

GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY AND ITS ROLE IN THE SPHERE OF MANAGEMENT. THEORETICAL AND APPLIED APPROACH

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Purpose: The aim is to present the generational diversity and its meaning in the sphere of management in the time of demographic crisis. There is no doubt that both aging society and decreasing number of young people entering the labor market will force managers to consider different values and attitudes to work and life representing by younger and older generation while considering the todays and future existence of companies. Moreover, chosen results of own study in this field are presented.

Design/methodology/approach: In the period 2022-2023 a quantitative study was conducted among 100 respondents from SMEs located in Poznan district. Four research criteria were adopted. The interview questionnaire consisted of 24 questions. CATI and PAPI methods were used to collect data.

Findings: The respondents' answers indicate that most companies have not implemented an age diversity strategy. More than half of the respondents have experienced age discrimination in the last six months. There is a statistically significant difference between age groups and the frequency of experiencing inequality by age. It turned out that the 50+ generation attributed higher importance to the resource "equality" in its professional career.

Research limitations/implications: The basic limitation of the conducted research is the number of respondents.

Practical implications: It is necessary to encourage business owners to implement generational diversity strategy in time of unfavorable demographic trends. Companies should pay special attention on the multigenerational coexistence and cooperation of workers, which can ensure both many benefits and misunderstandings.

Social implications: By adapting workplaces to needs of two different generations' needs and expectations, creating friendly atmosphere, reducing acts of age discrimination may enhance seniors to stay longer active on labor market and encourage young people to start working in such a company or maintain loyalty among recent hired workers. Companies can also reduce existing stereotypes by conducting integrating activities, especially organizing mixed teams.

Originality/value: The originality of this paper is sought in the attempt to compare older and younger generation in the sphere of age discrimination and their attitude toward age equality.

Keywords: generational diversity, management, demographic crisis.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The process of ageing societies has become one of the most important demographic phenomena of the 21st century. As life expectancy increases and fertility rates fall, many countries – both developed and developing – are experiencing a significant increase in the proportion of older people in their populations. As Ł. Jurek notices, "over the course of one century (from the mid-twentieth century to the mid-twenty-first century) the population structure moves from a progressive, through stagnant, to regressive model. If the current trends continue, in the long run an ultra-regressive structure will emerge and consolidate, which can be described as an "inverted demographic pyramid". [...] As a result, the current proportions between individual age categories are disturbed. Older people are beginning to dominate numerically over the rest of the population, especially young people" (Jurek, 2012, p. 34). These statements are grounded in statistical data. According to the World Bank, the number of people aged 65 and older in 1960 was about 105 million, which was only 5% of the total world population. In 2023 it is already 7 times higher and amounts to about 804 million, representing more than 10% of the global population (WB, 2025a). It is forecast that by 2050 this number may reach up to 2.1 billion, which will correspond to almost 23.4% of the total population (WHO, 2024).

There is no doubt that the aging of societies is a success of civilizational development and progress in medicine (Szukalski, 2006, p. 6). Unlimited access to food, higher calorific value of the diet, improved hygiene conditions or progress in the treatment of many diseases, thanks to which, for example, diseases that until recently were fatal are now treated as chronic, have a huge impact on extending life. At the same time, the modification of professed norms and values, the change in the role of women, the costs of upbringing, financial instability, but also widespread consumerism, the cult of youth and beauty are among the factors responsible for the decreasing fertility rates in the world. Back in 1960, this measure was at 4.7, while in 2023 it is 2.2 (WB, 2025b). According to forecasts for 2050, a statistical woman will give birth to only two children during her reproductive years (WB, 2025c). Moreover, from 2040 onwards, simple replacement of generations with a fertility rate of 2.1 will not be ensured on a global scale. It is worth adding here that many developed countries do not meet this assumption now. Low fertility is responsible for the decrease in the share of people in the 0-14 age group in the population. According to World Bank data, the share of this cohort globally was 37% in 1960 and is now at 25% (data for 2023) (WB, 2025d). On the other hand, according to forecasts for 2050, it will already be a share of 15.6% (WB, 2025e).

Unfavorable demographic trends are also observed in Poland. In 1960 the share of older people in the population was only 6%, and in 2023 it was already at 20%. In turn, according to forecasts, in 2050 one in three Poles will be 65+, which will place our country among the oldest in Europe (Eurostat, 2020). On the other hand, the fertility rate in Poland in 1960 was 3%,

in 2023 it was 1.2, and in 2050 it will be 1.4, respectively. It is worth noting here that the last time it reached the level of simple replacement of generations was in 1991 (WB, 2025f). Progressive demographic processes have serious consequences in many areas of socio-economic life. The situation on the labor market is particularly uncertain, where "the proportion of economically active people to economically inactive people is changing in favour of the second group" (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019, p. 95). After all, the aging of the population also means the aging of the workforce, while a lower number of births does not guarantee a sufficient supply of labor. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, the average age of an employee in Poland in 2023 is 42.6 years, and the median is 42 years. The largest group are people aged 35-44 (28.9% of the employed), followed by 45-54 years (24.8%), 25-34 years (22.1%), 55-64 years (15.15%), 15-24 years (5.85%) and people over 65 years of age (3.3%) (Central Statistical Office, 2023). Forecasts that show that by 2035 the number of people working in Poland may decrease by up to 2.1 million, which is 12.6% of the current employment level, are not optimistic. This is a consequence of the departure of people aged 50-64 from the labor market and the entry of fewer younger cohorts into the labor market (By 2035..., 2025).

