

**The recruitment process of Generation Z in the context of demographical changes
in the labor market**

Abstract

Current demographic changes, such as population aging and population decline, constitute a challenge for contemporary organizations. The objective of this article is to assess cross-generational management in terms of recruiting Generation Z employees as a response to the current demographic changes. The case study method was used to illustrate the cooperation between organizations and secondary schools, which is one of the forms of boosting the attractiveness of the organization as an employer.

Key words: recruitment, cross-generational management, demographical changes, Generation Z

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Introduction

Globalization and the development of modern technologies are often cited among the phenomena that are generating challenges for the labor market. However, the current situation is unprecedented in that changes have never occurred so fast. Also the demographic changes observed in Poland and other European countries are not without a say in shaping the labor market. Both population aging and population decline, correlated with fewer births, determine the need for transformations in the staff policy of companies, making it necessary to utilize the potential of all available human resources. The aim of this article is to find a solution to the problems of business organizations related to demographic changes, especially in the recruitment of Generation Z (Gen Z) employees, i.e. people born after 1995 who are currently entering the labor market. A hypothesis has been assumed that cross-generational management activities, including adaptation of recruitment practices to the expectations of the youngest participants of the labor market, including recruitment through cooperation of businesses and educational institutions, can provide a solution. Based on a critical review of the literature and the case study method, one of the forms of increasing the attractiveness of

the organization as an employer and seeking young candidates for work was presented; this method is cooperation of businesses with secondary schools. In preparing the article, both Polish and English literature sources were used, mainly from the Emerald, CEON and BazEkon databases.

This article is divided into four sections, preceded by an introduction and concluded with a summary of the findings. The first section presents the most important information about demographic changes that are currently affecting the Polish labor market, such as the aging of society, increasing life expectancy, and the acceleration of generational changes. The next section covers the analysis of cross-generational management practices in the workplace, which can be a response to the demographic challenges mentioned above. Constituting a kind of age management, it is addressed to all generational groups employed in an organization. One of its elements is the recruitment process adapted to the needs and expectations of different generations of job candidates. The article focuses on the recruitment of Gen Z employees as the youngest participants in the labor market, whose recruitment allows organizations to increase the generational diversity of its staff. This, in turn, brings a number of benefits and threats. A good solution in this area seems to be cooperation between secondary schools and employers. Activities pursued in this area are described in the last section of the article.

Demographical changes in the Polish labor market

The demographic processes currently underway pose a great challenge to labor market participants. In Europe (including Poland), population aging can be observed, which is defined as a "systematic increase in the percentage of older people in the population" (Klimczuk 2012, p. 244). Population aging is strictly correlated with low fertility, longer life expectancy of individuals, and a negative migration balance (Schimanek, Kotzian, Arczewska 2015, p. 10). It is estimated that the number of people over 65 in relation to the number of people aged 15-64 will increase from 22% in 2015 to 69% in 2060 (Moczydłowska 2015, p. 30, Kaźmierczyk 2007, pp. 21-22). Furthermore, the situation in Poland is worse than in other European countries due to the more marked decline in the number of young people and increase in the number of older people, which result from cultural changes and successive periods of drop and rise in birth rates (the so-called *baby bust* and *baby boom*), thereby creating the wave effect (Skowron-Mielnik 2013, p. 62). Thus, the total population decreases.

People are living increasingly longer, which is influenced by economic growth and technological progress (Mendryk 2013, pp. 105-106, Moczydłowska 2015, p. 29). At the

same time, the birth rate decreases. Consequently, the entire age structure of society changes: the number of people in pre-working age is decreasing, and the population of people in post-working age is on the rise (Brdulak 2014, pp. 157-159; Mahon, Millar 2014, p. 554; Kaźmierczyk 2007, p. 23). Staff problems are further aggravated by the external migration of Polish people (Moczyłowska, 2015, p. 30), prompting a steady decline in the available human resources. All this leads to the necessity of extending the period of economic activity (Szaban 2013, p. 149, Gawrycka, Szymczak 2015, p. 98).

An important factor is also the acceleration of generations. Due to the dynamics of technological and social changes, generations are succeeding each other increasingly more often. Their representatives must cooperate with each other, which is another challenge in modern organizations. There has never been such a large social diversity in the labor market as there is now (Brdulak 2014, pp. 157-159).

