

# Managing age diversity in the workplace – a challenge for contemporary organizations and managers

**Marta NOWACKA**

**Jan Długosz University of Częstochowa, Faculty of Pedagogy, Poland**

## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** Considering the progressing demographic changes triggering ever larger generation diversity of today's organizations, the paper aims at identifying: how do intergenerational relations develop in the workplace and what is the manager's role in the process of the organization of work and atmosphere creation in an age diverse staff?

**Design / Research methods:** An analysis of the secondary research (Polish and foreign) on intergenerational relations in the workplace was carried out. Also, findings made on the basis of the author's own research are presented: quantitative studies (a survey carried out among 103 students of the University of the Third Age at Częstochowa University of Technology and 100 students of Częstochowa University of Technology), and qualitative studies (focus groups comprising students and in-depth interviews conducted among 3 of the UTA students and 2 members of Alumni Association of Częstochowa University of Technology)

**Conclusions / findings:** On the basis of the research analysis, the problem of intergenerational isolation between different generations was revealed and also a lack of common ground which affects the creation of work atmosphere and the organization of work and which arises, among other things, from stereotypical thinking, prejudice, fear, lack of knowledge. The possibility of a cross-generational cooperation is not determined by the actually existing differences in terms of values, motivation or the expectations of representatives of the different generations (which would render the cooperation and the priorities alignment impossible). Thus, it is feasible to build a productive cooperation within intergenerational staff, with managers playing a significant role in this process. In the first place, they should ensure an appropriate atmosphere in an age-diverse staff. To ensure that each employee feels respected and treated equally (in this context the manager's attitude is important). In organizing work for their employees, managers should seek to create chances and opportunities of mutual cooperation among people of different ages, so as not to deepen intergenerational isolation, and instead create opportunities of getting to know one other. This, in turn, can contribute to fewer prejudices and stereotypes which tend to arise from not knowing the other person well enough. An element of specific integration could be encouraging employees to fulfill the organization's goals by commonly striving for them.

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E-mail: [mart.zajac@gmail.com](mailto:mart.zajac@gmail.com)

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**Originality / value of the article:** The research analysis was employed to determine the factors which may have impact on the creation of intergenerational relations in a workplace, with this providing the basis for defining the manager's role.

**Implications of the research:** The identification of factors impacting the creation of relations in the workplace allowed for specific recommendations and guidelines for managers to be formulated which may be useful in creating proper relations in age-diverse organizations in Poland.

*Key words:* manager, generation, intergenerational relations, age diversity.

JEL: M12; M14

## 1. Introduction

The progressing demographic changes within the Polish society<sup>1</sup> (cf. GUS 2016), including changes in terms of engineering, technology, culture and economy influencing its evolution may play a significant role in the development of worker teams in organizations (cf., e.g. Parzonko 2015). The changes unfolding in the widely understood environment are important in terms of how attitudes, values, specific communication styles and people's conduct are being shaped – which indeed may affect their behavior in the workplace. What is more, the dynamics and pace of those changes in Poland are all contributing to the differences among people of diverse upbringing, growing up in different settings. Today various generations are functioning on the labor market. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that in the context of the change dynamics, the term “generation” acquires a somewhat different meaning. “Once generations used to change every 25-30 years, following one after another; yet, nowadays different generations are identified already every 10 years” (Imiołczyk 2012: 6). The literature concerned with this subject shows that currently the following generations are functioning on the labor market: baby boomers (born between 1949-1963); X (born between 1964-1979), Y (born between 1980-1994) (Baran, Kłós 2014: 924), Generation Z (those born after 1994) (Koc 2015; Finch 2015; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska 2014). Some literature also distinguishes Generation C (Morbitzer 2012: 295).

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<sup>1</sup> The age median of Polish population in 2015 was 38.2 for men and 41.6 for women, while 10 years before those values were at, respectively: 34.7 and 38.9. The percentage of people over 65 of age in the Polish population in 2005 was 13.3%, while in 2015 it was 15.8% (GUS [Central Statistical Office] 2016). According to the GUS demographic forecast, the age median in Poland in 2020 will be 40.3 (men) and 43.6 (women), and over the subsequent years, i.e. until 2050 it can be at 50.1 (men) and 54.8 (women) (GUS 2014)

Interesting is that the criterion for distinguishing the subsequent generations is no longer only their date of birth, but also the life style they manifest. This can be exemplified by the just mentioned Generation C, which some scholars identify as a group of people who tend to have a similar lifestyle and behavior – whatever their age (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomątowska 2014).

