

Intergenerational Teamwork from the Employees' Perspective

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary, exploratory study investigates age-diverse teams across different work contexts, examining how age heterogeneity is perceived and managed. While supervisors are more inclined to note age- and generation-specific behaviors, employees tend to pinpoint differences in work attitudes, professional experience, and openness to collaboration-factors deemed fundamental for successful teamwork. To capture these perspectives, we conducted 18 semi-structured interviews (six per organization) in three companies in Valais (tourism, a large-scale bakery with restaurant services, and a social-medical centre) and analyzed them using an object-oriented qualitative content analysis. The findings indicated that the form of collaboration (e.g., high interdependence vs. autonomy) and institutionally embedded exchange mechanisms are crucial to unleashing generative potential. Results indicated that informal hierarchies and shared values often outweigh the visible characteristic of age. An open culture of diversity, coupled with psychological safety, fosters knowledge and experience sharing and supports the development of transactive knowledge. This illustrates how organizational and context-specific factors shape intergenerational teamwork, revealing that age differences alone are merely one piece of the puzzle. Practical implications mainly concern establishing clear structures for learning and exchange, integrating experienced employees as mentors, and consciously fostering positive intergenerational relationships.

Keywords: Age Heterogeneity, Interdependence, Intergenerational Teams, Learning Culture

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Introduction

The research project presented here was carried out by a four-member interdisciplinary research team from three research institutes (Management, Tourism, and Social Work) at the HES-SO Valais-Wallis, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland. This study emphasizes how the work context and professional backgrounds of employees influence their intergenerational teamwork. Studies often reduce age heterogeneity to a binary distinction between young and old, inadequately considering generations Y and Z (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021; Klaffke, 2016). This research project explicitly addresses all four generations interviewed and gives equal attention and weight to each.

The Organizations

Employees from organizations in the tourism sector, private sector, and public sector were interviewed. The smallest of the three organizations is the Fondation Barry (<https://www.fondation-barry.ch/de/>). Established in 2005, the foundation took over the breeding of the famous Saint Bernard dogs from the monks at the Great Saint Bernard Pass. According to the 2022 annual report, the foundation employs approximately 40 full-time equivalents. Within the tourism sector, this foundation serves as a flagship for the canton of Valais.

The "Sozialmedizinisches Zentrum Oberwallis" (SMZO) is the second organization (<https://www.smzo.ch>) whose employees were interviewed regarding their teamwork. It is a private association providing socio-medical services under a service agreement with the canton of Valais for individuals of all ages who require care, assistance, support, or social welfare services. SMZO employs around 300 employees in 170 full-time positions. For this research project, employees from the social welfare department were interviewed.

The third organization is "Zenhäusern AG" (<https://www.chezzen.ch/>), which identifies itself as a hybrid bakery and catering company. Founded in 1982, this family-owned business operates 15 branches throughout the canton of Valais in bakery, confectionery, pastry, takeaway, catering, restaurant services, and communal catering. The company employs over 430 employees and fifteen apprentices (Zenhäusern Frères SA, 2024). Interviews were conducted with employees from the production department.

Theoretical Background

The organisations presented above are confronted with the transformations in the 21st-century working world. They employ age-diverse teams consisting of employees from the four generations currently active in the labour market. The working and organisational environments of the 21st century pose new challenges regarding forms of collaboration, organisational structures, task and role requirements, relationships between individuals and organisations, and the understanding of work itself (cf. Bachmann, 2019).

According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, the following four generations are currently active in the Swiss labour market: the Baby Boomer generation (born 1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y, also known as Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012). In 2023, Generation Y was the largest group, accounting for 35.8%, followed by Generation X at 34.9%. Generation Z (15.4%) has now surpassed the Baby Boomer generation (13.3%). The Silent Generation (1928–1945), accounting for only 0.5%, is nearly entirely phased out of the labour market (BFS, 2024) and is therefore not considered in this study.

The concept of generation involves attributing a social identity to individuals based on their socio-temporal positioning within society (as well as within the state, family, or an organization). This social identity is characterized by the fact that: "Actors orient themselves in their thinking, feeling, willing, and acting towards social perspectives for which either the year of birth, age, duration of membership in the respective society, or the interpretation of historical events are relevant" (Lüscher et al. 2010, p. 33, translation). The terms of generativity and intergenerational collaboration used in this study emphasize the human capacity, individually and collectively, to recognize and consciously consider the mutual interdependence of generations in their actions (Lüscher et al., 2010).

