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OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GENERATION Z ON THE POLISH LABOR MARKET (IN THE OPINION OF STUDENTS OF CZESTOCHOWA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)

SZANSE I ZAGROŻENIA PRZEDSTAWICIELI POKOLENIA Z NA POLSKIM RYNKU PRACY (W OPINII STUDENTÓW POLITECHNIKI CZĘSTOCHOWSKIEJ)

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Summary: Labor market instability entails a deterioration in the living and working conditions of contemporary youth. The main aim of this article is to present the views of young people belonging to generation Z on the assessment of situation in which they are entering the labor market and their own chances in the context of the possibility of fulfilling their goals and personal plans. The article consists of three parts. The first one is an attempt to discuss the causes and consequences of phenomena occurring on the contemporary Polish labor market. The second part presents the characteristics of the representatives of generation Z. The article ends with the presentation of the results of pilot studies conducted among the students of Częstochowa University of Technology, whose task was to present their own reflections on the situation on the national labor market in terms of their expectations and requirements of the market.

Keywords: generation Z, labor market, occupational opportunities, threats.

Streszczenie: Niestabilność rynku pracy pociąga za sobą pogorszenie sytuacji życiowej i zawodowej współczesnej młodzieży. Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie poglądów młodych ludzi należących do pokolenia Z na temat oceny sytuacji, w jakiej znajdują się wchodząc na rynek pracy i własnych szans życiowych w kontekście możliwości urzeczywistnienia obranych przez siebie celów i osobistych planów zawodowych. Artykuł składa się z trzech części. Pierwsza stanowi próbę omówienia przyczyn i konsekwencji zjawisk występujących na współczesnym polskim rynku pracy. W drugiej części zaprezentowano cechy charakterystyczne dla przedstawicieli pokolenia Z. Artykuł kończy prezentacja wyników badań pilotażowych przeprowadzonych wśród studentów Politechniki Częstochowskiej, których zadaniem było zaprezentowanie własnych refleksji odnośnie sytuacji panującej na krajowym rynku pracy pod kątem ich oczekiwań i wymogów stawianych przez realia rynku.

Słowa kluczowe: pokolenie Z, rynek pracy, szanse zawodowe, zagrożenia.

1. Introduction

Entering the labor market of the youngest generation of employees, referred to as generation Z, in the situation of unemployment is not easy, especially when they are lacking in education and work experience. Facing difficulties in obtaining expected employment, many young people make the decision to pursue higher education hoping to improve their chances of finding a better job. This article analyzes many factors that affect both the opportunities and risks experienced by this generation. The author discusses selected issues concerning the situation of the young generation on the Polish labor market. These considerations are based on literature studies and empirical studies conducted by the author. The research was aimed at presenting the views of representatives of generation Z on perceived opportunities and threats to their functioning on the labor market. In pursuit of the aforementioned purpose a survey method was used. The research was conducted in the first quarter of 2017 among the students of full-time studies in the Faculty of Management, licentiate in Finance and Accounting in the course of management of human resources in financial institutions. The research sample included 186 students.

The author is aware of the limitations of the research included in the article, because it was conducted on a small group of respondents, and the results obtained are not universal. It is only a starting point for further and broader research in this field among a representative research sample. In order to obtain valuable research results, it will be necessary to widen the set of research tools and to increase the sample to other university students from other cities.

2. Characteristics of generation Z

Representatives of generation Z are people born after 1995, the oldest representatives will be 22 years old in 2017. They use modern technology from an early age, because they have learned to use a smartphone, tablet or laptop to a greater extent than many adults. Therefore, they have no trouble communicating in the virtual world. Easy access to the Internet makes it possible to search for information that interests them [Szymczyk 2016]. Even establishing relationships with other people is replaced by contacts in the network. What is important to them is what is connected with online life. As a part of a virtual community, they are open to making friends on Facebook, because they are most likely to share their interests and passions with others via Internet. Thanks to the expert knowledge of virtual reality they have learned how to function in the world of open borders. The fascination with the virtual world makes it possible for them to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. At the same time they make virtual purchases, chat with friends, watch interesting things and follow several auctions. They are not afraid of travelling or working in various parts of the world [Rymszewicz 2017]. Generation Z was influenced by many factors, and the environment and community that contributed to their personal development should

