

**THE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCES OF SOLDIERS IN POLAND –
THE Z GENERATION PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract. Leadership competence is a unique set of qualities, skills, knowledge and abilities attributed to specific social and professional groups. Cultural circumstances mean that societies in different countries may have different views on the nature, development opportunities and scope of leadership competences. There are also more and more differences occurring in the views resulting from generational differences. In addition, existing stereotypes in societies are constantly fuelled by media messages, which determines how the image of different formations, including soldiers, is assessed. Bearing in mind the complexity of the nature of leadership, different views of both theoreticians, practitioners and laymen in terms of leadership competence, or even the natural attribution of leadership competence to soldiers and the essence of leadership in the military environment, the author of the article has made efforts to show what kind of leadership competence is held by the soldiers in Poland in the opinion of representatives of the youngest generation (generation Z). This article is based on an in-depth analysis of the source literature (Polish and foreign) and the results of empirical research. Ascertainments and conclusions presented in the article confirm the conviction about the complexity of the nature of leadership, leadership competences, as well as the functioning of stereotypes in the society, which in a certain natural way determine the ways of thinking and the course of cognitive processes.

Keywords: competence; leadership; soldiers; generation Z

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1. Introduction

Poland's membership in the structures of the largest political-military alliance, i.e. NATO, its geopolitical location and the resulting opportunities and threats, constant strengthening of the presence of US troops and allies on Polish territory, rich military traditions and the high dynamics of changes in the security environment on a global scale cause the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland to take permanent actions aimed at improving their capabilities through not only retrofitting of technical facilities, but above all through changes in structures and continuous improvement of soldiers' competences. The changes that take place in the Polish Army are of great importance from the point of view of the citizens, because they translate into a sense of security, which is inevitably connected with the quality of the image of the Armed Forces and the soldiers themselves.

Taking into account the specificity of both the military environment – hermetic, hierarchical, with a specific organisational culture, the constant need to add up to the army's personnel count, which is associated with natural fluctuation, as well as the continuation of the process of increasing the number of operational units, a very important aspect is to equip soldiers with leadership skills necessary both in times of peace, crisis and war (Welyczko, Balcerzyk 2019). Increasing the size of the army is associated with the need to recruit candidates for soldiers, which in the coming years are and will be mainly representatives of the Z generation.

Having the above in mind, in the opinion of the author of the article, it is important to get to know the opinions of the representatives of the Z generation with regard to the leadership competences that soldiers in Poland have. Knowing the perspective of the youngest generation, differing from the perspective of other generations (Groves 2020; Hameed, Sharma 2020; Rudolph, Rauvola, Zacher 2017; Krauter 2020; Lowe, Barry, Grunberg 2020; Jukšs, 2021; Gyurák Babel'ová, Stareček, 2021; Zahrani, 2022), gives an opportunity to identify the key leadership competences of soldiers, as well as to indicate the remaining competences, which should be characterised by soldiers and which have a significant impact on their social image. The identification of key competences connected with the self-assessment of the respondents gives an opportunity to predict the potential interest of young people in the future in the perspective of their professional career in the Polish Army.

The research problem was formulated in the form of a question: *What are the key leadership competences of soldiers in Poland according to the representatives of generation Z?* The following hypothesis was adopted for the research problem thus posed: key leadership competencies in the opinion of generation Z include those found in the American model of leadership competencies, the Soldier's Honor Code, and the service feedback regulation.

This paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, this paper reviews existing studies that have investigated dilemmas related to the definitions and components of competencies interpreted differently by different authors, which may hinder the understanding of the essence of leadership competencies as well as influence the inclusion of certain behaviors as competencies. Leadership competencies in the category of innate abilities were also analyzed as well as those subject to improvement, because the way competencies are perceived has a significant impact on the opinions about the possibility of developing and acquiring these competencies. Then, while looking for a list of key leadership competencies, the model of the development of leadership competencies used in the US army was referred to (Poland recognizes the US army as one of the main allies, and additionally, the stationing of US soldiers in Poland becomes an opportunity to make comparisons in terms of applied solutions), and because in Poland the model of the development of leadership competencies is at the stage of construction, the leadership competencies contained in other regulations, including the Soldier's Honor Code and the regulation on service opinion, have been shown.

The second part of the article was devoted to presenting the results of empirical research. The distinguished leadership competencies were analyzed, which made it possible to indicate the most important competencies in the eyes of the youngest generation Z. This part of the article also presents the respondents' opinions on the quality of the image of the military. The quality of the image results from the way the respondents perceive this service, including the perception of the image of a soldier as a patriot and a leader, which is most often promoted in Poland. There were also indicated the criteria that should be taken into account in the process of evaluation of soldiers to show the importance of leadership competencies in the group of other required competencies. The answers given by the respondents were related to the declarations of willingness to apply for a job in uniformed services and having appropriate competencies to work in that formation. It is worth noting that the way the young generation perceives the military and the leadership competencies of soldiers exerts an impact on their opinions about the military as a workplace.

This article is devoted to the perspective of generation Z, which is the result of noticing a gap in research in this area. All conducted research focuses on distinguishing competencies, indicating the style of leadership, while taking into account the generational diversity, including the specificity of future soldiers – representatives of generation Z. The perspective of this generation has not been researched so far, and their opinions can be a great source of information necessary to modify the legal and cultural framework of the future army. The theoretical effect of the research is to show a list of key leadership competencies in the opinion of the youngest generation, and the practical possibility of using the results of the research in the process of both building a Polish model of developing leadership competencies of soldiers, and a fuller understanding of the perspective of the youngest generation.

2. Leadership competences – theoretical dilemmas

Concept and components of competence

The issue of competence has been the subject of multi-year exploration by philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, educators as well as representatives of management sciences. Dynamic changes in organisational cultures, as well as constantly growing requirements of the labour market, including technological changes, cause that competences are more and more often given attention, which translates into the development of competence models, including the use of competence profiles in organisational practice, both in the business environment and public organisations, as well as uniformed services.

