Changing Societies & Personalities, 2021
Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 103–125
https://doi.org/10.15826/csp.2021.5.1.124

ARTICLE

Intergenerational Cooperation and Stereotypes in Relation to Age in the Working Environment

Danijela Brečko
University of Ljubljana, Republic of Slovenia

ABSTRACT
The problem of intergenerational cooperation in the workplace is becoming increasingly important, especially because of the ageing workforce. The article presents the issue of companies facing the challenge of changing a work environment that has to be tailored to the characteristics of each individual generation in the workplace. Generational differences and similarities are explained in more detail, especially in relation to work, followed by a consideration of stereotypes and age discrimination in the work environment. The article illustrates the problem of stereotypes related to age at a selected company. In focus groups we found several positive as well as negative stereotypes regarding age in the workplace, which we use in a research questionnaire especially designed for this study. The questionnaire was completed by 394 employees, and the results used to provide answers to the following research questions: Are there stereotypes within the company about the characteristics of different generations? And do different generations have different foundations regarding the company's expected attitudes towards their work? The results show that in the focal company there are mostly positive stereotypes regarding age. We also found out that there are no significant differences between the different generations regarding the company's expected attitudes towards their work. The respondents of all ages expected these attitudes to be based on similar foundations.

KEYWORDS
generations at workplace, characteristics of generations, older workers, age management, age-related stereotypes and discrimination, work attitude of different generations

Received 7 September 2020
Accepted 29 January 2021
Published online 19 April 2021

© 2021 Danijela Brečko
danijela.brecko@sofos.si

Introduction

In 2010, one in nine people in the world was older than 60, but in 2017 this was already one to eight. In 2050, one in five people in the world is expected to be over 60, and in more developed parts of the world this figure will be one in three (Tros & Keune, 2016, p. 5). Rapid changes, especially in the developed world, are the result of three tendencies that occurred after World War II. First, the appearance of so-called Baby-boom generation, also known as the prosperity generation, which currently accounts for the largest number of people approaching retirement age. Second, on average women now have fewer children, especially in more developed regions of the world. And third, life expectancy is increasing as people are healthier due to greater access to health and social care. One consequence of these tendencies is an increase in the share of the elderly population in relation to the younger population (Tros & Keune, 2016).

In anticipation of the economic and social changes associated with an aging population, it is essential to ensure development and progress, including the achievement of the goals set out by the United Nations (UN). In particular, at the Second World Assembly on Aging, held from 8 to 12 April 2002 in Madrid, Spain, the UN adopted the International Plan of Action on Aging Madrid – MIPAA (United Nations, 2002), which emphasizes the importance of taking into account older people in development planning. Later, it was decided that countries must provide an environment in which older people share the results of development in order to improve their health and well-being (United Nations, 2015).

As people age, they often go through various changes, in areas such as personality, needs, impulses, intelligence, physical abilities, (working) memory, work experience, emotional regulation and social perceptions (Bal, Kooij, & Rousseau, 2015). In theory and practice, it is not possible to find an unambiguous answer as to the chronological age of an individual that should be considered an “older employee”. However, it is possible to recognize the consensus that employees in the age group of 50 or 55 fall into this category (Ibid.).

However, this article does not focus only on older employees, as it is a topic that also concerns younger individuals who face low job security, with no improvement in this condition expected in the near future (International Labour Organization, 2013), and thus have to prepare for a significantly longer working life than their parents had. It is thus estimated that people currently in employment will work until the age of 75 (Bal et al., 2015).

Defining Generation

Each individual has their own characteristics, but certain things are the same based on age. Moreover, differences between groups of individuals are not only related to their chronological age, but also differences between individual generations. Generations are groups of individuals born in a particular historical period, in a particular area, and who share important life and historical events with major social dimensions that most representatives of the generation were directly confronted with during personal

development. The emergence of generations throughout human history is one of the fundamental sources for the dynamics of historical development. Living in comparable conditions (economic, historical and so on), exposure to the same events (cultural, environmental), and exposure to similar technologies can affect individuals so much that they think, decide, and behave in similar ways.

Generations in society change approximately every twenty years or so, where some deviations from the years of birth emerge from the literature (Dolot, 2018; Speer, 2011). Each generation is divided into three to seven annual subgroups, based on the first wave, core, and last wave (Tolbize, 2008). Due to the importance of the issue – the impact on the economy, the labour market, corporate strategies – intergenerational differences and the emergence of new generations have become the subject of research throughout the developed world. Age management and intergenerational differences are and will increasingly be issues in all companies (Maj, 2015).

The following recent generations have been identified (Tolbize, 2008):

- Traditionalists (silent generation, veterans), born between 1922 and 1945, who unconditionally value authority and a hierarchical managerial approach;
- Baby-boom generation (children of prosperity), born 1946 to 1964, defined as the workaholic generation;
- Generation X, born 1965 to 1980, who respect authority and believe that a work-life balance is needed;
- Generation Y (millennials), born from 1981 to 1995, who grew up in prosperity and rapid technological development,
- Generation Z, which also has many other names, such as iGeneration, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Facebook Generation, and Generation C (Dolot, 2018), born approximately 1995 to 2010, which naturally communicates and works in both real and virtual worlds and loves change;
- Generation Alpha, a new generation that already follows Generation Z and was born after 2010 as children of millennials, lives in the world of digital technology, and has not yet entered the labour market (McCrindle, n.d.).

Generational Differences and Similarities in the Workplace

In theory, there are at least two views on generational differences in the workplace. The first assumes that events influence and shape each generation, and although individuals in different generations are diverse, they nonetheless share a particular mindset, values, and behaviours because of the same events they have lived through. These thoughts, values, and behaviours vary between generations. The second view argues that although there are variations throughout a work cycle, life cycle, or career stage, ultimately all employees are equal in terms of what they want the job to offer them (Tolbize, 2008).