All of the abovementioned prompts an increase in the value of the so-called age dependency ratio (calculated as the number of people non-working age people per 100 working-age people), which may negatively affect social relations, cause instability of public finances and the pension system, burden young people with health insurance premiums, as well as disturb the generational hierarchy of values and political views. This, in turn, may lead to cross-generational conflicts at societal level (Mendryk 2013, pp. 105-106, Klimczuk 2012, p. 244, Pawlak 2016, p. 409, Wziątek-Staśko 2015, p. 48).

Employers most willingly employ people aged 30-45. They are much more skeptical towards offering vacancies to young people without experience, as well as the oldest candidates. Unfortunately, the number of people in the 30-45 age group, which is the one opted for by employers, is decreasing. Employers must, therefore, change their attitude. Furthermore, they should strive for diversity among employees, seeing diversity as a potential that can be used (Skowron-Mielnik 2013, p. 63). Employers who are often biased against both the youngest and the oldest job candidates also should take note of that. The optimal use of available human capital is one of the best possible solutions to the current demographic situation. There are many initiatives to encourage employers to hire older people. It is worth mentioning, for example, the Polish project "*Wyrównywanie szans na rynku pracy dla osób 50+*" ["Equal opportunities in the labor market for people aged 50+"], co-financing of remunerations for employing the unemployed after the age of 50, or exemption from paying contributions to the Labor Fund for employees who are over 50 years of age. However, this should not lead to exclusion of Gen Z, who are just entering the labor market.

Cross-generational management as a response to demographic challenges

Currently, representatives of four generations are employed in business organizations: baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomałowska 2014, pp. 405, Burchardt, Sikora 2014, p. 175). Each of these generations has different values, different needs, and a distinct worldview. Their cooperation and communication is, therefore, a challenge - for themselves, for HR departments, and for supervisors of multigenerational teams. The different attitudes towards work of people from different generational groups, and the problems caused by inefficient communication between them, are becoming an issue. Cross-generational teams have frequent conflicts resulting from mutual misunderstanding. However, it should be emphasized that people from different generational groups can successfully cooperate with each other, which will be beneficial for all parties.

Cross-generational management can be a solution to these problems. At this point, however, it is necessary to explain what age management is. Age management "is part of diversity management (Pawlak 2016, p. 409). These are the activities that allow a more rational and effective use of human resources in the enterprise by taking into account the needs and abilities of employees of all ages" (Liwiński, Sztanderska, 2010, p. 3). Most often, however, age management concerns only the oldest employees. In Western countries, it has been implemented for several years, whereas in Poland it has existed so far mostly in theory (Schimanek, Kotzian, Arczewska 2015, p. 6). Age management may provide an answer to negative demographic changes (Świeszczyk, Ziemia 2013, p. 58, Sołtys 2013, p. 61). It allows effective use of declining human resources (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomałowska 2016, p. 382). In a broader sense, age management encompasses activities at the level of the economy as a whole, and more narrowly, at the level of a company (Hilarowicz 2015, pp. 22-23). Age management is usually equated with practices addressed towards the oldest employees in a business organization (Woszczyk, Warwas 2016, p. 40, Fuerte, Egdell, McQuaid 2013, p. 272). It should, however, include comprehensive activities directed to all employees. It is necessary to use the potential of employees from each age group (Nowaczyk, 2017). This kind of age management can be called cross-generational (or multigenerational), as it responds to the individual needs of all employees (Woszczyk, Warwas 2016, p. 44) and avoids either discrimination or favoring either of the generations.

Cross-generational management should cover all areas of human resource management (Gajda 2015, p. 26). In the context of demographic change, recruitment of employees is the most important element. If properly implemented, it allows to build multigenerational teams, the existence of whom is beneficial to the organization.

Recruitment of Gen Z as part of cross-generational management

One of the aspects of cross-generational management is the adjustment of HR processes, including recruitment of employees, to the needs of people of all generations. Using the principles of cross-generational management at the stage of recruitment and selection of staff allows for proper planning of employees' needs, prevents demographic bombs (i.e. mass retirement of the oldest employees), and thus, mitigates the risk of a sudden loss of knowledge - both explicit and implicit (Zajac 2014, p. 29). Cross-generational management also helps maintain the desired age structure among employees. As such, it is the basis for further activities in the area of human resources management. For this reason, this article focuses on discussing the recruitment process of employees.

