



Dissertation - OSHRM



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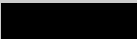
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The advance of technology, globalisation connected to more significant diversity in the workplace, competition and increasing workloads have created new challenges for leaders (Kalliath & Kalliath, 2012). More recently, COVID-19 impacted the world right before a cost-of-living crisis hit, and since then, society and organisations have never been the same (Anjun et al., 2022). In this context, employee relations face problems in attracting and retaining talent and declining performance of young generations (Kuzior et al., 2022).


A focus to combat the current problems at work due to its potential advantages is employee engagement (Sharp, 2019). The notion introduced by William Kahn in 1990, employee engagement today has over fifty definitions (Sharp, 2019). Consequently, this field is still ambiguous, as the definition of engagement and how to measure it are debated among investigators (Sharp, 2019). For the purpose of this study, it will be considered one of the most relevant definitions from Gallup, a pioneer in the field (Sharp, 2019). Gallup argues that employee engagement encompasses the involvement and enthusiasm of employees while performing their duties at work (Kuzior et al., 2022).

Additionally, according to researchers, wellbeing is a growing topic now and in the coming years, as not only personal life and society but also work impacts individual wellbeing and vice versa (Dean, 2018). Considered a concept for organisations to incorporate in their business strategy for 2024 to tackle retention and performance issues, most studies regard emotional, mental and physical health, social and financial wellbeing, and even a sense of purpose and belonging when analysing wellbeing (Mosley, 2023; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021).

These two concepts are interconnected and have a potential role in strategies to retain and develop Generation Z (Mosley, 2023). However, recent researchers found that Generation Z considers the tools available to support wellbeing under-utilised. (Fruitful Insights, 2023). Since the reasons behind the statement are unclear, the study will propose to address the gap.

Research Aim

This research aims to contribute to understanding to what extent wellbeing support at work can meet expectations and engage Generation Z within the UK. To achieve this purpose: (a) it will explore the expectations of Generation Z regarding wellbeing at work, and (b) gather an



overview of initiatives offered by companies in the UK to then (c) critically analyse the impact of wellbeing support tools in the engagement of Gen Z.

Research Questions

1. What are the expectations of Gen Z regarding wellbeing at the workplace in the UK?
2. What support do employers provide to employees?
3. What is the impact of wellbeing tools in responding to Gen Z expectations and consequent engagement at work?

Literature Review

Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Relationship


Research to date has proven a positive correlation between employee engagement and their wellbeing, consequently, it has progressively become a business priority (Kalliath & Kalliath, 2012; Salem et al., 2023). In other words, a positive work environment supports a more favourable wellbeing of an individual within the workplace (Salem et al., 2023). In return, organisations identify greater engagement, enhancing organisation and individual performances and low turnover (Achmad et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, critics suggest that engagement and wellbeing are complex to consistently maintain in any organisation (Sharp, 2019). Some reasons could be the heavy workloads, the singularity of each person's interpretation of these topics and research gaps (Sharp, 2019; Kalliath & Kalliath, 2012).

Despite criticism, the current world situation, including COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, raised challenges connected to employees' mental health (Kuzior et al., 2022).

Therefore, it can be an opportunity for employers to promote new initiatives to improve their workplace, taking a competitive advantage to face others (Pendell & Helm, 2022).

Generation Z Wellbeing and Engagement



In 2023, the statistics indicate low wellbeing among workers, with Generation Z taking the lead against their cohorts (Fruitful Insights, 2023). Generation Z are the people born between 1996 and 2010, also known as Gen Z or Zoomers, the most recent generation to enter the work market (Kuzior et al., 2022).


One of the main concerns regarding the generation dominating the workforce in the next ten years is that 1 in 3 individuals of this generation deal with wellbeing issues due to stress, anxiety and depression (Fruitful Insights, 2023). Despite Gen Z having positive perspectives on the support from employers, studies emphasise low wellbeing and high levels of burnout and stress compared to others as defining factor of this group (Deloitte, 2023; Pendell & Helm, 2022).

A possible explanation for these results to differ from one generation to another might be clarified by the Zoomer's feeling of not belonging to a community, which increases isolation; a deeper understanding of mental health and its consequences; and a greater vulnerability to speaking up and reaching out for help (Fruitful Insights, 2023). However, much uncertainty still exists about the extent of the impact of the current socioeconomic context on Gen Z as consequences continue to develop (Becker, 2022).

From an engagement perspective, according to Professor Anthony Klotz, a current topic in employee relations impacting organisations known as the great resignation, where companies are struggling to retain their staff, is partially explained by the poor wellbeing aligned to low engagement (Kuzior et al., 2022). On this note, it is relevant to notice that multiple researchers point out that Zoomers are the group more prompt to leave their jobs (Fruitful Insights, 2023; LaGree et al., 2023). Nowadays, work-life balance, flexible hours, development, recognition and wellbeing are values more relevant than money and job stability for young employees (Kuzior et al., 2022).

Employee Engagement and Wellbeing in the UK

The UK has been one of the countries with meaningful social changes over the recent years, from Brexit, one of the nations most affected by COVID-19, to the harsh consequences on people and businesses driven by the cost-of-living crisis (CIPD, 2023; Elflein, 2022; Rees & Oliver, 2022).



