# INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

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**Summary:** This article is a review of literature and secondary research about significance of interpersonal relations in contemporary organizations. Particular attention was paid to intergenerational relationships within the organization.
The aim of the study is the characterization of the generation  and attempt to determine the factors that have an influence on the relations shaping between employees in various age (with particular emphasis on the role which, in this context, the manager can be in charge) in organization.

**Keywords:** generation, the organization, the relations in organization, the diversity of age

## 1. Introduction

The organization – defined as "a group of people who work together in an orderly and coordinated manner to achieve a set of goals" (Griffin 1996) – could not exist, grow and achieve the desired results without the commitment and efficient work by employees. All employees (along with their creativity, innovation, hard work and dedication) form an organization. For this reason, nowadays it is believed that people are the most important capital of organization, and successful HRM (Human Resource Management) (Bylok, 2009), or MCM (Human Capital Management) (Lipka, 2011) can decide about competitive advantages of the organization in the market. Efficiency of employees and consequently also the organization depends on various factors. It is pointed out that one of them is the atmosphere in the workplace (including the corresponding interpersonal relations).
In recent times, the issue of creating relations in the organization is becoming more and more important. This is caused inter alia through progressive demographic changes (and consequently increasing generational diversity in the organization); the nature of work changes (e.g. remote work, flexible and short-term contracts), as well as progress of technology (that affects the type and method of communication) etc. Therefore, before the contemporary managers there are many challenges connected with creating the atmosphere and positive relations inside and outside the organization. Relationships in the workplace depend on many factors and may impact on the functioning and development of the organization. This article is a review of literature and secondary research and aims to identify the factors influencing the creation of a relations in the organization (in particular among people in different age).

## 2. Significance of interpersonal relations in contemporary organizations

According to the study by Glińska-Neweś, Kalińska and Karaś (2014,): positive interpersonal relationships between employees have a significant impact on the development of the company. The detailed conclusions of this research indicate that: "state of interpersonal relations in teams of employees translates into the relations between the teams in the company, which has an impact on the enterprise development". Moreover, the development of company also fosters the situation in which employees like each other; when employees can

count on each other and when they show acceptance and respect themselves. Positive relationships in workgroup and good relations between groups of employees could be achieved by building an appropriate organizational culture and a climate conducive to creating positive relations within the organization.

Simultaneously it should be mentioned that the issue of working environment has a significant impact on job satisfaction of employees and their motivation to work. Research conducted by Smolarek (2013) indicated that the most important factors which determine the attractiveness of jobs is the working atmosphere (this was stated by more than 55% of employees). Such requests were also confirmed by other studies (e.g. Wziątek- Staśko 2014).

Moreover, according the Nowotarska-Romaniak research (2009, p. 72). the most important factors affecting the atmosphere at work include relationships with colleagues (69%), financial conditions and mutual respect (by 61 %.) and relations with superior (59 %.) It confirms that relations at work are an important factor affecting the functioning and development of contemporary organizations.

Creating and managing relations within the organization (as between employees, groups of employees as well as employees - employers) therefore constitutes a challenge to managers who should take into account in this process ever-increasing diversity of employees. In particular, differentiation of employees with respect to their age seems to be very important.

## 3. Relations between different generations in organization

Demographic changes associated with the ageing population and age structure of employees changes are conducive to age diversity of employees in the organization. At present it often happens that in one organization (and in one team of employees inside organization) representatives of different generations work together: baby - boomers ( BB, born between 1949-1963); generation X (born between 1964-1979) and generation Y (born between 1980-1994) (Baran and Kłos, 2014).

This situation could have an impact on the creation of a relations and atmosphere at work. Of course, generational differentiation can bring many benefits to the organization, as demonstrated by both employers and employees. Managers underlined that the biggest advantage is mainly the possibility of knowledge- sharing (55%). What is interesting, employees identified more benefits of working with colleagues of different ages, namely: having different perspectives (72%), knowledge-sharing (66%), new ideas (41%) and improved the problem-solving (32%). (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2014 p.11). On the other hand generational differentiation could be cause of misunderstanding between people in organization. The same research shows that the most important challenges of working with colleagues of different ages, from the point of employees view are the lack of shared interests (32%), misunderstandings (29%), lack of shared values (28%), potential for disruptive conflict (22%). Importantly, employers mainly said that there are no challenges (17%), then underlined such points: age stereotyping (16%), internal progression/succession planning problems (16%) and lack of shared values (15%). This indicates that in practice there could be some misunderstandings between the different generations in the organization (which, to a greater extent, is noticed by employees rather than managers) and managing of age diversity team could be major challenge for mangers, who must be prepared to this. Otherwise, intergenerational diversity can be a source of problems and conflicts in organization, which negatively affects the atmosphere and relationships at work. Meanwhile, good relations between the generations in organization seem to be very significant in the context of the knowledge- sharing. Słocińska's survey show that elder employees (who have a lot of valuable knowledge) "more often declare they do not share knowledge as they afraid of

being dismissed" (2013). This may be related to a lack of trust, bad atmosphere and animosity in organization.

Moreover, it should be noted that it is important to ensure access to lifelong education, both for young and elder workers (more about adult education, among others, ed. Krüger 2014). Lifelong education, regular training for all can equalize the level of knowledge in the organization.

„Despite the fact that many employers think their organizations are age-diverse, very few are proactively monitoring the age distribution of their workforces. (...)and nearly half of line managers are not trained in promoting team working in age- diverse teams" (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2014).

Research conducted in 2007, among 30 Polish organizations indicate that in the surveyed organizations noticed the occurrence of strong intergenerational barriers and prejudices. These barriers were not directly related to overt conflict, but rather with generation isolation. The conflict of generations is mainly psychological (Gojny and Zbierowski 2013). The study was conducted among employees 50+ and 35- as well as among managers. Intergenerational problems perceived by groups of younger employees were mainly:  discrimination against young workers by 50+ and specific characteristics of 50+ (mainly: resistance to change, low level of knowledge - primarily languages and IT). Intergenerational problems perceived by 50+ are in the first place resulting from defects of people under 35 such as exterior at work or lack of responsibility. The other intergenerational issues are suggested by managers. Managers indicate that the main cause of confusion is competition between generations.

People in different ages do not identify with each other. They isolate themselves from each other and do not see the common interests and values. Each generation has specific characteristics, models of behaviour and mentality.

Tolbize (2008) has done a detailed review of studies and on this basis, pointed to the similarities and differences between the generations. We can observed some discrepancies between the attitudes of people in different ages. For example: the representatives of Baby Boomers may still be uncomfortable interactive with authority, representatives of  gen. X  are comfortable with authorities and are not impressed with titles or intimidated by them and Y believe that respect must be earned. The representatives of gen. X and Y want to be held in esteem; listened to and  they do not expect deference. BB require special treatment and more weight given to their opinions. Moreover representatives of BB are loyalty and they value company commitment. The representatives of gen. X are less loyal to companies than previous generations but they are loyal to people. Y are loyal when dedicated to an idea, cause or product. Knowledge of these differences may be important during the creating relations in the workplace. These differences indicate, among other how managers can win the trust and respect, build authority among different age groups or how they should communicate with them, how achieve loyalty of employees.

Simultaneously the other research findings allow to conclude that (simplifying):

- Demographic variables (age) are not particularly important in shaping the individual hierarchy of factors affecting employee satisfaction (Springer, 2011).
- There are no notable significant differences in factors affecting the motivation of employees of different ages. What is interesting, there are some differences in the assessment of such factors as: "employment security" and "comfort and safety at work". These factors are the most motivating to work the youngest people (more than others). What is surprising, because in literature it is often stressed that younger people appreciate independence, are flexible and ready to change jobs frequently (Wziątek-Staśko, 2014).
- Age does not determine the highly regarded value of work significantly. Interestingly all respondents appreciated the work life balance while usually this value is associated with

the generation Y (Baran and Klos, 2014). People in every ages expect to be respected (Montana and Petit, 2008)

However, it should be noted, that differences in motivation and approach to work, there are also between different people coming from the same generation.

Results from the above information, that between representatives of various generations there are differences related to lifestyle, work style of work, means of communication, attitudes towards work, etc. It should be noted, however, that despite the prevalence of certain differences between generations, these differences are not significant enough to preclude mutual cooperation. They do not concern to a significant extent, a matter of associated with motivation and satisfaction at work. In fact, a lot of opinions about people in different age are based only on pseudo- science and stereotypes (not confirmed in reality). Unfortunately, stereotypical perception and treatment of people due to their age is revealed by both managers and work colleagues and has a big influence on the creation of relations at work (Blauth and al., 2011)."Generational conflict is more likely to arise from errors of attribution and perception, than from valid differences" (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2014). Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that all problems and intergenerational barriers indicated by managers, employees 50+ and 35- (in cited study) can be divided into:

- problems that are eligible for change through training: eg.: discrimination, 50+ defects, defects of 35-, communication, fears 50+, the barriers and insulation between generation,
- problems which may be affected by employer - the organization of work,
- objective problems - the difference in generations understood as the difference in situations and family life, the beginning and the stabilization of their career (Żorska Izba Gospodarcza, 2006; Zbierowski and Gojny 2013).


## 4. Conclusion

To sum up, according to the analysing literature and research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Generations differ from each other, but these differences can be a source of development for the organization. Sources of misunderstanding are usually reluctance, prejudices, stereotypes and mutual isolation.
- Employees recognize the positive aspects of intergenerational cooperation. However, they emphasize that creating right atmosphere is possible only when in organization ground for communication and cooperation for people in different age will be created (common values, common interests).
- Important role in this process is played by employers, who have a significant impact on the creation of an atmosphere in organization.
- One of the most important roles of managers is to recognize the true characteristics, motivation and expectations of their employees, the fight against stereotypes in the workplace (awareness of employees about it), as well as getting rid of their stereotypical thinking about people in different age.
- Employers also recognize the advantages and challenges of generational diversity. They are ready to undertake the challenge, but according to the survey currently doing it on a small scale. In this context, it is worth to promote the idea of age management (both among employers and employees). Employers should also educate their employees how important is efficiency cooperation between employees of different ages. They should try to combat the stereotypes about age. Moreover, they should seek common points that link generations and can provide a platform for cooperation.

- It would seem, that during the creation of intergenerational relations very important roles could play representatives of generation X. They have points in common both with the generation Y and baby boomers. In this case, X may constitute a "link" between other generations.

Summing up mutual relations between employees of all ages can result from certain differences that are associated with the mentality characteristic of certain generation as well as professional development stadium. It significantly to affect not also firmly established stereotypes and specific fear, and even resentment. Identifying and overcoming them can contribute to creating positive relations between people in different age.

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