As Milena Gojny and Przemysław Zbierowski emphasize, „in the context of the huge technological leap our civilization has been experiencing over the last decades and the development of IT ideas at an ever greater pace, the chasm between the generation of people not yet 35 years old and those over 50 has been wider than ever before, creating additional barriers” (Gojny, Zbierowski 2013: 160). Those barriers may play a significant role in the development of relations between people of different ages, including the relations in the workplace, and further, they can influence the organization of work in the Polish enterprises. Bearing this in mind, it appears that the peculiar diversity of generations poses an exceptional challenge for contemporary managers who should, in the management process, account for the context of age diversity among employees.

It would therefore be worth starting discussions on how the relations between employees working in the contemporary work teams characterized by age diversity have been developing, and what factors play a significant role in this process – in order to identify the manager’s role and define the recommendations for being better equipped in dealing with the challenges engendered by the generational diversity in organization. Thus, the aim of this paper is to show the following (based on the analysis of the findings of the selected secondary studies and author’s own studies):

- how intergenerational relations develop in the workplace – does the employees’ age diversity impact the work atmosphere and if so, how does it do it; and how does it influence the organization’s functioning?
- what is the manager’s role in the process of the organization of work and creation of atmosphere in the workplace in an age diverse staff?

## **2. Intergenerational relations in the workplace – the research context**

In attempting to answer those questions the decision was made to review some secondary studies (Polish and foreign) and author's own studies on the development of relations among different aged people.

At the planning stage of the author's own research, it was assumed that the attitudes towards other generations could have an influence on the intergenerational relations. Taking into account the components of the attitude (cognitive, emotional/affective and behavioral), it was assumed that what could impact the intergenerational relations and work atmosphere could be, among other things, the way different aged employees perceived one another (what they knew of and thought about one another), their views on the intergenerational relations, willingness to cooperate and previous experiences.

The above elements became the object of the author's own studies (quantitative – a survey and qualitative – focus groups and in-depth interviews) conducted among representatives of the different generations (students – including those working, students of the University of the Third Age, members of the Alumni Association of Częstochowa University of Technology – including employers). The objective of the studies was to show a certain general tendency in the development of the relations between people of various ages.

In order to complement the findings of the studies (and to have them embedded in the realities of the organization of work), the selected secondary research on intergenerational relations in the workplace was used. Those studies were largely chosen whose description allowed for the formulation of the conclusions regarding the areas which were to be analyzed, according to the arrangements made at the planning stage (i.e. perception of each other, views held on people of different ages, willingness to cooperate and previous experiences).

In light of the fact that the analysis was based on the description of surveys carried out on a variety of respondents (in a workplace, university, in Poland and across our country's borders, among representatives of various lines of business) the conclusions formulated show some sort of tendencies in the development of the relations between the different generations. On this basis, general recommendations were outlined for contemporary managers pertaining to shaping the relations among the intergenerational

staff. The level of generality of the formulated recommendations makes it possible for them to be adapted by managers operating in a variety of industries. However, it should be underscored that the specificity of every organization requires more detailed characteristics of the relations between different generations functioning in the work setting, factors impacting those relations (including the role of the specific manager), as well as identification of strategies aimed at creating the intergenerational relations.

### **3. Intergenerational relations in the workplace – the employees' views**

The survey conducted, among others, on 700 employees within the framework of the project „Generation Dialogue – efficient management of generations in an enterprise” (HRP Perspective: 2-30) found that in general employees reported their willingness to cooperate with different generations. Further to that, over half of the surveyed employees from each age group even reported that they preferred working in an age diverse team (such response was given respectively by: 61.3% of baby boomers, 59.8% of Generation X, and 53.1% Generation C). In addition, the majority of respondents did not agree with the statement that “people are unable to cooperate in an age diverse staff” – 2/3 of the surveyed disagreed with this statement. Considerably fewer respondents agreed with this statement, since that was only 17.4% employees (other persons did not make a clear statement in this respect). Moreover, employees highlighted the advantages that could arise from the age differences of people employed in the organization, pointing out that, “different aged workers come up quicker with solutions than workers at a similar age” (67%) and were more open to customers' needs (77.3%). One can therefore acknowledge that the views on intergenerational relations held by respondents are positive, with their willingness to cooperate being high, too.