In organizations, workforce heterogeneity is primarily addressed through the concept of diversity management (DiM). Its objective is to establish an inclusive organizational culture where employees are valued in their diversity and uniqueness (Gurtner et al., 2017). Within this framework, age is understood as one dimension alongside gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability, religion, or worldview.

In addition to the age-diverse team composition, this research project emphasizes the dynamic nature of teams by focusing on concrete, day-to-day collaboration. The dynamics within teams are and remain highly relevant in agile, project-based teams, as well as in teams whose composition remains closely constant over extended periods of time.

«Teaming is the art of communicating and coordinating with people across boundaries—across differences in expertise, status, and geographical proximity» (...) (Edmondson, 2020, XV). Edmondson (2020) further emphasizes that organizations must foster a work culture that enables employees to develop their talents. She also highlights the importance of sharing knowledge and ideas to enable teams to realize their full potential.

Social categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that individuals classify themselves and others into their own or another group. Furthermore, people tend to affiliate with others in their own group, thus seeking homogeneity. This formation of subgroups is explained by people's tendency to acquire a positive self-identity through association with social groups. Generally, employees prefer interacting with individuals who share similar attitudes, values, and behaviours, as this provides them with validation and a sense of security (Strasser et al., 2020, p. 35).

The research tradition analysing team decision-making processes concludes that heterogeneous groups possess broader knowledge, more diverse competencies, and varying opinions, which potentially increase their ability to develop creative and innovative ideas and solutions (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Rock & Grant, 2016). A 2015 McKinsey study analysing 366 companies demonstrated that open communication and an inclusive organizational culture are essential prerequisites for successfully leveraging team diversity (Rock & Grant, 2016; McKinsey & Company, 2015). Depending on how heterogeneity is perceived, handled, and anchored within organizations, it can lead to either positive or negative effects on group effectiveness (Ries et al., 2012).

In this context, the salience or perception of age heterogeneity serves as a moderator. In recent years, heterogeneity research has examined how group members' attitudes and values influence group processes. By focusing on the perception of age differences within teams, potential stereotypes can also be identified (Ries et al., 2012). Van Dick et al. (2008) found that positively connoted heterogeneity positively influences collaboration and productivity within groups. Moreover, appreciation for heterogeneity is always specific to a single dimension and

cannot be generalized to other dimensions. From the organization's perspective, age-related heterogeneity can find expression in its values, guiding principles, practices, and symbols through the "appreciation of age-related, socialization-related, and life-situation-related diversity" (Krins & Heberling, 2016).

Intergenerational learning requires a positive attitude toward lifelong learning. Due to their social imprint, experience within the organization, age-related development, and specific life stages, different generations contribute distinct knowledge resources to learning processes. Intergenerational learning can foster changes in attitudes, experiences, methods, and transactive knowledge (Gerpott et al., 2021).

The concept of psychological safety is defined as "the belief that the work environment is safe enough to take interpersonal risks" (Edmondson, 2020). From an organizational perspective, it is relevant that psychological safety is considered a workplace characteristic to which both teams and leaders can contribute. Key factors contributing to psychological safety include the team's overall learning orientation, work design (team structure, role clarity, degree of interdependence, and degree of team autonomy), and interpersonal communication (Bachmann, 2019; Iachini, 2018). Creativity and innovation result from psychological safety (Edmondson, 2020). Aspects of interpersonal relationships, the quality of relationships among team members, and trust among team members are drivers for psychological safety within teams (Bachmann, 2019). On the management side, psychological safety primarily manifests in how power is handled. "Increasing uncertainty, the removal of structures and boundaries, as well as the rise in self-management and self-organization can only lead to greater flexibility, creativity, and innovation through successful communication and decision-making processes within the team" (Bachmann, 2019).

Research Questions

In this exploratory study, the research team focused on the following research questions:

1. How do employees in intergenerational teams describe their teamwork, working conditions, and organizational culture?
2. How do employees perceive the exchange of experience and knowledge, and how does the organization promote this exchange?
3. Can industry-specific similarities and differences in intergenerational teamwork be identified across the three organizations examined?

Methodology

Data collection was conducted using a qualitative research approach, which was suitable for the exploratory nature of this study. In a first step, the research team developed a shared interview guideline (Flick, 2016).

