

AGE DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

The paper deals with the topic of age diversity in the workplace. The main goal of the research is to find out the possibilities for supporting four generations working together. The lengths of active career prolong due to the postponed retirement age. Four generations of employees are working together. Each generation has a different approach to work, a different motivation and different expectations of the employer. Companies must adapt their HR processes to the expectations of all the generations. The research among 240 respondents brings an overview of motivational methods using for the four different generations, Z, Y, X and Baby Boomers. The hypothesis that the youngest and oldest generations are more discriminated was confirmed partly. The differences in offering flexible approaches to the employees by big, middle and small enterprises were not found.

Key words: age management, generations Z, Y, X, Baby Boomers, flexible working approach

JEL Code: J24, L31, M12

Introduction

The ageing of the population, the extension of the retirement age and the associated employment of different age groups bring the need for a change in approach to work. Representatives of four generations meet in organisations. It puts increased demands on management, teamwork and setting up a culture of enterprise. The biggest issue that has come to the fore is the ageing of the workforce and the deepening age diversity. It is important to understand the perception of age by both employers and employees. There are prejudices about established stereotypes (Fisher, Truxillo, Finkelstein, Wallace, 2017). Age-related discrimination occurs in some organisations, especially in the youngest and oldest generations. This fact can then lead to the distinction and reduction of the performance of discriminated workers. Age discrimination at work was positive and significantly correlated with job stress and sick job leave, which shows its relationships with worse well-being and perceived health (Carral, Alcover, 2019).

1 Age management

From sociological conception, a group of populations born within a specific time frame are understood by a generation, bounded by major events (e.g. wars), technologies (e.g. the Internet), social conditions (e.g. the political system) or other essential factors, and thus it is also influenced. Hole, Zhong and Schwartz (2010) stated in their global view of generations that the Czech Republic is divided into Babyboomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1982) and Generation Y (1983-2000) according to years. Generation Z is represented by people born after 2000. Economically active, however, are only Babyboomers, Generation X, Generation Y and part of Generation Z that is now entering the labour market. The workforce distribution is as follows – 35% of Generation Y, 35% generation X, 24% of Generation Z and 6% Babyboomers (ManpowerGroup, 2016). Different generations differ in motivation to work and expectations from employer and job. Communication and teamwork play an important role in intergenerational cooperation, which can create several obstacles. In some cases, there may be age discrimination in organisations. The principles of Age management are implemented to reduce the occurrence of discriminatory behaviour.

Age management defined Fuertes, Egdell and McQuaid (2013), who propose measures that combat age barriers while also promoting age diversity. Among them are flexibility, lifelong learning, career planning, health care and much more. In SHRM's 2015 Workplace Forecast the most significant percentage of HR executives (40 per cent) cited flexible work arrangements as the most effective strategy for attracting and retaining talented workers of any age in the next ten years. Wellness programs are increasingly critical to retaining mature workers (Paullin, 2004). Most of the U.S. companies provide wellness program for their employees (SHRM, 2015).

The definition of older workers is usually used for employees age 55 and older. According to the SHRM survey (2015), there were defined the three strengths of older employees. There are: More experiences, more professionalism, more loyalty. On the other hand, the three main disadvantages are less flexibility, health difficulties and tiredness. Despite these facts, the older employees are very valid members of the teams. Especially in the case of employees, that regularly increased their knowledge and skills by training and development.

Most of the managers are aware of the fact altering population, but not many of them implemented strategies according to the change (Paullin, 2004).

With the employment of older workers can be connected many bias (AGE UK, 2018): 'Older workers are just waiting to retire', 'They will not necessarily work as hard', 'They will not want to learn new skills at their age' or, 'They will not stay as long.' All of those are entirely wrong. The attitude to work depends on each employee. It is a mistake to generalise these statements for all employees. Also, other misconceptions are used against the employment of older workers: that younger workers cost less; that younger workers are likely to be more productive; that younger workers will provide the employer with more years of work, and that older people need to leave work to 'make way' for younger people. As it was mentioned above, these stereotypes do not play a role for every older employee. The fact is that the population is being older and we have to face this situation.

