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## The Impact of Intergenerational Differences on Employee Engagement in an Organization



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**Abstract.** The relevance of the study is driven by the need to adapt corporate engagement policies to the specifics of the workforce's age structure, especially in the context of demographic aging and the growing share of employees from Generations Y and Z. The aim of the work is to identify the specifics of how employees of different generations perceive engagement programs, using an industrial enterprise operating in a special economic zone as an example. In the scientific literature, engagement is interpreted as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components; however, the generational aspect remains understudied. The novelty of the research lies in the empirical comparison of the levels and semantic characteristics of engagement among representatives of Generations X, Y, Z, and older employees, based on the validated international Kincentric model. The empirical base includes the results of a questionnaire survey of 72 employees of „SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC conducted in the

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spring of 2025. An adapted questionnaire was used, comprising 24 statements grouped into four blocks: Engagement, Management, Resources, and Development. Percentage values were calculated based on the number of respondents who answered each question. Methods of descriptive statistics and intergroup analysis were applied. The obtained data indicate the highest level of engagement among Generation Y and a decrease in indicators among employees aged 56 and older. Differences in career expectations and perceptions of the corporate environment were identified. The practical significance of the study lies in the formation of personalized HR strategies for a multi-generational workforce. The limitations of the study are associated with the territorial specifics and the single-organization sample; promising directions for future research include expanding the geographical scope and comparing industry-specific cases.

**Key words:** employee engagement, generational differences, behavioral model, corporate policy, Generation Y, Generation X, Generation Z, intergenerational interaction, motivational strategies.

### Introduction

Current challenges of sustainable socio-economic development require organizations not only to adapt to changing environmental conditions, but also to effectively manage internal resources, primarily human capital. Staff involvement, being one of the key categories of labor economics and personnel management, is considered as the most important factor in increasing productivity, innovation activity, and competitiveness of the organization.

The generational diversity of staff increases the complexity of management tasks and requires the development of flexible interaction models that combine economic efficiency and social sustainability. Representatives of Generations X, Y, and Z differ in motivational attitudes, communication styles, and career expectations, which makes it necessary to move from universal to differentiated engagement strategies that take into account the age and value specifics of employees.

This problem is particularly important in high-tech industrial clusters, where the cost of human resources and the requirements for their qualifications are particularly high. “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC belongs to such organizations, which operates under conditions of constant technological and organizational changes. In this case, the issues of mentoring, motivation, career growth and staff

retention are directly related to the sustainability of the production system.

The aim of the study is to develop proposals for adapting the HR strategy of the industrial organization, taking into account intergenerational differences in staff engagement. To achieve it, we carried out a comparative analysis of employee engagement levels of different age groups, identified cohort differences in motivational orientations and perception of the corporate environment, and proposed directions for adapting HR strategies to the intergenerational context.

The scientific novelty of the work consists in an empirical analysis of generational differences in engagement based on the validated international Kincentric model, which made it possible to correlate quantitative indicators with qualitative characteristics of motivation and organizational behavior. The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of applying the results obtained in the development of personalized engagement programs aimed at improving the effectiveness of intergenerational interaction and the sustainability of human resources.

For the correct interpretation of the research results, the work uses a generational typology based on the theory of generations by W. Strauss and N. Howe (Strauss, Howe, 1991), which is widely

used both in foreign and Russian academic circles. According to this concept, each generation represents a stable cohort community, formed under the influence of key historical and socio-cultural events during the period of personality formation (approximately from 10 to 25 years). These events form stable values, attitudes, and behavioral strategies that distinguish the generation from the previous and subsequent ones.

Modern Russian researchers (Parma, 2021; Miroshkina, 2017; Dzaei, 2019; Rikel, 2019; Belyaeva, 2022) emphasize that the theory of generations is an interdisciplinary framework in which the approaches of sociology, psychology, pedagogy, cultural studies and even political science intersect. In addition to classical concepts (Mannheim, 1952; Strauss, Howe, 1991), cohort analysis, age stratification theory, transmission models (transmission of cultural norms), and concepts of digital generation are actively used.

In this study, the following periodization is adopted, adapted to the Russian context (Nefedova, 2020; Pavlova, Elshin, 2020; Lebedeva, 2019; Kotovshchikova, 2019).

**Generation X** – born in 1965–1980. They are considered to be carriers of stability, professional ethics, prone to hierarchy and long-term planning.

