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THE SILVER GENERATION IN A COMPANY – AN ASSET OR A BURDEN?

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Purpose: Diagnosis of the barriers and benefits associated with the functioning of Silver employees in the work environment, which influence managers' evaluations of their position within employee teams.
Design/methodology/approach: A literature review and a pilot survey study were conducted. Quantitative statistical analysis was used in the data analysis.
Findings: Interest in the research topic was observed. Respondents' evaluations indicate an average level of the use of age management solutions by managers, while at the same time recognizing the benefits associated with the functioning of age-diverse teams. Based on the pilot study, it is not possible to determine which attitudes toward Silver employees dominate or what factors condition them; therefore, it is recommended to continue the research on a representative sample.
Research limitations/implications: The study was of a pilot nature, and its results can only be referred to the research sample. Continuing the study on a representative sample will make it possible to determine which factors shape managers' attitudes toward the oldest employee groups and how these attitudes can be modified.
Practical implications: Verification of the pilot study and continuation of the research on a representative sample will, in the future, make it possible to formulate recommendations for managers responsible for designing and implementing HR policies in the area of age management.
Social implications: Identification of the conditions for extending the professional activity of older workers, as well as their effectiveness and self-fulfillment in employment, as factors preventing their socio-economic marginalization.
Originality/value: Refinement of the research gap enabling the undertaking of a comprehensive study based on a representative sample, as well as the possibility of modifying the research instrument in line with changes in the employment structure and the age structure of the workforce.
Keywords: company, Silver employees, age management, manager, human resource management.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Population ageing leads to significant changes in the age structure of the workforce; therefore, employees belonging to older age groups are playing an increasingly important role in organizations. This phenomenon encourages both researchers and management practitioners to reflect more broadly on the significance of employees referred to as the Silver generation (aged 50+) in the work environment.

The literature emphasizes that these employees can constitute a valuable source of experience, knowledge, and organizational stability for companies. At the same time, it points to barriers affecting their functioning in the workplace, including age-related stereotypes, generational differences, and the impact of technological changes on employee requirements. Consequently, the question increasingly arises as to whether the presence of Silver employees in an organization represents developmental capital or a burden.

In analyses of this issue, particular importance is attached to examining the attitudes and opinions of managers responsible for the functioning of age-diverse teams. Their experiences and evaluations may indicate both the benefits and the barriers associated with employing older workers. An analysis of these opinions makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms of intergenerational team functioning as well as the determinants of effective age management in organizations.

Therefore, the aim of the presented article is to present managers' opinions on the benefits and barriers they identify in relation to the employment of Silver generation workers. As the presented results are based on a pilot study, they should be treated as a starting point for further research on the role of this group of employees in organizations and on the development of solutions supporting effective management of age-diverse workforces.

2. Factors shaping the professional activity of Silver employees – a literature review

In the context of accelerated population ageing in Europe and shrinking labour resources, the question of the role of employees aged 50+ is no longer merely a theoretical consideration but is becoming a strategic issue for organizations and social policy. In all EU countries, including Poland, the number of workers aged over fifty has clearly increased over the past decade, while at the same time various barriers to this group's access to employment, development opportunities, and occupational mobility remain evident (Eurofound, 2024; Eurofound, 2025; Bazydło-Egier, Krawczyk-Dąbrowska, Ulicz, 2025). On the other hand, attention is drawn to the unique characteristics of this group of employees, which not only

distinguish them in the labour market but also make them resources with distinctive skills, qualifications, and ways of functioning in the work environment, thereby increasing their attractiveness. Increasingly, they themselves feel fully capable of working, wish to remain professionally active longer than required by legal regulations, and seek self-fulfilment and development at work.

Demographic processes related to increasing life expectancy and the improving health status of older workers contribute to growing pressure to extend working lives and to introduce changes in age management within companies (GUS, 2024, 2025; Bazydło-Egier, Krawczyk-Dąbrowska, Ulicz, 2025). At the same time, management practice indicates discrepancies between the stereotype-based perception of mature employees as carriers of experience, stability, and organizational knowledge, and concerns regarding costs, absenteeism, adaptation to technological changes, or lower learning flexibility (Stawiarska-Klasa, Wons, 2024, p. 579; Asiamah, 2024; McCaughey et al., 2025).

