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## **The Need for Counselling Support in Multigenerational Working Teams**

The objective of the article is to present reflections on activities contributing to conscious and intentional building multigenerational teams in the workplace and applications of counselling in this regard. In Poland, activities aimed at building multigenerational teams in the workplace are conducted as part of interventions undertaken due to diverse professional experience or employees' age, and the result is that the issue of building multigenerational teams is most often considered as a research domain in economics and human resource management. The article, written from the point of view of a researcher-humanist, aims to indicate needs to undertake counselling activities in a broad sense which goal is to build a multigenerational dialogue in a work environment as well as interventions in terms of enhancing the potential of clients representing various generations on the labour market.

**Keywords:** multigenerational teams, career counselling, working identity, workplace relationships

For many years, we have witnessed socioeconomic changes which concern Poland as well as the whole Europe. These changes are connected with, among others, the condition of particular economies, citizens' professional activity and the demographic situation of the European countries which determines the labour market significantly. An important aspect of these changes is also a change in the proportion of employees representing various generations on the labour market. Until recently, the image of the Polish labour market was mainly dominated by two categories of people engaged in professional activity which was confirmed by extreme age brackets and often led to public debates on threats resulting from an aging population as well as problems connected with employing young people. Therefore, a number of preventive measures supporting these groups of clients were taken (cf. *Program Młodzi na Rynku Pracy. Działania na rzecz zmniejszenia bezrobocia młodzieży* [Youth on the Labour Market. Activities for Reducing Unemployment among Youth], Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2012; *Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee* (OJ C 120, 26.4.2013);

*Project of the Government Programme for Social Participation of Senior Citizens for 2014-2020, Long-term Senior Policy in Poland for 2014-2020*, Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2013a, 2013b). The listed policies are not only an element of the Polish social reality as they can be also observed in other European countries (cf. *The Youth Guarantee & Youth Employment Initiative three years on*, European Commission, 2016; *Young People and NEETs in Europe: First Findings*, Eurofound, 2011; *Ageing and Employment Policies: Denmark 2015. Working Better with Age*, OECD, 2015; *The pension system and labour market for 55+ in the Baltic and Nordic countries*, Nordplus, n.d.). Unfortunately, the undertaken interventions, including these in terms of counselling support, mainly aimed at avoiding the situation of unemployment, while issues connected with the functioning of employees were neglected as well as problems related to them, e.g. those resulting from employing representatives of many generations in one company. Available data shows that the current labour market is a very diverse space, also in terms of employees' age, and this diversity leads to many side effects, especially in the sphere of the so-called workplace dialogue and the functioning of multigenerational teams which may consist of the representatives of several generations who often present different attitudes towards work.

The objective of this paper is to highlight a significant issue of working identity, a multigenerational aspect of workplace relationships and an increased need for developing counselling support in this regard. To emphasise problems resulting from the presence of multigenerational teams, thus needs in terms of the mentioned counselling, the context of sociodemographic transformations will be discussed as it serves as a background for changes in the field of work. The analysis will focus on issues connected with the workplace as a space for building relationships and developing working identity. The final part of the article will be an attempt to make recommendations, not only related to counselling, aimed at building a dialogue in multigenerational teams.

### **The Social Context of Changes in the Field of Work**

Technological development, automation, robotization, aging workforce, longer life expectancy, changes on the labour market, work individualization, generational diversity as well as employees' competencies and demand for new skills (European Economic and Social Committee, 2018) are clearly key categories determining the background for deliberations. However, taking account of the discussed issues, the author will first look at demographic changes which have a direct impact on the current labour market.

According to data presented in various reports, demographic changes constitute one of significant factors determining an overview of Europeans' professional activity. Trends in changes are also clearly visible in population projections for

Poland for the years 2008-2035, whereas population aging is currently one of the most important socioeconomic problems in Europe and is a major challenge for national labour markets. According to estimates by the European Commission, in 2060 in the European Union there will be two people of working age for every person aged over 65 years, whereas in 2008 the proportion was 4 to 1 (European Commission, 2011). According to the cited report, the share of the population aged over 65 will increase to 30.0% in 2060 (151m) in comparison with the share of 17.1% (84.6m) in 2008.

Similar demographic trends are visible in Poland; according to Eurostat, in 2050 the population of Poland will be around 34.7m, which means there will be a decrease of around 4.55m people and the process of population aging will be faster than in the EU in general. The percentage of young people (aged 24 or under) in Poland in 2015 was 26%; however, projections indicate that it will have decreased to 24% by 2025 and to 20% by 2050, so it means that population aging will intensify and result in aging workforce. As the data shows, within several dozen years Poland will be among the 5 oldest countries in the EU, whereas in terms of the percentage of people aged 65 years or over it will take 7th place in Europe (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2014, pp. 155-163). The consequence of a new demographic order will be an increasing imbalance in relationships between generations – the number of the youngest and people of working age, and the number of post-working age population; and in the long-term perspective, there will be a further decline in people engaged in professional activity. There will also be significant changes in the employment structure due to age (Gross-Głowacka, 2018, p. 129). Fewer and fewer young people will enter the labour market and potential resources of older generations will be wasted to an even greater extent. Such a state of affairs implies a need to encourage older people to stay in a company and employers to perceive them as key resources of an organization. The projected future also indicates that the ongoing generational diversity in the workplace will be an inevitable phenomenon. There is no turning back from multigenerational teams including employees from various age groups, which just confirms that it is valid to undertake activities which aim at supporting employees in their professional activity as well as helping them to communicate with the representatives of all generations present in the company.

