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Generationally Diversified Labor Groups in Contemporary Labor Market. A Chance or a Threat for Organizations?

Abstract: Demographic changes connected with aging of Polish society shall determine the situation in the labor market to an ever-growing extent. The increase of average lifespan in combination with limited options of early retirement and smaller supply of employees shall lead to higher percentage of personnel aged 60 and more inside organizations. All these factors signify that more and more frequently contemporary companies shall function with personnel characterized by a truly large age gap. Undoubtedly, age of employees significantly influences their attitude to work, system of values, loyalty toward both the co-workers and the employer, as well their professional ambitions. In spite of these major differences, individuals from various generations will be forced to cooperate in the same teams. This article presents partial results of empiric studies dealing with the issue of generational diversification of human resources conducted in local labor market of the city of Ruda Śląska, both among the employees and employers. Opinions of employees and employers concerning the quality of mutual cooperation of individuals characterized by large age differences have been analyzed and simultaneously potential opportunities for mutual learning of employees belonging to different age groups have been presented.

Keywords: *labor market, generations, cooperation of individuals belonging to various age groups, aging of society*

Introduction

Demographic processes connected with aging of society shall influence labor market to a continuously growing extent. This refers to practically all highly developed societies. However, a particularly intense process of society aging is to be observed in Western European countries. As it has been concluded by M. Zrałek: “Society aging constitutes a global phenomenon, still in Poland it shall progress very dynamically” (Zrałek, 2015, p. 201). The

demographic models for Poland clearly indicate to a considerable growth of the number of citizens in post-productive age within the next several years but also to the increase of the number of individuals in pre-retirement age (Józwiak, 2013). Moreover, Eurostat forecasts predict that Poland shall belong to those European states for which the value of the age median in the period between 2050 and 2060 shall reach the highest level. The average life expectancy shall increase. In 2050 the said median shall reach 82.1 years for males and 87.5 for females (Chomańkowska, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2018, p. 37). At this point, according to forecasts, Polish society shall become one of the oldest in the European Union (Żołądowski, 2018, p. 204).

Demographic forecasts for our country are clear – the aging process of our population shall advance even further. As observed by Puślecki: “Similarly to numerous other Western European countries the demographic situation of Poland is characterized by a decrease in the birth rate (expressed in low fertility rate) as well as an increase of an average lifespan of citizens. Both these indicators lead inevitably to the phenomenon of aging of Polish society” (Puślecki, 2016, p. 79).

According to the data of the Central Statistical Office the percentage of individuals in post-production and immobile age is growing as is the age median. Forecasts of the Central Statistical Office predict that in 2050 Poland will be facing the percentage of population in preproduction age at the level of 13.5% whereas the number of individuals in mobile production age (between 18 and 44) and production immobile age (between 45–59/64) shall reach respectively 25.4% and 27.2%. Taking into consideration the economic age groups individuals in postproduction age shall constitute the largest group with the percentage of 33.8% of population in 2050 (*Sytuacja demograficzna osób starszych...*, 2014 a, p.41.) On the other hand, the age median of population shall increase from the present 39 and reach 52 years in 2050 (*Prognoza ludności Polski...*, 2014b, p.127). It is widely emphasized in the literature on the subject that within the subsequent years our domestic labor market shall face a shortage of labor resources supply unprecedented after 1989. This phenomenon “may result in a situation in which numerous employers shall encounter difficulties in satisfying their human resources demands and they will be forced to reduce their business activities. In the scale of the country such situation will weaken our economic growth” (Sipurzyńska-Rudnicka, 2018, p. 110). Thus, we may conclude that the changes in the age structure of the society shall directly influence the labor market, as well as functioning of companies and institutions (Borowiec, 2015). The intensifying process of society aging in combination with regular reduction of opportunities to retire early available for various professional groups shall result in the fact that employees will be faced with the necessity to function in generationally diverse work teams inside organizations.

Consequently, individuals representing generations characterized by considerable age difference will work together in the same teams – these will be teenagers entering labor market on one hand and those reaching their retirement age on the other. Moreover, it is to be expected that certain proportion of those receiving pension shall remain profession-

ally active. Thanks to this activity seniors will be able to satisfy a range of their needs of both material and non-material nature. Kubiak clearly emphasizes that “The population aging process observed in Poland currently creates good atmosphere for emphasizing the needs and role of seniors within society” (Kubiak, 2018, p. 101). Simultaneously it is worth emphasizing that the phenomenon of aging of population coincides with better condition of health of the elderly and with higher level of activity among this age group, also in the professional sphere. This trend shall also influence the labor market and it is expected that the percentage of individuals who shall remain active in the labor market even after reaching the retirement age shall increase.

