

The Work Project presented here constitutes a requirement for the award of the Master's degree in Leadership – Executive by the Nova School of Business and Economics.

Engagement and Intention to Stay among generations Y and Z

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to analyze the link between employee engagement levels and their intention to stay, with a focus on generations Y and Z, using a mixed-methods approach. The research includes quantitative data from a survey of 355 participants and qualitative insights from 8 interviews. The analysis reveals engagement as a predictor of the intention to stay and no significant differences in engagement and intention to stay among generations. Key factors driving engagement for these generations include supportive leadership, work-life balance, positive work environment, meaningful work, autonomy and empowerment, professional growth opportunities, transparent communication, and cultural diversity. These findings highlight actionable strategies for organizations to enhance engagement and subsequently increase employees' intention to stay.

Keywords: engagement, intention to stay, generation Y, generation Z

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding how engagement influences the intention to stay among generations is essential for modern organizations. Within any company or institution, employees that are engaged are more efficient, productive, innovative, and committed, which significantly impacts organizational performance and stability (Gallup, 2024). Generation Z, born after 1997, began entering the workforce around 2017, with a growing presence as more members complete their education and join companies. This generation is expected to make up a significant portion of the global workforce by 2025 (Deloitte Insights, 2017). Acting efficiently on HR strategies to keep people engaged so they stay in the organization regardless of their generations is a key objective.

Engagement is described as a positive and fulfilling work-related mindset marked by energy, commitment, and deep involvement. The concept of engagement has evolved since Kahn (1990) first linked psychological conditions at work to employee behavior. Subsequent research, such as Schaufeli et al. (2002), has further refined our understanding of engagement, emphasizing its importance in fostering a motivated and productive workforce. Since the first theories on work engagement emerged in the late 1990s, a large number of organizations have integrated the concept of engagement within their framework and human resources activities (Mangia and Ross, 2023). Employee engagement at work is now widely adopted by companies. Endres and Mancheno-Smoak (2008) demonstrated that links between engagement and profitability and financial performance exist, the higher people are engaged in their work, the higher financial performance is.

Intention to stay refers to an employee's desire to stay with their current organization (Tett and Meyer, 1993). This intention is crucial for organizations and companies, as it reduces turnover rates, ensuring organizational knowledge is maintained over time. Retaining employees has become a major focus of HR strategies following the "Great Resignation" that began in 2021 (Junger, 2021). This phenomenon, marked by a significant wave of voluntary resignations, firstly

happened in the United States but also spread to Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. An example is the Tang Ping movement in China, where individuals resist the high-pressure culture of overwork and societal expectations, reflecting a larger trend of workers looking for improved work-life balance and mental well-being. Massive quitting of qualified people is an important concern for organizations and their business continuity.

Workplaces today are increasingly diverse, one aspect of this diversity is age: with significant representation from Generations X, Y (Millennials), and Z. This factor of diversity brings complexity in management of the workforce (CIPD, 2014). The retention of employees is a key aspect. An American study (BLS, 2022) showed the tenure by age within organizations. For example, employees between 20 and 24 years old tend to stay less than 2 years within their company. On the other hand, people between 35 and 44 stay at least 4 years and half. Also, an interesting finding is that for all generations, tenure has decreased by 9% between 2012 and 2022. This indicates the relevancy of the topic in HR strategies.

The diversity of age can be a source of conflicts due to difference of value, behaviors and workstyle (Meier & Crocker, 2010) Age-related differences in work stress creates clashes that can lead to resignation, increasing turnover. Furthermore, it is hard to retain younger generations compared to previous ones: loyalty, job satisfaction or career expectations are part of the factors contributing to higher turnover rates among Millennials and Gen Z (Sujan, 2023).

This study aims to investigate how engagement affects the intention to stay among generations Y and Z. The focus is made on the Solvay group, a leader in essential chemicals worldwide. By examining this relationship, the study aims to verify these relationships and highlight which factors of engagement need to be taken into consideration.

The primary research question is: How do engagement and intention to stay differ among generations Y and Z? The objective of the study is to analyze the relationship between engaged employees and their intention to stay by generations.

The study aims to answer the question in two parts. Firstly with a quantitative analysis via survey, to statistically understand if indeed engagement is a predictor of the intention to stay and if there are significant differences among these two generations. Secondly, a qualitative analysis highlights the reasons and factors of engagement at work. The findings of this study offer insights for organizations looking to enhance engagement and retention strategies for generations Y and Z.

This study is organized into five sections. Following the introduction, the first chapter provides a literature review of engagement, intention to stay and generations at work. Second chapter outlines methodology used: survey construction and sample definition. Third part details the statistical results obtained. Fourth chapter discusses the findings, implications, limitations, and future research directions. Finally, a conclusion with recommendations close this study

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generations

A generation can be understood as a group of individuals born within a specific time span, typically around 15 to 20 years. These individuals experience similar cultural, social, economic, and historical events, particularly during their youth, which significantly shape their values, attitudes, and behaviors (Strauss and Howe, 1991). For instance, Millennials grew up during the rapid rise of digital technology, influencing their communication habits and expectations for connectivity, while Generation Z has been immersed in the digital world from an even earlier age, making them digital natives.