The analysis of available sources, that is reports and studies of strategies, shows that the issue connected with the presence of various generations on the labour market is addressed in the public debate, both at the level of the country and Europe; however, the proposed solutions, including those from the field of counselling, seem to overlook the issue of the functioning of multigenerational teams and developing them. Proposals concerning the applied activities most often focus on strictly demographic inequalities and analyse problems connected with the functioning of specific age groups on the labour market separately. According to them, social efforts are most often aimed at supporting the so-called youth, in particular at introducing them to the labour market, as well as employees aged 50+ (Rzechowska,

2014). There are no solutions integrating all participants of the labour market into coherent multigenerational teams which could use the diverse experiences and competencies of employees representing all generations.

An example of activities aimed at solving demographic problems (at the national level) is e.g. *Poland 2030. The third wave of modernity. Long-term National Development Strategy* (Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji, 2013), which among main development challenges presents unfavourable demographic changes, whereas a key role in meeting these challenges is assigned to generational solidarity<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, among activities oriented at promoting this solidarity, one can notice initiatives in terms of the silver economy (SE). However, it is hard to resist the impression that activities undertaken or designed in this regard more often focus on treating the addressee of these influences subjectively rather than objectively. The analysis of the silver economy programmes enables drawing conclusions that people from the 50+ category, being within the interest of the silver economy, are more often perceived as clients and consumers of specific goods and services and not as an essential labour market resource with their competencies and skills. According to Andrzej Klimczuk, the silver economy is often understood as “the silver market” which includes goods and services for older people, which, according to the author, leads only to changes in marketing, whereas there is also a need to focus on strategies enabling reducing ageism as well as solutions concerning designing public spaces, houses and flats friendly for all age groups (Klimczuk, pp. 43-44).

A response to the “objective” character of the silver economy to some extent may be findings included in the final report *The Silver Economy EU Law and Policy* (Worthington, Simmonds, Farla, & Varnai, 2018). The authors of the report specify that tasks done as part of SE should concentrate on positive/active sides of ageing which are defined by the World Health Organization in the document titled *Active Ageing the Policy Framework* (World Health Organization, 2002). When analysing the cited report, it can be observed that the aspect of professional activity of older generations is touched upon in two out of five groups of factors mentioned there (social and economic) which emphasise that through better access to education for people aged 50+ their employability will improve and the period of professional activity will be longer. Moreover, the authors indicate a new phenomenon on the labour market, that is third-age entrepreneurs, and emphasise their competencies as well as great personal and social capital (Worthington et al., 2018, pp. 21-26). The proposed solutions should also contribute to the longer functioning of older

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<sup>1</sup> Demographic indicators presented in the strategy included, among others: an increase in an employment rate in all age groups, over a three-times higher employment rate of people aged 65-69, an employment rate of women with the youngest child to 5 years old to 70% in 2030 (currently 57.7%), a decrease in age of entering the labour market of 1 year (21 years old in 2030) and a decrease in social passivity of youth (pp. 24-26). In the light of the current Polish government policy, these assumptions are rather unlikely, and it is connected with, among others, revoking the pension reform and supporting professional inactivity through extensive social programmes.

generations on the labour market, and consequently, generational diversity in the workplace.

Currently, on the mentioned labour market, there are as many as five generations which present diverse attitudes towards work, various expectations towards employers and co-workers, and prefer different communication models at work. Among generations most often mentioned in the source literature, the oldest ones are traditionalists born before 1946 (often called: the war generation) who are more and more rarely engaged in a professional activity due to the fact they are over 70. The next generation includes people born between 1946 and 1964 who are called baby boomers. The next one is Generation X. These are people born between 1965 and 1979/1980. Next, there is Generation Y born between 1980 and 1994, whereas the youngest is Generation Z<sup>2</sup> or C<sup>3</sup>, that is people born after 1994 (cf. Bursh, Kelly, 2014; Wiktorowicz et al., 2016)<sup>4</sup>. When analysing the population age pyramid in Poland, it is clearly visible that proportions between generations will change and soon the largest group among employees will be the so-called millennial generations, that is the representatives of Generations Y and Z (Newspoint, 2018).