The demographic ageing of societies, including Polish ones, and labor shortages pose a specific challenge for employers (OECD, 2021). In response to staff shortages, the need for professional activation of older people, striving to employ a smaller population of young workers, and consequently the integration of different generations in the workplace is increasingly pointed out. Multigenerationality is therefore becoming not only a fact, but also a necessity. Employees from the baby boomers, X, Y (Millennials) and Z generations operate side by side. Each of these generations represents different values, work styles, expectations towards the employer and the level of digital competence. Organizations must learn to manage teams in which people with very different experiences, competencies and expectations cooperate (Turek, 2021). On the one hand, there is a chance for the exchange of intergenerational knowledge, and on the other hand, there is a risk of conflicts resulting from different work styles. In addition, age stereotypes and even age discrimination (so-called ageism) do not facilitate the coexistence and cooperation of younger and older groups of employees. In the literature, one can find numerous negative consequences in the form of reduction or complete withdrawal from professional activity, difficulties in finding a job, marginalization, reduced mental well-being, as well as financial losses. Therefore, it is crucial for business owners to create an inclusive work environment and invest in age diversity management policies (Szarota, 2011). Only conscious use of the potential of each age group, both younger and older employees, can ensure the efficient functioning of the organization in the face of the growing demographic crisis.

The above findings became the premise for the quantitative study on a sample of 100 respondents representing two different age generations (up to and over 50 years of age) employed in 50 small and medium-sized enterprises located in the Poznan district. During the

research the aim was to find answers to, among others, following questions: 1) is the generational diversity management strategy implemented in enterprises? 2) have the respondents experienced any signs of age inequality in the workplace in the last six months? 3) is there a relationship between the age groups of respondents and the frequency of experiencing inequalities due to age? 4) is age equality in the labour market important in the opinion of the respondents? The study was conducted on the basis of an interview questionnaire using two methods of data collection, i.e. CATI and PAPI.

The article consists of two parts. The first, of a theoretical nature, discusses the issue of diversity and management of age-diverse groups of employees. In the second part, the author presents the research criteria of the completed scientific project, the results in the area of interest of the article, and then conclusions and recommendations.

2. Generational diversity management

Let us note at the beginning that the diversity of human resources in enterprises is the basis of diversity management. Over the past few years, this issue has been in the center of interest of representatives of both various sciences, including, among others, economics and management, psychology, sociology, or gerontology, as well as the business community. As E. Robak notes, "managing the diversity of human resources in an organization is the foundation for creating and maintaining a friendly working environment for each employee and at the same time gives the opportunity to use their potential to achieve organizational goals" (Robak, 2017, p. 36).

The term "diversity" (from Latin: *diversus*) means the opposite and is currently used in many publications interchangeably with such terms as heterogeneity, otherness, non-uniformity, variety, or multiformity. These differences are related to many visible and invisible features or corresponding to primary (e.g. biological sex, race, age) and secondary elements of identity (e.g. nationality, education, social status) of the individual and related to his or her functioning in the company (e.g. form of employment, scope of duties, professional experience, trade union membership) (Cooke, Saini, 2010). In the scientific literature, this concept has been functioning since the late 1960s and was initially used in the context of the anti-discrimination law that was being formed, primarily in the United States and in Western Europe, whose purpose was to protect the interests and care for equal treatment of mainly women and ethnic minorities in the face of the growing stereotypes and prejudices marginalizing some citizens at that time. In the 1980s and 1990s, in turn, a change in the approach to diversity was observed. This term, already embedded in the legislation of individual countries, has taken on a new, broader meaning. At that time, the aim was to increase social awareness and acceptance of the differences between people, which was to bring measurable

benefits also in the area of management (Przytuła, Krysińska-Kościańska, 2019). In particular, it was pointed out that the diversity of employees of a given company, difficult to imitate by market competitors, can have a positive impact on organizational efficiency and competitiveness of enterprises (Richard, Miller, 2013). In this way, the concept of diversity has been reflected in management sciences.

Diversity management is currently perceived as a contemporary approach to personnel management aimed at the optimal use of various employee characteristics in the workplace (Kędziora, Łojkowska, 2010). There are many authors who describe this management strategy as the highest stage of human capital management today (Wziątek-Staško, 2012). A review of the literature also allows us to conclude that diversity management is increasingly located in the concept of sustainable human resources management, where a wide range of dimensions of employee diversity is considered and specific policies are applied in the field of, for example, age management, counteracting mobbing and discrimination (Pocztowski, 2016).

It is also worth adding here that diversity management is not the same as the so-called "equal treatment policy", which means the implementation of the statutory prohibition of direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics listed in the Labour Code (Act of 1974, Art. 11). "Diversity management goes far beyond the framework of interventions that are implemented in the area of equal opportunities policy. The legislation defines and mandates actions that meet the conditions of equal treatment, but only the conscious implementation of the strategy of using and benefiting from the differences between employees brings companies closer to diversity management" (Jawor-Joniewicz, 2016, p. 36). The table below presents a comparison of equal opportunities policy and diversity management based on four basic criteria, i.e. goal, subject of action, area of intervention and main actors.