Undoubtedly, the age of employees constitutes one of the key determiners differentiating their attitude to work, values, possessed qualifications, aspirations or finally loyalty toward co-workers and the employer (compare self-reference 2019). Individuals aged twenty approach these issues differently than those aged sixty.

Thus, formulating the following question – will the increasing aging of work teams constitute an opportunity for companies to grow or rather a threat for their efficient functioning? – is fully justifiable. This question is crucial inasmuch as, as it has been stressed in literature on the subject, “for contemporary organizations team work constitutes an important source of building competitive advantage, and the necessity to continuously increase labor efficiency results in an ever-greater interest in this form of organization” (Chomątowska, Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013, p. 194).

The hereby article – based on the results of empiric studies – attempts at providing answers to this question. Additionally, the objective of this article is to present opinions of mutual cooperation and potential opportunities for learning from one another by individuals representing considerably different age groups – opinions of both employees and employers.

Generations in the Labor Market – Theoretical Aspects

The term “generation” is most frequently interpreted as an age criterion. The dictionary of Polish language defines this notion as “a group of people born and living in the same epoch, whose attitudes and worldview have been shaped by their common experiences; a group of people of more or less the same age” (*Słownik Języka Polskiego*, 1979, p. 772). A similar explanation of the term “generation” is to be found in the dictionary of the English Language in which “generation” is described as: “All the people in a group of country who are of a similar age, especially when they are considered as having the same experiences and attitudes” (Collins English Language Dictionary, 1990, p. 603), which may be interpreted as individuals of similar age possessing the same life experiences and attitudes.

Within the area of social sciences Piotr Szukalski differentiates four methods of defining of the term “generation”. The first approach “used (...) in anthropology bases on the bonds and family roles of individuals. In this case generation is understood as

a group of related individuals, possessing a common ancestor” (Szukalski, 2012, p. 12). The second description “typical for social policies – takes into consideration, above all, the (potential) professional activity thus categorizing individuals as belonging to pre-productive, productive and post-productive group (...). In this nomenclature the term generation defines target groups of social policies i.e. groups of individuals selected according to their (assumed) probability of current stage in the life cycle” (Szukalski, 2012, p. 13). The third approach “close to demographic and economic analyzes defines generation as a group of individuals of similar age, that is born in the same period usually analyzed from the perspective of a single year or a five-year period (Szukalski, 2012, p. 13). And finally, the fourth approach “referring to cultural similarity resulting from the influence of a traumatic experience which has left its stamp on the method of reasoning among a group of individuals entering adulthood thus determining the course of their life and manner of defining reality” (Szukalski, 2012, p. 13). Zielińska and Szaban make a reference to the fourth approach claiming that “the social bond of the members of a generation in the historic sense is shaped on the basis of a collective experience during their youth.” (Zielińska, Szaban, 2011, p. 38).

Within the scope of sociology, the term “generation” is understood as “(...) all individuals belonging to a given culture group of more or less the same age characterized by similar attitudes, motivations, expectations, approach to the world and system of values stemming from their common historic and social situation” (Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016, p. 19). Another statement worth quoting here is the interpretation of this term provided by Giddens who defined a generation as “(...) all individuals born and living in “the same period” (Giddens, 2012, p. 1084). Simultaneously the same author emphasizes that It is not only the year of birth that determines belonging to a given generation but also the common experiences shaped by the specific society (Giddens 2012, p. 1084). A generation – as it has been repeatedly emphasized in literature on the subject – is defined as “a group of individuals born at approximately the same period of time, possessing the same historic experience. On the basis of similar and unique experiences representatives of a given generation manifest certain similarities in their manner of functioning and ideology which differentiates them both from the previous and subsequent generations” (Marschall, 2004, p. 240).

Thus, the definitions describing the term of a “generation” stress not only the geographical borders, but they also clearly hint to shared experiences resulting from the fact of having witnessed certain events as well as social and economic processes.