When analysing demographic trends and projections concerning the future of work, changes in the public debate concerning the functioning of generations on the labour market can also be observed. It is worth noting that initially the interest in the issue of working generations concentrated on the two most antagonised generations presenting different attitudes towards work, namely generations X and Y, and on highlighting, and even escalating, differences between them. The discussion on “generational conflict” slowly changes its character. This issue is much more often addressed, and its consequences analysed, in the context of multigenerational team management or age management. It is also evident that the centre of gravity of the discussion on generations was shifted from the identification of factors strictly differentiating generations to competencies which characterise particular generations. This, in turn, is connected with changes in the workplace and the identification of phenomena within such concepts as: globalisation, digitalisation, flexibility, robotization, professionalisation, innovation, Industry 4.0, gig economy (cf. Deloitte Global, 2018; European Economic and Social Committee, 2017; Newspoint, 2018; Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2018).

Obviously, the observed changes in the discussion on the functioning of generations on the labour market are a positive phenomenon, however, the fact remains

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<sup>2</sup> Generation Z the term used in Poland as the continuation of describing generations with two preceding letters, that is X, Y.

<sup>3</sup> The term Generation C: from English *connect, communicate, change*. These generations will be described in the next parts of the article.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the adopted age border may differ depending on a cited source or a country where specific generations are analysed. Moreover, it should be pointed out that publicists distinguish next groups or generations among the so-called millennial generations (Y and Z), e.g.: Yummies, Snowflakes and HENRYs (Serwis Gazeta Prawna, 2017).

that there is still an insufficient number of activities directly aimed at supporting adults in the workplace and, above all, at facilitating their functioning in spaces which are generationally diverse. The analysis of counselling activities clearly shows that currently counselling support is addressed to people who need it, concentrates mainly on improving the employability of clients, is of a protective and interim nature and is targeted at the selected groups, the so-called groups at risk or disadvantaged groups, e.g. NEETs, the precariat, people with disabilities, emigrants, the unemployed (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2015; Guichard, 2018, pp. 26-27). On the other hand, there is lack of activities designed for working people who more and more often feel the need for such support. Therefore, it seems inevitable to extend such counselling activities which will go beyond typical “employable” interventions and concentrate (also) on supporting working people or even employers, e.g. through designing activities aimed at maintaining “workforce potential” and their development as well as at integrating employees representing various generations. This issue seems to be particularly valid at present when the unemployment rate in Europe is steadily declining. Currently, in the EU Member States the unemployment rate is 6.8% and in Poland only 3.5% (as of the end of June 2018 according to Eurostat).

At the same time, the employee’s market reveals new problem areas with which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century not only job seekers struggle, but also entrepreneurs creating jobs. Difficulties which employers face are more and more often identified. These are difficulties connected with recruitment, that is an insufficient number of employees meeting their expectations (in terms of specific skills, experience and attitudes towards work), with lack of people willing to work in general as well as lack of people interested in building a coherent team. It is worth noting that the employee’s market forces employers to adapt to the new reality and follow expansive economic and demographic tendencies. Currently, entrepreneurs more frequently employ “anybody” when searching for candidates and are driven by a need to fill vacancies rather than to employ specialists. Today’s employers emphasise that they are more often “forced” to employ candidates from the so-called younger generations towards whom they have a lot of reservations, especially in terms of engagement, loyalty, decision making or responsibility. Such a situation clearly shows that the real problem of the European labour market is not a workforce surplus, but its lack, which, in turn, generates the need to reformulate current or design new interventions (also with regard to counselling) addressed to new groups of recipients of these services.

### **Work Environment as a Place of Developing Multigenerational Relationships**

Regardless of demographic, social and organizational changes determining a new, changed form of work, it will still be an activity which to a great extent involves humans and constitutes a significant sphere of their lives. This sphere often decides on the quality of existence of individuals and gives a specific shape to individual biographies. Work still plays an essential role in self-construction of particular individuals regardless of generational identity and is a sphere in which a human changes and has the opportunity to become an individual in a relation with others as well as a recognised and active member of society. As Jean Guichard writes, “through their work activities an individual transforms, constructs their identity, becomes an entity. When their work activity (or their products) is recognised by others, an individual perceives themselves as a bearer of specific talents, and they are likely to be perceived by others as a person «able to...»” (Guichard, 2018b, p. 26). As a result, doing work is connected with self-realization: an individual perceives their active life as one thanks to which they can become “what” they want and what they expect to be (Guichard, 2018b, p. 26). Work is also an environment which significantly affects the level of life satisfaction. The research findings published in the report *Social Diagnosis 2015, Objective and Subjective Quality of Life in Poland* (Czapiński & Panek, 2015) show that job satisfaction directly translates into career satisfaction and the level of life satisfaction.

However, it should be taken into account that apart from positive aspects of working, negative work phenomena can be also identified. These are phenomena which directly concern employees, such as stress, lack of job satisfaction<sup>5</sup>, burnout, workaholism and many others. However, for the purposes of this study, I would like to look at this problem from a different perspective, that is from the point of view of people responsible for building and developing multigenerational teams in the workplace and preventing such phenomena.