However, full understanding of competences, including leadership competences, requires a return to the sources and explanation of the history of competences. The term competence derives from the ancient Roman word *competentia*, which meant responsibility, readiness for something (Filipowicz 2014). Those referred to as the competent persons were, among others, judges, craftsmen, clerks and gladiators, i.e. persons considered ready and therefore entitled to make decisions, carry out specific actions. Socrates and his pupil Aristotle also paid attention to the issue of competence. In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, he stressed that there are as many virtues, “considered as the ability to perform good deeds” (2001: 104), as there are activities performed by people. In 1782 R. Meyer transferred the issue of competence to the sphere of practical considerations from the sphere of philosophy by describing the competence of traders and entrepreneurs, and the greatest interest in the issue of competence occurred in the 1970s thanks to D. McClelland’s publication: *Testing for competence rather than for intelligence* (1973), which stressed the importance of competence in efficient functioning in the workplace.

Despite the widespread use of the term competence, it is difficult to find clarity in its definition by representatives of individual sciences. An attempt to explain this phenomenon was made by J. Kotter (in relation to the sciences of management), who emphasises the existence of three scientific currents, such as structuralism (Kotter 1982; Leszczyński, Rasiński 2000), phenomenology (Hatch 2002) and behaviourism (Rakowska, Sitko-Lutek 2000), which have a significant impact on the formation of this concept. The proponents of structuralism, when defining the term competence, pay particular attention to the influence of environmental and social factors on the formation of human competence, treating it as a living organism, an open system susceptible to various stimuli. In turn, supporters of phenomenology pay attention to the cognitive acts of a human being, while behaviourists emphasise the importance of behaviour as a result of human learning and adaptation to the requirements of the environment. These approaches show three aspects of competence development: environmental context, action content and behaviours (Rakowska 2007). Taking into account the views of D. McClelland, this author can be considered a supporter of the behavioural approach, because he considered that the possession of competence can be inferred only on the basis of observable human behaviour, which is conditioned both environmentally and personally (McClelland 1998). R. E. Boyatzis also paid attention to the issue of competence by publishing in 1982 a book entitled *The competence manager: A model for effective performance*, he popularised the approach to competence as a set of such features as: abilities, motives, personality traits, self-image, perception of social role and knowledge. R. E. Boyatzis defined competence as: “potential existing in a human being, leading to such behaviour which contributes to meeting the requirements of a given work position, within the parameters of the organisation’s environment, which in turn gives the desired results” (1982: 18). The author emphasises that competences manifest themselves in human behaviour, which does not mean that all competences are revealed by people in their professional work. L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer also paid attention to the issue of competence, showing it as internal characteristics of an individual (1993), as well as D. D. Dubois and W. J. Rothwell who define competence as: “characteristics of a given person, which are used in an appropriate and consistent way in order to achieve the expected results. These features include: knowledge, skills, certain aspects of self-perception, social behaviour, character traits, thought patterns, attitudes and ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (2008: 32). In turn, referring to Polish literature, the importance of knowledge as a component of competence is emphasised by M. Jabłoński (2009), G. Bartkowiak (2003) points to the essence of practical use of knowledge flowing from experience, A. Szczęsna and T. Rostkowski (2004) stresses the importance of ambition and ability, and K. Pazik (2002) focuses on the essence of behavioural patterns.

Taking into account the above considerations, one may be tempted to state that competences are a multidimensional concept, while the components of competences differ taking into account the American, British or Polish approach. In this article, the term competence shall be understood as a set encompassing: knowledge, skills, motivation, personality traits, attitudes and values that are revealed in the work process determine the efficiency of the performance of the entrusted tasks.

The essence and types of leadership competence

The term leadership, like competence, is multi-dimensional, resulting in a variety of theories, models and approaches, and at the same time in different interpretations (Alvesson, Einola 2019). Almost 50 years ago R. M. Stogdill emphasised that “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (1974: 7). The difficulty in finding an ideal definition of leadership results, among other things, from the fact that such a definition should be both firmly rooted in the theoretical ground and easily implemented in organisational practice, integrating all possible – coherent approaches, as well as the comprehensive one taking into account the achievements of psychological, sociological, management and security sciences. Waiting for such definitions to appear, taking into account the complexity of the concept, seems to be at least naive, which does not change the fact that every year new definitions are being developed as a result of both epistemic exaltation and empirical research.

There are at least several reasons why there is a difficulty in defining leadership. These include (Avery 2009):

- the nature of leadership – leadership is not tangible and repetitive, it is rather a social creation created in a specific cultural and historical context; thought patterns used by theoreticians and practitioners considering the issue of leadership are also an important factor as they influence the identification of leadership behaviours and characteristics (Andrews, Field 1998);
- the social image of a leader resulting from cultural circumstances (in different cultures there are models of leadership often with real historical characters assigned to them – patterns of behaviour and leadership attributes);
- the existence of many myths about leadership, according to which a true leader is able to solve all existing problems, always acts for the benefit of the organisation without any own benefit;
- the existence of the idea of a heroic leader – a lonely rider who fights alone for the good of the organisation, which in many cases, including the idea of dispersed leadership, does not find fertile ground in modern organisations;
- attempts to narrow down the definition of leadership solely to the issue of exerting influence.

Examples of definitions of the term leadership are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of leadership

Author	Definition
P. Żukiewicz	„Leadership is a social process in which a social entity (e.g. citizen, group, organisation) supports another social entity (citizen/group/organisation) because it considers it to be currently the most socially relevant image of the leader’s ideal and most likely to achieve certain goals accepted by both entities.” (2011: 48)
ADP 6-22	„Leadership is the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organisation.” (2019: 1-3)
J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner	„Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.” (1995: 30)
J.C. Rost	„Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.” (1997: 11)
V.H., Vroom and A.G. Jago	„(...) a process of motivating people to work together collaboratively to accomplish great things.” (2007: 18)
G. Yukl and D.D. Van Fleet	„Leadership is viewed as a process that includes influencing the task objectives and strategies of a group or organisation, influencing people in the organisation to implement the strategies and achieve the objectives, influencing group maintenance and identification, and influencing the culture of the organisation.” (1990: 149)

Analysing the definitions in Table 1, it is possible to point out that there are three main ways of defining the term leadership: since leadership can be treated in terms of process, relationship (influence) or a set of qualities typical of a leader (Żukiewicz 2011). The approach to leadership as a process is presented, among others, by J. Antonakis, who emphasises that leadership is “a process of influence between a leader and supporters in a specific context” (2006: 6). In turn, according to J.C. Rost (1993), leadership is the relationship between a leader and those who follow him. The aim of this relationship is to influence the behaviour of supporters, allowing for changes that reflect social beliefs. The last of the approaches presents leadership in terms of skills. K. Blanchard, a proponent of this approach, stresses that leadership „is the ability to influence people by releasing their strength and potential to enable them to pursue greater good” (2007: XVI). However, considering leadership only in terms of skills may be considered incomplete. This can be explained by referring to the definition of the term competence, as well as by referring to the components of competence and therefore the elements that are relevant for the overall development of competence. Skills are only one of the components of competence and the others are knowledge, personality traits, attitudes, values and motivation.