Still, although being convinced that the intergenerational cooperation is possible and beneficial, and declaring their willingness to such cooperation, 36.5% of respondents reported that the age diversity was conducive to conflicts in the workplace. What is more, almost 1/3 of each of the generations answered positively the question whether they had ever experienced conflicts in the workplace arising from the generational differences. Employees from Generation X were most likely to experience this kind of

conflicts (37.6%), followed by baby boomers (31.5%) with Generation C being the least likely to make this experience (27.9%). This answer distribution can present the intergenerational relations in a slightly different light. It suggests that, in line with what respondents reported, contacts between different aged employees are possible, advantageous and evaluated positively, yet, as it turns out in practice, they can generate some difficulties (among others, in the process of building relations), which can even have the effect of causing conflicts in the workplace.

Similar findings came from the studies on intergenerational relations in the workplace carried out among employees under 35 years of age and those over 50, as presented in the report “Organizational and psychological determinants of monitoring for sustaining workers of age 50+ on the labor market” (Misztal et al. 2006). In the course of the study, neither group indicated directly the problems existing within the intergenerational relations. Like in the study cited before, the majority of respondents expressed their willingness to intergenerational cooperation. However, based on the detailed analysis of all responses (both those given by employees in the quantitative and qualitative studies), the authors of the report conclude that although there is no open conflict between the employees participating in the study, we can still talk about some sort of generational isolation which influences how the relations are being shaped. In the qualitative study (metaplan) both age groups (-35, 50+) had the opportunity to report on possible intergenerational problems. The highest number of problems indicated by the -35 employees was concerned with them being discriminated by the 50+ workers. In their views, the source of problems lies also in the features characteristic for the 50+ group, “mainly including their resistance to change and a low level of knowledge (mostly lacking language and IT skills; however, in terms of their expertise, experience and knowledge of the company the 50 + employees are highly estimated by the -35 employees). In the group of answers given by the 50+ employees as to the problems in terms of intergenerational relations, “the problems ranking highest, according to the 50+ employees, were those arising from the character flaws of the -35 persons, such as: superficiality at work and lack of responsibility.

The respondents place much importance on those problems, yet they still believe that “this is solvable” through, e.g. education, exerting influence on younger colleagues –for which the older employees express their readiness.

As can be gleaned from the above, the findings show that on a declaratory level intergenerational relations are evaluated positively by employees, with employees expressing their willingness to cooperate. What is, however, of significance in the studies presented above is that they suggest that some barriers exist across the mutual contacts between employees of various age – although initially none of the surveyed reported them in a straightforward way. Yet, it appears that those barriers, intergenerational problems can largely stem from the way employees perceive one another. It turns out that different aged employees see the sources of problems predominantly in the faults and negative approaches of the other age group. The young ones feel discriminated by the older ones, highlighting the faults of the older employees, which they believe can have a significant impact on their cooperation. The older employees, meanwhile, see the faults of the young ones, wishing to change them, on top of that (Misztal et al. 2006). This can be of significant relevance to shaping the intergenerational relations (and it can strengthen the young employees' sense of being discriminated or unaccepted by the older staff).

The outcome of the other studies on intergenerational relations provide similar findings. After all, the studies in question were conducted among students of the University of the Third Age (UTA) operating at Częstochowa University of Technology, students of that university and members of the Alumni Association of Częstochowa University of Technology – in other words, not in the working environment. Still, the representatives of the different generations took part in the studies and their conclusions can also be translated into the relations in the workplace. The research was conducted in 2014, encompassing quantitative studies – survey (carried out on 103 students of the UTA and 100 students of whom 50 studied management and the other half technological sciences), qualitative studies – carried out in 2 focus groups (each made up of 7 students) and in-depth interviews conducted among 3 UTA students and 2 representatives of the Alumni Association of Częstochowa University of Technology, who were also employers encountering the different generations in their professional work. Representatives of each of the surveyed group (like respondents from the studies cited before) all agreed that the intergenerational cooperation was possible, with them being ready to embrace it. Over 90% of students and the UTA students expressed their openness to working together with the other group. As a crucial benefit coming from this