be considered as the basis. The analysis of literature provides information that they are often raised in families with a good financial situation, get whatever they desire, live in stress-free conditions, and therefore do not want to be humble, and believe that all their expectations should be fulfilled [Szymczyk 2016]. They do not like to wait to express their opinion. They are called instant generation, or people who need to have everything immediately. Not without significance is the impact on this generation's development of political, social and economic events. The 1990s and the economic upswing were reflected in the changes taking place in the labor market and in people themselves. Factors related to market conditions have shaped the awareness and expectations of people towards work and employers. Another factor that has a direct impact on the formation of this generation is certainly modern technologies that have left their mark on them and have caused them to require a different way of communicating because they have certain expectations for work and employers [Waluś (access: 29.07.2017)]. Employers' observations show that the expectations of this group of workers are sometimes disproportionate to their competences. Representatives of generation Z are not usually prone to immediate compliance to authority, and do not adapt to top-down orders before they understand the reasons for their responsibilities and agree with them. If managers do not differentiate the approach to motivating workers from different generations, they will not be able to keep the most productive people. It is therefore necessary to use a variety of means and ways of communicating and work organization to effectively communicate with them. A serious challenge for employers is to provide the youngest generation with constant feedback on the implementation of tasks entrusted to them, whether they succeed or fail. The Internet taught them such a style of functioning where they are able to instantly obtain information. Although this is a generation that is very open to new solutions and multi-tasking, they are impatient because they want to achieve their own professional goals at a rapid rate without having to build a career for many years [Różne pokolenia... (access: 29.07.17)]. As a result, employers should be aware that due to the specific needs and expectations of generation Z, they should be prepared for the major challenges of building a professional relationship with them and being more flexible.

3. The situation of the young generation on the Polish labor market

With the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, young people turned out to be the social category most affected by its negative consequences. The difficult situation in which young people find themselves in the labor market is caused by a serious problem such as unemployment. It affects wider and wider circles of young society and carries many dangers. Daily life shows that uncertainty and instability are phenomena that nowadays are affecting especially young people. The young generation is experiencing lack of perspectives on finding permanent employment, they have to deal with junk contracts, short-term part-time work, continuous piece

work and the need to use the services of employment agency [Chirkowska-Smolak, Grobelny (eds.) 2015, p. 13]. Employers do not see the benefits of employing people who are just entering the labor market. They are looking for people with professional experience, and young people do not have it because they have not had the possibility of gainful employment yet. At this point a vicious circle arises because the marginalized young man has not been able to acquire any experience. This situation can result in long-term unemployment. It is worth mentioning that unemployment rises to the level of a serious problem that hinders the young generation from fulfilling the role of an adult and realizing the vision and dreams of finding one's own life path.

Long-term unemployment among young people without job opportunities is worrying because it triggers a rise in the psycho-wave effect in Poland. This effect identifies negative phenomena in the areas of mental functioning of young people as a result of unfavorable interdependencies between environmental requirements, social expectations, aspirations and self-esteem, and social resources and competences that could be used in difficult situations. The effect of psycho-wave is most often accompanied by: increased levels of psychological stress, frequent occurrence of feelings of fatigue and exhaustion, feelings of depression and headache [Brzezińska et al. 2012, p. 265]. In order to counteract this unfavorable phenomenon, it is necessary to implement solutions that help young people enter adulthood, during which the ability to perform tasks and professional and family roles becomes a determinant of their success. In order to improve the current situation of the young generation, it is worthwhile to look for solutions to bring them closer to the labor market, which in turn would increase employment and career opportunities.