Most companies today have a rich mix of generations among their employees. With each generation entering the labour market comes different attitudes, work ethics, life experiences, and goals. Managing the work environment with generational diversity, as we are witnessing today, presents both an opportunity and a challenge: the

opportunity to involve a group of people who bring unique experience and knowledge to the company, and the challenge of reconciling the generational differences that define them. There is also a risk that skills and knowledge will be lost through early retirement in this context, which will have a negative impact on the economy, businesses and the younger generations.

Attitude to Work

A factor that contributes to intergenerational conflicts in the workplace is the level of work commitment that representatives of each generation show. For example, Generation X is recognized as a work-avoiding generation, employers complain that in general this generation is uncommitted to work, and work only as long as required to work or even less (Tolbize, 2008). In contrast, the Baby-boom generation is recognized as workaholic, with the trend of workaholism having emerged among them – although of all the generations mentioned in this study that of the Traditionalists is the one recognized as the most industrious.

Perceiving how hard someone works can be related to how individuals approach their work tasks. The Baby-boom generation is recognized as process-oriented, while the younger generations are seen as result-oriented, no matter when and where the work is done, which may create the impression of a lower level of activity. However, past surveys showed that 44% of employees aged 18 to 24 were willing to work more time in the workplace, while this percentage was only 23% among older employees (Tolbize, 2008).

Affiliation to an Employer

Another claim that often arises in connection with intergenerational differences is the different level of affiliation to the employer. The Traditionalist and Baby-boom generations are known for their very high loyalty to employers, unlike the following generations. The younger generations are more interested in having good workplace relationships with co-workers than with their employers. The younger generations value changing jobs as a form of career advancement, while the older generations – in the light of their greater affiliation to an employer – value gradual advancement within the same company. However, younger generations have come to realize that loyalty to an employer does not guarantee job security, as they often witnessed at their parents losing their jobs. Employer affiliation has declined over time, with 70% of Traditionalists, 65% of Baby-boomers, 40% of Generation X and 20% of Generation Y stating they would remain with the same employer (Tolbize, 2008). Employer affiliation among Millennials and Generation Z is falling rapidly, with 61% of the latter stating that they would leave an existing employer within two years if had the chance to do so (Pontefract, 2018).

Affiliation to the employer must also be considered from other angles. Compared to the older generations, the representatives of the younger generations (from Generation X onwards) do not in fact change jobs more often than representatives of the older generations did at the same age. The frequency of job changes is due in part to the state of the economy, as employees change jobs in times of economic

prosperity when opportunities are good. Typically, younger employees change jobs more often, and then tend to stay with the same employer as they get older. Employer affiliation is therefore more a question of employee age and other factors, and not so much a question of intergenerational differences. Representatives of all generations point out the same reasons why they would stay with the same employer: the opportunity to advance and develop, the opportunity to acquire new skills, work tasks that are stimulating, and higher payment. Employees, regardless of age or belonging to different generations, also show a higher degree of employer affiliation if the company has the same values as the employee, such as a focus on quality of life, good communication, autonomy at work, respect for both older, experienced employees and young, talented employees (Tolbize, 2008).

Attitude to Respect and Authority

Authority is defined as one of the most important values in the workplace by 13% of the Traditionalist generation, while this figure falls by at least half in all subsequent generations (Tolbize, 2008). This suggests that the attitude towards authority is the same for all generations who are now actively involved in the workplace, although a hierarchical approach to leadership is slightly more desirable for the Baby-boom generation than others. Representatives of Generation X and younger are relaxed towards their superiors and are not intimidated by job titles. Representatives of Generations Y and Z believe that respect should be earned, and thus do not feel unconditional respect for authority.

Both younger and older employees want to be respected in the workplace by co-workers and superiors, although the understanding of the concept of respect varies between different ages. Older employees want their opinions to have weight based on their experience, while younger employees want to be listened to when presenting their views. Older employees do not want the level of respect for all employees to be the same, but believe that those who are higher in the hierarchy or have more experience deserve a greater level of respect (Tolbize, 2008).

Stereotypes about the Characteristics of Generations

The results of some past research (Bal et al., 2015) show some typical stereotypes about older employees, which can be classified into six main categories: poorer performance of work tasks, resistance to change, poorer ability to learn, shorter period to retirement (and thus not worth investing in), a higher cost but also greater reliability. The stereotypes about older employees, as held by other staff, are 60% positive according to descriptions given by younger employees, and 85% positive for those given by middle-aged employees. The most commonly named characteristic of older employees was experience. Among the most common negative beliefs were the characteristics of resistance to change and inability or unwillingness to learn.

On the other hand, stereotypes are also attributed to younger generations, ambition and a focus on personal success, a quick change of job when a better opportunity arises, and financial prudence regarding borrowing (Stahl, 2018). Formal

education is no longer the main source of knowledge for younger employees. They strive to work in a positive work environment, with a well-established company brand. The key to their satisfaction at work is a diverse work environment where they can adopt multiple roles and do multiple jobs.

However, there is also research, which finds that generational differences, in terms of what preferences and values a certain generation pursues in the workplace, are very small or negligible. In fact, within each generation there is a very wide range of these preferences and values. For example, an analysis of 20 different studies conducted on nearly 20,000 people (Costanza et al., 2012) showed small and inconsistent differences in attitudes toward work, regardless of which generation the individuals involved in the research belonged to. The analysis concluded that although an individual employee goes through changes in their needs, interests, and preferences over their career, these changes are not related to which generation the individual belongs to.

In a company context, negative beliefs about stereotypes associated with employees of different generations affect the discriminatory decisions of the employer regarding the management of such employees, and the discriminatory behaviour of employees regarding cooperation with such individuals. However, age discrimination is not only recognized in the key decisions of employers regarding employees of different generations, such as who to hire, educate or promote, as discrimination may also occur in the everyday work environment and behaviour: how the employer and other employees talk to such an employee, how they include or exclude them at individual events, pursue or ignore their ideas for work, and so on (Bal et al., 2015).

