implications – The results of the study provide valuable knowledge about GenZ and their post-COVID-19 idea of SWE. The conclusions can be used by HR practitioners to improve or adjust workplaces to meet the expectations of GenZ representatives.

Originality/value – Existing knowledge on the work environment refers mostly to pre-pandemic conditions and expectations of older generations. Recent work changes underscore the necessity to furnish organizations and scholars with updated knowledge and guidelines. This study offers an insight into the mindset of young HRM professionals who will be responsible for introducing changes in people management systems while obtaining managerial positions.

Keywords Supportive work environment, Workplace, Generation Z, Supervisor support

Paper type Research Paper

Introduction

The world of work has changed significantly since the early 2000s as information and communication technology (ICT) has impacted the way we interact. According to [Saurin et al. \(2008\)](#) ICT development together with market pressures and changing demographics makes workplaces transform into complex, unpredictable and dynamic knowledge environment which force substantial changes in the relationship between an individual, work and the workplace. At the same time, both scholars and practitioners realized that new generations' attitudes and expectations towards work design and workplaces have changed significantly. There are distinct inter-generational differences in the cohorts' perspectives with respect to work ethic, attitude to authority, professional success and work-life balance (WLB) ([Kossek et al., 2012](#)).

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All the changes in the work environment have been strengthened by the COVID-19 crisis. Since the pandemic, more attention has been paid to research and in HRM practices to develop working conditions that support employees and assure WLB. According to [Guest et al. \(2022\)](#), improving the experience of work and job content should be a priority for organizations as it can lead not only to intra-organizational outcomes, but it can be also beneficial for the society. In their studies on pandemic remote work, [Wilson et al. \(2024\)](#) concluded that employees suffered from a lack of interaction with people outside the household. Additionally, in the post-pandemic circumstances, employees expect organizations to provide flexibility in the choice of working time and space and at the same time create an environment that will support them in fulfilling tasks and in dealing with a variety of job-related and personal challenges.

Nevertheless, according to [Tran et al. \(2021\)](#), firms willing to improve their workplaces have little guidance on how to make them more supportive, as only a few studies have developed a systematic framework. Moreover, [Guest et al. \(2022\)](#) claim that in the context of digital technology, principles of socio-technical systems and the quality of working life theories should be revised to respond to a call for a 21st-century humanization of work.

Knowledge about necessary changes in working conditions might be obtained from the research on employee expectations. However, the youngest generation has just entered the labour market. According to [Dwivedula et al. \(2019\)](#), the number of studies on GenZ at the workplace is rising, but it is still scarce and there is insufficient theoretical corpus in the research. Similarly, other authors ([Barhate and Dirani, 2022](#); [Chillakuri, 2022](#); [Ngoc et al., 2022](#)) concluded that this theme is still in its nascent stage and more data concerning the GenZ expectations towards work, and their evaluation of existing workplace settings is needed. Despite the fact that there are examples of research aimed at identifying the youngest cohort's expectations, most of it was conducted among students. On the basis of the literature review, [Barhate and Dirani \(2022\)](#) concluded that nearly 90% of the papers they investigated focused exclusively on GenZ students and the data was collected on campuses. Authors also claimed that almost all studies were quantitative in nature, which is also confirmed in [Fratricova and Kirchmayer \(2018\)](#) and [Ngoc et al. \(2022\)](#) publications. Research on GenZ work expectations is crucial for designing appropriate attraction and retention strategies ([Barhate and Dirani, 2022](#)) and for evaluating organizational readiness of managing GenZ ([Chillakuri, 2022](#)).

The research gap this article aims to address, concerns the insufficient amount of research (especially qualitative) on the work experiences of people from GenZ and a limited number of publications indicating how they perceive a supportive work environment (SWE). In our research, we have applied the SWE concept, as it may be an adequate framework for addressing young people's expectations and organizational changes.

At the research design stage, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1. How do GenZ employees define an SWE?

RQ2. What are the characteristics of an SWE?

RQ3. What actions should organizations take to create a SWE?

RQ4. What are the benefits for the organization and the employee from creating SWE?

RQ5. To what extent are working conditions offered by organizations supportive?

The main aim of this article is to provide data about work environment expectations of young HRM professionals, GenZ representatives and to identify elements of SWE that can be further used as guidelines for employers. As this study is exploratory in nature, structured interviews were conducted. The group of young HRM professionals was chosen due to the fact, that they are aware of people and work-related factors and may potentially be responsible for creating a work environment when obtaining managerial positions in a few years.

This article is structured as follows: firstly, a literature review of work design and environment theories is presented. Secondly, based on recent publications, key findings about GenZ expectations towards work are presented. Thirdly, SWE concept is discussed with special regard to its dimensions, practices and outcomes. It is followed by a description of the research design and presentation of the findings. In the last part expectations towards the work environment are summarized and implications for practice are outlined.

Literature review

Employment and work design-related theories

According to [Guest et al. \(2022\)](#), recent research on work environment has originated in human relations school which questioned principles of scientific management by emphasizing the role of people over machines in assuring productivity. The concept of socio-technical system (STS) emerged from contradictions between human relations and scientific management approaches. According to the STS concept, organizations consist of interrelated components referring to social (i.e. people and the relationships among them; expectations towards work, supervisory relationships, interpersonal relationships) and technical subsystems (i.e. facilities, work techniques and procedures used to fulfil tasks; [Ghosh and Sahney, 2011](#)). The aim is to optimize the co-functioning of these two subsystems as the expectations, which employees bring to the workplace, have to be identified and met by organizations.

Meeting employees' expectations is driven by organizational behaviour theory, which emphasizes that employee motivation, influenced by social and relational factors, boosts performance. Organizational support referring to employees' social needs may increase the sense of belonging, self-determination and psychological empowerment ([Knight and Parker, 2021](#)). These, in turn, cause higher engagement in occupational duties and result in higher performance. Such assumptions are also in line with the social exchange theory (SET), according to which when a person benefits from a relationship, they reciprocate actions to balance the social exchange ([Baranik et al., 2010](#)). The level of compliance between employees' needs and companies' offers can also be analysed in the light of organization support theory (OST), which arose on the basis of SET. Social support is the perception or experience that one is cared about by others, valued and is part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations. OST consists of three perceptual components: perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS) and perceived coworker support (PCS) ([Tran et al., 2021](#)).