Enterprises have already developed the practice of employing older generations. Often, however, they are not prepared for the generation that is just entering the labor market, in this case Gen Z. It is assumed that Gen Z comprises people born after 1995 (Żarczyńska, Chomałowska 2016, p. 406). Of course, it should be remembered that, as in the case of other generational groups, assigning an individual to a given generation does not depend solely on their date of birth, but also their worldview, attitude to duties and work, lifestyle and system of values. It can be seen that some representatives of Gen Z have a problem with finding their place in a new reality, which is not as safe as the familiar home or school environment (Galaj 2014, pp. 85-88). They are just starting to understand the rapidly changing world in which they grow up. Undoubtedly, entering the labor market is difficult for them, and it will require them to change their attitude towards work. Many feel frustrated when it turns out that reality has not turned out to be as perfect as they imagined. They expect a challenging job, in which their potential will be fully explored. They want the freedom to decide about the place, time and way of performing tasks. HR specialists emphasize that young people are much more demanding than older employees. They often change their place of work, are disloyal, have high expectations (Berkup 2014, pp. 223-224, Kong, Sun, Yan 2016, p. 2564, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomałowska 2016, p. 381). Of course, this is also due to changes in the labor market, such as increased flexibility accompanied by reduced employment stability,

progressing individualization, and de-standardization of professional careers. At the same time, Gen Z's need for immediate results, reluctance to professional sacrifice and unwillingness to assume responsibility for tasks all contribute to frequent changes of their workplace. Therefore, it is worth considering how to encourage young people to get properly engaged and to retain them in an organization.

Potential solutions to problems related to the recruitment process of Gen Z

Recruitment activities, forming part of cross-generational management, should depart from the proper preparation of a job advertisement. Addressing the youngest employees, it is worth emphasizing positive relations within the team, professionalism of the employee implementation process, career development programs (preferably under the mentor's supervision), and referring to Gen Z's key skills such as openness, command of foreign languages or proficiency in using modern technologies (Warwas, Wiktorowicz 2016, p. 76). According to research by A. Grenčíkova, J. Guščinskiene and J. Špankova (2017), financial incentives are the most important for young employees up to the age of 25, in fact significantly more important than for older generational groups. In an advertisement, it may be worth including precise information about the proposed remuneration, which will encourage Gen Z candidates to participate in the recruitment process.

Young people consider personal contacts and the Internet to be the most effective methods of job seeking (Young Professionals Advisory Council, Observatory of the Economy and Labor Market of the Poznań Agglomeration, 2017, pp. 42-43). Online recruitment is expected by Gen Z, and it is precisely in the network (especially social media) where young people look up their future employers. Company profile is thoroughly reviewed before applying for a job. Therefore, it is not only the attractiveness of the advertisement itself that is important, but also the transparency of business activity, integrity and activities in the field of corporate social responsibility, as these factors attract young candidates. Thus, the content placed and regularly updated on the official profiles on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or YouTube is of significant importance from the point of view of successful recruitment of Gen Z employees. Last but not least, attention should be paid to adapting the company's website to be viewed on mobile devices (Warwas, Wiktorowicz 2016, p. 76). Social media should also be used in a different way. In fact, the entire process of recruiting Gen Z employees can take place via social media. As argued by Richard Docherty (2010, p. 11), this is also beneficial for the employer. It makes the recruitment process more streamlined, more effective, and less costly. In turn, Aurelie Girard, Bernard Fallery and Florence Rodhain (2014, pp. 98-100)

postulate the use of social media in recruitment in order to reduce the number of applications while increasing their quality. They emphasize that it is also beneficial for candidates because it allows for better understanding of the company. Thanks to social media, the company can also increase its attractiveness among the youngest generation of employees, as the employer's reputation is very important to Gen Z. A good solution is also recruitment in the form of video games and applications such as *Unilevergame*, a recruitment game addressed to students who want to do summer internships at Unilever (Warwas, Wiktorowicz 2016, p. 90).

According to the representatives of Gen Z, the recruitment process should entertain and surprise. Recruitment of the young generation must not be stressful. A close relationship with the candidate at every stage of the process is important. A job advertisement should be a showcase of the company: interesting and surprising, informative, and therefore likely to attract the attention of a Gen Z candidate (*Pięć trendów...*, 2018).