**Generation Y (millennials)** – 1981–1996. They are focused on flexibility, personal development, work-life balance, and prefer horizontal forms of communication.

**Generation Z** – since 1997. They perceive digital technologies as a natural environment, tend to individualize, seek immediate feedback and a high degree of involvement in significant projects.

It is worth saying that the boundaries of generations in different sources may vary ( $\pm 2$ –3 years), and some domestic classifications (Shamis, Nikonov, 2017, 2023) include additional archetypes – “perestroika generation”, “digital generation”, etc. Nevertheless, the basic generational division into X, Y, and Z remains analytically productive, especially

in applied HR research.

In addition, numerous studies have documented that the transformation of the generational structure is caused not only by age, but also by the action of many factors.:

- political (reforms, ideological rifts);
- economic (crises, employment structure);
- technological (digitalization, AI dissemination);
- social (changes in families, educational trajectories);
- cultural (value shifts, lifestyle).

Recognizing this complexity avoids a simplistic understanding of generational differences and treats them as a dynamic, contextually sensitive category. In our study, we use a generational approach as an analytical tool to interpret differences in the perception of corporate engagement programs, without claiming a rigid classification or universal typology.

### Literature review

The issue concerning personnel involvement in organizational processes has long occupied an important place in scientific research in the field of management, organizational psychology and labor sociology. The concept of engagement was first conceptualized in the classical work of W. Kahn (Kahn, 1990), where it is interpreted as a condition in which a person brings themselves to organizational roles with full physical, cognitive and emotional commitment. This model has formed the basis for many subsequent studies focusing on the psychological conditions of inclusion, such as meaningfulness, safety, and accessibility (May et al., 2004).

It is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of “engagement” and “loyalty”, which are often used synonymously. Loyalty reflects a predominantly stable, passive attitude toward an organization, a willingness to maintain membership in it and follow its norms. Engagement, on the other hand, involves active participation, emotional

attachment, and the desire to contribute to achieving the company's goals. Taking into account generational differences, the perception of these categories is also changing: for senior employees, loyalty is more often associated with long-term work and responsibility, while representatives of Generations Y and Z emphasize engagement as an opportunity for self-realization, recognition and development.

Key theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of engagement have been developed in foreign literature (Hackman, Oldham, 1975; Leiter, Maslach, 1988; Schaufeli et al., 2002, 2006; Saks, 2006; Macey, Schneider, 2008). The researchers emphasized the difference between involvement in work and in an organization, and proposed multifactorial models that include components such as energy, commitment, and absorption. The scales they developed, including the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), are widely used in applied HR research.

Despite this, there is still no unity in understanding the essence of engagement. As B. Shuck notes, there are several competing approaches: from functional (involvement as a derivative of working conditions) to value-based (involvement as conscious identification with company goals). W.H. Macey, B. Schneider distinguish between surface activity and genuine psychological involvement, which actualizes the task of its deep diagnosis.

Russian researchers also pay attention to the internal mechanisms of engagement. In a number of works, corporate patriotism is interpreted as the highest form of inclusion (Magura, Kurbatova, 1998); the role of values in maintaining labor efficiency is emphasized in (Grishchenko, Brikoshina, 2015), and the connection between engagement and the quality of HR branding is noted in (Gromova, 2016).

However, these works mostly lack a detailed study of the age differentiation of the perception of engagement. This creates an obvious gap, especially in conditions where labor collectives are becoming

more and more generationally diverse. Modern research (Nefedova, 2020; Lebedeva, 2019) demonstrates that representatives of Generation X value stability, recognition and a hierarchical structure of interaction more, while Y and Z are focused on flexibility, development and horizontal communication. A number of studies confirm that the use of universal approaches to motivation and engagement is becoming less effective (Pavlova, El'shin, 2020; Kotovshchikova, 2019; Palaguta, 2017).

Nevertheless, even in these studies, generational features are most often considered outside the organizational context, which limits the possibilities of practical adaptation of the results. In addition, a significant part of the work is descriptive or conceptual in nature – loosely related to specific engagement programs, tools, and results. Empirical studies that use measurable indexes (for example, Gallup Q12 or the Scriptunova methodology, 2010) are rare and, as a rule, do not record differences between generations.

The problem becomes even more urgent when we consider that staff turnover in Russia remains high<sup>1</sup> (HeadHunter, 2025), especially among young professionals. The research<sup>2</sup> (Towers Watson, 2017) highlights that engagement is becoming a critical retention factor and requires flexible and targeted programs from employers that are sensitive to age, seniority, and career motivation.