The level of return on investment in human capital an employee achieves and the perceived organizational support can constitute the foundation for the evaluation of job quality, which is a multidimensional concept that can be decomposed into two broad areas: employment quality (employment contract, remuneration, working hours, career development) and work quality (autonomy, intensity, social environment and physical environment) ([Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011](#)). High job quality, evaluated with the use of these dimensions increases employee satisfaction according to a eudaimonic approach which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning ([Ryan and Deci, 2001](#)). According to [Erdogan et al. \(2012\)](#), work-related factors, such as meeting the needs, conducting mindful activities and job-related tensions, impact the quality of work and nonwork life as well as a feeling of self-worth. These all build a perception of one's life satisfaction, which may improve performance, commitment and turnover intentions in the employment context.

All aforementioned theories and concepts lead to the conclusion that companies should pay attention to work design, which refers to the content and organization of one's work activities, relationships and responsibilities ([Knight and Parker, 2021](#)) to meet employees expectations towards return on investment, provide them with an appropriate level of person-organization fit and assure their well-being. This in turn, according to POS and SET, will result in higher engagement, commitment and performance.

GenZ expectations towards work

Establishing one cutoff point for a generation across the world is challenging. While major events such as the 2007 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic occurred at the same time for everyone, other changes that shape the unique experience of a generation were not simultaneous (Karasek, 2022). The latest generation to join the workforce is Generation Z (GenZ, Zoomers) born between 1995 and 2010 (Egerova et al., 2021). Despite the fact that in some scientific articles (e.g. Parry and Urwin, 2021), there are opinions that generalizing about employees taking into account their generational affiliation, based mainly on the year of birth, is inadequate and burdened with numerous limitations, we believe that the youngest age group of workers, GenZ, shares many common global experiences (e.g. financial crises, COVID-19), which allow to treat them as a homogeneous different than others group.

The meta-analysis of literature on thriving in the workplace made it possible to conclude that the most crucial elements for all cohorts are supportive coworker behaviour, supportive leadership behaviour and perceived organizational support, regardless of respondents' age (Kleine et al., 2019). While GenZ shares an appreciation of WLB with the previous generation (Millennials, Generation Y), there are certain qualities that set GenZ apart from other cohorts. Studies show that they value intangible elements (e.g. honesty), independence, flexibility and CSR initiatives (Ngoc et al., 2022). Research by Basa et al. (2023) showed that GenZ representatives highly value respect in the workplace and that they prefer working in SMEs rather than in large companies. GenZ in Poland emphasizes the importance of self-development and clear feedback (Karasek, 2022). This cohort is aware of the risk of burnout and they expect employers to take steps to prevent it (Michalak and Olejnik, 2023). On the basis of the literature review, Dwivedula et al. (2019) listed the following GenZ motivators: opportunities for learning, financial rewards, work culture, flexibility (eg. remote/hybrid work), work-person fit (e.g. enjoy work, sense of purpose), work-related factors (workload and equity of rewards), achievement (performance appraisal, career growth and recognition), relationships at work (team climate and leadership). The pandemic considerably has increased the expectations regarding the availability of remote work (Delbosc and Kent, 2024).

Taking into account relationships with supervisors, Lee et al. (2022) stated that transformational leadership is of key importance for the retention of GenZ members. Similarly, Chillakuri (2022) stated that GenZ members expect a persistent connection with supervisors and peers not only because it helps fulfil their daily activities but because it also creates valuable bonds. Barhate and Dirani (2022) concluded that for GenZ relationships at work are essential. Members of this age cohort also expect support in career development by considering their needs for learning, mentorship and growth. They pay much attention to WLB and stability which is not perceived only in terms of salary. What is more, in some research, it is stated that GenZ pays attention to the impact of their tasks and companies' activities on society, they want to have a clear understanding of companies' vision and that is why, opportunities to engage in CSR activities make organizations more attractive for them (Chillakuri, 2022; Ngoc et al., 2022). Ngoc et al. (2022) found that according to GenZ workers, physical conditions make the organization more attractive. Research by Ayoobzadeh et al. (2024) showed that for GenZ the five most highly valued features of work environment include: *good people to work with, work-life balance, job security, good people to report to and good training/development opportunities*. To conclude, recent studies indicate that for GenZ, organizational support in assuring WLB balance is essential, and that this age cohort has different expectations towards workplaces than previous ones.

Summing up, a lot of studies were done on older generations (Moore et al., 2015) or – and the more recent ones – on students (Grow and Yang, 2018; Ngoc et al., 2022). One notable exception is a study on Czech and Slovak representatives of Gen Y and Gen Z that included both people with and without work experience. Moreover, this study indicates that the geographical environment has a significant impact on workplace expectations (Egerová et al., 2021). Therefore, exploring expectations in a particular country is vital, as those insights cannot be substituted by studies conducted in other ones.

Dimensions, practices and outcomes of SWE

There is no unanimous agreement on factors that should be included when designing a work environment. According to OECD guidelines, to evaluate the working environment the following dimensions should be included: physical and social environment, job tasks, organizational characteristics, working-time arrangements, job perspectives and intrinsic job aspects (Murtin *et al.*, 2022). However, recent studies by Piwowar-Sulej and Cierniak-Emerych (2024) made it possible to classify employees' expectations into five dimensions: support and development at the level of the enterprise, participation, employee support and development at the departmental level, employment security and conditions of work and remuneration. This classification was made on the basis of 18 detailed items, but it should be added that people aged under 30 accounted for only 25% of the research sample.

In the research concerning SWE, there is also a lack of consensus in defining dimensions that should be taken into account. Some authors refer only to those that are intangible and reflect relationships between employees. Others add procedural issues regarding organizational support. Yusliza *et al.* (2021) claim that SWE includes: perceived climate, supervisory relationship, peer group interaction and perceived organizational support, while Rhoades *et al.* (2001) suggest organizational rewards, procedural justice and supervisor support. Other researchers also include Internet communication and software (Wiskow *et al.*, 2010) and the physical design of workspaces and their availability (Knight and Parker, 2021).

