Alina Gil
https://orcid.org/0000-0003 3041-6640
Rafał Głębocki
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1908-9020
Urszula Nowacka
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4465-2452

Research on cross-generational collaboration. An abridged analysis in the limelight of a global change

Badania nad współpracą międzypokoleniową. Skrótowa analiza w świetle globalnej zmiany

Słowa kluczowe: globalna zmiana, kompetencje społeczne, młodzi dorośli, odpowiedzialność społeczna, włączenie społeczne, współpraca międzypokoleniowa.

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest próbą nakreślenia kierunku, w którym może podążać edukacja w związku z globalnymi zmianami technologicznymi i społecznymi – w rzeczywistości postpandemicznej. Za pomocą przekrojowego przeglądu opinii eksperckich oraz analizy wyników badań sformułowano podstawy o charakterze naukowym dla praktycznych wdrożeń edukacyjnych. Współpraca międzypokoleniowa, rozwijająca kompetencje społeczne młodych dorosłych, została wskazana jako wsparcie dla społecznie odpowiedzialnej i integracyjnej pracy pokolenia starszego.

Key words: cross-generational collaboration, global change, social inclusion, social competences, social responsibility, young adults.

Abstract: The article is an attempt to outline the frames of the need for an educational switch evoked by global technological and social changes in the post-pandemic reality. A compact cross-section review of experts' opinions has been presented to formulate a solid social and scientific basis for practical educational implementations. Cross-generational collaboration that embraces young adults' social competences improvement has been indicated as support for the older generation's socially responsible and inclusive work. It has been demonstrated through an abridged research outcomes analysis.

Introduction: Times Of Global Change And Young Adults

The first decades of the 21st century are often referred to, certainly from a societal viewpoint, as the Network Society[1]. It is characterized by a vast flow of information, massive use of IT, and, above all, the Internet. At the same time, contemporary

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1   J. van Dijk: *The Network Society,* the fourth edition, Sage Publications, London 2020.

societies experience unprecedented changes, e.g., migrations, climate-related disasters, and social and civic unrest on issues like equality. Artificial Intelligence and robotic solutions affect the labor market and threaten humans in various jobs[2]. As a result, reality might be described as liquid modernity, where changes are frequent, sudden, and unexpected. The most vivid example of such a situation is the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which globally turned upside-down the existing state of affairs in all aspects of societal life.

In the article, light has been shed on education from the times of global change perspective. Research On Cross-Generational Collaboration[3] abridged analysis has been used. The research was carried out within an international Erasmus+ project titled *Generation: Smart. Social Competences Transmedia Bridge To Cultivate A New Culture For Cross-Generational Collaboration (GSmart)*[4]. Cross-generational collaboration, defined as "the ability of different-age people to go partners,"[5] has been outstretched and focused on the *social responsibility*[6] – of the older generation, including decision-makers and educators, for the younger one.

Special attention has been brought to young adults, i.e., 18-25 year-olds – Generation Z. They belong to the group of Higher Education students. This time in human development seems to be especially important – "[…] the years from 18 to 25 are a time of stunning accomplishments and chilling risks. A roller coaster of internal and external changes, including brain changes, propels young adults from adolescence toward full maturity."[7]

According to recent surveys, Generation Z feels the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in a specific way. First, therapists warn that young adults can risk missing out on life experiences due to online alienation[8]. "Zoomers" – the term Generation Z has been nicknamed due to a popular online communicator's extensive use[9] – started to choose to stay in their virtual comfort zones, which can potentially

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[2]   RP.pl: *Tesla replaces workers with artificial intelligence. It's a "financial victory",* https://cyfrowa.rp.pl/sztuczna-inteligencja/art36613791-tesla-zastepuje-pracownikow-sztuczna-inteligencja-to-finansowe-zwyciestwo, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[3]   GSmart: *Report: Research. Cross-Generational Collaboration In The Domains Of Working Life And Every Day Life,* https://bit.ly/erasmus-gsmart-report, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[4]   GSmart – Erasmus+ Project no. 2020-1-PL01-KA204-081415. Coordinator: Jan Dlugosz University in Czestochowa. More information – https://www.generationsmart.eu/, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[5]   GSmart: *Innovative Educational Model For Cross-Generational Collaboration,* https://bit.ly/erasmus-gsmart-model, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[6]   Ibidem, p. 5, and p.12.