The analysis of the definitions contained in Table 1 also leads us to reflect on the distinctive features of leadership, which include: processability (a sequence of changes over time) (Northouse 2004), prototyping (reflecting the ideals rooted in the cognitive patterns of a given social group) (Hogg, Reid 2009), voluntariness (no coercion) (Jakubowska 2001) and teleological (participants in the process pursue common goals) (Blondel 1987).

Leadership, understood in the category of a set of features typical of a leader, taking into account distinctive features, results in a variety of views on leadership competence. J. Adair (2013) has devoted attention to the issue of leadership competence, indicating that the qualities of leaders include: enthusiasm, honesty, strictness and being demanding combined with justice, human feelings, self-confidence, humility and courage. S. P. Robbins (2001) also defined the universal list of qualities that differentiate leaders from non-leaders, including ambition and energy, the desire to lead and influence others, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, and deep technical knowledge in the field of leadership responsibility. According to M. Kets de Vries (2008), the key competences of a leader are: go-aheadness and assertiveness, being oriented towards taking actions, sociability, openness to ideas, flexibility, cooperative attitude, conscientiousness, analytical and emotional intelligence, emotional stability. In turn, according to I. Majewska-Opielka (1998), leadership competences include: self-esteem, proactivity, independence, positive thinking, internal cohesion, the ability to create visions and the ability and willingness to learn continuously. B. Jamka (2000) indicates such skills as: focusing on goals, achieved results, inspiring people to act until their capabilities are exhausted, looking beyond operational goals, looking at future goals, and stimulating the imagination of their people and acquiring their involvement. N.R. Lockwood (2005) stresses the importance of active listening, being non-judgemental, cooperative skills, experience in conflict resolution and change management, openness to learning and ability to develop competences in others. A. K. Koźmiński (2013), in turn, indicates five leadership competences, such as anticipatory, visionary, value-creating, mobilising and self-reflexive. In the source literature one can also find sets of competences necessary for leaders functioning in an international environment – managing multicultural groups. The authors of the list are S. Chang and M.P. Thorenou (2004), who emphasise the importance of such competences as: cultural empathy, learning to work, communication skills, including listening, open-door policy, clear expression of views, knowledge of other languages, managerial skills and emotional stability. The importance of emotional intelligence as a key leadership competence is indicated by D. Goleman (1998, 2014), N. M. G. Mfikwe and T. G. Pelsier (2017). In turn, the ability to introduce and monitor the course of change is emphasised by D. Belias and A. Koustelios (2014).

The competence sets presented above by both domestic (Polish) and foreign authors are not fully contradictory, although significant differences can be seen. As emphasised in the subsection, leadership is not a tangible creation, but rather a social image shaped by the prism of culture, tradition, ideals rooted and translated into cognitive patterns. Different competences are therefore indicated in the case of leaders operating in an international, multicultural and multigenerational environment, and others in relation to local communities, public organisations and uniformed services. The specifics of a given organisation, including the type of organisational structure, organisational culture, history and traditions, age and gender of employees, level of their competences, leadership style (Al Khajeh 2018; Solomon, Steyn 2017), as well as the industry in which the organisation operates, are only an incomplete set of potential factors determining both the understanding and scope of leadership competences necessary for leaders.

Leadership competences – innate or development-related?

Not only the list of competences necessary for a leader is the subject of lively and constant discussion. The attention of both theoreticians and practitioners is constantly focused on the very nature of leadership, including an attempt to unequivocally answer the question whether the leaders are born or leadership competences can be developed taking account of the proper surrounding. The mainstream in this area is reflected in leadership theories, whose analysis reveals different views and attempts to justify them (not always successful), which translates into a wealth of theoretical leadership background. The result of the discussion is, for example, the emergence of a paradigm of classic, transactional, visionary and organic leadership, as well as the emergence of the theories that are classified as situational, behavioural and emotional theories of leadership (Avery 2009).

In the classical leadership paradigm, the right of a leader to exercise his or her function and influence over others resulted from his or her birth, divine choice (a functioning belief system), political, economic or military position, as well as certain cultural standards (tribal, patriarchal). The classical paradigm is based on the so-called theory of an outstanding individual, whose foundations can be found in the works of Plato (2003), who sought predispositions to hold the office of a leader in the so-called divine touch, manifested in the love of wisdom that philosophers manifested. The theory of the eminent individual, in various ways, can also be seen in F. Nietzsche's idea of a superhuman (1990) or the elite theory based on the principle of asymmetry between the leader and the led party (Avery 2009). The classical paradigm is also found in the theory of great people, popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to which society is divided into leaders and subordinates. To become a leader, according to the theory, one must be born a leader, which involves belonging to a higher social class, so that this birth decides about being a leader and not competence (Kirkpatrick, Locke 1991). Other foundations in turn lay at the foundation of the emergence of the leadership traits theory, the supporters of which emphasise that leaders differ from other people by the so-called leadership potential, treated as a result of having by an individual a set of specific attributes that condition his or her behaviour. This idea was developed by D. McClelland (1973), who, through the application of the competence approach, searched for the attributes that are the basis of effectiveness. However, the search for a set of unique attributes, typical for a leader, was not crowned with a success, because, as researchers emphasise (Stogdill 1948; Bass 1990), distinguishing the attributes themselves does not determine the leader's success, because it is the ability to use a given attribute in appropriate proportions in specific leadership situations that determines the leader's effectiveness.

