

Generational intelligence of Polish managers

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is the systemization of knowledge concerning generational intelligence and its role in management as well as the diagnosis of generational intelligence of Polish managers. Within the research the method of critical analysis of literature as well as the authors' own design of a questionnaire gauging the generational intelligence was utilized. The study, which was carried out on a sample of 200 representatives of upper and middle management staff, showed that the level of participants' generational intelligence is higher than average with significant variance of results in individual subscales. Respondents obtained high scores in subscales: "awareness of differences between generations and their acceptance" and "cooperation and knowledge sharing". At the same time they have problems connected to collaborating with people belonging to a younger age group which manifests itself as a relatively lower willingness to utilize knowledge possessed by that group of workers, a low comprehension level of vocabulary used by them as well as decreased understanding of the perspectives and attitudes of younger workers. This is further exacerbated with negative emotions experienced by managers in situations when someone younger than them can do things better.

Key words

generational intelligence, managers, generational diversity

Introduction

The article is based on the assumption that a high level of generational intelligence of managers is a key determinant of an organization's effective management of generational diversity. It is, to a large degree, up to them whether generational differences will be transformed into intangible capital and become an organization's source of competitive advantage. The aim of the present article is the systemization of knowledge concerning generational intelligence and its role in management as well as the diagnosis of generational intelligence of Polish managers.

Research presented within this publication has been conducted with the participation of 200 managers using a tool developed by the author to gauge generational intelligence. On account of not having achieved full representativeness within the study sample the results are treated as preliminary. Conclusions formulated upon them require further, more in-depth study.

1. Generational intelligence in respect to the concept of human intelligence – epistemological analysis

Intelligence is the general ability to adapt to new conditions and performance of new tasks through the utilization of thought facilities [Grabner, Stern and Neubauer 2003, p. 90]. From the perspective of management, it is popular to treat intelligence as a set of mental abilities which allows an individual to efficiently use acquired knowledge and effective reaction to new tasks and situations [Turcza, 2008, pp. 71-79]. Thus understood intelligence is a key factor of professional skill, a basis for improving competence and professionalism [Moczyłowska, 2018]. Generational intelligence should be defined as a specific type of human intelligence founded on general intelligence. Using the terminology concerning theory of intelligence developed by R.J. Sternberg [2000] it could be said that the organization of cognitive processes responsible for the perception and understanding of generational similarities and differences is a key element of generational intelligence. It is the acquisition, organization and processing of information to create knowledge based on the identification of attributes of our own generation and those of other people's as well as the ability to construct knowledge about oneself as a representative of a particular age group and its subsequent utilization to identify and solve problems resulting from generational diversity [Moczyłowska, 2018]. Generational intelligence is the capability to reflect and initiate activities resulting from the understanding our own flow of life as well as that of others, the understanding of stories of family and community within their social and cultural contexts Biggs,

Lowenstein, 2011, p. 12]. Looking at the problem from the perspective of management science, the author suggests the assumption that generational intelligence of a person is his ability to effectively function within a generationally diverse environment. This concerns organizational environments as well as all others in which the individual finds himself surrounded by generational diversity. The most important components providing insight into a person's generational intelligence are interpersonal skills (with special consideration for communication) as well as tolerance toward diversity or flexibility of behavior adequate to the specific character of requirements within a multigenerational environment. Generational intelligence permits the recognition and understanding of dissimilar manner of thinking and reaction to different patterns of behavior exhibited by representatives of various age groups. Having this type of intelligence, thanks to the individual's knowledge and his ability to use it to act in accordance with the expectations of representatives of other generations, limits the number of barriers, especially communication and mental barriers.

An individual's generational intelligence can be divided into three interconnected and mutually complementary components:

- knowledge – or familiarity with generational differences and their conditionings;
- cognition – the ability to identify and interpret behaviors, gestures and declarations of people representing a different age group within the context of a particular situation. This is also a capability of utilizing acquired knowledge in specific social situations;
- behaviors – involve adequate reactions to the behavior of representatives of different generations. This ability is especially significant on account of the fact that it concerns the automatic and uninhibited adjustment to the other party and the conscious resignation from the stereotypical judgment of other people on account of their age [Moczyłowska, 2018].