When analyzing the notion of a generation from the perspective of the labor market T. Kawka states that it is: “a group of individuals characterized by similar social identity and professional goals and values which bind each of these individuals into one coherent group. These people possess similar attitude to life that is to the role and importance of certain crucial aspects of life such as: family, friendship, love, interests or work. Within each generation a common, shared attitude to authorities, organizations, autonomy and sense of freedom is developed as well as the approach to participation in groups and gatherings

also of corporate nature, and analogically to expectations, sources of motivation and work satisfaction” (Kawka, 2018, p. 123).

Generational diversification of employees has become an increasingly popular subject of scientific research – particularly in the scope of description of characteristics of functioning of individuals characterized by large age difference inside the labor market.

One of the classifications ordering the age frames for belonging to various generations in the labor market lists the following four categories (compare Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016, p. 22):

- a. Baby boomers generation (those born before 1965);
- b. generation X (those born between 1965 and 1979);
- c. generation Y (those born between 1980 and 1989);
- d. generation Z (those born after 1989).

Numerous characteristics of generations that may be encountered in the literature on the subject: “(...) should, however, be studied with a considerable dose of caution. Treating generational belonging as the main determinant of an individual’s attitude to their professional life would constitute an enormous mistake. It would also be incorrect to ignore the detected differences. Rational company management requires development of a sustainable approach to the issue of generational diversification of company’s employees free from extreme measures” (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2018, p. 89).

Hence, based on the literature on the subject we may list the crucial features constituting the attempt at ordering the diversity of representatives of individual generations – particularly in the aspect of their functioning in the labor market. Nevertheless, one should not generalize in this case as generations are also diversified internally (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątkowska, 2014, p. 408).

Individuals classified as representatives of Baby-boomers generation are unwilling to change jobs, respect their co-workers and employers, are loyal toward co-workers and employers and usually feel well within hierarchic structures with clear management rules. At the same time Baby-boomers expect stability and security in professional sphere of life (Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016, p. 27–28). Unfortunately, despite their numerous virtues important from the employer’s point of view it has been emphasized in the literature on the subject that the older individuals face particularly large trouble finding subsequent, relevant employment once they lose their positions (Muster, 2019a, p. 29). In spite of the fact that discrimination of candidates during recruitment process among others due to their age is statutorily prohibited research has revealed the problem of discrimination of individuals above 50 years old by employers in the process of recruitment and selection for vacant positions (Muster, 2010). This is largely connected to their lower level of spatial mobility in comparison with younger groups of employees. Representatives of older generation are particularly threatened by digital exclusion (Kryńska, Arendt, 2010, Muster, 2019b) which constitutes another factor hindering their functioning in the modern labor market.

For individuals classified as representatives of generation X independence and individualism bear great importance. They expect unambiguous and matter-of-fact feedback concerning the effects of their work. Employees of generation 'X' are clearly goal-oriented professionally. They do not enjoy working on several tasks simultaneously. They prefer commencing a new task after completion of the previous one. They are able to order their tasks in hierarchy from the very important, through important and less important ones (Więcek-Janka, 2018). They identify professional success with diligence and hard work, and they are able to subordinate their private lives for the sake of reaching professional goals (Kaczmarczyk, 2019, p. 200).

The virtues of representatives of generation Y are among others the fact that they are development oriented and willing to work inside a team. These individuals are characterized by high level of formal education, sound knowledge of foreign languages, problem-free use of modern technologies (Robak, 2018, p. 248). Individuals belonging to generation Y are also characterized by high professional and spatial mobility. They are also willing to work in international environment.

On the other hand, the representatives of generation Z - as it has been emphasized in the literature on the subject: 'do not know the world without a computer and the Internet and they expect that modern technology so omnipresent in their lives shall also be present in the workplace, in course of interactions with their superiors, co-workers and customers (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątkowska, 2014, p. 413). The possibility of gaining work satisfaction is also very important for the representatives of generation Z while simultaneously frequently they do not treat work as life necessity. For them notion of work-life balance is of considerable importance and they value their free time as well as the possibility to realize and develop their interests unrelated to work. They are characterized by lower level of loyalty toward employers and smaller level of integration with the workplace. They are not afraid to change their place of work if they fail to gain work satisfaction. They quickly adapt to dynamic external and internal environment of an organization; they accept changes and are willing to create them. Representatives of the youngest generation in the labor market accept flexible forms of work organization and employment more easily than their older colleagues.