On the basis of the literature review, seven general dimensions of SWE can be identified. These dimensions together with their subcategories are presented in Figure 1. The dimensions presented below served subsequently as guiding principles for conducting the interviews.

A significant amount of research has been conducted on employee's expectations towards workplace. While understanding what organizations have to do to create SWE is challenging, there were a number of practices identified as supportive by employees (see Table 1). Some solutions are more universal, e.g. appropriate pay or job security, while others depend on personal preferences, e.g. a place near the window or child care available on site.

Research proved that the supervisor's role is crucial as it provides a role model, fosters meaningful relations, supports employees in stressful situations and creates an overall inclusive work environment (Bersin, 2015; Singh and Jena, 2018; Peple and Davies, 2019).

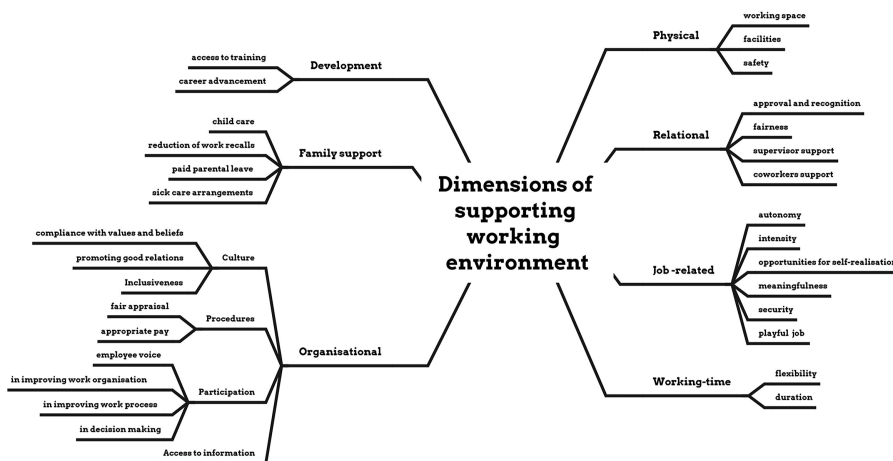


Figure 1. Dimensions and subcategories of SWE. Source: Authors' own elaboration on the basis of: Rhoades (2001), Kaczmarczyk and Murtough (2001), Gilbreath (2003), Taylor (2008), Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.* (2011), Wiskow *et al.* (2010), Kennedy and Daim (2010), Ghosh and Sahney (2011), Kossek *et al.* (2012), Bersin (2015), Chen and Shaffer (2016), Mishra (2017), Peple and Davies (2019), Scharp *et al.* (2022)

Table 1. Examples of supportive practices

General

Adjusting practices to individual situation
Job security
Creating sustainable work environment
Providing applicants with realistic job preview
Creating person-organization fit at recruitment stage
Appropriate pay

Supervisor support

Hiring competent and fair leaders and providing them with further training
Preventing work overload
Providing clear instructions and feedback
Encouraging communication/transparency
Setting example regarding work-life balance
Acknowledging challenges in personal life that affect performance
Anticipating problems and preventing them
Setting clear expectations
Supporting employees in career planning
Providing vocational counselling
Celebrating success
Reacting to disruptive behaviour/bullying
Setting and enforcing the norms regarding acceptable behaviours
Monitoring the work and offering help if needed
Coaching and mentoring
Supporting employees in stressful situations
Providing challenges and opportunities for personal growth and development
Intervening in potentially career-damaging situations

Development

Stress management training
Social skills training
Diversity training
Providing requested training

Relational

Providing sincere praise and approval, recognition
Treating employees with dignity and respect
Fostering inclusive work environment
Promoting good relations

Work organization

Encouraging employee input in decision making process
Providing set up for work from home
Adequate notice before implementing decision
Fair appraisal
Including in designing policies and processes

Working time

Flexible work schedule (time/place)
Avoiding overtime

Job related

Assigning meaningful job
Delegating job with positive characteristics
Showing purpose
Incorporating play elements – e.g. gamification
Autonomy

Family-friendly

Child care on site
Reduction of work recalls
Sick care arrangements
Paid parental leave
Family supportive supervisor behaviours

Workplace infrastructure

Place near window
Comfortable, new or renovated space
Safe work conditions
Places that foster relationships with lounges/ cafe
Exercise facility

Source(s): Authors' own work on the basis of: Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), Kaczmarczyk and Murtough (2001), Rhoades *et al.* (2001), Gilbreath (2003), Kossek and Hammer (2008), Taylor (2008), Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.* (2011), Baranik *et al.* (2010), Kennedy and Daim (2010), Liaw *et al.* (2010), Wiskow *et al.* (2010), Ghosh and Sahney (2011), Hammer *et al.* (2011), Kossek *et al.* (2012), Ghosh *et al.* (2013), Bersin (2015), Buch *et al.* (2015), Knight *et al.* (2017), Mishra (2017), McMullan *et al.* (2018), Singh and Jena (2018), Pepple and Davies (2019), Côté *et al.* (2021), Yusliza *et al.* (2021), Scharp *et al.* (2022), Vu *et al.* (2022)

The current literature reflects expectations that organizations will also take into consideration global challenges linked to climate change (Kossek *et al.*, 2012; Mishra, 2017) as the work environment cannot be perceived as supportive without eco-conscious practices.

The topic of the SWE is earning more and more recognition among scholars and practitioners owing to the long list of potential benefits. There have been a number of positive outcomes identified, both for organizations and employees (see Table 2).