Above all, it is worth noting that currently the workplace becomes a space which employees, in particular younger ones, more rarely identify themselves with, are not connected with and do not want to connect with. Conditions which the flexible labour market offers, including the possibility of working in various places and at various times or the possibility of providing services for a few employers at

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<sup>5</sup> Half of respondents are satisfied with their professional career (50%), but it is often moderate satisfaction (33%). Additionally, the report findings indicate that work is a sphere which generates stress, whereas lack of job satisfaction intensifies with age. Life stress intensity is treated in the literature on the quality of life as the main as well as most direct factor differentiating well-being. The cited research presented findings concerning stress in 8 dimensions: marital stress, parental stress, stress connected with caring, financial stress, work-related stress, environmental stress connected with living conditions, neighbours and safety in the place of living, health-related stress and stress connected with public administration. In 2015, a general level of life stress was lowest since the beginning of the research in 2000, except work-related stress. (Czapiński, Panek, eds., 2015)

the same time, cause that an employee spends less and less time in one workplace as well as with other employees. In turn, these incidental contacts with them translate into a distortion of workplace relationships or their degradation. Unfortunately, the observations of the contemporary world of work indicate that a type of interpersonal relationships is of less and less significance for working individuals. Citing Alicja Czerkawska, we can say that we live in the world in which “relations become scattered, superficial and instrumental” (Czerkawska, 2018, p. 132), and if there are any, they are more and more often random and incidental. Therefore, it is a valid question whether nowadays, in the era of work technologization, positive and close relationships are possible and necessary in the process of creating teams diverse in terms of generations and cultures? The answer should be clear and definite “yes”, positive interpersonal relationships are necessary and they are the foundation in constructing coherent working identity. Building them in the modern labour market conditions is not an easy task; it is a challenge which should be taken up.

It is confirmed by statements of some researchers, among others, Annamaria Di Fabio emphasises after Dawid Blustein that “working is an inherently relational act (Blustein, 2011), in which each decision, experience and interaction with the world of work is understood, influenced and shaped by relationships” (Di Fabio, 2014, p. 14). Interpersonal relationships should be a factor which provides a sense of security and stability in all spheres of life, including the professional sphere. In times of permanent change, these relationships should serve as the fundamental “building blocks” of our identity and, taking account of time (in the lifelong perspective) which we spend at work and the projections that the time of professional activity will be extended, they should be also an essential element of developing working identity.

The problem of relationships, including workplace relationships, is not a new topic in literature about management, psychology, counselling or pedagogy, and it is analysed in terms of various aspects, however, for the purpose of this study, I would like to highlight a relatively new concept of the Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)<sup>6</sup> which became a source of inspiration for conducting research on the significance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. A crucial voice in the discussion on the importance of these relationships may be observations presented by Aldona Glińska-Neweś who in her research refers to POS. The author is convinced that positive interpersonal relationships constitute a necessary, however,

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<sup>6</sup> The concept which was initiated in management sciences in 2003. It includes various theories and research which primary goal is to answer questions (which remain unanswered) about the essence of states, processes and determinants influencing an individual and group growth which in that case means the optimum scope of human functioning. The cited author indicates that, thanks to POS, attention has been drawn to the significance of positive phenomena also in terms of individual welfare, happiness and fundamental values which are a primary goal of each person, whereas, achieving this goal, that is happiness and individual welfare, by creating proper conditions also contributes to the development of an organization (Glińska-Neweś, 2017, pp. 18-21).



not sufficient condition to improve efficiency of an organization (Glińska-Neweś, 2017, p. 205). In her opinion, their common denominator is mutual kindness, affection, support and showing mutual interest as well as trust. Glińska-Neweś points out that the effect of positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace translates into, apart from efficiency increase, affective (experiencing positive emotions), behavioural (willingness to cooperate, share knowledge, help each other) and cognitive reactions (increased efficiency in processing information, learning) (Glińska-Neweś, 2017, pp. 206-207), which may be very helpful in the process of building multigenerational teams.

The review of the source literature concerning different generations, their characteristics and functioning on the market does not indicate direct needs within building workplace relationships (cf. Wiktorowicz et al, 2016, Glińska-Neweś, 2017, Deloitte Global, 2015, 2016, 2018), however, it draws attention to the weaknesses of multigenerational working teams. They include, among others, lack of intergenerational understanding, lack of dialogue between the representatives of various generations and as a consequence lack of any bonds which develop through relationships. It seems that the main problem connected with lack of intergenerational relationships and dialogue in the workplace is a false image of particular generations promoted by, among others, media. Fostering beliefs about the conflict of generations and the lack of understanding between their representatives contributes to generational separateness, being reserved to others and distancing oneself from the workplace, thus makes the work environment a less attractive space which employees do not identify with. The atmosphere of the lack of trust, suspicion towards co-workers, competition, fight for a position, fear of being judged and stereotypical perception of colleagues from other generations hinder or even prevent building any relationships and dialogue. These aspects are unfavourable for building a multigenerational team where relationships based on trust and a sense of community dominate. It is overlooked that it is necessary to use resources of specific working generations consciously and that it generates the need for acquiring specific knowledge, learning about the characteristics of particular generations and trying to understand their motivations and expectations. It is not taken into consideration that standardised knowledge about particular generations may enable shifting from stereotyped attitudes which often lead to stigmatisation and gaps as well as constitute a major barrier to intergenerational understanding in the workplace.

