



Renata Tomaszewska

ORCID: 0000-0001-9605-1483

Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz

e-mail: renatatl@ukw.edu.pl

Katarzyna Ludwikowska

ORCID: 0000-0003-3015-8100

Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz

e-mail: kasial@ukw.edu.pl

Aleksandra Pawlicka

ORCID: 0000-0003-4380-014X

ITTI Sp. z o.o. in Bydgoszcz

e-mail: oliko.aleksandra@gmail.com

Age diversity in organizations as an imperative: a multiple-case study¹

Keywords: generations, labor market, diversity, human resource management, age management, multigenerational management

Abstract. The paper discusses the coexistence of four generations of employees in the contemporary labor market – Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z. It presents the results of qualitative research on the opinions and attitudes of employers towards the four generations of workers and the necessity of age management in diverse human teams. In doing so, it taps into the evolving and increasingly

¹ Jedna z autorek, Aleksandra Pawlicka, wykorzystała narzędzie Grammarly w niskim stopniu ingerencji, w zakresie korekty językowej/stylistycznej tekstu. Wyniki wsparcia SI zostały przez nią zweryfikowane i zaakceptowane. Autorka ponosi pełną odpowiedzialność za ostateczne brzmienie publikacji.

popular concept of diversity management worldwide; age is one of the key dimensions of diversity. The paper analyses age diversity among employees as both a threat (e.g., conflicts, stereotypes, ageism) and an opportunity for organizations (e.g., utilizing the potential of all age groups, internal transfer of know-how, knowledge, and experience). The analysis demonstrated a dichotomy in the perception of age diversity as both an opportunity and a threat in the workplace, with the research outcomes providing recommendations for managing age diversity aimed at organizations in the EU.

Różnorodność wiekowa w organizacjach jako imperatyw: *multiple-case study*

Słowa kluczowe: pokolenia, rynek pracy, różnorodność, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, zarządzanie wiekiem, zarządzanie wielopokoleniowe

Streszczenie. W artykule omówiono współlistnienie czterech pokoleń pracowników na współczesnym rynku pracy – Baby Boomers, X, Y i Z. Przedstawia wyniki badań jakościowych dotyczących opinii i postaw pracodawców wobec czterech generacji pracowników oraz konieczności zarządzania wiekiem w zróżnicowanych zespołach ludzkich. W ten sposób wpisuje się w rozwijającą się i coraz popularniejszą na świecie koncepcję zarządzania różnorodnością, w której wiek jest jednym z jej kluczowych wymiarów. Ukazuje różnorodność wiekową pracowników zarówno jako zagrożenie (np. konflikty, stereotypy, ageizm), jak i szansę dla organizacji (np. wykorzystanie potencjału wszystkich grup wiekowych, wewnętrzny transfer know-how, wiedzy i doświadczenia). Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań posłużyły do sformułowania rekomendacji dotyczących zarządzania różnorodnością wiekową skierowanych do europejskich organizacji.

Introduction

The rapid transformation of society, driven by demographic shifts globally, including in Europe and the USA, significantly influences various aspects of organizational management. The future economy will be shaped by the three fundamental factors, i.e., ecology, globalization, and demography (Mulgan, 2009). Intense and growing competition necessitates that organizations demand increasingly diverse human resources, the acquisition of which becomes crucial for effective competitive rivalry both on the international and global stage, as well as within the domestic arena.

One of the significant challenges that companies face today is changes in the available human resources. Across organizations worldwide, the issue of diversity management has emerged as a precursor to substantially evolving human resources. The term “diversity management” was first introduced

in the USA in the 1980s. Since 2009, diversity management has been recognized as a global phenomenon (Holvino and Kamp, 2009).

In Europe, there is a consensus on the concept of diversity management, which is applied in organizations and society as an active (inclusive) approach, rather than as affirmative action (Kuldová, 2012). This means that diversity management does not involve altering existing expectations and standards, for instance, for women and minorities. Rather, it recognizes the fact that different groups may respond uniquely to various situations, and efforts should be made to minimize potential frictions that may arise within organizations. The activities of the European Union bodies have significantly contributed to the development and popularization of this concept (Gross-Gołacka, 2018).

The diverse external and internal environments require organizations to undertake adaptive actions to prevailing circumstances. Maximizing diversity and harnessing its benefits for the company are crucial issues for today's management quality, including human resource management. Organizations leverage diversity to become more creative and responsive to changes. Diversity encompasses a mix of many characteristics – differences and similarities – that employees bring to the workforce or company. These characteristics include age, gender, disability, race, ethnic background, religion, as well as educational level, family structure, position, geographic location, style, and values, encompassing both visible and invisible traits (Gross-Gołacka, 2018).

In examining one key dimension of diversity – age – we may observe a fascinating scenario in the labor market: the simultaneous contribution of representatives from as many as four generations! These include: Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, and Z. Each generation brings different skills, experiences, attitudes, communication styles, interests, and energy to the workplace. Generational diversity can be viewed in two ways: (1) through the often harmful lens of stereotypes, and (2) through the potential arising from both similarities and differences among the generations.

Despite nearly four decades of increasing publications on diversity management and its dimensions, as well as its impact on organizational success, research seems insufficient and unsystematic, particularly when considering the significance and extensive consequences of demographic changes and labor market trends for the business world. Therefore, the authors of this study have identified a significant gap in the discourse, analysis, and research on this topic, focusing on the dimension of age. This paper presents findings from the research on employer attitudes towards the four generations of employees and the need

to implement what is increasingly referred to as age management or multigenerational management. The objectives of this work are threefold: to organize knowledge concerning age diversity management in organizations, to operationalize this concept using qualitative methods, and to establish the outcomes of research conducted at the request of Public Employment Services in Poland, part of the European Employment Services (EURES) which can be recommended to other organizations within the EU.

