



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVE GENERATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET – COURSE AND PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:** The article has a theoretical-empirical character. It addresses issues related to the professional development of individuals active in the labour market, taking into account the division into the Baby Boomers, and the X, Y, Z generations. Based on the subject literature, the process of professional development and the characteristics of each generation are presented. The article also presents the results of qualitative research conducted at the end of 2022, aimed at determining the opinions of representatives of the generations active in the labour market regarding the course and future prospects of their professional development. The diagnostic survey method and the interview technique were used for research purposes. The analysis of the obtained research material indicates that due to variable conditions such as political, economic, social, and educational factors in which representatives of each generation grew up, their professional development proceeded slightly differently. However, problems related to professional support in the field of educational and career counselling at different stages of development, despite the passage of years, have proven to be similar.

ROZWÓJ ZAWODOWY GENERACJI AKTYWNYCH  
NA RYNKU PRACY – PRZEBIEG I PERSPEKTYWY

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój zawodowy, aktywność zawodowa, generacje: Baby Boomers, X, Y, Z

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczno-empiryczny. Poruszono w nim kwestie dotyczące rozwoju zawodowego osób aktywnych na rynku pracy, z uwzględnieniem podziału na generacje Baby Boomers, X, Y, Z. Na podstawie literatury przedmiotu przedstawiono proces rozwoju zawodowego oraz charakterystykę poszczególnych pokoleń. Zaprezentowano również wyniki badań jakościowych przeprowadzonych pod koniec 2022 roku, których celem było ustalenie opinii przedstawicieli generacji aktywnych na rynku pracy na temat przebiegu oraz dalszych perspektyw ich rozwoju zawodowego. Do celów badawczych wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, technikę wywiadu według dyspozycji. Z przeprowadzonej analizy uzyskanego materiału badawczego wynika, że ze względu na zmienne uwarunkowania np. polityczne, gospodarcze, społeczne, edukacyjne, w których wzrastali przedstawiciele poszczególnych pokoleń, ich rozwój zawodowy przebiegał nieco inaczej, jednakże problemy związane z profesjonalnym wsparciem w zakresie doradztwa edukacyjno-zawodowego na poszczególnych etapach rozwoju, pomimo upływu lat, okazały się podobne.

## Introduction

Development is commonly associated with progressing from a worse state to a better state, implying individual progress. On the other hand, professional development is a process of changes that occur in the consciousness and behaviour of individuals, including youth selecting a profession, learning a profession, and workers engaged in specific developmental tasks (Czarnecki, Pietrulewicz, Kowolik, 2017, p. 149). The focus of this study is the process of professional development, which encompasses a sequence of developmental changes occurring throughout an individual's life, starting from the period preceding the commencement of professional work, through the usually longest period of professional work, and extending into the post-professional period (Plewka, 2016, p. 82). Undoubtedly, professional development is closely related to the overall development of an individual, as highlighted by Kazimierz M. Czarnecki and Czesław Plewka, among others. These authors emphasize the close connection between professional development and biological, physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural, moral, erotic, psychomotor, aesthetic, and political development (see Czarnecki, 2010, pp. 35-40; Plewka, 2016, pp. 26-27). Therefore, when analysing the course of an individual's professional development, it is necessary to consider it holistically, recognizing the interdependence of their professional skills with their overall development on multiple levels, as well as the influence of various factors and life situations they have encountered.

Another crucial aspect, relevant to the discussed topic, is multigeneration-ism, which we have experienced and will continue to experience in various aspects of life. It is evident not only in the professional realm but also in families, peer groups, or local communities. Currently, the labour market encompasses representatives of four generations – and it is not the number of generations that is significant, but the substantial differences between their members, which have become more pronounced and deepened due to technological progress. As a result, the focus of the article is on the process and prospects of further professional development for representatives of the “Baby Boomers” (BB), X, Y, and Z generations who are active in the labour market; both employed individuals and the unemployed have been included (Zieliński, 2017, pp. 11-15).

## Process of Professional Development – Theoretical Analysis

In the literature, five distinct periods of professional development have been identified and subjected to research analysis. The period of professional development refers to the time that elapses from the initiation of certain changes until their completion. In the field of professional studies, the literature highlights the period of vocational pre-orientation in children, vocational orientation in youth, vocational learning in adolescents, skilled professional work in adults, and vocational reminiscence in retirees and pensioners (Plewka, 2016, p. 85). The characteristics of each period and forms of activity have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Process of Human Professional Development

Period of Professional Development	Age <sup>1</sup>	Dominant Forms of Activity	Specific Forms of Activity
Pre-occupational orientation	3-11 years	Observation of Professional Life, Gathering Information about Adult Work, Imitation of Adult Behaviour.	Recognition of professions, determination of professional activities of adults, imitation of professions and activities in play, knowledge of basic work tools, utilization of appropriate sources of knowledge about professions and professional activities, expression and justification of career aspirations and imaginations.

