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Age-Diverse Teams in the Organization

In the face of strong generational diversification on the labor market, teams that are diversified in terms of age are recommended in organizational practice. Such teams foster the exchange of views among representatives of various age groups, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills, and promote intergenerational collaboration. In light of the value inherent in this solution—confirmed in studies and organizational practice—395 working people were asked of the scope of its application in their companies. Criteria used in the analysis included organizational climate, work area, company size, and company policy with respect to age.

Key words: age, work, organization, generations, age management, age-diverse teams.

Introduction

The aging of society and the growing age disproportion in the structure of the worker population have been under observation for an extended period of time. Not only demographers are aware of this fact, so are politicians, representatives of science, and the world of labor and organizations. Many aspects of human life are being considered in the search for effective solutions to this situation, including the occupational function dimension. It is for this reason that when examining age-diverse teams it is absolutely necessary to call attention to matters involving the strong generational diversity that characterizes the modern labor market. Today, several generations are professionally active—veterans (also referred to as “traditionalists”), Baby Boomers, and Generations X, Y, and their successors. These groups are characterized by differences in age, but primarily in their distinct psychosocial profiles of functioning. The specifics of this diversity is contained in differing

qualities, value systems, experience, attitudes, expectations with respect to work and employers, shaping and achieving one's own image in the role of an employee, and in differing views on mutual work–home and work–family relations (Brdulak, 2014; Gadomska–Lila, 2015; Kołodziejczyk–Olczak, 2014a and 2014b; Stachowska, 2012a; Woszczyk, 2013; Woszczyk and Gajda, 2014). The effective coordination and joining of various generations is facilitated by the concept of age management,¹ an end result of contemporary demographic transformations. In organizational practice, collaboration among generations is expressed in the building of mixed–age work teams (Hildt–Ciupińska et al., 2012).

Using theoretical and empirical premises as a guide (Aronowska, 2014; Brdulak, 2014; Gajda and Seroka–Stolka, 2014; Kołodziejczyk–Olczak, 2014a; Rogozińska–Pawelczyk, 2014; Woszczyk and Gawron, 2014), the problem of the presence of age–diverse teams in Polish companies has been taken up. In exploring this research area, the quest was for an answer to the following questions: What is the scope of the building of age–diverse teams in Polish companies? Does the type of organizational climate cause differentiation in the utilization of nonhomogeneous worker teams as a component of organizational practice? Which aspects of age policy that coexist in the organization foster the creation of age–diverse teams? Finding answers to these questions was the basic goal of the research whose results are contained in this paper.

Why Age–Diverse Teams?

Worker teams are a subject of interest to management theoreticians and practitioners as well as representatives of work and organizational psychology. Numerous studies (Brzezińska and Paszkowska–Rogacz, 2000; Buszczak, 2002; Jachnis, 2008; Jaworska, 2014; Kozusznik, 1998; Robbins, 1998) analyze the matter of team roles, mechanisms making group processes dynamic, and facilitating and inhibiting factors conditioning the effectiveness of the functioning of the individual and the group. Proof has been found (Unsworth and West, 2003) that teamwork brings profits to both the worker and the organization. Tangible examples have been noted of the efficiency of teamwork—improved work quality, growth in productivity indicators, and several business benefits. The synergy effect making itself known in the col-

1 In the face of a strongly demographically differentiated labor market, age management (analyzed from the perspective of the individual, company, and society), thanks to the skillful application of instruments, is a solution making possible the parallel satisfying of the interests of the organization and of the workers (Fabisiak and Prokurat, 2012; Litwiński and Sztanderska, 2010a; Stachowska, 2012b).

laboration of individual members is responsible for the success of the individual and the value of teamwork.

