

## STEREOTYPES OF OLDER EMPLOYEES COMPARED TO YOUNGER EMPLOYEES IN SLOVENIAN COMPANIES

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*Human resource management has an important impact on age diversity in companies. Age diversity in the workplace is growing and older employees are staying longer in the workforce, therefore it is important that employers can create a positive environment for age diverse employees. This paper introduces the difference in stereotypes in the workplace between older and younger employees in Slovenian companies. The main goal of this paper is to present the importance of age diversity and their age difference in stereotypes in the workplace. The paper is based on a research including a survey between two age groups of employees. We classified younger employees in the group of under 50 years of age and older employees in the group of above 50 years of age. For data analysis we used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test to verify the differences in stereotypes in the workplace between two groups. Results show that there are significant differences in all of the variables describing stereotypes in the workplace between younger and older employees in Slovenian companies.*

*Keywords:* Stereotypes, Employees, Age diversity, Human resource management.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Aging population is one of the most salient social and contemporary phenomena in the world (Stamov-Rošnagel and Hertel, 2010; Pitt-Catsoupes

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and Matz-Costa, 2008). Carone and Costello (2006) explained that by 2050, the population of older workers (55-64) in Europe will grow to 60 percent. Further, Arthur (2006) argued that in the USA, the number of workers over 55 will increase by 73 percent by 2020, and the number of younger workers will grow by 5 percent. Therefore, the workforce will be more diverse in terms of age, and older and younger people are more likely to interact in the workplace, so it is important to examine the stereotypes they hold of each other (Bertolino et al., 2013). Age-related stereotypes are quite popular and often rather negatively biased (Posthuma and Campion, 2009; Rauschenbach et al., 2012; Hertel et al., 2013). Authors Armstrong-Stassen and Templer (2005) assert that the effective development and utilisation of older professional and managerial employees is an important issue. Moreover, organizations are not prepared to tailor the training methods to the needs and preferences of older managerial and professional employees. Stamov-Roßnagel and Hertel (2010) explained that negative stereotypes about older employees, usually based on subjective theories rather than empirical findings, require systematic research necessary to prevent age discrimination due to incomplete knowledge of older workers and related self-fulfilling prophecies.

There are many different views about age and aging. In western societies, ageing is often seen in the context of decline and deterioration, while Asian cultures usually value ageing more positively (Leung, 2000). Because of the increasingly aging workforce and the demand of an effective diversity management, companies worldwide have to be aware of the issues mentioned above to achieve positive outcomes (Rabl, 2010). Morton et al. (2005) found that older employees are often seen as an obstacle or as a problem that must be solved and not as an opportunity for companies - especially in terms of transfer of knowledge and experience, which could be exploited.

In this paper we present the importance of human resource management in the age diversity of employees in the context of stereotypes in the workplace. The main purpose of this research is to examine if there are statistically significant differences in stereotypes in the workplace between older and younger employees in Slovenian companies. This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: Are there statistically significant differences in stereotypes of older employees compared to younger employees in Slovenian companies?*

*RQ2: Which stereotypes prevail among older employees compared to younger employees in Slovenian companies?*

Research presents descriptive statistics and the results of the Mann-Whitney test for answers about stereotypes between older and younger employees in Slovenian companies.

The structure of this article is as follows. The next section shows literature review of the stereotypes of employees. The third section describes the methodology used in the survey about the stereotypes of older and younger employees in Slovenian companies. The results of this survey are presented in the fourth and discussed in the last section.

## **2. AGE DIVERSITY AND STEREOTYPES IN THE WORKPLACE**

### **2.1. Age diversity in the workplace**

Ageing has become a necessary focus of interest in today's society (Aaltio et al., 2014). Studies which were summarized by Shore et al. (2003) show that work attitudes and evaluations of older and younger workers are affected by the ages of their coworkers: older managers usually treat both older and young employees similarly, whereas younger managers provide more opportunities for development to younger employees.

Authors Verworn and Hipp (2009) stated that older workers are as motivated as younger workers to contribute to their organizations or that they more consciously engage in discretionary behaviors to compensate for any losses in technical core performance. However, companies with a high share of older workers tended to invest less in training or innovation input. According to Avery et al. (2007), Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008), older workers may learn faster at work settings and in training situations than their younger colleagues. Interestingly, mature workers have been found to embrace change more readily than younger employees and show high disposition to participate in such processes and be more engaged overall.