Based on the information presented above, it can be indicated that GenZ has different expectations towards the work environment than previous age cohorts. The scope and specificity of these expectations also indicate that the concept of SWE may match their requirements. Nevertheless, as already stated, publications on working Z are scarce, as most of the research was conducted among students. Additionally, the research is based mainly on

Table 2. Examples of SWE outcomes

For organization	For employee
Better productivity/performance	Increased job satisfaction
Increased commitment	Improved mental health
Enhanced engagement	Lower stress
Better customer orientation	Decreased risk of depression
Increased customer satisfaction	Lower risk of burnout
Greater willingness to comply with safety regulations	Lower risk of heart attack
Improved knowledge sharing	Better diabetes control
Cost reduction (including health care)	Fewer complications during pregnancy and childbirth
Lower absenteeism	Better overall physical health
Decreased employee turnover	Improved well-being
	Lower work-family conflict
	Higher self-efficacy

Source(s): Authors' own work on the basis of: Kaczmarczyk and Murtough (2001), Gilbreath (2003), Kossek and Hammer (2008), Taylor (2008), Baranik *et al.* (2010), Kennedy and Daim (2010), Liaw *et al.* (2010), Ghosh and Sahney (2011), Hammer *et al.* (2011), Kossek *et al.* (2012), Erdogan *et al.* (2012), Bersin (2015), Buch *et al.* (2015), Cheng *et al.* (2015), Knight *et al.* (2017), Kurtessis *et al.* (2017), McMullan *et al.* (2018), Pepple and Davies (2019), Pinna *et al.* (2020), Yang *et al.* (2020), Tran *et al.* (2021), Côté *et al.* (2021), Scharp *et al.* (2022), Vu *et al.* (2022)

quantitative methods with the use of a previously defined list of factors, which limits this group of employees in expressing their expectations.

Research design

The main goal of the research was to gather opinions of GenZ HR professionals on SWE. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, individual in-depth interviews (IDI) were used. The approach is necessary to gain in-depth understanding of the nuances that may affect the opinions regarding specific practices and SWE dimensions.

A survey questionnaire could lead to oversimplification and the conclusion, such as that high remuneration is the be-all and end-all (Stachowska, 2020). Many studies regarding workplace expectations rely on questionnaires distributed via the Internet to reach numerous respondents (Moore *et al.*, 2015; Stachowska, 2020; Egerová *et al.*, 2021). However, to answer the research questions and construct a full picture of SWE it was necessary to use a qualitative approach so that respondents could reflect on their priorities and expectations, explain what support exactly means to them and how organizations can address it. Interviews are an appropriate tool in research projects focused on the opinions and experiences of a limited group of people (Babbie, 2007). Prior studies on workplace expectations that also applied a qualitative approach confirm that it allows to elicit substantial responses on the importance of meaningful work, work-life balance and personal connect (Chillakuri, 2022).

The selection of young HR professionals was underpinned by the fact that they are representatives of GenZ and have knowledge in the field of HRM. Because of that knowledge, they have a greater sensitivity to working conditions and HR processes. Additionally, these young professionals may be responsible in the near future for shaping work conditions in organizations after their promotion to managerial positions. Change is an integral part of a career, e.g. preferred psychological contract depends on the career stage (Low *et al.*, 2016). However, studies show that orientation toward work is not as volatile as shifts in occupied positions or companies (Schabram *et al.*, 2023). Especially people who focus on their calling, tend to continue their work regardless of challenges (Schabram *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, work values tend to remain unchanged and continue to affect people during their professional advancement (Jin and Rounds, 2012). The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling – the crucial criterion was age (representatives of GenZ) and HR experience.

At the stage of recruiting respondents, each person was informed about the purpose and scope of the study and asked about their willingness to participate. During the meeting, at the very beginning of the interview, each respondent was notified about: the purpose of the study, the issues included in questions, anonymization of answers and the form of their use in potential publications, as well as the possibility of resign from participating in the interview at any moment and without giving the reason. After receiving this information, all respondents confirmed their willingness to continue the interviews.

Interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams in December 2023. The interview protocol consisted of open questions regarding understanding of the SWE concept, its dimensions, types of supportive practices, outcomes, as well as barriers. The average interview time was 38 min. Interviews were conducted in Polish, recorded with the consent of the respondents and transcribed. Transcripts were independently coded using a list of pre-defined codes based on the literature review by two researchers using Nvivo software. After coding, an in-depth analysis was carried out and the results were synthesized. All the respondents were born between 1996 and 2000 (see Table 3) and had an average experience of 2 years and 4 months in HRM (from 6 months to 5 years). They worked mostly in large companies operating in diverse business sectors, all were private.

The research process included five stages. The first stage was a literature review—to identify key components of the work environment and SWE. On this basis, interview questions were prepared. They were grouped into four main themes: understanding the concept of work environment and SWE, actions that organizations should take to create SWE, the assessment of how successful respondents’ organizations were in creating SWE, and what benefits SWE brings to employers and employees. In the third stage, the interviews were conducted. Next, the interviews were coded independently by two researchers and finally, the results were synthesized to formulate conclusions.

Table 3. Respondents’ characteristics

Respondent	Year of birth	HRM area	Company size	Business sector	Years of experience
1	1996	Recruitment	Large	Production	4
2	1999	General	Medium	Business consulting	2.5
3	1997	Recruitment	Large	Creative	5
4	1999	General	Large	BPO	1
5	2000	Recruitment	Large	SSC	1
6	1997	Recruitment	Large	BPO	2.5
7	2001	Payroll	Large	IT	0.5
8	1997	General	Large	SSC	3
9	1999	Recruitment	Large	Medical	1.5
10	1997	General	Large	Energy	4
11	1999	General	Large	Financial	3
12	1999	General	large	SSC	3
13	1999	General	Large	Production	1.5
14	1999	General	Large	Trade	1
15	2000	General	Large	SSC	1
16	1997	General	Large	medical	2
17	1999	Recruitment	Large	Creative	3.5
18	1998	Payroll	Large	SSC	3
19	1999	General	Large	Trade	2

Note(s): SSC stands for shared services centres, BPO stands for Business Process Outsourcing

Source(s): Authors’ own work based on research results

Results

This section will present respondents' opinions about SWE. Based on the information obtained, eight main components shaping SWE were identified. These include: coworkers, supervisors, work organization and design, organizational environment, development, physical environment, job content and family support. The first part will present respondents' detailed opinions on these components, along with quotes from their statements. It is then summarized in a chart that also contains examples of specific actions that the organizations should introduce. The last part presents the opinions of the respondents on the extent to which their organizations create an SWE.

