Abstract
Studies developed by management practitioners and theoreticians suggest a growing interest in organizational knowledge (OK) and a broadening understanding of the term. Currently, the concept encompasses not only a set of codified data or information but also knowledge accumulated in the brains of employees. This knowledge poses a challenge for the processes of its positioning, processing and dissemination. This mainly concerns so-called tacit knowledge, i.e. hidden knowledge of which employees themselves may not even be aware. The method of processing such OK is significantly linked to subjective perception of employees, which, in turn, is currently an important element of employer branding (EB) communication. The purpose of this study is to analyze, on the basis of a research, the links between the approach to OK represented by the examined organizations and their EB activities in the context of transformations associated with the youngest employees of the generation Z entering the labor market. The research was conducted in 2019 among organizations ranked as the TOP 500 in Poland. The TOP 500 list includes the organizations that had the best market and financial performance in 2018 according to the methodology used by the Rzeczpospolita newspaper. The analyses use the STATISTICA program. The following tests were used: the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA on ranks, the Mann-Whitney test, the median test and the Pearson’s chi-square test. The strength of correlations between the variables was evaluated by means of the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. The results of the research suggest that the leading market organizations still see OK in the traditional way, as a resource that should be protected both by individuals and by the organization. Consequently, the resource is not fully used or shared between employees what affect company’s image.

Keywords: employer branding, organizational knowledge, generation Z

JEL Classification: M12; M31; M51

1. Introduction
Discussion on the importance of organizational knowledge in the area of management has continued for a number of decades, and its popularization may be attributed to the publications of Nonaka et al. (1995; 2006; 2007, 2009). What is innovative about them is that they highlight the role of so-called “silent knowledge” located in the brains of employees. Such approach in a way complements the so far dominant, also in Poland, conviction in the light of which organizations acquire knowledge mainly from the environment through the transfer and processing of data, information, technologies, patents or licenses (Nielsen, 2006). What is worth noting about deliberations on OK is the fact that knowledge and its acquisition may be treated both as the attribute of an organization and the attribute of an individual - employee. Currently, in an era of managing large data resources, knowledge management may be reduced to the availability of data or to technological capacities to process data (Hanisch et al., 2009). In the light of this approach, the terms: data, information, knowledge are sometimes connected and used interchangeably. The represented attitude dehumanizes knowledge, even though it is
a complex resource and its utilization is conditioned by the individual’s ability to convert it, i.e. to receive it, process it and use it in action. Knowledge is a broader and deeper term and it develops as a result of the experience of practical application of information. It is linked with the cognitive and emotional sphere of the individual who has knowledge (Davenport & Prusak 2000, pp 2-5). If this is how we understand knowledge, then we must also assume that the term OK does not literally mean that an organization creates knowledge or owns knowledge (we do not discuss here the issue of intellectual property associated with patents, licenses or other legal marks for intellectual property). These are the people - the employees who create the organization who carry and administers knowledge. This viewpoint requires subjective treatment of employees and shifts the attention of organization managers, associated with knowledge, towards Human Resource Management (HRM) issues. In this study, the author discusses whether OK is something that distinguishes an employer and increases his attractiveness in the labor market. In the literature, this issue is called Employer Branding (EB). It is emphasized to be of key importance both for attracting and keeping an employee. In the last decade, also in Poland, the EB has been broadly discussed by management practitioners as a result of deep transformations taking place in the market. First of all, Poland, the same as other developed countries, experiences demo-graphic problems and the related generation gap in many areas of the economy. Secondly, the new generation of employees, so-called generation Z, is entering the labor market. They grew up in the era of the Internet and the ubiquitous modern technologies and their attitude to knowledge and information is different than that of the previous generations.

The purpose of this study is to analyze, on the basis of a research, the links between the approach to OK represented by the examined organizations and their employer branding activities. The first part of the study discusses the theoretical links between the abovementioned areas, the second part presents selected results of the research conducted in this filed, while the third part discusses the results in the context of transformations associated with the youngest employees of the generation Z entering the labor market as well. This study compares selected results of the research conducted in 2019 among TOP500 Polish organizations and information from EB reports concerning the acquisition and keeping of employees.