The noticeable lack of patience of this generation also entails specific implications for recruiters. The process of acquiring employees no longer can consist of many stages. Young people expect immediate feedback (Warwas, Wiktorowicz 2016, p. 76, Kaźmierczyk 2007, p. 37), refusing to take part in a multi-stage recruitment process and then wait weeks for the decision. During that time, they will find another job and get hired there.

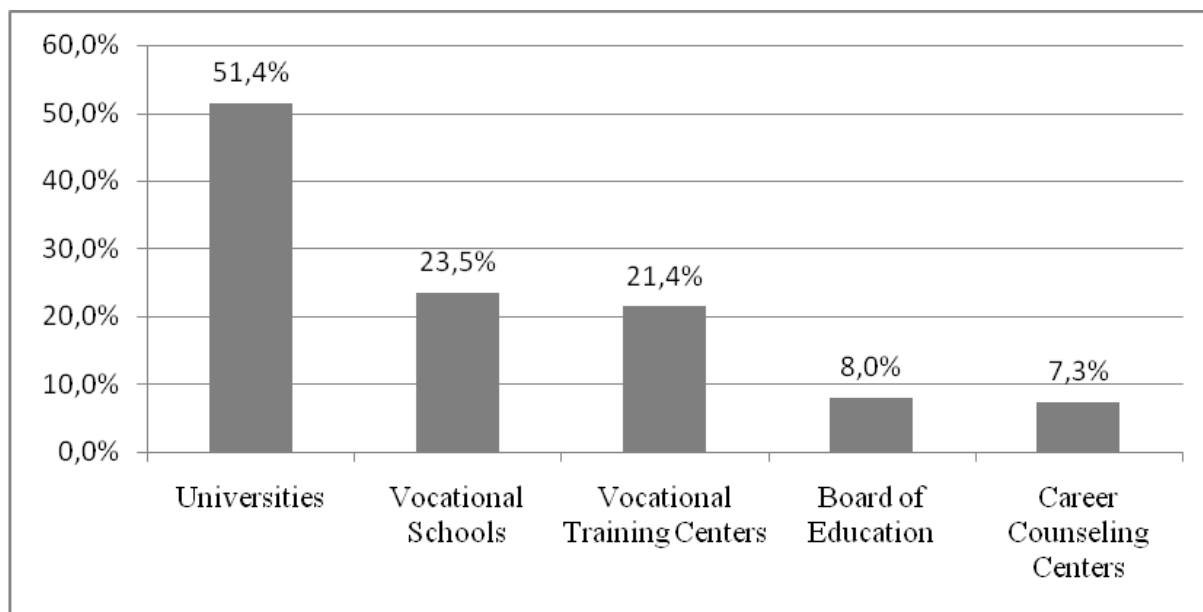
Obviously, young employees should also be sought at job fairs, at universities, and in secondary schools. An interesting solution is to establish cooperation with schools through initiatives such as patron classes, workshops, field trips or internships. This is beneficial to the employer for many reasons: they build a positive brand image in the local job market, acquire the right candidates, prepare them for work in their company, strengthen ties between employees of different ages, and if accompanied by other properly implemented staff management systems, bond employees with the workplace for a long time. A positive effect is also a decrease in the number of young unemployed people in the local labor market, as they choose a profession corresponding to demand. All this makes the company's image positive in a young person's eyes.

Cooperation of employers and schools

As already emphasized, building a positive image of the company among the youngest job candidates - present and past - is the basis for their successful recruitment and retention. One of the ways to achieve this may be to use the company's cooperation with schools, especially secondary schools.

A 2013 study by the Polish National Center for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education indicates that over half of upper secondary schools cooperate with employers - mainly in the organization of hands-on classes and apprenticeships. Other forms of cooperation included consultations (38.4%), field trips (35.73%), acquisition of schooling materials (27.25%), organization of competitions for students (14.83%), and retrofitting school classrooms (10.7%). Subsequently, the organization of internships for students and teachers, training for teachers, joint creation of the curriculum, patron classes, and inviting non-teacher employees to the school were indicated (Pfeiffer 2013, pp. 9-10). It is worth comparing these results with the ones obtained in 2014 by the Observatory of the Economy and Labor Market of the Poznań Agglomeration. Unfortunately, as much as 77.6% of companies participating in the study did not cooperate with any educational institution whatsoever, while the others cooperated primarily with universities, followed by vocational schools and vocational training centers (see Chart 1), mainly in the field of internships, apprenticeships, training and conferences (Young Professionals Advisory Council, 2014, pp. 45- 46).

