

## THE IMPACT OF WORKFORCE AGE DIVERSITY ON NON-FINANCIAL ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of workforce age diversity on non-financial organizational outcomes, with a specific focus on the role of knowledge transfer. It aims to understand the implications of age diversity for organizational success, considering both positive and negative effects, and to provide actionable insights for management practices.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employs a quantitative approach involving surveys conducted among medium to large enterprises in Poland. Data collection utilized structured questionnaires administered to HR managers, HR directors, and rank-and-file employees. The study measures workforce age diversity using estimated data and calculates diversity indices (Blau and Teachman) to quantify diversity levels. Knowledge transfer is assessed using a validated scale, and non-financial organizational outcomes are measured through scales assessing innovation, risk-taking, and flexibility.

**Findings:** The empirical analysis reveals that age diversity among employees does not directly correlate with organizational outcomes such as innovation and risk-taking. However, knowledge transfer significantly enhances these outcomes. Contrary to initial hypotheses, age diversity does not directly influence knowledge transfer within organizations, indicating a complex relationship that requires nuanced management strategies.

**Research limitations/implications:** Limitations include the use of estimated age diversity data and the specific focus on Polish organizations, limiting generalizability. Future research should explore additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational culture and leadership styles, to better understand the dynamics between age diversity, knowledge transfer, and organizational outcomes.

**Practical implications:** Practically, this research underscores the importance of fostering effective knowledge transfer practices within diverse age groups to enhance organizational innovation and flexibility. It recommends that organizations invest in training and development programs aimed at facilitating intergenerational knowledge exchange, thereby optimizing workforce potential and adapting to demographic shifts.

**Originality/value:** This paper contributes to the literature by providing empirical insights into the complex interplay between age diversity, knowledge transfer, and organizational outcomes. It highlights the critical role of knowledge transfer in leveraging age diversity as a strategic asset for organizational competitiveness and sustainability.

**Keywords:** workforce age diversity, non-financial organizational outcomes, knowledge transfer.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

As organizations adapt to a changing business environment, workforce diversity becomes an increasingly crucial aspect of success. One of the key facets of diversity is employee age, which reflects not only demographic changes in society but also brings forth a range of challenges and opportunities for organizations. This article analyzes the impact of workforce age diversity on non-financial organizational outcomes, considering the role of knowledge transfer.

Diversity management is the process of establishing and maintaining a positive work environment where both similarities and differences among employees are valued, enabling each individual to maximize their contribution to organizational goals (Kandola, Fullerton, 1998). It is also a management philosophy that recognizes heterogeneity in organizations as crucial for improving outcomes (Özbilgin, Tatli, 2011).

Research on diversity focuses on relationships among employees at the group and organizational levels, reflecting its dynamic nature (Pfeffer, 1983). However, providing a clear definition of diversity can be challenging because diversity exists concerning specific traits of group members, such as age or personality (Carstens, De Kock, 2017).

In the context of diversity management, it is essential to consider individual differences among employees and to cultivate a work environment conducive to maximizing their potential. This approach can contribute to increased organizational efficiency and better utilization of employees' talents in achieving organizational goals.

## 2. Theoretical concept of age diversity

Literature analysis allows for the classification of diversity, yet due to the existence of multiple definitions, there is also no consensus among scholars in the area of classification. Diversity typification can be based on: division according to levels of diversity: shallow and deep levels (Pfeffer, 1983); division based on dimensions of diversity: primary, secondary, and organizational identity (Arredondo, 1996); division according to emotional intelligence and diversity model (Gardenswartz, Rowe, 1994); division into five categories of diversity and corresponding types of diversity (Mannix, Neale, 2005); division based on diversity constructs: separation, variety, and disparity (Harrison, Klein, 2007); division into task diversity and relationship-oriented diversity (Joshi, Roh, 2009; Tasheva, Hillman, 2018); division into functional and demographic diversity (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, Homan, 2004; Tasheva, Hillman, 2018); division based on three different sources of diversity (human capital, social capital, demographics) at two levels of analysis: individual and team (Tasheva, Hillman, 2018).