The current situation in the labor market (low unemployment rate, decreasing supply of labor resources, limited opportunities of early retirement) implies that representatives of all these four generations will cooperate inside the same labor teams.

The term of "age management" has been introduced into literature on the subject and it is defined as: "(...) an element of human resources management and more specifically; an element of managing diversity relying in realization of various activities allowing for more rational and effective exploitation of human resources within a company thanks to the fact that the needs and abilities of various ages are taken into consideration" (Liwński, Sztanderska, 2010, p. 3). This definition emphasizes the need to differentiate the management of human factor in organization accounting for the age factor. Employees of various age

possess different “psychological and physical efficiency which is translated into their work efficiency” (Liwiński, Sztanderska, 2013, p. 7).

Methodological Assumptions of Conducted Empirical Studies

This article presents partial results of empirical studies related to the issue of generational diversification of human resources. The research has been conducted among employees, the unemployed and employers in the local labor market of the city of Ruda Śląska¹. Moreover, a wide range of existing data (*desk research*) related to the age diversification of labor resources – presenting the current situation and the expected trends of change have been analyzed. The article presents fragments of research conducted among the employees (quantitative research) and employers (qualitative research) which regarded, among others, the issue of cooperation of generationally diversified individuals in one place as well as mutual learning in such groups. The studies involved 310 individuals working in companies and institutions located in the city of Ruda Śląska. The research group has been selected purposefully. The main criteria for selection of respondents for this research was the fact of employment in companies and institutions operating in the area of Ruda Śląska. Simultaneously, in the process of selection of respondents, great attention was paid to the fact that the chosen individuals reflect the different age structure of inhabitants of the town of Ruda Śląska. The gathered empiric data were aggregated at the level of four age groups (Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016, p. 22):

- individuals born before 1965 (Baby boomers),
- individuals born between 1965 and 1979 (generation X),
- individuals born between 1980 and 1989 (generation Y),
- individuals born after 1989 (generation Z).

The research conducted among the employees was realized by the clerks of the regional Employment Agency in Ruda Śląska who – in compliance with the art of social sciences-distributed and later collected surveys from individuals employed in local companies and institutions. The filled questionnaires were supplied directly to the representatives of public employment agencies.

Additionally, in the offices of the Regional Employment Agency in Ruda Śląska three integrated focus group interviews were conducted with employers representing small,

¹ This research was conducted in the period between July and September 2017 by Regional Employment Agency in Ruda Śląska. The author of the hereby article acted as the coordinator and substantive head of this research. The research fell within the concept of methodological triangulation. Various methods of collecting empiric material were used such as among others analysis of existing data (*desk research*), standardised interview with the unemployed (N=430, quantitative selection), surveys distributed among the employees (N=310, target selection with consideration of age diversity of population in productive age), whereas while studying the employers integrated group interviews were used (three focus studies among the total number of 28 employers).

medium-size and large organizations and also the institutions surrounding business (coaching institutions, private employment agencies, local economic authorities). The total amount of participants of the focus research equaled 28 individuals. These were company owners or individuals appointed by employers who hold decision making positions in their organizations in the scope of employment policy realization. Issues such as cooperation of individuals characterized by significant age gaps, problems related to mutual learning and knowledge sharing were discussed during the focus session.

Mutual Learning of Individuals Belonging to Different Age Groups Inside Working Teams

The research performed in the local labor market of the town of Ruda Śląska proved that the age criterion does not constitute a factor hindering cooperation between individual employees – on the contrary, cooperation between employees of different age is efficient and smooth.

As has been proven by the conducted empirical analysis nearly all studied employees evaluated the cooperation with individuals of significantly different age groups in the workplace as satisfying. Simultaneously a correlation clearly indicating that the older the respondents the lower percentage of them described this cooperation as very good was observed. However, a more detailed statistical analysis has proven that younger respondents manifest larger degree of satisfaction resulting from cooperation with older co-workers (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondents’ opinions concerning cooperation with individuals of significantly different age

Replies	Year of birth							
	before 1965		1965–1979		1980–1989		after 1989	
	Baby boomers generation		generation X		generation Y		generation Z	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
very good	31	56.4	60	61.2	58	63.7	48	73.9
good	23	41.8	38	38.8	32	35.2	16	24.6
bad	1	1.8	0	0.0	1	1.1	1	1.5
very bad	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	55	100.0	98	100.0	91	100.0	65	100.0

Source: research of Regional Employment Agency Ruda Śląska, own calculations.

