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Transformation of the general approach to professional career among generations active on the labour market

The paper tackles the problem of changes in general approach to professional career development among selected representatives of four generations presently active on the labour market, namely: Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. The widely multi-generational structure of employment poses new challenges both for organizations, professional job advisers, and employees. In a traditional approach to vocational development, the most important element was the professional labour system where professions – once acquired – were pursued for the rest of one's vocational career, effectively defining the employee's identity. Lives of employees were relatively orderly and organized, stable and predictable, following the common pattern of: education – employment – retirement. One of the more ostensive effects of the present transformations in the general approach to professional career is the departure from linear, established, predictable and long-lasting qualities of vocational development towards more flexible, transient and patchwork patterns of professional career, pursued in multiple organizations in line with the present shift of responsibility for career development from an organization to the employee as the 'proprietor of career capital'. Based on literature studies, both domestic and foreign, as well as personal experience gathered over the course of previous research studies and projects, the author presents an overview of the most fundamental changes and transitions observed in the approach to vocational development among selected representatives of generations presently active on the labour market.

Keywords: professional career, labour market, multigenerationality, career patterns, human resource management.

The main premise stimulating the author's interest in the subject came in the form of a shared view that the model of a professional career pursued within a single organization and involving a profession learned once over the entire course of employment has already become a thing of the past, and that the present pace of changes and the impact of new both internal and external factors makes predictions of vocational development less and less accurate. Based on more than 20 years

of research and experience in the subject of professional career development, the author has found confirmation of important transformations in the general approach to professional career observed among representatives of specific generations active on the labour market – both employees and employers. Of these, the most important changes include the following: replacing the previous concept of employee loyalty towards their organization (measured by years of employment) by the modern idea of “professional loyalty” within the bounds of the chosen occupation; the growing significance of horizontal career development – an alternative approach involving accumulation of new skills and expertise with the intention of reaching “professional mastery” not necessarily measured by advancement within the ranks of the organization; the growing accumulation of career capital and the struggle to increase one’s labour market attractiveness (employability); readiness to change jobs; and increased awareness of the personal responsibilities for one’s own career development. In effect, modern approaches to career development are in stark contradiction to the previous (traditional) model, emphasizing the non-linear, unpredictable and unstable character of modern careers pursued in multiple organizations, following multiple patterns of development in multiple assignments and socio-vocational positions – and not necessarily involving vertical advancement in organizational structures.

Based on the extensive bibliographical studies available on the subject – both domestic and foreign – supported by the author’s individual experience gathered over the course of past research and projects, it may be observed that, despite the salient changes in the general approach to career development, the area remains underrepresented, particularly in the context of the new phenomenon emerging on the labour market – the problem of multigenerationality in employment. To shed some light on the subject, this paper provides a general overview of changes and transformations observed in popular approaches to career development, as exemplified by selected representatives of the generations presently active on the labour market: Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. The above will serve as basis for recommendations not only for professional career advisors, but also for the employees themselves. This paper presents ideas developed on the basis of studies of domestic and foreign literature, supported by results of scientific research. Geographically, the research was mostly limited to the region of Lower Silesia, with respondents selected among those employees of the region’s companies who chose to participate in post-graduate studies organized by Wrocław University of Economics and Business and by other institutions of higher learning located in Wrocław, Legnica, Dzierżoniów and Kłodzko, and among regular students of the above institutions (to a total of 1137 respondents).

A diagnostic survey was the fundamental research method employed in the study – this segment of research was based on the use of a survey questionnaire, subject to regular modifications and updates, to adjust it to the changing circumstances. This form of quantitative research was supplemented by qualitative research

using face-to-face interviews with elements of a biographical method (biographical narratives) concerning the respondents' subjective evaluations of their past career developments.

Transformations of the general approach to professional career development

The scope of available publications on the subject of professional career development allows for identification of two major perspectives: the traditional approach, with professional career perceived as “a structural property of the given trade or organization”, and the modern approach defining career as “a property of an individual employee” (cf. Barley 1989; Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshal, 2000; Miś, 2007; Bańka, 2000; Bohdziewicz, 2008; Arthur, 1994; Herr & Cramer, 1996 et al.).

The traditional approach was characteristic for the period marked by the dominance of stable conditions of employment, by meticulous division of labour and extensive specialization, by the emergence of bureaucratic procedures, and by the dominance of sleek, hierarchical organizational structures placing main emphasis on the principle of job seniority and employee age as foundations for professional progress. Careers of individual employees, most often involving life-time commitment to a single organization, were founded on presumptions of constant and ordered progression of career development stages, from the initial choice of profession, through stabilization and fruition, to culmination. In the traditional approach, the employing organizations and professional career advisors were equally careful in their determinations of skills and predispositions among candidates applying for the job, based on individual properties, abilities, expectations, motivations, and preferences. As for the candidates themselves, their ability to make an informed and conscious choice of a profession to pursue for the rest of their vocational career was often referred to as *career maturity*, and it was commonly assumed that such maturity is some form of a one-off lifetime acquisition (Holland, 1997). Traditionally, the foundation for professional development was the “psychological contract of employment of a relational type”, where an employee was offered guarantees of employment, stabilization, and job security in exchange for their lifelong commitment, loyalty, identification with organizational objectives, and involvement in the realization of tasks delegated to them.