It is worth clarifying that the authors are aware of the ongoing debate surrounding the concept of generational categories in social sciences and the findings from practitioners who point to the fact that different groups of workers exhibit varying values and preferences in the workplace. However, they also acknowledge that no compelling argument has yet been presented that justifies recognizing generational distinctions as a unique factor influencing one's approach to work. According to the current state of the art, it is recognized that each generation is shaped by unique social, economic, political, and cultural experiences, and thus, the professional and personal functioning of individuals cannot simply be viewed as a continuation of the approach of the previous generation.

Additionally, the authors are aware that the chronological frameworks used to define generational membership vary, sometimes significantly, across different regions. For example, the generational timeline in the United States differs from that in Western European countries. There is also inconsistency in the typologies and terminologies used within the literature. While scholars in human resource management have succeeded in defining multiple generational types, the terminology and characterization of these generations are neither consistent nor comprehensive. Often, generational classifications are based on common features, preferences, or behaviors observed in individuals of similar ages. However, these classifications are often intuitive, reflecting arbitrary beliefs based on subjective experiences and fragmented observations, primarily within the field of human resource management.

Therefore, the authors know (as highlighted by Elżbieta Kasprzak and Rafał Trocki, 2019) that the categorization of generations is primarily based on age criteria, which are linked to shared socio-historical and cultural experiences, as well as stages of individual development. Previous typologies and classifications of generations in the workforce have been derived from observations of behaviors, surveys, and direct interviews within sociological and human resource management paradigms. However, these frameworks tend to overlook

developmental regularities, subjective factors of personality development, value systems, and the interpretation of events or the interaction between individuals and their environments. In the existing literature, generational cohorts are typically described based on values, motives, preferences, and skills – often referred to as ‘psychological functioning in the workplace’ – without reference to psychological theories and studies that would substantiate such a division.

There is, therefore, uncertainty as to whether these classifications represent scientific theories or simply reflect a set of beliefs or, at best, a folk theory of workforce groups. What is lacking are definitive studies that confirm the validity of distinguishing generations based on age and identifying them as groups with specific values and motivations, which are consistent within each generation and distinct from other generations. Thus, the authors have initiated such research and aim to contribute to this ongoing discussion by sharing their findings. Lastly, in the authors’ opinion, there is more evidence in favor of the concept of generationality besides the results of the research presented in this article – as supported by a review of the literature; some papers discussing this concept have been (Brownell and Resnick, 2005; Charpignon et al., 2024; Cho and Chenette, 2024; Gursoy et al., 2008; Hunt et al., 2015; James et al., 2011; Komp-Leukkunen, 2019; Mehari et al., 2024; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Turi et al., 2022; Urbancová et al., 2024) and many more.

With all this in mind, in this paper, the authors present a case study of five business entities operating in Poland, which employ workers from the Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, and Z. The work presented contributes significantly to the literature as it is based on authentic research conducted through case studies, which empirically confirm the need for managing age diversity in organizations.

Background

Four generations actively engaged in the labor market

An analysis of the professional structure of contemporary society, both American and European, reveals that while the coexistence of two or three generations in the workforce is a natural phenomenon, today we find ourselves in a unique situation. Namely, the labor force is comprised of four distinct generations: Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, and Z. Although there are differences in the chronological frameworks that define the membership of each generation, the literature

typically indicates that Baby Boomers include individuals aged 55 and older; Generation X comprises those aged 40–54 years; Generation Y includes individuals aged 25–39 years; and Generation Z consists of those aged 15–24 years.

The criteria used to differentiate these generational cohorts focus primarily on age differences. However, variations are also noted in organizational culture preferences; attitudes and values; familiarity with modern technologies; approaches to professional work; relationships with employers and colleagues; methods of learning and knowledge acquisition; and the motivation displayed in the workplace (Kasprzak and Trocki 2019). According to the state of the art, it is acknowledged that each generation is shaped by a unique set of social, economic, political, and cultural events in which it has participated. Consequently, the way individuals function both professionally and personally cannot simply be a continuation of the approach characteristic of the previous generation.

The overriding economic development goal of optimally utilizing the potential of all employees necessitates diversified approaches to different age groups, while simultaneously developing acceptance and understanding of the need for such approaches. This is a challenging task, as individual differences, which have a defined and significant impact on the choice and effectiveness of human management tools, complicate the standardization of procedures. Additionally, intergenerational management also requires consideration of the distinctive attitudes towards work and life that vary across generations. Although categorizing generations according to birth years can potentially lead to stereotyping, and the division into age cohorts itself is subject to debate, model descriptions of generations serve as a good starting point for understanding the generational differences perceived and signaled by employers. However, categorizing generations does not exempt from moderating the general principles and tools of management to accommodate the individual characteristics of each employee, which is, in fact, the core of professional human resource management (Jamka, 2019).

Referencing the general characteristics of the four professionally active generations in the current labor market, and relating to Abraham Maslow's classic pyramid of needs, one may note that:

- The oldest and most experienced are the representatives of the Baby Boomers, the post-World War II demographic surge. These individuals are currently in what is termed late adulthood and are transitioning into retirement age. They often work their entire lives for a single employer in organizations where hierarchy and formal communication are valued.

The need for belonging is significant to them, and they view their professional work as an important duty,

- Demographically crucial today, Generation X seeks recognition and affirmation of their worth. They work extensively, place high importance on salaries, but employment security is also a priority for them,
- The Millennial generation, or Generation Y, primarily declares a need for self-actualization. Biographically, they experience what is known as the ‘rush hour’ of life, which involves the convergence of key events across various life domains: the period of the most dynamic professional career development and simultaneously, starting families. This generation places more emphasis than others on private passions and work-life balance. It is noteworthy that by 2020, they constituted half of all employees globally and currently have a significant influence on corporate life (Jamka, 2019; Ryan, 2007).

The labor market has also seen the emergence of the next generation – Generation Z (also known as Post-Millennials, Gen Tech, Gen Wii, Net Gen, Digital Natives, Gen Next, Post Gen, Internet Generation, iGen, iGeneration, as well as Generation C, iPad generation, iPhone generation... (Ludwikowska and Tomaszewska, 2023). This group comprises young individuals whose real-world lives are intertwined with the virtual, communicating constantly and predominantly online. Work is just one component of their diverse and colorful lives. This generation remains the least understood. Generation Z can be seen as a ‘blank slate’ from an employer’s perspective and an ‘enhanced’ version of Millennials, soon to become the most significant demographic group in the workforce. By 2025, Generation Z is expected to account for 27% of the labor force in leading Western countries and one-third of the global population. They know their value and seek appropriate remuneration and recognition. Unlike their parents, they are not afraid to fight for their rights and make demands of their employers. These young people highlight the need for a flexible approach to work and for their tasks to be meaningful. More so than the three preceding generations, the youngest workers pay attention to the ecological and social commitments of their employers. In 2020, about 50% of Generation Z were working as freelancers. This trend has fueled the growth of platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr. Thus, it can be said that Generation Z is, in some ways, overturning the traditional work model and challenging conventional career paths (PWC et al., 2022).

Diversity in organizations. Managing diversity

As derived from previous analyses, the youngest employees require a slightly different approach from employers compared to older generations (Egdell et al., 2020). Moreover, the coexistence of four actively working generations in the same workplace justifies the postulate for the necessity of introducing new people management methods in contemporary organizations.

The broadest concept within the area of human resource management, into which the considerations presented in this paper fit, is diversity management. This entails directing diverse human teams. Diversity occurs in a group of people when its members differ from one another along one or several significant dimensions. Diversity management is recognized as the most advanced form of anti-discriminatory actions.

Initially, diversity was defined primarily in terms of race, ethnic origin, and gender. Subsequently, it was recognized that these characteristics insufficiently define individual attributes, hence definitions have been expanded to include issues such as disabilities, sexual orientation, skills, education, professional experience, life attitudes, lifestyles, learning styles, and also age (Jemielniak et al., 2023).

Diversity management is an approach to organizational management that assumes a company can benefit from the presence of differences among its employees. Members of an organization always differ from each other in certain respects. If a company does not focus on recruiting employees of a single, strictly defined type (e.g., only young people, only men, only those on civil law contracts) but instead accepts and manages these differences, it can better meet market needs and enhance its competitiveness. Diversity management is based on the belief that staff diversity, encompassing all possible aspects in which people differ from and are similar to each other, can become a source of business benefits. It involves accepting the differences inherent in the workforce and transforming them into higher work efficiency, better outcomes, and enhancing the company's image as an attractive employer. Diversity management teaches how to utilize the potential of differences, fosters effective collaboration, and enables the company to adequately respond to the needs within the organization and external challenges. It helps create a positive atmosphere in the team, impacting employee engagement and endearing partners and clients. It encompasses all organizational activities aimed at recognizing diversity in the workplace and optimizing its use. Diversity management posits a positive effect that can arise from the diversification of people within an organization. It is a broader concept

than ‘equal opportunity policies,’ which aim to counter specific situations where discrimination might occur (Jemielniak et al., 2023).

This is a challenge that managers must address. The influence of biases and stereotypes on workplace cooperation can be highly detrimental if not managed properly. However, effective diversity management can generate significant benefits for organizations (Jemielniak et al., 2023).

Workplace diversity arises from several key processes:

- labor shortages: Forcing searches for new pools of candidates, including among migrants and genders previously underrepresented in certain roles;
- global talent shortages: Projections by the Korn Ferry Institute indicate that by 2030, there will be a millions-strong workforce deficit in Russia, the USA, and China, while India will have a surplus of highly skilled workers;
- extended professional activity: Leads to the coexistence of multiple generations at work and requires ongoing education for older employees amid changing demographic proportions;
- social changes: Leading to the professional activation of people with disabilities, necessitating an inclusive work environment and appropriate policies (Tarasewicz-Gryt and Wasilewski, 2022).

Age management

Age management is integrated into the concept of diversity management. It involves the effective utilization of the potential of employees from all age groups, fostering diversity within the company and the internal transfer of know-how, knowledge, and experience. Age management is an approach to team management that helps avoid issues related to age differences among employees; more so, it transforms these differences into assets and leverages them for the benefit of the company. Although age management can be applied to all employees (considering the alignment of management goals and techniques to groups differing by age), it is most commonly discussed in terms of initiatives targeted at older employees (50+), which is not necessarily a rational approach (Binda et al., 2018). Therefore, alongside this concept, terms such as multigenerational and intergenerational management are increasingly being developed, which involve solutions that consider the needs of employees of different ages and at various stages of their professional lives, representing multiple generations (Woszczyk and Warwas, 2016).

Meanwhile, managers' interest in the concept of age management is minimal. It mainly arises in situations such as restructuring, organizational changes, the need for accelerated technological development, or when there is an immediate threat of losing skilled and experienced workers; it may also be related to managing costs within the company, client requirements, or the desire to retain qualified employees. Moreover, as we have emphasized, age management is stereotypically (although it actually aims to break down stereotypes) associated by managers with a policy of favoring older individuals – which is fundamentally untrue and also contrary to regulations prohibiting discrimination, including on the basis of age. Without making the managerial staff aware of the scale of future, yet not so distant, threats, and without understanding the principles of age management, it is difficult to speak of a rational approach to this issue. What does it mean to “manage age”?

1. Firstly, age management may involve the employer's attitude towards older employees, as well as the attitudes of these older workers towards their roles in the company and their career paths.
2. Secondly, it may encompass the employer's approach to younger (newer) employees, as well as how these employees feel about their work and career development within the company.
3. Thirdly, it should include fostering a cooperative atmosphere, good relationships, and influencing the efficiency of all age groups within the company. This facilitates the creation of conditions for intergenerational dialogue and shapes the workplace to be friendly to employees from various generations.
4. Such management might involve actions taken by the employer themselves, as well as interventions by the state (at the local or national level) aimed at improving the overall situation – here, we are indeed talking about older employees in the labor market or, for example, the youngest employees entering this market (Binda et al., 2018).

Age management entails implementing a variety of actions that allow for more rational and effective use of human resources in organizations. Age management tools aim to combat age barriers and/or promote age diversity, helping to create an environment where individual employees can utilize their potential without being disadvantaged by their age (Naegele and Walker, 2006).

This management area also includes actions aimed at combating age discrimination, or ageism, which is based on stereotypes and prejudices related to the biological diversity of people associated with the aging process. Therefore,

crucially, age management excludes discrimination. Maintaining a balance between the ‘youth’ and ‘maturity’ of human resources is considered the best way to respond to rapidly changing circumstances associated with globalization and a dynamic economic environment (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014).

It turns out that the more age-diverse the staff, the better it is able to respond to market conditions, flexibly adjusting its activities to the changing needs of customers. Age-diverse teams provide good work outcomes through intergenerational knowledge and skill exchange. Forming teams that utilize the strengths of both younger employees (such as physical stamina) and older employees (such as life and professional experience) ensures tangible benefits for the organization. Thus, age management can involve the employer’s approach to employees of different ages, as well as the relationship of employees of various ages to their work and career. It can also pertain to actions taken by the employer, as well as interventions by the state (at the local or national level) aimed at improving the overall situation of workers – representatives of four generations in the workforce (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014). The target audience for HR policies based on this concept should not be individuals of a specific age, but rather those facing problems or challenges most commonly associated with age (Brooke and Taylor, 2005).

Current challenges that prompt employers to implement multigenerational management include:

- The risk of losing knowledge as older employees retire, particularly in organizations with a high percentage of employees aged 45+, where there is no system for transferring knowledge to younger workers.
- The reluctance of older employees to share knowledge with younger ones, driven by fears of job loss, especially among those nearing retirement age.
- Difficulties experienced by older managers in managing younger employees, mainly due to communication problems.
- Resistance from older employees to changes in work methods.
- A lack of willingness to develop among some older employees.
- A shortage of adequately educated job candidates, which can be mitigated through partnerships with schools and universities, as well as development programs for graduates.
- High turnover among young employees, especially in organizations that incur significant costs in onboarding new staff, which can be reduced by recruiting experienced individuals, valuing education, assessing employees, and creating individual development plans.

- Low motivation among older employees to achieve high results when compensation depends on position and competence rather than seniority, a challenge in companies that have moved away from seniority-based bonuses.

These challenges highlight the need for age management within HR policy to effectively utilize human resources in an organization (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2014). From this compilation, it is evident that organizational problems are not limited to managing older employees but also younger ones. Therefore, diagnosing the needs of employers should consider all age groups of employees.

The presented concepts – diversity management and age/multigenerational management – set new directions in human resource management.

Age diversity: a threat and opportunity for organizations

Given the challenges facing organizations, diversity management should become a priority for managers, encompassing the recognition of diversity, planning effective management strategies, and employing a diverse workforce. This approach, requiring an understanding of the essence of diversity and social integration, will measure management quality. Diversity management involves continually discovering people and their contributions, as well as the values they can bring to the organization and society. In the 21st century, an organization's success will depend on its ability to manage diversity, which should become part of its business strategy. The benefits of employing a diverse workforce include improved financial outcomes, innovative solutions, effective employee retention, and increased attractiveness to customers. At the macroeconomic level, diversity enhances productivity, innovation, and the ability to capture new markets. At the micro level, diversity improves the quality of goods and services, attracts talent, reduces staff shortages, and limits employee turnover. Although managing diversity is challenging, it can lead to synergy and better outcomes. Building leadership that is sensitive to cultural differences and focuses on uniting employees from various backgrounds is becoming crucial in global companies (Belbin, 2016; Gross-Gołacka, 2018; McShane and Glinow, 2010; Sonnenschein, 1999).

Communicating in a diverse environment can be hindered by barriers that managers should identify and minimize. Cultural barriers include ethnocentrism, prejudices, and stereotypes. Ethnocentrism involves treating one's own group as superior, leading to intolerance and chauvinism, which results in discrimination against other groups. Prejudices involve clinging to preconceived

notions despite contrary evidence, hindering effective communication. Stereotypes, which are simplified and often inaccurate conceptions, can be both positive and negative. Additionally, differences in communication practices and language, such as uncertainties, misinterpretations of non-verbal cues, and language itself, are easier to notice and eliminate (Jemielniak et al., 2023). For example, as regards the age of employees and the coexistence of four generations actively engaged in the labor market, these issues arise as more individuals from the Baby Boomer generation are retiring. Vacant positions are being filled by representatives of Generation X, who largely employ individuals from Generation Y. For instance, one might encounter views such as:

- Investing in Baby Boomers is not worthwhile because they will soon retire; they cannot work in teams; they dislike changes; they are apathetic.
- Employees from Generation X are the most loyal and are also the biggest workaholics.
- Generation Y employees never stay after hours because they only care about themselves; they are self-centered and afraid of failure.
- Employees from the Baby Boomers and Generation Z work from a specific start to end time.
- Generation Z employees cannot work effectively in teams (Stankiewicz, 2016).