A crucial element of the conducted research was the attempt to provide replies to questions concerning mutual learning in the workplace context by employees of significantly different age groups. The professionally active respondents listed what younger employees

may learn from their older co-workers (Table 2) and vice versa – what the older employees may learn from their younger colleagues (Table 3).

Table 2. Respondents' opinions on what younger employees may learn from their older co-workers

Replies	Year of birth							
	before 1965		1965–1979		1980–1989		after 1989	
	“Baby boomers” generation		generation “X”		generation “Y”		generation “Z”	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
responsibility	40	72.7	63	64.3	47	51.6	32	49.2
dedication to work	34	61.8	55	56.1	53	58.2	26	40.0
accuracy	28	50.9	39	39.8	38	41.8	32	49.2
team work	22	40.0	53	54.1	26	28.6	16	24.6
loyalty toward employer and co-workers	16	29.1	35	35.7	28	30.8	12	18.5
coping with stress	13	23.6	26	26.5	26	28.6	24	36.9
efficiency/ effectiveness	7	12.7	15	15.3	20	22.0	17	26.2
optimism	6	10.9	8	8.2	12	13.2	7	10.8
using new technologies	4	7.3	4	4.1	5	5.5	2	3.1
taking risk	3	5.5	2	2.0	11	12.1	5	7.7

Source: research of Regional Employment Agency Ruda Śląska, own calculations.

Important: the percentages do not add to 100 due to the fact that the respondents could select the maximum number of three replies.

The oldest employees participating in the research – the representatives of Baby boomers generation most frequently stressed the fact that their younger colleagues may learn the following from the older co-workers above all (first – the most important):

- responsibility,
- dedication to work,
- accuracy,
- team work,
- loyalty toward employer and co-workers.

Generation X employees who took part in the survey research mentioned that the younger members of personnel may learn the following from their older co-workers:

- responsibility,
- dedication to work,
- team work,
- accuracy,
- loyalty toward employer and co-workers.

On the other hand, employees of generation Y when expressing their opinions on what young employees can learn from their older colleagues mentioned mainly:

- dedication to work,
- responsibility,
- accuracy,
- loyalty toward employer and co-workers,
- team work,
- coping with stress.

The youngest employees – representatives of generation Z (born after 1989) – when identifying areas that younger members of personnel could learn from their older teammates listed the following:

- responsibility,
- accuracy,
- dedication to work,
- coping with stress,
- efficiency/ effectiveness.

On the basis of the collected empiric material resulting from the study of employees it may be concluded that the younger personnel should follow the example set by their more experienced colleagues in the scope of work culture and discipline but also in the sphere of motivation and attitude to their professional duties.

The hereby article also presents the opinions of employers for the sake of comprehensive description of generational differences. Employers defined basic differences in functioning of younger and older individuals in the labor market simultaneously attempting at pinpointing the benefits resulting from cooperation of individuals of considerable age difference including mutual learning. Thanks to this the picture of generation diversification of employees is more complete.

Analogically to employees the studied employers also mentioned that younger employees should adapt the role models set by their older, more experienced colleagues in the area of widely understood work culture. We may quote the following statement of one of entrepreneurs as an example:

“Younger employees could learn punctuality and work discipline from their older colleagues. The elderly ladies I employ have been taught punctuality, what’s more they come to work about a quarter earlier” (representative of a small company).

Other participants of the focus research observed that older employees can teach the younger teammates: *“punctuality, responsibility, regularity and keeping their word”* (representative of a business surrounding institution) and also *“respect for work and co-workers”* (representative of business surrounding institution).

Simultaneously, employers participating in the focus research emphasized the necessity for older employees to gain authority among their younger colleagues. In their assessment it was a crucial element entitling the older personnel to pass on their knowledge capital and desirable manner of behavior in the organization system. As stated by one of the respondents:

“Our observations show that the youngest (...) willingly learn from the more experienced individuals, but those older employees need to build their authority first and it does not result directly from their position or seniority. For the young these factors are completely unimportant, what matters for them is their behavior, knowledge and ability to pass it on. We are rather moving toward the idea of mentorship” (representative of a big company).