Under the present conditions of growing changeability and unpredictability of the economic environment, globalization processes, fierce competition and rapid development of new technologies, including the Industry 4.0¹ project, and in view

¹ Industry 4.0. involves information-intensive transformation of manufacturing (and related industries) in a connected environment of big data, people, processes, services, systems and IoT-enabled industrial assets with the generation, leverage and utilization of actionable data and information as a way and means to realize smart industry and ecosystems of industrial innovation

of the rapid demographic changes, organizations are faced with a load of significant transformations within their structures. The most potent symptoms of such changes include: the progressing trend of flattening of organizational structures; significant workplace reductions; rapid decline of old professions and specializations contrasted with equally intensive emergence of new professions; propagation of flexible forms of employment; and the phenomenon of multigenerationality. These are directly translated into drastic transitions of both the labour market position of employees, and of the roles assigned to career development advisers and management personnel. The popular image of professional development realized with success within a single organization for 30 or more years of employment is definitely a thing of the past. Participants of the modern labour market change their jobs every 5–6 years, practically without a chance to spend a lifetime working for a single organization. Employees are expected to provide a broad spectrum of new and extensive competences, including openness to change and dedication to “lifelong learning”, since even the most prestigious diploma is no longer a receipt for professional success. Principal transformations of the general approach to careers can also be seen in the context of the shift of relations between individuals and organizations from dependence to subjective mutual recognition, and in the change of placement of the modern career development from internal to dominant external markets (local, regional, national, or international). Another important aspect in this context is the shift of responsibilities for career development, from the previous focus on organizations to the present emphasis on individuals as “proprietors of career capital” – i.e. their knowledge and skill resources required by the trade – with numerous references to modern employees as “career capitalists”. The value of career capital is measured by the ability to form a cohesive “professional identity” moulded by past vocational experience, thus emphasizing the perception of identity based on professional rather than organizational identification, in stark contrast to the traditional approach to careers (Bohdziewicz, 2014, pp. 101–108).

It may be worth noting that a well-established professional identity offers individuals greater insight and better understanding of their own assets, motives, values, and goals (both personal and professional), thus increasing their potential on the highly demanding labour market. The importance of this aspect is further elevated by the present emphasis on building “personal employability” by focusing on abilities and skills that offer the chance to improve their attractiveness on the broadly defined labour market. And the levels of these skills are largely related to the wealth of “career capital” accumulated by individuals (Bohdziewicz, 2012, p. 293). To reach high levels of “personal employability”, individuals need to show a considerable skill and expertise in self-management, goal-orientation, effective communication, building and maintaining of personal and professional relations,

creative thinking, proactive behaviours, and lifelong approach to learning and self-improvement. This particular area is the best target for the effective support and proactive involvement on the part of professional career advisers. Such support is necessary and should be offered to employees at every stage of their professional development.

According to Mark L. Savickas, the modern approach to professional career development involves mostly the study of “adjustment” or flexibility of individuals in their adaptation to the professional environment and the changing socio-economic conditions. In particular, it aims to study the properties of human development and social learning, i.e. the life-long process of career development. Modern careers – in his opinion – should be characterized by: contextuality, dynamics, non-linear development, patchwork patterns, unpredictability, multitude of perspectives, and consistency with the established pattern of identity (Savickas, 2003, pp. 87–96; Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239). Similarly, Anthony G. Watts believes that changes observed in career developments of modern employees should no longer be perceived in terms of a linear process, but as a ‘careerquake’ that requires them to continuously redefine their identities, turning the act into a ‘lifelong progression (development) of individuals in learning and at work’ (Watts, 2012, after: Bilon, 2013). An interesting metaphorical analogy in the approach to professional career development was adopted by Yehuda Baruch, with the traditional model compared to the stable, durable and typically life-long commitment of a formal marriage, as opposed to the modern approach to career akin to informal cohabitation, a relation described as conditional, transactional, often unstable and less predictable (Baruch, 2006; Bohdziewicz, 2008, pp. 153–154). Table 1 below presents the most fundamental differences between traditional and modern approaches to professional career development.

The main focus of research at present is placed on the study of the modern approach to career development. For instance, Sherry E. Sullivan and Ryan Emerson have postulated a set of recommendations for the effective realization of unlimited career development, with “individual entrepreneurship independence” deemed the most important direction of change in the natural progression from traditional linear model of career to the modern model. In view of the above, the authors placed their focus on the following:

- ♦ professional loyalty replacing the previous standard of organizational loyalty,
- ♦ individual employees being more oriented on the subjective dimension of their professional career and on an internal reward rather than the objective properties of their professional development supported by an external reward,
- ♦ individuals are more prone to rely on own skills in place of the traditional organizational support (Sullivan & Emerson, 2000).

Table 1. Traditional and modern approaches to professional career development

Traditional career approach	Modern career approach
Linear – within the bounds of a single organization, predictable, stable (lifetime employment), with rigid promotion patterns	Mutable – not limited by organizational structures (transitory, impermanent, spiral), flexible, largely unpredictable, individualized
Responsibility for professional career development is borne mainly by the organization, with partial responsibility of an employee	Employee as the owner of their own “career capital”, the “career capitalist”
Type of relation: dependence – loyalty and involvement in exchange for security and stability of employment	Type of relation: subjective, transactional, based on exchange of short-term involvement for a chance to develop and improve personal employability
Organizational identity – identification with the organization and its objectives	Professional identity – identification with the profession, trade, or competences
Paradigm of bureaucratic procedure	Paradigm of entrepreneurship
Prevalence of reactive attitudes	Prevalence of pro-active attitudes
Motivation system based on the specificity and properties of organizational positions	Motivation system based on employees’ value for organization
Career ladder structure, promotion mostly vertical, education perceived as the key to successful career	Continuous development (both personal and professional), with promotion following vertical or horizontal patterns, adaptability, focus on building of the personal ‘career capital’ and professional reputation
Low acceptance of mobility – typically kept within the limits of one or two organizations	High acceptance of employment mobility – both geographic and psychological
Clear demarcation of professional and personal life. Family life often suffering at the expense of career.	Career perceived through both personal and social life contexts. Priority placed on retaining proper balance between work and personal life
Age limitations. Ordered structure of career development stages.	The only limitation is the learning capacity. Iterative patterns (cycles) of professional career development

Source: own research based on [Bohdziewicz, 2008; Lanthaler & Zugmann, 2000, pp. 28–32; Mayo, 2002, p. 190; Miś, 2007; Sullivan, 1999, p. 458].