According to Cortijo, McGinnis and Ciamara (2018), the population around the globe is ageing, and the organisations must solve this fact. They suggested programme for corporations that can solve the problem. The programme includes different training to different age groups in the corporation, avoid discrimination in all HR processes, especially in recruitment and career development, offer flexible working arrangements and support the well-being, help with a gradual transition to retirement. Other studies on this subject most agree on these principles.

The proposed age management measures aim to maintain the ability and willingness of workers to continue to work even at an older age. In the Czech Republic, Urbancova and Fejfarova (2017) researched the implementation of age management in organisations. The relationship between age management levels and business size and the application of age management and the number of employees over 50 years of age in the organisation was examined. Five hundred forty-nine organisations took part in the research, with respondents to managerial positions completing a questionnaire for their organisation. The results found that 31.3% of organisations employ only 5% of employees over the age of 50. By contrast, only 7.3% of organisations have more than 41% of employees over the age of 50, most of whom are farms. The results suggest that age management is introduced in only 161 organisations (29.3%). 70% of organisations have not implemented any age management initiatives at all. This was most often justified by the fact that age management in the organisation is not considered important, the organisation does not have suitable employees (experts) to implement initiatives in the field of age management or do not have the time and necessary

funds. 28.1% of respondents said that the organisation's culture does not support age management. By contrast, 23.2% of organisations said they had not yet implemented any age management concept but intend to do so in the next five years because they are aware of their need in the future (Urbancova, Fejfarova, 2017).

2 Research methodology

The research was carried out in 2019 in quantitative form using a questionnaire survey. As a collection method, sharing through direct links to the questionnaire and sharing on social networks Facebook and LinkedIn. The total number of questionnaires answered was 240. The survey was opened and not filled out by 239 respondents, i.e. only 50% of people with a link filled out. No questionnaire remained unfinished.

The main objective of the research was to determine whether businesses support age diversity. The partial question was to determine the level of discrimination overall and by age group. The hypothesis was formulated as follows: The youngest and oldest categories of employees will be more discriminated.

3 Findings and discussion

The structure of respondents was 55% female and 45% male. Respondents were divided by age into four categories that roughly correspond to generations. I am aware that this sample is not representative enough. However, this survey serves as a probe into this issue.

Table Nr. 1 shows the structure of respondents.

Table 1: respondents according to the age groups

less than 22	1	1%
22 - 34	144	60%
35 - 44	48	19%
45 - 55	38	16%
55 and more	9	4%
Total	240	100%

Source: own research

The questionnaire involved questions regarding age management, diversity management, diversity, age programs for employees and benefits. The results brought answers to the research questions.

The data shows that 76% of respondents agree with the statement that the organisation they are working for supports the age diversity.

Table Nr. 2: The organisation supports the age diversity

Strongly agree	29%
Agree	47%
Disagree	24%
Strongly disagree	0%

Source: own research

The statistical comparison of the age groups of respondents does not show any significant correlation by comparison of the positive and negative answers. The distribution of the definite answers among the age groups is in the table Nr. 3.

Table Nr. 3: The organisation supports the age diversity

Age group	Percentage of „agree“
22 - 34	62%
35 - 44	76%
45 - 55	78%
55 and more	67%

Source: own research

Using the statistical correlation, the correlation coefficient is 0,29, the correlation with agreement an age groups is low.

The next questions are oriented at the age of discrimination.

Next question was oriented towards the age discrimination. The results are visible in the table Nr. 4. Research question: I was a witness of age discrimination.

Table Nr. 4: I was a witness of age discrimination

Strongly agree	4%
Agree	12%
Disagree	40%
Strongly disagree	44%

Source: own research

The respondents agreed with the statement that they were witness of age discrimination in 16%. Next question explored the victims of age discrimination.

Table Nr. 5: I was a victim of age discrimination in the organisation.

Agree	11%
Disagree	89%

Source: own research

11% of employees were victims of age discrimination. The results could be more analysed by using a quantitative approach and though the interview with the respondents. It can help to understand the problem of discrimination in more detail.

The comparison of the victims and witnesses of age discrimination shows that more people were witness than victims. But still, the percentage of the victims is high. Comparing the age groups, the hypothesis that more discriminated are young and older people was not proved.

The distribution among the age groups is similar. There is a critical point about the question. It was not mentioned the time. The length of employment can distort the results. For the improvement of the results, the subject of the next research should be more specified, for example, only for the last year or two years.

From 11% of the victims of age discrimination, there were 28% of young people; the same percentage was for the age group between 45 – 55. The expectation that older people are more discriminated was not proved. The correlation among the age and victims of discrimination is negative with the correlation coefficient (-0,79) confirmed that younger people are more discriminated than older employees.

Table Nr. 6: Victims of discrimination according to the age groups

22 - 34	29%
35 - 44	24%
45 - 55	27%
55 and more	20%

Source:own research

Comparison between men and women shows that more men at a young age are more discriminated then women and older employees. Table Nr. 7 shows the data in numbers.

Table Nr. 7: Victims of discrimination according to gender

Women	Men	Age
14	24	22 - 34
6	4	35 - 44
8		45 - 55
1		More than 55

The explanation of this result may lay in the gender antidiscrimination rules. The companies are more aware of gender issue and do not want to be exposed the gender discrimination.

Another view of the research results can be according to the size of the company. The respondents working in smaller organisations are more exposed the discrimination than in the big corporations. Big organisations must follow the rules, are under the control of international parent companies and has to establish the antidiscrimination rules.

Table Nr. 8: Victims of discrimination according the size of organisation

Nr. of respondents	Size of the company (FTEs)
2	Above 1000
8	250 -1000
6	50 - 250
13	below 50

Source: own research

Question number 9 shows career opportunities for all employees without age difference. More than 56 % of respondents agree with the statement that career opportunities are available for all employees. 44 % of respondents disagree with the statement. Usually, career development and career opportunities are available for younger people until the age of forty (Nagy, Johnston, Hirschi, 2017).

Table Nr. 9: Career opportunities are available for all employees without age difference.

Strongly agree	20%
Agree	36%
Disagree	39%
Strongly disagree	5%

Source: own research

The question that the company offers the intergenerational training brought the answer that corresponds with the study of Urbancová, Fejfarová (2017). Only 23% of respondents agree that the organisation provides intergenerational training. 77% of respondents disagree with the statement. The result corresponds with the findings in previous research of Urbancova and Fejfarova.

Table Nr. 10: The company offers the intergenerational training.

Agree	23%
Disagree	77%

Source: own research

Next part of the study explored the benefits for the older employees. From the comments of the respondents was found that the differences in offering benefits for the older employee are not significant. The organisations offer benefits in the flexible form so the employees can choose from the menu. The research confirmed the statement of Paullin (2004) that the flexible working hour is essential and used by companies to retain older people at work and help them to improve the work-life balance. No difference among big, middle and small companies was found.

Table Nr. 11: Benefits for older employees

Flexible working hours	64%
Part time job	57%
Home work	53%
Rotation to more suitable position	26%
More days for holiday	18%
More sick days	14%
More health care	12%
Contribution for rehabilitation	16%
Ergonomic work place	12%
Requalification	12%

Source: own research

Confirmation of the hypothesis

The hypothesis was formulated as follows: The youngest and oldest categories of employees will be more discriminated.

The hypothesis was confirmed partly. The correlation with the higher age correlated negatively (-0.79). The youngest age group between age 22 – 34 is the most discriminated group, the oldest group 55 plus the least.

Conclusion

The paper brings a view on the problem of ageing population and coworking different age groups of employees in organisations. The survey confirmed the previous research and studies. Respondents presented the missing program for retaining and developing older employees. The intergenerational training is missing the support of the career development after age above 45 is insufficient. The percentage of people being a victim of age discrimination is still significant. The hypothesis than young and older employees are the main victims of age discrimination was not confirmed. The survey shows that young men confirmed their discrimination more often than young women or older employees. The situation in support of older worker by suitable benefits seems to be more developed. The companies offer flexible working hours and homework, support of well being and health care for older people.

The survey brought a probe to the important issue of elderying population and cooperation of different generations at work. The next research should be oriented more on the cooperation of the different generations. It could research more in detail the problem of discrimination in the workplace and the state of implementation of age management.

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