Characteristics of SWE components – respondents' opinion

Coworker support. All respondents pointed to human interactions as one of the most important elements of SWE. The coworker support was described as fundamental for two reasons. Firstly, friendly colleagues help with completing tasks by providing advice and sharing their experience and feedback. Organizations may facilitate this process by providing training on communication and teamwork, ensuring fair and transparent procedures regarding compensation and promotion, arranging support structures, e.g. backups when an employee is absent and preventing unethical behaviour (e.g. mobbing).

If you trust your coworkers, if you have good relations, you can say < Hey girls, I'm going through a difficult stage currently > or < I need support in this process, because I am not able to cope by myself > and when you get the support it means you do have relations – this openness and cooperation. (P15)

Secondly, respondents emphasized the importance of personal connection: talking about non-work related subjects, eating lunch together and meeting outside work hours. Organizations may facilitate this process by creating shared spaces (e.g. lounges), organizing teambuilding activities (networks, charity or sport events, workshops) that allow for making memories and managing conflict between team members. Coordinating once in a while an in-person meeting in the office (instead of a remote one) may also help to socialize.

Team-building meetings, that's the first thing that comes to my mind, but also direct supervisors. It seems to me that at the stage after recruitment, they can pay attention to these factors directly related to personality and character. So, it's just about fitting into the team. (P16)

Summing up, organizations should foster an environment where employees are encouraged to help others, seek advice and rely on each other by creating opportunities for employees to get to know each other. However, certain behaviours cannot be mandated, and it is crucial for companies to assess candidates' attitudes during the recruitment process to foster a positive and SWE.

Supervisor support. Respondents listed many characteristics of a supportive supervisor including: being appreciative, responsive, decisive, available, open to feedback and caring. Supervisors have a special role in professional development because they can: become a mentors, provide training and feedback, clearly state their expectations, give space to work independently, help to plan career paths and intervene if an employee has too many responsibilities or only does repetitive tasks. Supervisors should adjust their management style to individual subordinates' needs and should be able to manage the whole team facilitating cooperation. They must be aware of what team members do and should also consider non-work-related factors, that may impact performance. People in leadership positions have also a unique responsibility to create an inclusive environment, where all subordinates feel that they belong and their contribution is valued.

Employees typically leave companies due to poor management, where team leaders fail to effectively manage their teams or lack individualized approach to each employee. (P12)

Problems at work serve as a litmus test for supervisors. Respondents emphasized the importance of feeling that they can rely on their leaders when difficulties occur, expecting

them to be capable and willing to provide protection, find solutions, handle matters discreetly and always give the benefit of the doubt. Many respondents reported they expect their managers to treat them as partners.

In case of personal problems, I believe a supportive manager is someone who is willing to find the cause in a situation where an individual's performance has been declining, and is able to see the bigger picture of the situation. (P3)

The list of expectations is long, so organizations must implement solutions that will help supervisors become supportive. This process can be facilitated by: implementing a companywide policy that will encourage supervisors to conduct often 1:1 meetings, where feedback is provided, educating on the importance of mental health, providing training on how to be a better manager and avoiding situations where one supervisor has too many subordinates.

Work organization and design. Almost all respondents confirmed that work design and organization are components of SWE. The key element indicated by participants is flexibility, which allows them to fulfil non-work responsibilities, e.g. caring for others or their own health. They claimed that flexibility is crucial for assuring WLB, thus indicating a preference for task-based work settlement enabling better organization of their activities.

Task-based arrangement is better than hourly billing, the point is to get the tasks done, which in my opinion is also much more beneficial than the situation where I have to stay at work for 8 hours. (P2)

Today, I can think that tomorrow I will work remotely, or I will get up in the morning and decide to go to the office. So it is definitely supportive, if I can make such decisions and I don't even have to consult it with anyone, because it doesn't matter to my employer. What counts is that I do the work I have to do, and where it comes from is not important. (P10)

The second issue is employment stability referring mainly to the employment form but also to the importance and value of performed tasks.

What is important is employment stability – on the one hand, employment contract for an indefinite period, but on the other hand, I need to be sure that the organization will not get rid of me after I have made a mistake or if it turns out that we don't earn enough in a given year. (P1)

Another element is job autonomy – making decisions about how tasks are performed. Respondents want to feel that they have an impact on the tasks they perform and are not limited only to following procedures.

Companies should give autonomy in the order and way tasks are performed and freedom in choosing methods of tasks accomplishment. In my opinion, employees feel better having greater autonomy, the ability to decide what time they start working, how they arrange tasks to be done on a given day. I think it also has a positive impact on their well-being and is part of a SWE. (P7)

The key action that should be undertaken by an organization is work structuring. Companies should accurately estimate the number of tasks and time consumption to ensure appropriate employment. This will reduce the periodic accumulation of tasks and eliminate overtime.

The direct supervisor, who distributes work among employees should do it in such a way that each employee has tasks tailored to their competences and that suits them. Additionally, the work and responsibilities should be distributed more or less equally. Manager should provide enough staff so that this work can be done, without overtime. (P11)

Limited scope of duties, or rather the number of these duties and the amount of work adjusted to working hours so that overtime is not necessary. (P18)

Respondents believe that employees, even at the lowest levels, want to take part in the decision-making process to have an impact on what is happening in the organization and on work division and task assignment.

Speaking from the point of view of an employee at lower levels, we want to participate in decisions whether we undertake a project and who will be involved. Of course, the supervisor has the final say, but he/she should also give employees freedom to choose who coordinates this project and who wants to be involved (P9)

Organizational environment. All respondents believe that the organizational environment is a part of SWE. One of the elements they pay attention to is the number and scope of internal procedures, which in some situations may significantly limit effectiveness.

It should be simple, short in terms of policies. The organization should not complicate any regulations at work regarding the environment or culture or the way of accomplishing tasks. (P8)

The culture of the organization is also important, especially sensitivity to diversity. Companies should undertake actions to create an inclusive climate.

Now various networks are being created – people who hike, ride horses and so on. This is a gathering of people who have common interests, which means that work is not entirely a chore. LGBT people also have networks in many companies and I think this is very supportive. Network meetings themselves take place at work, but people also meet outside, so we also have a bit of WLB here. We have a break from work, we can talk to someone over coffee, have lunch together, thus we have a larger group of friends to spend time with. (P4)

Respondents expect to be informed about what is happening in the company and to receive clear information from the supervisor about the organization of work and the division of tasks.