[7]   MIT: *Young Adult Development Project,* https://hr.mit.edu/static/worklife/youngadult/index.html, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[8]   The Guardian: *'Generation sensible' risk missing out on life experiences, therapists warn,* https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/aug/19/generation-sensible-risk-missing-out-life-experiences-therapists, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[9]   RP.pl: *More and more demanding generations are entering the labor market,* https://edukacja.rp.pl/rynek-pracy/art36577701-na-rynek-pracy-wchodza-coraz-bardziej-wymagajace-pokolenia, [Access: 21.03.2023].

be socially devastating. Secondly, migrations[10] and the pandemic affected young people most regarding job loss[11]. Last but not least, the world economy has been falling slowly, yet inevitably into crisis, which caused a considerable decrease in young adults' life satisfaction[12]. These circumstances call, possibly more than ever before, for a way to allow young adults to participate in education that would enable them to take advantage of reality – to face the issues. Therefore, the older generations should feel socially responsible for supporting Generation Z in the situation when young adults' "[...] well-being is in decline"[13].

Expert Opinions: On Educational State-Of-Affairs

At first glance, it might seem that the constant reforms applied to educational systems in different countries respond to the aspiration of getting along and embracing global social and technological change. However, a close examination of these revisions demonstrates precisely the opposite. For once, such endeavors aimed at reforming the educational systems are often merely directives dictated from above, e.g., from ministerial levels down to the schools. In many cases, the motivation for such efforts is financial, as teachers are one of the largest groups of state salary recipients in most countries.

Thus, much too often, these pursuits fail, as could have been seen in the Common Core (CC) that almost broke the U.S. schooling system. In its wake, 45 states decided to participate in the program; later, most either changed the initial status or even wanted to withdraw from the initiative. Moreover, the analysis reveals that the CC authors did not consider different levels of students' wealth vs. poverty as factors that eventually proved decisive about their educational chances and performance[14].

Any attempt to bring about a significant switch in educational systems is, to say the least, monumental. For once, the direction of such a desired change must originate from the bottom-up, hopefully with the support of society and its elected ministerial echelons. The educators, students, school managerial staff, and families should influence the actual educational processes, keeping the debate within the societal and civic framework. To add a pebble to the garden of this debate, five still valid expert voices from the last decade till now have been notified in the article.

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[10] European Student Think Tank: *Migration, Youth (Un)employment and the EU,* https://bit.ly/3PB5X3d, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[11] Schengenvisa: *Young People Among Most Affected by Loss of Jobs Due to COVID-19, Report Shows,* https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/young-people-among-most-affected-by-loss-of-jobs-due-to-covid-19-report-shows/, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[12] Tyler J. VanderWeele: *Why Young People's Mental Well-Being Is in Such Decline ... and a possible way forward,* https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/human-flourishing/202208/the-decline-well-being-in-young-adults, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[13] Ibidem.

[14] CNBC: *How Common Core Broke U.S. Schools,* https://youtu.be/U3Z9gBKuTlk, [Access: 21.03.2023].

Expert Opinion: On Globalization And Digital Communication

The importance of social and technological conditioning in connection with education was confirmed in the RAND Corporation work *Teaching and Learning 21st Century Skills: Lessons from the Learning Sciences*[15]. The authors conclude that economic globalization, vastly diverse and intersecting populations, and rapid change in the area of digital technology constitute challenging factors for contemporary societies.

For this reason, the way we think about schooling systems should be changed towards the education of skills relevant to the needs of learners. Collaborative planning, designing, and building information delivery systems under the current challenges seem to be critical elements of new educational models. A primary task is contained in the area of transforming learning into a collaborative activity while ensuring accessibility.

The authors of the above report point out that 21st-century skills should be developed primarily through quality content created with care to avoid trivialization – also by globalized digital means of communication. Changes that teaching institutions should undergo toward bottom-up-driven learning environments are equally essential.

