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Managing Age-Diverse Employees in a Cultural Context

JOANNA RATAJCZAK

Institute of Management, Poznań University of Economics and Business

Abstract

This article is empirical. Its main purpose is to recognise, diagnose, and assess the relationship between cultural factors and the level of age management in the organisation. Four detailed research problems were also posed regarding the connections between the type of organisational culture, the cultural dimension, and the level of management of age-diverse employees. To find answers to these questions, research was carried out that consisted of two stages. The first was a case study of four companies with different types of organisational culture. It was supplemented by conducting a CAWI survey among individual employees from organisations with different cultural backgrounds. The obtained results lead to the conclusion that the most beneficial for the existence of the highest level of management of age-differentiated employees is the clan culture, as well as low power distance and individualism. The article ends with recommendations for managing age-diverse employees in organisations with different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: diversity management, type of organisational culture, dimensions of national cultures, multi-generational employees

JEL Classification Codes: M50, M54

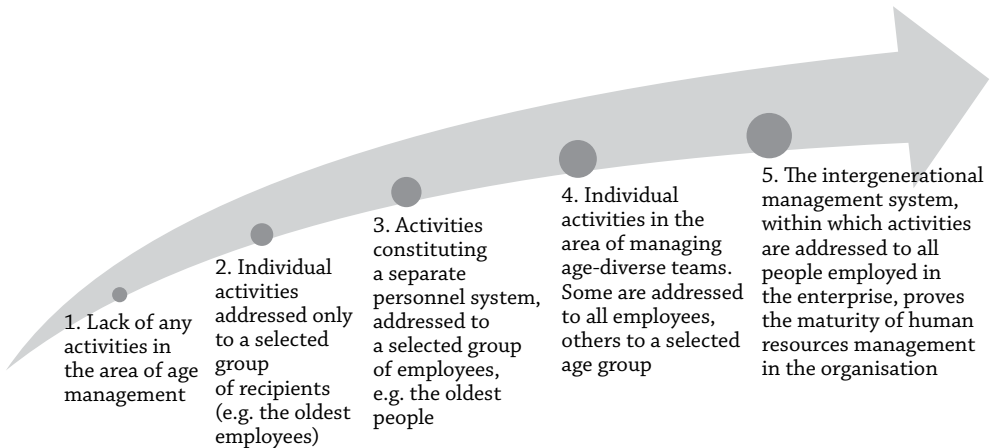
Introduction

Belonging to a given generation is determined by shared historical experience. Therefore, no generation can be considered in isolation from the national context, political events, and history of a given region (Opalińska, 2018, p. 142). Evidently, the modern world is highly globalised, so the same generational groups may exist in different corners of the globe. However, individual differences between employees should not be underestimated. To understand generational differences, an organisation should acknowledge cultural background of its employees. Culture, nationality, ethnicity, and age determine the hierarchy of values they profess. It is therefore important to properly identify them among individual generational groups, which will help in the proper management of age diversity in the company. Cultural differences at work are as important as those resulting from the age structure (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, Marcinkowski, Motyl-Adamczyk, 2016). Understanding them allows for an increase in the effectiveness of the employee team and better interpersonal relations.

Research methodology

The results discussed concern the research procedure conducted for the doctoral dissertation. It was proposed to distinguish several levels of age diversity management in the enterprise. The results are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Levels of generational diversity management



Source: own study based on literature.

The functioning of a separate system for managing age-diverse employees proves the maturity of human capital management in a given enterprise, and the higher the level of generational diversity management in the organisation, the better and more mature human resources management in general. The main problem was as follows: What are the connections between cultural factors and the level of advancement in managing age-diverse employees in the organisation? In turn, the detailed research questions are: (1) What are the connections between the type of organisational culture of the company (according to Cameron and Quinn's typology) and the level of advancement in managing age-differentiated employees in the organisation as well as attitudes and behaviours towards age-diverse employees in the company? (2) What are the connections between the individual dimensions of national culture according to G. Hofstede and the level of advancement in managing age-diverse employees in the organisation as well as attitudes and behaviours towards age-diverse employees in the company? The answers to the above questions were obtained as a result of the research procedure. The research was conducted from March 2019 to January 2022. The study used the diagnostic survey method (survey and interview technique), observation, and document analysis. The research consisted of two stages. The first one, which was the main part, used a multiple case study. Therefore, it was qualitative research. To select research organisations, HR employees were first asked to complete a short survey questionnaire, which allowed them to recognise the type of organisational culture present in a given company (Cameron, Quinn, 2015) as well as to assess the activities carried out in the field of managing employee generational diversity. The organisations were selected in such a way that they were large enterprises operating in Poland. The stages of empirical research are presented in Figure 2.

Survey questionnaires, interviews, observation sheets, and document analyses were created by the author of the research. In one of the organisations, due to the ongoing SARS-COV-2 pandemic, observations were made by two employees who had been previously trained by the author. Using a questionnaire created by the author, an analysis of documents was also carried out: mission and vision of the company, work regulations, description of the company's strategy, description of the organisational structure, description of the business path, description of the motivation system, regulations for employee evaluation, regulations for remuneration, promotion, as well as employees' rewards, job description and rules for employee recruitment.

Organisations with at least a single activity in the field of managing age-diverse employees or a separate age-diversity management system were invited to participate in the main research. Only four companies accepted this invitation.

Figure 2. Stages of research

Literature analysis		Purpose: to review and systematise concepts related to the subject scope of the article and to determine the research gap
Preliminary – pilot research (purpose: selecting an organisation for research, testing research tools)		
Surveys (Cameron and Quinn questionnaire and a survey assessing the level of management of age-diverse employees)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the questionnaire was sent to 453 organisations • 354 completed questionnaires were received in response • at this stage, 5 organisations were selected that took part in further research
Main research Purpose: confirming the type of organisational culture and identifying activities related to the management of age-diverse employees		
Stage I		
Multiple case study method	Document analysis	conducted using a created questionnaire based on documents provided by the surveyed organisations
	Observation	observation taking place in the surveyed organisations regarding the work of multigenerational teams
	Surveys CAWI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surveys addressed to employees of the surveyed organisations – of various ages, employed in various departments at various management levels • in one organisation surveys were conducted in paper form, in other enterprises in electronic form (CAWI)
	Interviews	direct IDI interviews with managers of various departments, at various management levels – several from each of the five organisations participating in the research
Stage II Purpose: complementing qualitative research, identifying activities in the field of managing age-diverse employees in organisations with different cultural origins and a different type of organisational culture		
Surveys CAWI		the survey questionnaire was completed by 362 people working in Polish, German, Scandinavian, Asian and American enterprises

Source: own study.