The difference between generation and age is important to clarify. Generations are defined by shared experiences and cultural moments that are consistent across an entire group, regardless of where individuals are in their life stages. In contrast, age refers to the specific phase

in a person's biological life and the experiences associated with that particular stage. For example, while both a Millennial and a member of Generation Z might be in their late 20s or early 30s, the shared generational experiences they had growing up (such as how they first interacted with technology or global events) will differ, even though their age-related concerns (like building careers or starting families) might be similar (Strauss and Howe, 1991).

Millennials or Generation Y (born 1981-1996): This generation values work-life balance, purpose, and flexibility. They seek meaningful work and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Millennials are known for their tech-savviness and preference for collaborative and inclusive work environments.

Generation Z (born after 1996): Brings a digital-first mindset, entrepreneurial spirit, and desire for stability and growth. They have grown up with technology and social media, making them extremely connected. Gen Z values diversity, innovation, and a workplace that supports their professional development and personal well-being.

Work Engagement & Generations

Engagement is usually defined as a sense of involvement, motivation, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, dedication, and energy. Engagement is an "emotional involvement or commitment" and "being in gear"(Macey and Schneider, 2008). . Schaufeli et al (2002) characterized employee engagement as a favorable and fulfilling psychological state related to work, marked by vigor (energy and enthusiasm), dedication, and absorption (deep focus):

- **Vigor:** This is defined by an important of energy and mental resilience while working, a readiness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in challenging situations.
- **Dedication:** This involves a strong involvement in one's job, accompanied by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

- Absorption: This is characterized by strong focus and strong enjoyment in one's work, where time seems to pass faster, and it may be difficult to detach from work activities.

Engagement means that employees are actively involved in their work roles, demonstrating their involvement physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their tasks. Employee engagement also includes a psychological presence, with two essential components: attention (the cognitive readiness and time devoted to thinking about a role) and absorption (being deeply immersed in a role, which focuses on the intensity of engagement) (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

While "employee engagement" and "work engagement" are often used interchangeably, "work engagement" is more specific, relating to the employee's connection with their tasks. Including the organizational relationship can blur the distinction between engagement and notions like commitment and extra-role behavior.

Understanding the factors that influence an employee's work engagement can be guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. This model explains how job characteristics affect employee well-being and retention. Job demands, for example the amount of work to deliver, can lead to anxiety and ultimately to burnout when not proactively handled. Job resources, like social support and autonomy, help employees feel valued and capable, boosting their engagement. When employees have a balance of manageable demands and sufficient resources, they are more likely to be engaged and have a stronger intention to stay with their organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The Job Demands-Resources model highlights nine factors of engagement from employees towards their work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Autonomy refers to the control employees have over how they perform their work, giving them the freedom to make decisions about their tasks. Supportive leadership involves management being trustable, present to help and guide when facing challenges. Performance feedback offers clear and consistent information about one's performance and progress, helping employees to improve and grow. Opportunities for

professional growth are crucial, such as training, promotions, mentorship that lead to career development. Task variety, by allowing employees to engage in diverse tasks, keeps the work stimulating and reduces monotony. The work environment plays a significant role, where a team spirit culture fosters a sense of belonging and engagement. Social support is essential, as strong collegiality and teamwork, along with support from colleagues, create a collaborative environment. Job security provides confidence in the stability and continuity of one's role, reducing anxiety about the future. Lastly, role clarity ensures that employees have clear expectations and comprehend their roles and responsibilities, helping them stay focused and effective in their work.

According to Gallup (2016), Millennials report higher engagement levels when their roles are aligned with their personal values and when they have regular opportunities for feedback and development. This generation is characterized by a strong preference for collaborative and socially responsible workplaces, which significantly influence their engagement levels.

The youngest cohort, Generation Z, values diversity, technology integration, and continuous learning. Research by Parker and Igielnik (2020) suggests that Gen Z employees are engaged when they have access to cutting-edge technology, opportunities for skill development, and a diverse and inclusive workplace. This generation values the ability to continuously develop their skills, and their engagement is higher when they perceive that their workplace is progressive and inclusive.

The influence of age on employee engagement has also been documented. Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) conducted a comprehensive study that revealed a positive correlation between age and engagement levels. Their findings suggest that older employees, who typically have more established careers, exhibit higher levels of loyalty and job satisfaction. Conversely, younger employees, mainly Generation Z, are often more transient and seek rapid career

progression. If their engagement needs are unmet, these younger cohorts are more likely to switch jobs in pursuit of better opportunities.

In examining generational engagement within organizations, the insights from Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000) are pivotal. Their research highlights the importance of adapting workplace strategies to accommodate the distinct values and expectations of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. By tailoring communication styles and recognition systems to each generation's preferences, organizations can enhance engagement, loyalty, and productivity across a diverse workforce.