Beliefs about the characteristics of different generations, which may turn out to be correct or false, stem from two different but interrelated factors. The first is the content and influence of the beliefs of other generations on a particular generation. The second, and newer concept, is that of meta-stereotypes, which are how a member of a certain generation believes other generations think of them as an individual (for example: older employees will worry that others think they are unwilling to learn, even if others co-workers do not actually have such an opinion of them). It is thus very likely that employees will have certain beliefs about the characteristics of other generations of employees (stereotypes), while assuming that other employees also make assumptions about them as individuals (meta-stereotypes). Based on this assumption, research was conducted (King et al., 2019) that confirmed that a multitude of stereotypes and meta-stereotypes occur in the workplace, and that these beliefs are not always accurate or the same. The responses of employees who completed the survey, and belonged to different generations, were very different. Stereotypes about older employees were mostly positive and included the words “responsible”, “working”, and “mature”, while older employees were concerned of being seen by others as “boring”, “stubborn”, and “weak-willed”. The stereotype of middle-aged employees was that they were “fair” and “ethical”, and the meta-stereotype was that they were “energetic”. Stereotypes about younger employees ranged from the positive “enthusiastic” to the negative “inexperienced”, while younger employees were convinced that others saw them in a much more negative way (“unmotivated”

and "irresponsible"). The study concluded that older and younger employees feel that other generations see them in a much more negative light than they actually do, which means that no stereotype and meta-stereotype holds up completely.

The potential consequences of these findings can be alarming, as erroneous stereotypes and meta-stereotypes can cause less cooperative relationships in the workplace and less knowledge transfer and learning, and this can negatively affect the work efficiency of an individual employee. Meta-stereotypes, that is, an individual's erroneous beliefs about what other generations think of him or her, can also affect that individual's work efficiency.

Method

We undertook critical assessments of intergenerational cooperation and age management in a company with over 2,000 employees from four generations, and with a large share of older employees. The selected company, called Company X in this study, was founded in Slovenia. According to its size, is classified as a large company. It is engaged in a gainful activity, being a Slovenian provider of technological solutions. The technological industry, in which the company operates, is changing, developing and adapting to new technologies and the growing demands of users (Company X, 2018).

At the end of 2018, the focal company had over 2,000 employees, and the average age of these was 44.8 years.

In studying intergenerational collaboration and age management in Company X, we used an observation method (focus groups) that we performed with 150 employees.

Moderated focus group meetings were held in the company from 10 to 25 September 2019, primarily for preparation of the company's strategy. In total, we have formed six focus groups, each with 25 participants. The sample included approximately the same number of employees from all departments. The moderators quantitatively checked the perceptions of the participants in the following areas: older employees and attitudes towards them, stereotypes about the elderly, problems faced by the elderly, the value of elderly employees for the company, motivation and commitment of the elderly, working conditions and health protection, attitudes towards the elderly and career development opportunities. Moderators checked the perceptions of the participants with 10 pre-designed questions:

- How old are the elderly, who are the "older" employees anyway?
- What is the attitude in the company to old age and the elderly?
- Are there stereotypes about the elderly? How are they expressed? How do you feel about them?
- What opportunities for training and career development do elderly employees have?
- What is intergenerational cooperation like?
- What is the attitude of the company towards the employment of the elderly? What are your experiences?

- Where do we have the biggest problems with working conditions for the elderly? What are some specific problems?
- What is the value, or potential, of elderly employees for the company?
- How do you see yourself, if you are older? What is your value?
- How do you assess the commitment and motivation of the elderly, and why do you think this?

Each question was written separately on a poster and the participants spontaneously wrote down their answers. Focus groups were moderated according to the principle of the open space method, which means that each participant in the focus group wrote down the answer to those questions to which they wanted or felt they could contribute an answer. For example, for the questions "Are there stereotypes about the elderly? How are they expressed? How do you feel about them?" we obtained a total of 57 spontaneous responses. Those that were very similar in content were combined into one answer, with 10 answers in total. We then classified the stereotypes about the elderly employees into two groups, those that related to cooperation and knowledge transfer in the company, which we termed positive stereotypes, and those that discouraged participation, termed negative stereotypes.

We then used a quantitative research method, which was completed by a random sample of the employees, where the desired sample was ten percent of all the staff at Company X. Individual variables (nominal, ordinal and interval measurement scales) were analysed. In the following sections we will present the variables used in the analysis and their basic statistics, with the aim of providing appropriate and substantive answers to the research questions. The questionnaire was hosted using the services for online surveys 1KA[1]. The survey was conducted from November 24, 2019 to December 16, 2019. In the analysis of the questionnaires, we used the statistical software package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The research was performed using the snowball method. We sent the questionnaire to 21 people employed in the selected company (in leading positions) and asked them to pass the questionnaire to their subordinates, taking into account the generational diversity of the workplace. The persons to whom we sent a hyperlink to the questionnaire were selected from our directory (105 persons) with a random 20% sample (random selection, as all units had the same probability of selection). A total of 394 people responded to the survey, and we received 334 questionnaires with at least one question completed, giving a positive response rate of 85%. A total of 255 surveys were completed in full (i.e., 76% of all questionnaires with at least answer).

Research Questions

With this research, we wanted to examine the following questions:

- Are there stereotypes about the characteristics of different generations of employees in Company X?
- Do different generations use the same foundations in terms of the company's expected attitudes towards their work?