After selecting the companies that ultimately took part in the research, to obtain detailed data, interviews with managers of HR and other departments (multi-generational teams), surveys, document analysis, and observations were conducted. The following companies took part in this stage of the research: Aquanet (hierarchy, Polish organisation), provider of telecommunications solutions (market, Polish organisation),

provider of telecommunications infrastructure (adhocracy, Polish organisation), company operating in the field of retail trade¹ (clan, Swedish organisation). Therefore, they were carried out in companies representing all types of organisational culture according to Cameron and Quinn's typology and with different cultural backgrounds.

The second stage complemented the qualitative research and was conducted for comparative purposes. As part of it, an anonymous survey was conducted on the Internet, addressed to employees of organisations with different cultural backgrounds and different types of organisational culture. The questionnaire was completed by 362 people (including 11.6% employees of companies of German origin, 2.2% – Scandinavian, 7.7% – American, 1.7% – Korean, 72.9% – Polish, 3.9% – other than those previously mentioned; 32% – clan-type culture, 37.6% – hierarchy-type culture, 22.1% – market-type culture, 8.3% – adhocracy-type culture), however, for the results to be generalisable, the sample size should be 1,536 respondents (at least 384 respondents representing each type of organisational culture, assuming a maximum error of 5%, a fraction size of 0.5 and a confidence level of 95%). For this reason, the results obtained only complement the qualitative research conducted in the first stage. However, they will not allow for generalisation.

It is worth adding that the main research was preceded by pilot study, the aim of which was to test research tools. They were intended to check the reliability and validity of diagnostic tools, as well as their readability and understanding by research participants. For this reason, Aquanet initially surveyed 10 employees and then repeated it on a larger sample. A tool is reliable when repeated use under the same conditions produces the same results. In both cases (both on a smaller and larger sample), similar percentage results were obtained. In addition, similar results were obtained using the other research methods (observation, document analysis, interviews), which confirmed the mutual reliability of the tools used. Therefore, all tools were found to be reliable.

In terms of validity, we measured mainly face validity (the respondents confirmed that the tools used measured what was expected) and content validity (the questionnaires were prepared based on the results of an extensive analysis of the literature on the subject, and their internal structure was also assessed). It is worth adding that in qualitative research it is difficult to guarantee the accuracy of the results. Two ways of ensuring the validity of research results are usually recognised: triangulation of the research methods used and assigning relevance by the respondent. Both took place during the research.

¹ Three organisations participating in the research (except Aquanet) did not consent to the publication of their names. For this reason, their details have been replaced with asterisks in bibliographic entries and some footnotes.

Managing age diversity in a hierarchy culture

Aquanet S.A. (hereinafter: Aquanet) is a Polish water and sewage company based in Poznań. The age structure of personnel and the existence of teams of age-diverse employees in the organisation were determined. The company considered the exchange of experiences and the possibility of transferring knowledge to be positive aspects of the work of such teams. However, no negative symptoms of working in age-diverse teams were noticed. It was noted that Aquanet does not have a separate system for managing age-differentiated employees, but there are individual activities in this area within other personnel systems. Results were also obtained from the part of the questionnaire used to identify Cameron and Quinn's type of organisational culture. The hierarchy type culture received 490 points (81.67% of all points that could be scored in the questionnaire), the clan type culture – 110 points (18.3%), and the adhocracy and market cultures received zero points each. On this basis, it was concluded that Aquanet has a hierarchical organisational culture.

It was also recognised that as many as 88% of employees perceive age management as an opportunity to reconcile the needs of different generations in the organisation. For 12%, however, it is an action for the youngest in terms of age and experience or a completely unnecessary action (both answers received 6% of responses).

In the examined organisation there is no separate system for managing age-differentiated employees (much less intergenerational management). However, there are individual elements belonging to other personnel systems that can be considered components of age diversity management in a company. Interestingly, nonetheless, 4% of employees in the surveys stated that there is a separate system for managing age-differentiated employees – half of them claim that it is addressed to newly hired people, regardless of age, seniority, and experience, and the remaining half say that it is addressed to all employed persons. These people stated that this system provides knowledge and experience as well as care for newly hired workers.

At the same time, almost 2/3 of the staff notice activities in this area in other personnel systems. The largest number of people, as many as 51% of respondents, take part in health protection and promotion activities. Half of the respondents also admitted that the organisation supports intergenerational cooperation. These people indicated that this is due to integration events attended by personnel of different ages, training of young staff by experienced employees, as well as the way work is divided (“everyone does everything regardless of age”, “fair division of tasks”, “no age group is disadvantaged, but neither is it singled out”). Mentoring is also popular (41% of employees participate in this programme), and the area of

work organisation (e.g. flexible working time, flexible forms of employment) – 37% of respondents use these solutions.

As mentioned, mentoring activities also take place at Aquanet. In many departments, a newly hired employee receives a supervisor, i.e. an experienced person who has been working in the organisation for years, who introduces them to the tasks of a given position. In return for ones additional duties, such a person receives an appropriate reward, the amount of which, however, depends on the discretion of his or her direct superior. It should be emphasised here that there is no formal mentoring system in the organisation. The assignment of a supervisor is an individual decision of the manager of a given team.