In this context, there is a growing interest in internal engagement programs: mentoring, recognition of achievements, career development, and participation in projects. However, the mechanisms of their perception by different generations remain poorly understood. This is especially true for high-

<sup>1</sup> HeadHunter. Staff turnover study in Russia: 2025. Available at: <https://hh.ru/?hhtmlFrom=article> (accessed: 09.06.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Deloitte. Retention – Under the Spotlight: Transportation, Hospitality and Services. 2022–2023. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/gx-tgr-transportation-hospitality-services-retention-sector.pdf> (accessed: 05.05.2025).



tech enterprises operating in special economic zones, where the requirements for staff efficiency are combined with the tasks of continuity and rapid adaptation.

Thus, the analysis of modern literature allows identifying several key scientific gaps:

- lack of a unified methodology for assessing engagement, taking into account generational differences;
- lack of empirical evidence-based cases in the industrial sector;
- weak operationalization of the concepts of engagement for Russian realities;
- insufficient development of a programmatic approach to engagement in the context of geographically specialized structures, such as SEZs.

Our study aims to fill in these gaps by referring to a specific case – “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC, where real-world engagement programs are used to analyze their perception and effectiveness for different generations of employees.

### Research methodology

The empirical study was conducted in April – May 2025 on the basis of “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC, located in the Sverdlovsk Region and operating under the federal program for the development of special economic zones. The object of the analysis was the personnel of the enterprise participating in corporate engagement programs.

The methodological basis was formed by a quantitative strategy using a questionnaire based on an adapted version of the international **Kincentric (formerly Aon Hewitt)** model, recognized in the global practice of measuring staff engagement. The model helps to capture three key behavioral indicators: willingness to recommend an employer, the intention to continue working for the company, and the desire to make additional efforts to achieve its aims. The use of this model provided an opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of engagement, taking into account intergenerational differences.

Seventy-two employees representing three age groups took part in the survey: generation Y (25–39 years old) – 42%, generation X (40–55 years old) – 35%, and the older generation (56–70 years old) – 23%. With a total staff of about 250 people, the sampling error did not exceed 7.8% with a confidence level of 95%. The stratified nature of the sample ensured the representativeness of the data and made it possible to compare the results between cohorts.

The questionnaire included 24 statements grouped into four areas: engagement, the role of the direct supervisor, organizational resources, training and development. The answers were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – “totally disagree” to 5 – “totally agree”). This format made it possible to obtain quantitative assessments of the perception of key aspects of the organizational environment.

The primary data processing was performed using an Excel spreadsheet editor. We used methods of descriptive statistics, intergroup comparisons, and interpretation of results in the logic of the Kincentric behavioral indicators for the analysis. We paid particular attention to identifying differences in assessments of managerial communications, feedback opportunities, career development, and training programs across generational groups.

The study design used allowed combining the reliability of quantitative measurements with an analytical interpretation of cohort differences in the perception of the corporate environment. This provided an opportunity to empirically confirm the hypothesis about the influence of the age structure of staff on the level of engagement and perception of HR practices.

### Research results and discussion

Analysis of empirical data obtained during a survey of employees of “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC project revealed significant differences in the level and structure of engagement between representatives of different generations. The use

of the validated Kincentric model provided both a quantitative assessment (engagement index) and a qualitative interpretation of the respondents' behavioral and motivational characteristics. This section presents the key results, grouped by the main thematic areas of the study: differences in engagement indices, perceptions of team interaction and feedback, career expectations, as well as the values underlying engagement.

In addition to the calculated engagement indices, it is important to take into account the qualitative aspects of the perception of organizational processes by representatives of different generations. The analysis of the questionnaire data by age group revealed significant differences in the assessment of key management blocks, such as teamwork, feedback opportunities, as well as career development and training.

For instance, young employees (25–39 years old) are more likely to critically perceive the effectiveness of managerial communications: 41.7% of respondents in this group indicated an irregular feedback from management. At the same time, they are actively involved in corporate initiatives and positively evaluate learning and growth opportunities, provided that these opportunities are presented in an interactive, flexible form. This highlights the need to use digital platforms and flexible formats in the staff development system.

The 40–55-year-old group shows a mixed picture: on the one hand, they demonstrate sustained loyalty to the company's mission, on the other, they are most critical of the work of senior management and the lack of clear career prospects. This imbalance indicates the need to introduce transparent development tracks within the company, adapted to mid-level specialists.