The ongoing discussion about generational differences in attitudes and work needs clearly indicates the necessity for changes in the approach to traditional employee management concepts (Chester, 2006) – from instrumental to subjective approaches. The challenge lies in managing age in a way that maintains the employment of workers with necessary knowledge, qualifications, competencies, and desired work attitudes, as well as enables the development of all employees, regardless of age (Sołtys, 2013).

Comprehensive age management is based on an individualized approach to employee needs, non-instrumental treatment of organizational human resources, and integrated action in organizational and human resource management (Sułkowski, 2001). Supporting age diversity among employees can foster employees' beliefs that the organization supports a diverse workforce, leading to better results in all three areas of human resource management, financial performance, and social responsibility (Ali, French, 2019).

### **3. The impact of age diversity among employees on non-financial organizational outcomes**

The effects of age diversity among employees on non-financial organizational outcomes have been analyzed in the literature. Research has focused on the impact of age diversity among employees on non-economic aspects, primarily at the organizational level (Bashir et al., 2021).

Studies conducted by P.M. Bal and S.A. Boehma (2019) showed that organizations with age diversity among employees had lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher engagement, resulting in customer satisfaction and favorable organizational outcomes (Bal, Boehm, 2019). Age diversity among employees supports broadening perspectives, streamlining decision-making, and enhancing creativity in problem-solving (Ali, Ng, Kulik, 2014). Similar beliefs are expressed by other researchers who indicate that diversity can lead to the expansion of available knowledge and increased innovation, giving the organization a competitive advantage (Mahadeo, Soobaroyen, Hanuman, 2012). Research also suggests that age diversity among employees stimulates creative thinking and supports workplace innovation (Pitt-Catsouphes, Mirvis, Berzin, 2013). Other studies indicate that increasing age diversity among employees positively influences firm productivity, especially in performing creative tasks (Backes- Gellner, Veen, 2013). The literature suggests that the more diverse a team is in terms of age, gender, and culture, the greater the positive impact on team integration and improvisation, translating into strategic changes and adaptation to environmental changes (Lee, Lee, Ham, 2017). This emphasizes the observation that older individuals are often perceived as less inclined to adapt to new conditions, which may stem from their richer experience focused on maintaining existing skills (Goštautaitė, Bučiūnienė, 2015; Wöhrmann, 2021). Based on the above findings, the following hypothesis can be considered:

*H1. Age diversity among employees is positively associated with non-financial organizational outcomes.*

Organizational outcomes do not solely change based on age diversity among employees. Many moderating and mediating variables can influence this relationship, such as transformational leadership, employee relationships, and market environment (Kearney, Gebert, 2009; Moon, 2018). Through these studies, a better understanding of how age diversity affects organizations and what factors can modify this relationship can be gained.

#### **4. Knowledge transfer in the context of age diversity and organizational outcomes**

The transfer of knowledge among employees of different ages is gaining increasing importance due to demographic changes (Burmeister, Fasbender, Deller, 2018). However, the literature does not unequivocally define intergenerational knowledge transfer or transfer among employees of different ages (Schmidt, Muehlfeld, 2017). This transfer is significant because older and younger employees can collaborate, complementing each other's knowledge (Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Voelpel, 2017). Despite the benefits, the perception of the consequences of knowledge transfer at the organizational level is less studied, and interactions among employees differing in age can bring both opportunities and challenges (Burmeister, Fasbender, Deller, 2018). Older employees often play the role of knowledge providers, while younger ones are recipients, limiting the potential of both groups (Deal, Altman, Rogelberg, 2010). Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider bidirectional knowledge transfer, where both groups serve as senders and receivers (Kooij, De Lange et al., 2008). Challenges related to knowledge transfer include motivational differences, conflicts, different learning methods, and age norms (North, Fiske, 2015). Despite the challenges, age diversity can be beneficial when employees share valuable knowledge (Burmeister, Fasbender, Deller, 2018). Knowledge transfer can increase motivation, improve mental and physical well-being, and encourage staying in the organization (Wöhrmann, Fasbender, Deller, 2017). Thus, age diversity among employees can be a valuable organizational asset, especially when knowledge transfer is effectively managed (Burmeister, Fasbender, Deller, 2018). Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

*H2. Age diversity among employees is positively associated with knowledge transfer.*

The intellectual capital and skills of employees constitute a significant competitive advantage for organizations, impacting even their survival (Chen et al., 2017). Organizational knowledge transfer is positively related to innovation and organizational outcomes (Van Wijk, Jansen, Lyles, 2008). Effective knowledge management brings numerous benefits, including better work organization, increased innovation capability, improved decision-making,

and increased sensitivity to changes (Islam, Low, Rahman, 2021). Research on organizational outcomes considers various aspects such as financial results, innovation, and organizational flexibility (Maurer, Bartsch, Ebers, 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

*H3. Knowledge transfer is positively associated with non-financial organizational outcomes.*

Knowledge transfer activities should be tailored to the diverse developmental needs of employees at different ages (Kulik, Ryan et al., 2014). The increasing number of older employees requires organizations to retain their valuable knowledge before retirement, which translates into achieving positive results (Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Voelpel, 2017). However, without high levels of cooperative behaviors, such as trust and communication, knowledge transfer in the organization is impossible. This is significant because organizational knowledge transfer supports the development of capabilities and the utilization of competencies, and also influences organizational outcomes, including innovation (Islam, Low, Rahman, 2021; Van Wijk, Jansen, Lyles, 2008).

Research on knowledge transfer among different age groups is relatively new (Kulik, Ryan et al., 2014). Initial evidence suggests that such transfer can be an important organizational process, although age diversity among employees may hinder it as employees prefer to interact with peers of similar age (Burmeister, van der Heijden et al., 2018). Furthermore, the encouragement of knowledge sharing between younger and older workers should be incorporated into organisations' human resource strategies (Tang, Martins, 2021). Knowledge transfer may mediate the relationship between age diversity among employees and organizational outcomes (Maurer, Bartsch, Ebers, 2011). Social capital can influence organizational outcomes through improved knowledge transfer and resource sharing (Andrei, Parker, 2022). This conclusion leads to another hypothesis:

*H4. Knowledge transfer mediates the relationship between age diversity among employees and non-financial organizational outcomes.*

Emphasizing the importance of research assumptions, it should be noted that the exploratory approach is based on incomplete enumerative induction. The detailed hypotheses may not cover all possible or used relationships of employee diversity by age (Czakon, 2014).

## **5. Examining the relationships presented in the research model in the context of empirical results**

The main objective of the planned research was to verify the relationship between age diversity among employees and organizational outcomes, considering the role of knowledge transfer as a mediating factor. The theoretical and cognitive objectives of the study included the following points: systematizing knowledge in the areas of employee age diversity and

knowledge transfer; evaluating the impact of employee age diversity on organizational outcomes, considering the potential mediation of variables; developing a conceptual model of the relationship between the individual variables; conducting empirical research on the influence of employee age diversity on organizational outcomes; conducting empirical research on the impact of knowledge transfer on organizational outcomes; conducting empirical research on the mediating role of knowledge transfer in the relationship between employee age diversity and organizational outcomes. Practical objectives included formulating guidelines for practice aimed at enhancing age diversity among employees and increasing its impact on company results. Methodological objectives included confirming the feasibility of using research tools to measure all variables, especially the variable related to age diversity.

To test the research hypotheses, quantitative studies were conducted among companies located in Poland. Data collection took place from May to October 2021 and included organizations employing more than 50 employees, i.e., medium, large, and very large enterprises. The respondents in the study were HR department managers or HR directors, as well as rank-and-file employees employed in these organizations. A complete set of completed questionnaires was collected from each company, including one from the person responsible for HR management and three from employees, totaling 800 completed questionnaire sets. Estimated average employee age, the Teachman index, and the Blau index were used to measure age diversity among employees. A scale developed by V. Martín-Pérez's team (Martín-Pérez, Martín-Cruz, Estrada-Vaquero, 2012) was used to measure knowledge transfer, which includes seven statements. The selection of a specific questionnaire was dictated by the following assumptions: the tool measures employee attitudes at the organizational level; it allows responses from both HR managers and employees without modification; it is user-friendly, making it respondent-friendly; it is understandable and transparent; it has been positively verified by other researchers; it comprehensively explores the variable compared to other tools; the source of the research tool is credible and reliable. Several questionnaires were used to measure non-financial results. To measure innovation as a non-financial outcome of the organization, a scale developed by B. Ahlin's team (Ahlin, Drnovšek, Hisrich, 2014) was used, comprising six statements. To measure the organization's risk approach as a non-financial outcome, a scale developed by C. Kontoghiorghes's team (Kontoghiorghes, Awbre, Feurig, 2005) was used, which includes four statements. Additionally, to measure flexibility in response to environmental variables as a non-financial outcome of the organization, a scale authored by M. Perez-Walls (Perez-Valls, Cespedes-Lorente, Moreno-Garcia, 2016) was used, comprising eight statements. Control variables included the type of organization activity and the industry sector in which the company operates, following the approach used in previous studies (Kunze, Boehm, Bruch, 2011).

The demographic analysis of the sample involves a review of the research population from which a sample containing medium, large, and very large companies employing more than 50 employees was selected. The sample selection was based on the national official register of

entities of the national economy, known as the REGON register maintained by the Central Statistical Office (GUS). As of March 31, 2021, the research population consisted of 31,582 organizations. Out of the study, 200 economic entities responded, of which 200 had HR managers or HR directors, and 600 were rank-and-file employees. A total of 800 completed questionnaires were collected. Statistical data regarding the type of activity and industry sector show that the surveyed organizations represented diverse sectors of the economy. The average age of employees in the organizations was 39.07 years, with a standard deviation of  $\pm 6.10$  years. The most numerous age groups were representatives of Generation Y (25-39 years) and X (40-55 years), constituting 36.96% and 33.51% of all employees, respectively. The Teachman and Blau indices confirm significant age diversity in the surveyed organizations, which is a key aspect of the analysis. Various statistical analysis techniques adapted to the nature of the studied relationships were used in the statistical analysis of the collected empirical material. In addition to the methods used to operationalize the studied variables, such as reliability analysis, correlation, and factor analysis, regression analysis was also used to test the influence of control variables and potential mediation in the studied relationships. In the case of the first hypothesis (H1), indicating a relationship between age diversity (predictor) and organizational outcomes (dependent variable), statistically significant relationships were mostly absent in the analyzed regression. This indicates that the analyzed regression is not statistically significant, and the model is not well-fitted to the data, suggesting a lack of confirmation for the proposed hypothesis H1. In the case of the second hypothesis (H2), indicating a relationship between age diversity (explanatory variable) and knowledge transfer among employees in the organization (dependent variable), statistically significant relationships between the analyzed variables were absent (Standardized Beta: 0.079 for managers; -0.048 for employees). This indicates that the analyzed relationship is not statistically significant, and the model is not well-fitted to the data, suggesting a lack of confirmation for proposed hypothesis H2. The third hypothesis concerns the relationship between knowledge transfer (independent variable) and organizational outcomes (dependent variable). The model assumes that there is a statistically significant relationship between knowledge transfer among employees and individual dimensions of organizational outcomes. Regression results showed that the level of significance is always below 0.1, and in many cases even below 0.05, thus confirming hypothesis H3. This means that the model fits the variables well. Furthermore, the Beta coefficient suggests a positive relationship, namely that greater intensity during the knowledge transfer process among employees leads to improved organizational outcomes. Moving on to the analysis of the last model containing mediation, it is worth mentioning that hypothesis H4 was verified according to the approach described by R.M. Baron and D.A. Kenny (1986). Additionally, due to the rejection of hypothesis H1 (indicating that age diversity is positively associated with organizational outcomes) and the rejection of hypothesis H2 (indicating that diversity is positively associated with knowledge transfer) at the stage of analyzing these hypotheses, knowledge transfer cannot be considered a mediator between age diversity and organizational

outcomes. In other words, if age diversity is not associated with knowledge transfer or organizational outcomes, then knowledge transfer cannot mediate the relationship between diversity and organizational outcomes. In summary, the complex hypothesis H4 should be considered falsified. The balance of the verification of the hypotheses presented in table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Summary of the verification of research hypotheses*

Hypothesis	Content	Testing Result
H1	Age diversity among employees is positively associated with non-financial organizational outcomes.	falsified
H2	Age diversity among employees is positively associated with knowledge transfer.	falsified
H3	Knowledge transfer is positively associated with non-financial organizational outcomes.	confirmed
H4	Knowledge transfer mediates the relationship between age diversity among employees and non-financial organizational outcomes.	falsified

Source: own elaboration.