Contemporary international literature identifies three complementary streams of research on employees aged 50+. First, there is a strong focus on ageism in the workplace and the consequences of age-related stereotypes for the functioning of older workers and the quality of HR decisions (Bae, Choi, 2023; Burn, 2023; Funk, Lorenz, 2024). Studies on discrimination in recruitment show that age, compared to other applicant characteristics, is often one of the strongest factors negatively differentiating candidates (PARP, 2024; Qvist, Larsen, 2025). Second, there is a growing body of research on successful ageing at work and the determinants of maintaining work ability and motivation in later life, as well as person-environment fit (Kooij et al., 2020; Debelak, 2024; Meng et al., 2025; Eurostat, 2025). Particular importance is attached to HR practices designed to be age-inclusive and to strengthen career sustainability, well-being, and the willingness to remain professionally active for longer (Dublanka, 2024; Cui et al., 2025; Hou et al., 2025; Song, 2026). The third area concerns research on age-diverse teams and their functioning. Researchers point out that the effects of age diversity depend on organizational climate, leadership quality, and solutions supporting cooperation and knowledge transfer (Waligóra, 2024b; Zellman, 2025; Tóthová, Kučera, 2025; Li et al., 2025). At the same time, findings on development decisions indicate a risk of accumulating inequalities, as managers may prefer investing in training for "more employable", younger workers, while age may reduce the perceived value of such investments for employees approaching retirement (Lössbroek, Schippers, 2025). The issue of intergenerational learning is further explored in studies on reverse mentoring as a tool for reducing the digital skills gap and strengthening bidirectional knowledge exchange (Li et al., 2024; Gordon, 2025).

Similarly, in Poland, the issue of age management in the workplace is gaining importance both in academic research and in reports by public institutions analysing the labour market. Publications by GUS and other institutions systematize the picture of the situation of older people and their activity in the labour market (GUS, 2024; MRPiPS, 2024; PARP, 2024; CIOP-PIB, 2025). They point, among other things, to the need for employer actions aimed at reducing

stereotypes and strengthening the use of the potential of employees aged 50+ (Bazydło-Egier et al., 2025). Research also shows that for the effective functioning of modern organizations, not only the age structure of employees matters, but also the way age diversity is managed, including building an inclusive climate and applying HR practices that mitigate negative intergenerational tensions and foster organizational identification (Waligóra, 2024a, p. 91; Mori et al., 2024; Waligóra, 2025, p. 158; Song et al., 2026). At the same time, managers differ in their assessments of the competencies and professional situation of Silver employees, which justifies the need for a deeper diagnosis of this issue among decision-makers (Schulz, 2024; Guzal-Dec, Jaśkiewicz, 2025; Song et al., 2026). As a result, it is reasonable to examine to what extent perceiving this group as either a developmental asset or a burden stems from actual managerial experience, and to what extent it results from cognitive biases, organizational conditions, cost pressures, lack of age management tools, or limitations in job design.

These premises, in the author's view, justify undertaking research focused on managers, as it is their beliefs and workplace practices that determine whether Silver employees participate in recruitment processes, remain employed, and develop professionally. Their decisions determine whether the potential of the mature segment of human capital is activated or lost. Conducting empirical research on this issue may provide a basis for designing evidence-based HR practices aimed at increasing productivity and well-being in both the professional and private lives of Silver employees, as well as reducing legal and reputational risks associated with age discrimination (Eurofound, 2024; Eurofound, 2025).

3. Methods

When designing the empirical study, it was considered essential to determine how managers define the role of Silver employees within their teams and which factors influence their evaluations. The aim of the study was to validate a survey questionnaire designed to identify the benefits and barriers associated with the employment of workers aged 50+ from the perspective of managing age-diverse teams. This should enable the conduct of broader research in the future and the collection of empirical material allowing for the formulation of recommendations and guidelines for age management in HR policy. The applied dimension of the study included the verification of research assumptions and the research instrument, enabling the future implementation of representative studies that would provide information for identifying factors and business arguments supporting the prevention of age discrimination and exclusion in organizations.

To achieve this aim, four research questions were formulated:

1. What barriers and benefits related to the employment of Silver employees are identified by managers?
2. What actions do managers take to reduce the risk of ageism and age discrimination?
3. What age management solutions do managers implement to support the productivity and well-being of Silver employees?
4. What factors and business arguments facilitate the implementation of strategies preventing age discrimination and exclusion in organizations?

Answers to these questions were sought through an empirical study conducted using the diagnostic survey method and an online questionnaire technique, for which an original questionnaire was developed. It consisted of 5 demographic questions and 5 substantive questions, each including from 5 to 9 statements related to the research problems. For each statement, respondents selected an answer on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree." These questions were preceded by a screening question regarding whether the respondents' organizations employ individuals aged over 50.

The survey was made available to internet users between 7 January and 15 January 2026. The invitation to participate specified that it was intended for individuals holding managerial positions. After closing the survey, the results were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. Statistical analysis was conducted using the arithmetic mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ). The results of this analysis are presented in the following section of the article.

4. Analysis of the research results

The processing and analysis of the statistical data obtained in the study began with a characterization of the participants, based on responses to the demographic and screening questions. Complete responses were obtained from 116 respondents, of whom 4 indicated that there were no employees aged over 50 in their organizations. This means that the final sample consisted of 112 participants (Table 1).

Women predominated in the sample – 75 respondents (67%) – as well as individuals aged 40 to 50 years – 55 respondents (49.11%). The mean age of the respondents was 47.5 years, with a standard deviation of 8.76. The average tenure in a managerial position was 10.21 years, with a standard deviation of 6.4.

In the substantive part of the questionnaire, respondents were first asked to assess the extent to which they agreed with statements concerning the benefits of employing Silver workers, such as bringing professional experience to the team, stabilizing its functioning, transferring knowledge to younger employees, building a culture of responsibility and loyalty,

work engagement, intergenerational cooperation, and supporting younger employees in developing their experience.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristic		Number of responses	Total
sex	women	75 (66,96%)	112 (100%)
	man	37 (33,04%)	
age	up to 30 years old	0 (0%)	
	31-40 years old	11 (9,82%)	
	41-50 years old	55 (49,11%)	
	51-60 years old	41 (36,61%)	
	over 60 years old	5 (4,46%)	
	$\bar{x}$(σ)	***47,5 (8,76)***	
length of service in a managerial position	up to 5 years	27 (24,11%)	
	6-10 years	39 (34,82%)	
	11-15 years	29 (25,89%)	
	over 15 years	17 (15,18%)	
	$\bar{x}$(σ)	***10,21 (6,4)***	
company size	up to 49 employees	31 (27,68%)	
	50-249 employees	65 (58,03%)	
	250 or more employees	16 (14,29%)	
industry	production	28 (25%)	
	services	31 (27,68%)	
	trade	16 (14,29%)	
	public administration	11 (9,82%)	
	other	26 (23,21%)	

Source: own elaboration.

The second issue concerned the analysis of the impact on the functioning of the teams managed by the respondents of barriers related to the employment of Silver workers. Respondents referred to such problems as adaptation to new technologies, generational differences in teamwork, age-related stereotypes, difficulties in accepting organizational changes, participation in training, manifestations of discrimination, as well as differences in communication styles between older and younger employees.

The next issue addressed the actions undertaken by respondents to prevent ageism and age-based discrimination, including those promoting cooperation among employees of different ages, ensuring equal development opportunities, raising awareness of ageism, and taking into account the needs of different age groups in team management.

Subsequently, respondents were asked about solutions aimed at enhancing the productivity and well-being of Silver workers in the workplace, such as offering flexible working arrangements, mentoring, training tailored to the needs of employees of different ages, supporting their health and well-being, adjusting tasks to their competencies and capabilities, encouraging knowledge and experience sharing, recognizing them as valuable resources contributing to organizational effectiveness, and incorporating age management into HR policy.