2. OK as a factor that increases employer attractiveness

OK is understood as accumulation of basic knowledge, know-how and social skills (Słocińska, 2016). Thus, it is a combination of elements acquired in the process of learning and socialization and a result of the participation of individuals in various networks of relationships that give general or specialist knowledge. In this study, the author’s attention focuses on the problem of explicit and implicit knowledge. The major problem with implicit knowledge is its verbalization. It needs to be verbalized in order to be transmitted and transformed into the implicit knowledge of the recipient/listener. The process is also called “the spiral of knowledge” (Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995). In this process, individual knowledge expands by being shared with others - this is how individual knowledge transforms into OK. An organization does not generate knowledge on its own, without the individual initiative of the respective employees and mutual group relations. Problems associated with the transmission of internal knowledge in an organization are closely linked with the HRM, and in particular, which has been important in the last few years, with employee turnover (Soliman & Spooner, 2000). It concerns attracting and keeping not only employees who have specific knowledge resources but also employees who are able to learn, multiply and disseminate knowledge. For this, an employee must not only have specific skills but also, more importantly, social
competencies. If such an employee leaves, the organization loses the knowledge that is contained in their brain or body as well as a network of personal and professional relations that are sometimes hard to replace (McDermott, 1999, p. 105).

So far, Polish organizations, having a comfortable position on the labor market, focused mainly on preventing “knowledge leakage” by applying repressive HRM tools. These measures were not only inefficient but also harmful from the perspective of the knowledge management concept. Knowledge was perceived as a resource that gave individual competitive advantage to an employee (Słocińska, 2016). Consequently, employees did not want to share knowledge.

In the last two decades, the position of employees has been growing in many countries. Employers look for new HR tools to attract and keep new employees. One of such tools is the EB, which means various measures undertaken by organizations in order to create a positive employer brand. Such activities may be undertaken both within and outside an organization. The EB term was introduced to scholarly literature by Ambler and Barrow (1996). They defined the EB as a set of functional, economic and psychological advantages of working for and identifying with a specific employer. Many researchers (Barrow & Mosley, 2006, p. xvi; Berthon et al., 2005, Mosley 2007) also highlight a connection between the EB and internal marketing, internal branding and organizational brand (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Regardless of EB direction, an important element of such activities is the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), which is a description of the properties and attractiveness of jobs offered by a given employer. OK, which is a unique, typical of a specific employer, cumulative set of organizational and technical experiences, more and more often becomes an element of that proposition. Until recently, given the dominant employer market and rather high unemployment, it was quite easy to hire an employee at a relatively low cost in Poland. Today, the labor market is different - it is more difficult for an organization to acquire the right employee and recruitment costs are higher.

An analysis of 2012-2020 reports made by the HRM Institute (http://www.hrminstitute.pl/raport-employer-branding/) shows a growing importance of the EB in the policies of Polish enterprises. According to Eurostat data (https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/eurostat-polska-wciaz-w-czolowce-krajow-z-najnizszym-bezrobociem), the unemployment rate in Poland by the end of 2019 was 3.3%, which meant that employers were forced to fight to win the candidate’s attention. Although early HRM Institute reports showed that employers were quite ambivalent about the EB, now, most of them are aware that it is not an optional measure but a must in our times. According to the HRM Institute Reports concerning EVP, employers think that the most important in the process of attracting valuable candidates are: atmosphere at the company, salary and employee benefit system, work-life balance (WLB) measures, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) measures and possibilities for development.

There are several generations of employees on the labor market, although division into generations is of rather sociological nature. Currently, on the labor market, there are representatives of the Baby Boomers generation, the generations X and Y and the youngest generation Z. The Generation Z, although not very numerous on the labor market yet, already poses a special challenge for the HRM. There are not many reports concerning this generation (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017), but the ones that are available suggest that the attitudes and behaviors of members of the Generation Z are different than other generations (Bejtkovský, 2016; Bencsik, et al. 2016; Dolot, 2018, Lazanyi, & Bilan, 2017). The generation Z is usually defined as persons born after 1995, although for some researchers, this generation starts with people born in 1990, while for others - in 2000 or later (Robak, 2017). It should also be noted
that, at the time when this generation is entering the labor market, work as such is undergoing major transformations. They are technical and technological changes and changes in the organization of the time and place of work (work from home, conditions and forms of employment, wellbeing or WLB). These transformations will probably progress as a result of the global COVID 19 experience.