<sup>1</sup> Due to changes in the education system (such as the introduction of middle schools and their subsequent elimination starting from the 2019-2020 academic year), the age of participants may undergo slight modifications.

Period of Professional Development	Age <sup>1</sup>	Dominant Forms of Activity	Specific Forms of Activity
Occupational orientation of youth	12–15 years	Making partial decisions regarding career and school choices; making the final decision.	Selection of a vocational education field, choosing a profession within a specific field, determination of the level of professional qualifications, selection of a specific vocational school.
Learning a profession by youth	16–25 years	Formation of vocational awareness (knowledge, skills, habits, routines, attitudes, beliefs).	School-to-work adaptation, school-to-work identification, school-to-work stability, reception of vocational and general education content, internalization and structuring of vocational and general education content, school-to-work achievements, school-to-work qualifications, plans for further socio-professional development.
Professional work (skilled)	18–65 years	Formation of work awareness (knowledge of operations, skills, habits, routines, attitudes, occupational-personality traits).	Maturation of decisions regarding entering professional work, socio-occupational adaptation, socio-occupational identification, socio-occupational stability, continuing education and professional development, peak socio-occupational achievements, gradual decline in socio-occupational activity, retirement from active professional work.
Reminiscence and post-career vocational reflection of retirees	After retirement	Assessment of past socio-economic life.	Adaptation to changing life circumstances, predominance of reminiscence and vocational reflection, the twilight of life.

Source: Own compilation based on Plewka, 2015, p. 135.

As indicated by the information presented in Table 1, each form of activity is tailored to the age and developmental capabilities of individuals. Due to the focus of research on the professional development of individuals active in the labour market, the analysis will only encompass four periods: occupational pre-orientation, occupational orientation, vocational learning, and professional work.

## Active generations in the labour market<sup>2</sup>

Resources in the labour market are typically considered in relation to individuals in the so-called working age (although this is a simplification, as both

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical information regarding the characteristics of individual generations was derived from: Klementowska, Flaszynska, 2018, pp. 47, 50-60.

individuals in pre-working age and post-working age can provide labour services). From the perspective of the labour market, the population can be divided into three groups: 1) employed individuals, 2) unemployed individuals, and 3) economically inactive individuals. The combined resources of employed and unemployed individuals form the economically active population, also known as the labour force, which is the subject of interest in this study (Zieliński, 2017, pp. 11-15).

Currently, in the labour market, similar to previous years, we are experiencing multigenerationalism. However, what characterizes it today (compared to, for example, multigenerationalism in centrally planned economies) is significant diversity among different generations (sometimes even within the same generation). This diversity stems from technological and technological progress, changes in communication methods, and access to education in both formal and non-formal forms. Among the individuals active in the labour market, the “Baby Boomers”, Generation X, Generation Y, and older representatives of Generation Z are distinguished.

Individuals from the “Baby Boomer” generation were born after World War II (between 1946 and 1964)<sup>3</sup>. They are often referred to as “hardworking” individuals, dedicating themselves to their professional careers at the expense of their own family, friends, and leisure time. The main motivators for this generation include fear of job loss and financial motivation (Zarebski, 2014, pp. 118-119). Their childhood, adolescence, and education took place during the era of deep socialism. Additionally, the entire duration of work for the older representatives of the “Baby Boomer” generation also fell within a centrally planned economy. The professional situation of younger representatives of the Baby Boomer generation, however, differs somewhat. They have worked in both times of job security and difficult transitional periods, and continue to work in a market economy. Their situation in the labour market has been (and often still is) the least favourable. Some representatives of the early Generation X also found themselves in a similar situation, as they started their professional careers in a centrally planned economy and continued in a market economy. One of the key difficulties they faced was the relatively short time they had to adapt to changing market conditions, for which they were not prepared (Andrulonis, *Generation Y...*). Generation X encompasses people born between 1965 and 1985 (Zarebski,

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of all generations, one can observe minor variations in age ranges in the subject literature.