An interesting typology of modern patterns of professional career development can be found in Jon P. Briscoe and Douglas T. Hall. The two Western authors provided not only an effective depiction of real career trajectories, but also

a good representation of aspirations and career preferences of individual employees (Briscoe & Hall 2006, pp. 4–18). These made it possible to identify eight such basic patterns:

- ▶ **The *lost/trapped pattern*** – characterized by unawareness of one's own value and self-control, with the prevalence of passive and reactive attitudes, low mobility, and inadequate use of one's own skills and personal assets. Career success in this pattern depends more on chance and favourable conditions than on the determination of employees themselves. The most important challenge faced by followers of this pattern is the adequate identification of priorities, increased self-awareness, and focus on pro-active behaviour.
- ▶ **The *fortressed pattern*** – with strong emphasis on values, but also characterized by inadequate flexibility and mobility; with individuals deemed unable to provide effective management of their career developments. They have a prospect of successful professional careers, but only within the bounds of stable and predictable organizations where such values are most sought after. The most important challenges faced by followers of this pattern include: the effective increase of physical (geographic) and psychological mobility, improved openness and readiness to change, and improved self-control.
- ▶ **The *wanderer pattern*** – distinguished by high geographic mobility, but not necessarily supported by equally high psychological mobility, making this type of career more dependent on external circumstances and life-changing opportunities rather than the employee's own decisions. The most important limitations in this type of career development include the following: lack of autonomy and self-reliance, a muddy system of values, and difficulties in establishing priorities. The most important challenges, on the other hand, include the ability to adjust to key values, departure from conformist behaviours and passive attitudes in favour of increased and pro-active involvement.
- ▶ **The *idealist pattern*** – typical for individuals placing emphasis on their own value systems and high psychological mobility, with simultaneous low physical mobility and weak potential for proper management of their own career development. This type of employee is often described as 'geographically trapped', since they display strong preference for career models that allow them to remain idealistic without challenging their low flexibility.
- ▶ **The *organization man/woman pattern*** – this pattern is a reflection of a career pursued within the bounds of a single organization. Employees displaying preference for this pattern of professional career development are characterized by high psychological mobility, but not necessarily that of a more physical dimension, resulting in strong emphasis on organizational identity. Major challenges for this type of attitudes include the demand for proper identification and effective pursuance of the employees' own goals and needs while lessening the load of the more organizational types of involvement, and seeking inspiration and opportunity outside the bounds of their home organization.

- ▶ **The solid citizen pattern** – much akin to the fluctuating career model, is commonly associated with high psychological mobility coupled with exceptionally low physical mobility often related to life events or indeterminate circumstances (such as personal preferences, family situation, or a confining health condition). A good exemplification commonly adopted by proponents of this particular concept is the phrase “employees bloom where they’re planted”. In effect, the most important challenge in this model is to find a “home”, i.e. a safe environment for the effective implementation of this pattern of development. This career model should be developed in accordance with personal values, with a great deal of autonomy and good potential for continuous development of personal talents and aptitudes. In general opinion, this pattern of professional career development is one of the most prevalent of the present approaches.
- ▶ **The hired gun/hired hand pattern** – characteristic for individuals with high physical and psychological mobility, and with good adaptation skills. Unfortunately, this segment of employees is typically fairly reluctant to base their decisions and career development activities on any values or priorities of a higher order; for them, professional career is just work you do – in any time and place, without limitations, but with due diligence and effectiveness, in line with a motto that “your hands are on hire, but not your heart”. Main challenges in this pattern of career development include the ability to define personal values and priorities, and to use them effectively in following your own career path.
- ▶ **The protean career architect pattern** – this pattern is a combination of properties of both the boundaryless career and the protean² career, and is applied to individuals with exemplary, outstanding, or even altruistic qualities, high physical and psychological mobility, governed by a strong intent to actively manage their professional development based on the highly internalized systems of values, realized in pursuance of the true sense of life and success. The main challenge in this type of attitude is the constant search for the best environment to fulfil their development at the best possible level of personal satisfaction and gratification.