Aquanet does not offer differentiated benefits based on the age of employees. However, the surveyed managers emphasise that it would be a good idea to introduce benefits targeted at specific groups of recipients of different ages, e.g. financing a nursery and kindergarten for the children of employees of generations Y and Z, or sponsor expert trainings for employees of the X generation demographic. In their opinion, it would be necessary to restore the training allowance, which was abolished in the company a few years ago.

Broad-scale healthcare activities are also significant, such as co-financing private medical care, blood donation campaigns, mammography tests for women, mole tests, and arranging of the so-called health days. It is worth emphasising that older employees, belonging to the baby boomer generation, can count on a broader package of medical tests and more frequent periodic tests than required by the local law.

Information meetings were also organised for employees of pre-retirement age in cooperation with the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS). It is important to emphasise that while this is not a top-down practice, some managers are delegating less strenuous tasks to baby boomers. This is especially important in the case of physical workers whose health does not allow them to continue performing their current duties.

Office workers also have the opportunity to take advantage of flexible working hours (arrival at work is allowed from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.) and to work remotely during one day every two weeks, which certainly facilitates the reconciliation of work and personal life, and that is especially important for younger generations.

Aquanet also promotes lifelong learning by organising English language courses during work and co-financing first-cycle, second-cycle, or postgraduate studies, provided that the field of study is consistent with the needs of the company.

The organisation also creates employment plans every year (mainly including planning for potential retirement and the need for new employees). Unfortunately, however, they are not related to employee succession plans, although both managers and regular staff members believe that it is essential. It is worth emphasising that some managers of multigenerational teams, as part of the above-mentioned informal

intermentoring, pair up employees who are to retire in the coming years with those who are the youngest, recently employed. Thanks to this, the skills of young workers are naturally developed and the knowledge resulting from experience is transferred. According to the managers who gave interviews, there are noticeable problems with such cooperation, especially among the baby boomers who do not understand and often do not want to understand the approach to professional work typical of their younger colleagues.

Regardless of the generational group, Aquanet employees decided that the most beneficial activity for them in the field of managing age-diverse employees is mentoring (although it does not formally exist in the organisation). Younger respondents also positively evaluate the creation of succession plans, counteracting ageism, flexible working hours, flexible forms of employment, and job rotation. Older generations, however, prefer activities in the field of ergonomics, health protection and promotion, as well as activities aimed at people at pre-retirement age, which are intended to help them mitigate the effects of the retirement process.

Staff members were also asked to indicate the least favourable elements of managing age-diverse employees. Regardless of age, respondents indicated diversity in recruitment activities and training topics depending on the age of employees. Older generations, on the other hand, found salary differentiation, job rotation, and creation of succession plans to be the least beneficial. Younger workers, in turn, negatively evaluated the differentiation of employee evaluations and the talent management system due to the employee's age, as well as activities aimed at people at pre-retirement age and activities in the field of health protection and promotion.

The surveyed employees also indicated the greatest benefits and disadvantages resulting from activities related to the management of age-diverse staff members. The former included, above all, better intergenerational cooperation and working atmosphere, a better level of interpersonal relations, and an increase in motivation among all generations of employees. The least beneficial effects of this type of activity were, however, concerns that they may be perceived as discriminating against certain groups of employees, as well as the deterioration of the working atmosphere and jealousy between members of staff.

Respondents' supervisors were Baby Boomers (33%) and Generation X (67%). The majority of employees participating in the survey rated the quality of cooperation with their superiors as good (17% of responses) or very good (51% of responses). The others had no opinion. It is worth noting, however, that 50% of Generation Y employees and as many as 87.5% of Generation Z employees stated that cooperation with their superiors would be even better if they were younger.

Four managers from different departments, at different management levels, took part in the interviews. One belonged to the baby boomer generation, two

to the generation that experienced the shift to remote work, and one to the generation that benefited from co-financed nursery and kindergarten for employees' children (generations Z and Y). Additionally, expert training and participation in the monitoring process as a mentor were provided. There were also benefits such as access to a sanatorium, additional leave to recover health, and a change of duties after the age of 50 or 55, which is particularly important for blue-collar workers. In their opinion, it would also be necessary to restore the internship allowance, which was abolished a few years ago.

To sum up, this company takes individual actions in the area of generational diversity management addressed to all employees. However, they have no imposed structure described in HR documents. The vast majority of actions take place only due to the grass-roots initiatives of the managers of individual teams. They are used ad hoc when necessary. Therefore, in an organisation characterised by a culture of hierarchy, activities related to the management of employees of different ages occur at the fourth level (described in Figure 1).

Managing age diversity in a market-type culture

The second surveyed organisation is a telecommunications service provider operating in the Greater Poland Voivodeship. The results of research conducted in the company showed that there are practices and values typical of the market culture. The results of Cameron and Quinn's questionnaire are as follows: market-type culture scored 245 points (40.83%), adhocracy-type culture – 190 points (31.67%), clan-type culture – 155 points (25.83%), and hierarchy type only 10 points (1.67%). This is also confirmed by the results obtained through observation and document analysis.

There are recruitment activities tailored to the expectations of different generations, starting with the preparation of a job advertisement. First of all, there is a noticeable diversification of the channels for reaching job candidates belonging to different generations. The organisation rather believes that in the recruitment process it is worth using a different way of communicating with older and younger candidates, however, as the interview shows, the organisation's management does not recommend differentiating recruitment sources or other differences, even if they were to be present only in the language used in the advertisement or during the interview.

All benefits are addressed to employees regardless of their belonging to a given generation group. Moreover, none of the employees participating in the study declared that they were dissatisfied with this solution. All respondents considered it inappropriate to differentiate benefits, carrying the risk of discrimination against

certain groups of employees. The only acceptable solution, in their opinion, would be to introduce a cafeteria system from which each employee could choose the motivational elements that interest them.

There is also a formalised mentoring system in the organisation. Participation is obligatory for all newly employed staff members, but its course depends on the department. A person selected by a superior to take up the role of a mentor may refuse, however, it is emphasised that this has never happened so far, and the mentor receives additional financial gratification for one's actions. Respondents assess the effectiveness of the existing mentoring system differently. It is pointed out that its effectiveness depends largely on the mentor, which is hard to disagree with.