Thus, it is common in popular opinion for members of Generation X to perceive their younger colleagues – Millennials – as lazy, know-it-alls, overly confident, yet simultaneously too sensitive to criticism and in need of constant affirmation. There is also a stereotype that Millennials believe they cannot trust representatives of Generation X. Moreover, they feel that they are often unjustly excluded from the decision-making process, while Generation X could learn a lot from them – their subordinates – if only they took the opportunity (Kowalówka, 2015).

Additionally, there are a set of myths and stereotypes about age management, which we discuss in further detail later in the article. For example, one might encounter the following statements:

- Age management is a European Union invention and a manifestation of ‘political correctness’ in labor relations.
- There have always been older and younger workers in the workplace, and there has always been a differentiation of status.
- Older employees ‘won’t reinvent the wheel’.
- Young people ‘want a lot but really know nothing’.

- It's impossible to manage effectively without 'betting on a dark horse' – implying reliance on the most effective, engaged, and easily 'steerable' age group.
- Older employees are trouble for the company and should not be the focus of attention.
- Younger employees "come quickly and leave even quicker" (from the company).
- 'Systematic' initiatives – related to age management will be implemented 'with a big bang' and yet will have 'a short life' (Binda et al., 2018).
- The list of prejudices and stereotypes is long.

It is crucial to approach the discussion on this topic rationally and objectively. Many HR activities in companies are met with resistance, and HR department representatives spend considerable time convincing their adversaries. Therefore, the area and topic of age management are no exception, but they successfully can and should be a field for discussion (Binda et al., 2018).

With this in mind, the authors of this study have undertaken to research the opinions and attitudes of employers towards the four generations of employees and the necessity of implementing what is increasingly referred to as age management, often termed multigenerational management.

Materials and methods

The qualitative study was conducted among employers in Poland in October and November 2023. Since the publication of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss's work in 1967, qualitative research has been innovatively applied in academia.

The authors employed two research methods: desk research and case study. Desk research involves the purposeful search and use of secondary data, such as statistics, reports, literature, expert statements, documents, websites, and legal acts, allowing for extensive comparison of research results and enriching the mechanisms of inference. Its empirical potential aligns with the theoretical assumptions of the case study method, which enables the comparison of results from various cases through the repeatability of the research procedure (Smith, 2008).

The case study method, long used in human resource management, involves analyzing individual cases. In the study presented, the authors implemented a multiple-case study approach, which allows for the repeatability of the research

procedure and the compilation of results from different cases (Bennett, 2001; Gustafsson, 2017). The empirical potential of desk research corresponds with the theoretical foundations of the case study method.

In this article, a case study has been presented of five business entities operating in Poland, employing workers from the Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, and Z. The authors focused on organizations in sectors typically associated with younger employees, such as the creative industry, marketing, IT, e-commerce, and AI. The sample selection was stratified and purposive-random, conducted at the request of the Public Employment Services in Poland, which are part of the European Employment Services (EURES).

Study limitations

The limitations of the research were: (1) only selecting entities employing workers from all four generations, (2) choosing organizations in industries where Generation Z is most likely to be employed (creative industry, marketing, IT, e-commerce, AI), and (3) willingness to participate in the study. Multiple samplings were necessary as some companies refused to participate without giving a reason, did not respond to contact attempts, or informed that they deliberately do not hire Generation Z employees due to negative experiences. The case studies were anonymous:

- Case Study 1 represents a global public company in the Game Dev industry, where 70% of the staff are Generation Z specialists, employed due to the industry's demand for younger workers.
- Case Study 2 is a global public company in the industrial sector using AI, employing 280 people and valuing the flexibility and lower financial expectations of Generation Z employees.
- Case Study 3 describes a global LLC in the IT sector, employing nearly 4,000 workers, including 20% under 30 years of age, aiming to maintain competitiveness through “juniorization” of the team.
- Case Study 4 concerns a global LLC in the electronics sector, employing over 1,300 workers and focusing on workforce diversification due to labor shortages and demographic trends.
- Case Study 5 outlines a global LLC in the technology sector, employing 920 workers and 150 temporary agency workers, with revenue of several million USD in 2022.

Results and Findings

The desk research conducted consistently shows that the increasing age diversity among employees in today's labor market has become one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary organizations and human resource management, including employers, recruiters, managers, HR professionals, career advisors, and trainers.

There is a need to build employer awareness about the similarities and differences between the generations of employed workers; to implement generational management tools in organizations and to create multigenerational workplaces, identifying factors that shape the engagement of employees from different generations.

The need for diversity management – specifically age management – was confirmed in the case study analysis.

An important challenge in the process of meeting the expectations of different employees is to build a culture of communication. The surveyed employers are aware of significant generational changes in communication styles:

There are many introverted people, especially in the IT industry. There are individuals who are hard to reach. Some young people do not feel the need to talk to each other, but it often turns out that they do not communicate directly, yet they are in constant contact through messengers [employer no. 3].

Generation Z is quiet, closed off in multimedia tools, yet the most important thing for them is the relationship. So at work, they also want to establish a relationship with their boss. The question arises, how to enter this relationship. [...] The number of emoticons is surprising. I am not that expressive. But that is the generation – they communicate with images [employer no. 3].

The first stage should be recognized as preparing the existing workforce for the arrival of new individuals representing different generations, thus bringing diverse attitudes and ways of functioning in the workplace:

Communication also depends on the people inside the company. And emphasis must be placed on those who are already inside. Young people are not worse, but they are different. And people tend to categorize them. [...] Employees should

be told: they are a bit different, but that doesn't mean they are worse. Give them a chance [employer no. 5].

The next step in building an internal communication system that facilitates intergenerational integration is to establish rules for current reporting of difficult situations and conflicts. As the experiences of respondents often lead to conflicts:

It's important to communicate continuously. If something happens, come up and say it. [...]. If you notice any signs, don't sweep them under the rug and then say after six months that he is hopeless. Instead, come and talk about it. We tell this to the young. And we also say this to the older ones: immediately signal if something is not right [employer no. 5].

Developing a culture of communication and the communicative competencies necessary for its implementation should be recognized as one of the most important areas of development for contemporary organizations:

We build awareness among the management that we need to adapt [...]. That's why we have training: change management, diversity management. And we constantly talk about this. When we are among the team and someone starts complaining about the young, we clearly say – you have no right to complain! You need to educate yourself and communicate according to the needs of the young [employer no. 4].

Last year we conducted a whole package of nine trainings – the Leader's Academy, to build awareness among middle and senior management. There was also a workshop part. But it's not that these trainings work 100%. It's much better than it was at the beginning because if he hears ten times that it's his role, that he needs to educate himself, then reflection arises [employer no. 4].

We believe that good company management means good managers. We come for the company, but we leave because of the managers. That's why there is an emphasis on training here. We have already done a lot, but there is still much to do [...] [employer no. 4].

We pay a lot of attention to communication [...]. We refer to values because we have five core values, including teamwork. We place a strong emphasis on this,

and each employee is held accountable in this regard. If there is a red card and someone crosses the line, then there will be a note in the record that they have broken the code of ethics [...] [employer no. 5].

Based on their experience, employers noted differences in the professional functioning between employees from the four generations they observed:

I think the biggest difference is the expectations regarding what the employer or the job in general should provide to the employee, and simultaneously the employee's view on what they should offer to the employer. It is very evident that Generation Z has very high expectations of their employer. At the same time, they have a very distorted view of what they should contribute and what their duties are towards the employer. And I don't know where that comes from. It seems to me that... No, I don't know the source. I don't want to make diagnoses here because it's not exactly within my competence [employer no. 1].

People after the age of 30 don't have such expectations. They want to come to work, do their job, and relax after work. They can distinguish work from relaxation. Generation Z cannot do that [employer no. 1].

There are differences because Generation Z has specific needs. Gen Z is creative, acts quickly, finds information and new knowledge easily, and has great potential. When older employees think 'something is impossible,' Gen Z believes 'everything is possible.' This stems from the fact that for Gen Z, there are no barriers [employer no. 3].

Generations Y and X grew up in different times and have different needs. They are more stable and more loyal to the company. The younger generation is different. We currently have unemployment, very low, the lowest in Europe along with the Czech Republic if we consider Eurostat data. This new generation is focused on seeking what is best for them, so they are often oriented towards change. Someone comes in and soon clearly communicates that they do not like it here. And they leave [employer no. 4].

They generally (Generation Z), want to learn and they want to acquire skills. And generally as we observe young people entering, they want to see the salary rate in the job listing. That's basically the foundation. Without that, they won't

even pay attention to the ad. Then, when they come in, they want to make decisions independently, or at least they say they do. They want to rule in their area, but on the other hand, they are passive in the sense that if you don't point it out explicitly and tell them to do it, they won't do it. So, on one hand, they say: I want to make decisions and have control, but on the other hand, when it comes to taking initiative at work, they don't do it independently, so that's the difference [employer no. 5].

The respondents emphasized the importance of being proactive in cooperation with employees of different generations, as the type and quality of actions for the employed workforce determine whether they will continue their employment. The responsibility for this segment of operations is most often assumed by HR departments:

The role of HR has changed accordingly. HR employees are sometimes like mothers or therapists for Generation Z. They come to us with problems that would have been unthinkable a few years ago. Because a manager noticed they have a piercing. That something is wrong at home. That they are taking medication and feel sleepy at their workstation. This indeed may indicate less independence and maturity of this generation. They are too coddled by their parents. And now, for example, HR has to take over this function [employer no. 4].

We still do not separate the recruitment process by generation [...]. Companies are not prepared to enter such a recruitment model, but that is the future. We need to have a great image upfront so that the candidate becomes interested in the company and the position [...]. We already see that if we do not reach a higher level of recruitment, we may lose valuable candidates [employer no. 3].

We focus on age diversity – such is the global policy of the company [employer no. 4].

When it comes to Generation Z, we strongly emphasize explaining to them what they will be doing. This is very important. It's not enough, as with Generation X, for them to hear about the industry and say: I'll take it, I'll take it! They need to know exactly what they will be doing in their position, what hours they will work, and how much they will earn. And that slightly distinguishes

this generation from others. Everything must be laid out. You need to prepare mentally [employer no. 4].

The biggest challenge is the mentality of managers. It's necessary to make managers aware of how to work with Generation Z and why it is worth collaborating with them. [...] Generation Z cannot be changed. Older generations can be changed [...]. [employer no. 4].

The respondents believe that cooperation with employees from four generations simultaneously can be effective and satisfying, and that having age diversity in work teams is valuable.

This is the most creative team and geared towards change. For example, this level of flexibility is not present in Generation X. And it is the driving force for the company to do something that no one else has yet thought of. They like to do things differently; not behave stereotypically in the tasks we have to do. They lead in this. They also build teams differently in the workplace. This relational layer is super important. They also influence the rest in this way [employer no. 3].