When building multigenerational teams, it also seems crucial to shift from the prevailing corporate discourse (instead of focusing on efficiency and effectiveness, the emphasis should be placed on an employee). A favourable factor in building multigenerational teams based on positive relationships may be treating intergenerational differences as chances or challenges, and definitely not as barriers. Therefore, it also seems essential to search for phenomena, facts or processes which are common, connect generations and will constitute a starting point for improving communication in multigenerational teams. Good team communication may

contribute to creating a bond thanks to which a sense of acceptance and psychological security may improve, trust may be built and as a consequence an authentic and integrating workplace relationship may be developed. It can be assumed that in such a team employees are more willing to support each other when doing tasks and have more energy as well as inner satisfaction, so their involvement, and consequently, effectiveness and creativity increase. Improving communication in a multigenerational team may contribute to shifting from the strict hierarchy, very often determined by age or work experience, to partnership between employees.

### **(Counselling) Interventions Aimed at Strengthening Multigenerational Teams**

As Guichard states, changes in the modern world lead “to certain consequences for the career and life design interventions: What should be their current role? Should they simply contribute to the better functioning of today’s world by facilitating people’s integration into current work organizations? Or, rather, should they help them design active lives that contribute to building a ‘better’ world: a world more respectful of ecosystems, less unequal, a world that does not impose brutal working conditions? Such questions concern the final purpose of career and life design interventions” (Guichard, 2018, p. 28). Taking account of the deliberations of the cited author as well as the aforementioned thoughts by other researchers, it is worth considering the possibility of designing counselling activities aimed at strengthening multigenerational teams, developing their members’ potential and helping in constructing their individual biographies. Counselling support, which is properly prepared, could contribute to developing clients’ potential (in that case employees from various generations), improve the sense of the employees’ dignity and empowerment in the workplace as well as promote attitudes of generational solidarity.

However, it should be noted that in order to achieve intended objectives counselling support at the time of “being an employee” is insufficient as such activities should start at the time of school education. Particularly, I think about developing competencies necessary to build one’s own identity. Unfortunately, counselling interventions, or in fact guidance interventions, are addressed to Polish school-age youth, concentrate more on hard skills and marginalise the significance of soft skills necessary for the proper functioning of young people and fulfilling various life roles, including those connected with their profession. As Małgorzata Rosalska writes, it may sometimes seem that guidance is much more aimed at helping someone to become an employee and not an active participant of the labour market who makes the right decisions concerning their career and optimal functioning in work-related situations (Rosalska, 2012, p. 16). Taking account of shortcomings in terms of developing this group of competencies, especially among employees representing younger generations, it is worth designing educational and pedagogical

activities aimed at supporting the development of soft skills necessary in adult life. Promoting such activities should improve the self-esteem of particular individuals and, as a result, it can make a person deal with difficulties in a better way, e.g. in the workplace when confronted with co-workers representing other generations.

Not presenting specific methods of work and counselling interventions, I would like to point out that a useful solution in developing competencies necessary for being a conscious and responsible adult as well as a “complete” employee seems to be using and applying a concept of professional capital proposed by Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan. The authors think that professional capital is a function of personal, social and decision-making capital. Personal capital refers to individual resources which a person has and which include, among others, knowledge, skills, capabilities, abilities and talents. Social capital, on the other hand, refers to resources defined as a network of contacts and functioning in a team, developing and maintaining workplace relationships as well as skills to use resources from the social environment. The third type of capital that professional capital comprises is decisional capital which means “the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). The type of capital presented by Rosalska is related to such categories as inner locus of control, proactivity, reflectiveness, and independent thinking and activities (Rosalska, 2016, p. 213). Developing competencies which are part of professional capital may become a crucial goal of counselling support aimed at developing and improving clients’ resources. It seems to be particularly useful with regard to millennial generations who are alleged to have poorly developed decision-making skills.

A different goal of counselling aimed at improving potential of counselling clients can be developing “emotional skills for every adult” specified by Robert Taibbi (2017). The cited author presents a set of 8 mutually connected skills which, according to him, almost every person can master. He points out that it is not an exhaustive list, but it should be an incentive to create one’s own list of competencies important in adult life. The listed competencies include: the ability to control one’s emotions; the ability to confront others; the ability to admit mistakes; honesty; the ability to approach anxiety; being open to new things and solutions as well as the ability to ask for help and support; being proactive; the ability to determine priorities and values, willingness to follow them (Taibbi, 2017). The presented kinds of competencies seem crucial not only with regard to “being an adult”, but also in the context of building working identity. It can be assumed that an employee who is competent in the listed areas will be “a good candidate” for a multigenerational team member, will be able to derive benefits from diversity, to share their observations and knowledge, to use the offered support and engage in building relations based on trust. Unfortunately, the descriptions of younger generations (Wiktorowicz et al, 2016) show that the listed competencies are often scarce and their lack makes intergenerational divisions in the workplace grow.

### **Psychological Paradoxes and Contradictions and Today's Employee Expectations**

Insufficient competencies, various attitudes towards work presented by particular generations and the lack of understanding between their representatives contribute to chaos in the workplace in terms of both employee needs and activities undertaken by employees. Due to this chaos the work environment more frequently becomes an environment of paradoxes and contradictions where it is difficult to find a place for oneself. For the purpose of this article, I distinguished some of them as well as expectations, the fulfilment of which, in my opinion, considerably affects the working identity of today's human-employee. I identify the following ones among them:

- ♦ the need for support vs the lack of ability to ask for help,
- ♦ the need for using knowledge of other employees vs "I don't need authorities and I can do it on my own" attitude (no need for teamwork),
- ♦ the need for development vs the lack of the ability to learn ("I want to know, but I don't want to understand" attitude),
- ♦ the need for sharing one's knowledge and experience vs fear of competition and losing one's authority,
- ♦ the need for following changes vs the lack of flexibility and openness,
- ♦ the need for presenting oneself as "a self-sufficient and independent individualist" vs longing for a sense of community and relationships.

The presented list is not exhaustive and probably most relevantly verbalised, but it is only a proposal for ordering paradoxes, contradictions and expectations of employees which was created on the basis of the source literature and several years of observations of work environments diverse in terms of generations as well as industries. The result of these observations and literature studies cannot be only the identification of the presented contradictions, but also an attempt to find an answer to the question about their reasons and source.

The first source is considered to be the lack of recognition and the need for being valued. Despite promoting strong and independent individuals who seem to be self-sufficient also in terms of any support, today's world generates a huge demand for recognition, positive feedback, some kind of mindfulness connected with the presence of other humans and celebration of small ordinary things. This way of thinking seems to be confirmed by a concept by Axel Honneth, a social philosopher, who claims that we live in the time of the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 2012). Monika Bobako points out that the main axis around which Honneth builds his concept is the term of identity as a basis for human growth and self-realization. According to the author, "Honneth is mainly interested in intersubjective conditions in which this identity may occur, and describes them as relationships of recognition. In his opinion, the inability to build integral identity constitutes a real and

severe moral injury which becomes a form of contesting targeted at the existing social relationships and inspires the emergence of these struggles for recognition” (Bobako, 2012, p. XXVIII). When referring to that author, Mirosława Nowak–Dziemianowicz also claims that one of the consequences of the changes in the modern world is “increasing demand for recognition understood as the basis for each social relationship and a condition of intersubjectivity. Changes that everyone faces today become one of the most important reasons for deficit of recognition, thus increasing demand for such recognition” (Nowak–Dziemianowicz, 2016, p. 332). The concept of the struggle for recognition perfectly corresponds with the attitudes of employees representing various generations on the labour market. It particularly applies to the millennial generation which when confronted with the market reality experiences its huge deficit, mainly from the so-called older employers or co-workers who are not very willing to express it towards the representatives of Generations Y or Z. Experiences connected with that turn out to be particularly severe as the millennial generation was brought up in the atmosphere of praises and permanent adoration from parents, so its representatives expect similar recognition also from employers and co-workers. It is difficult to come to terms with the situation of the lack of praises or often even with criticism from superiors. It is worth noting, however, that this struggle for recognition and the need for being valued are also visible in the attitudes of older generations who despite a stable professional position still expect to be recognised in terms of skills and experience they have as well as roles and functions, not only professional ones, that they have.

The next source of the identified paradoxes, in my opinion, is a common attitude of a lot of people engaged in a professional activity which can be called “a success-oriented approach”. It is an attitude which has become a characteristic of today’s reality and achieving success has become one of peoples’ most important goals; it is even some kind of the categorical imperative, especially for young people. Unfortunately, a vast part of society perceives failure to achieve successes in a very negative way and it often means being part of “those who are worse off, losers”. Due to this way of considering success the mentioned category is not only a theoretical category, but becomes synonymous with a name of social practice or an element of socialisation of a young generation which considerably affects the direction of development of young people’s identity (Wawrzonek, 2018a). This success-oriented approach perfectly corresponds with the aforementioned deficit of recognition. The lack of success activates the process of deprecating oneself which leads to lower chances of recognition and as a result its deficit. It is also worth noting that the social expectation of success in a natural way provokes behaviours aimed at avoiding failures. In turn, this attitude may contribute to unjustifiable negative behaviours in the workplace, especially among millennial generations. It should be also noted that the social context in which young generations grow up and the message that their representatives are most important do not favour the resignation from this privileged position when they grow up (Wawrzonek, 2018a, pp. 105-107). Many

of them, for the first time in the workplace, found themselves in a situation when they did not receive what they expected. A vision of no immediate gratification in the form of a pay rise or promotion deepens fear of failure and the aforementioned recognition deficit, which in turn induces escape behaviours in young people which are not positively perceived by experienced employees. Clearly, young people lack the ability to deal with new and difficult situations when they are expected to act maturely and take responsibility for their activities.

The next source of the listed contradictions may be relationships shaped by phenomena connected with such concepts as self-confidence and self-esteem. Seemingly, these two categories mean the same, however, there is a significant difference between them. A Danish author, Jasper Juul points out that self-confidence refers to what we can do, depends on abilities and on how competent a person is at various areas of life (Juul, 2014, p. 110). On the other hand, according to the author, self-esteem refers to the fact who a person is. It is determined by the fact how well a person knows themselves and understands their own emotions and conduct. Self-esteem is a combination of what a given person knows about themselves and what they think about themselves. Healthy self-esteem means that thinking about oneself is of an objective and accepting nature (Juul, 2014, pp. 110-112). Taking account of the way of the functioning of young people, a hypothesis can be formulated that young people are quite self-confident, but they have relatively low self-esteem. They value themselves through the prism of the stringent criteria of adulthood and professional qualifications, build "their greatness and uniqueness", construct their sense of self-confidence around things which are visible, easily identifiable and verifiable (Wawrzonek, 2018b). Unfortunately, according to Juul, this way of thinking is flawed. It is self-esteem, and not self-confidence, that determines the quality of life and the character of relationships with other people (Juul, 2016, p. 90). The author points out that people with low self-esteem have difficulties with discovering their "real greatness". Some people want to become invisible, others, on the contrary, expose themselves excessively and seek attention from others (Juul, 2016, p. 90). However, they both endeavour to be noticed and recognized for who they are and not for what they have or can do.

The lack of self-esteem, recognition deficit and finally being success-oriented are closely connected with the next source of the identified paradoxes, that is with suspicion and the lack of trust towards others, and often even towards oneself. Trust is not only a fundamental element of each relationship, including workplace one, but also an important concept referred to when describing various phenomena which many social and economic sciences deal with. When referring to economic sciences, it can be said that trust is an essential element of "social capital, an organisational resource influencing an organisation's economic result" (Bugdol, 2010). The atmosphere of the lack of trust, suspicion towards others, also co-workers, often provokes escape behaviours and discourages people from engaging in any relationships. Faced with the choice between a relation based on the lack of trust,

competition, risk of failure, and a virtual “tailor-made” relationship which meets expectations (at least seemingly), more and more often the latter option prevails. It seems to be safer and easier. Therefore, virtual reality more frequently wins with actual reality, which is clearly visible on the example of the youngest Generation Z or C. Available descriptions of Generation Z very willingly attribute to them names such as digital natives which highlight the fact that these people lead parallel lives: real and virtual. Due to extremely easy access to modern technologies and a diverse and wide offer of possibilities presented online virtual reality is not only an alternative reality for the representatives of young generations, but also the one they prefer. Unfortunately, living in the virtual world deprives young people of the possibility of practising life skills, in particular in terms of building relationships and trust towards other people. Real contact with other people is more frequently limited to a short exchange of information aimed at gaining own benefits, and it is not a dialogue or an attempt to interact with others, but a transaction binding two independent individuals.

Taking account of the mentioned observations, it seems that one of the most significant tasks for lifelong counselling is considering them in the process of supporting and preparing adults or future adults to fulfil various life roles, including workplace roles in a highly diverse work environment.

### **Main Assumptions of Counselling Organized for Multigenerational Team Members**

At this point, it is worth thinking of the directions of counselling interventions which may play an essential role in preparing an individual to function in a multigenerational team. Apart from support with regard to the functioning in the workplace as an environment of paradoxes, it seems crucial to develop competencies in the area of building, improving and maintaining relationships. Using achievements of a humanistic-oriented counselling, Czerkawska points out that “an adult can experience positive relationships in various social systems, learn them and use them in later life” (Czerkawska, 2018, p. 132). I think that one of these places can definitely be the field of work. A similar view is presented by Guichard who writes that work activity usually “involves a variety of relationships with others, such as cooperation, competition, support, domination, tutoring, etc.” (Guichard, 2018b, p. 26). Therefore, the question arises what activities should be undertaken to build relationships?

Solutions proposed in the concept of the Positive Lifelong Self and Relational Management (PLS&RM) may be helpful here. The author of the concept points out that the current reflection on career management and life management considers that lifelong self management is a fundamental challenge for the optimal management of world's complexity. The idea of the Positive Lifelong Self and Relational

Management (PLS&RM) highlighting Self in relationships originated from and is compatible with development and contextual theories, the career construction theory by Mark Savickas, Guichard's self-construction model and life designing as well as with Blustein's relational theory of working. As Di Fabio indicates, "it is the concept which integrates the idea of positive lifelong management and positive lifelong self management and positive lifelong relational management" (Di Fabio, 2014, p. 17). It is worth noting that from the counselling point of view activities conducted as part of PLS&RM have a definitely preventive character with regard to both building individual's personal resources as well as activities aimed at building relational potential. This form of counselling intervention is consistent with the 21<sup>st</sup> century counselling trends which assume that it is life design counselling which facilitates adapting to ever-changing life and work. However, it should be taken into account that in order to function well in a team of employees, especially a multigenerational one, it is necessary to acquire competencies enabling being in a relationship in general and being an author of one's own biography beforehand. Therefore, it is worth benefiting from the developments of a relatively new form of counselling interventions, that is career/Life Design counselling which refers to perceiving a human subjectively. Counselling interventions anchored in the Life Design concept may help people who seek advice with regard to their professional life. They can take account of the integration and functioning in a generationally diverse team by providing all employees with a space of sustainable development where needs and aspirations of each employee are respected regardless of their generational identity. As Alicja Kargulowa emphasises, the mentioned type of counselling helps advice seekers to be stronger in their responsibility for themselves when achieving emancipation understood as freeing oneself from internal and external influences (Kargulowa, 2016, p. 20), which, in my view, may contribute to building a strong employee position in a multigenerational team in the atmosphere of respect.

The listed examples of the basis for interventions are not exhaustive, but they are only an attempt to draw attention in the counselling discourse as a space for new, necessary auxiliary interventions to an important aspect of the individual's subjectivity, that is working identity as well as the place where it is constructed, and in that case it concerns multigenerational working teams.

Summarising these suggestions, I would like to emphasise that the mentioned problems and presented reflections lead to questions not only about the form of counselling support for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also about new roles of counsellors. I realize that it is a rather complicated and time-consuming task, therefore, I do not undertake the full identification of these roles, but I would like to propose one of them. Considering my field of research interest, partially referred to in this article, I am willing to attribute career counsellors the role of "architects of intergenerational bridges" as they have the chance to be the people who will combine employees representing various age groups into an integrated team and prepare the



representatives of diverse generations to build and manage a multigenerational team (Wawrzonek, 2016. p. 173). Importantly, counselling support should be aimed at developing and integrating teams diverse in terms of age, and focus on thinking about such a team as a community of mature people who are conscious of their resources, design their careers and are open to changes, experiences and values preferred by others, and not only as a non-integrated group of individual young and old people who have no common relationships.

### Final Considerations

Discussing the issue of counselling support in the workplace, I wanted to make it very clear that there is a need to design and develop counselling interventions also with regard to this space of life activity which is work. When studying the literature referred to in this article, it is noticeable that the terms of professional identity and working identity are considered to be one of the key terms present in the analyses of contemporary career design processes. At the same time, according to Marcelo A. Ribeiro, Marii C.C. Uvaldo and Fabiano F. da Silva, working identity should be understood as narrative identities that are “daily produced in relational contexts and turn into true autobiographical narratives” (Ribeiro, Uvaldo, & da Silva, 2016. p. 76). Guichard, on the other hand, emphasises that an imperative to base counselling reflections on the world of work does not exist yet, however, it should be promoted (Guichard, 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, it is important that modern career counselling should focus on the world of work and support aimed at the development of working identity as a crucial and integral element of identity in general. It can be assumed that properly planned counselling support will enable using “human potential” better, which, in turn, may contribute to improving the self-esteem of individuals representing various generations in the workplace and encourage them to engage in relationships based on trust and tolerance. Czerkawska claims, and I am also convinced of that, that the role of counsellor and the task of career counselling is to participate in “creating conditions for growth and development as well as accepting difference and accompanying others with respect, without taking away their dignity and the right to individuality” (Czerkawska, 2018. p. 142). It is connected with hope that the planned counselling support may contribute not only to better functioning of multigenerational teams, but also to the well-being of individuals who are part of these teams, and in the longer perspective to fair and sustainable economic and human development. When designing counselling interventions aimed at supporting clients at different stages of life and in various areas of their functioning, one should concentrate on such activities which, on the one hand, will contribute to empowering individuals, emphasising their individuality and uniqueness, on the other hand, socialise and prepare them to function in diverse communities and teams, including multigenerational ones. Strong self-esteem

anchored in the view that one's uniqueness and humanity can be built in the relation with other people, in the atmosphere of trust, exchange and using experiences of others, creates an opportunity for a new quality of work.

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