It is also important for me to have access to information, that I know what is generally going on in the company. It can be granted, for example, by introducing regular meetings with employees. I think it is a very good option, because regardless of what department we work in, we have an insight into what is generally happening, we can also be proud of it. We may present to other departments what we do, what we introduce, and this is definitely an element integrating employees in general, because there is always a reason to talk. (P14)

According to the respondents, organizational conditions include also environmental, social and governance factors.

A charity event, in which all employees can get more or less involved, baking cakes or creating something, but also selling it, simply promoting it, or buying it. Sustainable development, external activities, charity–this is very supportive not only for the employee, but simply for the rest of the country, of the world. (P8)

Development. All of the respondents believed that development is of paramount importance – both for them and for the organization.

Organizing different meetings with people who are experts in their fields, with a person who has already chosen their career path, went through different phases of their life and work and finally succeeded. That person shares their experiences, challenges and what they worked on. (P5)

It is crucial that the company goes to bat for the employee. If a person is burned out or overwhelmed with work, it is important to support this person, offer an opportunity to reinvent themselves within the organization, start with a different team. I think it is important to offer such an opportunity to employees so they can persevere. (P17)

Organizations can create a work environment that supports development by offering various activities such as training, mentoring and coaching, but may encompass expansions of the responsibilities, job rotation, job shadowing, participation in conferences, networking or supporting them in establishing themselves as experts. To provide development opportunities supervisors should give space to talk about expectations, career goals and direction in which an employee wants to develop. Leaders should provide feedback and a clear delineation of responsibilities.

Physical environment. Most respondents indicated that the most important are ergonomics and access to adjustable chairs and desks as well as to two monitors. An office should be designed with respect to H&S regulations. Most respondents claimed that they work remotely, so employers should provide them with similar equipment (desks, chairs, monitors). In open space offices, it may be difficult to concentrate due to noise, and this is why employees prefer remote work and employers have to guarantee a sufficient number of desks and silent space (e.g. booths).

If you need to focus on your tasks, the employer should provide you with some rooms in which you can work in silence. We are working in open-space but we have got an access to such rooms. If the noise is high and others are loud you may use them. (P12)

Additionally, respondents indicated good location (to omit traffic), accessibility of kitchen and dining rooms, chill-out spaces (yoga rooms, gym) and showers as SWE components. Many respondents claimed that offices should be modernly designed and filled with flowers, as it creates a good mood and increases motivation to work. Nearly half of the respondents also commented on adapting space to the needs of people with disabilities.

Job content. Six of 19 respondents do not perceive job content as a part of SWE. In their opinion when taking up job, the employee agrees to what they will be doing.

No, I wouldn't classify it as a SWE, because when it comes to job content and the scope of responsibilities, we know what job we are applying for and what it involves. (P13)

According to some respondents, the employee is responsible for searching for a job that meets their interests and expectations. Employers specify duties in job advertisements, therefore the candidate accepts them when applying. However, it is important that the job description is consistent with the real situation.

Transparent presentation of the offer – what we will do, and not only selling the offer, but also talking about things that may seem negative, like routine – on a daily basis you will deal with this and that and this is what it looks like. It is also important to talk about less interesting and attractive aspects of a given offer, so that one knows from the very beginning what the job is like. (P6)

However, the majority of respondents claim that job content is a part of SWE and affects employees well-being. Assigned tasks should be valuable and tailored to employees' competences.

Through its actions, the organization should show employees that they are part of something that makes sense, that together they create a community, which certainly brings them together and makes them feel good about what they do and that they feel that they are doing something worthwhile, something that matters. (P7)

If the tasks are not tailored to the employee and are not in line with their competences, it is obvious that the employee will not feel good in such a workplace and will not fulfil the tasks on time. (P19)

Supervisors are the ones directly responsible for employee satisfaction on the job. They should systematically verify the match between the work content and employees' competences. Respondents point out that it is possible to undertake various activities aimed at increasing job satisfaction and thus creating an SWE.

It is possible to organize work in such a way that it is interesting for us and keeps us motivated all the time, even if it is repetitive and associated with a large dose of routine. (P6)

When employees have specific tasks to perform and they report to their supervisor that they have some problems, are unable to perform the tasks appropriately due to lack of knowledge, the supervisor may assign this task to someone else. (P16)

Family support. Because not all employees have children, this aspect of SWE has been the most polarizing. Two respondents have reported that they consider benefits for parents/

caregivers unfair. However, the majority of respondents claimed that even though they are not parents, they do not perceive such practices as excluding:

It will be a supportive work environment if we take care of people who also raise kids, who will later become adults in our society and make decisions for us. (P1)

Organizations can implement various measures to foster SWE for caregivers: including families in sports package, healthcare or insurance, creating a dedicated family room, offering an option to bring the child to work, providing additional paid leave or creating kindergarten for employees' children.

Creating on-site child care, so that working mothers could return to work quicker, or maternity leave – all supports family life. When it comes to benefits like sports packages or health insurance, they should also encompass family members. (P17)

The most straightforward yet crucial solution is to enhance flexibility, comprising adjustments in both work hours and location or facilitating transitions from full-time to part-time roles. Some respondents pointed out that the most supportive for families is extra time off.

Summary of SWE practices

Based on respondents' claims relationships with peers and supervisors, flexibility in work design and development opportunities are the most important. These components were indicated by most participants. Young professionals expect flexible work arrangements which can be achieved by hybrid work, flexible working hours or tasks-based work scheduling. They also expect that organizations will provide them with training and individual coaching programmes. Additionally, support from peers and supervisors as well as individualized attention is crucial.

A list of identified detailed activities referring to each component is included in [Figure 2](#).

Respondents' current working conditions

In respondents' opinions none of the organizations have fully created SWE. However, the offer of most companies meets the expectations of young employees to a large extent. The most frequently introduced components include: development opportunities, supportive relationships with co-workers and supervisors and physical working conditions (see [Table 4](#)). Relatively few respondents indicated that organizations provide flexibility in work organization, which, according to respondents, is an SWE key element. Only four people indicated that they received feedback in the expected form and frequency and that is why this is an issue that respondents indicated as missing or requiring change.