3. Data and Methods

The survey results presented in this paper come from the nationwide quantitative survey of Polish companies under the project “New tendencies in HR management in large enterprises” carried out in 2019 with the participation of a specialist external partner: MRW Market Research World. The goal of the survey was to identify the social and psychological factors which support personnel development in organizations as well as to identify the non-financial values in organizations and processes of human capital and trust management in organizations.

The survey was made with the use of quantitative methods and mixed techniques: CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) and CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). The combination of these two methods served to increase the response data and it is a commonly used approach. The survey started with CATI and in the case of refusal or interruption, the alternative way was suggested, i.e. to fill in/finish the interview on a dedicated Web platform. Alongside CATI, invitations to participate in the survey were distributed electronically and they allowed respondents to choose the method (online or by phone).

The survey operator was the database of the 500 largest companies in Poland (according to the 2018 ranking by the Rzeczpospolita portal). Random sampling was used. In the event of refusal to participate in the project, another entity was randomly selected. As a result, the survey of a representative sample was carried out according to the following parameters: general population = 500, error of estimation = 6%, confidence interval = 95%.

The survey tool was a standardized questionnaire containing closed questions. The form of the questions in the questionnaire included both questions and statements. Both contained answers in the Likert scale (the Likert scaling technique) that allowed to specify the relative intensity of various answers (Joshi, et al. 2015). The questions used predefined variants of the answers. The form of the predefined as specified conditions enables a reliable and quick analysis of the collected material as well as ensures its homogeneity and easy processing. The closed questions were constructed in such a way as to ensure their theoretical, logical and content-related correctness. The paper uses a fragment of the research concerning the EB and level of organizational climate in the examined enterprises. The demographic and EB questions are original and they were formulated by the members of the research team of the Department of Applied Sociology and Human Resource Management of the Faculty of Management of the Częstochowa University of Technology, whereas the questions concerning the OK were developed on the basis of a publication by Krot and Lewicka (2016).

The following research problem was formulated: are there links between the approach to organizational knowledge represented by the examined organizations and their employer branding activities? Any dependencies reported will be analyzed in the context of the expectations of employees of the generation Z from their employers.

The research covered 179 companies, of which 41.8% were manufacturing companies, 14.5% were manufacturing and service providing companies, 27.4% - service providing companies, 8.4% - trading companies and 7.8% - manufacturing and trading companies. Most of the responding organizations were in the revenue group ranging from 51 to 200 million PLN.
(68.1%), the second most numerous group were organizations with revenue ranging from 5 to 50 million PLN (17.9%), and the least numerous group were organizations with income exceeding 200 million PLN (14%). In terms of the number of employees, most of the responding organizations employed 201 to 500 persons (73.18%) and the rest were organization employing more than 500 persons (26.82%).

The following areas were identified as EB proposition components: training and development, ethics and CSR, WLB, atmosphere at work (social working environment), wages and employee benefits. The indicators of organizational knowledge were: prosumer activities, free access to knowledge and information, cooperation between respective departments of an organization, encouraging employees to take on challenges, expecting employees to improve their skills, accepting employee ideas, accepting the risk associated with the use of knowledge, employees helping each other solve problems, expecting employees to be creative, appreciating employee engagement in the development of new ideas and manager’s support in the search for innovative solutions.

4. Results

The significance of difference in the abovementioned EB indicators was assessed using the STATISTICA program, the Pearson’s Chi^2 test, the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA on ranks test and the median test. The significance of differences was tested in order to verify the statistical hypotheses, i.e. to reject the null hypothesis of lack of differences between indicators regarding the independent variables, such as: the type of activity of an organization, the size of an organization and the annual revenue of an organization.