Training addressed to employees is also not differentiated by age. However, the management board member participating in the interview noted the need to diversify training methods in such a way that the pace of learning was adapted to the target group. In turn, online training should be addressed to the youngest employees. It is worth noting that respondents from the HR and sales departments have different opinions and oppose differentiating the topics and forms of training.

The organisation offers many activities to people at pre-retirement age. They, like other employees, can take advantage of the remote work system and rehabilitation programmes. At the same time, workshops were also organised to show younger employees how older people function.

There are no employee succession plans in the organisation, but departure management practices are part of talent management. Each employee determines an individual career path together with his or her supervisor. If one wants to end cooperation with the company, the so-called exit interview is conducted.

In the organisation, it is emphasised that generational diversity management is not particularly significant; in fact, there are only its elements. The sales department manager decided that a separate intergenerational management system was not needed in the organisation. Moreover, it would be discriminatory to many employees. The only element of this system that in manager's opinion is necessary could be a different way of recruiting people from dissimilar age groups, which will be reflected in, for example, a distinct language used in advertisements (more casual to young people and formalised in advertisements addressed to more experienced candidates) and different channels to reach candidates. In sales department manager's opinion, there is no need to take action to prevent age discrimination in the company, because there is no such demand. There is also no need to support intergenerational cooperation. The success of an organisation is determined by a good atmosphere in the team, recognising the requirements of each employee, supporting them, and giving them the right direction.

Creating succession plans was considered the most effective. Older generations also appreciate activities related to the promotion of lifelong learning, health care, and those aimed at people at pre-retirement age, while younger generations – counteract age discrimination as well as flexible working time and flexible forms of employment. They probably found themselves best at work during and after the pandemic, when most of the organisation’s employees worked (and still work) remotely.

It is worth emphasising that only two respondents stated that age diversity management activities should constitute a separate, formalised personnel system. The rest prefer the current solution, i.e. individual elements in this area implemented as part of other HR systems.

Employees were also asked to indicate the least favourable elements of managing age-diverse staff members. The Baby Boomers, Y and Z generations found the differences in the number and subject of training, as well as the assessment criteria due to the employee’s age and job rotation, to be the least beneficial. In turn, Generation X employees find the least effective mainly in varying the number of training sessions. It is worth emphasising, however, that in general, representatives of this generation rarely considered any actions to be ineffective.

The surveyed members of staff also indicated the greatest benefits as well as disadvantages resulting from activities related to the management of age-diverse employees. The former included, above all, an increase in motivation among all employees, a better working atmosphere and improved intergenerational cooperation, as well as a better level of interpersonal relations. The least beneficial effects of this type of activities were, however, concerns that they may be perceived as discriminating against certain groups of employees and the nuisance resulting from the need to create various benefit proposals that would suit personnel of different ages or to individualise evaluation criteria or prepare separate training for different generational groups.

Respondents’ supervisors were Baby Boomers (5%), Generation X (85%), and Generation Y (10%). The majority of employees participating in the survey rated the quality of cooperation with their superiors as good (30% of responses) or very good (60% of responses). The rest had no opinion or rated the quality of cooperation rather poorly. As many as 90% of respondents believed that the age of their superiors is not important when assessing the quality of cooperation with them.

To sum up, in a company with a market-type culture, there are individual activities in the area of generational diversity management, addressed to all employees, which are included in the company’s HR documents. However, they are not considered a priority or necessary, but rather an addition to other systems.

Managing age diversity in an adhocracy culture

The next organisation examined is an operator of open fiber optic networks that has been functioning for several months. It cooperates with telecommunications service operators, providing them with access to its infrastructure and thus allowing them to reach individual customers. Findings from research conducted in the company showed practices and values characteristic of the adhocracy culture. The results of Cameron and Quinn's questionnaire are as follows: adhocracy-type culture scored 250 points (41.67%), market-type culture – 210 points (35%), clan-type culture – 125 points (20.83%), and a hierarchy-type culture only 15 points (2.5%). This is also confirmed by the results obtained through observation and document analysis.

In the area of recruitment, it postulates the use of the same sources of obtaining candidates and methods of communication, regardless of their age group, which results from the specificity of the organisation's industry. Age is not a criterion in the recruitment and selection process of employees. Only the skills and knowledge of job candidates count.

All benefits are addressed to employees regardless of their belonging to a given generation group. Differentiating benefits is considered to discriminate against certain groups of employees. The organisation tries to provide a wide enough range of benefits that are part of the cafeteria system so that each member of staff, regardless of age, can choose something that suits their individual needs.

The mentoring system is informal. These activities are aimed at newly employed people who receive their own "guardian" for the first months of work. It is worth adding that at the beginning of the activity, mentors changed every week so that the mentee had the opportunity to learn from different people working in the department. This is no longer the case now. According to respondents, however, the main disadvantages of mentoring are noticeable. Since it is informal, the mentor does not have any benefits from his or her work but only receives additional responsibilities. Therefore, it is an unnecessary time burden for him or her.

The training addressed to employees is not differentiated by age. It is worth noting, however, that employees indicate the need to organise training in the field of soft skills, addressed to employees from generations Y and Z. It should be noted that respondents from human resources departments are opposed to differentiating the topics and forms of training.

Employees of pre-retirement age are not offered any facilities. Still, the organisation takes part in several activities in the field of health promotion and protection, such as webinars on this topic, exercises, training with experts in the field of medicine (mainly online), as well as vaccination campaigns. They are addressed to all staff members.

There are no employee succession plans in the organisation yet, but they are being prepared. They will be part of the talent management system (which is also being created). This is understandable because the organisation has only recently started operating. It is worth emphasising, however, that both of these areas will be independent of the age of employees, and activities within them will be addressed to all members of staff. If an employee decides to end cooperation with the company, he or she is interviewed during the so-called exit interview. However, there are activities in the field of employment planning. The organisation also finances postgraduate studies and courses that meet its needs, thus supporting lifelong learning.