Respondents most often indicated poor relationships with co-workers or their superiors as the reasons for potentially quitting job (5 responses each). Next were the lack of development opportunities (3), inadequate remuneration (2), lack of career paths (2), lack of flexibility and poor work organization resulting in too many tasks and the need for overtime. Therefore, it can be indicated that for employees from GenZ, the climate in the organization is a factor of significant importance in the context of their retention.

Discussion

The study was aimed at gaining knowledge about how representatives of GenZ define SWE and at identifying practices for creating such an environment. The results indicate a substantial role of relationships with peers and supervisors in SWE. Respondents were able to indicate many features expected from a manager, most of which directly refer to the transformational leadership model. This is consistent with the research results of [Lee et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Chillakuri \(2022\)](#), who indicated that people from GenZ expect constant contact with their superior, openness and focus on development. Relationships with peers should be based not only on

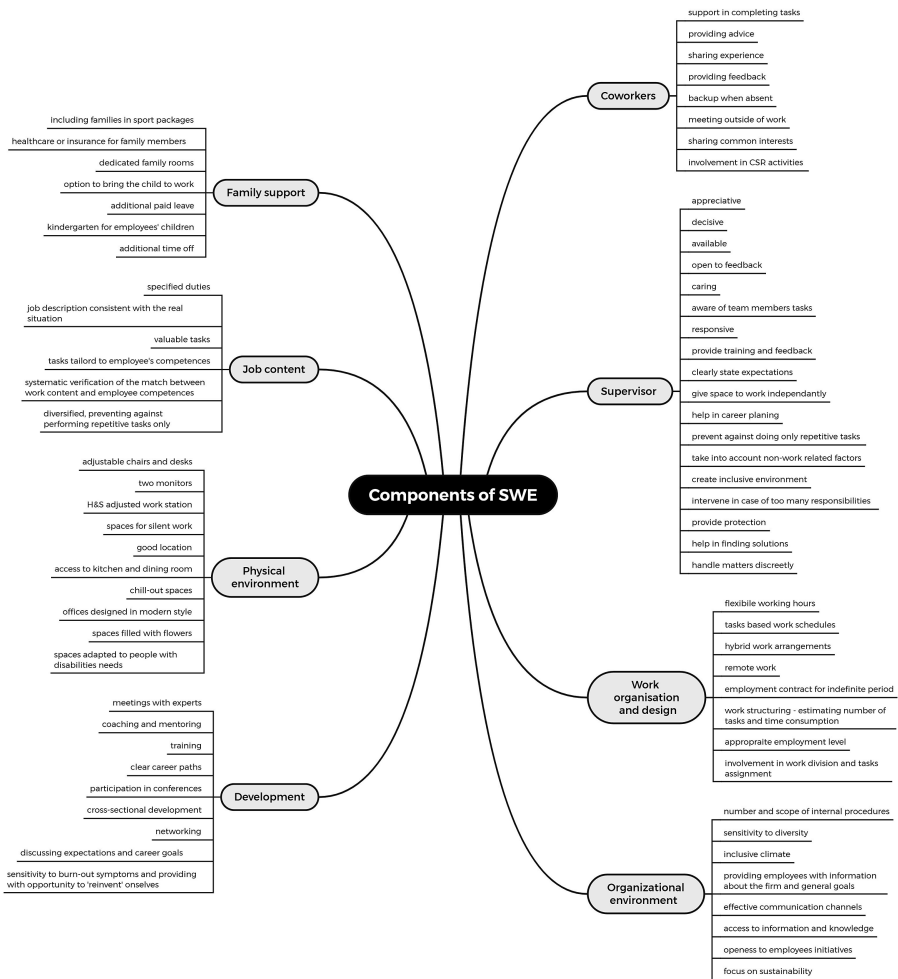


Figure 2. Respondents opinion on SWE components. Source: Authors' own work based on research results

support in performing tasks and providing an appropriate atmosphere but also on creating non-professional bonds. These opinions are in line with the conclusions formulated by [Buch et al. \(2015\)](#), [Dwivedula et al. \(2019\)](#), [Pepple and Davies \(2019\)](#) and [Barhate and Dirani \(2022\)](#).

Our research also confirmed the importance of work organization, in particular flexibility in work arrangements. The importance of this issue was pointed out, among others, by [Kossek et al. \(2012\)](#), [Dwivedula et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Chillakuri \(2022\)](#). Respondents believe that remote work helps to achieve WLB. Those findings are also important in the context of the growing importance of job crafting. Factors contributing to the perception, that the organization is supportive may also facilitate job crafting, which in turn impacts work engagement and well-being ([Robledo et al., 2019](#)).

Participants confirmed the importance of physical conditions such as appropriate equipment, workstations and availability of amenities, which was also indicated by [Kaczmarczyk and Murtough \(2001\)](#), [Muñoz de Bustillo et al. \(2011\)](#), [Kennedy and Daim \(2010\)](#) and [Ngoc et al. \(2022\)](#).

Table 4. Respondents' opinion about current working conditions

Components existing in companies	What should be changed/improved	What is missing
Development (15)	Internal communication (2)	Career paths (4)
Supportive relationships with supervisor (13)	Frequency and quality of feedback (2)	Psychological support (2)
Supportive relationships with peers (13)	Work design and organization (2)	Good communication (2)
Good physical working conditions (13)	Development	Feedback, meetings with supervisor (2)
Benefits (8)	Family/parental support	Equipment and tools on job posts (2)
Flexibility (7)	Salary	Incentives building relationships among employees
Family support (5)	Benefits	Family/parental support
Good work design and organization (5)	Career paths	Flexible working hours
Feedback (4)		
CSR initiatives (3)		
Good communication (3)		
Appropriate salary (3)		
Career paths (3)		
Autonomy		
Internal knowledge database		

Source(s): Authors' own work based on research results

Another element identified in previous studies and confirmed in ours is the importance of development programs. Respondents believe that attention to professional development and having a clear vision of promotion is an important element in building SWE. Such opinions are consistent with the conclusions regarding GenZ presented by [Dwivedula et al. \(2019\)](#), [Barhate and Dirani \(2022\)](#), [Ayoobzadeh et al. \(2024\)](#) as well as with the research results on SWE by [Baranik et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Côté et al. \(2021\)](#).