Nowadays, the behavioural approach, according to which leadership is treated as an ability recognised by action and therefore subject to improvement, is becoming increasingly popular. In turn, the scope of the desired leadership competence depends on the situation and results from environmental factors, including organisational culture. Other behaviours will be desirable as leadership behaviours in the male culture, other in the female culture, etc. behavioural approach to leadership is seen, among others, in the leadership network of R. Blake and J. Mouton (1982) (Ahmed, 2015), while situational approach is included in the leadership continuum model of R. Tannenbaum and W. H. Schmidt (1975), in situational leadership theory (life cycle theory) of P. Hersey and K. H. Blanchard (1977) and in LPC theory (Least Preferred Co-worker) F. Fiedler (1976).

In conclusion, leadership theories, which are rich in the source literature, are based on two different assumptions: leadership is treated as an innate, non-acquired ability, typical of outstanding individuals, and as a set of qualities and skills, and therefore competences that can be acquired and should be properly used in practice, taking into account situational factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership behaviour. The presence of these two different theoretical groups further underlines the complexity of the leadership phenomenon, including its ambiguity.

Models of competence and ways to improve soldiers' leadership competence

From the earliest of times, the issues of leadership have been mainly associated with the military. Military leaders from different countries, due to their achievements, both great victories and devastating defeats, have become a permanent part of history, being in a way a role model and a coveted ideal for every soldier, strategist or leader. The identification of leadership with the military stems, among other things, from the classic leadership paradigm, according to which a military leader, by virtue of his/her position, had the right to influence others. In

addition, taking into account historical aspects, it is worth noting that for a very long period of time the military leader was at the same time a king or a tribe leader, and thus an outstanding individual often considered to be anointed by the divine. Traditions of arms significantly influence the understanding of the essence of leadership in a given country and army. The military is additionally a very specific type of organisation due to its structure, hierarchy, command, subordination, conditions and scope of action, as well as the way it influences the whole society and the perceived level of security.

Shaping the image of a soldier – leader – hero according to the views of many authors is connected with the fact that society needs heroes (Campbell 2007). However, societies are different from each other, and the image of a hero in a given culture results from the existing archetype, which is translated into values understood in contemporary culture, thus shaping the image of a soldier – a leader. Patterns of heroes’ soldiers developed in popular culture are constantly appearing in the media, with many images showing a deliberate distortion reflecting only positive features and leadership behaviours of outstanding soldiers, while omitting behaviours that are described as at least incompatible with the soldier’s ethos. Not without significance is the fact that for many years heroism patterns have been transformed for the purposes of post-war and pacifist propaganda, which does not detract from the qualities demonstrated in soldiers, such as: courage, honour, nobility and competence.

Thus, social expectations regarding the role and behaviour of soldiers are mainly due to the cultural and historical context, including the accepted and widely recognised role models of famous military leaders. Not without significance is the fact that soldiers during the acquisition of competences during courses, training and studies carefully analyse not only the course of battles and executed manoeuvres, but also the profiles of leaders. It can therefore be concluded that there is a socially accepted, more or less general, model of soldiers’ leadership competence. It can be found, among other things, in documents and legal acts regulating the functioning of troops in individual countries, as well as in documents of generally accepted and, for example, the political-military alliances in force in the Member States.

Looking at American documents, it is worth to note ADP 6-22. *Army Leadership and Profession* (2019). This document contains a model of leadership requirements – please see Figure 1, which defines the basic competences and attributes of a leader at all levels, regardless of degree or rank. The model, as stressed in the document, stems from historical experience and shows the most important competences necessary in the army.

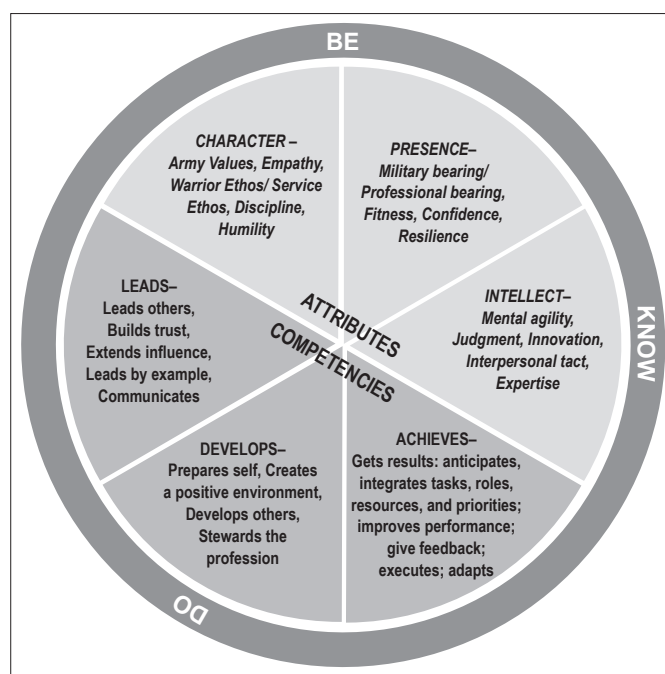


Figure 1. The Army leadership requirements model.

Source: ADP 6-22. Army Leadership and Profession C1, 25 November 2019, p. 1-15.

The universality of the model results from the development activities adopted and applied in practice and the human resources management system. The model emphasises the features that a leader should have. The “BE” area – it concerns the character of a leader, including his/her values, empathy, service ethos, warrior ethos, discipline and humility, and his/her appearance resulting from the level of professionalism, confidence and resilience. In turn, “KNOW” - covers the scope of leader’s intellectual abilities, including agility, judgement, innovation, interpersonal tact and expertise.

The character, appearance and intellect of a leader determine his/her position. Leaders should continuously expand their expertise through operational tasks, institutional learning and self-development, which will allow for the acquisition of comprehensive competences and thus affect the ability to adapt to most situations and the courage to take responsibility for what you and other people do.

The model also indicates the behaviours, and thus the competences, that are expected from a leader, which include: the ability to lead, extending one’s range of influence beyond the framework of the organisational structure (chain of command), setting an example for others with one’s behaviour (being a role model), the ability to communicate, the ability to create a proper work/service environment, the ability to shape one’s own competences and develop others and achieve the expected results. It can therefore be considered that a true leader: leads by setting the direction, the goal of actions, by shaping motivation, building trust, setting an example, which would not be possible without efficient communication. A good leader also takes care of his or her own development and development of others, as well as achieving the set goals by defining and requiring the implementation of specific tasks within the adopted standards of conduct.