Creativity [is an advantage, a benefit of Generation Z]. They can contribute a lot. They are proficient in social media. They observe something, test it at the workplace, and hence their innovativeness. They have a desire to develop. They look for ways to do things cleverly to work less. And because of this, they are innovative. They smartly navigate new technologies. They are raised on it. And we benefit from it. And if they don't know a solution, they know where to find it quickly on the internet. This generation quickly gives up in routine. They struggle there. But if there are challenges they need, then Generation Z feels a sense of purpose [employer no. 4].

It's worth having everyone because diversity is good. Together, we create a valuable company [employer no. 4].

Discussion

The organizations studied perceive age diversity similarly to what the desk research analysis has shown – as both an opportunity and a threat – the dichotomy in the responses of the employers surveyed is clearly outlined. The respondents point to many benefits/advantages of having employees from four generations on the team. They emphasize the flexibility of the youngest people, also associated with the possibility of their integration into the workforce through the formation of new habits; creativity; innovation; the need for development and learning; openness and proficiency in social media and new technologies increasingly linked to artificial intelligence.

The statements cited are very valuable and inspiring. However, this does not mean that employers do not experience difficulties in managing teams composed of representatives from many generations; for instance, in relation to the youngest, these include: a lack of humility; a lack of responsibility; a lack of engagement; a lack of independence; a lack of personal initiative; not talking about emotions; a lack of patience, coupled with a need for immediate gratification; fickle enthusiasm; a tendency to give up quickly; and a lack of focus on the future.

Most importantly, despite these examples of challenges that employers with mixed teams face, the majority believe that working with them is efficient and satisfying for companies; that they provide diversity within employee teams. In conclusion, all interviewees are aware of the situation related to the presence of four professionally active generations in the labor market and the generational differences increasingly occurring in many organizations. They realize that they should implement or are already implementing measures towards multigenerational management. What remains realistically within the employers' power is to prepare for this cooperation.

The expert analysis conducted has identified effective practices in the organizations the authors studied, which can be recommended to other employers for successful implementation. These include:

- Conducting benchmarking studies on age management, involving the comparison of processes and practices of one's own enterprise with those considered best in the analyzed field.
- Regular, systematic internal surveys to assess working conditions, workplace atmosphere, and communication.

- Developing and implementing strategies for HR department accessibility and openness to ongoing communication with employees (HR on-call).
- Implementing mentoring programs led by experienced employees.
- Introducing employee suggestion programs and other forums that allow for expression about the company.
- Organizing in-house competitions and games (gamification) that break the monotony of work, present challenges, and offer opportunities for healthy competition.
- Conducting exit surveys at the end of employment to identify and record in databases the declared reasons for departure.
- Utilizing multiple communication channels that consider the communication styles of different age groups: sending emails, posting on social media and on monitors at workstations displaying articles, information, news; managing a company newsletter, etc.
- Jointly establishing rules for smartphone use during work hours.
- Introducing personalized motivational elements, such as additional packages for scooters for commuting.
- Organizing meetings between employees and supervisors to provide regular feedback in the form of praise and mental support.
- Building transparent communication based on the defined values of the company and the team.
- Building employee teams based on team building; fostering a team climate and mutual commitments.
- Implementing integration activities in generationally diverse teams.
- Preparing HR staff and middle to senior management for working with multiple generations.
- Conducting informational and educational activities on diversity management and combating discriminatory behaviors and stereotypes.

Conclusions

The study presented has highlighted the significance of managing age diversity within organizations through an analysis of five business entities in Poland. The findings emphasize that age diversity can be both a challenge and a strategic advantage, enhancing innovation and adaptability. The research emphasizes the importance of leveraging the unique strengths of different generations – from

Baby Boomers' experience to Generation Z's tech-savviness – to foster a collaborative and competitive workplace.

Generational differences in the approach to professional work have always existed, and they will continue to do so. To manage each group effectively, it is crucial to properly understand what is important to them and why, and then to seek common values and find mutual understanding. Recommendations from this study include adopting intergenerational communication strategies and continuous training programs tailored to diverse age groups. These strategies are crucial for building an inclusive environment and enhancing operational efficacy.

In light of this, it appears that today, no entity operating in any market can afford to overlook the aspect of employee diversity – if it aims to successfully implement its vision, then diversity management must be an imperative for the organization.

References

- Belbin, M. (2016). *Zespoły zarządzające. Sekrety ich sukcesów i porażek*. Wolters Kluwer.
- Bennett, A. (2001). *Case study: methods and analysis*. *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences*. Elsevier.
- Binda, A., Kozak, Z.E., Leśnikowska-Marciniak, M., Szakiewicz, I., Szych, H., Marciniak, J. (2018). *MERITUM HR*. Wolters Kluwer.
- Brooke, L., Taylor, P. (2005). *Older workers and employment: managing age relations*. *Ageing & Society*, 25(3).
- Brownell, P., Resnick, R.P. (2005). *Intergenerational-multigenerational relationships*. *Journal of International Relationships*, 3.
- Charpignon, M.-L., Celi, L.A., Cobanaj, M., Eber, R., Fiske, A., Gallifant, J. Li, C., Lingamallu, G., Petushkov, A., Pierce, R. (2024). *Diversity and inclusion: a hidden additional benefit of Open Data*. *PLOS Digital Health*, 3(7).
- Cho, E.S., Chenette, E.J. (2024). *Improving the diversity of the PLOS ONE editorial board*. *PLOS One*, 19(8).
- Egdell, V., Maclean, G., Raeside, R., Chen, T. (2020). *Age management in the workplace: manager and older worker accounts of policy and practice*. *Ageing and Society*, 40(4).
- Glaser, B.G., Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing.
- Gross-Gołacka, E. (2018). *Zarządzanie różnorodnością. W kierunku zróżnicowanych zasobów ludzkich w organizacji*. Difin.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T.A., Chi, C.G. (2008). *Generational differences: an examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce*. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3).
- Gustafsson, J. (2017). *Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: a comparative study*. Academy of Business, Engineering and Science, Halmstad University.