Table 1.
Equal opportunities policy and diversity management

Criterion	Equal opportunities policy	Diversity management
Goal	prevention of discrimination in accordance with the legal provisions	creating working conditions that increase the chances of the company's development and achieving measurable business results
Subject of action	addressed mainly to women, people with disabilities and representing ethnic minorities	addressed to all employees of the company
Area of intervention	personnel management procedures	organizational culture
Main actors	human resources and human resources managers	all managers and employees

Source: (Wirth, 2001).

It is worth noting here that in the 1990s in Poland, both corporate social responsibility and diversity management were not yet in the center of attention. It was not until the end of the decade that the model of development of private enterprises began to be questioned, attention was paid to the social costs of transformation and employee rights in companies. At that time, there were voices pointing to the need to promote good practices in the field of equal opportunities. The decrease in unemployment in Poland after accession to the EU resulted in

the transition from the employer's market to the employee's market. In such circumstances one of the key motivations for the development of the idea of diversity management has emerged, i.e. the need to reach for recruitment pools¹ that have been overlooked so far. There was also a struggle to retain talents and people with high development potential, regardless of age and gender (Bojarczuk, Pietrzak, 2018).

Currently, among the important reasons proving the need to implement the concept of diversity management in enterprises, such as the changes taking place in the goods and services market, the increase in the role of intangible factors and ethical values, there are also issues related to transformations in the labor market characterized by a large diversity of employees in the dimension of multigenerationality (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019). This situation forces modern managers to consider the issue of age in the activities of enterprises. For this reason, the concept of age diversity management, in which the age of the employee is treated as a valuable resource of the company, is becoming more and more popular. By the way, it should be added that considering the division of employees due to this feature, the phrase generational diversity management is used interchangeably.

It is worth adding here that numerous publications and statistical studies group the population according to different age ranges, depending on the needs. In the context of demographic challenges, the population is often divided into two categories, i.e., the younger and older generation, but there is no unambiguous age limit below/above which a person is considered younger/older. Some authors assume the age of 50, while others claim that an older person should be at least 60 years old. There are some authors who consider a person to be old at the time of his or her retirement. It is also common to group the population into generations, considering the intervals of years in which they were born. In this way, four generational groups are distinguished, i.e. baby-boomers (1946-1964), generation X (1965-1980), generation Y (1981-1990) and generation Z born after 1990 (Twenge, 2023). This division is presented below using seven differentiating criteria.

Table 2.
Age generation comparison

Criterion	Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Generation X (born 1965-1980)	Generation Y (born 1981-1996)	Generation Z (born 1997-2012)
Attitude to work	loyal, hardworking, often identify with work	independent, value work-life balance	flexible, they want their work to be meaningful and aligned with their values.	mobile, expect balance and quick gratification
Technology	slow adaptation, learn gradually	adapted, remember the analogue world	brought up with the internet, very digitally proficient	so-called "digital natives" – technology is their natural environment

¹ A recruitment pool is a group of potential employees identified on the basis of a specific feature, e.g. gender, age, disability.

Cont. table 2.

Communication	direct, formal	email, phone	SMS, instant messaging, social media	mainly social media, shortcuts, images
Cooperation	focus on individual work rather than teamwork	problems with team working	ease of working in a team	work efficiency in multicultural and virtual teams
Approach to authority	respect for hierarchy	skeptical, but they accept authority	they like partnership, they expect mentoring	they do not recognize hierarchy, they value authenticity
Career preferences	employment stability	professional development and balance	challenges, flexibility, development opportunities	flexibility, diversity, rapid development
Motivation	safety and prestige	self-realization	meaning of work, development, recognition	autonomy, values, technology

Source: (Bojarczuk, Pietrzak, 2018, p. 135; Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019, p. 103; Górka, Mroziowski, 2018, pp. 42-51; Kozak, 2017, pp. 285-296; Pabian, Oczachowska, 2020, pp. 37-52; Twenge, 2017, 2023).

Based on the analysis of the information contained in the table, it can be concluded that generational affiliation determines the approach to work, the method of motivation, communication styles, the level of competence, professional experience, the ability to use technology, as well as the formation of one's own professional and life goals and strategies for achieving them (Wawer, 2013). Therefore, it becomes necessary to consider the existing differences between individual generations in the processes of human resource management. Therefore, it requires the implementation of a deliberate strategy aimed at creating and maintaining a friendly work environment based on respect and sensitivity to various traits and behaviors characteristic of individual generations cooperating with each other in the workplace. It is necessary for the cooperation of multigenerational teams to be perceived by managers in terms of opportunities and benefits, rather than potential conflicts and threats (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019). This requires equal treatment of employees regardless of age and is undoubtedly the foundation of a fair and effective human resource policy. Age diversity in teams can be a source of mutual learning, innovation, and a better understanding of the needs of diverse customer groups (Turek, 2021). In turn, age discrimination (ageism) leads to the marginalization of some employees, loss of their potential, decrease in motivation and reduced efficiency of entire teams (Wnuk, 2015). In the face of an aging society and staff shortages, promoting age equality is becoming not only a matter of ethics, but also an economic necessity (Błaszczak, 2021). According to data from the European Commission, as many as 40% of Europeans consider age discrimination to be a common problem in the labor market, which confirms the need for action in this area (European Commission, 2020).

As E. Robak (2017) aptly observes, "generational management is primarily the implementation of a wide range of activities shaping the environment in which individual employees can fully use their diverse potential. These initiatives make it possible to create heterogeneous teams with a complementary mix of experience, to transmit qualifications and know-how between generations, to motivate older employees and to avoid waves of recruitment

– retirement" (p. 43). The literature indicates many benefits related to the implementation of the idea of generational diversity management. Individual benefits include inter alia improved working conditions, increased trust and loyalty to the employer and co-workers, higher motivation, and commitment. Moreover, benefits achieved by the company itself include, for example, reduction of the shortage of employees, lower turnover and the associated loss of knowledge and skills, reduction in recruitment costs, increase in labor productivity, which can have a positive impact on increasing the level of profits. In the macroeconomic dimension, researchers see the positive impact of generational diversity management on maintaining and even increasing the pool of professionally active people and social welfare. Moreover, the burden on the state budget due to social security may be reduced, there is a chance to maintain the production capacity of the economy, as well as reduce the level of social exclusion and discrimination (Pedro et al., 2020).

3. Research criteria

In the period 2022-2023 the quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 50 small and medium-sized enterprises from the Poznan district as part of the project entitled "Methods of shaping the intellectual capital of employees taking into account age diversity". The basic research problem was to identify the degree to which these entities consider the phenomenon of diversity due to age in the management of the intellectual capital of the company. Two persons from each company were invited to participate in the study, and one of them had to be under 50 years of age (included in the younger generation category) and the other equal or above this age range (included in the older generation category). The selection of enterprises constituting the research population was purposeful, and the criteria for this selection were:

1. location (Poznan district is characterized by the largest number of population in non-mobile age (45-59/64), i.e. 86,268 people, the largest number of unemployed people aged 55-59 (12.7%) and aged 60+ (8.2%), as well as one of the highest rates of demographic old age in the voivodeship (Central Statistical Office, 2020b; USwP, 2020a; PUP, 2019);
2. total number of employees (small and medium-sized entities, which are the largest group of enterprises in the Poznan district (just after the city of Poznan)) (EPS, 2020);
3. section C according to PKD 2007 (it is included in the key industries of Wielkopolska and is developing most strongly in the Poznan County (next to the Kalisz and Konin Districts)) (Dąbrowska et al., 2019);
4. employment of at least 4 people under 50 years of age and at least 4 people equal to or over 50 years of age.

Based on the analysis of data from the database purchased from the Statistical Office in Poznań and their correction with research assumptions, a group of 362 entities was distinguished. Fifty-two companies agreed to participate in the study using the CATI and PAPI methods. However, the data analysis was carried out based on 100 fully complete and correctly completed questionnaires from 50 economic entities. The main tool of the study was an interview questionnaire, which consisted of 24 questions. The research was preceded by a pilot study. Before the implementation of the project terminological arrangements in a set of a.o. following terms were required: age, generation, age equality, diversity, age diversity management, stereotype, ageism.

The respondents mostly represented small enterprises (64%). The average respondent coming from the younger generation was 33 years old, and from the older generation was 56 years old. The surveyed people were mostly men in both the younger (58%) and older (65%) groups. In addition, both groups were dominated by people with incomplete or full higher education (82% and 74%, respectively). The average professional experience of the younger respondent was 9.7 years, while the older respondent was 30.2 years. Most of the respondents described their health as good or very good (younger generation: 90% and older generation: 78%).

4. Results of own research

The basic premise of the study was that "one of the effects of population ageing is the ageing of the workforce" (Urbaniak et al., 2015, p. 55). Moreover, "the labor market situation is further complicated by the fact that an increase in the number of older people is accompanied by a decrease in the proportion of young people in the labor market" (De Lange et al., 2010, p. 118). This means that business owners must increasingly strive to maintain employment and even extend it among older employees, while looking for ways to employ and maintain the resources of the younger workforce, the number of which is slowly becoming scarce. Therefore, it requires them to apply such a personnel policy that "should take into account this diversity and create a field for mutual coexistence and cooperation of these two groups. Otherwise, their dissimilarity may become the basis for devastating conflicts manifested by mutual dislike, lack of communication and disorganization of work" (Jurek, 2012, p. 152). Only conscious actions on the part of company management can protect them from the negative consequences of demographic transformations. Therefore, generational diversity management is becoming a necessity, not a whim or an experiment of business owners.

Therefore, during the implementation of the project, answers were sought, *inter alia*, to research problems, which took the form of the following questions:

1. do the analyzed companies have an age diversity management system in place?
2. have the respondents surveyed experienced age inequalities in the workplace in the last six months?
3. is there a relationship between the age groups of respondents and the frequency of experiencing inequalities due to age?
4. is age equality in the labor market important in the opinion of the respondents?

In the preparation phase of empirical research, the following research hypotheses were adopted:

H1: Most of the surveyed companies have an age diversity management strategy in place.

H2: In the surveyed companies, less than half of the respondents experienced manifestations of inequality based on age in the last six months of work.

H3: There is no statistically significant difference between the younger and older generations of workers and the frequency of experiencing age inequality.

H4: Age equality is equally important in the workplace for the younger and older generations.

It should be added here that in the study, the quantitative variable "age" was transformed into a qualitative variable for the purposes of inference by grouping numerical values into "generation", with 1 being the younger generation (people under 50 years of age) and 2 - the older generation (people aged 50 and over).