ADP 6-22 stresses that there is a difference between attributes and leadership competences in that competences are skills that can be trained and developed, and attributes include personal perseverance, characteristics shaped by experience over time. A soldier can be trained to be an effective rifleman, a tank commander, but the army has less influence on shaping e.g. the courage of a soldier, which results from personality traits as well as experience. Every soldier should constantly improve his/her competences, striving for self-development. Attributes as internal qualities of a leader influence his/her behaviour in certain circumstances. Morality, ethics of action, openness to others, mental and social skills are essential in exercising the function of a military leader.

True military leaders are people who are able to adapt their behaviour to the situation, the level of competence of their subordinate soldiers, while taking into account and being aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. The dynamism of leadership results, among other things, from the conditions in which leaders function, constantly changing expectations and requirements, as well as from staff turnover. Key competences of a leader also include the ability to influence others, self-confidence, self-awareness, and the ability to evaluate the competences of others (which is so important in assigning tasks).

Noting the Polish legal regulations, the competences of soldiers, which are subject to evaluation, among others, when providing service assessment, are indicated in the Ordinance of the Minister of National Defence of 26 May 2014 *on issuing service opinions on professional soldiers* (Journal of Laws 2014, item 764). In accordance with the Ordinance, during the process of issuing service assessments, performance of official duties is evaluated taking into account the following criteria: quality and timely execution of tasks, availability, autonomy and initiative, as well as planning and organising work. Competences and predispositions such as: responsibility, determination in pursuing a goal, accuracy and speed of decision making, resistance to stress, communication skills and ability to cooperate in a team, compliance with laws, standards and rules, self-development and improvement of qualifications, care for equipment and property as well as personal culture and care for appearance are also analysed.

The key competences of soldiers can also be found in the *Code of Honor of the Polish Army Soldier* (2008), according to which every soldier should: act honestly, show a patriotic attitude, bravery, responsibility, justice, truthfulness, professional solidarity, fidelity to military oath, respect for the institutions of the state and society, honesty, should take care of the image of the army and the ethos of service, constantly shape their character

traits and develop their competences, show respect for their superiors, show constant readiness to carry out their tasks, in combat situations act in accordance with standards of humanitarian law, act prudently and thoughtfully and help others at the risk of their lives.

Taking into account the complexity and the very nature of competence, it should be emphasised that in the models of leadership competence functioning in individual armies, constant attention is paid to the necessity of and development of subordinates.

3. Leadership competences - practical dilemmas

Soldiers' key leadership competences – results of empirical research

The analysis of the considerations presented so far shows that leadership competence is inseparably attributed to soldiers. They are, in a way, the main criterion for assessing their image, as well as their usefulness for the state and its citizens. With this in mind, the main research problem in this article is formulated in the form of a question: *What are the key leadership competences of soldiers in Poland according to the representatives of generation Z?* Providing answers to such a research problem required both theoretical and empirical research. Empirical research used the method of a diagnostic survey carried out with the use of a survey technique, using the author's questionnaire prepared on the basis of an analysis of Polish and American source literature as well as laws, regulations and doctrines devoted to the issues of military service and improvement of soldiers' leadership competence. The use of materials of American origin is mainly due to the fact that Poland belongs to NATO, and therefore also stems from the following the model of and implementing of some foreign solutions within the Polish legal framework and organisational (training) solutions.

Empirical research was conducted in January 2019 on a sample of 100 representatives of the Z generation, i.e. people born in 1995-2010 (Cilliers 2017). The participants of the research were students of a military university, studying for a civilian degree. Questionnaires were distributed directly by the research author. The surveys were presented in the form of carbon copies. 120 surveys were distributed, of which 20 were discarded after analysis because they were not filled out completely or not in accordance with the instructions. 59% of women and 41% of men participated in the study. 25% of respondents lived in the countryside, 24% in a city with less than half a million residents, and 51% in a city with at least half a million residents. Among the respondents there were 17% who had applied for a job in the uniformed services in the past.

The research was of pilot nature and was not representative. In the prepared questionnaire, in addition to questions devoted to the issue of competence, the survey also included questions about the attributes of attractiveness of uniformed services as employers, the image of individual uniformed services in Poland, as well as features of the organisational culture of selected uniformed services in Poland as employers. The results of the research after statistical analysis using the Statistica.pl package (basic analysis of statistical data and V Cramer to verify the strength of the association between two categorical variables) are presented in this article as well as in other scientific publications. The study was devoted to the problem of image of 4 uniformed services in Poland (army, police, border guard, fire department). In this study, the results are presented only in relation to soldiers. The whole survey questionnaire contained a total of 27 questions.

During the research conducted, no distinction was made between soldiers into leaders and non-leaders because as they claim that Welyczko and Balcerzyk: „Each officer who commences his/her duty in the Polish Armed Forces should be prepared in terms of a competence-task-oriented way in order to fulfill core roles at his/her first assignment – a platoon leader” (2019: 810). Leadership competencies should be typical for all soldiers, however, not all will be required at the same level which is dictated by job position and scope of responsibilities. It is undeniable, however, that in every soldier it is worth to diagnose and develop these competences, thinking also about the career development in the military structure and the potential possibility of holding command positions in the future.

As an introduction to the conducted research, the general image of the Polish Army was verified – please see the Chart 1. This action was purposeful, because the quality of the image of the organisation corresponds to the quality of the image of the employees, and one of the crucial factors influencing the image assessment are the competencies that soldiers have which translate into the so-called brand of an employee (Wojtaszczyk 2012), and therefore in the case of soldiers under consideration.

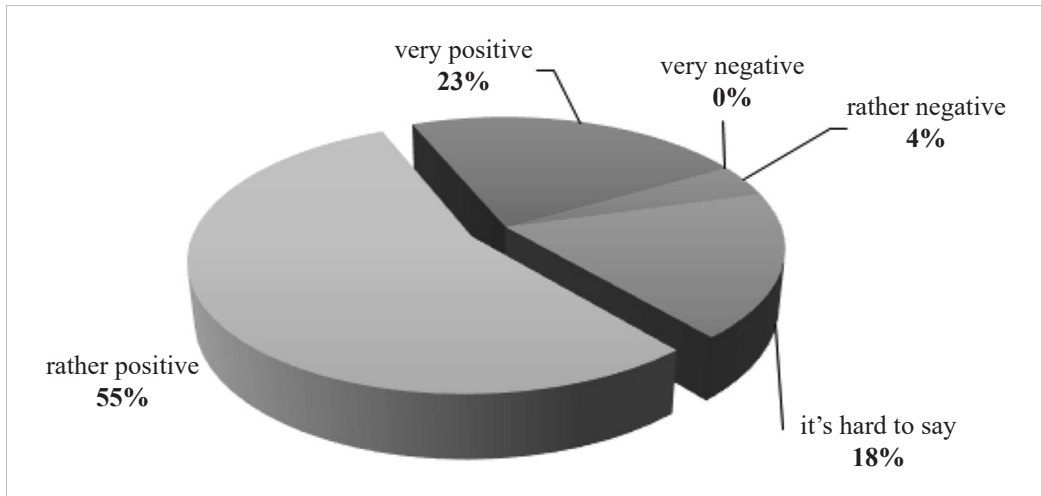


Chart 1. The image of the Polish Army

Source: own research results.

According to the conducted surveys, the image of the Polish Army is assessed positively by 78% of the respondents. 22% of the respondents were of a different opinion. Continuing the subject of the image and moving towards the image of the soldiers, the respondents were asked to indicate whether, in their opinion, the soldiers of the Polish Army are performing their service because they feel the calling. This statement was confirmed by 77% of the respondents, 20% of the respondents were not able to give an unambiguous answer to this question, while the opposite views were declared by 12% of the respondents. Therefore, it can be stated that in the opinion of representatives of the Z generation, the Polish Army enjoys a positive image, while the soldiers are perceived as serving because of the calling.

Binding the image also to the level of soldiers' competence, the respondents were also asked to evaluate the soldiers' training. The analysis of the questionnaires shows that 76% of the respondents indicated that the soldiers are well and very well trained, only 8% of the respondents were of a different opinion. Positive assessment of the competence of soldiers is of significant importance in relation to the subject matter of the research, as it allows us to conclude that the respondents should also positively assess the leadership competence of soldiers. This assumption was analysed in the survey. 83% of representatives of the generation Z, when asked whether soldiers should have leadership competences, answered yes and rather yes. These answers probably result, among other things, from the fact that in the army not every soldier performs the function of a leader, so that the leadership competences do not have to be a feature typical for all soldiers, which does not detract from the fact that these competences need to be constantly improved. Another reason for such a structure of answers may also be the views of those surveyed about the very nature of leadership competence, which by some are considered inborn, and by others to be subject to improvement.

Continuing the subject of leadership competences, the respondents were also asked to indicate which of the distinguished competences can be described as the key competences of soldiers in Poland. The analysis included 23 competences, in the group of which the competences defined by various authors as leadership competences. From a group of 23 competencies, the respondents were asked to indicate those which in their opinion can be described as crucial competencies of soldiers. The results of the research are presented in Chart 2.

The key competence, in the opinion of the largest group of respondents, is resistance to stress (92% of respondents gave such an answer). Then there was the ability to deal with crisis situations – 91% of the respondents emphasised the importance of this competence, which results, among others, from the unpredictability of the battlefield and the necessity to act in a non-standard way under the influence of stress. 89% of the respondents indicated the importance of soldiers’ courage, which corresponds to the image of the soldier – the hero, 83% stressed the importance of the ability to use working tools, and thus stressed the essence of typically technical competence (Narváez et al. 2020) (a leader should be an epistemic authority (Bocheński 1993) – which means being an expert in a given field), 82% considered the ability to make decisions to be important, 80% of the respondents indicated firmness, 77% indicated responsibility, and 73% the ability to submit oneself to higher command. It is worth noting that the ability to submit oneself to higher command should be typical not only for subordinate soldiers, but also for commanders of various levels who have to submit to their superiors – commanders, which results from the specific structure and organisational culture of the army.