Another important issue to look at is the "elevator effect" and its vivid manifestation is the inflation of education. A young generation is doomed to be trapped in the possibility that, despite the massification of higher education, not everyone can become its beneficiary. This demonstrates that obtaining higher education by the representatives of generation Z does not guarantee that they will increase their chances in the current labor market in order to be competitive in comparison to the older generation [Długosz 2016, p. 78]. We are therefore faced with the problem of over-educated young people capable of working. At this point it is worth asking: what makes them deprived of the possibility of flexible and mobile functioning on the labor market?

It turns out that when young generation is in the situation of choosing the future career path they are left "on their own". There is a lack of an effective vocational counseling system in which specialists would be prepared for such as difficult task as providing young people with support from the moment of transition from school to work through internships and training aimed at preparation for work [Hagno 2017]. Young people that are considered a risk society are threatened by the negative effects of education system, which does not fit the needs of today's labor market. According to the World Bank's study, under the conditions of mass higher education, the expectations of employers towards young people are changed, as they do not

focus solely on the employment of hard-skilled graduates. In accordance with the requirements of the market it becomes necessary to develop soft skills and attitudes such as: loyalty, honesty, professional discipline. It is therefore crucial for a young person entering the labor market to create a system of links between education and labor market needs, as well as co-operation on the employer-university line. This cooperation should happen in several dimensions:

- involvement of employers in the preparation of models and training programs,
- introduction of trainees to improve the level of vocational training in schools,
- creation of solutions to encourage employers to prepare apprenticeship places [Rusewicz 2017].

The difficulty of the young generation in the labor market is also due to the fact that a large number of them are getting education in "easy" courses every year, which do not guarantee employment. This is the case when a whole group of students is educated in a particular profession and there are not enough job offers for a large part of graduates. Typically, a broader perspective have the most mobile people who decide to go in search of employment outside the place they live, sometimes also abroad. At the same time others work below their qualifications or in another profession [Młodzi w liczbach... (access: 07.08.2017), p. 5]. In this case, we can talk about the presence of mismatch of qualification of employees to the needs of the company, which manifests itself at the same time as the excess and lack of qualifications in relation to market needs. It is not uncommon for young people to undertake work below their skills. In market conditions marked by unemployment, a major problem is the low quality of offered jobs. As practice shows, the experience of unemployment at the beginning of careers results in the inability to obtain a satisfactory level of pay. In addition to the above-mentioned, the consequences of skills mismatches to the labor market also include: higher staff turnover, lower productivity and reduced quality of human capital [Szymański 2016, p. 25].

The difficult position of generation Z on the labor market has risen to the level of a negative phenomenon called precariat. This is a situation related to employment marked by uncertainty on the labor market. Precariat employment occurs when young people are provided with odd jobs, are exposed to unemployment, and their employment conditions are unstable. The employer does not focus on their professional development or the improvement and utilization of their potential [Dębek 2016, p. 18]. Noteworthy K. Cymbranowicz's statement is that "precariat class is the most represented in the youngest age groups. Undoubtedly, work based on a fixed-term contract is dominant among young people because it is accepted by them. This is related to the fact that young people are just entering the labor market. It is not without significance that only then they actually learn to practice their profession by gaining first skills. This kind of employment is supposed to be an introduction to work on the so-called full-time employment [Cymbranowicz 2016, p. 27]. The consent of young people to fixed-term contracts leads to a situation

where they are at risk of permanent apprenticeships. This type of agreement, on the one hand, facilitates the transition from education to the world of work, but, on the other, the segmentation of the labor market to the stable job market and the temporary workers, who are in constant uncertainty, threatened with unemployment and poor prospects for promotion, reduces the chances of a successful start into an adult life. Therefore, it is necessary to implement solutions that offer support to young people [Program "Młodzi..." 2012, p. 6]. Systemic instruments directed to the young generation are meant to make it easier for them to start their careers so that they do not start at the employment agency, and if so, to make the time spent searching for work as short as possible. It is important to remember that the chances of finding and maintaining a job depend on qualifications and abilities of the person concerned, but also on individual's characteristics and behavior. The program of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy addressed to young people seeking employment shows that most of the initiatives targeted at this group "will focus on complementing deficits in work experience and education, and enabling first employment through instruments affecting the demand side of the labor market (employers) in the form of incentives for employing young people" [Program "Młodzi..." 2012, p. 7].