[1] https://www.1ka.si/

Sample and Variables

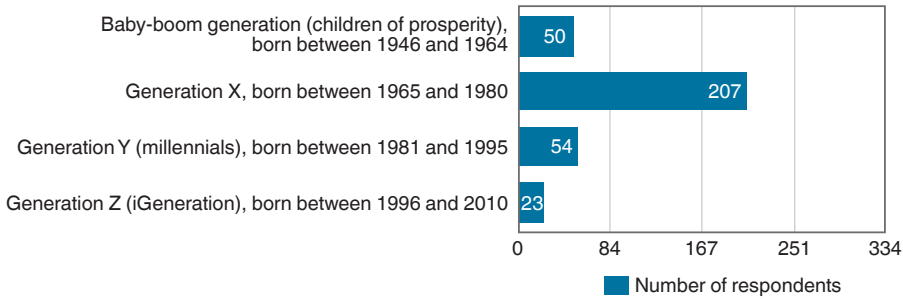
In the statistical analysis of the survey, we took into account the relatively large sample, with more than three hundred individuals, born between 1946 and 2010, who completed the questionnaire. The studied variables can be divided into two groups: main and additional. As an additional variable we can only use the first variable (which generation you belong to according to the year of birth), as it specifies the age groups of the respondents. In the statistical analysis this was treated as a nominal variable, although age is basically of ordinal in nature (as it can be classified in order from lower to higher).

Some of the main variables were assessed on an interval scale measuring the strength of agreement with certain statements (1… strongly disagree, 5… strongly agree), the validity of a statement (1… not true at all, 5… absolutely true), or the strength of significance of certain items (1… most important), 9… least important).

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the answers with regard to "Which generation do you belong to according to the year of birth?", which shows that 207 (62%) respondents are representatives of Generation X, 54 (16%) of Generation Y, 50 (15%) of the Baby-boom generation, and 23 (7%) of Generation Z. Figure 2 shows the rate of respondents in correlation with the basic population.

Figure 1

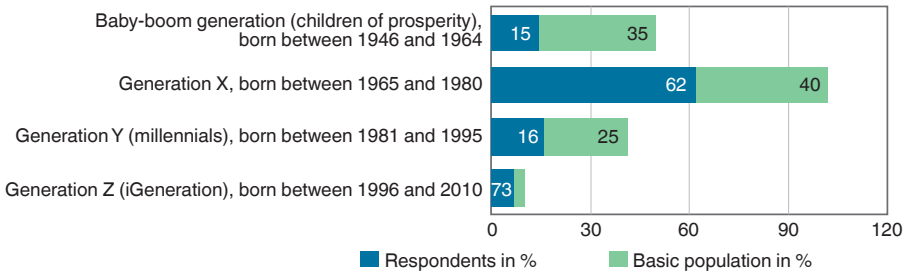
Distribution of the Variable "Which Generation Do You Belong to According to the Year of Birth?"



Source: Own data

Figure 2

The Rate of Respondents in Correlation with the Basic Population



Source: Own data

The number of respondents by generation is satisfactory in terms of the number or share of representatives of each generation in the basic population. Most respondents are from Generation X (the average age of this generation, born between 1965 and 1980, is 46.5 years), which also roughly coincides with the average age in the company, which is 44.8 years. We therefore estimated that the structure of respondents coincides with the age structure of employees in the company.

Results

Are there Stereotypes about the Characteristics of Different Generations of Employees?

To answer the research question "Are there stereotypes about the characteristics of different generations of employees in Company X?", we wanted to find out whether the expression of individual characteristics in each generation is stereotypical, and if the beliefs of different generations are particularly characteristic of each generation. For this reason, we examined beliefs about the same traits, and whether these are expressed as stereotypical in all four generations, either as stereotypical in a positive direction (that a certain trait almost entirely belongs to a certain generation) or in a negative direction (or a certain trait does not in any way describe a particular generation).

Given the research question of whether there are stereotypes about individual generations in the selected company, and based on a number of characteristics highlighted by focus group participants, we made a simple analysis of stereotypes, as presented in Table 1. We classified these stereotypes into those whose linguistic significance has a positive connotation (those stereotypes that are aimed at cooperation, knowledge transfer, progress in the company) and those with a negative connotation (those that discourage cooperation, knowledge transfer and progress).

The results of the focus groups conducted in the selected company show a very diverse range of beliefs or stereotypes about the older generations. The strategy adopted by Company X for older employees defines these as those aged 51 and above. For employees at this age, the focus group participants listed stereotypes that were overwhelmingly negative (36), with only 11 being positive. This could lead to the conclusion that in Company X the beliefs about older employees discourage cooperative relationships with this generation, and do not encourage the transfer of knowledge between the younger and older employees. This is worrying, as such stereotypes cause the deterioration of cooperative relations in the workplace and reduce the transfer of knowledge and learning, which can negatively affect the work efficiency of individual employees and consequently the efficiency of the whole company. For this reason, we concluded that it is very important for Company X to carry out more detailed research on the stereotypes about different generations of employees in order to combat the negative views that currently exist. For this purpose, in the research we deliberately focused on only a few of those characteristics that we considered to be more important for cooperation and knowledge transfer in the workplace, as follows:

- motivation to work;

- desire to acquire the new skills needed to do the job;
- adaptability to changes in the work process;
- good physical readiness for work;
- desire to have personal contact with other colleagues;
- loyalty to the employer;
- greater commitment to maintaining a work-life balance than to devoting oneself to work.