It should also be pointed out that the importance of CSR practices for GenZ, as indicated by, among others, [Chillakuri \(2022\)](#) and [Ngoc et al. \(2022\)](#), was confirmed in our research. Respondents indicated that when working in an organization, they want to be able to engage in CSR activities and expect their organizations to operate in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Some respondents indicated that family support was important for them. This is consistent with the results of [McMullan et al. \(2018\)](#). However, it should be noted that some interviewees considered the introduction of programs dedicated to employees with children as limiting the inclusiveness of the organization.

Our research not only allowed us to confirm that the conclusions of other studies are still relevant but also enabled us to identify elements that were insufficiently indicated by other authors, e.g. structuring work. Respondents repeatedly referred to overtime, which in their opinion results from incorrect identification of the number of tasks and the time required to complete them. The second element is office space organization. According to our respondents, working in an open space makes it impossible to concentrate, which is one of the arguments for performing assigned tasks from home. They expect to perform various tasks and that their superiors will ensure that their duties are not too routine.

Based on the literature review and the research results, it can be indicated that SWE for GenZ may consist of similar components, but their importance will be different. Representatives of this generation pay particular attention to appropriate relationships with peers and supervisors, flexibility and development opportunities.

In conclusion, respondents' answers indicate that SWE should include: flexible work settings, supervisor and coworkers support, development opportunities, family-related practices, job content and physical work environment. However, their employers do not create a fully SWE. The elements present in most workplaces are: appropriate relationships with the supervisor and coworkers and development opportunities. There are many areas in which employees' expectations are not met and further changes and improvements are necessary to create a fully SWE.

Implications of the study

The study has several implications for organizations that intend to foster SWE. Firstly, organizations should start by recognizing employees' needs. In particular, gathering feedback cyclically is important with regard to training and career development – organizations should be more open to workers' suggestions.

Secondly, respondents find good interpersonal connections crucial. Organizations need to start by hiring leaders who are capable of adjusting their management style, support subordinates and allow independence. Alternatively, organizations can support their current leaders in transition by developing necessary skills, particularly in delivering feedback. Companies should also try to find the most natural way to help teammates bond and create a supportive atmosphere.

When creating SWE, organizations should also take physical conditions into account as workplace design, equipment and ergonomics are critical for effective work. Attention should be paid to modern, comfortable interior design with plants and quiet spaces for work.

The key element in creating an SWE seems to be providing employees with flexibility. The vast majority opt for hybrid work, preferably with flexible working hours. Additionally, a significant proportion of employees prefer task-based rather than time-based work settlement.

Finally, organizations should take into account societal changes and how they affect workers' expectations regarding family-supportive practices. A number of employees are interested in benefits related to child-rearing, but an increasing number of young professionals have also caregiver duties arising from the ageing society. Taking this, as well as the increasing popularity of non-traditional families into consideration, companies must rethink the structure of work-life benefits.

Nevertheless, taking actions related to the implementation of SWE may encounter many organizational constraints. Firstly, implementing solutions that will address some of the expectations will involve financial costs, which many organizations cannot afford. Additionally, introducing solutions related to hybrid work may cause significant difficulties in maintaining the existing culture and creating organizational identity, due to the fact that employees will not meet with the same intensity. This may also have implications in the context of creating coherent work standards and optimal use of internal procedures. It should also be noted that the identified demands are the voice of the youngest generation and will not necessarily reflect the expectations of employees from other age cohorts. Therefore, it may be a challenge to create solutions flexible enough to reconcile the interests of all employees.

This study has also implications for theory. Firstly, our research confirmed the high awareness of GenZ regarding expected working conditions. Most of the factors were in line with the ones identified in previous research carried out among students. It can therefore be concluded that these expectations are typical for this generation, deeply rooted and not subjected to significant modifications after starting professional work.

The use of qualitative methods also allowed us to identify additional and clarify existing expectations of this generation. The list of activities presented in [Figure 2](#) may constitute an important guideline for researchers on the factors that should be taken into account when analysing the expectations of GenZ employees.

Based on the findings from this study, the authors present two main recommendations for policymakers. Firstly, given the importance of flexibility for respondents, policymakers

should consider implementing incentives for employers to encourage hybrid work models and protect employees from sudden policy changes that would require them to be present in the office without sufficient justification. Secondly, the government should invest in family-supportive initiatives, including the expansion of childcare facilities, such as kindergartens and the development of social and nursing homes to support the needs of the ageing population.

Limitations and further research agenda

This research has certain limitations resulting mainly from the method applied and the selection of respondents. As qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of certain phenomena but not for generalizations, we perceive these results as a voice in the discussion on identifying expectations of young employees rather than as indications on how to shape the work environment for GenZ. Additionally, in our studies, we have asked respondents to present their opinions which may cause self-reported data bias. The self-reported data may be imperfect, as scientists point to social desirability bias often impacting the honesty of respondents (Krumpal, 2013). However, in this research, there were a number of measures implemented to increase data reliability. Firstly, a high degree of privacy during interviews was ensured, since respondents could choose where to take the call—in the majority of cases, it was a home office, which prevented other employees from overhearing the conversation. Additionally, they were ensured that they would remain anonymous so that they were not at risk of any professional repercussions. Secondly, the subject of the interview did not touch on sensitive data or social issues but rather focused on general solutions that could be implemented to create SWE. Finally, the respondents were informed about the scientific significance of the research, thus emphasizing the benefits of telling the truth and potentially decreasing social desirability bias.

Conducting research among people working in HRM, allows for better identification of factors shaping SWE because these people are more aware of HR processes, but it may cause a certain bias resulting from the greater knowledge about the conditions that the employer should offer. It may therefore turn out that the opinions formulated by respondents will go beyond the expectations of other GenZ representatives.

Based on these limitations, three directions for further research can be indicated. Firstly, continuing research using the same method among people employed in other areas or people with different educational background. Secondly, based on the collected information, it is possible to design questionnaires for quantitative research, assessing the importance of individual areas and the level of their implementation in organizations. Thirdly, respondents indicated that increasing diversity in the workplace means different needs and expectations that future research should explore.

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