An important element in the development of generational intelligence is the development of an individual's generational identity. With age, a person's life experience becomes more and more intense and complex. The experience of our own maturity followed by aging most often signifies experiencing the diversity of perceptions displayed by representatives of various generations. As has been stressed by S. Biggs and A. Lowenstein [2011, p. 3], generational intelligence requires an individual to qualify himself into a particular age group and assume a posture of tolerance toward different generational groups. It encompasses the ability to understand other people and their motives for behaving a certain way but within generational experiences including historical experience as well as social conditions

shaping the attitudes of people from a given age group. It additionally requires a person to identify with his own generation, particularly the understanding and sharing of the same cultural and language codes or behavior patterns. The concept of generational intelligence is based on a conviction proven by science that, despite diversity resulting from the individualism of personalities, people are connected by a strong bond which is the consequence of shared experiences relating to a given time and place [Lipka and Król, 2017; Wątroba, 2017]. The difference of these experiences cannot, however, become a basis on which people are judged hence generational intelligence allows the establishment of intergenerational ties or the feeling of an economic and cultural (or in families - biological) connection to representatives of other generations which breeds a positive emotional attitude toward them. It determines the willingness to perceive their positive attributes and behaviors. This also concerns interpersonal relationships within the environment of an organization [Biggs, Haapala and Lowenstein, 2011, pp. 1107-1124].

An individual's generational intelligence can be presented as a model comprised of the following components: metacognitive generational intelligence, behavioral generational intelligence, motivational generational intelligence and cognitive generational intelligence [see Figure 1].

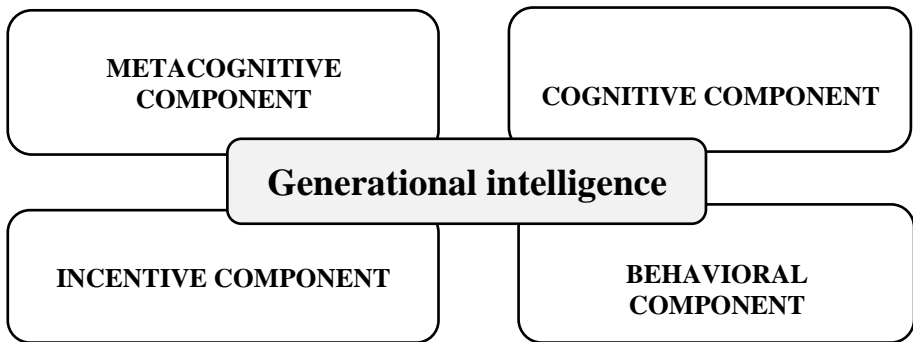


Fig. 1. Components of human generational intelligence
Source: developed by the authors.

Through metacognitive cultural intelligence the individual can understand similarities and differences between people conditioned by their membership in a given generational group and being the result of varying social experiences. It can additionally be divided into two complementary components: metacognitive knowledge (the knowing of how to make use of acquired knowledge in various social situations) and metacognitive experience (how to use the experience gained in future

interactions with representatives of different generations). Metacognitive generational intelligence reflects mental processes which are utilized to acquire and comprehend knowledge about other age groups. People who have a high level of generational knowledge show the ability to collect and process information that is important in the context of generational diversity. They are not only aware of how they can improve their abilities to interpret the behaviors of representatives of various generations but know how to make use of the knowledge gained during direct contacts. This component of intelligence is responsible for the level of formal intelligence and a person with such intelligence knows how to act in a given situation prior to their interaction with members of other generations.

The cognitive component is the second element of the generational intelligence model. It permits the perception of norms, values or behaviors as well as differences between generations. Cognitive generational intelligence is the knowledge concerning not only generational differences but also similarities between age groups. People with a high level of this component of generational intelligence have highly developed generation related mind maps. They have the ability to, independently of others, analyze changing over time historical, economic, political and cultural experiences as well as predict some behaviors resulting from generational diversity. The cognitive component requires being critically self-aware of age as a factor which is important in social relationships, including the relative ability to recognize our own generational personality and having an understanding of relations between generations [Biggs, Haapala and Lowenstein, 2011].

The next element of generational intelligence is the motivation to interact and becoming familiar with the differing norms and values of other generations. Having knowledge regarding the norms and behaviors of various age groups is insufficient if there is a lack of motivation to utilize this information in practice [Moczydłowska and Kowalewski, 2019]. Motivational generational intelligence determines the level to which a person believes or expects that he is capable of effectively interacting and cooperating with differently aged people. It stimulates effort and energy to get to know and understand people from other generations.