The subsequent Table No 3 presents opinions of the surveyed employees concerning the skills that older employees could learn from their younger workmates.

Table 3. Respondents’ opinions concerning skills to be acquired by the older employees from their younger colleagues

Replies	Year of birth							
	before 1965		1965–1979		1980–1989		after 1989	
	“Baby boomers” generation		generation “X”		generation “Y”		generation “Z”	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
using modern technologies	50	90.9	81	82.7	74	81.3	55	84.6
taking risks	23	41.8	50	51.0	34	37.4	35	53.8
optimism	20	36.4	38	38.8	39	42.9	34	52.3
coping with stress	12	21.8	19	19.4	16	17.6	6	9.2
teamwork	4	7.3	6	6.1	19	20.9	11	16.9
responsibility	3	5.5	1	1.0	0	0.0	1	1.5
loyalty toward employer and co-workers	1	1.8	2	2.0	1	1.1	2	3.1
efficiency/ effectiveness	1	1.8	13	13.3	18	19.8	12	18.5
dedication to work	0	0.0	4	4.1	15	16.5	7	10.8
accuracy	0	0.0	3	3.1	7	7.7	2	3.0

Source: research of Regional Employment Agency Ruda Śląska, own calculations.

Important: the percentage values do not add to 100 due to the fact that the respondents could select the maximum number of three replies.

Analysis of gathered empirical material clearly indicates that respondents listed issues connected with the use of modern technologies as the key skill to be acquired by older employees from their younger colleagues.

The oldest group of respondents – those belonging to Baby boomers generation – provided the following responses.

- using new technologies,
- taking risks,
- optimism,
- coping with stress,
- teamwork.

Employees of generation X mentioned the following issues, mainly:

- using new technologies,
- taking risks,
- optimism,
- coping with stress,
- efficiency/ effectiveness.

The subsequent age group of surveyed employees – representatives of generation Y talked about the following areas in which the older employees could learn from the younger ones:

- using new technologies
- optimism,
- taking risk,
- team work,
- efficiency/ effectiveness.

Finally, the youngest respondents – representatives of generation Z replied most frequently that the older employees may learn the following skills from the younger ones:

- using new technologies
- taking risk,
- optimism,
- efficiency/ effectiveness,
- team work.

Thus, on the one hand – a fact that is hardly surprising – employees regardless of the age criteria unanimously declared that in work teams, youngsters should share their knowledge connected with use of new technologies and especially with the use of virtual space with the older colleagues. Thanks to this, younger employees may contribute to reduction of digital exclusion of professionally active representatives of the older generation. Simultaneously, employees regardless of their age group mentioned that younger personnel may constitute a good example to their older co-workers in the scope of ability and readiness to take risks and maintain optimistic approach toward life.

When applying Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, the level of correlation between the answers provided by the oldest (Baby-boomers) and the youngest (generation Z) employees participating in the research has been analyzed. The said factor falls within the range (-1,1) where Spearman's coefficient =1 proves the total rank compliance (Gruszczyński 1986, p. 149).

Detailed analysis of the gathered research material has shown that the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient in case of analysis of correlation of responses between these two groups of largest age difference of respondents conducted to determine factors which the youngsters can learn from the older equaled 0.87. Thus, the degree of convergence of provided answers is at a very high level. A delicately lower level of convergence (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient = 0.76) has been obtained in course of analysis of the responses to the question regarding factors that the older employees may learn from the younger.

It is worth mentioning that in course of the focus research employers – similarly to employees – strongly emphasized that younger workers may teach their older colleagues how to use new technological appliances. We may quote one opinion as an example:

[Younger individuals may teach their older colleagues – author's note] *“How to increase the efficiency of methods of work with the use of new technologies – young people are familiar with technologies, they are adapted to them while the older employees need to become acquainted with them”* (representative of a small company).

However – a fact that was stressed also by employers – apart from the issues related to new technologies, and particularly connected with various applications of the Internet, older employees may acquire the following features from young people entering the labor market: high self-esteem, assertiveness and ability to express their expectations toward the employer. Respondents also mentioned the positive attitude of youngsters to problem solving in the workplace.