Yet, research indicates mixed findings. For example, a systematic review by Costanza et al. (2012) demonstrates the empirical data on generational differences in engagement. The review suggests that while observable differences in workplace values and attitudes exist—often influenced by each generation's formative social and economic environments—the actual engagement levels are surprisingly similar across generations. This finding challenges the popular narrative that Millennials or Generation Z are fundamentally more or less engaged than older generations. Moreover, Cheung et al. (2018) bring a larger view on this topic by looking at generation Y in different industries. Their research demonstrates that the variations in engagement are usually minor and strongly impacted by their jobs and industry. A study from 2016 showed generational differences in engagement and found that younger generations, particularly Gen Z, prefer flexible and tech-driven work environments and are more likely to disengage in traditional or overly structured environments. This contrasts with Gen X and Baby Boomers, who are often more adaptable to conventional work settings and may show sustained engagement in more rigid frameworks.

Intention to Stay & Generations

The concept of Intention to Stay delves into employees' inclination to remain with their current employer for an extended duration Meyer and Allen (1991). It encompasses various factors, including job satisfaction, engagement, organizational commitment, perceived alternatives, and future career aspirations. When employees exhibit high levels of intention to stay, it signifies a strong desire to prolong their tenure within the organization. This has profound implications for organizational stability and performance. Low people turnover rates, increased productivity, and enhanced overall performance are among the benefits associated with a workforce characterized by high intention to stay.

Research by Hom and Kinicki (2001) and Maertz and Griffeth (2004) further explained the complex factors of intention to stay, demonstrating the factors that shape employees' decisions to either stay or leave. Recognizing and fostering intention to stay is imperative for organizations committed to cultivating a stable and high-performing workforce ready for long-term success.

The concept of intention to stay has evolved from early studies on employee retention. March and Simon (1958) initially focused on why employees leave, while later research shifted to understanding why they stay. Meyer and Allen (1991) significantly contributed to this area by identifying three types of commitment: affective (emotional attachment), continuance (cost-based), and normative (obligation-driven), which influence employees' intentions to remain with their employer.

Mitchell et al. 's (2001) job embeddedness theory adds that employees' intention to stay is also influenced by how well they fit in their job and community, and what they would have to give up if they left. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, prioritize career development, meaningful work, and flexibility when deciding whether to stay with an employer. Research shows that Millennials seek opportunities for growth and value alignment with their personal and professional goals. According to Gallup (2016), Millennials are more inclined to stay with an

organization that offers regular feedback, development opportunities, and a clear sense of purpose. Moreover, their retention patterns indicate a preference for employers who support their career aspirations and provide a work-life balance that accommodates their desire for flexibility.

This review has explored intention to stay and its correlation with generations, focusing on Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z. It highlights the distinct preferences and priorities of Millennials and Generation Z in the workplace: career development, meaningful work, and flexibility, seeking growth opportunities for Generation Y and technological integration, stability, growth potential and inclusion for Gen Z. This may indicate the need for tailored retention strategies. Understanding these generational differences is critical for companies or organizations looking for a stable and engaged workforce.

Objectives and hypotheses

The aim of the study is to analyze the relationship between engagement level of employees and their intention to stay by generations as a moderating variable. A quantitative analysis is made to collect demographics, measure engagement level and intention to stay. A qualitative analysis is made to understand the factors of engagement.

Following the literature review and the objectives, the hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Engagement is a predictor of intention to stay
- H2: Generations Z and Y present significant differences in Work Engagement
- H3: Generations Z and Y present significant differences in Intention to Stay

METHODOLOGY

Description of the method

The survey is composed of 3 sections. The first part collects demographics data from the participants, mainly generations, tenure and experience. Second section is about the engagement

level, the Utrecht work engagement scale-17 defined by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003) was used, which applies a frequency scale of 7-point: never, a few times a year, once a month, a few times a month, once a week, a few times a week, every day. Finally the last section is about the Intention to Stay, with 4 questions measured using a 5-point Likert scale which start from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The details of the survey are in appendix 1.

Data were collected via an online survey made on Google Form. A preliminary test was made with 4 people in order to detect errors and validate the overall survey construction. An attention check question was inserted within the engagement. It is helping to maintain high standards of data quality and ensuring that the findings of the research are based on accurate and reliable responses. The survey was sent by email to the sample. The survey is built and shared with questions and answers written in English as the audience is global.

The survey includes the study's objectives and informs participants about the terms of confidentiality in accordance with ethical and deontological research standards. Data was collected from May 17th to May 31st, 2024.

The population targeted is the young professionals from Solvay group. This group is made of more than 1800 people. The email addresses and selection was made based on HR data and samples are made only of people below 36 years old and having access to computers.

Sample

Out of the 361 responses collected, 6 were excluded based on the attention check question, reducing the final sample to 355 responses.

In terms of demographics, 183 respondents are women (51.5%), 170 are men (47.9%), one person preferred not to say, and one is non-binary.