cooperation the respondents indicate the opportunity to learn from each other and knowledge exchange (Łazorko, Zajac 2015: 190-192). Still, both groups underline current communication problems between the different generations. Interesting is that the younger generation reports that these problems are to be identified largely on their own part (25%), as well as being due to the prejudices/stereotypes regarding their mutual perception (21%), with 15% of respondents seeing “a tendency to moralizing” evinced by older persons as a problem. In the focus interviews, this very moralizing by older people was pointed as a significant barrier making young people feel anxious and fearful of forming intergenerational relations. This anxiety, in turn, can to some extent explain “the barriers identified by the younger generation on their own side”, which could be understood as the reluctance to start working together with other generations. In light of the findings of the studies presented before showing the older persons emphasizing and confirming their wish to change their younger colleagues, this problem may be much relevant to the intergenerational relations.

Older people also see some barriers in the cooperation with the younger ones. They perceive it predominantly in the employment of different language codes (this was recognized by over 30% of respondents), yet also in prejudices and stereotypes in thinking about each other (nearly ¼ of respondents), mutual reluctance to cooperation (around 15%) and the cooperation reluctance mainly on the side of the young (15%). A very small percentage of older people sees barriers only on the side of the old ones, or does not see them at all.

Once again then we come across a situation where declarations made of the mutual cooperation and views on the intergenerational cooperation (including those referring to benefits associated with such cooperation) fail to be reflected in actual behaviors (being anxious about the cooperation, a sort of unwillingness leading to isolation).

Interesting findings in terms of those peculiar fears provide responses given by both students and the elderly on how those groups perceive each other. The UTA students asked how they perceived young people, in general, evaluated them as: full of energy (34%), concentrating mainly on having fun (23%), being optimistic (18%), creative (16%), lacking in life as well as professional experience (14%). These very character traits are typically associated with young age and have in themselves no pejorative meaning. However, what might be interesting is the fact that only a very small minority



of the elderly evaluated young people as: wise (7%), polite (3%) or kind (3%). This data distribution can therefore point to some stereotypical perception of the young by the elderly. This perception is not downright negative (for such traits as energy, optimism, thinking about having fun are rather positive character traits); however, the traits that are positively evaluated do not refer to young people's competences to be used in the workplace, nor are they important from the perspective of building mutual relations. What is more, not seeing young people as kind and polite can engender a specific attitude toward them in terms of interpersonal contacts – e.g. avoiding such contacts, or assuming a “defensive attitude” right from the start.

Students evaluate the elderly mostly as: experienced, wise, prudent, having a wealth of expertise, attached to tradition, hard-working; yet neither polite, kind, nor open. Thus the interpretation of the results is similar to that based on the analysis of the elderly people's responses to the same question. Students in general also evaluate the elderly positively, mainly seeing them through the prism of the character traits which are typically associated with old age (life's and professional wisdom), yet they fail to evaluate positively those traits which are essential in human contacts such as: kindness, politeness, openness. Given that a similar tendency was present in the elderly people's responses, it could be of considerable relevance to shaping the intergenerational relations – this could be the reason behind mutual dislike, fear of working together and it may generate barriers. It further reveals that both the young and the old follow stereotypes, having no knowledge of one another.

The specific problems indicated by respondents which can get to be revealed in the intergenerational contacts appear to arise from mutual unacquaintance, failing to see their own strengths by people of different generations and stereotypical thinking – in other words, from, as it were, one's consciousness and manifested attitudes and not necessarily from the facts and actual disparities. Only the aspect of language differences is indeed related to factual generational differences – which are the manifestation of the socio-cultural changes cited in the paper's introduction. As it turns out, for some elderly people accepting those changes proves to be very difficult. For the young, on the other hand, this is a norm (they do not see any kind of “otherness” –therefore they do not see why it is necessary to adapt their communication – both in terms of its content and form – to the needs of the recipients of different ages). These observations may be of key

significance to the process of creating consciously the intergenerational relations in the workplace. Realizing the source of the possible problems makes it easier to solve them, which could involve, in terms of shaping the intergenerational relations, showing to people of various ages their mutual potential, displaying their strengths, creating a common ground for mutual cooperation (in an atmosphere marked by cooperation, kindness, and not rivalry), as well as educating people of different ages on, among other things, changes and differences that may have an influence on building the relations (e.g. cultural, language, health changes, etc.).