2014, p. 119). Among the values of Generation X, we can find personal development, independence, diversity, initiative, and hard work. Representatives of this group primarily seek stable and secure employment that does not require constantly taking on new challenges. Loyalty to one employer is important to them, and in return, they expect a high level of trust. Generation X believes that hard work is the only path to success, so they usually fulfil their duties diligently and are willing to prioritize their professional life over their personal life (Woszczyk, cited in *Andrulonis, Generation Y...*). Generation Y includes individuals born between 1986 and 1995 (Forbes, cited in Łysek, 2016, p. 105). Representatives of this age group dislike routine, are not afraid of layoffs, make quick decisions to change jobs, can multitask, are aware of their own capabilities, and build their portfolio based on their own experience gained from various positions (Zarębski, 2014, pp. 120-121). They are relatively well-educated, keep their theoretical knowledge up to date, are open to the world, often speak foreign languages, actively use modern technologies, and do not adhere to many rules imposed by the workplace. They prioritize their personal lives over professional success and are not loyal to one employer (*Andrulonis, Generation Y...*). They mainly focus on developing their skills, fear not finding a job aligned with their interests because their primary goal is achieving the objectives they set for themselves (Baran, Kłos, cited in *Andrulonis, Generation Y...*). The latest generation entering the labour market is referred to as Generation Z. It includes individuals born after 1995.<sup>4</sup> And it extends until 2009 (Mak, *Zrozumieć...*). Representatives of this generation are creative and multitasking, constantly connected to the internet, and freely use various communication platforms. They often interact online rather than face-to-face, and remote work is a natural part of their lives. They are also adept at handling complex computer programs (see Łysek, 2016, p. 105). Based on this brief characterization of each generation, significant differences in their approach to work can already be observed, which ultimately impact the way they carry out professional tasks and their relationships in the workplace.

## Methodological assumptions and analysis of research results

The survey was conducted in October and November 2022. Due to the limited presentation capabilities and the extensive research material, this article will only present a fragment of the findings. The main objective of the research

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<sup>4</sup> Some sources indicate the year 2000 (see Generation Z).

was to determine the opinions of representatives of the generations active in the labour market regarding the progression of their professional development and future prospects (without highlighting intergenerational relationships). Due to significant changes in family, educational, and professional conditions over the years, the obtained data will not be compared between generations. The research question that guided the study was as follows: how did the process of professional development (during the periods of pre-occupational orientation, occupational orientation, vocational learning, and professional work) unfold for representatives of the BB, X, Y, Z generations active in the labour market, and what are their future prospects? The diagnostic survey method was utilized for research purposes, employing individual interviews based on participants' availability for conversation (see Pilch, Bauman, 2010; Łobocki, 2009; Kubinowski, 2010; Baraniak, 2010).

A total of 12 individuals participated in the study – both women (7 individuals) and men (5 individuals) of various ages (Tab. 3). The participation of three representatives from each generation was a requirement for conducting the research. The surveyed respondents resided in the Lower Silesian, Silesian, and Lubuskie Voivodeships, in both urban and rural areas. The education level of the participants varied, with a predominance of secondary education (5 individuals), followed by higher education (4 individuals), and vocational education (3 individuals). The age, type of school completed by representatives of each generation, current occupation, location, and overall work experience are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Age, completed school, occupation/job, workplace, overall work experience of respondents.<sup>5</sup>

Name Age	The school one graduated from	Occupation/job	Current wor- kplace	Overall work experience
<b>Generation BB</b>				
Anna (59 years old)	Economic High School	Accountant	Accounting office	32 years
Paweł (62 years old)	Vocational School	Car mechanic	Automotive workshop (own business)	43 years

<sup>5</sup> In the table, the names of schools, occupations, and workplaces were used according to the terminology used by the respondents during the research.

Name Age	The school one graduated from	Occupation/job	Current wor- kplace	Overall work experience
Krzysztof (64 years old)	Vocational School	Driver	Transportation company	44 years
<b>Generation X</b>				
Alicja (45 years old)	Higher Pedagogi- cal School	Polish language teacher	Primary school	18 years
Jolanta (47 years old)	General High School	Personnel spe- cialist	Manufacturing company	22 years
Tomasz (53 years old)	Vocational School	Construction worker	Construction company	32 years
<b>Generation Y</b>				
Martyna (29 years old)	University	Social worker	Municipal Social Assistance Centre	4 years
Wiktoria (35 years old)	University	Real estate agent	Real estate agency	10 years
Mateusz (33 years old)	Electronics Tech- nical School	Electrician	Manufacturing company	11 years
<b>Generation Z</b>				
Nikola (23 years old)	General High School	Salesperson	Clothing store	2 years
Kamila (25 years old)	University	Accountant	Accounting office	1 year
Borys (22 years old)	Automotive Tech- nical School	Car mechanic	Automotive workshop	2 years

Source: Own compilation [if not indicated otherwise, the illustrative material in this article is the result of the author's own research].

The research was conducted in accordance with the periods of professional development presented in Table 1, which are recommended by key Polish scientific authorities in the field of professionology, such as K.M. Czarnecki (see 2016, pp. 314-367) and Czesław Plewka (see 2015, p. 135). Due to the respondents' professional activity (which was a requirement for participation in the study), their age, and consequently their work experience and current professional experiences, the focus was placed on four periods of professional development: pre-occupational orientation, occupational orientation, vocational learning, and professional work.



### *Pre-occupational Orientation*

Pre-occupational orientation corresponds to the period in a person's life known as preschool and early school years (ages 3-11). It is a time when children primarily explore their surrounding reality through observation, imitation, and play. The extent and manner in which they become acquainted with the "world of professions" depend not only on their health predispositions but also (and perhaps primarily) on their educational environment (both familial and institutional). Due to the passage of time, older generations remembered slightly less about their early childhood compared to younger individuals, but the obtained material is still highly interesting.