It is worth emphasising that the organisation actively counteracts age discrimination and these actions seem to be effective, as no manifestations of ageism have occurred so far. The company has introduced a diversity inclusion strategy and a code of ethics that regulates these issues. Superiors declare that they also support cooperation, including intergenerational one. However, it was not possible to determine how.

The organisation does not notice the need to introduce a separate system for managing generational diversity, which is explained by the fact that the age of employees should not be a determinant of the company's activities in any way. Interestingly, the IT department manager participating in the interview has a different opinion on this matter. He stated that although the organisation does not have a structured system for managing generational diversity, he has noticed for some time that all activities of the HR department are aimed at introducing such solutions. In his opinion, this is appropriate, especially since elements of intergenerational management are used on an ad hoc basis in the IT department, although they are not common and not approved in the company from the top. In IT department manager's opinion, the most important in managing a team is putting trust in the staff, appreciating employees, and individualisation of rewards. Success is determined by reconciling the needs of employees. Age, knowledge, experience, or competencies do not matter in achieving high work results, because these elements can be acquired over time. The right attitude is necessary. However, properly motivating all staff members is a challenge. In IT department manager's opinion, a good solution, which has no place in the organisation but would be worth introducing, would be different training topics addressed to people of different ages (primarily regarding the development of soft skills that employees from different generations demonstrate at a different level). However, employees should not be differentiated because age must not be a criterion taken into account at work in any area. Therefore, the manager does not see the need to support intergenerational cooperation.

Counteracting age discrimination and activities in the area of health care were considered the most effective. The youngest employees also value flexible forms of employment and working time, as well as mentoring (it is worth remembering

that it only operates informally in the organisation, so it may be worth considering formalising activities in this area). For the baby boomer generation, actions aimed at people at pre-retirement age would also be effective. This is even more interesting because such activities do not take place in the organisation. This is therefore an indication that it would be worth introducing them. Interestingly, as many as half of the respondents believed that age diversity management activities should constitute a separate, formalised personnel system.

Employees were also asked to indicate the least favourable elements of managing age-diverse staff members. Employees from Generation Z considered diversification of employee evaluation criteria based on age to be the least effective, while slightly older personnel from Generation Y considered job rotation to be the least effective. However, both of these activities do not occur in the examined organisation. Older employees mainly considered salary differences based on the age of employees to be ineffective. This is of course understandable. Salaries should depend on competencies and seniority, rather than age per se.

The surveyed staff members also indicated the greatest benefits and disadvantages resulting from activities related to the management of age-diverse employees. The former included, above all, a greater level of interpersonal relations, and secondly, *ex aequo* – a better working atmosphere, intergenerational cooperation of higher quality, and an individualised approach to each employee.

The least beneficial effects of this type of activity, as in the other surveyed organisations, were the fears that they may be perceived as discriminating against certain groups of employees, the deterioration of working atmosphere, and the burdensomeness of such solutions.

The respondents' superiors belonged to Generation X (59%) and Y (41%). All employees participating in the study rated the quality of cooperation with their superiors as good (62% of responses) or very good (38% of responses). The respondents also have no preferences as to the age of their superiors.

To sum up, the studied company exhibits an adhocracy-type organisational culture. It includes individual activities in the area of generational diversity management, addressed to all employees, which are included in the company's HR documents. It emphasises an individual approach to the employee's needs, without paying attention to his or her age. It applies not only to the principles of managing staff members of different ages formally accepted in the company. There are also many other activities aimed at motivating employees of different ages, as well as individualising rewards and responding to their needs.

Managing age diversity in a clan-type culture

The next company where the research was carried out is an organisation of Scandinavian origin, operating in the field of retail trade. The results of the conducted research indicate that the company has a clan-type organisational culture. It is also the only company with a formal, structured generational diversity management system, which is the fifth highest level of management of age-diverse employees. These activities are very extensive. It is also worth emphasising that in this company special attention is paid to the diversity of staff members, not only in terms of age, but also gender, culture, etc., and these issues are dealt with by a separate department dedicated only to this area of activities (the respondent participating in the interview was the manager of this department and belonged to generation Y). It is therefore not surprising that the organisation pays special attention to preventing discrimination, including age discrimination. For this purpose, numerous training courses are conducted, mainly for team leaders.

The company does not have different recruitment procedures for people of different ages. It is true that it covers classes in secondary schools, takes part in job fairs at universities, conducts internship programmes for students, etc., but all interested parties can take part in these activities, regardless of age. They are certainly not dictated by the desire to “rejuvenate” the staff. Also, job advertisements are not prepared for the specific age group to which they are addressed, but all media communication is aimed at inclusive activities. Great care is taken to ensure that every message coming from the organisation is understandable and attractive to every generation.

Different motivational activities for people in different areas of age have no place. All benefits offered are addressed to employees regardless of age or seniority. However, the focus is on their diversity to meet the needs of all employees.

The organisation operates a formalised intermentoring system, called reverse mentoring. Participating employees serve as mentors for each other and support each other in various areas of work.

The company is also friendly to people of pre-retirement age. It is emphasised that this is a group of the most loyal and effective employees. For this reason, organisation takes special care of them, offering, among others: work flexibility (time and place of work tailored to the needs of a given person) and a support programme including counselling and psychological assistance. It is worth emphasising, however, that opportunities such as flexible working time and flexible forms of employment are available to all employees.

The health protection and promotion system includes some diverse activities. This offer is wide enough to meet the needs of employees of all ages.

There is also job rotation in the company. The youngest employees can get to know the workplace better this way, while the oldest employees find relief in this solution, for example when their health condition no longer allows them to perform their current tasks. It depends on both the needs of the employer and the employee himself or herself.

Lifelong learning is promoted by co-financing studies, training, and courses. This is a key part of employee development, regardless of age or length of service.

The organisation also creates employee succession plans, which are part of the general trend of planning employment for the coming years, and a coherent departure management policy. Human resources department employees take their conversations with people who have decided to resign very seriously, these are the so-called exit interviews.