Further, authors Warr and Fay (2001) found no relationship between age and job proactivity, but a negative relationship with developmental proactivity. For the research field of career development it is crucial to understand the link between age and proactivity. This might benefit employers and society at large in finding ways to promote work participation and continued career development for older employees. It might also benefit employees in that better conditions are created for extended participation in attractive work over the career span.

Thus, generational differences are often expressed in (Leibold and Voelpel, 2006; Turner and Williams, 2005): views and expectations in relation to the work, methods of communication, relationship to their superiors, attitudes to learning, promptness and skill in the performance of activities, adapting to new methods practices, technologies. Different positions and views influence responses of employees to management and organization. So employers should be careful to generational differences, as they will with aging employees continue to rise. Morris et al. (2005) emphasized that the age is one of the fundamental elements with which the individual identifies, which affect the perception of an individual's point of view and also work results.

Zaniboni et al. (2014) demonstrated that the role of age in the relationship between job characteristics and job attitudes is important, because with the aging population, it is important to see how jobs might be redesigned to enable people to continue to work successfully. Truxillo et al. (2012) stress the importance of age diversity of employees in the workplace and they argue that the interplay between age and work characteristics is appropriate because people generally spend a significant part of their lifespan working. But the role of age in job design has largely been ignored.

## **2.2. Stereotypes of older and younger employees**

According to Cuddy and Fiske (2002), stereotypes are defined as cognitive structures that store our beliefs and expectations about the characteristics of members of social groups and stereotyping as the process of applying the stereotypic information.

Stereotypes in the workplace do not occur in isolation, but rather reflect widespread societal stereotypes about older people (McCann and Giles, 2002). Schmidt and Boland (1986) argued that there are many stereotypes about older employees. Some negative stereotypes deal with mental decline, physical decline, inability to cope with change, performance and productivity.

Warr (2001), Posthuma and Campion (2009) found some stereotypes about older workers: they are less creative, less motivated, less flexible, more resistant to change, and uninterested in training. According to Gordon and Arvey (2004) older workers face bias in terms of perceived job qualifications and potential for development, and this may lead to negative decisions about them. Therefore, Ng and Feldman (2008) assert that it is very important that organizations realize that these negative stereotypes of older workers are inconsistent with their actual work performance, which may be similar to, or even higher than that of

younger workers. Older workers are often exposed to negative stereotyping, suggesting work motivation declines with higher age (Nelson, 2002).

Chiu et al. (2001) stated that the popular stereotype among employers especially in Western societies is that older employees are unmotivated. Loretto and White (2006) argued that such beliefs about older employees may develop into age discrimination, which brings about many negative consequences for both employees and organizations.

Younger workers are seen as more work-motivated, ambitious, and able to learn quicker than older workers, and on the other hand, they are seen as less loyal and less emotionally stable (Gibson et al., 1993). Stereotypes that characterize younger employees are immaturity, unreliability and disloyalty, more important to them is social life, they also quickly change jobs, they are innovative, energetic, they have knowledge of the new technology (Newton idr., 2005). According to Goldberg and Ramsey (2005), Guest and Shacklock (2005), Markos (2005) and Newton et al. (2005) frequently stereotypical beliefs that concern older employees compared to younger colleagues in particular are the following: they are perceived as harder and slower to learn, less motivated, less creative, less productive, less physically powerful, less adaptable, flexible to change, more difficult to learn new tasks, senile. They are also perceived as more often sick and therefore absent from work, more costly to the organization and also they have technically outdated knowledge.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Sample**

For our research we used questionnaires to examine the stereotypes between older and younger employees in the workplace, which were sent online to small, medium-sized and large Slovenian companies in January 2016. Our research includes 400 companies and one employee in each company. Companies were selected randomly. The employees were divided into two age groups. The younger employees were classified in the group of under 50 years of age and the older employees were classified in the group of above 50 years of age. In most cases, the lower age limits defining older employees are 45 years (Brooke, 2003) or 50 years (Ilmarinen, 2001), so we decided that for our research the boundary 50 years. The sample consists of 400 employees: 174 (43.5%) younger employees (18 to 49 years) and 226 (56.5%) older employees (50 to 65 years).

The structure with respect to:

- The level of achieved education of respondents is as follows: 2 (0.5%) primary schools, 64 (16%) vocational or secondary schools, 137 (34.3%) high schools, 180 (45%) university education, 17 (4.2%) masters degree or doctorate.
- The regions where respondents perform their jobs is as follows: 45 (11.3%) respondents from the region of Pomurje, 95 (23.8%) respondents from the region of Podravje, 17 (4.2%) respondents from the region of Koroška, 16 (4%) respondents from the region of Savinjska, 15 (3.8%) respondents from the region of Zasavska, 8 (2%) respondents from the region of Posavska, 46 (11.5%) respondents from the region of South-east Slovenia, 120 (30%) respondents from the region of Central Slovenia, 21 (5.2%) respondents from the region of Gorenjska, 10 (2.5%) respondents from the region of Primorsko-notranjska, 3 (0.7%) respondents from the region of Goriška and 4 (1%) respondents from the region of Coastal-Kras.
- The size of companies in which respondents are employed is as follows: 102 (25.5%) large companies, 226 (56.5%) medium-sized companies and 72 (18%) small companies.
- For our study, structure of professions (white / blue collar jobs) or gender (male / female) is not relevant, since we examine presence of stereotypes among younger and older employees and therefore age is a more important factor.

### **3.2. Research instrument**

When designing the measuring instrument for measuring the stereotypes of employees in the workplace, we referred to the following theoretical principles and research of the following authors: Chiu et al. (2001); Newton et al. (2005); Morton et al. (2005); Leibold and Voelpel (2006); Goldberg and Remsey (2005). To determine the stereotypes of older and younger employees in the workplace, the employees indicated on a 5-point Likert scale labelled from 1 to 5 their agreement to the listed statements, whereby the meaning is: 1 - strongly disagree and 5 - completely agree.

### **3.3. Statistical analysis**

We used arithmetic means and medians for answers about the stereotypes of older and younger employees. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test were used to verify the normality of the data distribution. The Kolmogorov-

Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the data are not normally distributed ( $p < 0.001$ ) for any statement that describes the stereotypes of employees, therefore, the differences between two independent samples were examined with the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test.

#### 4. 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSES

Table 1 presents the average ranks and sums of ranks for answers about stereotypes of younger and older employees on which the Mann-Whitney U test is based.

They are shown to facilitate the understanding of the test results. Table 2 presents the means, the medians and the results of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test of the age groups.

*Table 1: Average ranks and sums of ranks for answers about the stereotypes of younger and older employees*

Statement	Age group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q1: In our company we feel the presence of stereotypes about age diversity employees.	18 to 49 years	174	256.16	44571.00
	50 to 65 years	226	157.65	35629.00
	Total	400		
Q2: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less productivity.	18 to 49 years	174	87.97	15306.00
	50 to 65 years	226	287.14	64894.00
	Total	400		
Q3: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of spending more time for learning.	18 to 49 years	174	88.05	15320.00
	50 do 65 let	226	287.08	64880.00
	Total	400		
Q4: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of spending more time for doing my work or work tasks.	18 to 49 years	173	87.47	15131.50
	50 to 65 years	226	286.14	64668.50
	Total	399		
Q5: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less affection towards new developments and changes in the workplace.	18 to 49 years	174	88.87	15463.00
	50 to 65 years	226	286.45	64737.00
	Total	400		
Q6: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less motivation for work.	18 to 49 years	174	88.05	15321.50
	50 to 65 years	226	287.07	64878.50
	Total	400		

Statement	Age group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q7: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less adaptability in the workplace.	18 to 49 years	173	87.52	15141.50
	50 to 65 years	226	286.10	64658.50
	Total	399		
Q8: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less innovation and being less energetic in the workplace.	18 to 49 years	173	87.58	15152.00
	50 to 65 years	225	285.55	64249.00
	Total	398		
Q9: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of lack of knowledge.	18 to 49 years	174	311.57	54213.00
	50 to 65 years	225	113.72	25587.00
	Total	399		
Q10: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of lack of work experience.	18 to 49 years	174	312.59	54391.50
	50 to 65 years	226	114.20	25808.50
	Total	400		
Q11: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less professionalism in the workplace.	18 to 49 years	174	312.47	54369.00
	50 to 65 years	226	114.30	25831.00
	Total	400		
Q12: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less loyalty.	18 to 49 years	174	312.29	54339.00
	50 to 65 years	226	114.43	25861.00
	Total	400		
Q13: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of unreliability and immaturity in the workplace.	18 to 49 years	174	309.53	53858.50
	50 to 65 years	224	114.03	25542.50
	Total	398		

The review of average ranks (Table 1) shows that in all cases differences in the stereotypes in the workplace exist between the groups. Seven statements (Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8) reflect greater stereotypes for older employees than for younger ones. In the other five cases (Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13) the stereotypes are greater for younger than for older employees.



Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test for answers about the stereotypes of younger and older employees

	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	18 to 49 years		50 to 65 years		Total	
			Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<i>Q1: In our company we feel the presence of stereotypes about age diversity employees.</i>	9978.000	.000	4.80	5.00	4.22	4.00	4.47	5.00
<i>Q2: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less productivity.</i>	81.000	.000	1.09	1.00	4.11	4.00	2.80	3.00
<i>Q3: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of spending more time for learning.</i>	95.000	.000	1.09	1.00	4.04	4.00	2.76	3.00
<i>Q4: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of spending more time for doing my work or work tasks.</i>	80.500	.000	1.09	1.00	4.05	4.00	2.77	3.00
<i>Q5: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less affection towards new developments and changes in the workplace.</i>	238.000	.000	1.11	1.00	4.11	4.00	2.80	4.00
<i>Q6: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less motivation for work.</i>	96.500	.000	1.09	1.00	4.04	4.00	2.76	3.00
<i>Q7: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less adaptability in the workplace.</i>	90.500	.000	1.09	1.00	4.07	4.00	2.77	3.00
<i>Q8: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less innovation and being less energetic in the workplace.</i>	101.000	.000	1.10	1.00	4.12	4.00	2.80	3.00
<i>Q9: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of lack of knowledge</i>	162.000	.000	4.89	5.00	1.37	1.00	2.91	3.00
<i>Q10: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of lack of work experience.</i>	157.500	.000	4.87	5.00	1.36	1.00	2.89	3.00
<i>Q11: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less professionalism in the workplace.</i>	180.000	.000	4.87	5.00	1.35	1.00	2.89	2.00
<i>Q12: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of less loyalty.</i>	210.000	.000	4.85	5.00	1.36	1.00	2.88	2.00
<i>Q13: Based on my age I feel the stereotype of unreliability and immaturity in the workplace.</i>	342.500	.000	4.78	5.00	1.35	1.00	2.85	2.50

The arithmetic means for answers about the stereotypes of older and younger employees in Table 2 show that older employees are more susceptible to stereotypes in the workplace than younger employees. Older employees express higher agreement with being stereotyped as less productive; spending more time for learning; spending more time for doing work or work tasks; more resistant to change in the workplace; less motivated for work; less adaptable in

the workplace and less innovative and energetic in the workplace. Also the Table 2 shows, that younger employees expressed higher agreement with being stereotyped about the lack of knowledge; lack of work experience and also about less professionalism in the workplace; less loyalty; less reliability and maturity in the workplace.

Older employees often have difficulties within the workplace since they are treated differently than younger employees. Usually, employers only see obligation towards older employees rather than using them as a valuable resource since they have a lot of knowledge and experience. Age discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes about age by the employers have a significant negative impact on the working environment, well-being and state of health of the older employees. Younger employees do not have so much professional experience and expertise as older employees which causes additional strain in their workplace. Younger employees are also less committed to staying with the same company, whether they have a loyalty problem or see better opportunities elsewhere.

By using the Mann-Whitney U test, we verified whether the observed differences are statistically significant. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test in Table 2 show that the observed differences are statistically significant for all statements.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test helped answer the first research question: there are statistically significant differences in stereotypes in the workplace between older and younger employees in Slovenian companies. Our research shows that on average, all age diverse employees are faced with the problem of stereotypes in Slovenian companies. This research examines the most common and damaging stereotypes in Slovenian companies. Results of this research show that compared with younger employees, older employees express higher agreement with being stereotyped as (i) less productive; (ii) less motivated (iii) less innovative and energetic, (iv) less adaptable (v) more resistant to change, (vi) spending more time for learning, and (vii) spending more time for doing work or work tasks. Compared with older employees, younger employees are more susceptible to feel stereotypes about their lesser loyalty, professionalism, reliability, knowledge and work experience. Taking into account this answer to the second research question presented in the introduction, managers should carefully track personnel decisions to look for patterns of age discrimination. Most of the negative stereotypes about older

employees are not true. Increasing opportunities for employees of all ages to work could help reduce negative stereotyping.

The workforce in Slovenia is aging. With this comes more prevalent risk of age stereotyping within the workplace, affecting a larger group of individuals. Based on the research we find that causes for stereotypes of age diverse employees in Slovenian companies could be unawareness of importance of older and younger employees which leads to negative employer opinion about age diverse employees, and unawareness of their differences which are changing through ages. Cause for stereotypes of age diverse employees can also be in poor management of age-diverse employees. The consequences of stereotypes in the workplace are reflected in poor interpersonal relations between employees and employers. Therefore, stereotypes of older and younger employees in the workplace can harm the organization and interpersonal relationships among co-workers. They can also have a detrimental impact on an individual's self-image, confidence and abilities and detrimental impact on motivation, satisfaction, performance and productivity of older or younger employees. Stereotyping based on age can also cause friction between employees of differing generations and so decrease effectiveness of cooperation between older and younger employees in the workplace. The consequences of stereotypes of age diverse employees in the workplace can also lie in high fluctuation and high absenteeism.

Managers play an important role in eliminating stereotypes for age diverse employees in the workplace. They should recognize that encouraging age diverse employees to share information among themselves to increase company productivity and competitiveness can help avoiding disadvantages and negative consequences of stereotyping of older and younger employees in the workplace. From this perspective, it is important to encourage intergenerational cooperation and intergenerational synergy in Slovenian companies. Moreover, it is also important to encourage awareness of the significance and understanding of active aging, of promoting healthy aging, of the effort to create a society of all ages by increasing solidarity between generations in Slovenian companies. To be successful, companies must create a culture that engages its older and younger employees and must invest in programs that attract, motivate and retain all age diverse employees.

Limitation of our research is reflected in the literature that is systematically and comprehensively based on theoretical knowledge and studies examining the management of age-diverse employees. Moreover, there is shortage of this kind of literature. Our research is also limited to the field of older and younger

employees in Slovenia. We therefore see further research possibilities in the examination of how younger and older employees are faced with negative stereotypes in companies.

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#### STEREOTIPI O STARIJIM ZAPOSLENICIMA I NJIHOVA USPOREDBA S MLAĐIM ZAPOSLENICIMA U SLOVENSKIM PODUZEĆIMA

##### Sažetak

Upravljanje ljudskim resursima ima značajan učinak na raznolikost dobi zaposlenika u poduzećima. Raznolikost s obzirom na dob je sve veća na radnom mjestu, a stariji zaposlenici su sve više prisutni u radnoj snazi, zbog čega je značajno stvaranje pozitivnog radnog okruženja za zaposlenike svih dobi. U ovom se radu analiziraju razlike u stereotipima između starijih i mlađih zaposlenika u slovenskim poduzećima. Temeljni je cilj rad predstaviti značaj raznolikosti dobi zaposlenika, kao i stereotipa o njima na radnom mjestu. Rad se temelji na anketi dvije skupine zaposlenika, pri čemu su kao mlađi analizirani oni ispod 50, a kao stariji oni s više od 50 godina starosti. U analizi podataka, korišten je neparametrijski Mann-Whitney test za utvrđivanje razlika u stereotipima na radnom mjestu, za dvije navedene skupine. Rezultati pokazuju da postoje značajne razlike svih varijabli, koje opisuju stereotipe na radnom mjestu, za skupine mlađih i starijih zaposlenika u slovenskim poduzećima.