Table 1
Stereotypes About the Older Employees in Company X

Positive stereotypes	Negative stereotypes
Experienced	"know-it-all"
Loving	troublesome
Accurate	without will
full of wisdom	listless
Practical	boring
Flexible	selfish
they need to be useful	excessively inquiring
Understanding	looking back
Social	they moan
Calm	less vital
eager for attention	interrupting
	do not accept feedback
	insensitive to change
	inflexible
	impatient
	awkward
	nervous
	impatient
	disinterested
	sensitive
	clumsy
	honourable
	patronizing
	forget thinks easily
	self-interested
	overly concerned
	they see and hear poorly
	conservative
	difficult
	heavy
	stubborn
	imperious
	they think they are always right
	resentful
	uptight

Source: Own data

Table 2
Basic Statistics for the Baby-boom, X, Y and Z Generations

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The Baby-boom generation is motivated to work	234	3.50	.999	.065
The Baby-boom generation is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	234	2.94	.983	.064
The Baby-boom generation is adaptable to changes in the work process	234	2.65	1.005	.066
The Baby-boom generation is physically well-prepared for work	233	3.27	1.012	.066
The Baby-boom generation is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	234	3.73	.976	.064
The Baby-boom generation is loyal to the employer	234	4.32	.821	.054
The Baby-boom generation feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	232	3.69	.902	.059
Generation X is motivated to work	101	3.77	.773	.077
Generation X is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	101	3.69	.821	.082
Generation X is adaptable to changes in the work process	101	3.53	.912	.091
Generation X is physically well-prepared for work	101	3.75	.713	.071
Generation X is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	101	3.87	.757	.075
Generation X is loyal to the employer	101	3.69	.718	.071
Generation X feels maintaining a work-life balance means more than dedication to work	101	3.74	.757	.075
Generation Y is motivated to work	232	3.41	.858	.056
Generation Y is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	232	3.92	.813	.053
Generation Y is adaptable to changes in the work process	230	3.96	.819	.054
Generation Y is physically well-prepared for work	232	3.52	1.040	.068
Generation Y is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	232	3.23	.942	.062
Generation Y is loyal to the employer	232	2.66	.868	.057
Generation Y feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	231	3.20	.950	.062
Generation Z is motivated to work	253	2.91	1.008	.063
Generation Z is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job	253	3.47	1.056	.066
Generation Z is adaptable to changes in the work process	253	3.66	1.092	.069
Generation Z is physically well-prepared for work	251	3.15	1.132	.071
Generation Z is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	253	2.83	1.031	.065
Generation Z is loyal to the employer	253	2.13	.862	.054
Generation Z feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	251	2.82	1.116	.070

For the stereotype analysis presented in Table 2, we excluded results that analyse meta-stereotypes by excluding respondents to whom a particular question referred. The stereotype was confirmed if the average values of the variables (responses) were greater than 3.67 (stereotype in the positive direction) or less than 2.32 (stereotype in the negative direction). If the average values were in between, i.e., they represented

a medium measure, we concluded that an individual trait is not stereotypical for a particular generation or that is neutral. The values of 2.32 and 3.67 were determined by dividing the scale of possible responses (1–5) roughly into thirds, with the lower third (mean values of variables 1–2.32) representing a stereotype in a negative direction (i.e., that a certain property is not or almost not expressed), and the upper third (average values of variables 3.67) represented a stereotype in a positive direction (i.e., that a certain characteristic is fully or almost completely expressed). We thus proceeded from the fact that a stereotype can only represent a more pronounced characteristic, but not every trait that is expressed only neutrally in an individual or an individual generation is a stereotypical characteristic. To determine what can be claimed at a 5% risk level, whether the mean values in the population are greater than 3.67 or less than 2.32, we tested the null hypothesis with a single-sample *t*-test (one sample *t*-test).

Based on the point average values of variables, we came to the conclusion that there are the following stereotypes in a positive direction at Company X.

- Baby-boom generation: is eager for personal contact with other colleagues; is loyal to the employer; believes that maintaining a work-life balance means more than devoting oneself to work.
- Generation X: is motivated to work; is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job; is physically fit for work; is eager for personal contact with other colleagues; is loyal to the employer; believes that maintaining a work-life balance means more than devoting oneself to work.
- Generation Y: is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job; is adaptable to changes in the work process. In contrast, there is only one stereotype in the negative direction.
- Generation Z: is not loyal to the employer.

Table 3

Verification of the Assumption of Arithmetic Means for the Baby-boom, X, Y, and Z Generations

	Test Value = 3.67					
	T	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
The Baby-boom generation is motivated to work	-2.538	233	.012	-.166	-.29	-.04
The Baby-boom generation is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	-11.357	233	.000	-.730	-.86	-.60
The Baby-boom generation is adaptable to changes in the work process	-15.534	233	.000	-1.020	-1.15	-.89
The Baby-boom generation is physically well-prepared for work	-6.094	232	.000	-.404	-.53	-.27
The Baby-boom generation is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	.952	233	.342	.061	-.06	.19
The Baby-boom generation is loyal to the employer	12.124	233	.000	.651	.54	.76

Table 3 Continued

	Test Value = 3.67					
	T	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
The Baby-boom generation feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	.259	231	.796	.015	-.10	.13
Generation X is motivated to work	1.330	100	.187	.102	-.05	.25
Generation X is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	.282	100	.778	.023	-.14	.19
Generation X is adaptable to changes in the work process	-1.492	100	.139	-.135	-.32	.04
Generation X is physically well-prepared for work	1.163	100	.248	.082	-.06	.22
Generation X is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	2.672	100	.009	.201	.05	.35
Generation X is loyal to the employer	.323	100	.747	.023	-.12	.16
Generation X feels maintaining a work-life balance means more than dedication to work	.963	100	.338	.073	-.08	.22
Generation Y is motivated to work	-4.624	231	.000	-.261	-.37	-.15
Generation Y is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	4.730	231	.000	.252	.15	.36
Generation Y is adaptable to changes in the work process	5.306	229	.000	.287	.18	.39
Generation Y is physically well-prepared for work	-2.237	231	.026	-.153	-.29	-.02
Generation Y is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	-7.141	231	.000	-.442	-.56	-.32
Generation Y is loyal to the employer	-17.729	231	.000	-1.011	-1.12	-.90
Generation Y feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	-7.466	230	.000	-.467	-.59	-.34
Generation Z is motivated to work	-11.944	252	.000	-.757	-.88	-.63
Generation Z is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job	-3.007	252	.003	-.200	-.33	-.07
Generation Z is adaptable to changes in the work process	-.144	252	.885	-.010	-.15	.13
Generation Z is physically well-prepared for work	-7.259	250	.000	-.519	-.66	-.38
Generation Z is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	-12.963	252	.000	-.840	-.97	-.71
Generation Z is loyal to the employer	-28.322	252	.000	-1.536	-1.64	-1.43
Generation Z feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	-12.109	250	.000	-.853	-.99	-.71