Summing up, it may be concluded that modern approaches to professional career development are formed in relation to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, personal traits, value systems, and motivation of individual employees, realized for the purpose of improving their value on the labour market and reinforcing their individual “employability” potential. In the process of career formation, persons active on the labour market are able to acquire unique experience

² The concept of boundaryless career is profiled in accordance with the categories of psychological and physical boundarylessness by Sherry E. Sullivan and Michael B. Arthur. The concept of protean career, on the other hand, is a reflection of the degree of self-independence and professional orientation based on values internalized by individuals selecting a particular career path (Sullivan, & Arthur, 2006).

and proficiency through their involvement with a variety of organizations, job assignments and social roles – the effects of these are particularly fruitful when such experiences are well-adjusted to the employee's own predispositions, expectations, and aspirations. This scenario of development offers employees a high degree of internalized satisfaction and fulfilment on the professional and personal level. However, it may still be necessary to ensure compatibility between individual forms of employee involvement and the current demands of the highly volatile environment, both internal and external. Thus, in order to ensure proper course and direction of their professional career development process, individual employees should be intent on constant accumulation and effective investment of their “career capital”, and should display proper “career energy”, i.e. strength, will and motivation for constant improvement to help them fully realize their passions and interests, both at work and in their free time. Since the modern perception of professional career development is not that of expedient intervention, but rather that of a lifetime pursuit of a relatively safe environment for professional involvement in the highly demanding and complex labour market coupled with constant adjustment of the employee's preferences and abilities to the new challenges and opportunities as they come, it may be concluded that the most important aspects of the modern approaches to career development should include: continuous adaptation to new market demands, openness to new trends, accumulation of “career capital”, readiness to change profession or even completely reorient the scope of professional activities (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017).

Characteristics of major generational segments presently active on the labour market

The demographic conditions and trends in Poland are largely shaped by the increase of population ageing, which results in rapid reduction of the share of professionally active persons in the entire population. Consequences of the process are quite severe for the national economy (Główny Urząd Statystyczny [GUS], 2019a). Three decades ago, in the year 1990, 6 persons in the working age corresponded to each person past their age of retirement; in 2018, the share dropped to ca. 4 persons, with 2050 forecasts suggesting a further decline to the most alarming value of 2 professionally active persons per one retiree (GUS, 2019b). One of the most important challenges faced by human resource managers and professional career advisors at present is the coexistence of four major generational groups on the labour market (*Baby Boomers* – hereinafter referred to as BB; X; Y; and Z), characterized by drastically different value systems, expectations, and approaches to work, professional career, and life patterns (Wiktorowicz et al., 2016; Tulgan, 2009; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2014; Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017). Representatives of each of the above generational segments display behaviours, thinking patterns and responses quite

typical for their segment and – at the same time – fairly distant from those of the remaining segments. These are usually formed as resultants of past social, structural and economic conditions that accompanied their early development, education and broadly defined development. Their attitudes, behaviours, their specific and unique personal and identity traits, and their skills and competences have been shaped by internal stimuli and external factors characteristic of the period of their personal formation (Doyle, 2017). However, it may be difficult to establish clear characteristics of the subsequent generations of the present employees, since those segments are rarely homogenous and often display significant differentiation of attitudes in the studied responses. One of the most evident errors in the study of generational properties can be seen in the use of excessively broad generalizations, since borderlines between generations tend to blur with time, with the increased rate of individuals adopting values, approaches and career models quite different from those preferred by the general population of their age group. For editorial reasons, the paper will only focus on the most fundamental differences observed between the studied generations of employees. Table 2 below presents general characteristics of the four generations presently active on the labour market.

Table 2. Generational diversity of age groups presently active on the labour market

Generation BB <i>of the post-war demographic baby boom</i> Age 56 +	Generation X <i>the communist rule (Iron Curtain) generation</i> Age 39 – 55	Generation Y <i>Millennials, the Google generation</i> Age 25 – 40	Generation Z <i>the Net generation, the Homeland generation</i> Age up to 25
Loyalty, extensive experience, involvement and personal dedication, respect for authority, responsibility, availability, workaholism, free from work-life balance considerations.	Work ethics, loyalty and prudence in action, accountability and independence, Orientation on objectives and financial security, struggling to establish a proper work-life balance.	Low respect for authority, lack of loyalty, resistance to imposed solutions, low work discipline, expectations of flexibility at work, priority placed on maintaining proper work-life balance.	Low accountability, lack of loyalty, strong sense of personal value, low work discipline, good flexibility, tolerance and mobility, priorities placed on life fulfilment and pursuance of life passions.

Generation BB <i>of the post-war demographic baby boom</i> Age 56 +	Generation X <i>the communist rule (Iron Curtain) generation</i> Age 39 – 55	Generation Y <i>Millennials, the Google generation</i> Age 25 – 40	Generation Z <i>the Net generation, the Homeland generation</i> Age up to 25
Demand for prestige and due recognition, resistance to change work placement or employment, resistance to new technologies, preference for routine activities, traditional approach to career, education as a key to success, stabilization and security of employment.	Strong focus on development – training and courses of supplementary education as a key to promotion, with a mixed approach to professional career development, preference for interactive learning, openness to new technologies and independent work assignments, preference for sequential activities.	Seeking instant gratification, financial and nonfinancial bonuses, supportive of the lifelong approach to learning, with a largely modern approach to professional career development, good involvement in activities which fulfil their interests or passions, preference for project-type assignments and multitasking.	Confidence, elevated ambition, intent on self-development, seeking instant gratification, preference for e-learning and interactive learning, openness to new technologies, good involvement in activities which fulfil their interests or passions, multitasking.
Orientation on individual assignments, organizational identity, influenced by: expert authority; leadership preference: thinker, commander.	Difficult and conflictive in teamwork-type assignments, with a mixed identity: organizational and professional, influenced by: specialists with practical experience, leadership preference: coordinator, executor.	Effortless and flourishing in team assignments, with professional identity, influenced by: peers, leadership preference: supportive, cooperative.	Very effective in multicultural and virtual teams, influenced by: forums and other user-generated online repositories, Leadership preference: inspiring, collaborative.

Source: own research based on: Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2014; Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017, p. 148; Weroniczak, 2010, pp. 40–42; Woszczyk, Gawron, 2014; Więcek-Janka, 2018.