To verify the first research hypothesis, the respondents were asked whether the age diversity management strategy was implemented in the companies they represent. If the answer was positive, the interview questionnaire additionally asked: 1) whether it was an independent decision of the owners or coercion from the outside, and 2) whether the system is fully implemented and the employees experience benefits from it or whether it is written down, formalized, but not practiced, and therefore it is not possible to indicate any profits for the employees. During the research, it was found that only 12 respondents representing 6 companies (correspondence between older and younger respondents) indicated the presence of a diversity management system due to age. In the case of two companies, it was an independent decision of the management, in the remaining four it was a requirement imposed by the headquarters. However, what is important, only in three or four (lack of consistency of answers between groups of respondents) is it actually implemented and brings measurable results. Therefore, the results obtained do not allow to accept the first research hypothesis.

Let us note that over the course of several years, age discrimination (or *agism*) has become an increasingly popular and widely discussed problem (Baszczak et al., 2021). It should be added here that this phenomenon applies to every age group. This is evidenced not only by numerous scientific publications, but also by reports and statistical studies edited by governmental and non-governmental organizations (Rojewska, 2024). For this reason,

the interview questionnaire included a question about whether employees had personally encountered unequal treatment on the grounds of age in the last six months. The results of the study revealed that 53% of respondents had experienced acts of age bias in the last six months, which allows the rejection of the second research hypothesis. This situation requires a broader recognition by company managers, because, as B. Urbaniak et al. (2015) rightly notes, the consequences of discrimination "are harmful in many dimensions – individual, social, psychological, health or economic" (p. 41). Unequal treatment due to age can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, difficulty coping with one's own problems, and consequently somatic and mental illnesses. In addition, in the social dimension, lack of contact and exclusion deteriorate the quality of life. The marginalization of the group also prevents the transfer of knowledge and experience between generations. Discrimination in the labour market, even leading to resignation from professional activity, also threatens the stable financial condition of the employee. In the macro aspect, it is also possible to point to the burden on the state budget due to the payment of social benefits or increased expenditure on health. What is more, the unused factor of labor potentially reduces production, and thus ultimately the value of GDP generated in each country (Devictor, 2012).

It is also worth adding here that the respondents to the survey, in the case of a positive answer to the second question, were asked to indicate the manifestations of discrimination from a list of 10 proposals (multiple choice possible). There was also an opportunity to give own answer. And so, both among the younger and older generations, the respondents most often pointed to disregard and ridiculing. A summary of responses by age category is presented in the table below.

Table 3.
Manifestation of discrimination according to generations

Manifestation of discrimination	Younger generation	Older generation
Disregard	16	18
Ridiculing	15	13
Devaluation	2	11
Stigma	0	5
Paternalism	0	9
Condescension	0	3
Isolation and rejection	9	10
Negligence	0	12
Segregation	0	6
Delegitimization	0	0
Other	0	0

Source: own study based on the results of the research.

Due to the fact that both in the literature and in numerous reports it is indicated that age discrimination is present not only among seniors, in the opinion of the author of the study, it has also become important to recognize whether the experience of inequality is related to the age group of respondents. For this purpose, the H3 hypothesis was formulated, which was verified by using the Pearson's Ch-squared significance test, assuming a risk of making a type

I error of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). The analysis used the quality variable “experiencing inequality” (EI) expressed by the respondent's answer YES (coded as "1")/NO (coded as "0") and the category variable “generation”, where "1" means the younger generation, i.e., people under 50 years of age, and "2" as the older generation, i.e. people aged 50 and over. The results of the analysis based on IBM SPSS software are presented below.

Table 4.
Pearson's Chi-squared test results

Case Processing Summary						
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
EI * Generation	100	100.0%	0	0.0%	100	100.0%

EI * Generation Crosstabulation					
		Generation		Total	
		1.00	2.00		
EI	.00	Count	31	16	47
		Expected Count	23.5	23.5	47.0
		% within EI	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%
		% within Generation	62.0%	32.0%	47.0%
		% of Total	31.0%	16.0%	47.0%
	1.00	Count	19	34	53
		Expected Count	26.5	26.5	53.0
		% within EI	35.8%	64.2%	100.0%
		% within Generation	38.0%	68.0%	53.0%
		% of Total	19.0%	34.0%	53.0%
Total	Count		50	50	100
	Expected Count		50.0	50.0	100.0
	% within EI		50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Generation		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total		50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.033 ^a	1	.003		
Continuity Correction ^b	7.868	1	.005		
Likelihood Ratio	9.176	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.005	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.942	1	.003		
N of Valid Cases	100				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Source: elaboration based on the results of the research using IBM SPSS software.

A p-value of 0.003 is less than the assumed alpha significance level, which allows the null hypothesis to be rejected. This means that there is a statistically significant difference between age groups and the frequency of experiencing inequality by age. Based on the data from the crosstab, it can be concluded that respondents from the older generation experienced age inequality significantly more often. These findings are presented in the graphic form below.

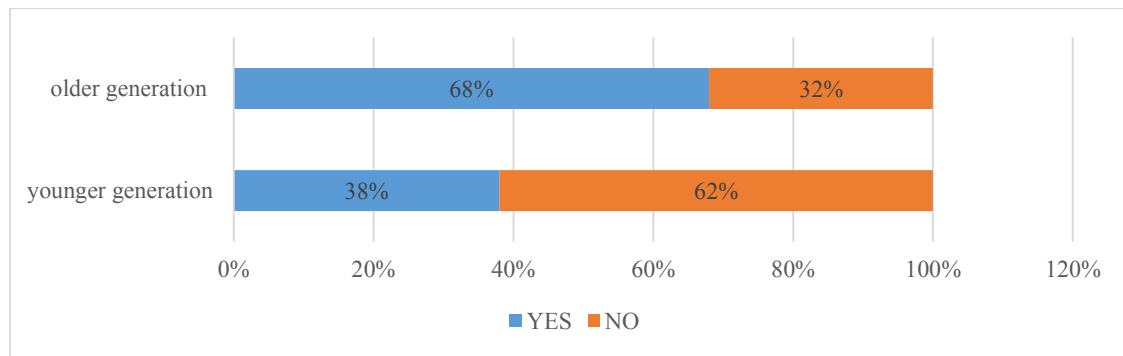


Figure 1. Experiencing age inequalities by age group.