The last part of the generational intelligence model is made up of the behavioral component. This is the individual ability to act effectively in contacts made within generationally diverse environments. Behavioral generational intelligence is responsible for the flexible adaptation to the behaviors of the other party which is the result of understanding the knowledge about other people and its correct interpretation. In contacts with the representatives of other generations nonverbal behaviors, a "silent language" which subtly and often subconsciously provide understanding, are very important. The learning of this "silent language" makes

interactions easier and can be a decisive element of good cooperation. It also requires showing respect and acceptance to the differences resulting from differing value systems and preferences being the consequence of divergent life experiences of individual generations.

2. Research methodology

The goal of the study was to provide a diagnosis of the level of generational intelligence of managers employed in companies operating within Poland. The authors formulated the following research problems:

1. What is the general level of generational intelligence of Polish managers?
2. What is the level of generational intelligence of managers in individual subscales (sense of generational identity, the ability to assume the perspective of other age groups, awareness of differences between generations and their acceptance, cooperation and knowledge sharing, communication with representatives of varying age groups and coping with emotions resulting from intergenerational contacts)?
3. Is there a difference between the level of the generational intelligence of women and men?

Research into the generational intelligence of managers was carried out from October 2017 to June 2018. The authors used a personally developed questionnaire designed to measure generational intelligence [Moczydłowska, 2018]. The questionnaire considered the following subscales:

- sense of generational identity,
- ability to assume the perspective of other age groups,
- awareness of differences between generations and their acceptance,
- cooperation and knowledge sharing,
- communication with representatives of different age groups,
- coping with emotions resulting from intergenerational contacts.

Since it is a commonly utilized and recognized manner of measuring reliability and an equivalent of the average of all possible half-reliabilities for a given test, the Cronbach Alfa coefficient was used to calculate the reliability of individual subscales (<http://nauka.metodolog.pl>). Respondents were asked to assess the veracity of 30 statements on a five-level Likert's scale where the intensity of agreement is measured using an ordinal bipolar scale described verbally and numerically [Brzezińska and Brzeziński, 2011].

Studies into the generational intelligence of managers were conducted on a sample of 200 managers, including 120 men and 80 women. The participants were

MBA students (Executive MBA degree program at the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw as well as Management MBA and Energetics MBA programs at the Lazarski University). The selection of the study sample was deliberate: "The technique of the deliberate selection consists of identifying units of population which should be included in the sample by a researcher choosing on the basis of his knowledge and experience" [Miszczyk and Walasek, 2013, p. 100]. In this case the sample consisted of middle and upper level management with management experience not shorter than 4 years. Conducting the study with MBA students allows, within a short period of time, access to a relatively large group of managers but, at the same time, limits the representativeness of the sample because it is made up solely of people with very high professional qualifications. Furthermore, the share of managers aged 60+ is relatively low (see graph 1) since they rarely attend post-graduate studies. For this reason the results formulated on the basis of the presented study are not treated as reflecting laws but rather indicate trends and tendencies.

Management staff considered in the study represents enterprises (200) located throughout Poland with a clear dominance of the Masovian Voivodeship (41%).

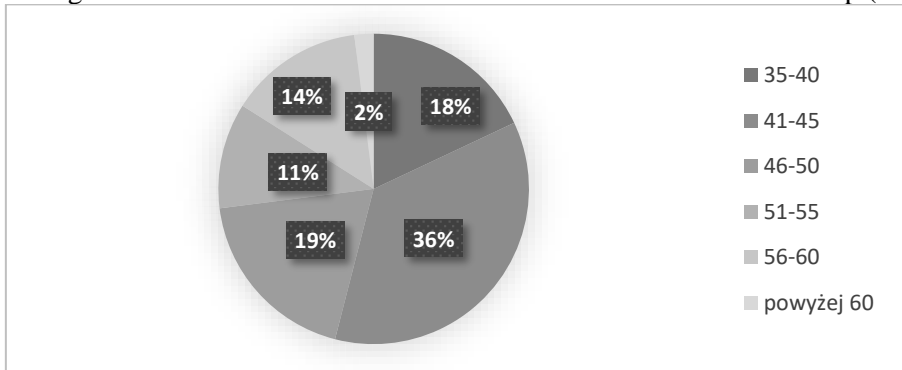


Fig. 2. Age of participating managers (n = 200)

Source: developed by the author.

All respondents were over 35 years old. On account of the lack of the representative share of all age groups within the sample, age was not treated as a variable considered within statistical analysis. The study group was dominated by people representing medium and large enterprises. Management staff employed by small companies constituted only 16% of the study sample. This selection mainly resulted from the characteristics of small enterprises which usually do not require the employment of management staff. Other attributes of micro and small enterprises significant in the context of the study included the combination of management

responsibilities with ownership, family nature of most companies within this group and flat organizational structure [Leszczewska, 2016, p. 39; Pocztowski and Pauli, 2013, pp. 10-12].

3. Generational intelligence of managers – results of a preliminary scientific inquiry

One of the most important elements of generational intelligence is the sense of belonging to a particular generational group established on the foundation of accepting the existence of generations and the conscious identifying with historical and social experiences of one's own generation. Table 1 presents the study results concerning management staff within this area. Managers exhibit relatively low level of generational identity expressed in establishing relationships with people representing the same generational group. Although they declare having knowledge regarding events which shaped the way of thinking and the hierarchy of values of their generation (average of 4.24) as well as agree to the thesis that shared generational experiences draw people together (average score of 4.4) they express their own sense of generational ties to their peers only on a barely satisfactory level (same score for women and men). Their inclination to share memories with members of their own generation is also below average.

Tab. 1. The sense of generational belonging subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD²
Recognition that shared generational experiences draw people together	4.5	4.3	4.4	0.696	0.485
Awareness of the most important events which have shaped the value system and way of thinking of my generation	4.4	4.1	4.24	0.588	0.346
Inclination to sharing memories with representatives of my own generation	3.2	3.7	3.48	1.176	1.383
Feeling of a strong generational bond with peers	3.2	3.2	3.2	0.852	0.727

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

The answers of respondents concerning their ability to assume the perspectives of other age groups vary immensely (see Table 2). During the analysis of questions related to this subscale it has been determined that the gender of participants does differentiate the generational intelligence indicator in a statistically significant way.

Tab. 2. The ability to assume the perspective of other age groups subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD ²
Seeking of effective motivational tools important to an employee at a given age	3.9	4.3	4.12	0.820	0.672
Knowledge concerning matters to which people older than the respondent are sensitive to	4.3	3.8	4.0	0.804	0.646
Seeking to better understand older coworkers, imagining how the situation looks from their point of view	4.1	3.9	3.96	0.665	0.443
Considering the point of view of different aged coworkers during decision making	4.0	3.9	3.92	0.981	0.963
Seeking to better understand younger coworkers, imagining how the situation looks from their point of view	3.4	3.6	3.52	0.703	0.494

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

Participating managers gave highest marks to their ability to seek effective motivational tools important to employees of a given age (average score for the entire sample was at 4.12) where men assessed their abilities in this respect statistically higher. In turn, women respondents assessed their knowledge concerning matters to which people older than them are sensitive to much higher than men. Other indicators testifying to the abilities of managers to assume the perspective of other age groups scored below a 4.0. Respondents of both sexes gave the lowest marks to their ability to gain a better understanding of younger coworkers and imagining how the situation looks from their point of view (the average only reached a level of 3.53). This is an alarming tendency since the lack of willingness to try to understand younger workers may lower a manager's ability to effectively utilize this group's competence potential.

Among all the considered components of generational intelligence of management staff the highest results were received in the "awareness of differences between generations and their acceptance" subscale (see Table 3).

Tab. 3. Awareness of differences between generations and their acceptance subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD²
The acceptance of the right of different aged people to have a different perception of the same problems	4.4	4.3	4.32	0.80	0.462
Ease in pointing out the strengths of older workers	4.3	4.3	4.3	0.533	0.284
Seeing the differences in the professional attitudes of people being at a different age than me	4.4	4.2	4.3	0.779	0.606
Accepting as natural that age influences the value system of a person	4.2	4.1	4.16	0.837	0.701
Ease in pointing out the strengths of younger workers	3.7	4.0	3.88	0.715	0.511

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

People taking part in the study rather highly (an average of 4.3) assessed their acceptance of the right of people of different ages to have a varying perspective of the same problems and their ability to see differences in professional attitudes of different aged coworkers. The evaluation of their ability to point out strengths of older employees was at a similar level. It is interesting, however, that respondents' appraisal of their ability to point out the strengths of younger workers (average of 3.88) was much lower. Here again the gender of participants turned out to be a statistically significant variable with women managers assessing this skill at a much lower level. At the same time, respondents deemed it to be natural that age influences a person's value system.

From the perspective of management, the most important indicator of generational intelligence of managers is their readiness to cooperate with people of different ages as well as their capability to share their knowledge and the utilization of the knowledge possessed by coworkers representing varying generational groups (see Table 4).

Tab. 4. Cooperation and knowledge sharing subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD ²
Ability to utilize the knowledge of younger coworkers	3.8	3.8	3.8	0.804	0.646
Ability to utilize the knowledge of older coworkers	4.4	4.3	4.36	0.798	0.637
Willingness to share knowledge and experience with younger people	4.4	4.1	4.2	0.804	0.646
Flexibility in adapting one's working style to the age of coworkers or customers	4.0	3.9	3.92	0.748	0.559

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

Analysis of study results leads to the conclusion that members of management staff rather highly appraise their ability to use the knowledge of older coworkers (an average of 4.36), however, their self-assessment related to their capacity to utilize the knowledge of younger associates is relatively low (3.8). In regard to both measures there are no statistically significant differences in the answers of women and men as well as managers representing varying age groups. Participants judged their capability to flexibly adapt their working style to the age of coworkers or customers as good.

The ability to communicate effectively with representatives of different age groups is a very important element of generational intelligence. It is the foundation of relationships, the shaping of interpersonal bonds and building the climate of cooperation. Results related to the "communication with representatives of different age groups" subscale show a large internal variance in the self-assessment of managers in this area. Respondents (especially women) gauged their communicational capabilities highly (average for the entire sample reached 4.44 but for women 4.8), however, in the appraisal of detailed indicators concerning communication capabilities they are decidedly more self-critical (see Table 5).

The assumption that the understanding of vocabulary used by representatives of different generational groups is a condition for effective communication was employed within the study. Although management staff declares that they understand the meanings conveyed by significantly older people well (the average for the entire population was at a level of 4.0), they assess their ability to understand the words used by people who are considerably younger than them decidedly lower (average of 3.4).

Tab. 5. Communication with representatives of different age groups subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD²
Ability to communicate effectively with different aged people	4.8	4.2	4.44	0.574	0.329
Understanding of words used by significantly older people	4.3	3.8	4.0	0.899	0.808
Ability to adapt speaking manner to people whose age varies significantly from me	4.1	3.5	3.72	0.965	0.931
Having experienced situations where some jokes or mental shortcuts are understood only by the respondent's own generation	3.6	3.6	3.6	0.804	0.646
Understanding of words used by significantly younger people	4.2	2.9	3.4	1.333	1.777

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

The variable which clearly differentiates managers' answers is their gender. All indicators of ability for intergenerational communication are markedly higher for women managers. Especially large variance has been noted in the appraisal of the "understanding of words used by significantly younger people" criterion where the men's score is well below satisfactory (2.9). Male participants also gauged as relatively low (an average score of 3.5) their ability to adapt their speaking manner to people of different ages.

Table 6 presents study results concerning the emotional component of generational intelligence. It has been decided that it is expressed through successfully dealing with emotions which naturally occur while working in a generationally diverse team.

Tab. 6. Dealing with emotions which occur during intergenerational contacts subscale

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD²
Anxiousness in situations where it is necessary to work with significantly older people	4.3	4.07	4.16	0.677	0.459

Measures	Women average (n = 80)	Men average (n = 120)	Sample average (n = 200)	SD	SD ²
Anxiousness in situations where it is necessary to work with significantly younger people	4.2	3.9	4.04	0.724	0.524
Ability to not show impatience when significantly older coworkers have problems with understanding or completing a task	3.9	3.5	3.68	0.973	0.947
Uneasiness when the respondent cannot do well something that significantly younger workers can	3.5	3.0	3.2	0.899	0.808

Source: developed by the authors on the basis of results of GI testing.

Majority of respondents assessed as rather not true the statement "I feel anxious when it is necessary to work in a team with significantly older people". Negative emotions occur slightly more frequently in respondents having to work with individuals who are markedly younger. At the same time, study participants admitted that they show impatience when substantially older coworkers have problems with understanding or completing a task. Management staff respondents considered in the study confessed that they feel uneasy if they cannot do something that significantly younger workers can do well. An average score concerning the ability to deal with this type of situation, for the entire sample, reached 3.2, but there is a statistically significant variance between representatives of different sexes.

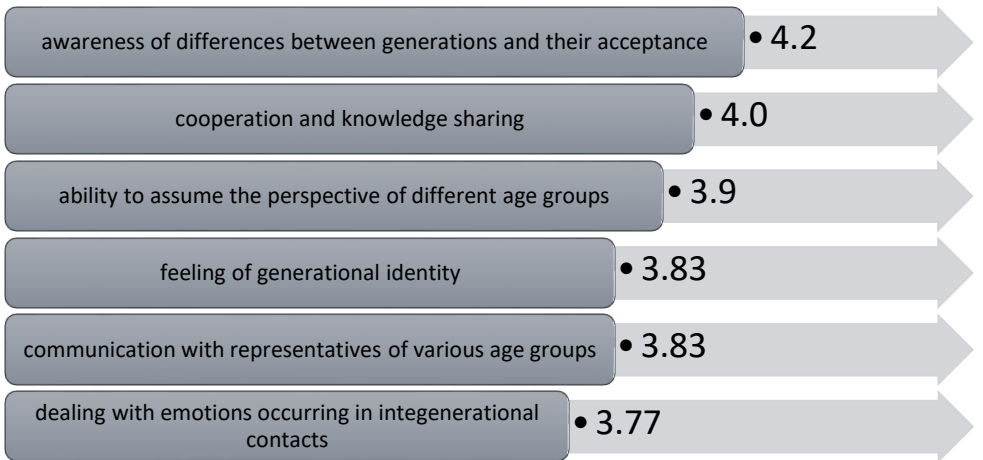


Fig. 3. Distribution of Likert scale averages in subscales of generational intelligence

Source: developed by the authors.

Analysis of Likert's scale averages for the entire study sample shows that managers most highly appraise their awareness and acceptance of generational diversity. Slightly lower is their readiness to cooperate in a generationally diverse environment and their willingness to share knowledge. All other components of generational intelligence show relatively small differentiation and are marginally below the score of 4.0.

Conclusions

On the basis of obtained results it can be concluded that managers taking part in the study achieved scores testifying to their higher-than-average generational intelligence. At the same time, however, it should be noted that they do admit to having problems in regard to working with people from a younger age group. This is manifested in the relatively lower willingness to use the knowledge of such workers, comparably weak understanding of vocabulary used by younger associates and in low readiness to understand the viewpoint and organizational attitudes of younger coworkers. This picture is completed by negative emotions felt by managers in situations when people who are younger than them can do something better.

Women occupying management positions attain higher scores in all areas covered by the study. They have significantly higher abilities than men to communicate with representatives of various generational groups. They deal better with emotions occurring during intergenerational contacts, display a higher readiness to share knowledge and are more open to cooperation. Male research participants, on the other hand, claim to have a better ability than women to seek effective motivational tools important to a worker at a given age and see the strengths of younger coworkers.

On account of the specific character of the study sample the relation between the age of managers and their generational intelligence was not analyzed. This issue requires further in-depth study. It is also a clear source of limitations for the formulated conclusions.

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Inteligencja generacyjna polskich menedżerów

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest usystematyzowanie wiedzy dotyczącej inteligencji generacyjnej i jej roli w zarządzaniu oraz diagnoza tego zjawiska wśród polskich menedżerów. W badaniach wykorzystano metodę krytycznej analizy literatury oraz autorski projekt kwestionariusza mierzącego inteligencję generacyjną. Badanie, które zostało przeprowadzone na próbie 200 przedstawicieli wyższej i średniej kadry kierowniczej, wykazało, że poziom inteligencji generacyjnej uczestników jest wyższy od przeciętnego przy znacznej zmienności wyników w poszczególnych podskalach. Respondenci uzyskali wysokie wyniki w podskalach: „świadomość różnic międzypokoleniowych i ich akceptacja” oraz „współpraca i dzielenie się wiedzą”. Jednocześnie mają problemy ze współpracą z osobami z młodszej grupy wiekowej, co objawia się relatywnie mniejszą chęcią korzystania z posiadanej przez tę grupę pracowników wiedzy, niskim poziomem rozumienia używanego przez nich słownictwa oraz mniejszym zrozumieniem perspektywy i postaw młodszych pracowników. Sytuację dodatkowo potęgują negatywne emocje odczuwane przez menedżerów w sytuacjach, gdy ktoś młodszy od nich może robić rzecz lepiej.

Słowa kluczowe

inteligencja generacyjna, menedżerowie, różnorodność pokoleniowa