A special example of an organizational solution that utilizes the group process to guarantee the transfer of knowledge, skills, and extra-substantive experience among representatives of various generations is the age-diverse team. It is one of the instruments generating a whole catalogue of applications of the idea of age management. Age-diverse teams are a platform for the exchange of various personnel goods and resources. Older and younger workers have a great deal to offer each other. Diversity, including age diversity, is a link forming the network of interpersonal relations (Gajda and Seroka–Stolka, 2014, p. 17). It is the strengths of each generational group that are utilized. The older workers serve with their personal and professional experience, worldly wisdom, expertise, and special skills. The younger ones provide the team with their higher level of physical fitness and stamina, flexibility, and better familiarity with modern technologies. Generational synergy works to eliminate deficits in knowledge and skills. It “buries” divisions among generations and fosters the building of ties among them (Rogozińska–Pawelczyk, 2014). Thanks to their life experience, older workers are characterized by less bravado, greater accuracy in assessing possibilities and the limits of risk, lower probability of error, a higher sense of responsibility, accountability, and greater precision and quality of work. Younger workers supplement this, achieving the synergy effect through their greater rate of action and dislike of monotony (Aronowska, 2014, pp. 120–121).

(Inter)mentoring is a platform for the effective transfer of resources among various age groups. It is tied with intergenerational learning and the shaping of a learning culture in the organization (Chutnik, 2012; Gajny–Zbierowska, 2014; Moczydlowska, 2014; Nawrat, 2014).

Age-diversity has a beneficial effect on innovativeness and efficiency of action. It is agreed that age-diversity has the strongest impact on the efficiency of a team when the age differences reflect differences in values, attitudes, and points of view (Unsworth and West, 2003). Age-diverse teams are better motivated and more creative and efficient. They work more quickly, more efficiently, and more effectively (Aronowska, 2014). This is confirmed by both organizational practice and research results. Research results (Woszczyk and Gawron, 2014) demonstrate that teams that are nonhomogeneous in terms of age better understand the needs of customers, are quicker at finding solutions than workers of similar age, and play a role in achieving higher business outcomes. Age differences among workers facilitate greater work efficiency (Brdulak, 2014, p. 165). Exactly this view was expressed by over 30% of Polish respondents taking part in the international research project.

Research Methodology

A total of 395 people,² 162 men (41%) and 233 women (59%), aged 20–64 were studied ($M=34.97$, $SD=12.19$). The job seniority of those studied amounted to 1–45 years ($M=12.98$, $SD=11.97$). One of the assumptions made was that in order to guarantee the correctness of conclusions regarding the organizational structure, professional experience amounting to at least one year of work was necessary, thus allowing a reliable assessment in this category. Those studied represented the following educational levels: primary $n=1$, vocational $n=18$, secondary $n=107$, bachelor's degree $n=130$, master's degree $n=111$, and postgraduate studies $n=28$. The respondents filled the following job positions: line $n=208$ (52.7%), managerial $n=53$ (13.4%), and specialist $n=134$ (33.9%). Among those studied, 293 people (74.2%) declared that their work is rather white-collar in character, while 102 (25.8%) considered themselves blue-collar workers. A total of 126 respondents (31.9%) were professionally active in the public sector, while 269 (68.1%) were in the nonpublic sector. Those studied were employed in companies of various sizes: micro $n=88$ (22.3%), small $n=91$ (23.0%), medium $n=87$ (22%), and large $n=129$ (32.7%). Statements were gathered from representatives of various generations: Baby Boomers (aged 50–64, $M=53.59$, $SD=3.48$, $n=79$), Generation X (aged 35–49, $M=43.72$, $SD=4.47$, $n=81$), Generation Y (aged 25–34, $M=27.91$, $SD=2.63$, $n=125$), and Generation Z (aged 20–24, $M=23.19$, $SD=0.90$, $n=110$).

Material making possible a socio-demographic characterization of the group was acquired thanks to collected demographic data. The scope of the required data was supplemented by the following assertions:

1. Teams that are diverse in terms of age are formed in my company.
2. Professional responsibilities and workload in my company are adapted to the changing age of workers and to their changing capabilities.