Chart 1. Cooperation of employers with educational institutions



Source: Young Professionals Advisory Council (2014), *Potrzeby kadrowe przedsiębiorców aglomeracji poznańskiej na tle kierunków społeczno-gospodarczego rozwoju regionu – diagnoza, prognoza, monitoring*, Poznań, p. 45.

It is also worth noting that companies are becoming less willing to cooperate with educational institutions. In 2017, only every fifth employer participating in the study conducted by the Observatory of the Economy and Labor Market of the Poznań Agglomeration said they were undertaking such activities. Similarly to 2014, cooperation partners were mainly universities and vocational schools, with the most common form of cooperation being internships and apprenticeships. As emphasized by employers, in doing so, they have the opportunity to recognize the potential of job candidates while allowing young people to gain a hands-on experience in the profession in which they are being educated. An increasing number of employers positively assesses cooperation with the education market, which may point to a qualitatively good offer of educational institutions, an increase in awareness of the benefits of such activities, and an increase in their effectiveness (Observatory of the Economy and Labor Market of the Poznań Agglomeration, 2018, p. 5; Gondek, 2016, p. 93, 102). In summary, while schools willingly cooperate with business entities operating in the labor market, the vast majority of enterprises never pursue this form of cooperation, which hinders their chance of acquiring valuable young employees.

An interesting project was also introduced in Leszno. It assumes a series of activities, which include designing an online platform with job-related content, including information on local enterprises in which students can take apprenticeships (their activities, expectations

towards employees, and possible career paths), bank offers, and reviews of employers. In the future, the career paths of selected local entrepreneurs will also be published there. The implementation of activities is carried out by a career counseling office, located in the Technical School Complex - Center for Vocational and Continuing Education in Leszno (ZST-CKZiU). The platform can be accessed at doradtwozawodowe.zstckziu.pl, and it is addressed to young people, parents, teachers, educators, and vocational counselors alike. Demonstration classes in the form of workshops for primary school students are also proposed to be run in cooperation with local employers, which will concern individual professions taught by vocational schools. The goal is to spark interest in students in the offer of these companies. Additionally, in order to promote vocational education, middle school students and the last-grade students of primary schools are invited, where the activities proposed to them consist of two parts: vocational and advisory. During the first part, students are invited to the studio of individual vocational subjects. In cooperation with older colleagues, they have the opportunity to learn basic activities in a selected profession taught at ZST-CKZiU. The second part of the course includes group career counseling (Rutecka-Siadek 2018). Noteworthy is the fact that the offer enjoys considerable popularity among primary school students from the entire *poviat* of Leszno.

At the same time, local authorities in Leszno launched the Student Plus program, which provides scholarships to students who have completed primary school and middle school (Polish: *gimnazjum*) in Leszno and who, upon graduating from university, decide to return to their hometown and start working there (*Program...*, 2017). This makes Leszno one of the few Polish towns that offer a career counseling program combined with the promotion of vocational education. Cooperation between education and the labor market can bring many positive effects. First, the chance of employment in local enterprises encourages young people to stay in Leszno. This may help improve the age structure of the town's residents, which is something the local government has been working towards for several years. In addition, by educating young people in sought-after occupations, unemployment is expected to be curbed among Gen Z. Young human resources may also encourage investment in the region. Leszno is, certainly, an example worth following.

Another project worthy of a mention is "*Współpraca z pracodawcami sukcesem szkoły i uczniów*" ["Cooperation with employers as an indicator of success of school and students"], carried out between 2013 and 2015 as part of the Operational Program "Human Capital" in cooperation with the City of Łódź. The project was co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund, and its activities were directed to students of the Gastronomic

School Complex in Łódź. The main objective of the project was to increase the quality of the educational offer of the school, with a view to increasing employability. Students were to acquire new skills and qualifications in line with the needs of the labor market through the development and implementation, in cooperation with entrepreneurs, of confectionery and waiting classes, as well as of carving and modern gastronomic techniques. The support also included career counseling, language classes, and preparation for school-leaving exams. In addition, students were able to participate in apprenticeships, during which they could use the knowledge gained in previous classes (Project 2018).