Table 3 Continued

	Test Value = 2.32					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
The Baby-boom generation is motivated to work	18.136	233	.000	1.184	1.06	1.31
The Baby-boom generation is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	9.650	233	.000	.620	.49	.75
The Baby-boom generation is adaptable to changes in the work process	5.017	233	.000	.330	.20	.46
The Baby-boom generation is physically well-prepared for work	14.273	232	.000	.946	.82	1.08
The Baby-boom generation is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	22.107	233	.000	1.411	1.29	1.54
The Baby-boom generation is loyal to the employer	37.285	233	.000	2.001	1.89	2.11
The Baby-boom generation feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	23.050	231	.000	1.365	1.25	1.48
Generation X is motivated to work	18.880	100	.000	1.452	1.30	1.60
Generation X is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	16.798	100	.000	1.373	1.21	1.54
Generation X is adaptable to changes in the work process	13.389	100	.000	1.215	1.03	1.39
Generation X is physically well-prepared for work	20.196	100	.000	1.432	1.29	1.57
Generation X is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	20.591	100	.000	1.551	1.40	1.70
Generation X is loyal to the employer	19.231	100	.000	1.373	1.23	1.51
Generation X feels maintaining a work-life balance means more than dedication to work	18.886	100	.000	1.423	1.27	1.57
Generation Y is motivated to work	19.338	231	.000	1.089	.98	1.20
Generation Y is eager to gain the new skills needed to do the job	30.029	231	.000	1.602	1.50	1.71
Generation Y is adaptable to changes in the work process	30.308	229	.000	1.637	1.53	1.74
Generation Y is physically well-prepared for work	17.532	231	.000	1.197	1.06	1.33
Generation Y is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	14.692	231	.000	.908	.79	1.03
Generation Y is loyal to the employer	5.956	231	.000	.339	.23	.45
Generation Y feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	14.139	230	.000	.883	.76	1.01
Generation Z is motivated to work	9.357	252	.000	.593	.47	.72
Generation Z is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job	17.327	252	.000	1.150	1.02	1.28

Table 3 Continued

	Test Value = 2.32					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Generation Z is adaptable to changes in the work process	19.511	252	.000	1.340	1.20	1.48
Generation Z is physically well-prepared for work	11.638	250	.000	.831	.69	.97
Generation Z is eager for personal contact with other co-workers	7.871	252	.000	.510	.38	.64
Generation Z is loyal to the employer	-3.423	252	.001	-.186	-.29	-.08
Generation Z feels maintaining a balance between work and private life means more than dedication to work	7.049	250	.000	.497	.36	.64

Source: Own data

In Table 3, these variables are shown in bold. However, when we performed the *t*-test and found variables for which we reject the null assumption and accept the alternative assumption, and at the risk level of 5% we claim that the average values in the population are greater than 3.67 or less than 2.32, then we obtained variables with statistically significant differences. These are underlined in Table 3.

One surprising finding from the analysis of the conducted survey refers to stereotypes about older employees. The focus group participants expressed many negative beliefs about older employees (in the focus groups those older than 51 were defined as older employees). In contrast, the results of a survey of older employees (which include members of the Baby-boom generation and part of Generation X) do not show characteristics that would discourage participation, knowledge transfer and progress at work. The Baby-boom generation is eager for personal contact with other co-workers and is loyal to the employer. The only stereotype that is not geared towards employee collaboration, knowledge transfer, and progress in the company would be that maintaining a work-life balance means more to the Baby-boomers than devoting oneself to work, it means that Baby-boomers prefer to maintain work-life balance over commitment to work.

We were also surprised by the difference between the stereotypes of different generations found in the other research and those found in our work. Prior to our research, we expected a lot of negative stereotypes about both older and younger generations, but this was not found in the responses. There may be several reasons for this, including inappropriate sampling, misunderstanding of questions and assessments by the respondents, and so on. It may be because the questions in the focus groups were asked very narrowly, in the sense of "highlight one stereotype about the elderly", while the survey allowed the assessment of the expression of individual traits on a 5-point scale, and this thus showed a more realistic picture of stereotypes in Company X.

Inaccurate stereotypes and meta-stereotypes can pose a threat to collaborative intergenerational relationships within a company. The analysis of the survey conducted

in Company X shows different stereotypes from those found by the related research presented in the introduction to this article, and thus we believe that is crucial that each company in its own internal environment makes the most accurate analysis of existing stereotypes.

Do Different Generations of Employees Come from the Same Foundations in Terms of the Company's Expected Attitude towards their Work?

For this research question, we analysed the answers with regard to which generation the respondents belong to and the classification of values by importance and their interaction. We expected the analysis to show that all generations come from the same foundations with regard to how they expect the company to view their work. That is, that there would no differences in values for all four generations. We used the Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test, which is a version of the Mann-Whitney multigroup test, in order to determine differences between groups when the dependent variable is measured on an ordinal scale. This test is equivalent to the parametric *t*-test or ANOVA, where the values of the variables are converted into ranges. The test was used to check whether the average ranks are the same by groups, and at the same time we also compared the variability in the ranks within the groups with that between the groups. Since rank 1 gets the smallest value of the variable, we further transformed the variables of the answers by mapping the range over the median of the answers. We changed the original maximum ranges to the smallest ranges, and vice versa. We thus obtained a new distribution that took into account ranges from minimum to maximum importance.

The average values are quite similar, with the two extremes being those for "I am satisfied with the work I do" (on average respondents give it the greatest importance) and "I work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued" (on average respondents give it the least importance).

Table 4

The Variables, Including the Significance of Values in the Workplace

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
I am satisfied with the work I do	265	6.70	2.482	1	9
I am respected in the company as a person	260	4.98	2.397	1	9
The work I do is valued and respected in the company	260	4.55	2.416	1	9
I have guaranteed good pay for the work done	262	5.25	2.367	1	9
I feel fulfilled, my work serves a specific purpose	260	5.30	2.609	1	9
I am making personal and career progress with my work	262	4.48	2.535	1	9
I work in a work environment where there are collegial relationships	261	5.31	2.354	1	9
My job is safe and stable, in the company and in my workplace	260	4.61	2.788	1	9
I work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued	259	3.85	2.338	1	9

Source: Own data

Table 5
Kruskal-Wallis Rank Test 1

	Which generation do you belong to according to your year of birth	N	Mean Rank
I am satisfied with the work I do	Baby boom	39	142.72
	Generation X	165	136.30
	Generation Y	43	106.87
	Generation Z	18	144.14
	Total	265	
I am respected in the company as a person	Baby boom	38	129.75
	Generation X	161	129.46
	Generation Y	43	133.09
	Generation Z	18	135.22
	Total	260	
The work I do is valued and respected in the company	Baby boom	38	145.57
	Generation X	161	131.38
	Generation Y	43	120.10
	Generation Z	18	115.69
	Total	260	
I have guaranteed good pay for the work done	Baby boom	38	118.42
	Generation X	163	128.94
	Generation Y	43	153.26
	Generation Z	18	130.33
	Total	262	
I feel fulfilled, my work serves a specific purpose	Baby boom	38	128.39
	Generation X	161	144.33
	Generation Y	43	101.88
	Generation Z	18	79.58
	Total	260	
I am making personal and career progress with my work	Baby boom	38	104.72
	Generation X	163	126.55
	Generation Y	43	162.06
	Generation Z	18	159.89
	Total	262	
I work in a work environment where there are collegial relationships	Baby boom	38	131.62
	Generation X	162	124.99
	Generation Y	43	135.43
	Generation Z	18	173.22
	Total	261	
My job is safe and stable, in the company and in my workplace	Baby boom	39	119.15
	Generation X	160	132.43
	Generation Y	43	129.47
	Generation Z	18	140.36
	Total	260	
I work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued	Baby boom	38	159.89
	Generation X	160	124.13
	Generation Y	43	127.31
	Generation Z	18	125.44
	Total	259	

Source: Own data

Table 6
Kruskal-Wallis Rank Test 2

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
I am satisfied with the work I do	6.622	3	.085
I am respected in the company as a person	.159	3	.984
The work I do is valued and respected in the company	3.116	3	.374
I have guaranteed good pay for the work done	4.941	3	.176
I feel fulfilled, my work serves a specific purpose	20.256	3	.000
I am making personal and career progress with my work	15.190	3	.002
I work in a work environment where there are collegial relationships	6.914	3	.075
My job is safe and stable, in the company and in my workplace	1.333	3	.721
I work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued	7.320	3	.062

Source: Own data

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the Kruskal-Wallis rank test. Based on these, at the risk level of 5% we conclude that the average ranks of all four generations are the same (or not different), except those for the variables "I feel fulfilled and my work serves a specific purpose" and "I am making personal and career progress with my work". In other words, for all variables except these two we cannot claim that there are differences in the ranking of the importance of items, so in this part the results support our expectations.

In terms of the variable "I feel fulfilled, my work serves a specific purpose", where we detected statistically significant differences, it is clear that Generation Z has the lowest average rank (and therefore rated it as less important value), followed by Generation Y, the Baby-boom generation and Generation X – younger generations therefore assess this variable as less important compared to the older generations.

The results for *personal and career advancement* are almost the opposite – the Baby-boom generation evaluates it as the least important variable, followed by Generation X, and then Generations Y and Z. Here, too, it seems that the younger generations evaluate personal and career advancement as more important than the two older generations. It is thus true that the younger generations are, on average, more driven with regard to personal and career advancement than the older generations.

The least differences in ranking between generations (based on the highest values of Asymp. Sig.) were found for "I am respected in the company as a person", "The work I do is valued and respected in the company" and "My job is safe and stable in the company and in my workplace".

The results here did not surprise us, but instead confirm that, regardless of the age or generational affiliation of an individual employee, members of all generations draw on similar values when doing their work, which means that they are driven by similar motives at work, as follows:

- to be satisfied with the work they do,
- to be respected in the company as a person,
- that the work they perform is valued and respected in the company,
- that they are guaranteed good pay for the work done,
- that they feel fulfilled at work and that the work serves a specific purpose,
- that they can make personal and career progress,
- to work in an environment where there are collegial relationships,
- that their employment is secure and stable,
- to work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued.

A slightly less important value for the younger generations is that they feel fulfilled at work and that the work serves a specific purpose. With regard to personal and career advancement, however, almost the opposite is found. However, we estimate that the younger generations see many opportunities for advancement ahead of them, while the older two generations have already completed their career advancement and are now settled in certain positions. Personal fulfilment at work and the purpose of performing work are also not so important for younger generations, because they may be looking for their personal fulfilment in private spheres, e.g., in starting a family or building a home, and therefore they do not worry about personal fulfilment in the workplace. The older generations have already established their homes, their children are becoming independent or have already done so, and thus they begin to look for their fulfilment in the professional sphere. However, reasons that are more precise could be found in further research.

Conclusion

The article focuses on the field of intergenerational cooperation in the workplace. Generational differences and similarities are seen in relation to work, such as attitude towards work, sense of loyalty to the employer, and attitude towards respect and authority. These generational differences and similarities relate in particular to certain stereotypes attributed to generations by theory. However, addressing such stereotypes is important from the point of view of preventing discrimination at work due to certain personal circumstances of individual generations of employees.

