

The Role of a Manager in Managing Information in the Remote Work of Generation Z Employees

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Abstract: The increasing significance of information as an economic resource and a component of competitiveness results in that it has become essential for the smooth functioning and development of modern organisations. Possessing information provides a competitive advantage, which is why information is regarded as a strategic resource of an organisation, which supports various processes including: decision-making, employee communication, and knowledge management. For people from Generation Z, representing the youngest workers on the labour market, the availability of information constitutes a significant attribute of quality of life, as well as quality of work. The significance of information and the resulting information management takes on particular importance in a remote work system. The aim of this paper is to present the views of employees from Generation Z concerning the significance of information and the role of the superior in managing information in a remote work system. The research results presented in this paper are part of a nationwide quantitative study of workers from the youngest generation on the labour market. The study was carried out in December 2022 on a representative sample of Polish Generation Z employees who had experience of remote work. In order to learn the opinions of the young workers concerning the analysed issues, a survey was prepared and the questionnaire technique based on a five-point Likert scale was used. The results of the conducted research indicate that young people from generation Z positively assess the impact of remote working on both the speed of information exchange and the ability to understand the provided information, as well as assess its veracity. They were most appreciative of the speed of information transfer in remote working, and more doubtful about the reliability of the obtained information. In contrast, respondents assessed the amount of information flowing to employees working remotely in a negative manner. As can be seen from the obtained data, respondents appreciate the role of the manager in exchanging information in remote work, especially young employees with short experience in this form of work. Whereas, those with longer experience of remote working and working in micro organisations obtained information mainly from colleagues. However, it should be emphasized that despite the positive assessment of information sharing in remote working and the role played by the supervisor, the interviewed Generation Z employees indicated primarily that they would like to work stationary or in a hybrid manner in the future.

Keywords: Information, Remote work, Generation Z, Information management

1. Introduction

The information society reflects the most important feature of social and economic change, i.e. the processes of creating and collecting information. The modern world bases on information and thus, a modern company must be able to take advantage and manage it properly. Information constitutes an opportunity to use the resources and knowledge of employees, to learn more about the market and the needs of the customer, and therefore to improve the company's operations, strengthen its position, and increase its competitiveness.

The issues of information management are presented as a core management function within an organisation, whose role is to acquire, store, and deliver proper information, to the right people, at the right time. Effective information management has an impact on the quality of work not only of managers but, through them, of all employees in the organisation. Employers whose employees work remotely often face the problem of how to support their subordinates in the area of information management in the broadest sense.

The aim of this paper is to present the views of Generation Z representatives concerning the significance of information and the role of the manager in shaping information exchange, as an essential element of information management, in remote work. The empirical part of the study is based on the results of a survey carried out in December 2022 among young people who are representatives of Generation Z. The survey included a randomly selected representative sample of 387 Generation Z employees residing in Poland and working remotely. In terms of the conducted study, the following main research problem was posed: How do Generation Z employees perceive the impact of remote working on information exchange and the role of the manager in shaping information exchange as an important element of information management? In the process of developing the study results, non-parametric tests were used to assess the significance of differences in the analysed variables: the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA test.

The paper presents a cognitively important topic, because knowing the preferences and expectations of young people from generation Z regarding the significance of information in remote working and the role of a manager in information management enables the effective management of these employees.

2. Theoretical Background

The term information comes from the Latin *informatio* and means "representation, explanation, notification". However, the scientific definition of this concept, despite its great importance, poses many difficulties for researchers. Among the many definitions functioning in the source literature concerning the subject in the context of the analysed issues, it is worth noting the general concept of information as a factor that increases our knowledge of the reality around us (Eaton and Bawden 1991, pp 156-165; Meadow et al., 2000, p. 35). Data and messages become information when they make it easier for a given recipient to solve a particular problem or reduce the state of uncertainty. Information that can be considered useful should not only be clear for the recipient, accurate and precise, but also include reliable sources of acquisition. Furthermore, in addition to being operative and up-to-date, they must relate to future periods without losing their link to the present. It is believed that information being a strategic resource of an enterprise not only enables communication between employees and management - coordinating individual and group activities, and works in favour of establishing relations with the environment, but also enriches individual knowledge and supports the process of change. The value of information depends on its timeliness, quality, and quantity, as well as its links to actionable tasks. The scope, content and form of the information provided in the company depend on the position and its place in the organisational structure. Individual levels of management have different information needs. Different information is needed for decision-making at the operational level and other ones at the strategic level (Septer 2013, p. 49).

Information management includes the processes and systems used to collect, store, and organize data, as well as the strategies and policies used to ensure the effective use of that data (Oluic-Vukovic 2001, pp 54-61). Its purpose is to ensure that the right information is available to the right people at the right time in order to facilitate decision-making and support the smooth functioning of an organisation. Information management in a company consists in developing and applying an appropriate pattern of behaviour, which constitutes a system of interrelationships between the information acquired, its analysis, the made decision, the given instruction, the action taken and its control (Choo 2002, p. 26). The significance of access to information in organisations continues to grow. On the one hand, completeness of information is important, and on the other hand, avoiding information overload (Bouthillier and Shearer 2002). Thus, proper information management has an impact on the quality of work not only of managers but, through them, of all employees in a given organisation. More and more often attention is being paid to the fact that focusing on the technological plane in the process of information management is insufficient, because its effectiveness is significantly influenced by the organisational factor and above all by the people involved (Gourlay 2000; Albrychiewicz-Słocińska 2022, pp 19-27).

Information constitutes a highly significant part of personal and professional life for representatives of the youngest generation on the labour market. Generation Z (also referred to as the Internet generation or multitasking generation) is most often defined as people born after 1995 (although some researchers include people born after 1990, and another approach includes people born in 2000 and later). Unlike the previous Generation Y, which was gradually entering the digital world, this generation has already grown up in the world of modern technology. Representatives of Generation Z are people who find it easy to work on several tasks at the same time as a result of wide access to information and social networks (Duffy et al., 2018; Dolot 2018, pp 44-50; Singh and Dangmei 2016, pp 1-5). Managing Generation Z employees poses many challenges, as these young people want to know and have an impact on what is happening in the organisation they work for, and they also want to know that their work is meaningful. Meeting these expectations is particularly difficult in the remote working situation, which, through the crisis caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, is increasingly functioning on today's labour market alongside the hybrid and onsite form of working (Stankeviciute and Kunskaia 2022, pp 221-235).

Many of the features of Generation Z representatives indicate that, for them, remote working is a suitable form of performing professional tasks. It means working with the use of means of direct communication at a distance, carried out completely or partly at a location indicated by the employee and agreed with the employer, including the employee's home address. The employer provides the remote worker not only with the necessary materials and working tools, including technical equipment, but also with the necessary training and technical assistance.

Among the organisational advantages of remote working, the main one is the reduction of operating costs, because the employer does not invest in renting office space and organizing workstations. In addition, an increase in organisational flexibility and a decrease in employee absenteeism are indicated. Employing remote

workers may also constitute the only opportunity for an employer to hire professionals who live far from the company's headquarters. Whereas, the biggest advantage of remote working mentioned by employees consists in the convenience of performing it from home and saving time and money on travelling to the employer's premises. Remote work also works in favour of employing workers with disabilities living in locations far from industrial centers, as well as workers caring for children or other dependent persons. The employee also benefits from flexible working hours agreed with the employer (Sanchez et al., 2021, pp 67-100; Pyöriä 2011, pp 386-399). Apart from these unquestionable advantages, this form of work also includes some drawbacks. Having limited contact with colleagues and supervisors, remote workers are less likely to integrate, support each other, share experiences and current insights. This situation can reduce opportunities for knowledge exchange and limit professional development.

The presented features of Generation Z workers and the specificities of remote working point to the difficulties that can arise in managing these young workers performing this form of work (Sandoval-Reyes, Idrovo-Carlier and Duque-Oliva 2021, pp 1-12; Boyer O'Leary, Wilson and Matiu 2014; Hamilton 2002). This situation can constitute a major challenge for management in various areas of operation, including information management.

3. Methodology

The research results presented in this paper are part of a quantitative survey study entitled: "Managerial aspects of remote work management". The study was carried out in December 2022 among young people working remotely, representing Generation Z. The presented excerpt from the survey results concerns the respondents' views on the impact of remote work on information sharing and the role of the manager in shaping information sharing as a significant element of information management in remote working.

The study was carried out with the use of quantitative research methods which take advantage of the survey technique. Generation Z representatives whose professional experience covered at least the year 2022 were surveyed. Due to the lack of statistical data concerning the number of people aged 15-34 performing remote work in Poland, people who are professionally active and represent the relevant age category were selected. Based on the 2021 Statistical Yearbook, the size of the working population in Poland, in the age range of interest to the researchers, was set at 4,802,000 people. For the population estimated in this way, the study sample size was set at 384 people with the following statistical assumptions: fraction size 0.5; confidence level 95%; maximum error 5%.

The study was carried out by Fieldstat sp. z o.o., a specialized market research agency, using quantitative research methods, CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview - 50% of respondents) and CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview - 50% of respondents). Ultimately, 387 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained. It should be mentioned that redundant questionnaires do not disrupt the planned structure of the study group.

The used research tool consisted in a standardized questionnaire consisting of 57 closed statements and 7 questions concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their workplace variables. The issues related to remote work were divided in the questionnaire into several areas relating to: knowledge, information and learning, as well as communication, teamwork, work organization, motivation, employee relations and work-life balance. Several questions have been prepared for each research area. A Likert scale (the so-called Likert scaling technique) was used for the responses. The used research tool (questionnaire) was original and was prepared by a research team consisting of staff from the Department of Applied Sociology and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management, Częstochowa University of Technology.

In terms of the conducted study, the following main research problem was posed: How do Generation Z employees perceive the impact of remote working on information exchange and the role of the manager in shaping information exchange as an important element of information management? The study also posed a number of specific problem questions:

How do Generation Z employees perceive the various aspects of information exchange in remote working, including: speed of information exchange, understanding information, assessment of information validity, and amount of information received?

Does remote working encourage Generation Z employees to seek information among colleagues?

How do Generation Z employees perceive the manager's role in shaping information sharing as an important part of information management in remote working?

A total of 387 people participated in the study, including 163 (42.12%) women and 224 (57.88%) men. The Generation Z employees participating in the study varied in terms of age. The least numerous were the youngest 76 (19.64%), between the ages of 15 and 24. The following age categories were represented by: 141 (36.43%) of people between 25 and 29 years of age, and 170 (43.93%) of people between 30 and 34 years of age. Employees with various levels of remote working experience took part in the survey. The majority of respondents - 296 people (76.49%) - worked in executive positions. The remaining respondents - 91 people (23.51%) were employed in managerial positions. Taking into consideration the size of the organisation where the respondents performed their remote work, micro organisations (with 1-9 employees) dominated with 182 (47.03%) indications, followed by small organisations (with 10 to 49 employees) with 86 (22.22%) indications, large organisations (more than 250 employees) with 64 (16.54%) indications, and medium organisations (50 to 249 employees) with 55 (14.21%) indications. Respondents also represented organisations that varied in terms of industry. Furthermore, respondents declared that in the future they would like to work: in a stationary mode (54.26% of indications), in a hybrid mode (28.17% of indications), and remotely (17.57% of indications).

STATISTICA software was used in the process of compiling the research results. Non-parametric tests were used to assess the significance of differences in analysed variables: Mann-Whitney U test (UMW), Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA test (AKW). Four questionnaire validity procedures have been used: content (Rossiter 2008), face, construct and nomological (Czakoń 2014) ones. The scale reliability was validated using Cronbach's alpha that is a measure of internal consistency ($\alpha = .970019$). For the analysis of the survey results, a number of statistical hypotheses were adopted regarding the existence of significant differences in the respondents' statements due to their socio-demographic characteristics and workplace variables. It was assumed that H0 constitutes the hypothesis concerning no differences due to the grouping variable, while H1 is an alternative hypothesis about the occurrence of such differences. These hypotheses were verified with the use of the aforementioned statistical tests allowing to reject the null hypothesis concerning no significant differences and accept the alternative hypothesis about the existence of differences in respondents' answers with regard to the individual independent variables. The study presents the relationships verified with statistical tests, authorizing to draw conclusions on the regularities in the studied group.

4. Results of the Research and Discussion

A number of indicators related to the analysed issue were selected from the total material extracted from the research survey. They present the respondents' views on the impact of remote working on information sharing among employees and the role of a manager in shaping information exchange as an important element of information management. An element directly related to the addressed research issue consisted in questions concerning the impact of remote working on: speed, understanding, and evaluation of the veracity of provided information and also the amount of information provided.

As can be seen from the obtained data, Generation Z employees participating in the survey were mostly (62.53%) of the opinion that remote working enables a fast exchange of information. Only 21.71% of respondents had a different opinion on this issue, and only 15.76% did not provide a clear answer. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents (55.30%) indicated that working remotely works in favour of understanding the provided information. Only 17.31% of respondents were of the opposite opinion and 27.39% answered this question with "neither agree nor disagree". Respondents also had a positive opinion on the impact of remote working on assessing the veracity of information, although in this case their opinions were less unanimous. 46.77% of respondents felt that remote working made it easier to assess the veracity of information, but 27.39% were of the opposite opinion, and as many as 29.72% did not provide a clear answer. Significantly, when asked if remote working leads to information overload, the majority (38.24%) were critical of this issue - pointing to extensive amounts of received information. However, it should be noted that 34.37% of respondents had the opposite opinion and 27.39% did not provide a clear answer (for a detailed summary of the respondents' answers regarding the impact of remote working on information exchange, see Table 1).

The conducted statistical analysis revealed that respondents' opinions concerning the impact of remote working on the ability to quickly exchange information varied according to their experience of remote working (the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test $p = 0.0011$, with an assumed significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ indicate rejecting the verified null hypothesis). Practice in performing this form of work also differentiated the indications of respondents concerning the impact of remote working on their understanding of the provided information (AKW test $p = 0.0003$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and assessing the veracity of information (AKW test $p = 0.0018$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Respondents who had been working remotely for 1 to 3 years were relatively more likely (72.29%) to agree with the statement that working remotely allows for a quick exchange of information than those with

other work experience. Those working remotely for the shortest period of time, up to six months, were the least likely to share this opinion (48.21%). However, it was characteristic that those working remotely for the shortest period of time were also the least likely to agree with the statements that working remotely facilitates understanding the provided information (39.28%) and makes it easier to assess the veracity of the information (31.25%).

Table 1: Percentages of answers in the Field of Remote Work

Remote work	strongly disagree	mostly disagree	neither agree nor disagree	mostly agree	strongly agree
enables quick exchange of information	6.72%	14.99%	15.76%	46.77%	15.76%
helps to understand the provided information	6.46%	10.85%	27.39%	40.31%	14.99%
facilitates the assessment of the veracity of information	5.42%	18.09%	29.72%	31.78%	14.99%
leads to information overload	7.24%	27.13%	27.39%	30.23%	8.01%
makes most of the information go through the manager	1.29%	15.76%	25.58%	32.82%	24.55%
encourages to seek information among co-workers	5.68%	21.71%	29.72%	36.43%	6.46%

Source: Own study.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test also indicate that the assessment of the respondents concerning: the impact of remote working on the ability to exchange information quickly, understanding the provided information, and assessing the veracity of the information - varied according to the form of preferred future work (AKW test $p = 0.0000$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Those respondents who would like to work remotely in the future were most likely to agree with the statements that working remotely provides the opportunity to exchange information quickly (75%), works in favour of understanding information (70.59%), and makes it easier to assess the veracity of information (64.71%).

Additionally, statistical tests revealed that the respondents' opinions regarding the impact of remote working on: the ability to quickly exchange information (AKW test $p = 0.0323$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and understanding the provided information (AKW test $p = 0.002$, $\alpha = 0.05$) varied according to the size of the organisation where they were employed. Survey participants who worked in large organisations were relatively more likely (67.19%) than respondents employed in micro (63.19%), small (61.63%), and medium (56.36%) enterprises to indicate the ability to exchange information quickly when working remotely. Similarly, respondents employed in large organisations were relatively more likely (62.5%) than respondents employed in micro (58.24%), medium (50.91%), and small (46.51%) enterprises to believe that remote working was conducive to understanding the information provided.

Due to the assumed aim of the research and the related research questions, in the conducted survey, respondents were asked to respond to statements regarding the role of a manager and colleagues in shaping information exchange in remote working. As can be seen from the received data, a predominant part of survey participants (57.37%) was of the opinion that performing remote work results in the majority of information going through a manager. Although, it should be emphasized that one in four respondents (24.55%) completely agreed with such a statement and 32.82% of respondents rather agreed. Only 17.05% of respondents had a different opinion on this issue, and 25.58% did not provide a clear answer (Table 1).

The results of the statistical analysis indicate that the opinions of respondents regarding the role of a manager in information exchange in remote working varied according to their work experience in remote working (AKW test $p = 0.0019$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and their position in the workplace (UMW test $p = 0.0080$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

Respondents who worked remotely for the shortest period of time - up to 6 months - were relatively more likely (64.28%) to agree with the statement that most information in remote working goes through a manager than those working for more than 3 years (58.06%) and those working for 6 to 12 months (55.9%), as well as those working for 1 to 3 years (50.6%). What's important is the fact that this opinion was far more frequently

expressed by respondents working in executive positions (60.48%) than those in managerial positions (47.25%).

In the context of the manager's role in managing information in remote working, the results of the question concerning obtaining information from colleagues are interesting. As can be seen from the received responses, 42.89% of respondents said that remote working encourages people to seek information among colleagues. An opposite opinion was held by 27.39% of respondents, and as many as 29.72% did not provide a clear answer (Table 1).

The results of the statistical analysis indicate that respondents' opinions regarding the impact of remote working on seeking information among colleagues varied by their: gender (Mann-Whitney U test $p = 0.0492$, $\alpha = 0.05$), experience in remote work (AKW test $p = 0.0053$, $\alpha = 0.05$), as well as the size of the organisation employing them (AKW test $p = 0$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Male respondents were relatively more likely (45.98%) than females (38.65%) to believe that remote work was conducive to obtaining information from colleagues. People with the longest experience of working remotely were relatively more likely (54.84%) to share this opinion than those working in this form for 1 to 3 years (51.81%) and people working for 6 to 12 months (41.61%), as well as those working remotely for the shortest time (34.82%). Verifying the significance of differences also shows that respondents working in micro organisations (55.5%) were relatively more likely to agree with this statement than those employed in large (37.51%), medium, and small companies (29.09%, 29.07% respectively).

The presented results of the survey have not been compared with others, because in the literature on the subject no studies on the opinions of remote employees from the Z Generation on the analyzed topic were found.

Continuing in the future, the research topic presented in the article should be expanded with qualitative research. Such research makes it possible to reach a deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of employees from the Z Generation who perform remote work. Particularly intriguing in terms of research is answer to the question of why the respondents, positively evaluated many aspects of remote work, want to work stationary or in a hybrid form in the future.

5. Conclusions

Information acquired from young Generation Z workers who had experience of remote working allowed for some interesting insights relating to the analysed issue.

The research results indicate that respondents perceived the impact of remote working on both the speed of information exchange and the ability to understand the information provided and to assess its veracity in a positive manner. However, it should be emphasized that they mostly appreciated the speed of information transfer in remote working, while they were more doubtful about the reliability of the information they were obtaining. These results confirm the fact that the information technologies used in remote working provide opportunities for almost immediate contact with all members of the organisation - something that is often difficult or even impossible in a stationary working situation. However, the deprivation of face-to-face communication (characteristic of remote working) and the related reduction in informal relationships and lack of non-verbal communication means that it can be difficult to assess the veracity of the provided information.

A following observation shows that people working remotely for the shortest period of time - up to 6 months - were the least likely to agree with the statements that remote work provides the opportunity to quickly exchange information, promotes understanding the provided information and makes it easier to assess its veracity. This situation means that more extensive experience of working remotely has an impact on positively perceiving communication in this form of work - which is probably related to the skills acquired over time by remote workers.

Furthermore, the obtained data signals that the participants of the survey working in large companies, relatively more often than respondents employed in other companies, emphasized the benefits of remote working in terms of fast and convenient information exchange. Respondents' opinions may result from the specifics of working in large organisations, where direct contacts are limited to the circle of closest colleagues and relationships with other members of the organisation are often similar to remote working.

In reference to the positive opinions of respondents concerning the impact of remote working on information exchange, the negative assessment of the amount of information flowing to employees working remotely is particularly noteworthy. Pointing to an excessive amount of received information, the respondents highlighted

the disadvantage of remote working in terms of information overload. In this context, the role of a manager should boil down to coordinating the information provided to individual subordinates so that they can focus on carrying out their duties effectively, without the need to waste time selecting information and without having to worry about missing out on the important information in too many incoming messages.

Another interesting observation concerns the role of a manager in the exchange of information in remote working. As can be seen from the obtained data, a predominant proportion of respondents indicated that in remote working most of the information goes through the manager and one in four completely agreed with this statement. Significantly, this opinion was far more often expressed by respondents who had worked remotely for the shortest period of time and those in executive positions. Therefore, young Generation Z employees with short experience of working remotely were more likely to ask their supervisor for information.

Significantly fewer respondents, in relation to those exposing the manager's role in information exchange, stated that remote working was conducive to gaining information from colleagues. This opinion was more often shared by those with the longest experience in working remotely and those working in micro organisations. This observation means that a smaller number of people with whom the respondents worked and a longer time in remote functioning works in favour of forming employee relationships, allowing for freedom to obtain information from colleagues.

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