Source: own study based on the results of the research.

The results provided an incentive for the author of the study to check whether age equality at work is equally important for employees of companies representing different generations. This question became the basis for the formulation of the H4 research hypothesis. Its verification by means of a statistical test required the adoption of a test null hypothesis (H4-0) and an alternative hypothesis (H4-1), which read as follows:

H4-0: There is no statistically significant difference in the assessment of the importance of equality by age between the younger and older generations.

H4-1: There is a statistically significant difference in the assessment of the importance of equality issues by age between the younger and older generations.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the "equality" resource on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is the least important and 5 is the most important. The frequency of responses, considering the division into two generations, is presented below.

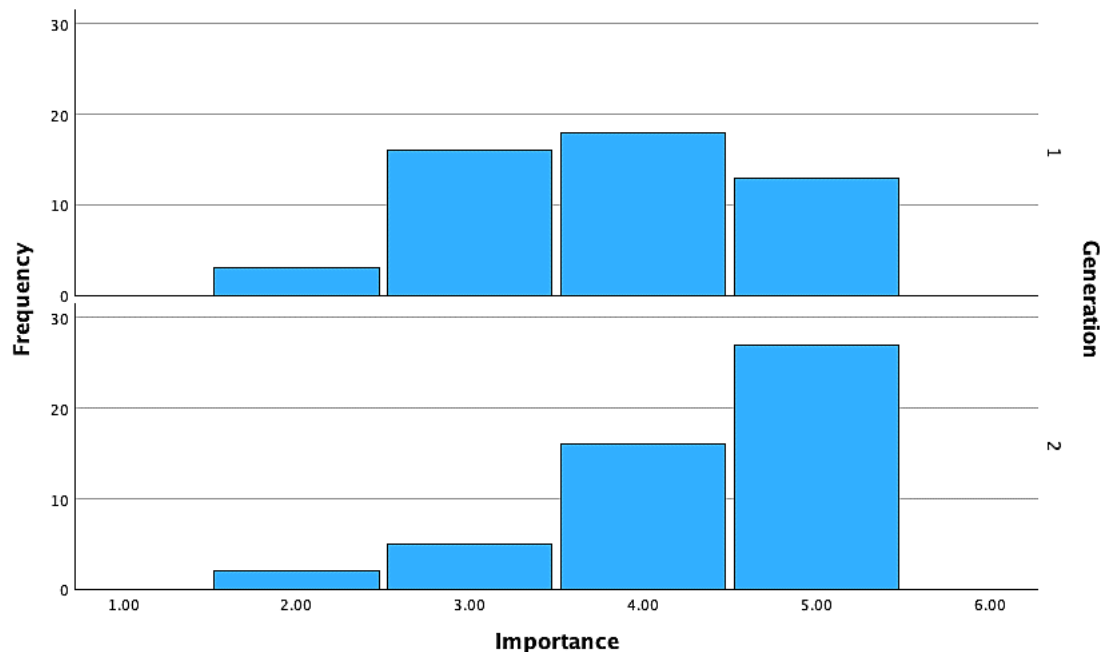


Figure 2. Frequency of evaluation of the "equality" resource.

Source: elaboration based on the results of the research using IBM SPSS software.

The answers provided by the respondents became the input data for the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples at the significance level $\alpha=0.05$. The results are presented below.

Table 5.
Mann-Whitney U test results

Test Statistics ^a				
Importance				
Mann-Whitney U				819.500
Wilcoxon W				2094.500
Z				-3.150
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)				.002
a. Grouping Variable: Generation				
Ranks				
	Generation	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Importance	1.00	50	41.89	2094.50
	2.00	50	59.11	2955.50
Total		100		

Source: elaboration based on the results of the research using IBM SPSS software.

The obtained p-value at the level of 0.002, which is lower than the assumed significance level α allows the null hypothesis to be rejected. This means that there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of the importance of the "equality" resource in professional work between the younger and older generations. Moreover, because the mean rank is higher for the older generation (mean rank = 59.11), it can be indicated that the generation 50+ has assigned higher importance to this resource. It is worth adding here that such a high importance assigned to the resource "equality" among seniors may result both from one's own (as indicated when verifying the H3 hypothesis) and from other people's experiences. It is common to observe in Poland the existence of many negative stereotypes about old age and the elderly. According to the data collected by the Foundation "Projekt Starsi", the most common negative stereotypes about seniors are: 1) perceiving them as demanding, passive, aggressive and resentful; 2) considering them inflexible, suspicious and secretive; 3) attributing pessimism, grumpiness, irritability and bitterness to them; 4) the belief that they cannot learn new things, and 5) the recognition that they are oversensitive about health, in need of institutional care and poor (Spraw aby..., 2025). It is worth adding here that the fact that the social perception of old age has changed, as well as the role that older people played in traditional societies, may also be important here. Until recently - as A. Klimczuk points out - "old age was perceived as a sign of experience, knowledge, wisdom, contact with supernatural forces, blessing, authority, power, prestige" (Klimczuk, 2012, p. 29). Currently, "ageing members of society have not only begun to lose their position as 'know-it-better' teachers, but due to the increasing pace of socio-economic changes, the achievements of science and technology, which in the 20th and 21st centuries have taken on unprecedented proportions, they have had to take on the roles of students themselves in order to keep up with the changes" (Urbaniak et al., 2015, p. 18). The box plot below presents the distribution of answers given by the younger and older generations to the fourth research question.

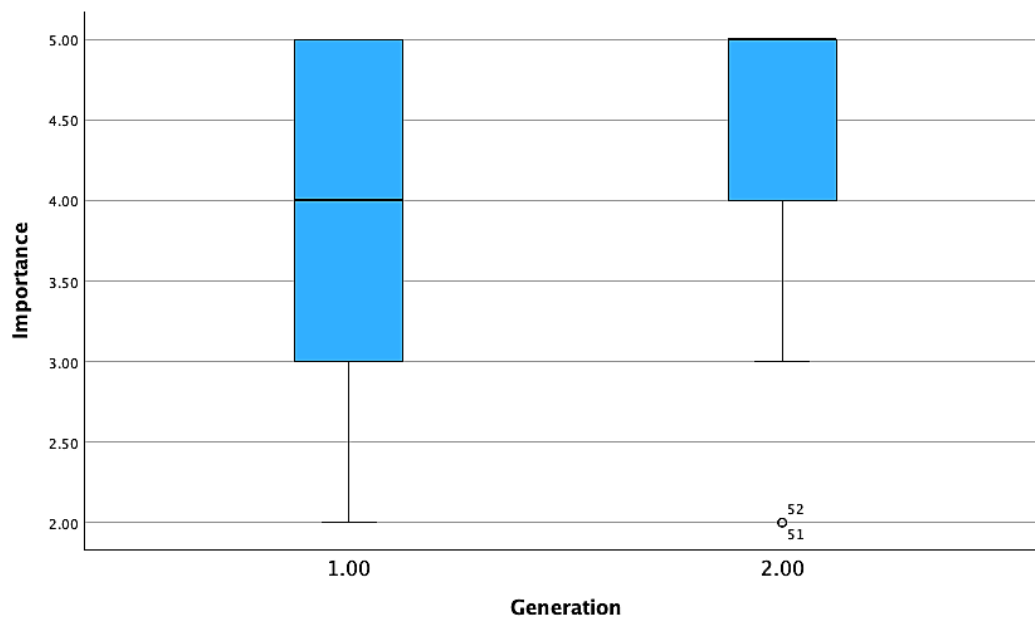


Figure 3. Distribution of responses for the rating of the "equality" resource.

Source: elaboration based on the results of the research using IBM SPSS software.

As the chart above shows, the lowest score that is not an outlier is a "2" among the younger generation and a "3" among the older generation. None of the representatives of the two groups surveyed considered "equality" to be the least important resource in professional work (a score of "1"). In addition, in the first age group, 25% of the ratings are below or equal to the first quartile, i.e. a rating at the level of "3", and 75% of the answers are above or equal to "3". On the other hand, among the older generation, it is a "4" rating. The median in the younger group of respondents is 4, and in the older group 5. In both groups of respondents, the so-called ceiling of the box corresponding to the third quartile also represents the highest score, which is not an outlier. On its basis, it can be indicated that 75% of ratings in both age groups are below the level of "5" meaning "most important". In addition, it can be added that in the older generation only two outliers can be distinguished, which characterized a rating of "2".

5. Recommendations

There is no doubt that demography is inextricably linked to the economy, and the key link here is the age of the population. The size and age structure of the workforce determine the development opportunities of both individual enterprises and the entire economy on a macro scale. Therefore, the ongoing transformations in the form of a shrinking working-age population and an aging of societies force the development of ways to effectively use the human capital of employees. One of the concepts proposed here is the management of generational diversity. Adopting this strategy is tantamount to noticing and appreciating all employees, regardless of

their age. However, such an approach requires a change in the way of thinking among the owners of modern companies and the adoption of an attitude characterized by openness, acceptance, and respect for the diversity of people. Different, individual needs and expectations of members are perceived as valuable values that should be skillfully managed.

The answers given by the respondents indicate that most of the surveyed companies have not implemented an age diversity management strategy. In only six of them it was implemented, and in two of them the decision connected with implementation was made independently by the management. In other companies, it was imposed by the headquarters. Importantly, only three of them implement this strategy and bring benefits to employees. Unfortunately, this situation currently confirms the general tendency in the country as to the low level of implementation of this type of philosophy in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises. This system, in turn, is developed more often by large companies, often with foreign capital. Therefore, the obtained results do not allow to accept the first hypothesis. However, in the face of increasing unfavorable demographic trends, it is worth considering the implementation of this system by business owners. Both the literature and, above all, business practice provide examples of the numerous benefits resulting from it.

Based on the analyses carried out, the second research hypothesis was also negatively verified. It turns out that more than half of the respondents (53%) have experienced age discrimination in the last six months. In both the younger and older group, the most common manifestation of it was disregard and ridiculing. This fact does not inspire optimism, as it may result in a decrease in the employee's self-esteem and motivation, and further in their social isolation and exclusion. The company itself may lose valuable experience and knowledge in the event of an employee's resignation, which in the long run may adversely affect its measurable economic effects. Discrimination can also lead to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes between generations.

In addition, the third research hypothesis was rejected during the research. This means that there is a statistically significant difference between age groups and the frequency of experiencing inequality by age. Moreover, based on the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that respondents from the older generation experienced inequalities due to age significantly more often. Therefore, it is recommended that managers of the surveyed companies identify the issue of discrimination through the implementation of an anonymous survey between employees, as well as individual conversations on this subject. Identifying the sources of discrimination is very important here. Such situations may result, among other things, from stereotypes about a given generation, not even confirmed by any such situations in companies.

It is also worth considering the implementation of training on employee rights, as well as the introduction of diversity policy regulations and a code of ethics containing provisions promoting openness and equal treatment, as well as counteracting discrimination between employees. Managers are also recommended to analyze such areas of the company's operation

as: recruitment, workplace design, professional development, or remuneration in terms of the existence of possible discrimination procedures. If they are identified, it is required to implement corrective actions. All these activities are particularly important in the case of older workers. As the research shows, there are statistically significant differences in the assessment of the importance of the "equality" resource in professional work between the younger and older generation. During the analysis, it turned out that it was the 50+ generation that attributed higher importance to this resource in their professional careers. On this basis, the fourth research hypothesis was rejected.

Let one add here that equal treatment of employees, not experiencing acts of discrimination by them, generates a positive atmosphere at work and thus can increase the commitment of staff to perform their duties, as well as their satisfaction and the need for self-fulfillment. In addition, employees free from prejudice and stereotypes are more likely to identify with the company, which can ultimately be reflected in both economic and non-economic results, in particular in terms of image among potential employees and customers of the company. It is also recommended to develop standards for measuring employee satisfaction covering the following steps: 1) identification of key areas of the survey (e.g. working conditions, relations with superiors, relations with employees, development opportunities, sense of meaning at work and belonging to the company, internal communication); 2) selection of one or more measurement methods from among the following proposals: employee satisfaction survey (open and closed questions, use of the Likert scale, anonymity ensured), use of the eNPS (Employee Net Promoter Score), individual and group interviews, cyclical pulse survey (based on 5-10 questions focused on current problems), psychometric methods (e.g. motivation tests in the form of the Reiss Motivation Profile), or engagement tests); 3) data analysis, drawing conclusions and constructing recommendations and a plan for implementing possible corrections in the functioning of the surveyed areas in the company. Importantly, regular audits can be a source of valuable knowledge for the company's management about what areas need to be improved. Such activities will undoubtedly be positively assessed by the employees themselves, as they are an example of care for their well-being in the workplace.

It should be noted here that a diverse team of employees and the competences of management are not a sufficient condition to benefit from the age diversity of employees. To achieve this goal, it is also necessary to create a culture of inclusion, in which employees are aware of diversity, respect the rights and differences of others, where each employee can express himself/herself, and heterogeneity is the basis for building a communication system in the company and the principles of cooperation. In this context, managers should look for ways to integrate between generations in the form of, for example, organizing corporate events or creating mixed teams. In the latter case, the author of the article proposes that the HR department develop a procedure for creating this type of teams consisting of seven basic points. First, it is necessary to define the purpose of the procedure, which is to ensure the creation of project or operational teams in which there is a balanced representation of employees

from different age groups. In this way, intergenerational cooperation, knowledge exchange and the building of an organizational culture based on diversity are promoted. Secondly, the scope of application of the procedure should be determined (selection of departments, project teams, initiatives; the composition of employees can be shaped by HR or the management itself). The third point includes defining a mixed-age team (i.e. a team with employees from at least two age categories) and an age group. The fourth point should list the individual stages of the process, i.e.: 1) identification of needs (creating a need to create a team, setting goals, number of people and required competences); 2) analysis of the age composition of the staff (preparation of a list of employees by age groups, analysis of competences, availability, seniority and communication styles); 3) selection of candidates; 4) consultations with the supervisor and employees; 5) identification of potential barriers (e.g. technological differences, work styles); 6) finalization of the team composition (approval by the HR department or project manager, data registration in the HR system); 7) communication and implementation (presentation of the composition and goals of the team to its members, the opportunity to raise concerns and questions, introduction to teamwork through integration workshops, training in intergenerational communication); 8) monitoring (from 1 to 3 months from the creation of the team, implementation of surveys, interviews) and evaluation. In turn, the fifth point of the procedure should include rules facilitating the achievement of goals by mixed teams. This includes, i.a. ensuring equal access to information and technology, avoiding generational stereotypes. It may also be important to introduce, i.a. intermentoring, which involves sharing knowledge and experience between older employees and younger employees (the so-called organizational mentor) and training older employees by younger employees in the field of, for example, new technologies (the so-called technological mentor). This form of cooperation then allows for the exchange of valuable resources while building good relationships between employees of different ages. The sixth point of the procedure should contain a list of all necessary documents (m.in. the application form for the creation of a team, the competence and age matrix, the establishment report or the evaluation report). In the last step, it is necessary to assign responsibility to the HR department, the department or project manager and the employee himself. It should be emphasized that the implementation of the procedure for creating mixed-age teams brings many measurable organizational, team and individual benefits for the employees themselves. What is more, building a culture of knowledge and cooperation between generations brings long-term benefits in the form of better preparation of enterprises for the adverse demographic changes described in this article.

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