The older generation (56–70 years old), on the contrary, shows high loyalty and stability in assessments. However, an expert interview with the director of sustainable development shows that it is this group that more often experiences

barriers to access to information and new forms of communication. The instability of individual initiatives (for example, mentoring and experience-sharing practices) and the lack of personalized forms of recognition of contributions were also highlighted as problem areas. This requires the development of specialized support programs for senior staff, focusing on knowledge transfer and social recognition.

Thus, the data obtained demonstrate the need to move away from a universal approach to engagement formation and move toward a generationally sensitive human resource management system. This is especially important in the context of demographic aging of staff and the growing importance of intergenerational interaction for the sustainable development of organizations.

In the future, it is advisable to supplement the study with the inclusion of such parameters as job level, work experience and psychographic characteristics, as well as to dynamically track changes in engagement depending on corporate transformations. The ability of the Kincentric model to adapt to such tasks makes it applicable for further monitoring and strategic planning in the HR area.

The greatest differences between generations were observed on issues related to professional development opportunities and receiving regular feedback from management. For example, among respondents aged 25–39, 60% fully agree that they receive regular feedback, while among the older group (56–70 years old), there were less than 30% of them. This indicates a generational gap in the perception of managerial communications.

Representatives of Generation X more often emphasized the importance of stability and predictability of internal processes, while Y focused on freedom of expression and flexibility of tasks. Generation Z, in turn, focused on digital transparency and the relevance of tasks, which correlates with the general trends of digitalization of the work environment. These differences are

important in developing corporate values that are understandable and close to each cohort.

We recorded the phenomenon of “ceiling expectations” among respondents over the age of 55: the majority do not consider the possibility of career growth as realistic. This may be due to both objective factors (company structure) and subjective ones, such as a decrease in self-esteem of career prospects with age.

Additionally, we found that not only age, but also the length of stay in the company has a significant impact on the level of engagement. Among Generation Y employees who have been working for more than 3 years, the engagement index exceeded 80%, while for new employees it did not reach 60%. This highlights the importance of retention and engagement strategies in the early stages of adaptation.

One of the Generation X respondents noted: “For me, engagement is when I know that my expertise is in demand”. While a representative of Generation Z said: “It is important for me that my ideas are immediately seen and taken into account”. These quotes illustrate the shift from role-playing to project contributions and expectations of immediate recognition.

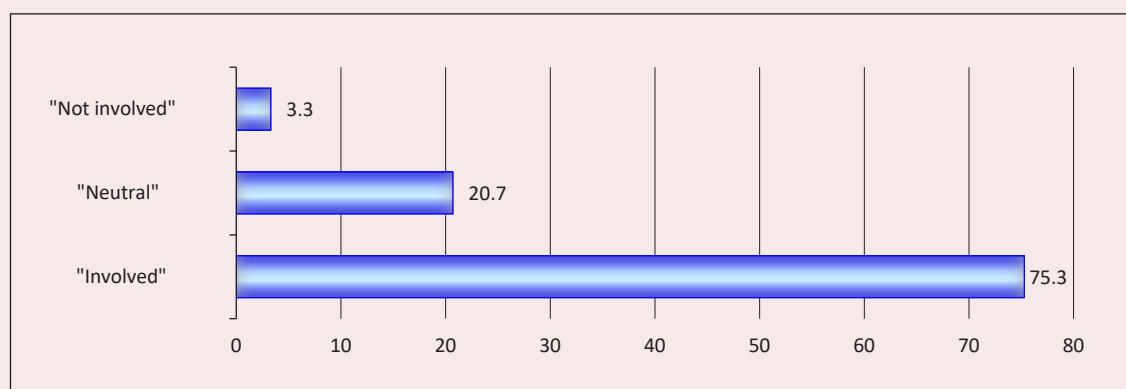
The Kincentric model demonstrated high sensitivity to differences in motivational attitudes, but required adaptation when analyzing the older age group, where some of the questionnaire formulations were interpreted ambiguously. This imposes limitations on direct comparison with the results of other studies and requires further testing of the toolkit in a multi-age environment.

As a result of the empirical survey of employees of “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC revealed several significant patterns reflecting the generational differentiation of engagement. The calculation of the engagement index based on the Kincentric model made it possible to classify respondents by the level of engagement (involved, neutral, not involved), as well as analyze the perception of key organizational practices and the environment. These data formed the basis for a meaningful discussion about the transformation of corporate culture in the context of age diversity.