The final issue concerned measures implemented within organizations to support Silver workers at work, including the use of mentoring and reverse mentoring, training to enhance digital competencies, flexible forms of work, adapting workplaces to the needs of older employees, and age management programs. Mean scores for each research area were calculated and presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Practices related to age management and the prevention of ageism in the respondents' organizations

Factors		Assessment $\bar{x}$ (σ)
benefits of employing Silver workers	contributed experience	4,2 (1,25)
	team stability	3,1 (1,09)
	knowledge transfer	3,9 (2,1)
	organizational culture	2,8 (1,23)
	team effectiveness	2,4 (2,11)
	lower risk of errors	2,9 (1,41)
	total	***3,22 (1,53)***
barriers related to the functioning of Silver workers in organizations	lower ability to adapt to new technologies	4,3 (1,08)
	intergenerational differences within the team	3,7 (0,96)
	the persistence of stereotypes	4,3 (1,42)
	difficulties in accepting change	4,6 (0,48)
	lower participation in training	3,8 (1,16)
	discrimination against older employees	2,4 (0,82)
	differences in communication styles	3,8 (1,91)
	total	***3,84 (1,12)***
reducing ageism and age-based discrimination	prevention of discrimination by managers	3,7 (1,19)
	promoting intergenerational cooperation	2,9 (1,02)
	ensuring equal development opportunities	4,2 (0,77)
	combating ageism	3,7 (1,31)
	taking into account the needs of all employees	4,3 (0,83)
	total	***3,76 (1,02)***
measures to enhance the productivity and well-being of Silver workers	flexible forms of work	2,1 (0,47)
	assigning mentoring roles	2,4 (0,57)
	training tailored to employees' needs	3,3 (0,83)
	supporting health and well-being	2,7 (0,91)
	adjusting tasks to employees' capabilities	3,9 (0,96)
	encouraging knowledge sharing	4,3 (0,81)
	treating them as a valuable resource	3,8 (1,58)
	treating age diversity as a factor enhancing effectiveness	3,7 (1,16)
	including age management in HR policy	2,2 (0,46)
	total	***3,16 (0,86)***
measures supporting Silver workers in the workplace	mentoring	2,9 (0,79)
	reverse mentoring	1,7 (0,67)
	training to enhance digital skills	3,9 (0,93)
	flexible forms of work	1,4 (0,54)
	workplaces adapted to employees' needs	2,6 (0,86)
	age management programs	1,3 (0,83)
	total	***2,3 (0,77)***
∑		***3,26 (1,06)***

Source: own elaboration.

The overall mean for the entire study was 3.26, with a standard deviation of 1.06. Particular attention should be paid to the results concerning the part of the study that addressed actions undertaken by respondents' organizations to support Silver workers in the workplace. Here, there is a clear predominance of ratings indicating a lack of activity in this area – mean score of 2.3, with a standard deviation of 0.77.

In the remaining areas, despite differences in ratings for individual factors, the mean values across specific domains do not show significant variation. At the same time, the relatively low variability of responses is noteworthy, with most answers clustering around the value corresponding to the statement "difficult to say." This suggests the need to modify the rating scale by introducing a forced-choice format, achieved through the use of an even number of response options.

5. Summary

In conclusion, it can be stated that the subject of the study is becoming an increasingly important area of scientific inquiry, and therefore its continuation should be considered justified. Based on the pilot results, preliminary answers to the research questions and conclusions regarding further work were formulated. It was identified which benefits and barriers related to the employment of workers aged 50+ were perceived by the managers participating in the study. According to their assessments, the key benefits include the opportunity to share experience and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. Among the barriers, the most important were identified as a lower level of acceptance of change and adaptation to new technologies, as well as communication problems between older and younger employees resulting from differences in communication styles.

Among the actions most frequently undertaken to reduce the risk of ageism and age-based discrimination in the workplace, respondents indicated taking into account the needs of all employees and adjusting working conditions accordingly. However, it is not possible to clearly determine what additional measures, beyond those already indicated, are taken by surveyed managers to support the productivity and well-being of Silver workers, or which workplace factors are used to prevent age-based discrimination and exclusion in their organizations.

In line with the research objective, the research gap was specified more precisely, which made it possible to modify the questionnaire so that it would fully enable the identification of benefits and barriers associated with the functioning of Silver workers from the perspective of managing age-diverse teams. The results of the pilot study did not provide a clear answer to the question of whether Silver workers in the respondents' organizations are perceived as an asset or a burden. Answering this question requires extending the study so that it becomes representative of the entire managerial population in Polish companies.

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