Based on the conducted empirical research, the following conclusions can be summarized:

- there is no direct impact of age diversity in the surveyed organizations on organizational outcomes such as organizational risk-taking and organizational innovation. However, the relationship between age diversity and organizational flexibility may lead to an improvement in other organizational outcomes over time;
- there is no direct impact of age diversity on knowledge transfer within the organization;
- there is a positive direct impact of knowledge transfer on non-financial organizational outcomes;
- neither HR managers nor employees perceive the process of knowledge transfer among employees in the organization as a significant mediator in the relationship between age diversity and non-financial organizational outcomes such as organizational innovation, organizational flexibility, and organizational risk-taking.

## **6. Summary with implications for management theory and practice, limitations of the conducted empirical research, and suggestions for further analysis**

In the study on the impact of age diversity on the non-financial outcomes of organizations, knowledge transfer plays a crucial role. As organizations age, it becomes necessary to balance the experience of older employees with the fresh perspectives of younger team members (Vignoli et al., 2021). Previous research has indicated both potential positive and negative effects of diversity on organizational outcomes. The present study contributes to expanding the discussion on this topic.



The research aimed to measure and understand the age diversity of employees, which posed a challenge for researchers. Managers were asked to provide information regarding the percentage of each generation within the total number of organization employees, enabling the calculation of Blau and Teachman diversity indices (Seong, Hong, 2018). Obtaining precise age data would have been challenging due to the size of the analyzed organizations; hence, estimated information was utilized for approximate diversity index calculations.

The main practical objective was to provide management with specialized knowledge regarding supporting age diversity among employees and to develop recommendations for managers and HR specialists based on the research findings. HR managers increasingly recognize their significant responsibility in dealing with challenges arising from demographic changes, such as the shortage of young professionals, aging workforces, and increased age diversity among employees, to ensure the long-term functionality of their firms. The results of scientific research can support them in these endeavors. It should be noted that the workforce is subject to changes, so managers should monitor these changes both within their teams and across entire organizations. Companies should be aware of the age structure of employees and not only identify the status quo but also design the future age structure of their personnel (Boehm, Dwertmann, 2015). Additionally, diversity does not always automatically bring positive effects. Without active management, it can lead to harmful consequences, such as increased interpersonal conflicts and employee turnover. Therefore, managers should actively manage diversity in their teams or organizations (Boehm, Dwertmann, 2015). Practical implications arising from the significance of knowledge transfer for organizations should be noted. Organizations interested in leveraging the full potential of bidirectional knowledge flow between older and younger employees should offer training and programs that support employees' ability and motivation to participate in knowledge transfer (Larkin, Burgess, 2013).

Limitations of the conducted empirical research and suggestions for further analysis include, among others, the use of objective measurement scales (Van Dam, Van Vuuren, Kemps, 2017) and investigating the reverse relationship between diversity and organizational outcomes (Singh, Darwish, Potočnik, 2015). Furthermore, the author recommend further research into how interactions between younger and older employees influence knowledge sharing behaviors. They also emphasize the role of task interdependence in facilitating or hindering knowledge transfer, suggesting that higher levels of task interdependence could mitigate negative effects of social comparisons on knowledge exchange (Fasbender, Gerpott, 2022). Future research could also consider moderating variables, such as task type (Backes-Gellner, Veen, 2013), trust, or fairness (Lau, Lam, Wen, 2014), and conduct dynamic studies that better reflect organizational variability (Van Dam, Van Vuuren, Kemps, 2017).

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