- Holvino, E., Kamp, A. (2009). *Diversity management. Are we moving in the right direction? Reflections from both sides of the North Atlantic*. Scandinavian Journal of Management, 25(4).
- Hunt, D.V., Layton, D., Prince, S. (2015). *Why diversity matters*. McKinsey & Company.
- James, J.B., McKechnie, S., Swanberg, J. (2011). *Predicting employee engagement in an age-diverse retail workforce*. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 32(2).
- Jamka, B. (2019). *HR na zakręcie. Zarządzanie przez pomiar czy aktywacja kreatywności?* Wolters Kluwer.
- Jemieliński, D., Koźmiński, A.K., Latusek-Jurczak, D., Pikos, A. (2023). *Zarządzanie. Nowe otwarcie*. Poltext.
- Kasprzak, E., Trocki, R. (2019). *Tajemnica różnorodności generacyjnej. Wiek czy ukryte wartości i motywacja?* In: R. Tomaszewska (ed.), *Sekrety organizacji. Barwy codzienności* (p. 193–218). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego.
- Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, I. (2014). *Zarządzanie pracownikami w dojrzałym wieku. Wyzwania i problemy*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Komp-Leukkunen, K. (2019). *Capturing the diversity of working age life-courses: a European perspective on cohorts born before 1945*. PLOS One, 14(2).
- Kowalówka, M. (2015). *Baby Boomers, Generacja X i Millenialsi, czyli zmiany pokoleniowe w organizacji*. Rynekpracy.pl, <https://rynekpracy.pl/artykuly/baby-boomers-generacja-x-i-millenialsi-czyli-zmiany-pokoleniowe-w-organizacji> (6.09.2015).
- Kuldová, L. (2012). *Nový pohled na společenskou odpovědnost firem – Strategická CSR*. NAVA.
- Ludwikowska, K., Tomaszewska, R. (2023). *Młodzi specjaliści z perspektywy kujawsko-pomorskich pracodawców. Raport z ekspertyzy*. Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Toruniu, https://wuptorun.praca.gov.pl/publikacje-dotyczace-ryнку-pracy/-/asset_publisher/UlMOEms77l3H/content/22542411-mlodzi-specjalisci-z-perspektywy-kujawsko-pomorskich-pracodawcow (5.01.2024).
- McShane, S.L., Von Glinow, M.A. (2010). *Organizational behavior*. McGraw Hill Irwin.
- Mehari, A.T., Ayenew Birbisa, Z., Nemera Dinber, G. (2024). *The effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance with the mediation role of workplace ethics: empirical evidence from food and beverage industry*. PLOS One, 19(7).
- Mulgan, G. (2009). *Europe 2025. Discovering the future through action as well as analysis*. In: E. Faroult (ed.), *The world in 2025 Contributions from an expert group* (p. 69–77). European Commission, https://espas.secure.europarl.europa.eu/orbis/system/files/generated/document/en/world_2025_EU_expert_group09.pdf (5.01.2020).
- Naegele, G., Walker, A. (2006). *A guide to good practice in age management*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, <http://www.ageingatwork.eu/resources/a-guide-to-good-practice-in-age-management.pdf> (30.01.2016).
- OECD (2020). *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce. Living, Learning and Earning Longer*, OECD Publishing, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/promoting-an-age-inclusive-workforce_59752153-en.html (16.12.2016).
- PwC, Well.hr, Absolvent Consulting (2022). *Young Poles on the labor market*, <https://www.pwc.pl/pl/pdf/young-poles-on-the-labor-market-2022-eng.pptx.pdf> (30.05.2022).
- Ryan, R. (2007). *Live first, work second. Getting inside the head of the next generation*. Next Generation Consulting.

- Smith, E. (2008). *Using secondary data in educational and social research*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Smola, K.W., Sutton, C.D. (2002). *Generational differences: revisiting generational work values for the new millennium*. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23.
- Sonnenschein, W. (1999). *The diversity toolkit: how you can build and benefit from a diverse workforce*. The McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Stankiewicz, A. (2016). *Stereotypy. Młodszy czy starszy – kogo lubimy, a kogo nie?* In: J. Wiktorowicz, I. Warwas, M. Kuba, E. Staszewska, P. Woszczyk, A. Stankiewicz, *Pokolenia – co się zmienia? Kompendium zarządzania multigeneracyjnego* (p. 56–74). Wolters Kluwer.
- Tarasewicz-Gryt, O., Wasilewski, M. (2022). *Raport HR 2022. Nowy nieuporządkowany świat*, https://www.projektgamma.pl/wp-content/uploads/Gamma_Raport_hr_2022_nowy_nieuporzadkowan_swiat.pdf (12.12.2022).
- Turi, J.A., Khastoori, S., Sorooshian, S., Campbell, N. (2022). *Diversity impact on organizational performance: moderating and mediating role of diversity beliefs and leadership expertise*. *PLOS One*, 17(7).
- Urbancová, H., Madzík, P., Vrabcová, P., Řehoř, M. (2024). *Navigating the age mosaic of employees: unveiling insights into age diversity strategies in modern workplaces*. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1).
- Woszczyk, P., Warwas, I. (2016). *Od zarządzania wiekiem do zarządzania międzypokoleniowego – ujęcie strategiczne*. In: J. Wiktorowicz, I. Wawras, M. Kuba, E. Staszewska, P. Woszczyk, A. Stankiewicz, *Pokolenia – co się zmienia? Kompendium zarządzania multigeneracyjnego* (p. 38–55). Wolters Kluwer.