Expert Opinion: On Need For A New Model Of Education

The content of the educational material is not unrelated to where the educational processes occur. It is further accentuated when the educational process becomes remote or hybrid, as happened in the wake of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the foreword to the book *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology: The Digital Revolution and Schooling in America. (Technology, Education – Connections)* by Allan Collins and Richard Halverson, John Seely Brown – an educator and entrepreneur, co-creator of the term *a new culture of learning*[16] – suggests that today's education still too often resembles the assumptions of the Industrial Revolution. It takes on a factory-like form, with teachers as specialists whose task is to create and provide universal and systematic truths.

This model of schooling might have worked quite well in a world without constant change, and the same skills learnt could be applied throughout life. Today, in a world of rapid change, where some skills become redundant almost as soon as they are acquired, teaching and learning need to be rethought, if not re-defined altogether. Therefore, it will not be too far-fetched to assume that if collaborative teaching and learning are introduced into the educational processes – mainly as social networking is almost universally spread – desired changes can be achieved.

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[15] RAND Corporation: *Teaching and Learning 21st Century Skills. Lessons from the Learning Sciences,* http://asiasociety.org/files/rand-0512report.pdf, [Access: 21.03.2023].

[16] R. Głębocki: *A model of education and a new culture of learning,* http://dlibra.bg.ajd.czest.pl:8080/Content/6069/3_Glebocki_Pedagogika_28.pdf, [Access: 21.03.2023].

In the reality of universal networking, the Internet offers almost unlimited access to information, allowing exploration on many levels expressed through text, images, and multimedia. As a result, an effective inquiry is more possible today than it used to be. Depending on their interests, learners can seek out niche interest groups, join these networks and take an active role in their development. It is no longer merely a search for information about facts but rather a way to build knowledge about things that also leaves room for interaction. The learner can react proactively to the exposed materials and share these reactions with others.

A. Collins and R. Halverson do suggest that teachers' tasks are changing. Nowadays, one can also learn from the feedback of others and from observing how others use the knowledge and information generated in the process. It must be noted, though, that while such practices can be found in the realm of self-study, this is not the case with current educational processes and systems.

Expert Opinion: On Learning Content And Information Access

In his book titled *Why School? How Education Must Change When Learning and Information Are Everywhere*[17], Will Richardson attempts to answer the question: how should education change in times of broad access to learning and information? The author states that the education system in its current form has remained unchanged for over 150 years. However, today's learners can take advantage of the Internet and thus move learning to a new level. This phenomenon challenges the fundamental assumptions of what is now called 'school.' In the new narrative, learning can occur anytime, anywhere, with a person of one's choice and not only with a teacher and classmates. Nowadays, learning relates more and more to issues that interest the learner rather than to the matters prescribed from above.

W. Richardson relates to the vast amount of information contemporary learners have to deal with. When we look beyond the field of education, we can see what kind of confusion this multiplicity causes in existing institutions. For example, the transfer of information was difficult in the past, at best assigned to television news or newspaper coverage. Today, information and communication are everywhere, and we can easily access them, e.g., by smartphones.

Furthermore, the business has to develop new communication channels and relations with the customer. The multitude of information and the fact that people are connected via the web can change government policy (e.g., WikiLeaks), entertainment (e.g., Netflix), or shopping (e.g., Amazon). So, why do we still think that the institution of school will be immune to these changes?

The author also pays attention to new ways of conveying education to learners. He considers the notion of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). The cost of traditional education increases, and finding a job is not always assured after

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[17]   W. Richardson: *Why School?: How Education Must Change When Learning and Information Are Everywhere*, Kindle Edition, [Access: 21.03.2023].

graduation. Thus, the model of traditional studies leading, at best, to typical middle-class life is no longer attractive to many young people. In response to the multitude of learning forms 'anytime, anywhere, by anyone,' the need arose to redefine what identifies someone as 'educated.' One of the answers may be expanding the use of MOOCs.

Expert Opinion: On Economy, (Geo)Politics, Labor Market, Culture And Convergence

In his publication called *Education and Technology. Key Issues and Debates*[18], the Australian researcher Neil Selwyn in collaboration with the Institute of Education of University College, London, chooses to consider the learning processes in a context that goes beyond micro, in the sense of the individualized learning environment of the individual learner, taking into account family and background. It is because learning processes are also influenced by macro-level conditions, such as the global economy, (geo)political factors, labor markets, and culture.

He takes up the notion of convergence, i.e., the coming together of devices that begin to perform similar functions, although technically, not originally related to each other. An example of such a tool is a smartphone (once separate devices – phone and computer), which can be used for telephoning and searching the web. In terms of content delivery, the convergence of digital technologies is the complementation and interpenetration of information. For example, extended reality (eXR), Big Data, and Artificial Intelligence convergence can enable a high degree of personalization and mobility, continuous connection in real-time, and more accessible and immersive collaboration.

In access to education, the Open-Source software stream is also significant. In this case, it is essential to note that even in collaborative environments for Open-Source software development, there are hierarchies that can hinder access to such software. Therefore, adapting this software to the present educational context and social conditions is also essential. It can be easily done through the Creative Commons International licensing and the Open Science approach.

Expert Opinion: On Future Skills In Digital World – Social Competences

Bernard Marr, one of the world's most successful social media influencers at the intersection of business and technology, in his book titled *Future Skills: The 20 Skills and Competencies Everyone Needs to Succeed in a Digital World*[19], points to critical skills development to become wide-awake for the digital future.

The author notices that the working world has changed dramatically in the last twenty years and will continue to transform even faster. He persuades to focus on

18   N. Selwyn: *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates,* Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, New York 2021.
19   B. Marr: *Future Skills: The 20 Skills and Competencies Everyone Needs to Succeed in a Digital World,* Wiley, New Jersey 2022.

improving social competences to keep pace with constant change and technological revolution. Among the most paramount, B. Marr enumerates human-centered skills – like teamwork and collaboration, and digital skills – like data literacy and cyber-threat awareness. Creativity, curiosity, and continuous learning are the same as necessary.

Research Context: Shift Towards Inclusive Young Adults' Education

The chosen scope of cited authors and their publications comprises a reasonable number of ideas about why the present young adults' education should be enhanced. The earlier-mentioned research on cross-generational collaboration can prove a practical route for such changes. The research was conducted in 2021 as part of the GSmart project implementation[20] and dealt with the necessity of overcoming cross-generational issues – for current and future needs. It consisted of three parts – cross-generational collaboration: (1) in the social environment, (2) in the work environment – opinions of managers, and (3) in the work environment and everyday life – opinions of seniors.

The research featured the so-called triangulation, i.e., quantitative and qualitative data analysis, to obtain more accurate research results. Researchers used the CAWI technique (Computer-Assisted Web Interview). The respondents were asked to complete the survey questionnaire in an electronic (online) form. The research results analysis formed the basis for designing an educational model for cross-generational collaboration[21].

In the article, three research outcomes that consider Generation Z have been cited. The first two quoted samples take the perspective of entrepreneurs and managers of different ages and groups in companies, institutions, associations, and foundations (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The third sample shows seniors' opinions. They were, e.g., the Third Age Universities participants (Fig. 3). In the former case, the research group comprised 116 participants – from all project partner countries, i.e., Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Turkey. In the latter, the surveyed group consisted of 84 respondents, also from all project countries. As the conclusions, six originally formulated educational applications have been proposed. They are based on the research outcomes and relate to the earlier-mentioned expert opinions.

Research: Outcome 1

It seems that social competences constitute a factor that can influence the educational processes to a significant extent. Hence, they seem the most appropriate to begin the selective – regarding Generation Z – and abridged research analysis. According to more than 60% of the respondents, i.e., entrepreneurs and managers, young adults should develop such competences as adaptation, communication,

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20   GSmart: *Report: Research,* op. cit.
21   R. Głębocki, A. Gil, U. Nowacka, J. Górna, M. Kowalczyk-Gnyp: *Educational Model For Cross-Generational Collaboration*, http://journals.rta.lv/index.php/ETR/article/view/6606/5340, [Access: 21.03.2023].

teamwork, cross-generational change of attitudes (attitude swap), empathy, problem-solving, and collaboration. On the other hand, the lowest number of indications concerned competences connected with ICT, creativity, and knowledge-sharing – less than 40% of the respondents' opinions. It may indicate that young adults are perceived as proficient in modern technology usage, creative, and prone to share their knowledge with others. This fact can be comprehended either as young adults' strength or their disinterest in these competences improvement regarding cross-generational collaboration in the working life domain (Fig. 1).
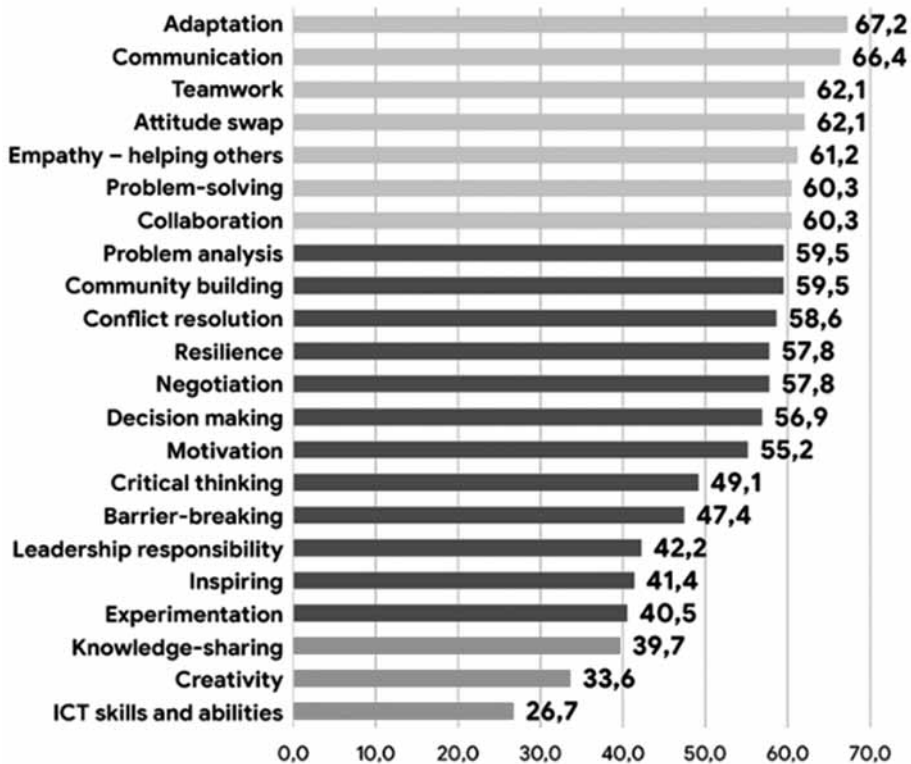

Fig. 1. Social competences which should be developed to improve cross-generational collaboration in the workplace in respondents' opinion – Generation Z (data in %); N=116

Source: GSmart: *Report: Research.*

Research: Outcome 2

All researched entrepreneurs and managers indicated insufficient knowledge and experience of people from Generation Z. At the same time, more than 87% of respondents recognized that young adults expect to share profits earned with their participation, value flexible working hours, remote-hybrid work, break standards and traditions, and have higher creativity. Contrary to common belief, nearly half of the