In each of the described organisations, six guided interviews were conducted with employees from different age groups as well as with one supervisor per organisation. In total, 18 interviews were conducted in German or French. The interviews included 10 women and eight men, with both men and women represented among the supervisors. Each of the four generations (BFS, 2024) was represented at least once. Care was taken to ensure that at least one team member additionally represented the generation of the supervisors.

After data collection, the research group collaboratively defined analysis categories. A qualitative, content-oriented analysis (Mayring, 2015) of the audio-recorded interviews led to the following thematically structured results.

Results

Interdependence in Teamwork

The various forms of collaboration are described in terms of interdependence. Interdependence refers to the mutual reliance among team members to achieve their goals (Bronstein, 2003; Iachini, 2018). In the surveyed organizations, this manifests as follows: At Zenhäusern AG, the interdependence among employees is most pronounced. The team members work together in one space and can only achieve daily objectives collectively. At Fondation Barry, teams are distributed across various locations and collaborate in a process-oriented manner. Jointly organized events guide their collaborative processes, always focusing on customer experiences on one hand and the Saint Bernard dogs on the other. At SMZO, employee collaboration is client-centered and spread across different departments. Employees must manage a high degree of autonomy in their daily work while coordinating knowledge and processes both within their team and across departments. Thus, knowledge and experience exchange play a significant role.

Depending on the teams' working conditions, different forms of communication and exchange are required. Zenhäusern AG emphasizes the importance of precisely defined work processes and employee representation, as no position can remain vacant. At Fondation Barry, fluid, highly responsive communication, along with employees' flexibility, is vital. Within SMZO, multiple platforms for mutual learning and exchange are significant.

Attitudes Towards Work

In this chapter, attitudes towards work are outlined in terms of age-specific and organizational-specific characteristics. In a second section, attitudes towards work are assessed more generally.

Regarding generational differences in attitudes towards work, supervisors in two of the three organizations provided the following insights: At SMZO, supervisors noted differences in employee loyalty towards their employer. Employees from the Baby Boomer and Generation X cohorts appear more willing to work overtime or read emails during vacations when necessary. Younger employees, however, are perceived as better at setting boundaries, being reachable only during official working days and not on their days off. Another distinction involves their attachment to their employer. Younger employees express a desire to change jobs after just 2 or 3 years of employment and consider this normal. Additionally, differences in how authority is handled are observed. Employees from Generations X and Baby Boomers are described as more loyal, conscientious, and respectful of authority.

At Zenhäusern AG, the supervisor highlights differences regarding reliability: Younger employees tend to be absent more frequently on Mondays, and it remains uncertain how long they will stay with the company. In contrast, the supervisor perceives older employees as reliable and stable.

At Fondation Barry, employees across age groups did not identify any apparent generation-specific differences in values and attitudes. Scientific studies confirm some of the differences described here, such as the Baby Boomer generation's loyalty to employers, respect for superiors, or longer tenure within the company (Klaffke, 2014, p. 39). Conversely, independence and autonomy rather than respect for authority are predominantly attributed to Generation X (Klaffke, 2014, p. 49).

Some employees expressed views on attitudes toward work that did not appear age- or generation-specific. Moreover, these statements clearly indicated that employees tend to prefer collaboration with colleagues who share similar attitudes.

Thus, in contrast to the visible characteristic of age, these are so-called invisible characteristics, specifically values, attitudes, and perceptions regarding working life (Klauffke, 2009, 2014, 2016).

In all three organizations, employees mentioned values and attitudes relevant to their daily work. At SMZO, employees show a high level of engagement with both their work and their employer. At Fondation Barry, passion for dogs appears to be the central and unifying element for most employees. At Zenhäusern AG, employees strongly emphasize the importance of cohesion and mutual support. These values mostly correlate with the specific working context. At Zenhäusern AG, close physical collaboration is the norm; employees depend on each other and achieve their daily goals only by working together as a cohesive unit. At Fondation Barry, the majority of projects, activities, and experiences revolve around Saint Bernard dogs. The dogs act as a unifying element, and projects and processes revolve around this central actor. Additionally, customer orientation is pivotal at Fondation Barry; customer experience is at the center, uniting employees' commitment to achieving goals. At SMZO, employees work in specialized departments. The tasks are highly complex and require significant coordination and communication among employees. Each employee carries a high level of personal responsibility and must continuously learn and adapt to new regulations. Thus, the specific working context clearly influences the forms of collaboration. In summary, a certain degree of homogeneity in values and attitudes can be observed within each organization. Moreover, these attitudes almost take on the character of expectations towards team colleagues. Similar attitudes are sought and welcomed, while differing attitudes are generally avoided. From the employees' perspective, the invisible characteristics of values and attitudes appear more prominently than the visible characteristics of age and the associated attitudes.