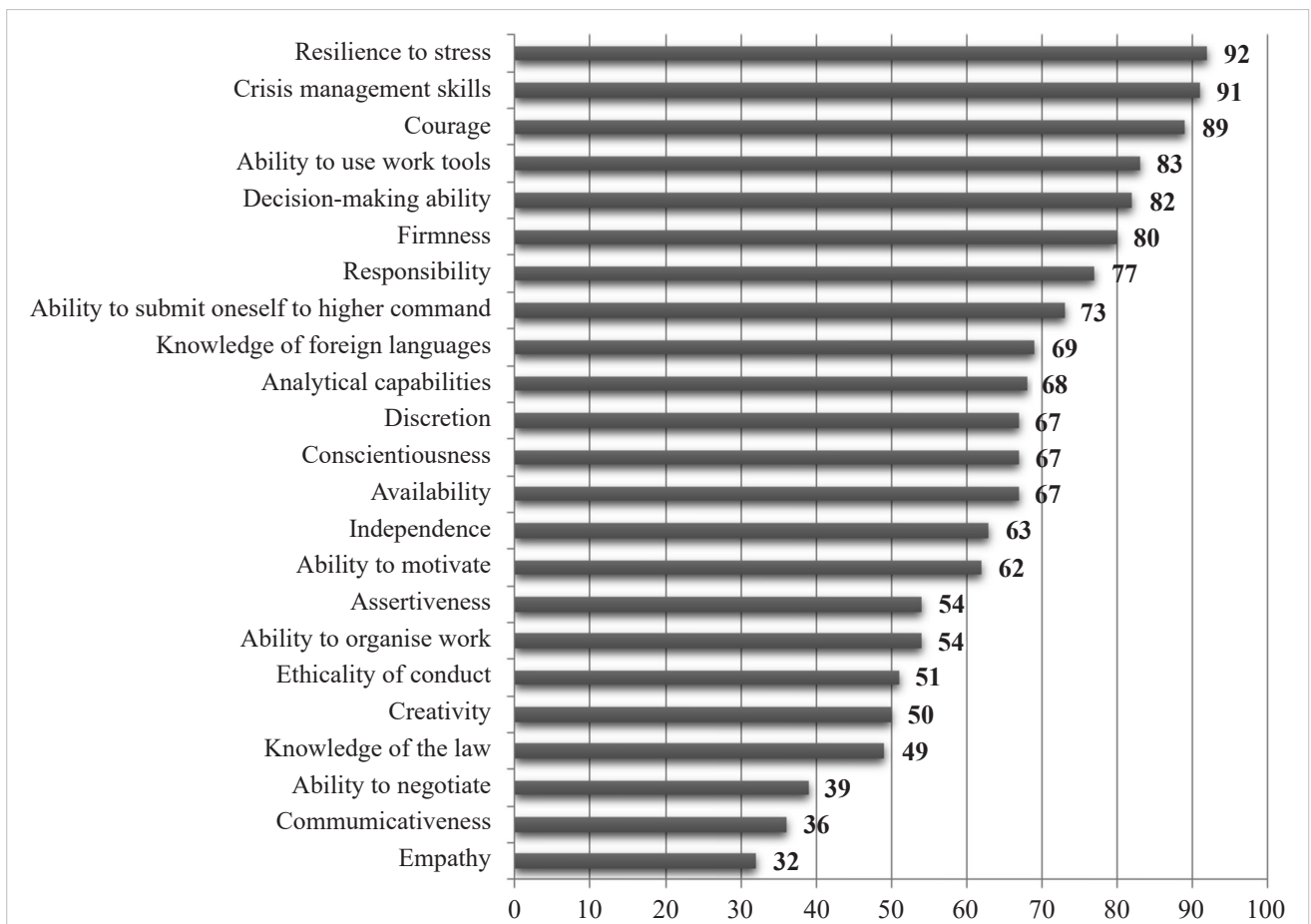


Chart 2. Key competences of professional soldiers (results in %)

Source: own research results.

Taking into account the cooperation of soldiers with troops from other countries, among others, within the framework of conducted exercises and peace missions, 69% of the respondents considered the knowledge of foreign languages as an important competence, which, especially in the case of commanders functioning in a multinational environment, is of great importance both for the efficiency of operations and image of the commander. Next, the respondents stressed the importance of such competences as: analytical skills (68%), discretion (67%), conscientiousness (67%), availability (67%) and independence (63%). Typical leadership competences such as the ability to motivate were indicated by 62% of respondents (Stănciulescu, Beldiman 2019), while assertiveness and work organisation were chosen by 54% of respondents. 51% considered ethical conduct to be the key competence (Kritz 2018), while 50% saw creativity as crucial. Less than 50% of the re-

spondents also considered such competences as: knowledge of the provisions of law (49%), ability to negotiate (39%), communicativeness (36%) (Lewińska 2015) and empathy (32%) as important.

During the course of the research, the respondents were also asked what the soldiers should be judged for. Respondents' answers are presented in Chart 3.

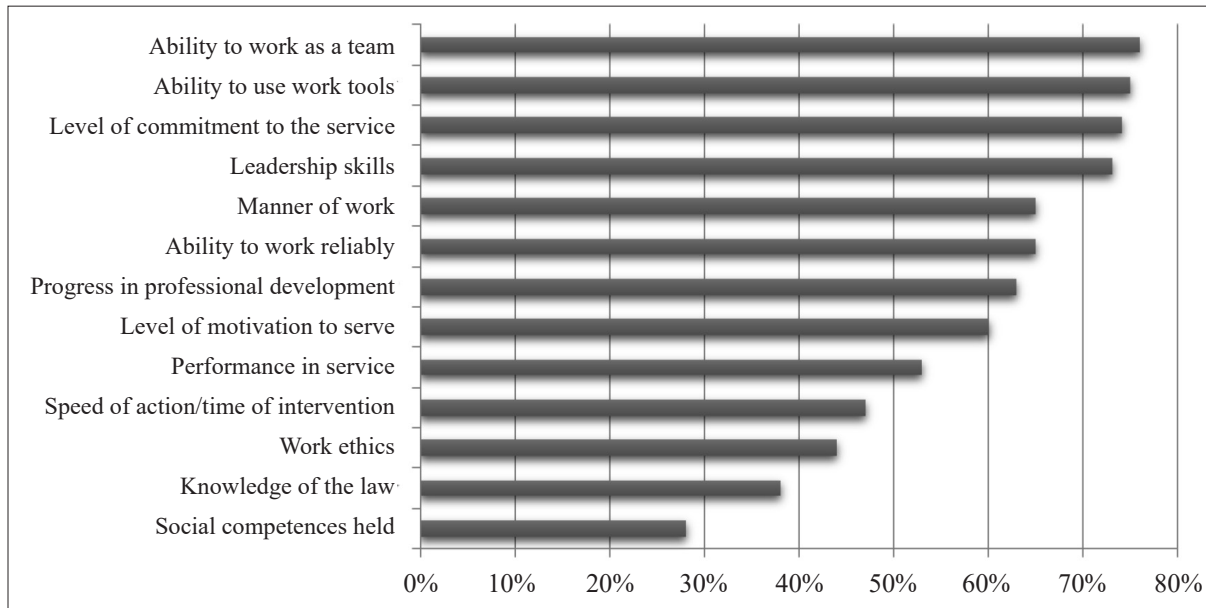


Chart 3. Criteria for evaluation of professional soldiers

Source: own research results.

Respondents to the survey indicated that the key criterion for evaluating the service of soldiers is the ability to work in a team (76%). Technical skills were assessed as the second most important (75%), level of engagement into service (74%) was third, and leadership skills (73%) were assessed only as the fourth most important criterion. It can therefore be concluded that in the opinion of the respondents, the most important competence of soldiers is the ability to cooperate in a team, but each team needs a leader – a commander, hence the group of important evaluation criteria includes leadership competence.

Taking into account the fact that representatives of the Z generation are potential candidates for service in the Polish Army, the respondents were also asked whether they took into account the possibility of pursuing their professional career in the army. A positive answer to that question was given by 25% of the respondents. In turn, 49% of the respondents were of the opinion that they have the competences necessary to perform service in uniformed formations. Interestingly, in the course of statistical analyses, a statistically significant correlation (at a low level) was detected between the declarations of competence and the gender of the respondents ($p=0.001$, V Cramera=0.37) – these were the women participating in the survey who declared that they had the competence necessary to work, among others, as soldiers.

While searching for reasons for obtaining the indicated answers of the respondents in the course of the research, both in the area of leadership competences, as well as in the aspect of self-assessment of leadership competences, it is worth noting once again the cultural conditions shaping the views of society. The author will try to explain it by referring to the C. Dweck's ideas, an eminent researcher dealing with personality problems, social psychology and human development psychology. The author in her book *MindSet: The New Psychology of Success* shows the existence of a kind of social phenomenon (Dweck 2018). According to the researcher, society as well as organisational cultures can be divided by taking into account their attitude to development opportunities, which allows to identify supporters of the so-called fixed mindset and growth mindset approach. The author explains in detail how both approaches affect human functioning, including willingness, determina-

tion of development and its effectiveness. The supporters of the fixed mindset approach believe that character, intelligence as well as abilities are constant features that determine success as a manifestation of intelligence. This also applies to leadership competence. Such an approach, when presented by leaders in an organisation, often leads to a situation where people do not take the initiative, do not want to be a leader, afraid of failure, a brutal judgement that depreciates their current position, because: „When the focus on sustainability takes over the whole company, courage and innovation have no chance of survival” (Dweck 2018: 143). This attitude to sustainability can also be seen in educational institutions and beyond, because many times, on the basis of one’s own experience, it is possible to recall a situation in which teachers, parents and peers have stressed that a person has no ability to perform certain tasks, thus unnecessarily putting effort into self-development. Such an approach results from the conviction of innate predispositions to perform a given job, which corresponds to the leadership theories, especially those showing the existence and search for so-called outstanding individuals. Unfortunately, multiplying such views has a negative impact on both self-esteem and potential opportunities for professional development. People who have met in their lives with views that they will never be leaders, probably will not take up a job in the army, or other uniformed services.

A different approach is presented in turn by supporters of the so-called growth mindset. With the focus on growth the qualities such as: knowledge, abilities, skills, or intelligence are recognised as flexible elements that can be developed, which is not without effort. In contrast to the fixed mindset approach, success is not seen as the result of effortless manifestation of human intelligence, but as the result of hard work that translates into development. According to C. Dweck, the indicated attitudes are somehow „inscribed in the fabric of the organisation, thus creating a culture of genius or culture of growth” (2018: 166). Unfortunately, in many cases with regard to professional soldiers and military environment, the dominance of fixed mindset approach can be indicated. The culture of geniuses in the army indicated by C. Dweck is identified with the figure of the soldier – the warrior – the hero. Such culture saves no place for weak, incompetent people, not showing courage, responsibility and charisma. The social stereotype of a soldier, fuelled by media messages (including reports on the implemented leadership training both at the national and allied level), can therefore be considered as the reason for obtaining such results of empirical research.

In conclusion, after analysing the results of the empirical research carried out, it is possible to indicate which leadership competences, in the opinion of representatives of the Z generation, are most important in the case of soldiers in Poland.

Conclusions

In this article the author has sought to answer the research problem formulated in the form of a question: *What are the key leadership competences of soldiers in Poland according to the representatives of generation Z?* Providing an answer to such a research problem became possible by conducting surveys among representatives of generation Z, i.e. the youngest members of society – adults continuing their education, as well as taking their first steps in the professional environment, being potential candidates for military service.

On the basis of the results of both theoretical and empirical research conducted and presented in the article, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- leadership is considered both in the category of process, relation (influence) and set of characteristics – competences;
- at the core of leadership theory there is one of the two assumptions: leadership as an innate, genetically conditioned ability, typical only of outstanding individuals (those anointed by the God) or as a set of development-related qualities whose effectiveness is conditioned by the situation;
- catalogues of leadership competences included in models/profiles differ depending on the analysed group of entities, professions, types of organisational cultures;
- soldier leadership competence models contain similar sets of competences, and an excellent way to exchange leadership experience is through national, international and allied exercises;

- leadership competences attributed to soldiers result, among other things, from the existing stereotypes fuelled by media messages, as well as from ingrained cultural, historical and generational patterns of thought;
- according to 78% of the respondents, the Polish Army enjoys a positive image, 77% of the respondents considered that Polish soldiers serve by vocation, and 75% of the respondents are of the opinion that they are well and very well trained;
- 83% of the respondents indicated that soldiers should have leadership skills, while 73% of the surveyed said that leadership skills should be the key criterion for the assessment of soldiers, right after teamwork skills, technical skills and commitment to service;
- as stated by the respondents the most important leadership competences of soldiers include resistance to stress, ability to cope with crisis situations, courage, ability to use work tools, decision-making ability, firmness, responsibility, ability to submit oneself to higher command, knowledge of foreign languages, analytical skills, discretion, conscientiousness, independence, or ability to motivate.

Based on the research, the following theoretical conclusions can be drawn in relation to existing research in the field of leadership, competence, subsequent generations in the labor market and practical recommendations:

- due to the fact that leadership competencies are seen through the prism of behavior, and the behavior of soldiers determine the image of the military as an employer, it is worthwhile in the analysis of the issue of competence of soldiers to keep in mind that the quality of the image may determine the views on key competencies that soldiers have;
- due to the positive result of correlation (albeit at a low level) between the disposition of competences and gender, it may be assumed that women are perhaps more confident in the disposition of leadership competences than men; this assumption is worth verifying, especially in relation to the increasing number of women in the army;
- the model of leadership competences, which is being built in the Polish Army, should include competences which the respondents indicated as typical for leaders;
- leadership competencies should be assessed in the professional assessment process in order to provide feedback to soldiers about their competencies and changes in their level, which would allow for a change in the approach from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset; leadership competencies should be directly indicated in the assessment sheet;
- the fact that 25% of Generation Z respondents indicated that they have leadership competences may mean that most of the respondents apply a fixed mindset in practice, which may hinder the future development of these competences; this assumption is worth analysing so that we can choose better methods for developing leadership competences;
- learning about the understanding of competencies and a list of key competencies in the opinion of representatives of generation Z allows for a better understanding of the youngest soldiers and future soldiers, including their expectations from leaders. Knowledge in this area allows for a more complete understanding of the causes of certain interpersonal relationships, including the effectiveness of leaders.

In conclusion, the research objective has been achieved and the main research problem solved.

The author would only like to mention that the research carried out for the purposes of, among others, this article was of a pilot character, which means that the results of the research cannot be applied to the whole generation Z in Poland. The author of the paper would like to conduct the research accounting for the criterion of representativeness in the current year, after the necessary changes concerning the research tool revealed in the pilot studies.

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