respondents disagree with the statement that Generation Z seeks a change or new experience and is open and direct. The respondents' identification of Generation Z competence potential demonstrates the direction to follow in creating a model for cross-generational collaboration (Fig. 2).
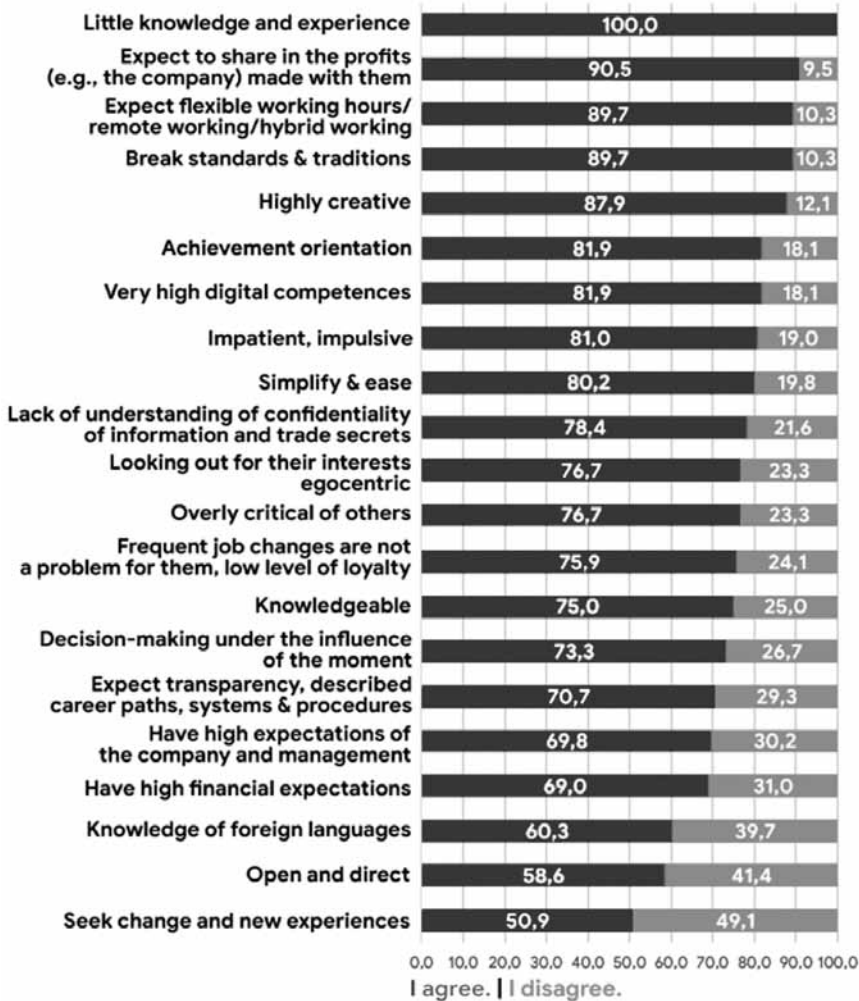

	I agree	I disagree
Little knowledge and experience	100,0	
Expect to share in the profits (e.g., the company) made with them	90,5	9,5
Expect flexible working hours/ remote working/hybrid working	89,7	10,3
Break standards & traditions	89,7	10,3
Highly creative	87,9	12,1
Achievement orientation	81,9	18,1
Very high digital competences	81,9	18,1
Impatient, impulsive	81,0	19,0
Simplify & ease	80,2	19,8
Lack of understanding of confidentiality of information and trade secrets	78,4	21,6
Looking out for their interests egocentric	76,7	23,3
Overly critical of others	76,7	23,3
Frequent job changes are not a problem for them, low level of loyalty	75,9	24,1
Knowledgeable	75,0	25,0
Decision-making under the influence of the moment	73,3	26,7
Expect transparency, described career paths, systems & procedures	70,7	29,3
Have high expectations of the company and management	69,8	30,2
Have high financial expectations	69,0	31,0
Knowledge of foreign languages	60,3	39,7
Open and direct	58,6	41,4
Seek change and new experiences	50,9	49,1

0,0 10,0 20,0 30,0 40,0 50,0 60,0 70,0 80,0 90,0 100,0
I agree. I disagree.

Fig. 2. Characteristics of Generation Z in the workplace in the respondents' opinion (data in %); N=116
Source: GSmart: *Report: Research*.