Generation-specific resources and contributions in age-diverse teams

The only explicitly highlighted age-related heterogeneity at SMZO is the difference between the relatively homogeneous team of social workers (Generation Y) and their supervisor, who belongs to Generation X. Without explicitly naming these differences, one social worker describes the advantages of this different perspective:

"The advantage I see is precisely the different ways of thinking and experiences that everyone brings. Currently, our team leader is from another generation, whereas we are quite similar otherwise. I greatly appreciate having someone around who thinks differently and sets other priorities." (Interviewee, translated from German).

At Fondation Barry, the representative of the Baby Boomer generation explicitly highlights the importance of her life experience. Additionally, she mentions learning outside the internet as a distinguishing factor compared to her younger colleagues. A representative of Generation Y points out her computer skills as a specific resource: "I am indeed good with computers, software, and so on, and often I can provide recommendations and advice; I show my colleagues how to use certain programs or how to handle them" (Interviewee, translated from French). On the other hand, younger colleagues also represent fresh ideas and novelty within the organization: "For instance, when young people want something fresher, more fun, and older people want something more conventional, there are sometimes minor disagreements" (Interviewee, translated from French).

At Zenhäusern AG, employees clearly differentiate between age, tenure, and expertise. A representative of Generation Z, aged 24, describes it as follows: "I am one of the youngest in the company and I have been here for almost ten years, so I have much experience" (Interviewee, translated from French). Another employee

emphasizes the importance of versatility and the potential for deployment in various roles: "For me, it is easier; although I joined later, I am polyvalent (...). I have worked at different stations in the bakery, whereas some here have stayed at the same post for 16 to 20 years" (Interviewee, translated from French). An interviewee refers to this versatility explicitly as the role of an "all-rounder". Only a few employees can be deployed at various posts: "You need to be able to do everything; if something happens, you must be ready to fill in for another person. Only a few of us can do this" (Interviewee, translated from French). Furthermore, another interviewee notes an age-related difference regarding employees bringing new ideas into the workplace: "The younger ones, who are new to the working world, tend to be more open to new things or ask questions about why we do things the way we do" (Interviewee, translated from French).

Salience of Age Heterogeneity and Its Influence on Teamwork

SMZO employees primarily describe the perception of age and "age-specific" behavior. Openness towards other generations is highly valued and appears to bridge the so-called "age gap": "I have never had the impression that this somehow led to friction. This also has something to do with our team leader, who shows openness towards us. He is young at heart, perhaps privately as well. He is very open towards our generation as well. It is a good interaction" (Interviewee, translated from German). Another interviewee expresses it as follows: "Well, I have to say, there is also an older social worker (...). However, he is modern and cheerful, and you can feel it" (Interviewee, translated from German). The representative of the Baby Boomer generation also remarks: "Eh, no, I hope, or rather, my feeling is that the age difference exists only on paper, but in everyday interactions with my colleagues, it's not present" (Interviewee, translated from German). The importance of nurturing intergenerational collaboration and the general approach towards interacting with members of other generations seem to affect intergenerational teamwork positively. One interviewee emphasizes the importance of actively engaging with younger generations and maintaining these connections. She also references her personal life situation as a mother of two adults, highlighting how she actively engages with Generation Z in her private life.

Work Experience as a Basis for Informal Hierarchy

Interviewees from SMZO repeatedly referenced colleagues who have been with the organization longer, thus possessing greater knowledge and experience. These informal hierarchies seem to be quite evident in employees' awareness. Employees are more likely to seek advice from someone who has been working there longer or who possesses specialized training (e.g., an insurance expert among social workers). One interviewee describes this clearly: "Well, I am certainly the one who brings stability to the team due to my work experience. Because I am also very routine-oriented in my daily work here, I believe I am a bit like a rock in the surf, providing support, especially helping new employees whenever questions arise" (Interviewee, translated from German). Among social workers, work experience is closely linked to expertise. The following quote expresses this clearly: "Uh, the basic qualifications are relatively similar; I think we all have a bachelor's degree. After that, there are differences depending on where you studied and what specializations you chose, perhaps resulting in slight knowledge differences. However, this is minimally noticeable. I have the impression that what makes a bigger impact is the work experience—what situations you have encountered and the knowledge you have been able to acquire from them" (Interviewee, translated from German). Informal hierarchies can also be

perceived as problematic, particularly when individuals insist on their advantage in knowledge and experience: "And the other person has just been here longer than the two of us. We both started at the same time. However, this person feels they know more, although at the moment we all know the same" (Interviewee, translated from German). At Zenhäusern AG, age-specific differences appear primarily related to the physical condition of employees: "With age, it becomes more difficult to maintain the working pace. The job is quite physical, and the rhythm is intense, so over time, you cannot keep up anymore; that is normal. The hands do not want to anymore" (Interviewee, translated from French). Another interviewee conveys the perception that younger employees have greater physical stamina. In comparison, older employees have greater mental resilience: "I think at an older age, you can bring in more experience than someone who is twenty years old, perhaps also greater perseverance when new tasks arise. Younger people sometimes tend to give up quicker" (Interviewee, translated from French). No definitive statements regarding the salience of age heterogeneity emerged from the interviews conducted at the Fondation Barry.

Psychological Safety

At SMZO, the topic of psychological safety is exemplified in the onboarding process for new employees: Each new employee receives a mentor ("Gotti" or "Getti") as support at the beginning of their employment: "It takes about a year until you are somewhat settled in. That has been our experience—after a year as a social worker, you start to understand how things work, you know the law, and you have discovered various work tools. The idea behind having a 'Gotti' or 'Getti' (mentor) is that someone is assigned to accompany me regularly throughout my everyday work, offering support. If I have case-related questions, I can go to this person's office to discuss them and receive close supervision and guidance. (...) Here, I can also ask silly questions that I would not dare ask in the team" (Interviewee, translated from German).

The presence of psychological safety is also evident in the structured communication channels and team interactions at SMZO. Social workers, for instance, engage in a daily morning exchange to discuss cases. Additionally, there is a monthly "Jour Fix," a meeting where each employee has a one-on-one discussion with their supervisor, focusing primarily on the employee's well-being within the organization. Employees are closely supported and embedded across multiple communication layers, and supervisors are readily available to address questions or concerns. Supervisors proactively encourage employees to take on new responsibilities, such as mentoring apprentices or, as demonstrated by an apprentice's daughter, exploring opportunities in different sectors when they show openness to new challenges. Another structure that promotes collaboration among employees across teams is the "Tandem" arrangement. As aptly described by one supervisor, this is a cooperative form of working designed to address interface issues: "We have the Tandem arrangement in our organization. This means every social worker is paired with a specific administrative assistant who supports me as a social worker with administrative tasks" (Interviewee, translated from German).

The influence of team meetings and communication structures on creativity within teams is described as follows: "We have a culture where, if something new needs to be implemented or if a new challenge arises, we form working groups comprising members from various teams—typically involving representatives from long-term counseling and the intake team. We are usually given some guidelines, often cantonal guidelines within the framework of social welfare law, but we still have significant freedom to design solutions. These working groups usually do not include team

leaders, which I greatly appreciate, as it allows us to work practically and shape solutions independently" (Interviewee, translated from German). Such working groups are consciously encouraged by management, who generally remain as uninvolved as possible: "For this reason, we usually form working groups across different teams. We moved away from the practice of my colleague and me developing an idea and then presenting it to the teams, going back and forth. Now we define, sometimes even self-organized working groups, with a clear task. For example, I might initially take the lead, start the process, attend meetings occasionally, and then let the group work independently on the issue. Eventually, their task is to concretely describe a product, a process, or an approach" (Interviewee, translated from German). The atmosphere within the Zenhäusern AG team appears very collegial, with personal conversations occurring during work: "We work in groups of four or five around a table. Someone shares something interesting; we are happy. We do not just talk about work but also about what we did last night, what we ate, (...)" (Interviewee, translated from French). One employee highlights a good working atmosphere as particularly important: "The good atmosphere at work is a priority. For me, the work itself is not the most important thing, but if the atmosphere is tense, (...) I do not want that" (Interviewee, translated from French). Within this environment, employees feel confident to express their views: "We can always voice our opinions, and they are appreciated by our supervisor" (Interviewee, translated from French). The supervisor describes this dynamic as follows: "Generally, I make the decisions, but many people suggest various things. I reflect, and there are excellent, top ideas!" (Interviewee, translated from French). Interviewees from the Fondation Barry did not specifically address psychological safety.

Discussion

In this study, the influence of the work context on teamwork emerges prominently. The concept of interdependence addresses the various forms of collaboration by focusing on mutual dependence in work processes and the associated achievement of objectives. This mutual dependence is particularly evident in teams such as Zenhäusern AG or Fondation Barry. The workflows at SMZO, by contrast, are characterized by greater autonomy. Here, employees are required to perform individual work steps autonomously and to seek relevant expert knowledge from colleagues when questions arise. Therefore, commonalities and differences in collaboration within age-diverse teams seem to depend less on sectoral logic (tourism, social work, private sector) and more on the degree of interdependence within age-diverse teamwork.

Intergenerational relationships in the surveyed teams are mostly positively connoted, seen as mutually enriching and complementary to one's own thinking and actions. Age-specific differences in attitudes toward work are highlighted exclusively by supervisors. Employees do address attitudes and values regarding work, but do not associate them explicitly with the visible attribute of age. Similar or differing work attitudes can have either a unifying or divisive effect on teams. Employees describe how they prefer working with like-minded individuals and indicate areas where friction and conflicts arise with colleagues who hold differing attitudes. Although employees' attitudes toward work do not appear to be explicitly age-specific, this aspect is clearly linked to collaboration and group dynamics.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that employees do not particularly highlight age-related differences. Instead, they perceive the importance of work experience within the organization as a distinguishing feature and as an informal hierarchy among colleagues. Work experience is chiefly assessed positively by employees, except when certain experienced employees insist too much on this advantage.

Several initiatives by supervisors at SMZO demonstrate how team diversity is actively promoted to facilitate mutual learning, initiate new projects, and consequently enable innovative solutions. The interface problems arising from the organization's complexity are specifically addressed, for example, by providing new employees with a mentor and by forming tandem partnerships between administrative staff and social workers. Additionally, supervisors do not merely rely on employees reaching out when needed; instead, monthly meetings are proactively scheduled as status reviews. This actively ensures employees can discuss their work situations openly due to the institutional embedding of these learning processes, which are oriented intergenerationally among other dimensions; a culture of mutual learning can be fostered, contributing to changes in attitudes and the development of transactive knowledge (Gerpott et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The present study examines three organizations from the tourism, industry, and social and healthcare services sectors, all located in the Canton of Valais, Switzerland. It relies on qualitative interviews for data collection. As qualitative research methods naturally offer limited generalizability, future research would benefit from including additional industries and organizations from other regions or countries to enable international comparisons. Similarly, longitudinal studies could be conducted—for example, to analyze the long-term impacts of mentoring by experienced employees and to foster positive intergenerational relationships consciously. In a subsequent step, it would be valuable to examine in more detail the effects on knowledge transfer, team dynamics, and the structural conditions for continuous learning, thereby developing a deeper understanding of how diversity-oriented leadership cultures and psychological safety can sustainably influence innovation capacity and collaboration in age-diverse teams.

The study's findings highlight potential avenues for further research. At the same time, they provide valuable insights concerning the research questions: They illustrate (1) how employees in intergenerational teams describe their teamwork, working conditions, and organizational culture (Research Question 1), (2) how the exchange of experience and knowledge is perceived by employees and promoted by the organization (Research Question 2), and (3) which sector-specific similarities and differences crystallize in intergenerational collaboration within the three organizations studied (Research Question 3).

Open, intergenerational communication and mentoring programs come into focus to simultaneously deepen knowledge exchange and foster potential innovation impulses. The statements of employees reveal that the visible characteristic of age takes on a new dimension, with age heterogeneity becoming more salient. Although one cannot influence age itself, behaviors and attitudes towards one's own age, as well as interactions with representatives of other generations, appear to be actionable options that can be consciously influenced. This illustrates an expanded scope of action, where openness towards different generations is considered more important than merely the age characteristic itself. What emerges clearly here is the interest and curiosity toward others, as well as the active pursuit of encounters and exchanges.

This aspect illustrates a culture of diversity that extends far beyond the dimension of age. In this sense, precisely such an open culture is considered a key determinant for knowledge and experience exchange, thereby sustainably influencing both everyday collaboration and, in the long term, an organization's innovative strength.

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