[Younger employees may teach the older ones – author's note] *“Different approach to problems (...) young people tend to look for another way if their current attempts fail”* (representative of business surrounding institutions).

Cooperation of Individuals Belonging to Different Age Groups Inside Work Teams

The focus research conducted among employers from the town of Ruda Śląska also constituted an attempt at diagnosing – on the basis of their observations and experiences – the condition of cooperation between employees belonging to considerably different age groups.

On the basis of the collected research material it may be concluded that cooperation between younger and older employees is generally sound and significant age differences do not constitute a factor that determines occurrence of conflicts. One of employers representing a small company provided an example of mutual, sound cooperation of employees belonging to considerably different age groups:

“There are three women working in a pub: one aged 23, the second aged 40 and the third aged 60, but they get on fine. At the beginning there were some misunderstandings in both directions but now they have reached agreement and now they constitute a truly integrated team” (representative of a small company).

Another employer stated what follows:

“In my team there are employees of various generations. Some of them are twenty-something, one is forty and there is also a sixty-year old lady. They understand each other very well. They use their surnames rather than first names, I have to admit, but the one who is 40 is the boss and they obey her, they look up to her. Everything is just fine and I do not observe any generations conflict” (representative of a small company).

A different employer observed:

“Our employees include those over 50 and those in their early twenties. The situation is dynamic but generally they manage to reach agreement” (representative of a small company).

When analyzing cooperation between employees of various age groups, representatives of institutions surrounding business described situations that they had observed in which older employees felt threatened by their younger colleagues for instance in the aspect of fear of losing their position for the sake of youngsters. To prove this the following opinions of employers may be quoted:

“Older individuals felt threatened by younger employees mostly because they are aware of the fact that they lack certain skills that younger people bring into the company” (representative of institutions surrounding business).

“I have similar experience. A young employee appeared and generated stress and such sense of threat created by the young that the deficits [of the older employees – author’s note] will be exposed and then communication is difficult” (representative of institutions surrounding business).

The signaled problems related to information flow led to the fact that the older, more experienced employees did not share their knowledge with the younger colleagues due to the fear of losing their positions. They feared that younger, more dynamic employees acquainted with modern technologies will take their place in the company. One of the employers observed:

“There was such a situation that older employees felt threatened by the young as they were aware that they lack certain skills which young employees brought and such young people were treated with great reserve by these older workers. They did not teach the young anything because they felt threatened and if they provided this individual with their knowledge it could be concluded that they are redundant. That is why the information flow was minimal”. (representative of institutions surrounding business)

Additionally, the focus research constituted an attempt to provide a reply to the question of possible conflicts and misunderstandings between individual age groups of employees. As it has been shown by the conducted analysis employees generally do not observe conflicts resulting from age differences among employees.

Generational Differences

A question concerning differences between younger and older employees was also directed to representatives of employees in course of the focus interviews.

When describing key differences between particular age groups of employees, employers stressed different attitude to work of the youngest and oldest generations active in the labor market. Individuals entering labor market and commencing their careers value their free time. In the employers' opinion representatives of generation Z are characterized by their pursuit of proper balance between their work and private life. Thus, employers need to keep it in their minds that contemporary youngsters follow the principles of *work-life balance* concept and these rules are important for this age group. To prove this, we may quote opinions of two employers:

“Young people are characterized by the fact that for them life is more important than work and not vice versa” (representative of a large company).

“The older generation lived to work while the young people work to live (...), we were entering a completely different system in the labor market, and functioning in a completely different system in totally different circumstances” (representative of a large company).

Young employees expect opportunities for self-realization not only in the professional sphere but also in the spheres of family life and education. Hence the capital of free time and

ability to realize their work-unrelated passions are crucial for them. Individuals responsible for preparation of principles of personnel policies within organizations should unquestionably account for this trend.

Conclusions

Generational diversification of employees functioning within the same teams shall become an increasingly popular situation in companies and institutions operating in our country. Currently observed demographic processes connected with the phenomenon of aging of society, the ongoing reduction of labor force supply, limited opportunities of retiring early shall all contribute to the reality in which employees belonging to four different generations (Baby-boomers, X, Y and Z) will be working together. The age gap between the youngest and the oldest co-workers may be as extensive as 50 years. Age is the key determiner influencing various attitudes and motivation to work, aspirations, systems of values or finally methods and channels of communication. As has been widely emphasized in the literature on the subject “Conditions in which various generations grew up also influenced their attitudes in the labor market” (Gwarek, Samitowska, Smogół, 2014, p. 129). However – as shown by research conducted among both employees and employers – such situations and generational differences should not be considered a potential threat for effective functioning of an organization. As observed by Rogozińska-Pawelczyk: “Future competitiveness of companies and their operational efficiency shall depend on effective use of potential of employees of various age groups and development of their competences” (Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2014, p. 18).