At the same time, intergenerational cooperation is supported by regularly obtaining information about the needs in this area from team leaders and training them. It is believed that managing generational diversity is now essential. It ensures comfort for employees, results in better business outcomes (a diverse team better reflects similarly diverse customers), and is also socially important due to ongoing demographic changes.

For 88% of employees, generational diversity management is an opportunity to reconcile the needs of different generations in the organisation, 3.5% of respondents consider it as activities aimed at the oldest staff members, and the rest claim that these activities are unnecessary.

Respondents primarily appreciate the wide range of benefits that meet the needs of all personnel, regardless of their age or length of service. As many as 73.7% of them take part in the reverse mentoring programme, noticing benefits such as: strengthening intergenerational cooperation, exchange of experiences, and improving communication between employees. As many as 87.5% of baby boomer staff members participating in the survey admitted that they appreciated the possibility of flexible working hours and support programmes as they approach retirement.

It should be emphasised that 91.2% of respondents also admitted that the organisation supports intergenerational cooperation and actively works to counteract discrimination by providing trainings, publishing brochures prepared for internal use, and conducting intra-company anti-discrimination campaigns. The company also has an employee diversity department, which actively monitors the situation in this area and responds on an ongoing basis to any negative aspects of the operation of age-diverse teams.

All personnel, except those from Generation Z, agreed that the most beneficial activity for them in managing age-diverse employees is mentoring. Younger respondents evaluate flexible working time and flexible forms of employment as very positive,

as well as the differentiation of the talent management system depending on the employee's age. Generation Y also considers the diversity of benefits within the motivation system to be beneficial. Older staff members mainly appreciate activities aimed at people at pre-retirement age (BB generation) and the promotion of continuing education (Generation X).

Employees were also asked to indicate the least favourable elements of managing age-diverse staff. Regardless of age, respondents indicated differences in remuneration and evaluation criteria depending on the age of employees (BB and X generations). The youngest generations, in turn, recognise that job rotation is not beneficial to them.

The surveyed employees also indicated the greatest advantages and disadvantages resulting from activities related to the management of age-diverse personnel. The former included, above all, better intergenerational cooperation, increased motivation of all employees, better level of interpersonal relations and work atmosphere. The least beneficial effects of this type of activity were, however, concerns that they may be perceived as discriminating against certain groups of employees, as well as the deterioration of the working atmosphere and jealousy between staff members. A large number of respondents also pointed to possible legal problems.

In the studied organisation there is a very large generational diversity of people holding managerial positions. Respondents' supervisors were from all four generations currently in the workforce: Baby Boomers (21% of respondents), Generation X (30%), Generation Y (37%), and Generation Z (12%). The vast majority of employees participating in the survey rated the quality of cooperation with their superiors as good (52.6% of responses) or very good (31.6% of responses). The rest had no opinion (12.3% of responses) or rated it poorly (3.5% of responses). However, the respondents do not have strong preferences as to the age of their superior. As many as 65% of all said they had no opinion on this matter. Only 12.5% of employees from the baby boomer generation, 15.4% of Generation Y, and 25% of Generation Z believe that they would work better with a supervisor who was their age.

To sum up, the company represents a clan-type organisational culture. It is the only surveyed company to have a developed diversity management system, including generational diversity, which focuses primarily on inclusive activities rather than differentiating employees based on age.

Behaviours and attitudes towards employees of different ages

No differences were noticed in the area of behaviour and attitudes towards employees of different ages in enterprises with a different type of organisational culture or cultural origin. Managers who participated in structured interviews

indicated the characteristics of four generations of personnel employed in the surveyed enterprises.

The baby boomer generation is perceived as the most loyal, dedicated, and committed group, but at the same time reluctant to change, innovate and learn new things. Employees belonging to Generation Baby Boomers see younger generations as competitors. Generation Y is described as well-educated and striving for a previously set goal, at the same time highly appreciating the balance between private and professional life.

Managers also emphasise that, certainly, there are exceptions among their employees who do not fit in the general picture of a given generation, which results from the individual characteristics of these people. However, most employees can be described according to accepted patterns, repeatedly described in the literature on the subject.

A slightly different opinion on the approach to differentiating employees of dissimilar ages was presented in a Scandinavian company with a generational diversity management system. It was pointed out that extensive activities are carried out to blur the differences between staff members and make them invisible. An audit conducted within the organisation showed that the group of employees over fifty years of age is the most committed and loyal. Therefore, those employees should be appreciated, while not forgetting about the youngest ones. We should also avoid any stereotypes and remember that our lives have changed over the last many years. Today's fifty-year-olds behave completely differently and have unlike needs than their peers from thirty years ago. The same applies to other generational groups.

Management of age-diverse employees in the context of the type of organisational culture and cultural background – results of the second stage of research

As already mentioned, in the second stage of the research, an online survey was conducted in which 362 companies participated (each represented by one person who completed the survey questionnaire), mainly Polish, German, Scandinavian, American, and Asian. These were mainly large enterprises (83%), operating in industries such as food, automotive, clothing, pharmaceuticals, and broadly understood services.

In most of the surveyed enterprises, there are no activities in the field of generational diversity management. The largest percentage of companies in which single activities or a generational diversity management system addressed to all employees (i.e. the highest levels of age-diverse employee management) take place is in an adhocracy culture.

Table 1. Type of organisational culture and level of management of age-diverse employees

Type of organisational culture Level of management of age-diverse employees	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchy	Together
n	116	30	80	136	362
Lack of activities in the area of managing age-diverse employees (level 1)	63.8% (74)	0%	25% (20)	66.2% (90)	50.8% (184)
Individual activities addressed to a selected group of employees (level 2)	0%	6.7% (2)	22.5% (18)	0%	5.52% (20)
Age-differentiated employee management system addressed to a selected group of employees (level 3)	0%	40% (12)	30% (24)	0%	9.9% (36)
Single actions addressed to all employees (level 4)	32.8% (38)	33.3% (10)	17.5% (14)	33.8% (46)	29.8% (108)
Age-differentiated employee management system addressed to all employees (level 5)	3.4% (4)	20% (6)	5% (4)	0%	3.9% (14)

Source: own study based on the obtained research results.

Table 2. Cultural origin of the company and the level of management of age-diverse employees

Cultural origin of the company Level of management of age-diverse employees	Polish company	German company	American company	Scandinavian company	Korean company	Other	Together
n	264	42	28	8	6	14	362
Lack of activities in the area of managing age-diverse employees (level 1)	63.4% (166)	9.5% (4)	35.7% (10)	0	0	28.6% (4)	51.1% (184)
Individual activities addressed to a selected group of employees (level 2)	0.8% (2)	4.8% (2)	14.3% (4)	25% (2)	0	71.4% (10)	55.6% (20)
Age-differentiated employee management system addressed to a selected group of employees (level 3)	6.1% (16)	23.8% (10)	35.7% (10)	0	0	0	10% (36)
Single actions addressed to all employees (level 4)	28.2% (74)	47.6% (20)	14.3% (4)	50% (4)	100% (6)	0	27.2% (108)
Age-differentiated employee management system addressed to all employees (level 5)	1.5% (6)	14.3% (6)	0	25% (2)	0	0	3.3% (14)

Source: own study based on the obtained research results.

The largest percentage of enterprises with a generational diversity management system addressed to all employees occurs among organisations of German and

Polish origin. However, taking into account the sum of answers related to the two highest levels, i.e. fourth and fifth, it turns out that the most advanced activities in the area of generational diversity management occur in Scandinavian and German companies. However, it should be emphasised that in the case of Scandinavian and Korean organisations, due to small number of respondents, it is difficult to generalise the results.

However, based on obtained data, it can be assumed that the dimensions of national culture that may determine the advanced level of management of age-differentiated employees are primarily low power distance and individualism. According to research conducted by Geert Hofstede, both are at a similar level in Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

The results of this stage of the research also showed that only in the fifty surveyed organisations there are diversified activities in the field of personnel policy, addressed to different age groups of employees. Only 3.3% of enterprises have a separate intergenerational management system. In 43% of these companies, there is an adhocracy-type culture, in the remaining ones – a clan or market type (28.5% each). That is quite surprising. It would seem that multi-generational management activities, as the highest level of age diversity management in an organisation, will more often take place mainly in a clan culture assuming teamwork, cooperation, friendly work atmosphere, and partnership, i.e. values and practices consistent with the idea of multi-generational management. It should also be noted that no organisation with a hierarchy-type culture applies to a system for managing age-diversified employees, addressed either to a selected age group or to all employees. The research results indicate quite clearly that the type of organisational culture is one of the factors determining the level of generational diversity management in an enterprise.

Research conclusions and recommendations in the field of generational diversity management for culturally different organisations

The results of the conducted research allow us to conclude that the most favourable type of organisational culture for creating and functioning in an enterprise is an advanced level of management of age-differentiated employees in the form of a developed, coherent generational diversity management system, where activities are addressed to all employees, which is the clan type. However, this should not be surprising. The essence of intergenerational management is part of the principles applicable to this type of organisational culture. Clan-type culture assumes cooperation between different generations of employees, mutual support, acceptance, close

non-professional relationships, and lack of discrimination and stereotypes (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2011). In this way, it promotes advanced practices in the area of intergenerational management. It also seems that since the culture of adhocracy allows for the introduction of innovative applications, proposing new ideas without negatively assessing or negating employee initiatives, as well as leaving considerable freedom of action to staff members, it will also favour the introduction of activities in the field of generational diversity management (after all, the surveyed company has introduced a “diversity inclusion” strategy, but it has not been operating for long enough to develop all possible activities in this area, although it intends to gradually introduce them). It will certainly be more difficult to implement generational diversity management in market or hierarchical cultures. This can be seen, for example, in the Aquanet company. Most activities in the area of managing employees of different ages are bottom-up initiatives, not imposed by strict procedures in this organisation. It is worth recalling that strong manifestations of a clan-type culture can be seen in everyday interpersonal contacts in this company. However, wherever there is a top-down hierarchy-type culture at Aquanet, intergenerational management is difficult. It is similar in an adhocracy-type organisation, where there are more intergenerational management practices than in a market-type organisation. Moreover, managers working in an adhocracy-type enterprise have a more positive attitude towards the introduction of this type of practice in the company than managers surveyed in a market-type company. This is also confirmed by the results obtained in the second, supplementary stage of the research. If age management practices existed in market-type organisations, it seems that they were not effective. On the contrary, one could get the impression that they even lead to discrimination against employees and are not well received by them.

It would also seem that the highest level of management of age-diverse employees will be determined by a low level of power distance, collectivism, femininity, a low level of uncertainty, avoidance and restrictiveness, and long-term orientation. All these dimensions allow for better personnel management in general while leaving employees a considerable amount of independence (apart from collectivism, which in turn assumes mutual care of employees and effective cooperation, and therefore also fits into the assumptions of intergenerational management) and enabling highly developed cooperation of people in different age.

It is worth noting, however, that in other types of organisational culture there is a fourth level of management of age-differentiated employees. They involve activities in the field of generational diversity management, which do not constitute a separate system but belong to other personnel systems. They are addressed to all employees. Therefore, the clan-type culture is mostly used for this type of solution

to occur. However, it can be assumed that in other types of cultures, the probability that generational diversity management will take place is similar.

The results of the conducted research have shown that developed systems for managing employees of different ages occur primarily in Scandinavian and German organisations. The common features of these national cultures are a low power distance index and individualism, which guarantees the employee's sense of independence and gives him or her freedom of action to demonstrate various initiatives, which fits perfectly into the concept of intergenerational management. In turn, in companies where there is a low power distance, it is assumed that all individuals in the organisation are equal and any injustices and unequal distribution of power are not accepted. Supervisors and employees are interdependent. Organisational hierarchy is not overly important. Respect is shown to all employees, regardless of status. A consultative, democratic leadership style also predominates. Hence, it undoubtedly favours intergenerational management practices.