#### 1. Engagement Index: generational differences

The highest level of engagement was demonstrated by employees aged 25 to 39 (group Y): 75.3% of them were in the “involved” category, while only 3.3% were in the “not involved” category (*Figure*).

Indicators of the employee engagement index for the 25–39 age group of “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC for December 2024, %



Source: own compilation.

This refutes the persistent stereotype of superficial loyalty and instability of millennials, forming the basis for a review of approaches to personnel planning.

The situation is fundamentally different for employees over 55 years of age: the share of neutrals is 40.4%, while those involved are only 19.1%. We can talk about a weak emotional connection with the organization, which is not necessarily a consequence of burnout, but may indicate a sense of exclusion or weak relevance of current motivation programs. The question arises: are representatives of the older cohorts really less involved, or is the problem that the engagement mechanisms themselves are focused on the values and behavioral patterns of Generation Y?

#### *2. Teamwork and feedback availability*

In most cases, employees of Generation Y noted the high quality of communication and support from colleagues and management (more than 60% of positive ratings). On the contrary, representatives of the 56–70-year-old generation feel a lack of belonging to a team and lack of regular feedback: only 25% of older respondents believe that they receive constructive feedback. This may be due to the lack of adapted communication channels, or to internal barriers related to age expectations, authority, and distance.

It is worth asking the question: is there a need for separate formats of intra-corporate communication focused on trust, dialogue and recognition, especially for senior employees?

#### *3. Perception of career development*

Of particular interest is the perception of career prospects. Almost 80% of respondents under the age of 30 (Z) believe that they have a real chance of professional advancement. In the 40–55-year-old group, this figure drops to 48%, while among employees over 55 it is only 12%. This reflects not only the objective limitations of career growth, but also the effect of “psychological ceiling” — a situation where employees themselves do not

expect development, even if they have formal opportunities.

This raises the issue concerning equity and effectiveness of age-friendly management: should organizations encourage the development of senior staff or focus on youth as a key human resource?

#### *4. Value priorities and meanings of engagement*

The survey results show that representatives of different generations put different value meanings into the concept of engagement. Young people (Y and Z) associate it with open opportunities, professional growth, a flexible environment and recognition of achievements. The older generation more often associates engagement with reliability, stability, formal fairness, and respect for experience. Hence, we can notice different perceptions of the same programs: elements of gamification, informal interaction, and horizontal management can inspire some and alienate others.

Thus, a universal toolkit of engagement can simultaneously motivate one group and demotivate another. A dilemma arises: is a radical personalization of corporate policy necessary, or should we stick to neutral, universal models that ensure overall sustainability?

### **Conclusions and discussion**

Summarizing the empirical study results made it possible to identify key patterns of staff involvement from different generations and identify ways to increase it in an industrial organization.

The results confirmed the presence of pronounced generational differences in the level and structure of involvement of “SEZ ‘Titanium Valley’” JSC staff. Based on the Kincentric model, we found that the highest engagement rates are demonstrated by representatives of Generation Y (25–39 years old), which contradicts common ideas about the low organizational attachment of this cohort. This indicates the transformation of millennials’ motivational attitudes and confirms the effectiveness of flexible, developing HR practices focused on professional growth and feedback.



Employees of the older age groups (56+) are characterized by a lower level of engagement, due not to a decrease in competencies, but to limited participation in internal communications and decision-making processes. This result indicates the need for targeted support programs for senior employees aimed at recognizing their experience, engaging in mentoring practices, and strengthening organizational identity.

The analysis showed that universal HR solutions that do not take into account the age and value diversity of staff are not effective enough. In the context of multigenerational teams, it is necessary to differentiate the tools of engagement and build adaptive motivation models that ensure a balance between individual expectations and the strategic goals of the organization.

The methodological significance of the work consists in testing the Scriptunova engagement index to analyze cohort differences and adapt the Kincentric model to the conditions of an industrial organization in the format of a special economic zone. The practical significance lies in the formation of grounds for adjusting HR strategies, taking into account the age structure of the staff and the objectives of the sustainable development.

The results obtained allow considering engagement as an integral indicator of the quality of an organization's internal environment and its ability to ensure effective intergenerational interaction. It is advisable to focus further research on the development of tools for diagnosing intergenerational dynamics of engagement and assessing the impact of management practices on the preservation of human resources.

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