It was possible to assume alternative hypotheses of the existence of differences between indicators with respect to the type of activity of an organization. The size of an organization and the volume of annual revenue did not differentiate the responses concerning the EB on the level p <0.05 (which, in social sciences, is considered to be the statistically significant level). The type of activity is a differentiating factor with respect to the importance of prosumer programmes in constructing the EB proposition for candidates (Pearson’s Chi^2 27.71549; df=16, p=.03418). An analysis of contingency tables revealed that production companies are the most negative about prosumer programmes, whereas service companies are the most positive about them.

The same as in the case of EB indicators, an attempt was made to determine how the OK indicators differ depending on the type of activity, the volume of annual revenue and the size of the organization. Here, the same statistics and statistical verification process were used as in the case of EB indicators. The analysis showed that the size of the organization did not cause statistically significant differences in responses concerning selected indicators. Concerning the volume of annual revenue, it was determined that the value of the Kruskal-Wallis test: H(2, N= 179)=12.13484 and the level of test probability p =.0023 as well as the median test (Chi-square= 10.46024 df = 2 p =.0054) make it possible to reject the null hypothesis and assume the alternative hypothesis of a de-pendency between the revenue volume and the declared acceptance of employee ideas. An analysis of contingency tables showed that organizations with the lowest and the highest indicators of annual revenue represented such approach. It was also determined that the type of activity of the examined companies affected their expectations of creativity and innovative thinking from employees (Pearson’s Chi^2= 42.36013, df=24, p=.01176). An analysis of contingency tables showed that such expectations were particularly typical of production organizations.
The next step in the analysis of data obtained in the research was to correlate EB indicators and OK indicators. This was done using the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient (R).

When analysing Spearman’s rank correlations, as many as four dependencies between the indicator of encouraging employees to take on challenges and the EB indicators were noted. The first dependency concerns the link between the abovementioned indicator of OK and activities undertaken by an organization for the sake of the local community (R=0.157026, p=0.035801). This dependency is somewhat unusual. It seems that organizations make a direct link between activities for the sake of the local community and the treatment of employees, who are probably recruited from the organization’s most immediate surroundings. Thus, treating employees subjectively and encouraging them to take on challenges that may be beneficial for the organization is understood as fulfilling the mission of helping the local community. The other three regularities associated with the abovementioned indicator of organizational knowledge are closely linked with the social environment of work. Dependencies were reported between encouraging employees to take on challenges and promoting the caring-partnership style of management (R=0.157222, p=0.035568); accentuating the social competencies of managers (R=0.163799; p=0.028456) and recognizing healthy atmosphere at work to be an important element of the emotional EB communication (R=0.176473; p=0.018124). This group of dependencies suggests that organizations that place an emphasis of the social environment of work are aware of its impact both in terms of image and the effectiveness of employees. Another reported dependency is the relationship between creating optimum conditions for cooperation between departments and accentuating the WLB as one of the key difficulties in constructing the EB proposition (R=0.183337, p=0.014027).

This relationship highlights the conflict that arises when trying to satisfy two seemingly contrary interests: on the one hand, optimizing the organization’s operations and streamlining organizational processes as much as possible and, on the other hand, meeting the need for balance between the employee’s professional and personal life. Optimization of the organizational process requires employees to be available and engaged and sometimes to devote their own needs for the sake of the organization. This affects the performance of social roles associated with motherhood, fatherhood, caring for dependents and involves temporary separation from the family or even inability to pursue one’s passions or interests or to manage one’s own time.

5. Discussion

An analysis of the research results and their comparison to reports concerning the EB and functioning of the generation Z in the labor market led to some observations and conclusions. The first concern the analysis of the functioning of the EB area and organizational knowledge in the examined organizations. Assuming that in 2019, those organizations, according to the methodology of the Polish economic and legal journal Rzeczpospolita, were the leaders of the Polish market in 2018, they should be expected to follow the latest trends in managing various areas of enterprises. It should also be noted that in 2019, when the research was conducted, economic performance in Poland was very good and the unemployment rate was the lowest since 1989. For economically booming enterprises, it meant serious problems with finding and keeping employees. This problem was reported in every sphere of the economy. Unfortunately, the opinions expressed by representatives of the examined organizations present a picture of companies enjoying a strong market position which had no problems with recruiting employees or did not think it important to increase the attractiveness of their own image as an employer. The elements that attracted the most attention of EB specialists in the examined organizations were salaries and social benefits, training and development, work ethics and the
atmosphere of work - at the same time, those areas were the most problematic in the process of building the EB campaign. As far as the salaries are concerned, this factor was the most frequent reason for employee quitting. This could be a sign of an outdated perception of the EB, influenced by the past situation in the labor market, when the financial elements of the EVP constituted the basic factor in selecting an employer. Currently, however, other factors are also taken into consideration when choosing the place of work. Modern solutions presented by organizations in EB reports focus on such factors as onboarding activities (particularly important for young employees), CSR, ethics, building links with the local community, employee volunteering and charity, WLB and prosumer programs. In most cases, the organizations were ambivalent about those indicators. Somewhat better was the attitude of the examined employers to the social environment of work relationships with the superior, healthy atmosphere of work, proper social competencies of the managers. It seems that a strong market and economic positions releases an organization from the obligation to attract an employee and offer unique and specific benefits corresponding to his or her contemporary sensitivity to social aspects.

In terms of the OK indicators, it was observed that most organizations had a moderately positive attitude to the discussed issues. However, their declarations were somewhat inconsistent. Companies that claimed to offer open access to knowledge and promote proactive attitude to knowledge and creativity among employees at the same time did not fully support independent thinking or innovation. It seems that the examined organizations have a group of specialists whose knowledge is managed in an individual way, whereas workers are not believed to individually represent a specific knowledge potential that, if developed, could increase the level of OK.

The attempt to link the two research areas did not yield the expected results. This, however, is also important information for the researcher. The only significant dependency observed was the impact of the social environment of work on the employees’ proactive attitude to using knowledge. This is a manifestation of the qualitative transformations in the workplace that increase the crucial role of social elements of work. Meanwhile, the general observation on the lack of dependencies between the analyzed areas leads to the conclusion that most of the examined organizations do not formulate or implement strategies reflecting the latest trends, either in the EB area or in the organizational knowledge management area. This is surprising, given the fact that they are leading organizations on the Polish markets and could be expected to establish new practical management solutions reflecting the social trends. Apparently, in the processes of attracting young candidates, companies focus mainly on the financial proposition, while knowledge and the possibilities of its development, as an element of the EB communication, are used more in connection with the existing employees. In a situation where organizations have to fight for employees, the fact that they do not use this additional advantage that could prove the uniqueness of their proposition may be considered as a loss they suffer.

6. Conclusion

Deliberations on the treatment of OK as a vital element of the EB communication were based on the assumption that leading Polish organizations are aware of the latest trends in those areas. Many organizations use OK as a distinguishing feature that could affect the candidate’s potential evaluation of it as an employer. The research concerned a specific economic period, which was very good both for employees and for employers. The global COVID 19 epidemics in 2020 will probably significantly change the distribution of forces in the labor market and in economic markets. The unemployment rates are already growing both in Poland and across the world. However, according to the forecasts prepared by specialists concerning the EB after
COVID 19 (www.hrminstitute.pl/raporty) in the next 10 years, i.e. until 2030, Poland will acutely feel a shortage of laborers due to the demographic situation (outflow of workers from the East). Before the pandemics, one of the employers’ major concerns was lack of an adequate number of job candidates. The way of layoffs that we are observing now could change this, but it seems the most probable that candidates looking for employment will have to retrain. The observed reduction of personnel also means outflow of OK, and it is not so obvious that this knowledge will ever return to organizations. Knowledge might undergo revaluation. On the one hand, employees with specialist knowledge will be highly desirable but, on the other hand, employees with basic technical knowledge and comprehensive skills will also be needed. Employees with professional experience who could give practical training to new workers will become valuable. However, the question is whether employees from the generation Z will be ready for such comprehensive learning. Undoubtedly, research in the analyzed areas conducted during the pandemic may yield new and surprising results.

References