Research: Outcome 3

In the survey's part regarding the domain of everyday life, the respondents – people aged 60 and above, e.g., the Third Age University participants – were asked to identify the characteristics of each generation. From a list of 49 features, the Top 10 most frequently identified ones have been displayed. The diagram shows the

results concerning Generation Z. It is worth noticing that both earlier-mentioned entrepreneurs and managers and people of 60 years plus claim that Generation Z has robust digital competences. Slightly fewer respondents, but still above 70%, believe that Generation Z features impatience, impulsiveness, and a distance from reality. Their knowledge and experience are the fields to be worked on. Thus, the research confirms that young adults and seniors have something to offer each other and can complement each other's competence gaps (Fig. 3).
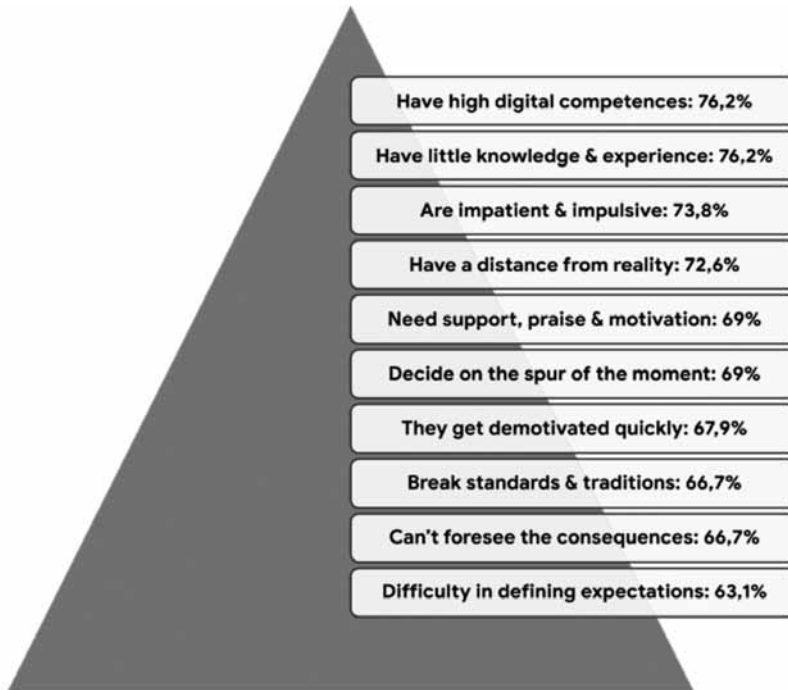

Fig. 3. Top 10 characteristics of Generation Z (data in %); N=84

Source: GSmart: *Report: Research.*

Research Conclusions: Educators' Possible Actions

Among various actions – depending on needs, resources, and creativity – in their socially responsible and inclusive work with young adults, educators may:
- Facilitate events fostering Generation Z to experience the community spirit they were deprived of during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Focus on improving the social competences that young adults still lack, like openness to different viewpoints, motivation boost, patience, critical thinking, problem analysis, and decision-making.
- Implement high-quality teaching processes and content to provide young adults with access to high-quality learning opportunities. It can be achieved through

innovative pedagogy solutions[22] and mental horizons expansion concerning, for instance, contemporary economy – e.g., COVID-19 supply chain disruption[23], (geo)politics[24], and labor market challenges[25].

- Inspire young adults to view their future perspectives in the globalized world to support them in consequences foreseeing and expectations defining.
- Operate on young adults' ICT high competences and creativity by cross-generational collaboration inclusive actions. For example, Generation Z collaborates with others on how to communicate in the digitally convergent world.
- Uplift young adults' knowledge of foreign languages and cross-culture openness, e.g., by encouraging participation in Erasmus+ projects and mobilities.

Summary: Follow You – Follow Me[26]

In the article, a possible alternation in the young adults' education approach has been proposed. Due to profound social and technological changes, now more than ever, the older generation should feel obliged to take responsibility for the younger ones. Quoted research outcomes and the specific cross-generational collaboration model may support the actions undertaken. The young adults' post-pandemic inclusion may be triggered at the level of cross-generational collaboration and social competences improvement. As for working and everyday life domains, decision-makers, educators and families can build a socially responsible system where Generation Z lives, works, plays, and participates in the educational processes.

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dr hab. Alina Gil
Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie
dr Rafał Głębocki
Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie
dr Urszula Nowacka
Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie