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1.8. CREATING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AS A PART OF DIVERSITY OF AGE MANAGEMENT

Summary: Demographic changes on the contemporary labour market have significant effect on functioning organizations. Contemporary organizations are more and more diversified. It requires new approach on the part of managers who are currently faced with the challenge of managing a team of employees, which are composed of representatives from several different generations (including: Baby Boomers, X, Y, Z). The important part of employees management in diversified organization is shaping a right atmosphere and correctly relations between employees in different age. This article presents the secondary data analysis and own research about intergenerational relations between people. The article shows factors which have influence on shaping relation in diversified organization. Moreover, the paper indicates some recommendation connected with intergenerational relations management.

Keywords: generations, diversity of age, intergenerational relations at work

Introduction

Every organization is created by people. The organization's development depends on way of working by employees – their motivation and engagement. In this context, it is worth to emphasize that people motivation and engagement are connected with relations at work, feeling to be respected, understood and liked. This thesis was confirmed by several surveys (e.g. Wziątek-Staśko, 2014; Skolarek, 2013; Glińska-Neweś, Kalińska and Karaś, 2014). Therefore, the issue of creating a correct relationship between employees should be an important part of modern management. However, this task becomes a significant challenge for managers. The progressive demographic change (and consequently increasing generational diversity in the organization), the nature of work changes (e.g. remote work, project teams, flexible, short-term contracts), as well as progress of technology (that affects the type and method of communication) make that the way of cooperation between people is changing and it is the cause that before the contemporary managers there are many new challenges connected with creating the atmosphere and positive relationships between people in organization (Zając, 2015). This article will be mainly focused on the intergenerational diversity impact on creating the relationships at work. It will be carried out the characteristics of intergenerational relations in organization and challenges that are associated with its creating (based on the secondary data analysis and own research). There will also be presented selected forms of creating the relations between employees in the context of diversity management.

Intergenerational diversity in contemporary organization – the benefits and challenges

A generation is defined by Weston as „a group of people born in the same general time span who share some life experiences, such as big historical events, pastimes, heroes, and early work experiences" (cited by: Blauth et al., 2011) In the past, generations used to change every 25-30 years and followed in sequence one after another. Nowadays, sociologists define the different generations every 10 years (Imiołczyk, 2012). In contemporary labour market there are several different generations: generation Baby Boomers (born between 1949-1963), generation X (1964-1979), Y (1980-1994) (Baran and Kłos, 2014). Moreover, It is said also about new generation - Z – people who were born after 1995 and who will enter the labour market soon (Koc, 2015; Finch, 2015). Therefore, it is said that contemporary labour market is more and more diversified. In fact, it is natural that people in different ages differ from each other. They grew up in other times, their attitude towards work developed in other circumstances, their education proceeded differently. This may affect their different approach to work and cooperate with superiors and colleagues. In addition, they have different knowledge, which is due among other things with other professional experience and phase of their professional development. Such diversity of employees' generations in one organization can bring many benefits, but it could be connected with some difficulties.

At first it should be noted that the generational diversity could be a great potential for organization. It is connected with diversity of knowledge, skills and possibilities. Exchanging the knowledge and experiences between employees in different ages is considered to be the greatest asset of age diversity in the organization (e.g. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2014). Variety of knowledge and experiences that exists in diversified of age team may contribute to the development of the organization and foster creativity of employees. It is said that differentiation on the level of education, job function, seniority, etc. turns out to have a positive impact on the work group, causing their strong drive to act. It is also important that the diversity of employees in terms of their personality can bring positive results. Moreover, a large impact on the creativity of the team may have even conflicts that arise during the cooperation in workgroup. However, only the conflicts of moderate intensity and concern on substantive issues could bring positive effect. Different opinions and views of employees favour more original, diverse and creative effects work (Lipowska, 2013; Kuntzberg and Amabile, 2000-2001). The positive impact of age diversity of employees in the development of the organization are emphasized by the researchers (Gojny and Zbierowski, 2013; Szaban, 2013; Walczak, 2011) as well as business practitioners (e.g. Groysberg and Connolly, 2014).

On the other hand, it is worth stressing that the differences between employees can also be a source of conflicts, misunderstandings and mutual dislike. Everything depends on the type of differences and skilful employees' management. It is important to notice that, for example even a moderate level of difference in styles of problem solving leads to the emergence of conflicts, hindering and blocking the creativity of individual members of the group. (Lipowska, 2013; Kuntzberg and Amabile, 2000-2001)

Moreover, conflicts which arise from the negative relationship between employees or inadequate organization of work (e.g. disputes about who is responsible for task) always have a negative impact on creativity and teamwork (Lipowska, 2013). Therefore, it is very important to appropriately manage the diversity of employees.

The diversity management can be defined as a strategy whose objective is creating and maintaining friendly working environment for employees through respect and sensitivity for their diversity (Flazalgić, 2014). The diversity of age management based on rational and effective management of potential employees in enterprises by taking account of the needs and abilities of employees of different ages (Litwińska, Sztanderska, 2010). Diversity of age management encompasses many areas. Undoubtedly, one of them is creating the right atmosphere and good relationships within the organization (Zając, 2014). Good atmosphere at work affects the involvement of employees and their motivations. Moreover, the atmosphere of trust and kindness encourages the exchange of knowledge, experience and inspiration, which is particularly important from the age diversity management point of view. Meanwhile, as indicated by the selected research: on contemporary labour market there are phenomena like discrimination based on age (both younger and elderly employers), stereotypical thinking and some kind of conflict between generations.

Relation between people of different age - a review of selected research

The research conducted into 202 enterprises in Germany by researchers: Kunze, Boehm and Brunch (2013) proved that: the greater age diversity in organizations, the greater phenomenon of discrimination based on age. It is quite obvious statement - it is difficult to talk about discrimination of age in homogeneous organization. However, this conclusion, is gaining more and more importance, if we consider the fact that today's organizations are increasingly diversified in age. Moreover, an important observation by Kunze, Boehm and Brunch was the fact that there were more common negative relationships between employees in different age who worked each other in one group and it had a negative impact on relations between the teams. It turn negatively affect the whole organization and prevented its development.

Research conducted by group of sociologists and psychologists (Uwarunkowania.., 2006) in Silesia region in Poland into two generations: people over 50 (baby boomers) and under 35 – (y generation) - (the most different generations in the contemporary labour market) showed that in practise there were a lot of barriers, which hinder intergenerational cooperation. The employees did not say about it directly, but survey showed that there were some hidden conflict, prejudices and some kind of isolation between people in different age. Both of young people and elderly people indicated some barriers in communication. The younger respondents felt that they were treated worse both by elderly employees and by managers. They felt disrespected and discriminated. Moreover, they underlined negative features of elderly people (such as reluctance to learn, tendency to moralize, their negative approach to younger people). In the opinion of young, the barriers in communication were related to main features of elderly, manager approach, organizational issue and their discrimination by elderly and managers. What interesting, young employees noticed a lot of weaknesses of elder

employees (more than themselves) and they said only about one strength of elder employees – about their experiences. This may be evidence of their hidden bias and do not being objective. The elderly respondents, similarly, felt that they were treated worse. They noticed some barriers in communication with younger too. In their opinion those barriers were related to weaknesses of younger people and their prejudice to older people. The elderly people treated younger like lazy, inexperienced and argumentative people. During the study, the elderly showed some kind of unwillingness to give advice and share knowledge with younger what could be a problem during the management - especially in context of diversity of age management. Such an attitude may be related to a general dislike for young or fear of loss of position. The barriers between employees in different age, especially in communication were underlined by employers too. Employers indicated barriers both in young and elderly behaviour. What interesting, the managers noticed a huge rivalry between young and elderly. On the other hand, in the context of diversity of age management and creation of good atmosphere at work by managers very significant is the fact that the managers emphasize much more weaknesses both younger and elderly employees than their strengths. It is interesting conclusion, because it could have direct link with the style of management, building atmosphere and relationships with the staff. It can be expected that the manager's approach to managing people is different, when they see more weaknesses than strengths of them. In this context more understandable is the fact that both the young and the elderly felt unappreciated by managers.

Conclusions of this study show that in surveyed enterprises there were problems with communication between employees of different ages. These problems were associated with stereotypical thinking, generational isolation and hidden prejudices. Importantly, these problems related to both employees and managers attitudes. It could be said, that the managers approach, in direct way could effect on shaping of the relationship at work (managers behaviour could strengthen of prejudices, conflicts and misunderstandings, or eliminate them).

Presented studies were carried out in 2006, but still appear to be valid. In Poland there are a lot of stereotypes and discrimination on labour market (the youngest and oldest employees most often underlined this problem) (Kukla, Duda and Zając, 2012).For example, the Słocińska survey shows that elder employees (who have a lot of valuable knowledge) "more often declare they do not share knowledge as they are afraid of being dismissed" (2013). This may be related to a lack of trust, bad atmosphere and animosity in organization.

Based on AchieveGlobal research (Blauth et al., 2011) it can be indicated that managers and employees of all ages and in a lot of every regions of the world emphasize the prevalence of stereotypes associated with age. A lot of managers create an image of their employees (their needs, expectations, motivation) based only on stereotypes. Sometimes, it has an impact on managers decision inter alia connected with organization of work (e.g. the creation of age homogeneous teams), allocation tasks, delegating employees to training etc. This may cause even greater generation isolation - the lack of opportunities for cooperation can lead to a lack of common ground, and consequently more barriers to communication between people. Moreover

unfair allocation of tasks and training (only based on the stereotypical thinking by manager) can lead to overt or hidden conflicts between employees. Therefore, in this context it should be stressed once again that the attitude of managers has crucial role in process of age diversity management.

Of course, the problems of stereotypes and discrimination because of age are not only connected with manager's attitudes and organization of work. The problem of communication between generations is wider and it applies not only to relations and to work. In this context, quite interesting conclusion could be given by research which was conducted in 2014 among students of Częstochowa University of Technology and their elderly colleagues: students of the Third Age University (UTA) and members of Alumni Club – graduates (Łazorko, Zając, 2014). This research was related with attitudes and willingness to cooperate between people in different age. It was not related with cooperation at work, but they provided an explanation of tendency to mutual perception of each other. The research was divided into two parts - quantity and quality ones. The quantity research was conducted using similar questionnaires among younger students and the UTA students. They were concerned the following topics: perception of each other (younger perception of seniors and vice versa), need for knowledge transfer between the groups and barriers of the knowledge transfer. Based on respondents' answer it could be said that both groups are quite open for knowledge transfer and open to that kind of experience (like cooperation between people in different age). At the same time they cannot indicate specific ways of that type of cooperation. This could mean that such cooperation does not occur now. The respondents of seniors were asked about their perception of young people. They generally assessed them as: full of energy (34%) thinking mainly about fun (23%), optimistic (18%), creative (16%), lacking of life and job experience (14%). These attributes (in stereotypical way) are associated with youth and they do not matter pejorative. However, it can absorb that the really small number of seniors assessed young people as: smart (7%), kind (3%), or friendly (3%). Such perception may cause certain adjustment in terms of interpersonal contacts with youngers - e.g. avoiding contacts or accepting defensive stance from the beginning etc. The elderly also perceive some barriers associated with working with younger people. They see them mainly in: using different language codes (more than 30% of respondents), prejudices and stereotypical thinking about themselves (nearly a quarter of respondents), mutual unwillingness to cooperate – both on senior and youngers sides (about 15%) and unwillingness to cooperate mainly on the side of the young (15%). The younger respondents consider the older colleagues mainly as: experienced, smart, prudent, characterized by extensive knowledge, attached to tradition, hard working but not as polite, sympathetic and open. Therefore, it can be said, that students also generally positively assess the seniors and they mostly perceive seniors through the prism of characteristics that stereotypically are associated with old age (wisdom of life and professional). On the other hand, they do not assess positively those characteristics which are important in interpersonal relations, such as friendliness, kindness, openness. It should be noted that a similar trend emerged in the group of senior respondents. This fact may be of considerable importance in shaping intergenerational relations - exacerbate animosity, fear of co-operation and generate barriers. To deepen

the results also quality research was conducted among students, UTA student and Alumni Club members (focus group, interviews). The research indicated lack of shared interest and common ground of communication. Every group of respondents during the focus interview said that they do not have opportunity to cooperate, communicate even in personal life – they live in separated world. Maybe it cause that they are afraid of cooperation, especially of linguistic differences that exist between them (they have been underlined mainly by the elderly). The elder think about younger that they are too complaining. The young people are afraid of moralization by elderly people and it causes that they are afraid of mutual cooperation. It is worth stressing that such concerns are associated with stereotypes and there are result from a lack of cooperation and mutual isolation.

Shaping the relation between employees in diversified organization – selected recommendation

All of previously presented surveys provide many barriers with communication between people in different age. The mutual isolation and stereotype thinking start in everyday life and then they effect on shaping the relationship between people in different age at work. In this context, the creation of good intergenerational relations in organization is a major challenge of modern management. An important part of human resources management is the knowledge of human behaviour in organizations. (Bylok 2009, p. 11) This is crucial aspect during the management in diversified organization and shaping the intergenerational relations.

The employees relationship management relies on making decisions and actions aimed at building long-term relationships with employees by enabling them to satisfy their needs, expectations and delivering economic and psychological returns (Moczydłowska, 2013). Therefore, it can be assumed that shaping of appropriate relationships in diversified organization should start from the recognition of the real employees needs and their expectations of mutual cooperation (both with superiors and with other employees). Meanwhile, presented studies have demonstrated that managers often are guided by stereotypes, and some kind of assumptions about generations rather than their real knowledge about employee's needs. So, one of the most important roles of managers is to recognize the true characteristics, motivation and expectations of their employees. Managers should treat every employee as an individual and getting rid of stereotypical thinking about people in different age (Blauth et al., 2011; Green at al., 2012; Zając, 2015). It could be a crucial aspect of shaping a good relations at work.

What is more, the presented research provided that source of misunderstanding between people in different age are usually their reluctance, prejudices, stereotypes and mutual isolation. In this context the managers should fight against employees stereotypes about each others. Managers should raise awareness of employees how they stereotypes may influence of their views. It is important to encourage every employees to reject age stereotypes and react on discrimination in organization. Blauth et al., 2011). Employers should also educate their employees how important is

efficiency cooperation between employees of different ages (for example by: practice, coaching, communication training etc.).

Moreover, it is important to create common ground for communication and cooperation for people in different age (Blauth et al., 2011; Green at al., 2012). It is natural that people prefer contact with people in the same age (Zabierowski Gojny, 2013) but this fact makes that this isolation is bigger. Therefore, the managers should motivate people to mutual cooperation and create opportunity for it (e.g. joint implementation of projects, common participation in training, mentoring programs, integration meetings, social gatherings etc.). They should seek common points that link generations and can provide a platform for cooperation.

Furthermore, it is also important to equal treatment of employees by managers. (and by each other's) Transparent rules applicable to all employees (among other things related to the delegation of responsibility, the possibility of promotion, access to training) can help to create relevant relationships at work. In this context, great importance may be work regulations (which lays out reciprocal cooperation between employees, their dependencies, rights and obligations) and ethical codes (which define the moral principles and values that should be guided by staff and managers - including such values as, inter alia, equality, justice, respect, acceptance). It is underlined that ethical codes are a tool for employees relationship management (Stanek, 2008). In the process of intergenerational relationship management the ethical codes could have really important role. It's very significant when employees are aware that they are treated in accordance with ethical principles. On the other hand, they should be aware of their duties connected with ethical treatment of their colleagues and they also should be guided by these principles during the cooperation with others. Managers should take care that every member of staff will be acquainted with the code. Moreover, it is important to engage people in different age to create the ethical code and regulations about mutual communication. What is very important the company should monitor and examine the state of relations inside the organization (as between employees as well as between employees and managers). Good tools to do it could be e.g. the communication audit or employee satisfaction survey.

Conclusions

To sum up, it should be emphasized that good relations between representants of different generation in organization have huge significance in their functioning and development. Meanwhile, there are a lot of barriers and stereotypes which shaped intergenerational relations in organization. A lot of them are hidden and it makes that it is really difficult to identify and eliminate them. In this context, a lot depends on the attitude of the manager and their sensitiveness, ethics and principles of organization of work in the organization. Very important is also common ground for communication and cooperation for people in different age. It should be remembered that the diversity of employee's age could bring many benefits for organizations (such as the transfer of knowledge and experience). Moreover, the diversified teams are more creative and innovative and it may affect the company's results, but only when in organization suitable conditions for cooperation will be created - inter alia good atmosphere (which

are affected by the relationship between employees and between employees and manager).

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