² The research was conducted over the years 2014–2015. The persons studied were from the Voivodeship of Łódź, where, according to statistical data (www.stat.gov.pl) the employment rate is comparable with the overall national indicator, which allows the assumption that the population studied is a representative one. The research results presented in this study are a part of a larger research project devoted to the psycho-social and professional differences in the functioning of representatives of various generations. The criterion for selection of the sample was the belonging of the studied individual to different phases of adulthood, which made it possible to achieve similar numbers within each generation. Using standardized research instruments, each respondent was studied with respect to assessment of work and life satisfaction, sources of professional stress, values achieved through professional work, and interference in the work-home areas. The conducted research also took into account organizational aspects and procured data relating to the age policy of the given company, including the establishing of age-diverse teams.

3. My company acts in order to provide equal opportunities for older workers.
4. My company properly utilizes the knowledge, skills, and experience of workers, regardless of age.
5. Older workers in my company are experts and authority figures for younger workers.
6. The managerial staff at my company has the knowledge and skills necessary for effective age management.

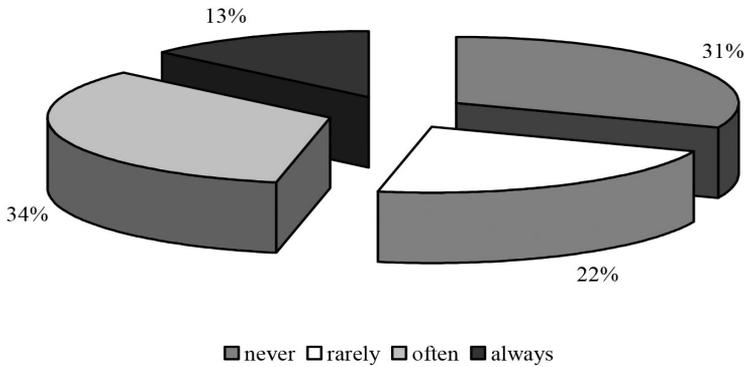
The Kolba Organizational Climate Questionnaire (Polish version as adapted by Chelpa, 1993) was used to measure the organizational climate. The Organizational Climate Questionnaire allows the diagnosis of one of three typical organizational climates and is a standardized and normalized tool (sten scores). A high score (7–10 sten) signifies a supportive organizational climate—a climate in which the employee is faced with high, but clearly defined requirements making possible his or her development, where employees bear personal responsibility for the performance of jobs and can simultaneously count on the support of a friendly superior and team. An autocratic climate (1–4 sten) means that workers face imprecise requirements that do not engender a feeling of responsibility, where a lack of trust and support, low acceptance of the superior who is not an authority figure for subordinates and where workers oppose his or her decisions or perform them reluctantly are all visible among workers. The intermediate type of climate, the one between the autocratic and supporting one, has a score of 5–6 sten. The lowest scores (1–4 sten) indicate an autocratic climate, scores in the 5–6 sten range describe an intermediate climate, while scored in the 7–10 sten range define a supportive climate. The questionnaire had satisfactory psychometric qualities. Accuracy was estimated on the basis of a factor analysis. A single factor structure was achieved and the factor loading of 0.63–0.79 explains a variance of 48.3%. The internal rate of compliance amounts to 0.61 (Chelpa, 1003).

Cross tables and the chi-squared test were the statistical tools used in drawing conclusions.

Research Results

Figure No. 1 illustrates the answers to the basic research question relating to the scope to which the employers of the studied persons form worker teams that are diverse in terms of age.

Figure No. 1. “My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age” – percentage breakdown of results.



Source: Own study.

In light of received data, the forming of age-diverse worker teams is declared by a moderate number of companies. According to the persons studied, such an organizational solutions is “always” used by 13% of employers (n=53). The breakdown of answers in the remaining categories is as follows: never 31%, n=123, rarely 22%, n=85, and often 34%, n=134. Information when taking into account the sector (public and nonpublic spheres) and company size (micro, small, medium, and large) is contained in Table No. 1.

Table No. 1. “My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age” by sector and company size.

Information about the company		My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age (%)			
		never	rarely	often	always
Sector	Public sector	30.2	18.3	39.7	11.9
	Nonpublic sector	31.6	23.0	31.2	14.1
$\chi^2=3.098, p=0.377$					
Company size	Micro	53.4	19.3	18.2	9.1
	Small	27.5	14.3	45.1	13.2
	Medium	20.7	26.4	40.2	12.6
	Large	25.6	24.8	32.6	17.1
$\chi^2=36.159, p=0.000$					

Source: Own study.

The presented data prove that both in the public and nonpublic sectors, the breakdown of results is similar. However, the size of the company proved to be of significance ($p=0.000$). In the presented comparison, the smallest companies have the poorest results (53.4% of micro companies do not form age-diverse worker teams or do so rarely – 19.3%). Among the small and medium organizations the percentage of companies (40.2%–45.1%) that often apply the analyzed solution is significant.

Table No. 2. “My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age” by organizational climate.

Company organizational climate		My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age (%)			
		never	rarely	often	always
Organizational climate type	Autocratic	25.5	27.7	33.0	13.8
	Intermediate	34.7	20.8	34.0	10.4
	Supportive	31.2	18.5	40.3	15.9
$\chi^2=5.648, p=0.464$					

Source: Own study.

An interesting result was noted with respect to the variable that was the organizational climate (Table No. 2). A similar way of organizing the work of teams utilizing age diversity is observed in all types of organizational climate.³

Table No. 3. “My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age” by organizational practices.

Information about the company		My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age (%)			
		never	rarely	often	always
In my company professional obligations and workload are adapted to the changing age of the workers and to their changing capabilities.	Never	48.0	18.9	22.8	10.2
	Rarely	19.8	27.1	39.5	13.6
	Often	29.9	15.6	37.7	16.9
	Always	28.6	7.1	42.9	21.4
$\chi^2=33.859, p=0.000$					

³ For the most part, participants in the study were subjected to a supportive climate (39.7%, n=157), and successively to an intermediate one (36.5%, n=144), and an autocratic one (23.8%, n=94).

Information about the company		My company forms worker teams that are diverse in terms of age (%)			
		never	rarely	often	always
Actions are taken in my company for providing equal opportunities for older workers.	Never	50.4	20.9	18.6	10.1
	Rarely	20.8	26.8	40.9	11.4
	Often	17.4	17.4	48.9	16.3
	Always	44.0	8.0	16.0	32.0
$\chi^2=60.279, p=0.000$					
Worker knowledge, skill, and experience is properly utilized in my company regardless of age.	Never	35.7	35.7	14.3	14.3
	Rarely	28.6	28.6	34.3	8.6
	Often	24.5	22.4	40.6	12.5
	Always	42.9	14.3	25.2	17.6
$\chi^2=23.855, p=0.005$					
In my company, older workers are experts and authority figures for younger workers.	Never	51.0	20.4	14.3	14.3
	Rarely	28.2	22.4	35.9	13.5
	Often	27.2	21.6	39.5	11.7
	Always	35.7	17.9	25.0	21.4
$\chi^2=17.533, p=0.041$					
The managerial staff in my company has knowledge and skills in effective age management.	No	36.8	24.2	25.5	13.5
	Yes	23.2	17.7	45.7	13.4
$\chi^2=19.161, p=0.000$					

Source: Own study.

The breakdown of results indicates that the organizational practices as specified in Table No. 3 are significantly diversified in terms of the forming by the company of teams that have a diverse age structure. Actions aimed at providing equal opportunities for older workers, the adapting of professional obligations and workload to the changing age of workers, the conscious and mindful utilization of the knowledge, skills, and experience of workers regardless of their age, the reinforcing of the authority of older workers on a foundation of their substantive experience, and a managerial staff ready to effectively manage personnel of diverse generations are all factor jointly present in the forming of age-diverse worker teams.

Summary and Conclusions

In the assessment of the respondents (Figure No. 1), 31% of companies do not form age-diverse teams, while 22% rarely do so. This organizational practice is often observed in 34% and always in 13%. Thus, the received breakdown of re-

sults, is cause for reflection. Is the glass half full or half empty? It would seem that the balance is moderately satisfactory. However, applying a comparison that is not completely symmetrical, it is somewhat less favorable than in the case of other research on 1,011 employers, where 60% declared “work in age-diverse teams” (Kołodziejczyk–Olczak, 2013a, 2013b).

In contrast to the deficit model, in the competency model each age group is characterized by strengths and weaknesses (Rogozińska–Pawelczyk, 2014). Older workers have at their disposal several valuable (perhaps even invaluable) competencies that younger generations naturally lack and that mold the value of the organization in a significant way. Their resources, developed and perfected over the years, include expert knowledge, credibility, responsibility, interpersonal skills, high level of emotional stability, and perspective on defined matters or problems. Research (Mockallo, 2015) shows that older workers are reliable, loyal, ethical, and approach their work more positively. According to research (Urbaniak, 2011), superiors value older workers for their loyalty to the employer, commitment to performed work, availability, abiding by regulations and bylaws, and the fact that they are high-class specialists. The younger generation presents greater openness and readiness for change (Lubrańska, 2008), enthusiasm, creativity, sound education, familiarity with foreign languages, and knowledge concerning electronic media (Galaj, 2014; Kołodziejczyk–Olczak, 2014a; Woszczyk, 2013). The more varied the employee resources in terms of age, the greater the flexibility of the company with respect to market needs, customer expectations, better adaptation to changes in the surroundings, and greater competitiveness. This is reason enough for companies to take up efforts for the universal application of solutions such as teams with diverse age structures. Such an effort is something that will pay off in terms of employee satisfaction and business efficiency. Age diversity is valuable company potential—a potential source of profits and advantages (Rogozińska–Pawelczyk, 2014). It may be assumed that in light of the presented data (Table No. 1), this view is shared by a significant part of the small and medium businesses, where over 40% organize teamwork utilizing groups of an age-diverse structure. For comparison, in the mentioned research (Kołodziejczyk–Olczak, 2014a and 2013b), “work in age-diverse teams” is declared by 72.9% of small and 79.8% of medium companies.

To a certain extent, results relating to organizational climate (Table No. 2) were a surprise. What was expected was that in line with the characteristics of supportive organizational climate type (Chelpa, 1993; Lipińska–Grobelny, 2007), shaping through strong interpersonal relations and visible group processes, the building of age-diverse teams will be decidedly more dominant. In light of the presented results, the differences lack any significance in character ($p=0.464$). Table No. 3 depicts data

illustrating the scope of forming of age-diverse teams in the presence of other age management practices. What was noted was that the organizational categories taken into account do significantly determine the frequency of application of the analyzed solution. The organizing of work taking advantage of teams with diverse age structures is facilitated by actions aimed at providing equal opportunities for older workers. Best practice examples (Litwiński and Sztanderska, 2010b) indicate that in subdividing tasks and obligations taking into account the individual capabilities of workers of various generations, jobs are assigned in line with age, predispositions, professional experience, and physical capabilities. Such solutions decidedly sever “equal opportunities” among generations.

An age-diverse team may certainly serve as a platform for the exchange of knowledge and experience. An intergenerational group makes possible the development of competencies that are strategic for the company. The confronting of points of view and experience, including between generations, results in a mutual enriching of employee competencies (Sadowska-Snarska, 2014). Research results are presented as a kind of correlation to these views. When a company properly utilizes the knowledge, skills, and experience of an employee, regardless of age, and care is taken so older workers become experts and authority figures for younger workers, then solutions fostering such practices—age-diverse teams—are applied more frequently.

The new worker demographic structures give birth to new expectations in the area of management techniques, collaboration, and management. Contemporary managers, aware of their role in the organization, need to answer the question: How can relations in a team be shaped so as to achieve the expected work effects, while simultaneously maintaining proper crew morale, guaranteeing well-being, and a feeling of own value and sense of performed tasks among employees (Brdulak, 2014)? Tasks facing contemporary managers with respect to intergenerational teams include guaranteeing efficient communication, the exchange of experience among group participants, improved cooperation, and actions aimed at weakening flaws while simultaneously strengthening the assets of representatives of each generation. A manager should demonstrate empathy, respect, and understanding for differences and diversity, and should also have knowledge concerning the values and motivation of his or her subordinates (Aronowska, 2014). The significance of these matters was also taken into account in this study. The breakdown of replies with respect to the item, “The managerial staff of my company has the knowledge and skills to effectively manage age” proves the significant differentiation of results.⁴ In com-

4 The opinions of those studied who fill managerial posts are interesting (n=53). In their view 45.3% have the appropriate knowledge and skills relating to the effective management of

panies where, in the view of respondents, representatives of the managerial staff have the appropriate resources in the area of age management, the decided part (45.7%) form age-diverse teams. The efforts of superiors in forming teams that are not homogeneous in terms of age are also visible in other studies (Urbaniak, 2011). They show that 30.7% of managers try to vary the age structure of worker teams. At the same time, however, 62.5% indicate that they have no influence over putting together a group. Looking at other data (Woszczyk and Gawron, 2014), worth discovering is the view of representatives of the managerial staff (n=200) on age diversity in teams. They admit that there are visible positive effects stemming from the application of such an organizational solution. A total of 65.6% of studied managers is of the view that teams that are not homogeneous in terms of age foster the achievement of better business results, develop solutions more quickly than workers of similar age (67.3%), demonstrate better understanding of customer needs (53.0%), and are more open (60.8%). Managers encompassed by the study also aired their views regarding their preferences as to managing age-diverse teams: 45% of those studied favored such a solution. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that generational diversity brings with it diversity of views and can give birth to misunderstandings and conflict. The very process of managing an age-diverse social group, with all the proven values of such a solution, is in itself also a potential source of problems for managers. A manager that is insufficiently prepared to manage age may cause conflicts of varying scales that are more or less destructive (Szaban, 2013). What is recommended (Gajda and Seroka-Stolka, 2014, p. 18) is to allow age-diverse worker groups to develop aligned mental models that increase the synergy effect within the team. Differences among workers may be a team's advantage and be a potential source of success as well as efficient, creative, and non-standard solutions. What is necessary to achieve them, however, is skillful management based on open communication, fairness, transparency, and evading all forms of favoritism (Aronowska, 2014, pp. 122–123).

Summing up, the ever-deepening demographic changes on the labor market are an important challenge to organizational theoreticians and practitioners, today. Entrepreneurs are expected to increase their interest in age policy, show increased favor and a more aware utilization of available instruments for managing different generations. The changing demographic situation is an equally strong incentive for the world of science. Research efforts should be directed by the need for seeking out, applying, and verifying effective, developed organizational solutions.

age. A total of 35% from among them state that their company never forms age-diverse teams, 24.5% rarely, 24.5% often, and 15.1% always.

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Zespoły zróżnicowane wiekowo w organizacji

Streszczenie

Zespoły niejednorodnie wiekowe to jedna z praktyk organizacyjnych polecanych wobec silnego zróżnicowania pokoleniowego na rynku pracy. Sprzyjają wymianie poglądów wśród przedstawicieli różnych grup wiekowych, ułatwiają transfer wiedzy i umiejętności, promują współpracę międzypokoleniową. Z uwagi na wartość tego rozwiązania, potwierdzoną badaniami i praktyką organizacyjną, zapytano 395 pracujących osób o zakres jego stosowania w ich firmach. Jako kryterium analiz uwzględniono: typ klimatu organizacyjnego, obszar pracy, wielkość firmy, działania firmy z zakresu polityki wiekowej.

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