Generational diversity of work teams constitutes an opportunity for growth of commercial units, non-profit organizations and public institutions. Lubrańska concluded that “The larger age diversification of human resources within a company is, the more flexible such company is in relation to labor market needs and customers’ expectations. Such companies also adapt better to changing environment and possess higher level of competitiveness (Lubrańska, 2016, p. 75). Older employees may pass on their diligent approach to duties onto their younger colleagues. All issues related to social aspects of an individual’s functioning in social work environment connected with discipline, work culture or loyalty toward both the co-workers, superiors and the employer may successfully be transferred from the older employees onto their younger workmates.

On the other hand, the older personnel may acquire the youngsters’ competences connected with the ability to use modern technologies or the Internet. Zamorska points out that: “Progress in science and technology, especially in information technology (...) has influenced work organization and management to a great extent simultaneously contributing to the occurrence of a completely different method of manufacturing of goods and services than those used previously” (Zamorska, 2017, p. 74). The digital world – also in the professional sphere – constitutes a natural area of functioning for the young generation. However, the older may experience problems to function in the reality of modern technologies.

Musiał-Karg discusses these issues from a wider perspective: “Due to dynamic development of IT technologies, common Internet access and modernization of every sphere of human life (e-commerce, e-administration, e-society, e-banking, e-books, etc.) it may be assumed that voters will aim at modernization of democratic procedures in such a way that they shall become more accessible and comfortable” (Musiał-Karg, 2015, p. 93). Thus, the role of the young generation in the scope of socialization of older employees does not need to be limited to issues related to work solely but it possesses a definitely wider social context.

Employees of various ages may constitute a complementary supplementation to one another and teams characterized by age differences shall provide opportunities for growth of organizations. Additionally – in the process of sharing knowledge with various age groups of employees – the fact that should be considered is that “Baby-boomers’ generation prefer traditional methods of education whereas younger employees (representatives of generation Z) possess high level of virtual competences which may also be useful in the process of training” (Hysa, 2016, pp. 393–394).

The research conducted in the local labor market of the city of Ruda Śląska proved that significant age diversification of employees does not largely influence the differences in perception of what these groups of employees could learn from one another. Teams of age diversification constitute an important value for contemporary organizations and their members may supplement one another according to the complementarity principle. Even more so when we realize that this model of work teams is coherent with EU strategic documents. As mentioned by Michaleska-Pawlak the European Commission: “places extreme emphasis on development but also on use of the potential of all [age – author’s note] groups, which may be useful on the labor market and within society at every stage of their lives thanks to proper investment policies” (Michalewska-Pawlak, 2017, p. 99).

Once the economic crisis initiated by the global pandemics of COVID-19 has diminished the situation in the labor market shall begin to improve gradually and the deficit of labor force may well be expected. This issue shall be particularly visible in highly developed economies just as it used to be previously. Consequently, individuals belonging to older age groups shall be employed more willingly. Although age discrimination of potential employees is prohibited older individuals tend to encounter problems when searching for employment. The reduction in supply of younger candidates in the labor market in combination with the expected return of economic boom shall lead to greater willingness to employ representatives of the older generation. The latter shall subsequently lead to more frequent occurrence of labor teams characterized by considerable age differences. Representatives of various generations shall function inside such teams and they shall manifest significant differences in terms of their system of values, competences, professional aspirations and motivation factors. However, this diversity constitutes a valuable element and individuals of considerable age differences – frequently of several decades – may complement one another thus contributing to realization of business objectives of the company.

Material presented here is of application nature and it may be used in activities in the scope of human resources management within organizations – with regard to specific nature of various age categories of respondents. The said research results may prove particularly useful in the process of creation of motivation systems, support for employees in their professional progress or in the scope of initiation of activities aimed at boosting the loyalty level of employees.

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