According to the Gallup Employee Engagement Report in 2022, the UK took 33rd place overall in Europe in employee engagement (Ryan, 2022). Furthermore, a report from Workhuman reveals that ninety-one per cent of Zoomers workers are struggling with wellbeing in the UK (Carnegie, 2023). These factors put British companies in a critical position to tackle employees' wellbeing (Carnegie, 2023).


The most common strategies aiming to help the wellbeing of workers include allowing employees to have control over their approach to work duties and responsibilities, flexibility of working hours and place, guaranteeing opportunities for development and autonomy, maintaining a balanced amount of workload, creating a work environment where managers are leaders in support individuals wellbeing and foster a sense of community across the business (Kelly et al., 2021).

Despite companies' investment in wellbeing, research indicates little progress in the workplace. The extent to which Deloitte (2023) states Gen Z regards the tools offered in workplaces to assist wellbeing and mental health initiatives not fully engaged. While social stigma is one of the potential reasons behind this discussion, an in-depth understanding remains unclear of how the mechanisms to deal with wellbeing at the workplace are not effective in retaining and improving Generation Z performance (Deloitte, 2023).

Methodology

In the first instance, it is relevant to establish the background of beliefs and assumptions of the reality, knowledge and search process that will guide the researcher during the study to achieve valuable results for society, the research philosophy (Sachdeva, 2009). The philosophic approach chosen for the research is the pragmatism paradigm. The pragmatism approach considers the society dynamic by being susceptible to culture, events and a continuous evolution over time (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Nonetheless, not only external forces affect the dynamic, but also human actions, either as individuals or organisations, impact the change (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Thus, regarding the goal and research questions, this approach would be the best to consider the current socioeconomic situation, young individuals' wellbeing and companies' support tools interconnection.

Pragmatism focuses on a deep understanding of any problem to solve it (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Based on this statement, the first two research questions are designed to collect an




insightful understating of the different variables affecting the impact of wellbeing support in responding to Gen Z expectations and their engagement in the workplace, answering the third and ultimate research question. Thus, the research questions are set to build on each other and further the academic literature on the topic.

Secondary research is the selected data collection, a methodology that uses data already collected, processed, and published by other entities (Goodwin, 2012). The data will be drawn from sources such as reports by relevant organisations on the research topic, government and regulatory reports and publications, and newspaper articles with academic recognition (Goodwin, 2012). The criteria to select data will be credible sources on the topics in analysis, focusing on the British workforce population overall and segregated by generation, centring on recent years. Even though there is a possibility to gather data outside of these parameters, if necessary, the criteria set will contribute to getting the most valid information to answer the research questions (Goodwin, 2012).

One of the advantages of the pragmatism paradigm is greater flexibility resulting from the possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Gelo et al., 2008). This research will adopt a mixed method approach to provide both an objective picture of the evolution of employee engagement and wellbeing at work numbers over recent years, get an overview of the progression of the most common tools used by organisations in the UK regarding employee wellbeing, and at the same time a detailed insight into the expectations of young generations in comparison to older generations at the start of the career regarding wellbeing initiatives at the workplace (Gelo et al., 2008).

Regarding data analysis, thematic analysis, an approach used to find patterns through the application of codes in the data under analysis, supported by descriptive statistics technique under statistical analysis, to analyse and resume numerical data, are the main tools to be used during the study that intends to be inductive (Goodwin, 2012).

In an initial trial analysis, one of the first influential reports on employee engagement in the UK, *Engaging for Success* by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke, sets the starting point of the analysis. The report describes a concern on employee engagement in the UK, where only 3 in 10 workers reported to be engaged in 2006 (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). Similarly, a recent report from Gallup declares that only 1 in 10 UK workers is actively engaging at work in



2022 (Doolin, 2023). Hence, the engagement evolution in the UK workplace reflects the performance and turnover challenges (Doolin, 2023).

While exploring potential solutions to engage employees, the 2009 report discusses the intertwined relationship between engagement and wellbeing. These circumstances highlight how vital it is to leaders demonstrate an honest interest in employee wellbeing since it could lead to greater engagement levels (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). However, most employees reported not believing in management's concern for wellbeing, which could partially explain the low levels of engagement mentioned previously. Furthermore, recent research from Fruitful Insights in partnership with Legal & General in 2023, where Gen Z was the centre of analysis, demonstrated that when facing a manager who does not care about employees, there is a negative impact on individual wellbeing (Fruitful Insights, 2023). This trial analyses unveil a weak evolution in engagement numbers and wellbeing support from 2009 to 2023, which reinforces the lack of effective wellbeing tools premise.

Closing Statement

There are potential limitations to secondary research. Since the study focuses on recent years and topics with research gaps, data will be limited to the available and accessible in the public domain (Goodwin, 2012). Furthermore, there is a potential to oversimplify the data to enable analysis within the given parameters of the dissertation (Goodwin, 2012). Regarding ethical considerations, there is no evidence for concerns, but the University of Portsmouth Policy for research will be followed.

To conclude, the lessons learned from the literature review, methodology and trial analysis set the expectation that a full analysis will contribute greater knowledge of how Generation Z engages through wellbeing.

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