According to the obtained information, all respondents from the Baby Boomer generation and 2 respondents from Generation X did not attend preschool. Their first contact with an educational institution occurred at around 6-7 years of age when they started primary school. The remaining participants in the study, one person from Generation X, and all from Generations Y and Z, attended both preschool and primary school from the age of 3. All generations remembered their initial and often changing career dreams, which usually involved aspirations for helping professions such as doctors, firefighters, police officers, and soldiers (all generations); artistic and sports-related careers such as actresses, models, singers, ballet dancers, and football players (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y, Z); other professions like teachers, astronauts, pilots, and computer programmers (Baby Boomers – one person, Generation X – two people, Generation Y – two people, Generation Z – one person); as well as careers of their parents, other family members, or acquaintances like neighbours (Baby Boomers – two people, Generation X – one person, Generation Y – one person). Unfortunately, for most of the participants (9 people), their career dreams did not align with their abilities, opportunities, or level of commitment. For example, Martyna said, "I really wanted to be a singer, but unfortunately, I didn't have the talent, so it remained just a dream. Then my mom enrolled me in dance classes, but it was difficult for me to manage the commute to rehearsals with other responsibilities, and I quickly lost interest, so nothing came of it." Krzysztof, on the other hand, mentioned that he dreamed of becoming a firefighter, like his father. However, he was more fascinated by fire trucks than extinguishing fires and helping people. Moreover, he had various health issues that would have prevented him from pursuing that profession. As a result, he became a driver, but not in the fire department, rather in a transport company. Respondents also indicated the

sources of their vocational knowledge. They learned about professions through the stories and observations of adults (all generations), fairy tales (Generation X, Y, Z), books (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y), and computer games (Generation Y, Z). They considered school visits by professionals from various fields who presented their tools of the trade to be particularly valuable (Generation X – two people, Generation Y – three people). Additionally, representatives of Generation Y and Z (a total of 5 individuals) mentioned visits by police officers, although these encounters focused on road safety rather than vocational presentations. All respondents from Generation X, Y, and Z remembered having toys that imitated tools used by professionals, which they had at home or in preschool. These toys included toy money and shop props, medical or hairdressing toolkits, vehicles used by various services, miniature school chalkboards, etc. However, representatives of the Baby Boomer generation acknowledged that toys were not as readily available during their time, so parents, grandparents, or the children themselves often made them. For example, Paweł stated, “My grandfather usually made toys for me, like a wooden pistol, a fishing rod, or something resembling a modern scooter.” During the preschool and early school years, vocational play activities played a significant role, both at school and in the family or neighbourhood environment. As stated by Anna from the Baby Boomer generation, “Whenever the weather was nice, all the children from the neighbourhood would be outside until late in the evening. We played games like war, catching thieves, organized running races, and treasure hunts. Sometimes we even went to collect apples without the owner’s knowledge because there was usually no one watching over us. Of course, afterward, we had to apologize and as a punishment, we had to work in her garden.” Alicja from Generation X also has vivid memories of neighbourhood games: “In our street, there were about 11 children of similar age, so we spent our afternoons together, either outside or at someone’s house. Since I had a typewriter and a mini chalkboard with chalk at home, my friends and I played office and school. We organized bike races with a judge, or we played ‘house’ because I had a mini house built by my grandfather in the backyard, where we also had a flower garden that needed watering every day.” The nature of play among the younger generation was slightly different. Mr. Mateusz from Generation Y mentioned, “With my classmates, we attended sports classes and met after school on the playground to play football because everyone wanted to be a football player. We also rode bicycles together. We watched cartoons and movies on VHS tapes at one friend’s house since he had a video player. I remember playing ‘pretend professions’ during preschool times,

such as pretending to be firefighters or soldiers, imitating the tasks performed by professionals, especially when we had the appropriate clothing and toys.” According to Nikola from Generation Z, “We played different professions when we had the appropriate toys. For example, if I had a hairdresser set, we played hairdressers, or if I had a doctor’s set, we played doctors. We also pretended to be models and dancers, trying on our moms’ clothes, which was quite funny. From a young age, we saw representatives of various professions on TV, so we had a rough idea of what those professions entailed.” Representatives of the Baby Boomers and Generation X noted the value of childhood responsibilities, which were often challenging to fulfil. These responsibilities included helping with pets, doing fieldwork, gardening, cleaning their rooms, sweeping the yard, taking turns at school, and visiting their parents’ workplaces (it is worth noting that in a centrally planned economy, situations where children stayed with their parents at work before or after school were rare due to transportation limitations). Jolanta’s statement illustrates such a situation: “Many commuting children grew up in my mom’s office. I remember that we would arrive at the office with my mom around 7:00 am, and then I went to school around 8:00 am. After school, I would come back to the office, and around 3:00 pm, we would take the bus home. During our time at the office, we mostly drew, played in the yard, or did homework for the next day. I have fond memories of that time; we all knew each other, nobody bothered anyone, and to this day, I maintain contacts with both my peers and the ladies from the office. During those visits, I got to know office work very well and the rules that applied there. Maybe that’s why I am now working in HR?” Representatives of Generation Y (2 individuals) and Generation Z (3 individuals) already participated in extracurricular activities during the early school years (one person from Generation X also attended dance classes, although she noted that it was a relatively rare occurrence back then). Among the mentioned extracurricular activities, the younger generations highlighted English language classes, ballroom dancing, sports activities (such as football and acrobatics), and playing the guitar.

### *Occupational orientation*

The period of occupational orientation, which lasts from approximately 12 to 15-16 years of age, is a time when children’s interests and passions begin to develop, and certain abilities also become apparent. In order to organize the information collected during the research, it has been presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Favourite subjects, interests, talents, supportive individuals and institutions, selected school/occupation chosen by the respondents<sup>6</sup>

Name	Favourite school subjects	Interests and/or talents	Supportive individuals and institutions in choosing further educational path	Selected occupation/ General high school
<b>Generation BB</b>				
Anna	Mathematics	Mathematical abilities	Mathematics teacher Parents Colleagues	Accountant
Paweł	Physical education Technical education	Do-It-Yourself activities	Parents Friends	Car mechanic
Krzysztof	Technical education Artistic education	Artistic abilities	Parents Friends	Lathe operator
<b>Generation X</b>				
Alicja	Polish language History	Reading books Writing stories Dancing	Classroom teacher Parents Colleagues	General high school
Jolanta	Mathematics	Mathematical abilities	Parents Sister	General high school
Tomasz	Technical education Physical education	None	Parents Friends	Bricklayer
<b>Generation Y</b>				
Martyna	Polish language History Music	Playing the guitar Ballroom dancing	Classroom teacher Parents	General high school
Wiktoria	Mathematics English and German languages	Language skills	English language teacher Parents	General high school

<sup>6</sup> In the table, the names of subjects and occupations were used according to the terminology used by the respondents during the research. Representatives of the Baby Boomer and Generation X had difficulties in specifying the time of the emergence of their abilities and interests; generally, they referred to the period when they attended primary school.

Name	Favourite school subjects	Interests and/or talents	Supportive individuals and institutions in choosing further educational path	Selected occupation/ General high school
Mateusz	Mathematics English language Computer science Physical education	Mathematical abilities Football	Classroom teacher Computer science teacher Classmates	Electrician
<b>Generation Z</b>				
Nikola	Music Physical education	Dance Acrobatics	Music teacher Physical education teacher Parents Friends	Sports-oriented general high school.
Kamila	Mathematics Art English language	Painting	Classroom teacher Parents	Economist
Borys	Technical education Computer science Physical education	Football	Parents Friends	Car mechanic

Source: Own compilation.

According to the respondents' statements, the individuals who provided support in making their first educational and vocational decisions were primarily parents (11 mentions) and peer groups (8 mentions). Following them were subject teachers (5 mentions), class tutors (4 mentions), and siblings (one mention). These individuals mainly offered non-professional advice, expressing their opinions either in favour of or against the vocational choices considered by students in the final years of primary or lower secondary schools. Representatives of Generation Z (2 individuals) also mentioned attending several open days at upper secondary schools and having conversations with their tutors regarding the job market situation and the educational choices made by students (3 individuals). Unfortunately, the obtained results revealed that despite the passage of years and numerous reforms implemented in the education sector, the engagement of schools (including career advisors and school counsellors), as well as other supportive institutions such as psychological-pedagogical counselling centres, was significantly weak and, regrettably, continues to be so in the diagnostic process and assisting students in lower secondary and primary schools with

their school and career choices (although two individuals from Generation Z mentioned undergoing tests related to their vocational predispositions in school, which still remains insufficient). It is worth noting that it is difficult to relate to the realities in which representatives of Generations BB and X functioned since the education system operated on slightly different principles. However, children and adolescents from Generations Y and Z should have received support in the form of school career guidance. Further analysis of the gathered research material highlights that during the aforementioned period, respondents had the opportunity to develop their interests and abilities (Generation BB – one individual, X – 2 individuals, Y – 2 individuals, Z – 3 individuals) through extracurricular activities as well as activities outside of school. Additionally, individuals from Generations BB and X mentioned visits to production facilities and engaging in community activities such as reforestation or helping farmers with potato harvesting. During the pre-decision period, representatives of the discussed generations faced dilemmas regarding career and school choices, as well as the city where the school was located. In some cases, this entailed arduous daily commutes or living in dormitories, which consequently incurred costs for the family. Key reasons cited by respondents for their choices included shorter education duration (vocational schools), close proximity to the school, low commuting costs, availability of a place in a dormitory, finding internship placements (pertaining to vocational schools), making a collective decision with friends, the potential for future employment, and the possibility of working abroad later on.

### *Vocational Learning*

The period of vocational learning is relatively spread out over time, lasting from approximately 16-17 to around 25 years of age. In the case of students in vocational schools (basic and intermediate), the initial vocational education begins much earlier compared to students in general high schools, thus the process differs slightly. The learning of a profession will be analysed based on the proposed form of vocational activity found in the literature (see Czarnecki, 2010, pp. 126-141).

For representatives of all generations, the process of school-to-work transition was accompanied by stress (regardless of the level of education). It was found that the adaptation difficulties were similar across all generations. Respondents pointed out problems related to: 1) the level of knowledge from primary school (BB, X, Y), citing, “I attended a small, rural school and had gaps in mathematics.

My older sister, who attended a technical school, had to help me. I believe that without her assistance, I would not have completed school”;

2) relationships within peer groups (BB, X, Y, Z), citing, “We from the countryside were treated worse by students from the city. Initially, groups formed among those from the boarding school, those from the countryside, and the locals. They considered us to be poorly dressed and backward. Luckily, I was with my friends from elementary school, so we managed together.” “In high school, groups formed early on, and as a result, we didn’t get to know each other well. Even when we went on trips, everyone was with their own group. Unfortunately, this continued until the end of school”; crises related to their chosen path (X, Y, Z), “After about two months of doing vocational internships, I wanted to drop out because I felt like I wasn’t cut out for it. But my boss talked to me, explained everything thoroughly, and I managed to continue.” “I wanted to drop out of school because I was struggling with several subjects at the beginning, but my mom arranged tutoring for me, and I somehow managed to pass with C’s.”

The respondents stated that at the beginning of their vocational or secondary school education, it was not easy for them. However, they could rely on support from their parents and other classmates, especially those who came from the same primary or lower secondary schools or similar environments, such as rural areas. According to four individuals who completed their studies, their adaptation and integration went smoothly, and the initial difficulties were related to “getting into the rhythm of studying, knowing where and how to handle things, who to associate with in a group, and being attentive to the instructors.” According to one person from Generation BB, one from Generation X, one from Generation Y, and two from Generation Z, their initial educational and vocational choices were not the best because they had different expectations regarding the profession. As one respondent stated, “Unfortunately, it was only during the practical training that I realized this profession wasn’t suitable for me, but it was too late to change, so I completed the school, but I never worked in that profession.” Other representatives from different generations, to a greater or lesser extent, identified with their chosen schools because, as they stated, “The learning was manageable, the teachers were fine, and so were the classmates, so there was no reason to complain.” The same was true for their chosen profession, although not all of them pursued employment in that field. During the interviews, representatives from all generations mentioned certain academic and vocational successes they achieved, ranging from passing specific subjects, progressing to higher grades, completing vocational internships, receiving certificates with

honours, winning competitions, subject olympiads, and sports competitions, passing vocational exams, passing the matriculation exam, and obtaining a diploma from higher education institutions. All respondents managed to obtain their vocational qualifications at the basic and intermediate levels within the planned timeframe, while those studying in general high schools passed the matriculation exam. Representatives from Generation X (one person), Generation Y (two individuals), and Generation Z (one person) also obtained higher education qualifications. Additionally, one person from Generation X completed postgraduate studies in two fields.

### *Professional Work*

Professional work encompasses the longest period in a person's career development and in this study, it will be analysed based on the forms of developmental activity proposed by K.M. Czarnecki (see 2010, pp. 142-157) for adults. It should be noted that different generations entered the labour market at different time intervals, thus facing different realities related to both centrally planned economies (where work was practically guaranteed for everyone – Generation BB and older representatives of Generation X) and market economies (younger representatives of Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z).

The research indicates that representatives of all generations, upon completing their education, were mature and ready to enter the workforce. However, due to systemic changes and the difficult economic situation in the country, which had an impact on the Polish job market, they did not always have the opportunity to find employment (this primarily applies to Generation X, which entered the labour market during a period of significant unemployment and an employer's market in almost all industries). The individuals who participated in the research, due to their age and the duration of their education, are at different stages of their professional paths. Of course, the most experienced individuals are the representatives of the oldest Generation BB (up to 44 years old) and Generation X (up to 32 years old). Representatives of these generations (5 individuals) have already changed their place of employment multiple times, along with their chosen professions. Only one person (Paweł) has been working in his trained profession for 43 years in the same place, and that is because, "After vocational school, I started working in my father's workshop, which later became my own." Respondents from Generation BB and X stated that the most challenging period in their professional work was the time of systemic transformation that occurred



in Poland after 1989 when open unemployment emerged, which, in many cases, became long-term in nature (as was the case for Anna, who was unemployed for over 3 years, Krzysztof – 15 months without work, and Tomasz – 2 years without work). Among the respondents, one individual from Generation Y and two from Generation Z are currently working in their trained professions. However, this was not always the case (previously, for a short period of time, two individuals performed work unrelated to their education and were employed on a contract-for-work basis).

The process of adaptation in professional work varied greatly depending on the place of employment. The first professional job for everyone was stressful, but as they gained experience, subsequent employment became easier. Adaptation difficulties were related to:

- 1) Lack of knowledge and/or professional skills (especially when the job was not aligned with their trained profession) – all respondents indicated this.
- 2) Relationships with management and/or colleagues (Generation X – 2 individuals, Generation Y and Z – all respondents).

Individuals with extensive work experience who entered the workforce during centrally planned economies stated: “There was job security. If not this job, then another one would be available, which made people more at ease. Generally, there was a friendly atmosphere, and people helped each other. Even if you didn’t know something, you could admit it without fear, and someone would always explain and assist.” On the other hand, respondents who started their first professional job in a market economy noted: “There is fierce competition. You have to constantly strive, and no one will help you. There is fear of asking someone about something, as it might be seen as a lack of skills. Especially when you lack experience, you have to constantly prove yourself, and they give you more tasks, often unrelated to your qualifications. How can you adapt in such an environment when the atmosphere is not good?”

All representatives of Generation BB, one individual from Generation X, and one individual from Generation Y identified with their chosen profession and place of work. However, the remaining respondents attributed their lack of identification to poor work relationships, unfavourable working conditions, low salaries, and short job tenures. Only individuals from Generation BB and one individual from Generation X feel stable in their current professional work. This is due to:

- 1) Long work experience at a particular employment and the assurance of continued employment.

- 2) Familiarity with the rules and principles prevailing in the company.
- 3) Acceptance: of one's position in the organizational structure of the company, management, co-workers, working conditions, and salary.

Unfortunately, the remaining respondents (8 individuals) have not yet achieved such stability, which is expected for young individuals entering the job market (unfortunately, individuals from Generation Y with over 10 years of work experience are also in a similar situation).

Due to the changing demands of the job market, individuals of working age must be prepared to upgrade or change their professional qualifications. This applies not only to the unemployed or job seekers but also to those already employed. Among the representatives of all generations participating in the research, there are individuals who have updated or supplemented their professional qualifications and competencies by participating in various courses, trainings, workshops, seminars, or conferences. This demonstrates their conscientious approach to professional matters. Therefore, it can be inferred that the opportunities for further education and professional development are highly significant for employees, especially the younger ones, and are often considered a reward for their work. Diagnosed individuals (Generation X, Y, Z) are aware of the necessity of improving their own professional skills and willingly take advantage of educational services and both in-school and extracurricular activities offered in the market, especially when they receive financial support from their employers. Representatives of the oldest generation, due to their age, no longer consider participating in vocational education programs for adults. However, two individuals are considering participating in educational activities solely for the development of their own interests. For example, one person stated, "I think I have already acquired enough professional knowledge, so when I retire, I plan to join music classes at the local cultural centre. My friends are already members and speak highly of it. The choir they belong to performs in various cities in Poland, so I can explore a bit and learn something." Another individual mentioned, "My wife is encouraging me to join the Senior Association, which operates at the cultural centre, as she is a member and is satisfied with it. The association organizes various events, lectures, workshops, and trips. Perhaps in old age, one could learn something and explore. Unfortunately, so far, there hasn't been time, and it seemed a waste of money on such indulgences, but maybe it's time to do something for myself."

### *Perspectives of Further Professional Development*

The prospects for further professional development are associated with the respondents' age. As mentioned before, the oldest generation no longer considers development strictly related to their professional work but rather focuses on their personal interests. However, Paweł stated, "I would like to retire because I feel tired, but I know I will have to continue working because my pension will be insufficient. I have my own workshop and loyal clients, so I think I won't run out of work in my old age. I am at an age where I can only do what I know, and I wouldn't learn new things." Representatives of Generation X, while not considering a job change (preferring professional advancement), stated that if an interesting offer for better-paid work appeared, they would gladly consider it, regardless of employment stability, even if it required further education or professional improvement. One person expressed, "I have practically achieved everything in my profession; I am a certified teacher, so nothing will change. I still have 15 years of work ahead of me, and honestly, I don't know how I'll manage. I often feel professionally burned out due to constant reforms, changes, bureaucracy, and responsibilities. Although I enjoy working with children very much, if an interesting job offer appeared, I would likely take it. I am accustomed to learning, so I could even undergo retraining."

From the statements of all representatives of Generation Y and Z, it is evident that they are determined to change their employment. Although four individuals expressed that they enjoy their current work and are interested in, for example, changing their position within the organizational structure of the company, they also declared their willingness to change jobs if they received a more favourable offer in terms of working conditions and/or salary. Young individuals are also determined to pursue further education, with some already taking steps in that direction (one individual from Generation Y and two individuals from Generation Z) by pursuing postgraduate studies and language courses. According to the youngest individuals active in the job market, "One should not become attached to a single job; one must constantly search to find what matters to them." "I am just starting my professional career, and everything is ahead of me. I don't intend to work in a store my whole life; I consider my current job as temporary. I am constantly looking at job offers, and I have already submitted several resumes; now I'm waiting for a response." "I think I will change jobs several times in my life; for now, I am not attached and I'm searching. I am also considering going abroad, which is why I enrolled in a German language course. Currently, I don't

have a family; I live with my parents, so I have enough money. But if I wanted to live independently, I couldn't manage it because with my current earnings, I can't even afford to rent an apartment. So, I will have to look for something better paying.”

Summing up the above considerations, it can be observed that the oldest generation is focused on retirement and developing their personal interests. Representatives of Generation X are not actively seeking employment changes but do not exclude the possibility if more favourable offers arise. On the other hand, the situation is entirely different for the youngest participants in the job market, who continue to pursue further education and actively monitor available job opportunities despite already being employed.

## Conclusions

The established research objective has been achieved, and the gathered research material has allowed for providing answers to the research problem. The process of professional development of the representatives of Generations BB, X, Y, Z active in the job market, as well as their future development prospects, has been presented.

Due to the variable political, economic, social, and educational conditions in which the representatives of each generation grew up, their professional development followed slightly different paths. As the initial developmental periods (pre-orientation, occupational orientation, and vocational learning) of the BB Generation and older representatives of Generation X took place during centrally planned economies, they followed similar patterns due to similar contextual factors. On the other hand, the youngest members of Generation X and all individuals from Generations Y and Z experienced their early stages of professional development within a market economy, which over time led to changes in the education and vocational market. The rapid technological progress also played a significant role, impacting not only the acquisition and execution of professional work but also vocational education. Successive educational reforms have transformed the education system, for example, the introduction of lower secondary schools (which began to be phased out from the 2019/2020 school year), where the duration of general education was extended at the expense of vocational education.

Indeed, the professional work of the representatives of the BB Generation and older members of Generation X began in a centrally planned economy

but continued in a market economy as well. They faced the greatest challenges because they were not prepared for such a rapid transition into the job market (the emergence of overt unemployment) and the need for continuous learning and professional development. On the other hand, the period of professional activity for younger representatives of Generation X and all individuals from Generations Y and Z started in a market economy, where unemployment and the necessity of continuous education for updating knowledge and acquiring new skills were evident. This awareness undoubtedly contributed to better adaptation to changing conditions in the education and vocational market.

When analysing the prospects for further professional development of representatives of active generations in the job market, certain patterns can be observed based on the respondents' answers:

- 1) Representatives of the BB Generation are no longer interested in changing their professional situation or pursuing further vocational education (they only consider the development of their personal interests).
- 2) Representatives of Generation X, although not entirely satisfied with their current employment, do not actively seek alternative employment. However, if more favourable offers in terms of better working conditions and/or salary were to arise, they are willing to consider them, even if it requires additional qualification enhancement.
- 3) Respondents from Generations Y and Z, despite being currently employed, actively search for jobs that meet their expectations in terms of salary and working conditions. They also continuously enrich their vocational qualifications and competencies.

Although the specific periods of professional development among the diagnosed generations, active in the labour market, occurred under slightly different conditions and had varying trajectories, common problems related to the lack of professional support during pre-decisional moments are noticeable. Unfortunately, the respondents did not indicate any supportive institution that would offer them:

- 1) Assistance in diagnosing their own vocational predispositions, which should be the starting point for further actions related to the choice of post-primary/post-secondary schools.
- 2) Support in job search or employment change.
- 3) Assistance in finding suitable forms of education, training, and professional development.

Furthermore, despite provisions in legal documents<sup>7</sup> or recommendations regarding the development and implementation of in-school career guidance systems, there was a lack of specific, cyclical activities in the field of educational and career guidance. This is surprising, especially considering the younger generations whose education coincided with numerous market fluctuations, rapid technological progress, changes in vocational training methods, and shifts in professional tasks across various occupations. The need for further education, skills enhancement, and sometimes even professional requalification became crucial. Of course, since the completion of secondary schools by individuals from Generation Y or Z, some positive changes have been introduced in terms of school career guidance, albeit insufficient, regulated by legal provisions<sup>8</sup>. However, what effects these changes have brought or will bring remains to be seen in the future.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that despite the diverse conditions of professional development among representatives of generations active in today's labour market, organizing professional and cyclical assistance accessible to every interested individual at each stage of their professional development is highly significant.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the Education System Act (1991), which obliges educational institutions to prepare students for choosing a profession and field of study.

<sup>8</sup> See Act (2016); Regulation of the Ministry of National Education (28.03.2017); Regulation of the Ministry of National Education (09.08.2017).

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