Regarding generations, 234 respondents were born between 1981 and 1996, making them part of Generation Y (65.9%), while 121 were born between 1997 and 2012, classifying them as Generation Z (34.1%).

Concerning overall professional experience, 25 respondents have been working for less than a year (7.0%), 58 for 1 to 3 years (16.3%), 57 for 4 to 5 years (16.1%), 67 for 6 to 8 years (18.9%), 81 for 9 to 11 years (22.8%), and 67 for more than 12 years (18.9%).

Regarding tenure in their current company, 66 respondents have been with their current employer for less than a year (18.6%). The majority, 145, have been with their current company for 1 to 3 years (40.8%), 52 for 4 to 5 years (14.6%), 52 for 6 to 8 years (14.6%), 29 for 9 to 11 years (8.2%), and 11 respondents for more than 12 years (3.1%).

In terms of education level, 42 respondents have a high school diploma (11.8%), the majority, 174, have a bachelor's degree (49.0%), 136 have a master's degree (38.3%), and 3 have a doctoral degree or Ph.D. (0.8%).

Regarding hierarchical level, a significant majority of respondents, 301, are single contributors in their organization (84.8%), 46 are team leaders managing single contributors (13%), and 8 are managing people who themselves lead single contributors (2.3%).

Finally, the respondents were mainly located in Portugal, with 82 (23.1%). The rest were distributed as follows: Brazil, 75 (21.1%); France, 53 (14.9%); United States, 31 (8.7%); Belgium, 26 (7.3%); Germany, 25 (7.0%); Thailand, 21 (5.9%); and the remaining 42 (11.8%) in the following countries: China 8, Italy 7, Spain 6, Mexico 5, Bulgaria 4, Netherlands 3, Singapore 2, Finland 2, Vietnam 1, South Korea 1, Japan 1, Indonesia 1, and Argentina 1.

The sample is diverse and represents the two generations the study aims to focus on.

Data analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics is the software used for statistical analysis. First the overall reliability is measured with the Cronbach Alpha. In a second time, the correlations between all variables are analyzed. Finally, One Way ANOVA are conducted to identify potential significant differences between groups.

The sector was removed from the analysis as the question was not phrased correctly: all participants are in the same company, so the sector should be systematically the same. However, answers vary and participants responded about their area where they work rather than their sector.

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

Engagement has a Cronbach's Alpha of .89 which indicates excellent internal coherence within the 17 items in the scale. The second reliability analysis for Intention to Stay shows a score of .32, indicating poor internal consistency among the four items. The analysis suggests that removing the item 4 (“Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave my present employer”) of the set would drastically improve the reliability. The 4th question might be less easy to understand than others and might have led to this inconsistency. By removing the 4th element of the set, the Cronbach Alpha is raised to .85, demonstrating a strong consistency in the data set.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The mean engagement index score is 5.35. This score is significantly higher than 4 which is the middle, the observed engagement level is considerable. Engagement level is similar between gender: Female=5.33; Male=5.37. The mean Intention to Stay index score is 4.01. This is significantly higher than 1 and than 3, indicating the sample has a high Intention to Stay. Intention to stay is similar between gender Female 4.00 & Male 4.02.

Correlation Analysis

Presented below is the correlation matrix. In bold are the significant correlations: an asterisk (*) indicates a correlation considered significant and double asterisk (**) indicates a highly statistically significant correlation:

Table 1 – Correlation matrix

		ENG INDEX	INT INDEX	Generati on	Work Experien ce	Tenure	Educatio n Level	Position
ENGINDEX	Pearson Correlation	1						
INTINDEX	Pearson Correlation	.53**	1					
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.02	0					
Generation	Pearson Correlation	.02	.06	1				
Work Experience	Pearson Correlation	.03	-.01	-.63**	1			
Tenure	Pearson Correlation	-.01	-.07	-.44**	.58**	1		
Education Level	Pearson Correlation	-.01	-.08	-.19**	-.07	-.10	1	
Position	Pearson Correlation	.12*	-.03	-.24**	.21**	.18**	.11*	1
Country	Pearson Correlation	-.05	-.09	-.14**	.01	.07	-.06	.09

Observations from the results:

- There is a strong positive correlation ($r=.53^{**}$) between Engagement and Intention to stay. Higher engagement level is, high the intention to stay is.
- There is a strong negative correlation ($r=-.63^{**}$) between Generation and Work Experience indicating that younger generations tend to have less work experience.
- There is a strong negative correlation ($r=-.44^{**}$) between Generation and Tenure, suggesting that younger generations have shorter tenures.

- There is a strong positive correlation ($r=.58^{**}$) between Work Experience and Tenure, indicating that those with more work experience tend to have longer tenures.
- There is a weak positive correlation ($r=.12^{*}$) between Position and Engagement, meaning that individuals with higher positions tend to have slightly higher Engagement scores.

Hypothesis verification

By knowing the statistical results of the study we can verify our hypothesis.

Considering the dependent variable as Intention to Stay and the independent variable as Engagement level, there is a strong positive correlation ($\beta=.53^{**}$) between Engagement and Intention to Stay ($p < .001$). Engagement explains 28% of Intention to Stay. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is validated.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, there are no significant differences in engagement among Gen Z and Gen Y ($p > .05$). Hypothesis 2 is rejected. Gen Z presents an Engagement level of 5.33 and Gen Y presents an Engagement level of 5.3.

To test Hypothesis 3, the same anova test was used. Even though differences are not significant ($p > .05$), it is interesting to see that there are differences between generations. Gen Z presents an Intention to Stay of 3.9, lower than Gen Y (4.09). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is rejected: there is no significant difference between Gen Y and Z.

Finally, One-Way ANOVA is conducted to identify potential significant differences between groups. When considering gender, the analysis shows a statistically significant difference in engagement scores between males and females, despite their mean scores being relatively close (5.33 for females and 5.37 for males; $p < .05$). However, there is no significant difference in intention to stay between genders ($p > .05$).

When considering position, the analysis shows a statistically significant difference in Engagement scores across different position levels ($p < .05$). Specifically, single contributors have lower engagement scores (5.29) compared to team leaders (5.64) and managers (5.54). However, there is no statistically significant difference in intention to stay scores across different position levels ($p > .05$).

Finally, the analysis of countries reveals no statistically significant difference in engagement scores across different countries. However, the intention to stay scores tend to be significant, with responses from Thailand having a lower intention to stay (3.53) compared to other countries (ranging from 3.85 in Portugal to 4.24 in Brazil).

Examining work experience, the findings indicate that no significant differences exist in engagement levels or intention to stay across different work experience groups. This implies that the level of an employee's work experience does not significantly impact their engagement or intention to remain with the organization.

Similarly, the analysis of tenure reveals no significant differences in engagement or intention to stay across different tenure groups. This suggests that the length of an employee's tenure with the organization does not have a significant influence on their engagement or intention to stay.

Regarding education level, the results demonstrate that there are no major statistical differences in engagement scores or intention to stay scores across different education levels. This suggests that an employee's educational background does not significantly affect their engagement or intention to remain with the organization.

Qualitative Analysis

Interviews

Following the quantitative analysis which has demonstrated that engagement predicts intention to stay, it is important to go deeper into the reasons that drive employee engagement. Even though the engagement level is high, the quantitative analysis does not explain why it is high. On the contrary, we don't know the reasons for low engagement. To enrich the study, a qualitative approach is employed through interviews to understand the factors that drive high and low engagement levels.

The interviews serve to identify the key drivers and barriers of engagement from the employee perspective. The proposed methodology is the following: a series of semi-structured interviews on a reduced sample of 8 employees from both genders, both generations and different levels of engagement. This will allow a comprehensive exploration of engagement factors across different demographics. All interviewees preferred to keep their name confidential.

The interview is semi-structured, based on 9 open questions: 4 to understand factors of engagement and link with leadership; 2 to understand the negative factors that lead to disengagement, and finally 3 questions to identify potential improvements in the current organization, highlight the top 3 main factors of engagement and eventually understand why the person is staying in the company (the interview guideline is presented in the Appendix 2).

Sample

Selection of interviewees was made based on their location, level of engagement, generation and gender. A total of 17 people were identified for a final 8 people who accepted the interview. 5 women, 3 from Gen Y medium to high level of engagement, above 6, and 2 women representative of Gen Z with high level of engagement. 3 men, 2 from Gen Y, one with a high

level of engagement, the other with a low level, below 4.5. One from Gen Z with a high level of engagement. Finally, we have 5 people from Generation Y and 3 from Generation Z.

Countries represented were: 2 in Portugal; 2 in Belgium; 2 in France, 1 in USA, 1 in Thailand.

Table 2 - Sample interviewed

Gender	Generation	Level of engagement	Engagement Index	Location
Male	Gen Y	High	6.06	Belgium
Female	Gen Y	Low	4.12	France
Female	Gen Y	Low	4.29	Portugal
Female	Gen Y	Low	4.35	Thailand
Male	Gen Y	Low	2.47	USA
Male	Gen Z	High	6.06	Belgium
Female	Gen Z	High	6.53	France
Female	Gen Z	High	6.18	Portugal

Interviews' Results

Seven main factors have emerged from the interviews: (1)Supportive Leadership; (2)Work-Life Balance; (3)Positive Work Environment; (4)Meaningful Work; (5)Autonomy and Empowerment; (6)Professional Growth Opportunities; (7)Transparent Communication. They are ordered by frequency. Following the last interview question “What are your top 3 factors that boost your engagement?” a point system is used: 3 points for the first factor, 2 points for the second factor and one point for the third most important factor. Results are gathered in table 3 below:

Table 3 - Factors of engagement by generation

	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
Positive Work Environment	9	7	16
Professional Growth Opportunities	4	3	7
Work-Life Balance	5	1	6

Autonomy and Empowerment	5	1	6
Meaningful Work	2	4	6
Supportive Leadership	4	2	6
Transparent Communication	1	0	1

The top 3 factors for Generation Y are: Positive Work Environment, Work-life balance and Autonomy and Empowerment. The top 3 factors for Generation Z are: Positive Work Environment, Meaningful Work and Professional Growth Opportunities.

The first one, mentioned systematically, is the Positive Work Environment. Interviewees shared that having a positive workplace, collaborative environment, including hybrid work, is important for engagement. A Gen Z in Portugal mentioned *“Flexibility in the planning and schedule is really important for me”*. It includes the office, laboratory or factory itself, with the colleague working around and the culture for example the team spirit, as another Gen Z in France said *“It is my first experience in working in hybrid mode, I love the facts that I can choose”*.

The second is the Professional Growth Opportunities. Participants said that having career development and advancement within the organization is a critical factor to remain engaged, for example a Gen Y in Belgium mentioned *“in my area, the career path is quite clear and I like it”* on another hand a Gen Y in Portugal said *“I can evolve in multiple other areas than the one I am currently in, the flexibility and size of the group allows non-linear career path”*. Also support for growth is key, this includes: training, mentorship, and the ability to take on new challenges, roles, and responsibilities.

The third factor highlighted is the Work-Life Balance, including the hybrid work possibilities, manageable workload, with management respecting and ensuring employees can disconnect from work, as a Gen Y in the United States said *“this is absolutely important to be able to disconnect from work”*. All these aspects help to maintain a healthy lifestyle between the job and personal life.

The fourth key aspect for engagement is autonomy going along with empowerment. Younger generations like to have the possibility to participate or that their opinion is taken into account during the decision making. More than this, generation Z and Y want to control how they perform their tasks, a Gen Y mentioned “*micro-management can demotivate me, I prefer when I have space to decide how I do my work*”. This work culture is promoting a sense of accountability, as opposed to micro-management.

The fifth factor detected was meaningful work. The sense of purpose was highlighted as crucial during the interviews, as a Gen Z based in France said “*in my previous job I was not fulfilled, purpose was missing, now I feel that my activities are aligned with my values*”. Participants shared that having a significant impact, aligned with their values is an important factor to be engaged. They also find their work fulfilling when knowing it contributes to the larger goals of the organization and society.

The sixth factor is supportive leadership, or servant leadership. Participants highlighted that a management being trustable, present to help and guide when facing challenges, but also being a coach and sharing direct yet constructive feedback is the main factor for people to stay in the organization. A person from Generation Z in Belgium highlighted “*currently, my manager gives me regular feedback; also he is guiding me which helps me to develop myself*” This is consistently highlighted as crucial for engagement.

The seventh is transparent communication. An organization which has open, honest, and clear communication within the different levels, a clear example was shared by a Gen Z in Belgium “*we have the opportunity to speak up, dialog is open, also on what is going not ok*”. Communication can also be as simple as the cascading of objectives, strategy and results of the company, or the latest investment, initiatives, etc. It also includes the feedback culture and dialogue between its people.

Finally, the factors driving low engagement levels are mostly the opposite of the ones leading to high engagement. Here is the list of reasons mentioned by interviewees that generate

disengagement: Poor Leadership, Lack of Recognition, Limited Growth Opportunities, Toxic Work Environment, Work Overload, Lack of Autonomy and Limited Tools and Resources. No prioritization was done on the factor of disengagement.

DISCUSSION

The study objectives were firstly to investigate how engagement affects the intention to stay among generations Y and Z, secondly to identify different levels in Work Engagement and the Intention to Stay, and finally to identify the factors influencing engagement level in a multinational company in the X sector. Results show that engagement predicts the intention to stay. No differences were found in engagement nor intention to stay between Gen Y and Gen Z.

As a global company, the Solvay group has since 2019 implemented a quarterly survey that measures level of engagement and other metrics. This has led to implementation of multiple initiatives such as hybrid work policies, new ways of working like no meetings on Friday afternoon or extension of paternity leave for all men up to 16 weeks, these three examples have enhanced work life balance and work environment. Also leadership training, specific career development tracks or mentoring systems have been deployed, improving leadership capabilities of managers and easing the growth opportunities.

The literature about generations and its differences in work engagement has not reached a consensus, with studies presenting mixed findings on whether significant differences exist between generational groups. For instance, Costanza et al. (2012) conducted a systematic review that highlighted the variability in engagement levels across generations, suggesting that while some differences in values and attitudes exist, these do not necessarily translate into significant disparities in overall engagement levels. Similarly, Cheung et al. (2018) found that the engagement levels of Millennials (Generation Y) and other generational cohorts are influenced more by job-specific factors and industry contexts rather than generational traits alone.

The present study contributes to this ongoing debate by demonstrating that there is no significant difference in engagement levels between Generation Y and Generation Z within our sample. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Costanza et al. (2012) and Cheung et al. (2018), indicating that generational differences in engagement level might be overstated and that similar engagement strategies can be effectively applied across these cohorts. By focusing on universal drivers of engagement, organizations can create inclusive and motivating work environments that cater to both Generation Y and Generation Z employees.

Interviews revealed seven primary factors influencing Engagement and Intention to Stay. These factors are: Supportive Leadership, Work-Life Balance, Positive Work Environment, Meaningful Work, Autonomy and Empowerment, Professional Growth Opportunities, and Transparent Communication. These findings align with previous research that highlights the importance of supportive organizational environments and growth opportunities in enhancing both engagement and retention.

However, the reasons of engagement highlighted by the Job Demands-Resources Model were not systematically mentioned by interviewees during qualitative analysis. Four drivers of engagement identified during interviews are part of the JDR Model: Positive Work Environment, Autonomy and Empowerment, Professional Growth Opportunities and Supportive Leadership. Nevertheless, five factors from the JDR Model were not mentioned by interviewees: Performance feedback, Task variety, Social support, Job security, Role clarity. These findings reveal that typical JDR Model engagement factors are not anymore relevant for Generation Y and Z in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Practical implications

This work aimed to study and validate the link between engagement level and intention to stay by generations Y and Z in the Solvay group.

The primary contribution of this work is the evidence that high engagement levels are strongly associated with a higher intention to stay. Furthermore, it demonstrates that there is no significant difference in engagement levels between Generation Y and Generation Z, suggesting that similar engagement strategies can be effectively applied across these generational cohorts.

This research provides valuable insights from a global company, showing that high engagement correlates with high intention to stay, regardless of generational differences. It shows precisely which factors have to be considered to raise and maintain engagement.

Concretely, to enhance supportive or servant leadership, an organization could launch a comprehensive training program to enhance the capabilities of managers and leaders. To tackle the work-life balance, companies could emphasize the importance of disconnecting from work and keeping a healthy balance between professional life and personal one, such as introducing flexible working hours and remote work options; encourage employees to take regular breaks and use their vacation days fully or implement wellbeing programs. For the “meaningful work” part, organizations could for example communicate the organization’s mission, vision, and values; or

encourage involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. As for autonomy and empowerment, strategies such as reinforcing delegate responsibilities and trusting employees to make decisions within their roles or recognize and reward employees who take initiative and demonstrate leadership can be applied. Proposing to employees opportunities to learn new skills, going out of their comfort zone with new challenges, or developing clear career paths. Finally incorporating a clear and honest communication plan with for example frequent in person town

hall meetings, speak-up policies or deploying the feedback culture can be concrete actions to ensure a transparent communication.

Limitations and suggestions

The work is focusing only on people from the same private organization, and thus results do not represent the sector, in this case chemical. To have a deeper understanding, multiple chemical groups could be analyzed. Furthermore multiple industries could be taken into consideration for such analysis: technology, manufacturing, transport, public sector, etc. The questionnaire can be improved, in this sense, with a question on the sector of activity, or type of work. Typically for a group like Solvay, it would have been interesting to see the difference between working on an industrial site or in a laboratory or in an office. Also having a differentiation question on the entity or business unit would have brought more granularity.

The interviews, yet bringing value to the quantitative analysis are limited due to the low number of interviewees. Future studies should aim for a more diverse and wide interview panel to capture a bigger range of perspectives. Despite tackling the top three factors of engagement, it would have been interesting to have a question identifying the top three reasons for disengagement. Finally, further studies should include Generations X and Baby Boomers to understand engagement across all age groups.

Final Conclusion

This study aims to better understand how engagement at work is impacting intention to stay for younger generations: Y and Z. By applying rigorous methods, it demonstrates that a high level of engagement from people within an organization is a major factor of their willingness to stay within this organization. The interviews highlight the factors that drive this high level of

engagement. Ultimately, this analysis challenges the prevailing stereotype that younger generations are broadly disengaged and don't want to contribute to organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Survey

Exploring factors of engagement influencing the intention to stay at work by generations

This survey is part of my Master's thesis in Executive Leadership at Nova SBE (Lisbon University). It aims to measure the influence of age and engagement at work on intention to stay in the current organization

The survey consists of 3 parts:

- Demographics (7 questions)
- Work Engagement (17 questions)
- Intention to stay (4 questions)

There are no right or wrong answers; **only your sincere opinion is needed**, as all information collected will be treated **confidentially**.

Completion time is approximately 10 minutes, and it's necessary to answer all fields.

Thank you!
Aymeric Bange

aymeric.bange@solvay.com [Switch account](#)



Not shared

Demographics

The following 7 questions are used to collect statistical data of the sample.

Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other:

You were born between: *

☐ 1946 and 1964 included

☐ 1965 and 1980 included

☐ 1981 and 1996 included

☐ 1997 and 2012 included

How long have you been working? *

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1 to 3 years
- ☐ 4 to 5 years
- ☐ 6 to 8 years
- ☐ 9 to 11 years
- ☐ more than 12 years

How long have you been in your current company or organization? *

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1 to 3 years
- ☐ 4 to 5 years
- ☐ 6 to 8 years
- ☐ 9 to 11 years
- ☐ more than 12 years

What is your education level? *

- ☐ High School diploma
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral (PhD)

What is your position? *

- ☐ Single Contributor
- ☐ Team Leader
- ☐ Manager of managers

What is your sector ? *

- ☐ Food industry
- ☐ Banking / Insurance
- ☐ Chemical / Plastic / Pharmaceutical industry
- ☐ Communication / Multimedia
- ☐ Electronics / Electricity
- ☐ Consulting
- ☐ Information technology / Telecommunications
- ☐ Automotive or metalworking industry
- ☐ Transport / Logistic

Where are you located ? *

Choose ▼

Engagement

The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work.

Please read carefully, and, depending on your feeling, select and answer

...

When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day



At my work, I feel bursting with energy: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day



At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day



I can continue working for very long periods at a time: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

At my job, I am very resilient, mentally: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

At my job I feel strong and vigorous: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

To me, my job is challenging: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

My job inspires me: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I am enthusiastic about my job: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I am proud on the work that I do: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

When I am working, I forget everything else around me: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

If today is Tuesday, tomorrow is: *

- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday
- ☐ Friday
- ☐ Saturday
- ☐ Sunday

Time flies when I am working: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I get carried away when I am working: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

It is difficult to detach myself from my job: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I am immersed in my work: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

I feel happy when I am working intensely: *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Every day

Intention to Stay

The following 4 statements are about how you feel to stay at your current company or organization.

I would like to leave my present employer: *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

...

I plan to leave my present employer as soon as possible: *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

I plan to stay with my present employer as long as possible: *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave my present employer: *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Authorization for the processing of collected data *

I give my consent to the collection of data and the processing of my personal data under the following terms and conditions:

1. The data controller is Aymeric Bange, employee at Solvay and student at Nova SBE from the Executive Master in Leadership.
2. Personal data is intended to support the master's thesis, in the academic year 2023/2024, under the theme "Exploring age as a factor of engagement influencing the intention to stay at work by generations" and will not be processed in a manner incompatible with the respective purposes of the choice;
3. Personal data is kept for the period considered necessary for the intervention (deadline or, if not possible, criteria used to define that period), respecting their conservation as required by the General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR in force, ensuring confidentiality and secrecy guarantees;
4. As the data subject, I have the following rights:
 - To request from the data controller access to my personal data, their updating, rectification, deletion, limitation, or opposition to their processing;
 - To object to data processing if consent has not been granted for the purpose or if the processing does not result, in particular, from a contract, judicial procedures, or defense of vital interests, among others;
 - Not to be subject to decisions based on automated processing, including profiling, if such processing may have legal or other significant effects on me.
 - To withdraw consent at any time without affecting the lawfulness of the processing based on the consent given before, whenever necessary for compliance with the data controller's obligations (which, by legal deadline definition, must be kept);

☐ I agree

Appendix 2 - Interview Guidelines

1. What specific activities or conditions make you feel engaged at work?
2. Can you provide specific examples or situations where you felt particularly engaged?
3. How do your managers or team leaders influence your level of engagement?
4. Are there any leadership behaviors or practices that you find particularly engaging?
5. What factors or conditions negatively impact your engagement?
6. Can you describe any particular experiences where you felt disengaged?
7. What changes or improvements could your organization make to enhance employee engagement?
8. What are your top 3 factors that boost your engagement?
9. Why do you stay in Solvay ?

Informed Consent - Survey

Informed, free, and clear consent regarding participation in the project under the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (2016/679).

We recommend that you carefully read this document concerning the project "Exploring age as a factor of engagement influencing the intention to stay at work by generation Y and Z" Any questions or clarifications should be addressed to bangeaymeric@gmail.com.

General Information About the Study

This study aims to analyze the impact of engagement level on intention to stay for generation Y and Z. The ultimate goal of this study is to generate knowledge that enables the development of strategies and/or initiatives that increase engagement. For this purpose, consent to participate in the study is requested, and participants will be asked to complete an online questionnaire

available on the Google Forms platform. Completing the questionnaires should take a maximum of 15 minutes.

Confidentiality

We inform you that all data collected in the context of this study are treated with strict confidentiality criteria, according to the rules of the Ethics Committee of the Nova University of Lisbon and in accordance with applicable legislation and regulations. The data will not be made public in an individualized manner, and the protection of the participants' identities will always be safeguarded. In the publication of any scientific works, the identities of the participants will be protected and not disclosed. Furthermore, the obtained data will be shared only in a global and aggregated form, with no disclosure of individual data or identification of any participant.

Right to Withdraw

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, so there will be no prejudice against participants who decide not to consent to their participation. In the case of consent, the right to withdraw from the study at any time and at any stage is safeguarded by simply interrupting the completion of the questionnaire, without any need for justification. Information from questionnaires that are not submitted will never be stored.

More Information

If there are any questions about the study, any of the procedures described above, or any need for further information, the research team should be contacted directly (contacts below). All questions will be properly clarified. This document can be downloaded and saved in PDF format.

Research Team:

Aymeric Bange - Contacts: bangeaymeric@gmail.com