How the age diversity of employees will be managed in an enterprise depends on many conditions. These include nationwide ones, such as legal regulations, the attitude of those in power, labour market policy, demographic issues, national culture, and the activities of non-governmental organisations in this area.

Research results (Cox, Blake, 1991; Gilbert, Stead, Ivancevich, 1999; Glimore, 1998; Hiranandani, 2012, p. 2; Mullins, 1993, p. 287; Patrick, Kumar, 2012, p. 2; Taylor, 1995) indicate, however, that team diversity (also in terms of generations) increases the level of creativity and innovation, motivation, commitment and efficiency. Sharing diverse experiences and knowledge allows for better use of the potential of all employees. Additionally, a diverse workforce is more responsive to the needs of similarly diverse customers and responds more quickly to market changes. It can also support oneself by carrying out tasks requiring different competencies. The diversity of knowledge, experiences, and points of view favours innovation and creativity, which in turn contributes to the expansion of intellectual capital (Mendryk, 2013, p. 109–110). The age diversity of employees allows for better planning of the process of handing over tasks to younger employees when older ones retire. If diversity management is effective, it provides many benefits related to the intergenerational exchange of experiences and knowledge, open communication and feedback, and, consequently, greater work productivity. It also helps to create a positive image of the organisation in the local environment, which attracts the best job candidates (Konfederacja Lewiatan, 2013, p. 12–13). Activities of this type also contribute to increased motivation, which transfers into greater efficiency. Properly carried out intergenerational management also promotes common goal setting in the organisation. Thanks to this, it is consistent with employees' goals (Świeszczyk, Ziemia, 2013, p. 61–63). Properly managed age diversity management of employees

also leads to an increase in the quality of management in general (Hilarowicz, 2015, p. 24–25). It allows one to focus on the competences and qualifications of employees, not on their age. Thus, it enables the development of all employees (Liwński, Sztanderska, 2010, p. 9). Intergenerational management is also a good investment from an ethical perspective. It allows to avoid and prevent manifestations of discrimination (Broughan, 2013, p. 141). Undoubtedly, effective management of age-diversified staff brings many benefits to the employer. Above all, however, it allows for the extension of professional activity (Lubrańska, 2015, p. 178–179; Ziółkowska, 2016, p. 368) and also creates conditions for the maximum use of the potential of each employee (Schimanek, Kotzian, Arczewska, 2015, p. 7), which is particularly important in the current demographic situation. Taking into account the characteristics of individual generations, age diversity management also allows us to respond to the individual needs of all employees and make the best use of their potential. Staff members, due to their different ages and experience, have different needs. However, they must cooperate, and the employer must make this as easy as possible for them. Therefore, managers should be encouraged to introduce at least elements of diversity management, including age diversity, into the organisation. However, a positive attitude is necessary on the part of all parties – both those in power and the management of individual companies, but also the employees themselves.

Future research

The main limitation was the organisation's reluctance to participate in the research (little response rate to all sent requests), as well as the state of COVID-19 pandemic, which made collecting research material much more difficult. Another limitation of the adopted methodology could be the incorrect interpretation of the results obtained, which was attempted to be prevented by using various research methods and examining distinct generational groups of employees from many different departments.

It would also be necessary to conduct further quantitative research on a larger research sample. However, recruiting a research organisation was not easy. Their scale (a combination of a survey, interviews, observations, and document analysis) meant that company managers who were asked to participate in the research did not agree to it or only completed the initial questionnaires and thus refused to participate further. Perhaps they were also afraid of showing their organisations in a negative light. In order to generalise the results obtained in the second stage of the research, it would be necessary to conduct it on a larger sample. Such investigation could be used to more precisely determine the relationship between individual dimensions of

national culture and the level of management of employees of different ages. They would also allow us to formulate and test hypotheses, which would provide a more complete picture of the cultural determinants of generational diversity management. It is therefore worth continuing the qualitative research carried out so far, this time in a quantitative form.

The created research tools, which constitute appendices to this dissertation, can be used for further research in the area of managing age-differentiated employees in the enterprise, both by the author and other researchers. This opens the field for further investigation.

Conclusion

To sum up, the current demographic processes constitute a significant challenge for labour market participants (Ratajczak, 2019, p. 209–210). Despite the increasing importance of both generational and cultural differences in organisations, employers very rarely decide to introduce activities in the company scope of generational diversity management. However, it seems that this is one of the most effective solutions to the current situation in the labour market, which may lead to a shortage of employees in the near future.

From the point of view of the effectiveness of these solutions, the most appropriate option seems to be the use of activities in the organisation that do not discriminate against any group of employees (Pawlak, 2016, p. 413–415). Therefore, internships in this area should be as broad as possible to meet the needs of all employees, regardless of their age. The employer should take into account the expectations of its staff, at the same time ignoring differences, which are a natural phenomenon and should be treated as such. However, it is necessary to facilitate intergenerational cooperation. Thanks to this, the company will be able to fully enjoy the benefits of generational diversity management.

What the management of age diversity of employees in an enterprise will look like depends on many conditions (Roberson, 2018, p. 72–75; Moczydłowska, 2021, p. 4–6; Leslie, 2019). These include nationwide ones, such as legal regulations, the attitude of those in power, labour market policy, demographic issues, national culture, and the activities of non-governmental institutions in this area. At the organisational level, the determinants of intergenerational management include the type of organisational culture, cultural origin of the enterprise, age structure of employees, size of the company, its environment, the general atmosphere in the enterprise, and the attitude of people managing personnel at each level, existing policies and regulations, as well as the activities, i.e. the experience of the organisation.

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Joanna Ratajczak

A graduate of doctoral studies at the Poznań University of Economics. Scientifically interested in managing age and cultural diversity, generational differences in the labour market and the workplace, and career counselling, especially for students with special educational needs.

e-mail: joanna.ratajczak@vp.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-0634-7545