An interesting solution is patronage classes, which are hands-on classes for students taking place in the company's office. In addition, students and teachers are provided with specialist courses and retrofits for school classrooms, while the most talented school graduates are guaranteed employment (Pfeiffer 2013, p. 13). An example of this is the cooperation between the Automotive School Complex in Gdańsk and Toyota Motor Poland, which has been ongoing since 2007. As part of this cooperation, the company has sponsored several classes in the school, supporting teachers in the process of updating knowledge, retrofitting classrooms with modern equipment and teaching aids, organizing exams for students who want to obtain the first-degree Toyota mechanics certificate, and finally, spreading knowledge about the state-of-the-art solutions used in Toyota cars. All this leads to an increase in the quality of education of future staff (Pancer, Bojka 2014, p. 12).

Among the good practices of cooperation between secondary schools and employers, the example of the Secondary School Complex No. 2 in Kwidzyn should also be mentioned, as it cooperates with Paper Kwidzyn. As part of this cooperation, the company sponsors field trips during which students can learn about career paths offered in the organization and participate in competitions promoting technical knowledge. The company has also helped modernize school classrooms. Then, there is the Technical School Complex in Gdynia, which has been cooperating with the Gdańsk-based company Sunreef Yachts since 2013 by organizing hands-on classes. In this cooperation, distinguished students can even count on financial bonuses. LOTOS Serwis, in turn, became the patron of students from the School of Communication (ZSŁ) in Gdańsk. As the company assumes, this cooperation will allow the preparation of suitably qualified future staff for the needs of the refining industry (Pancer, Bojka 2014, pp. 13-14).

Employers also have the option of setting up non-public vocational schools, in which learning comes with a guarantee of acquiring proper professional background. An example is the Non-Public School of Crafts in Wejherowo, which has been operating in Pomorskie

Province since the September 2016 and which is run by the Local Craft Guild of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises - Employers' Association (Pancer, Bojka 2014, p. 15).

There are many ways to boost the attractiveness of the company in the eyes of potential young employees, and thus encourage them to apply for a job. It is worth taking advantage of these solutions so as to acquire Gen Z employees, especially that age diversity among employees is beneficial to the employer. It prevents the loss of knowledge (explicit and implicit) upon the retirement of a significant part of the oldest employees. It also enables a quicker response to changing market requirements and adaptation to the needs of customers. Above all, however, it allows the transfer of knowledge between employees from different generations and better cross-generational cooperation.

Conclusions

Cooperation between employers and schools is just one of the cross-generational management activities that responds to demographic changes and serves the recruitment of Gen Z in the labor market. Cross-generational management can be an effective solution to demographic problems in Polish organizations. It is therefore worth moving from theoretical considerations to practical applications in this area.

Only time will tell the real benefits of adapting staff processes to the needs of employees from different generations (including Gen Z). Regardless, the career counseling and vocational education promotion program in Leszno is worth keeping an eye on to see how it develops. Given its fairly recent implementation (September 2017), it should take a few more years to see the first results, i.e. when the first students participating in the program enter the labor market.

It is also difficult to find information on the results of other cooperation programs between secondary schools and employers. A guess can only be made that, in line with the assumptions, they lead to an increase in the degree of matching skills of young employees to the needs of businesses and improvement of the company's image among the youngest generation. Nevertheless, it should first be verified whether this is true, thus making this topic an area that requires further research.

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Rekrutacja pokolenia Z w kontekście zmian demograficznych

Abstrakt

Obecne przemiany demograficzne, takie jak zjawisko starzenia się społeczeństwa czy spadek liczby ludności, są wyzwaniem dla współczesnych organizacji. Celem artykułu jest ocena zarządzania międzypokoleniowego w zakresie rekrutacji pokolenia Z jako odpowiedzi na zmiany demograficzne. Wykorzystując metodę studium przypadku, przedstawiono w nim też jedną z form zwiększenia atrakcyjności organizacji jako pracodawcy, jaką jest jej współpraca ze szkołami ponadpodstawowymi.

Słowa kluczowe: rekrutacja, zarządzanie międzypokoleniowe, zmiany demograficzne, pokolenie Z

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