As evidenced above, each generation of employees is equipped with their own distinctive set of qualities, expectations, leadership and management style preferences, individual work ethics, lifestyle choices, and approaches to professional career development. For this reason, correct identification of intergenerational differences in approach to career development and proper adjustment of the associated HRM instruments are deemed of particular importance. The wealth of

existing preconceptions or stereotypes of generational preferences and valuations of personal standards, needs and motivations are often quite distant from the factual image, and should be revised or rejected, as this type of opinionated conclusion is wrongful and harmful (Lipka & Waszczak, 2017). In this author's opinion, it is necessary to focus the scientific exploration on these qualities that are common among representatives of all age groups, particularly in the context of their unavoidable coexistence and cooperation on the labour market, and with the view of supporting the intergenerational solidarity. This aspect is also a promising area for other actors involved in the process, such as educational institutions, professional career advisers, organizations, and employees (regardless of their age group affiliation).

Research study reflections

This author's research study of intergenerational differences in the approach to professional career development was conducted in the Lower Silesia region of Poland, and covered all major generational groups presently active on the labour market (to a total of 1.137 employees). The research timeframe for generations BB, X, and Y spanned a period between 1999 and June

2015, divided into three time segments:

- ♦ the first stage, from 1999 to early 2005, with 237 representatives of generations BB and X examined. Professional careers of the respondents was mainly shaped by external determinants, also those preceding the systemic transformation of Poland.
- ♦ the second stage, from 2006 to 2009, with responses collected from a total of 310 representatives of generations BB, X, and Y. The onset of the period came immediately after Poland's formal accession to the EU structures, reflecting such changes as opening of borders, foreign education, and the unrestrained flow of capital and labour.
- ♦ the third stage, spanning the years 2010–2015, reflected the established history of Poland's EU membership, with responses collected from a total of 436 representatives of generations X and Y only (the oldest Generation BB was disregarded at this stage, due to poor representation of this age segment in the sample of respondents).

In order to determine the fundamental intergenerational differences in the general approach to professional career development, the author identified 15 elementary variables, including: establishing of a career plan; career development as a task delegated to companies; flexible adjustment of career plans to labour market demands; financing of supplementary education from personal resources; education financed or co-financed by the company; professional and geographic mobility; the need for constant learning; fulfilling of personal aspirations, potential, and

preferences; readiness to change jobs; career development perspectives; meeting of organizational expectations; autonomy and independence; maintaining of proper work-life balance; and security and stability of employment.

Based on comparative analyses of the studied populations, detailed profiles of respondents were constructed, allowing for a graphical presentation of the basic generational trends in the approach to professional career development among representatives of generations BB, X, and Y. An attempt was also made to analyse distinctive patterns of career development characteristic for the studied age groups, and supplementing them with opinions gathered from representatives of the youngest group, i.e. Generation Z (cf. Fig. 1).

The study provided evidence of a clearly dominant preference for the traditional models of career development among representatives of the oldest Generation (BB). More than 80% of respondents examined in stage 2 had placed their priorities on the security and stability of employment. A sizeable increase was also found in relation to respondents' readiness to follow a career path in accordance with employers' expectations (from 37% in stage 1 up to 66.6% in stage 2), along with nearly doubled scores in relation to their readiness to delegate their career management tasks to their company (from 29% to 58.3%), with a reduction by half of the respondents' individual involvement in preparation of their career plans (from 50% to 25%), and with a drastic reduction of mobility, both professional (from 60% to 33.3%) and geographic (from 40% to 25%).

mutable / modern career

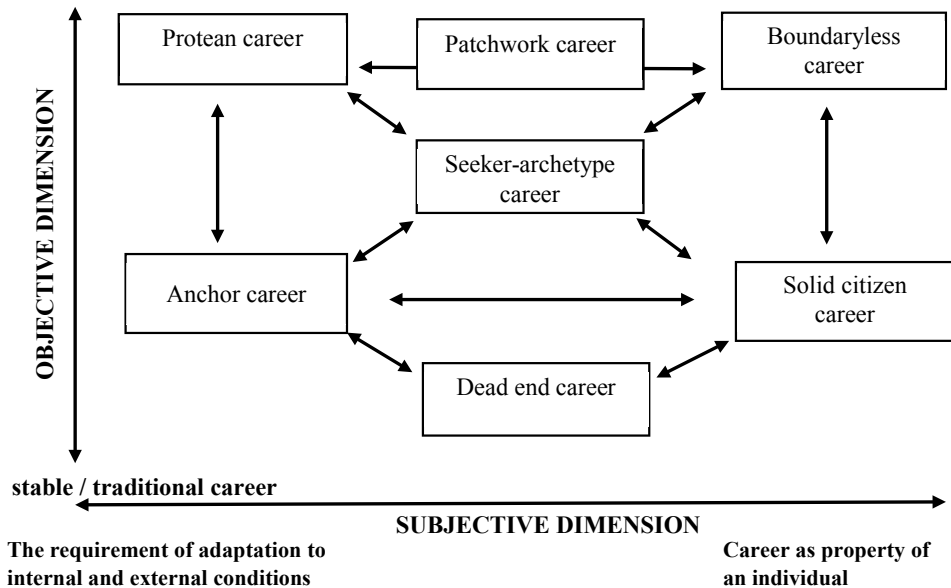


Figure 1. Types of career patterns characteristic for representatives of the studied age groups. Source: own study.

However, Generation BB respondents also showed some traits of a modern approach to career, as evidenced by 83.3% seeking jobs to better suit the fulfilment of their aspirations and predispositions, and 75% emphasizing the need for constant learning as a way to reinforce their attractiveness on the labour market. It may also be worth noting that some members of Generation BB were found to pursue not only the traditional set of career patterns, such as: anchor, solid citizen or dead end career, but also some of the modern patterns, such as the patchwork career³, an obvious evidence of their active involvement in their professional career development and their hopes in finding a job that offers new challenges and opportunities.

Research instruments employed in this stage included biographical narratives, intended to provide subjective evaluation of personal career development from individual representatives of the studied generations of employees. Respondents were invited to “have a hearty talk with oneself”, to have a good look at their lives as partially realized ideas, and to provide subjective interpretations of various events, coincidences, circumstances, and obstacles faced at various stages of their careers. Due to editorial constraints, this paper presents only a selection of narratives collected from representatives of each studied age segment.

Below are samples of subjective evaluations of professional career development obtained from representatives of Generation BB:

It was very difficult for me to reach my present professional status. I faced many obstacles on my path and made many sacrifices. However, it only proved that you can do anything if you really want to, but only under right circumstances, with a proper support from family and friends, and with a positive attitude of your employer towards your career development (BB.1).

My professional career deserves a top mark, in my opinion. This is largely thanks to my first employer, who managed to see both my strengths and weaknesses. He was quite effective in evaluating my predispositions for each task at hand (BB.2).

A decisive majority of representatives of Generation X showed evidence of the modern approach to career development. This trend was confirmed over the entire course of the study (from stage 1 to stage 3) by the decline of strong orientation on security and stability of employment (from 74% to 56.4% respondents), the nearly double support for the need of constant learning and continuous development (from 40% to 80%), as well as flexible adjustment of career plans to market demands (75%), readiness to bear individual responsibility for personal career development (from 36% to 64%), or the focus on fulfilment of personal aspirations, potential, and preferences (from 57% to 92.4% of respondents), coupled with a very

³ The patchwork-type career pattern is typically indicative of a career composed from multiple confronting elements and episodic activities often associated with externally determined imposition or limitation of control over the course of events. This type of career development is often haphazard, situational, made in response to circumstances that remain outside the effective control of the individual employee (Domecka, Mrozowicki, 2008, p. 144).

low expectation of financial support for supplementary education from the employer (20%). Another important quality of the modern approach to career development is the sense of perspective in the pursuit of the professional career, marked in the study by a strong growing trend (from 40% to 94%). The studied representatives of this age group were, in their majority, already involved in pursuing some form of a modern career pattern, such as the 'boundaryless', 'patchwork' or 'seeker-archetype' pattern. However, it should also be noted that a good portion of employees from this age group showed some evidence of a more traditional approach to their professional career development. This effect was particularly evident in the observed increase of the respondents' aspirations to fulfil the expectations of their organization and to move upwards in the organizational ranks (from 27% to 82.6%), in the decline of their declared readiness to change jobs (from 52.3% to 26.2%), and in the reduction of their professional and geographic mobility (from 57% to 38%). The observation is also confirmed in some of the narratives provided by selected representatives of this generation:

"The first few years were difficult. I had to work to pay for my studies. But it was a good investment and now I can reap the fruit of my earlier sacrifices (X. 1)".

I've been working for the same organization for 17 years now. I started from the lowest ranks, and rose to the present managerial position. I have had considerable initiative over the course of my professional career development so far (I was appreciated for my skills and involvement). My further progress within the organizational ranks will depend on many factors – and some of them are not readily acceptable for me (contacts, deals, bargains). It makes me quite unsure of my future (X. 2).

With regard to Generation Y, it may be worth pointing out that representatives of this age group have been raised and educated under the influence of unparalleled dynamic changes, namely: the systemic and economic transformation processes associated with the introduction of market rule, private property and civic freedoms, Poland's accession to the EU structures, globalization, rapid development of automated solutions, new technologies, and information/data processing. These determinants were quite potent in shaping the general attitudes of Generation Y members towards life, work, and future careers. In the light of this study's findings, it may be stated that attitudes of the studied representatives of Generation Y are well within bounds of the modern models of approach to career development. More specifically, this group of employees was more likely to prepare their career plans independently (40%) and, at the same time, more reluctant to delegate this task to the organization (18%) – mostly due to their short-term approach to jobs. However, 70% of the studied representatives of this generation were also focused on flexible adjustment of their careers to the changing demands of the labour market and to the expectation of the home organization. The decisive majority of them

were also fully aware of their own responsibilities for the course of their professional careers, as well as of the importance of various forms of supplementary training and education (74%); furthermore, they were quite doubtful of the support offered by their organization, and were more likely to seek such support elsewhere (EU funds, family, job centres, and other sources, such as the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons). However, analyses of trends over the entire timeframe of the study have revealed some evidence of decline in certain beliefs characteristic for the modern approach to career development, such as: the need to maintain proper work-life balance (a decline from 85.7% to 61.4%), readiness to change jobs (a drastic reduction from 64.3% down to 20.1%), geographic mobility (from 43% down to 24%), or the need for constant learning (another drastic decline, from nearly 93% down to 35% of respondents). Explanations for the prevalence of such changes among the studied representatives of Generation Y may include the following: difficult labour market, fear of losing a job, the strife for self-reliance, or the misguided sense of competence which, once acquired, requires no further management and updating. The most dominant patterns of career development in this age group included the 'seeker archetype', the 'boundaryless', and the 'protean' models, realized in many organizations (domestic or foreign). Young representatives of Generation Y identify themselves as European citizens; they are open to changes, highly mobile (in professional, geographic, and psychological dimensions of the term), and not avoiding risk. With a fluent knowledge of languages, wide network of contacts, and the innate need for challenges, they find these career models more suitable and attractive. Over the course of in-depth interviews, representatives of Generation Y often admitted to have displayed a strong preference for more traditional models of development in the early stages of their careers (particularly of the 'anchor' model), as they found them more suited for the purpose of attaining independence, stability, security, and living standard. At the same time, they were fully aware of their prevalent generational need for maintaining proper work-life balance. Below are two of the most characteristic opinions provided by representatives of Generation Y.

At present, I am fairly satisfied with my career progress. I've been employed since the moment I completed my studies, working for the same organization on a contract of employment. I was promoted to a managerial position quite early in my career. (Y.1).

The effective path of my career is more a product of a well-exploited chance and opportunity rather than a fruit of careful planning and meticulous pursuing of career objectives. On the one hand, I placed my hopes on "fate" and random offers from the labour market. On the other hand, I was able to try my luck with three different organizations. This helped me establish foundations for building my future professional position ... (Y. 2).

In addition, the findings suggested a distinct trend for shaping the “professional identity” and amassing “portable competences” among members of Generation Y and, to a lesser extent, among representatives of Generation X, while members of the oldest age group (BB) displayed a strong preference for organizational identity.

Studies of Generation Z and their preferred approaches to professional career development were limited to the years 2016–2019, as this was the earliest possible point of their entry on the labour market – research was conducted on a sample of 154 respondents (students of Wrocław University of Economics and Business). As suggested by the findings, predominance of the modern approaches to career development in this age group was fairly salient. Respondents were largely anticipative of the turbulent, volatile, unpredictable or outright episodic character of their future careers. They displayed their readiness to make sacrifices and to fully commit to their work as long as it corresponds with their interests, offering a sense of responsibility and enjoyment (91%). They placed great value on organizations offering good deal of support for employee creativity, training of new competences, and lifelong learning. For these reasons, they also tend to place great emphasis on information access and development of “virtual competences” (the effective use of Internet, home office solutions, building of interpersonal relations in the on-line environment) as some of the most important factors facilitating their professional development. At the same time, the youngest generation of employees is no longer fearful of changing jobs – they display an open approach to changes and high mobility, with assumed certainty of being able to always find some employment, be it at home or abroad⁴. This may be perceived as evidence of their elevated conviction of “employability”⁵. Their perception of factors influencing professional career development, in the order of importance, was revealed as follows: proper contacts (79%), family support (66.5%), and own predispositions and/or preferences (51.7%). For representatives of Generation Z, a dream job was described in terms of perspectives for further development and confronting new challenges, but also with a strong emphasis on the fulfilment of individual passions and interests, and ensuring proper work-life balance (90%). Members of Generation Z, similarly to their older colleagues, had often been involved in professional activities from the second or third year of their studies. Based on the general assumption that the educational capital alone is not a warranty of success on the labour market if not supplemented by social capital and experience, they had also shown involvement

⁴ According to the findings of the global Millennial Survey 2018, as many as 61% of gainfully employed representatives of Generation Z were willing to change jobs within the next two years if faced with such a prospect (for detailed information, see: the Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018).

⁵ Initially, the notion of “employability” was interpreted in the context of unemployment and labour policy, while the modern perception is more often associated with the aspect of professional career development pursued on internal and external labour markets, and defined as capacity of individual employees to maintain employment or find one that satisfies their expectations and career aspirations (Wiśniewska, 2015, p. 14; Świgoń, 2014).

in a range of extracurricular activities in student organizations, voluntary service, and vocational placement in domestic and foreign organizations. A decided majority of respondents in this age group were adamant that their responsibility for their own professional development should be shared with the employing organization (72.7%). In addition, some of them recognized the role of other actors in the process of career development, particularly of the academic career centres and of the professional career advisers; they were also ready and willing to reach for such forms of support (38%).

Respondents from this age group, in their majority, were found to pursue the modern models career development, namely: the 'boundaryless' and the 'protean' models; or declared their intentions to adopt those models in the foreseeable future. Below is a sample of a narrative deemed representative for this particular segment of the studied population:

My professional development was initiated quite early, in my student years (student organizations, commissioned assignments, followed by part-time employment in later years). In effect, I was fairly well-prepared to take up full employment in my chosen profession soon after my graduation from the University. The wealth of experience gained in my student years gave me the much required confidence – I am now certain that I can find a good job whenever I feel the need to change, if not at home, then surely in some foreign country (Z. 1).

In addition, representatives of this age group showed interest in the new form of work career organization, referred to as the "digital nomad"⁶ model – based on the extensive use of new technologies, Internet, and mobile devices as foundations for home office solutions in a range of professions unrestrained by the confines of space and time. Digital nomads are typically well-educated, proficient in languages, well-organized and representing a wide spectrum of work experience. They are fast in adapting to changes in their work environment, willing to share their knowledge and lifestyle ideas with others. On the one hand, they are fairly focused on their effective professional and personal development, and on the other – they display a tendency to seek new challenges and adventures, to see the world, to cooperate with others, and to live a life of independence and fulfilment.

Conclusions

The last decade has brought a drastic increase in the dynamics and the complexity of career development processes. This trend serves to elevate the already potent effects of such forces as the current demographic trends (both in Poland and globally)

⁶ Internet access is the only requirement for this type of job. Employees following this model are also described by such features as: flexibility in setting the place and time of work, and considerable freedom to pursue their own lifestyle choices (Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland, Phillips, 2018).

and the associated ageing of societies together with a sizeable increase in life expectancy and years-in-service expectancy. These phenomena constitute a major challenge for organizations, managers, and professional career advisers. Dynamic changes in technology, and the need to adjust to the requirements and standards of the new Industry 4.0 model require employees to consider frequent adjustments and shifts in their professional career development over the course of their labour service (irrespective of the age group they belong to). The key role in this process is played not only by representatives of the oldest generation (baby boomers), but also by members of younger generations, even those just entering or about to enter the active stages of their professional development (Generation Z).

Observations of business practice provide evidence of often negative opinions ascribed to representatives of the two youngest generations (Y and Z), emphasizing their apparent lack of humility and loyalty, disregard for authority, and elevated wage expectations. In this context, it would be advisable to take effective action in changing the prevalent stereotypes which are quite often unfair and wrongful. In particular, it may be useful to place proper emphasis and recognition of positive traits and competitive advantages of this group, such as: good education, language proficiency, expertise in the use of new technologies, easy grasp of new knowledge and skills, flexibility both in action and in thinking, coupled with their broad-mindedness and high tolerance.

In the opinion of John Guziak, head of the Deloitte “Human Capital Trends” taskforce, the practice of contemporary organizations seems to undermine the force of the previous long-established assumption of age as the most important factor deciding upon the employee’s ability to recognize challenges and requirements associated with their work assignments. Changes in the flexibility of the prevalent business culture models have made it not only acceptable, but highly expectable to offer managerial positions to members of the youngest generations. In view of the above, future determinations of effective strategies for the management of multigenerational teams designed to ensure the meeting of personnel needs will require further insight and proper understanding of the real structure of their expectations, including good recognition of their interests, value systems, preferences, and opinions.

The author fully subscribes to the view presented by Anna Wawrzonek in her arguments on the benefits of a revised approach to broadly defined career support, with the main focus placed on reinforcement of multigenerational teams and effective development of individual members of such teams, particularly in the context of their professional career capital – encompassing personal, social, and decision-making capital (Wawrzonek, 2019, pp. 360–361), and the “transferable capital”, which improves their employability in various organizations. Proper identification of preferences and aspirations characteristic for each generation of employees, of their attitudes and views on work and life in general, and the resulting structure of their needs and expectations, may bring much needed facilitation to the process of effective personnel management in organizations.

Intergenerational differences have the potential to improve creativity, ease of decision-making, and work effectiveness, but they can also be a source of various conflicts. To prevent this type of development, it may be advisable to introduce elements of intergenerational cooperation as part of regular training of both managers and rank-and-file employees, to help them deal effectively with intergenerational conflicts at work and to support the formation of durable intergenerational solidarity. A systematic approach to building an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, involvement, respect, and tolerance, coupled with a high sense of cooperation and peer support is a responsibility held collectively by each and every member of a multigenerational team.

In this context, a particular importance should be placed on the role of professional career advisers as supporters in the task of proper identification of preferences and predispositions of employees in various age segments. Their support involves preparation of job application documents, identification of employee strengths and weaknesses, and coaching for effective job interviews. While members of the youngest generations are generally well-prepared to find their bearings on the modern labour market, their older colleagues (representatives of Generation BB or X) are less proficient in this respect – support for this segment is therefore of particular importance. This may involve offers of training courses tailored to the specific needs of this group, extensive use of mentoring (sharing knowledge and experiences with peers), building positive attitudes to the so-called reverse mentoring (learning from younger colleagues), and broad use of career coaching in support of building self-awareness, creativity, and pro-active stance among employees of various age groups.

As suggested by the findings, representatives of Generations BB and X, with their wealth of experience, expertise, and practical wisdom, may provide valuable service in the roles of tutors, mentors, or specialists responsible for socio-professional adaptation of members of younger generations. It is also important to adjust the communication system to the needs of employees cooperating within multigenerational teams, coupled with training of older employees in various modern skills required of them in the context of new technologies and digital processes, to ensure continued development of their virtual competences. As this group typically places great emphasis on proper recognition and appreciation of their professional involvement and loyalty, providing them with a greater sense of employment security and stabilization and supporting them in their professional development is of paramount importance.

With respect to members of Generation Y, their involvement should be stimulated by a proper approach to motivation, particularly: providing them with organizational support for training and professional development, introduction of electronic forms of communication, offering immediate feedback on their job results, adopting a promotion policy based on qualifications and skills, and helping them maintain proper work-life balance. Generation Y is a group placing great focus on

separation between work and life duties, seeking stability and security also outside the context of their jobs. They expect their immediate supervisors to present them with an attractive vision of professional development, preferably one that provides them with constant stimulation and instant gratification.

Generation Z, due to the specificity of this age group, requires considerable investment in basic skills training, such as correspondence ethics, making use of printed sources of information instead of relying solely on the Internet, adopting flexible solutions for worktime schedule and job organization purposes (private conversations at work, using Internet for matters other than those related to their job, etc.). Members of Generation Z are generally perceived as highly sociable and open to new technologies; they place particular importance on their freedom in expressing opinions, generating ideas, and expecting rapid feedback.

Employers should be well-aware of the large variance in the characteristics of the four generations presently active on the labour market, bearing in mind the fact that a formal application of the same policy towards members of quite distinct populations may be harmful, and may generate needless conflicts at work. Therefore, it is essential to ensure proper flexibility in the effective selection of instruments for job motivation, styles of management, communication, and general approach to professional career development, to make them better adjusted to the requirements of specific age groups. The host of the above recommendations will bring tangible benefits, including the effective intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills, increased involvement of employees, and improved organizational innovative and competitive advantage.

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