- G. Standing, writing about the problems typical of precariat, pointed out that it was marked by the lack of employment guarantee in the following seven points [Standing 2014]:
- the labor market, i.e. the right opportunities to find a job,
- employment proper legal protection against dismissal,
- work related to the performance of such and not other duties,
- safety at work related to the protection of the health of workers,
- reproduction of skills providing opportunities for the development of such important skills as vocational education, training, the use of acquired skills at work,
- income remuneration suitable for the work performed,
- representation of employee interests.

4. Purpose of the pilot studies

The aim of the study was to investigate the awareness of generation Z regarding the perceived opportunities and threats to their functioning in the labor market. In order to achieve the above-mentioned purpose, the author used the method of questionnaire. The research was conducted in the first quarter of 2017 among the students of full-time studies in the Faculty of Management, licentiate in Finance and Accounting in the course of management of human resources in financial institutions. The research sample included 186 students. 75% of them were female and the age range of the sample was 20-22. 23% of respondents come from the country, 43% from a city of 32 to 100 thousand inhabitants and 34% from a city with over 100 thousand inhabitants.

5. Analysis of the results of research

At the beginning of the study, the author decided to verify the percentage of young people versed in the realities of the modern labor market especially in matters relating to employment prospects. Firstly, the focus was on identifying the opinion of young people on the causes of their unemployment. Examining the knowledge of young people in this area, it was found that 57% of students see the lack of practical skills in the profession required by most business owners among the main reasons for this negative phenomenon. They are aware of the fact that after obtaining secondary education, their skills are not compatible with the present needs of the market. Other reasons include: too high requirements of employers, too high expectations of young people in relation to work and pay, lack of interest in work and lack of adaptation of education system to labor market needs.

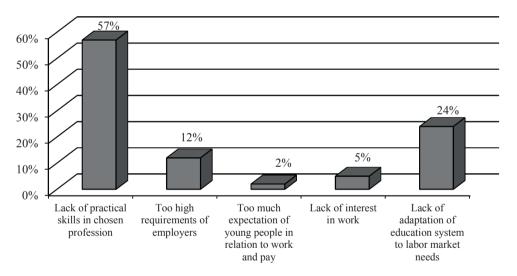


Fig. 1. The causes of unemployment among the young generation

Source: own study.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that young people are increasingly convinced of the difficulty of finding a job that meets their expectations. They are aware that finding their dream job is not easy, and it can only be found after meeting the expectations of employers. Professional knowledge and competences are required. Therefore, it is essential for them to engage in professional activity while learning, which gives a number of advantages, such as increasing qualifications and establishing professional contacts with potential employers through internships or apprenticeships.

Of the respondents, a large group (78%) negatively perceives the activity of vocational counselors, because they believe they did not receive sufficient support

during secondary school for their choice of profession and have not been provided with reliable employment information. The choice of profession is an important decision that affects the future life of a person. Yet, the research shows that the knowledge of the young generation in this area, which they had at the time of schooling prior to university, came from the Internet, and therefore was incomplete regarding the situation on the labor market, especially in terms of employment. The young generation's choices of the courses to study are not accidental, they are based on their interests and their ability to perceive their studies in terms of opportunities and perspectives that are related to their completion. In addition to their own interests, factors such as parental suggestions, peer feedback and subjective sense of the benefit of studying have played a key role in choosing the course of study.

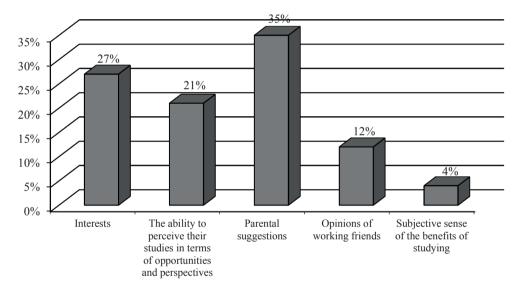


Fig. 2. Factors influencing the decision to start studies

Source: own study.

The vast majority of respondents (93%) know the factors that increase their chances of finding a job and the expectations of employers from potential candidates. The labor market puts demands on job seekers. These demands depend, for example, on: trends persisting in the economic market, the demand for workers in specific occupations, the experts in the field, the people with required professional competence, qualifications, skills and character traits. These factors change with the company's policy. Employers are increasing their expectations of representatives from generation Z, who often experience problems with finding a job. The results show that the surveyed individuals focused on identifying the group of conditions needed to be met when looking for employment. The results are shown below.

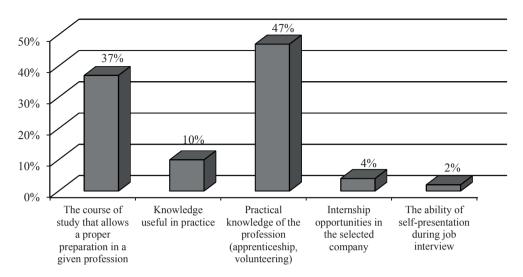


Fig. 3. Conditions for finding a job

Source: own study.

From the presented research it is clear that young people are well acquainted with the factors determining the chances of finding a good job. Most often, they point out that practical knowledge of the profession is essential in order to succeed in finding a job. Nearly half of the respondents recognizes the importance of practices that are conducive to gaining experience and acquiring specific skills in the profession. According to the respondents, finding time to volunteer can be helpful in acquiring such skills. It is a good way to discover the interest in a profession and find the energy that can be transferred to the area of professional career. In order to avoid problems entering the labor market where the employers attach importance to having specific skills, the respondents are aware of the need to complete a university with attractive study courses, that give the graduates good preparation for work in a given profession. At the forefront of the necessary conditions is the possession of knowledge that a candidate is capable of using in practice. Some respondents see apprenticeships as a chance for a first serious professional experience. They allow to acquire practical skills by performing tasks in the workplace. At the last position was the ability of self-presentation, which would ultimately affect finding of employment.

Because young people are aware that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to find employment in their chosen profession, they have decided to improve their qualifications during the course of their studies. The analysis of the research shows that among the representatives of generation Z, 62% operate on the labor market, and 38% are unemployed. Those who found employment usually lacked work experience in their chosen profession and, as a result, found a job as a vendor, courier, waiter, telephone salesman, driver.

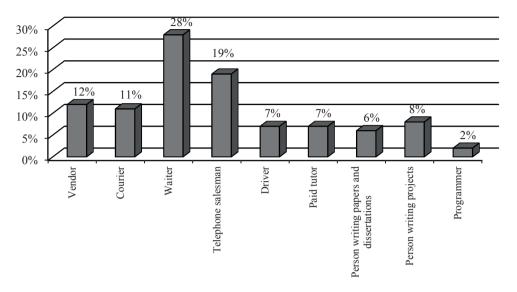


Fig. 4. Professions sought by the young generation without preparation in a chosen profession Source: own study.

The research shows that a significant group of young people works with no professional experience as unskilled workers in private companies. Aware of the fact that employers place high demands on young people entering the labor market, they find that they are more likely to have a chance of a better job with a higher level of education. They are convinced that in order to gain a satisfactory job in line with their professional ambitions, they need to continue their studies at higher education to work in specific positions in which they can improve their qualifications. Study analysis also points to the fact that the representatives of generation Z tend to give paid tutoring, write various assignments and projects and realize commissioned programming tasks.

The respondents were also asked whether they were using the services of the labor market institutions while looking for a job. The respondents' opinion shows that they have knowledge about the existence of such institutions, but few of them needed support in this regard. The analysis of results provides information that generation Z used the services of: employment office -5%, information center and career planning -8%, advertisements in the "Pośrednik" newspaper -9% and presenting their candidacy in direct conversations with a business owner -2%. The majority of respondents found work thanks to online advertisements -32%, employment agencies -17%, leaflets -15%, friends -12%.

In the case of young people, an important issue is to determine the working time due to the need to combine education with their professional duties. For them, attractive and necessary solutions include: individual work schedule (freedom of

choice of starting and finishing work), equivalent working time (extending the daily working time to 12 hours of work, which is compensated by shorter working time on another day), task time (settlement of the designated tasks, independently determining the time it will be performed), and remote work.

Research shows that the overwhelming majority (89%) of people taking part in the study are working part-time, using various forms of organization of working time, as shown in the chart below. Only a small percentage of respondents prefer to work more than half-time

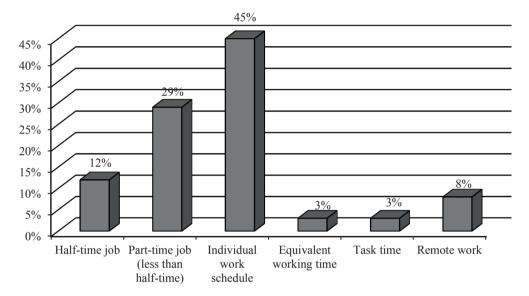


Fig. 5. Organization of working time of the young generation due to the need to combine education with professional duties

Source: own study.

On the basis of the obtained results it can be stated that in the case of the young generation, most work is carried out within individual time schedule. Young generation often choses to work part-time. Research shows that every 8 respondents expect flexible working conditions, and in companies where they found employment they were offered the opportunity to work remotely. At the last place were the equivalent working time and task time, which were especially used when hiring sales people.

In the remainder of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their plans for the future career. The data confirm that a significant proportion of young people are planning their careers at the stage of their studies. A large group of post-graduates wants to work in their profession (72%) in private or state-owned companies, and others are willing to accept any type of work, provided that their requirements are met (28%). There are also people who manifested entrepreneurial attitude (19%) and plan to start their own business. They are aware of the fact that this requires knowledge acquisition and professional practice. The study participants declare their desire to look for a job and expect high earnings adequate to their skills (74%), they also hope for good working conditions to achieve their individual and professional goals (56%). Their other requirements focus on such aspects as the reconciliation of work and private life (93%), and pursuing their own interests (86%). In case of employers not meeting the expectations of young people, they allow the possibility of finding a better job outside of their place of residence (71%) and even abroad (46%).

6. Conclusions

Young people make a lot of choices that are reflected in their further life. An example of this may be the transition from educational to professional life. This is an important moment as it determines the possibility of achieving personal goals as well as financial independence. Young people must meet the challenges of our time and overcome many difficulties and barriers on the labor market. There are obstacles in the form of job loss, competition and unstable working conditions. Due to the above, in order to cope with all market barriers, they are looking for different ways of self-realization.

The results of the analysis indicate that representatives of generation Z participating in the study are aware of what the market reality is. Their source of knowledge about the functioning of the labor market is the Internet. They have a poor opinion about the services of vocational counselors, which they did not have the opportunity to use at school, and while looking for a job they have experienced little support from labor market institutions. The majority of respondents found their jobs through internet advertisements, leaflets, and friends. Among respondents, there is a conviction that, despite persistent unemployment, their chances of finding a satisfactory job are increasing with good education and qualifications. Higher education is perceived by the young generation as a factor increasing their individual chances in the labor market. They think it is important to choose a field of study that will provide the skills to function in a competitive environment. This shows that they represent the attitude of focusing on the professional future. Participants in the study are students who have decided to start their professional activity by taking odd jobs from which they benefit. Finding a job not related to the direction of education allows them to gain professional experience that facilitates adapting to work and increases the likelihood of finding better employment in the future. The young generation believes that if they had a problem finding a job while studying they could get involved in volunteering. In the case of ineffective job search, a small proportion of respondents consider the possibility of setting up their own company, and most of them do not exclude the possibility of going to work outside of their home city or even abroad

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