The conclusions cited above confirm the research conducted in the UK by CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2014: 11). In the course of the research, the challenges workers identified as being associated with a diverse age staff include:

- lack of common interests and common ground for understanding (32% of employees);
- misunderstandings arising from the age differences (29% employees);
- lack of mutual values (28% employees).

This is precisely this lack of common interests and common understanding that could be the reason for people having no knowledge of one another, superficial judgment of one another, misunderstanding and thus fears, dislike and ever deeper isolation. All this can, in turn, have an impact on the creation of work atmosphere, mutual work productivity, information exchange and knowledge among employees (or lack thereof) – and what follows, on the organization of work.

Summing up the first part of the discussion, on the basis of the data collected we could conclude that:

- employees report a positive attitude towards undertaking cooperation with employees of different ages;
- most of them report that they would be most keen on working in a team diversified in terms of employees' age;
- employees discern advantages of working together;

The above statements (revealed in each of the cited studies) allow for seeing optimistically the issue of cooperation between employees of different ages. The generational diversity involves a great potential. However, on the other hand, the further

findings show that this potential is likely to be used inappropriately by organizations, which has the effect that the generational diversity may even turn into a problem for the organization. On the basis of the analysis of the studies, it should be indicated that:

- the statements made by employees surveyed allow one to observe that there are intergenerational conflicts and that there exists the phenomenon of generational isolation;
- employees report lacking common ground, no common values and interests – as the factors generating problems in establishing a satisfactory cooperation;
- a tendency to think stereotypically about each other can be gleaned from the respondents' statements. Both the old and the young discern only few strengths in people of a different age which are important in building a relation and establishing cooperation. They judge each other very superficially, not knowing much about one another;
- the elderly declare their willingness to change the bad habits (in their view) of young people. The young, on the other hand, fear the elder people's moralizing (which represents a barrier to them in establishing relations in general);
- the older people report that the different language codes used by the young create a communication problem.

As can be gleaned from above, a clear majority of the barriers is the result of lacking the awareness, of stereotypes and lacking knowledge of one another. Thus, one can conclude that those barriers could be eliminated by employing, by managers and HR experts, an appropriate approach to the management and creation of the intergenerational cooperation. In this context it is then worth finding out how they view the generational diversity in organization.

#### **4. Intergenerational relations in the workplace – managers and HR experts' approach**

According to the studies on 200 managers and 100 HR representatives within the framework of the project „Dialogue between generations – effective management of generations in enterprises” (HRP Perspective: 2-30), both HR representatives and employers express their positive attitude towards an intergenerational cooperation in

organization. Most of them disagree with the statement indicating that employees of different ages cannot cooperate with one another (61.6% of HR; 61.1% of managers). At the same time, however, nearly 1/3 of HR experts (29.6%) believes that the age diversity of employees is conducive to conflicts in the workplace, with almost half of them thinking that reconciling the expectations of employees of different ages poses a challenge to HR departments (46.9%). Moreover, 59% believes that managing an age diverse staff requires additional competences from the manager. Interestingly, managers themselves are somewhat more sceptical in this respect and see more challenges in managing age diversified teams. The majority of them highlighted that reconciling the expectations of employees of various ages posed a challenge for them (73.5%) and required having additional competences (71%). On top of that, 41.3% of managers (i.e. more than HR representatives) emphasize that in their view the generational diversity in an organization is conducive to conflict situations (which, as one might assume, in themselves could pose a management challenge).

In line with the above, one could argue that employees are not the only ones who see some sort of barriers in the intergenerational contacts – managers and HR experts also appear to be reporting them, i.e. persons who have the opportunity to observe the mutual cooperation between employees from a slightly different perspective; further to that, one could even suggest that they are sometimes responsible for some aspects of this cooperation. The opinions of managers and HR experts confirmed the finding, referred to in the first part of the paper, stating that creating relations between employees of different ages can produce some difficulties and certainly represents a challenge for contemporary organizations.

It may be interesting to see how managers interpret possible difficulties while shaping the intergenerational relations and where they believe the source of those problems is. The employers taking part in the comprehensive study described in the report cited earlier, “Organizational and psychological determinants of monitoring for sustaining workers of age 50+ on the labor market” (Misztal et al. 2006) see the source of misunderstandings, isolations or even conflicts mainly in the rivalry which they think is taking place between the employees of different generations. These observations represent yet another important finding in the discussion on the creation of intergenerational relations in the workplace. An incidence of some sort of rivalry can

determine the mutual relations, deepen the isolation and even generate conflicts. It is therefore valid information for managers. It is worthwhile for them to consider how they could prevent this rivalry or how to manage it; how to increase the productivity of the entire organization, e.g. creating a cooperation plane between individuals of different ages whose task would involve achieving a specific goal. It is worth remembering that having a mutual goal can foster integration and cooperation.

Greater awareness of both chances and possible problems, and thus arising challenges can allow managers to be better prepared to manage age diverse staff. One could conclude that the managers' role should be to encourage employees to cooperate, to arrange this cooperation, creating a common ground, making individual groups of employees aware of the each generation's qualities, seeking to identify and diminish possible feelings of anxiety relating to the intergenerational cooperation (such as the fear of the -35 against the moralizing on the part of the +50; older employees' fear of sharing knowledge with the younger ones; fear of the +50 of having to accept the role of a student taught by the young, etc.) as well as making others be aware of the common goals and values.

Interestingly, in this context it is extremely important for the managers (who are responsible for creating the relations, information transfer, educating employees, combating stereotypes, etc.) to have sound knowledge of employees of different ages – their strengths, preferences, expectations, needs, etc. However, it appears that managers themselves on more than one occasion use stereotypes, instead of deeper knowledge of their employees, pointing out, for example, that the problems in the intergenerational contacts are generated by lack of common interests or values (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2014: 12). A number of studies shows that e.g. the differences relating to the prized values in the workplace, factors motivating employees of different ages to act, expectations in terms of the organization of work are not that entirely different for the various generations as some wide-spread stereotypical thought constructs would like us to believe. Following that, based on the research review one could, for example, argue that (see Zajac 2015):

- „Demographic changes (including age) are not particularly important in the development of an individual hierarchy of factors influencing employees' satisfaction“ (Springer 2011: 172).

- There are no statistically significant differences in the factors motivating to work, which are valued by employees of different ages. Small differences can only be discerned for such factors as “job security” and “work safety and comfort”. These factors are slightly more appreciated by young employees (Wziątek-Staśko 2014: 693), (which might somewhat be contrary to the stereotypical thinking suggesting that the young people tend to be more flexible than the older ones, and have no problems frequently changing their jobs).
- The employees’ age does not determine significantly the values prized in the workplace. Generally, the representatives of different age groups appreciated work-life balance (Baran, Kłos 2014: 926), despite the fact that this value is stereotypically assigned to Generation Y. Employees of all ages value respect and expect it from their fellow coworkers and supervisors (Montana, Petit 2008: 35-49).
- A significant number of people (of all ages) would like to develop professionally and be promoted (HRP Perspective: 22). Thus, this is not a goal characteristic only of young people.

In light of the above, we can argue that these are not the real differences (in terms of prized values or work motivation) between employees of various ages that can generate problems in intergenerational contacts and management of age diverse staff, but lacking awareness and knowledge of the expectations of one’s fellow employees. Managers should then seek to gain a better insight into their employees (their motivation, values they prize in their job, their aims, expectations) – so as to be able, on the one hand, to select effective methods and tools of management (including creating relations in the workplace), and, on the other, to inform workers and make them aware of their potential and their fellow coworkers’ resources.

## 5. Summary

In the course of this discussion the attempt was to show how the intergenerational relations are being shaped in the workplace (whether and how the employees’ age diversity impacts the creation of work atmosphere, and how this influences the organization’s functioning), and what the manager’s role is in the process of

organization of work and creation of atmosphere in a workplace that is diverse in terms of employees' age.

In summing up the discussion on how the intergenerational relations are being shaped in the workplace – on the basis of the cited research – one can suggest that the development of relations between employees of different ages is largely determined by the way people of various ages perceive each other and by the experiences regarding intergenerational contacts. It appears that neither the young nor the old know much about one another, having no opportunities to getting to know and work with one another, being guided by stereotypes, which form the basis for their opinions with regard to employees of other ages. Nearly all the studies cited in the paper reveal the problem of intergenerational isolation, and lack of common ground. This suggests that although respondents report their willingness to cross-generational cooperation, having expressed positive views in this respect, it is hard to conclude that these relations are being shaped in a satisfactory way, having a positive impact on the atmosphere and organization of work. Quite the contrary, the persons surveyed reported conflicts in the workplace, fears and even rivalry. What is, however, important is that what causes this situation to emerge might be eliminated by a management process that is appropriately designed – which is a quite a challenge mainly for managers. As it turns out, the possibility of cross-generational cooperation is not determined by the actually present diametrical differences between the values, motivators or expectations as represented by the various generations (which would make the cooperation and reconciliation of priorities impossible). Thus, it appears that the problems revealed by respondents can be eliminated by education, transferring knowledge, combating stereotypes, creating chances of cooperation.

It is then possible to indicate the challenges and the manager's role in the process of organization of work and creation of work atmosphere in a team made up of employees in a wider range of ages. The challenges the manager is certain to face are as follows:

- Combating stereotypes, prejudices, making employees aware of strengths of those of different ages. Managers can seek to achieve this by e.g. organizing and conducting training, workshops for employees on intergenerational cooperation. During such meetings it is worth showing different aged employees' potential, dispelling stereotypes, but also concentrating on things that employees of various

ages could have in common in order to work out a common ground. For this to be possible, managers themselves should be aware of their employees' potential, their strengths, resources, as well as goals and individual strivings, so that having insight into those matters would form a base for preparing such workshops.

- Arranging cooperation, creating a common ground for actions, chances of mutual knowledge exchange. In this context, managers should strive for creating intergenerational teams; selecting people of different ages for one team seeking to realize a common goal. Here of essence is the manager's encouraging workers to exchange knowledge with one another. Managers should provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, awarding employees for this. They should also create an atmosphere of mutual trust (so that no one would be anxious about passing their unique expertise to others). In order to achieve this, managers themselves should be willing to share their knowledge with others, thus providing a good example to emulate. Moreover, given that there are some intergenerational differences in terms of the communication form, language expressions used, etc. (which, according to research, are a source of fear of working together with people of different ages) – the manager's role is to devise a strategy and communication rules that are known to and respected by all employees. To this end, the manager should become familiar with the specific ways of how the various generations communicate and propose solutions which make the combination of those ways possible.
- Making employees aware of common goals and benefits arising from their achievement so that employees could sense and have the need of cooperation, coactions (but not rivalry),
- Mitigating possible anxiety associated with cross-generational cooperation (e.g. fear of losing knowledge to the benefit of the young and thus becoming less valuable for organization). In this respect it is crucial for the manager to treat his/her employees equally, showing respect to each and everyone, highlighting their contribution to the organization so as to make everybody feel needed and valuable. Preventing any behavior which might appear to be age discriminating.
- On-going review of needs and expectations of employees of all ages and tailoring work methods and tools to them – of key appears here an individual approach to workers, and respecting their needs in the process of work organization. Moreover, it



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is unacceptable to assume that those needs are, for example, the same for all other representatives of a particular generation. The analysis of needs and expectations, an individual approach to staff helps managers to abandon their possible stereotypical approach to workers of different ages.

The challenges outlined above and the manager's role arising from them allow one to conclude that the process of creating the right atmosphere in a team made up of employees of various ages managers should start by working on their own attitudes towards people of different ages. Managers should foster their communications skills and learn how to adapt to their employees' ways of communication. It is paramount to seek to gain insight into their workers – their expectations, needs, goals and, based on this knowledge, choose appropriate strategies and tools. Another important element is also educating all employees with a view to battle the stereotypical approach towards fellow workers.

Considering the findings of the studies presented above, including also the fact that nowadays we encounter a large generational diversity functioning on the labor market, with society having entered the stage of an aging population, which might in future engender the problem of staff shortages, thus making it necessary to encourage people already at the age of retirement to continue work (which will contribute to the generational diversity even more so) – it is becoming a considerable challenge for today's organizations to develop the right approach towards the issue of managing age diverse staff, as well as shaping employees' attitudes towards one another.

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## Zarządzanie zróżnicowanym wiekowo zespołem pracowników – wyzwaniem dla współczesnego menedżera

### Streszczenie

**Cel:** Z uwagi na postępujące zmiany demograficzne, których efektem jest coraz większe zróżnicowanie pokoleniowe współczesnych organizacji, celem artykułu jest określenie, jak kształtują się relacje międzypokoleniowe w miejscu pracy oraz jaka jest rola menedżera w procesie organizacji pracy i kreowania atmosfery w różnorodnym pod względem wieku zespole pracowników.

**Metoda badawcza:** Dokonana została analiza badań wtórnych (polskich oraz zagranicznych) dotyczących relacji międzypokoleniowych w miejscu pracy. Przedstawione zostały również wnioski z badań własnych: ilościowych (badanie ankietowe przeprowadzone wśród 103 słuchaczy Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku Politechniki Częstochowskiej oraz 100 studentów Politechniki Częstochowskiej) oraz jakościowych (grupy fokusowe, w skład których wchodziłi studenci, oraz wywiady pogłębione przeprowadzone wśród 3 słuchaczy UTW oraz 2 przedstawicieli Stowarzyszenia Wychowanków Politechniki Częstochowskiej).

**Wnioski:** Na podstawie analizy badań wskazać można, że w relacjach pomiędzy pracownikami w różnym wieku ujawnił się problem izolacji międzypokoleniowej oraz braku płaszczyzny porozumienia, który wpływa na kreowanie atmosfery w pracy i organizację pracy, a wynika m.in. z stereotypowego myślenia, uprzedzeń, obaw, braku wiedzy. Możliwość współpracy międzypokoleniowej nie jest determinowana realnie istniejącymi różnicami pomiędzy wartościami, motywacją czy też oczekiwaniami przedstawicieli różnych pokoleń (które uniemożliwiałyby współpracę i pogodzenie priorytetów). Istnieje zatem możliwość kreowania efektywnej współpracy w zespołach międzypokoleniowych, a dużą rolę w tym procesie odgrywać może menedżer. Powinien on przede wszystkim zatroszczyć się o kreowanie odpowiedniej atmosfery w zróżnicowanym wiekowo zespole pracowników; zadbać, aby każdy pracownik czuł się szanowany i równo traktowany (w tym kontekście ważna jest zatem postawa menedżera). Menedżerowie organizując pracę swoim pracownikom, powinni dążyć do stworzenia szans i możliwości wzajemnej współpracy pomiędzy osobami w różnym wieku, tak by nie pogłębiać izolacji międzypokoleniowej, lecz stwarzać szansę na wzajemne poznanie się. To z kolei może przyczynić się do zredukowania uprzedzeń i stereotypów, które na ogół wynikają z braku wiedzy. Elementem swoistej integracji może być zachęcanie pracowników do wspólnego dążenia do realizacji celów organizacji.

**Oryginalność / wartość artykułu, wkład w rozwój nauki:** Analiza badań posłużyła do określenia czynników, które mogą mieć wpływ na kreowanie relacji międzypokoleniowych w pracy, by na tej podstawie określić rolę menedżera w tym procesie.

**Implikacje badań:** Zidentyfikowanie czynników mających wpływ na kreowanie relacji w pracy pozwoliło na sformułowanie swoistych rekomendacji oraz zaleceń dla menedżerów, które mogą być przydatne w kreowaniu poprawnych relacji w zróżnicowanych wiekowo organizacjach w Polsce.

*Słowa kluczowe: menedżer, pokolenie, relacje międzypokoleniowe, zróżnicowanie wiekowe.*

JEL: M12; M14