The article highlights the results of some past research showing typical stereotypes about older employees, such as poorer performance of work tasks, resistance to change, poorer learning ability, not worth investing in their development, and a higher cost, as well as being more reliable. Stereotypes are also attributed to the younger generations, such as ambition and attitude towards personal success, quickly changing jobs when there is a better opportunity, financial prudence regarding borrowing, formal education is not the main source of knowledge, and a desire for a diverse work environment. In a workplace context, negative beliefs about stereotypes associated with employees of different generations affect the employer's discriminatory decisions regarding the management of staff, as well as the discriminatory behaviour of employees regarding cooperation with each other. Some research confirms the link between stereotypes and actual employer

behaviour. Beliefs about the characteristics of different generations, which may turn out to be correct or false, arise from two different but interrelated factors: the first is the content and influence of other generations' beliefs on a particular generation (i.e., stereotypes), while the second is how an individual member of a certain generation perceives what members of other generations think of them (meta-stereotypes).

We conducted a survey on intergenerational cooperation in a chosen company with more than 2,000 employees. Based on the method of observation (focus groups) which we performed with 150 employees we obtained basic stereotypes, both positive and negative. We then used a quantitative research method, completed by a random sample of four generations of employees. We wanted to examine the following research questions: whether there are stereotypes about the characteristics of different generations of employees, and whether different generations come from the same foundations regarding the company's expected attitude to their work.

We came to the conclusion that there are the following stereotypes in Company X:

- The Baby-boom generation is eager to have personal contact with other employees, is loyal to the employer, and a work-life balance means more than dedication to work.
- Generation X is motivated to work, is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job, is physically well prepared for work, is eager for personal contact with other co-workers, is loyal to the employer, and maintaining a work-life balance means more than dedication to work.
- Generation Y is eager to acquire the new skills needed to do the job and is adaptable to changes in the work process.
- Generation Z is not loyal to the employer.

Participants in the focus groups expressed many negative beliefs about older employees, while the results of the survey do not show indicate that older employees would in fact discourage participation, knowledge transfer and progress at work.

The results of the survey also confirmed that, regardless of the age or generational affiliation of an individual employee, members of all generations work based on similar values, which means that they are driven by similar motives: that they are satisfied with the work they do, that they are respected in the company as a person, that the work they perform is valued and respected in the company, that they have guaranteed good pay for the work done, that they feel fulfilled at work and that the work serves a specific purpose, they progress personally and in their work careers, that the work environment has collegial relationships, their employment is safe and stable, and honesty and impartiality are valued. A slightly less important value for the younger generation is that they feel fulfilled at work and that the work serves a specific purpose. On average, it is most important for all employees of all ages to work in a company where they are satisfied with the work they do, where they feel fulfilled and that their work serves a specific purpose, and it is least important for them to work in an environment where honesty and impartiality are valued, and where their employment is secure and stable.

References

Bal, P. M., Kooij, D. T. A. M., & Rousseau, D. M. (Eds.). (2015). *Aging workers and the employee-employer relationship*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-08007-9

Company X. (2018). *Company Annual Report*. Ljubljana: Company X.

Costanza, D. B., Badger, J. M., Fraser, R. L., Severt, J. B., & Gade, P. A. (2012). Generational differences in work-related attitudes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 27*(4), 375–394. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-012-9259-4

Dolot, A. (2018). The characteristic of generation Z. *e-mentor, 2*(74), 44–50. https://doi.org/10.15219/em74.1351

International Labour Organization. (2013). *Global employment trends for youth 2013*. Geneva: International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_212423.pdf

King, E., Finkelstein, L., Thomas, C., & Corrington, A. (2019, August 01). Generational differences at work are small. Thinking they're big affects our behavior. *Harvard Business Review.* https://hbr.org/2019/08/generational-differences-at-work-are-small-thinking-theyre-big-affects-our-behavior

Maj, J. (2015). Age management in Polish enterprises: CSR or a necessity? In I. Ubrežiová, D. Lančarič, I. Košičiarová (Eds.), *Corporate social responsibility and human resource management in V4 countries. Proceedings from international scientific conference June 4–5, Nitra* (pp. 104–111). Nitra, Slovakia: Slovak University of Agriculture. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3355.0164

McCrindle, M. (n.d.) Why we named them Gen Alpha. *McCrindle Blog Archive.* https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blogarchive/why-we-named-them-gen-alpha/

Pontefract, D. (2018, June 3). Millennials and Gen Z have lost trust and loyalty with business. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/danpontefract/2018/06/03/millennials-and-gen-z-have-lost-trust-and-loyalty-with-business/

Speer, L. A. (2011). Four generations working together in the workforce and in higher education. *East Tennessee State University Electronic Theses and Dissertations.* Paper 1244. https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1244

Stahl, A. (2018, September 26). Gen Z: What to expect from the new workforce. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2018/09/26/gen-z-what-to-expect-from-the-new-work-force/

Tolbize, A. (2008, August 16). Generational differences in the workplace. *Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota.* https://rtc.umn.edu/docs/2_18_Gen_diff_workplace.pdf

Tros, F., & Keune, M. (2016). *Intergenerational bargaining in the EU. Comparative report*. Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS), University of Amsterdam. http://intergenerationalbargaining.eu/uploads/backbone/upload/asset/91/Final_comparative_report_iNGenBar_Tros_and_Keune.pdf

United Nations. (2002). Political declaration and Madrid international plan of action on ageing. *Second World Assembly on Ageing, 8–12 April 2002, Madrid, Spain.* https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Madrid_plan.pdf

United Nations. (2015). General assembly resolution A/RES/70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. *Seventieth United Nations general assembly, 25 September 2015, New York.* https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf