

THE MANAGEMENT OF GENERATIONAL CONFLICT AT WORK IN THE ROMANIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Leaders are looking for solutions to manage the multigenerational work force efficiently and optimally in a permanently fluctuating and changing environment. Four generations are active on the current labour market: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z. As humans make up the most valuable resource of a company, this paper aims at highlighting one of the main problems faced by today's leaders: generational diversity and generational conflicts at work. In November 2021-March 2022, we conducted this applied research on 86 respondents from Sibiu, Braşov, Alba, Mureş, and Cluj, and identified some of the causes that may lead to professional conflicts between employees belonging to different generations, including: the different values of employees of different ages, their different viewpoints, stress, miscommunication, age differences, and unacceptance of other opinions.

Keywords: *generations, teams, professional generational conflict, Z generation*

JEL classification: *M12, O15*

1. Introduction

We noticed that leaders find the topic of generations in the workplace as topical and a challenge. We started from questions such as:

- (1) How many generations does the present labour market include?**
- (2) How many generations work together in companies?**
- (3) What are the characteristics of each generation and how are they different?**

Throughout our study, we came to the conclusion that **this topic comes with various hidden levels**, which led us to come up with new questions regarding generations at work.

These questions focused on helping us **get a deeper understanding of how the members of different generations can contribute to a company's performance, to generating conflicts, to affecting human resource management processes.**

The need to study this topic also arises from the challenges that Gen Z poses to leaders, as this is the latest generation to have entered the labour market and which, according to scientific literature, has revolutionized the way in which a company's human resource is regarded, managed, and motivated. Recent studies refer more and more to organizational conflicts arising from generational differences within teams. Our applied research aimed at identifying the main causes that can lead to such professional conflicts in the teams made up of people of different ages.

2. Data collection design: Quantitative research

We gathered the data included in **this study** through an **opinion survey** (research process); the data collection tool used was a **questionnaire** created via www.isondaje.ro, an online survey website available to students, companies, and researchers.

The research consisted of a primary data collection method, including a structured questionnaire in which we defined items specific to our research topic and problem. The information/results we obtained come from external sources, i.e. employees and employers in the tourism industry, provided by respondents free of charge, as they filled in the questionnaires individually.

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The research was conducted in November 2021-March 2022; the sample under research was made up of tourism workers representing organizations/positions such as: pensions, hotels, museums, restaurants, cafes, tourism agencies, tourism complexes, tourism guides.

3. Results

Out of a total of 86 results/questionnaires, we analysed 78 questionnaires, while 8 were invalidated for reasons such as:

- (1) Missing answers,
- (2) Inconsistencies between answers,
- (3) Questionnaire filled in by people from outside of the sample scope - different fields,
- (4) Questionnaire filled in by people from outside of the sample scope - other geographic location than the ones under investigation.

The table below shows demographic data about the respondents:

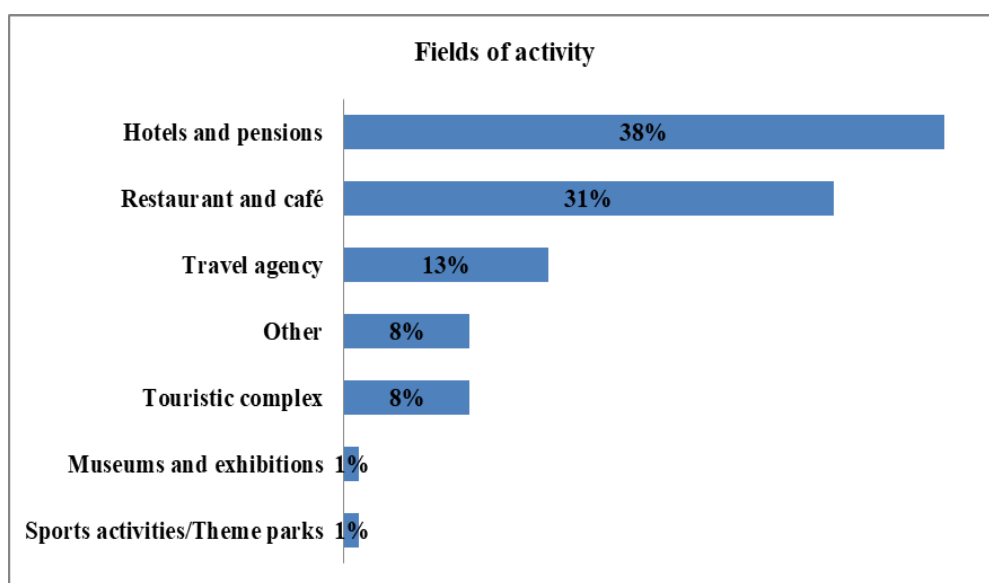
Table 1: Demographic data

Dimension/Variable	Frequency
Total no. of respondents	78
Total no. of female respondents	42
Total no. of male respondents	36
Average age of respondents	35.9
▪ Baby Boomer respondents (57-75)	3
▪ Generation X (42-56)	21
▪ Millennial Respondents (27-75)	35
▪ Generation Z Respondents (18-75)	19
Current status at work	
▪ Full-time employee	50
▪ Full-time remote employee	10
▪ Part-time employee	4
▪ Self-employed	3
▪ Unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic	3
▪ Retired	2
▪ Part-time remote employee	2
▪ Student	2
▪ Temporarily suspended employment contract because of the COVID-19 pandemic	1
▪ Others - entrepreneur	1
Educational status	
▪ MA	25
▪ BA	24
▪ High school	20
▪ Vocational school	5
▪ PHD	2
▪ Secondary school	2
County in which respondents work	
▪ Sibiu	67
▪ Braşov	7
▪ Alba	3
▪ Mureş	1
▪ Cluj	0

Source: Composed by the author on the basis of the information from the research

Figure 1 shows the fields in which the respondents work.

Figure 1: Fields of activity



Source: Composed by the author on the basis of the information from the research

In the geographical area covered by the sample, we identified a higher number of hotels, pensions, restaurants and cafes than touristic complexes, theme parks, and museums, which explains why the majority of answers represent these fields.

As for the items in the questionnaire, they were based on well-known theories and papers by experts such as (Karp & Sirias, 2001), (Bennett et al., 2012). Starting from (Parker, 2006), who shows the traits of **efficient teams** and of **inefficient teams**, we have formulated a series of items to identify the respondents' views on the team in which they work. Most respondents have used traits characterizing **efficient teams** to describe their teams.

Generational conflicts play a central part in our research, and so we shall focus our analysis on the question related to conflict.

Thus, as far as these items go, the respondents' opinions are as follows:

- **Conflicts are solved constructively**
 - 71% agree (totally agree/agree)
 - 16% do not agree (totally disagree/disagree)
 - to 14%, this sentence is indifferent (indifferent)
- **Conflicts remain unresolved**
 - 60% do not agree (totally disagree/disagree)
 - 26% agree (totally agree/agree)
 - to 14%, this sentence is indifferent (indifferent)
- **Employees of different ages are involved**
 - 92% agree (totally agree/agree)
 - 5% do not agree (totally disagree/disagree)
 - to 3%, this sentence is indifferent (indifferent)
- **There are conflicts between employees of different generations**
 - 51% agree (totally agree/agree)
 - 30% do not agree (totally disagree/disagree)
 - to 19%, this sentence is indifferent (indifferent)

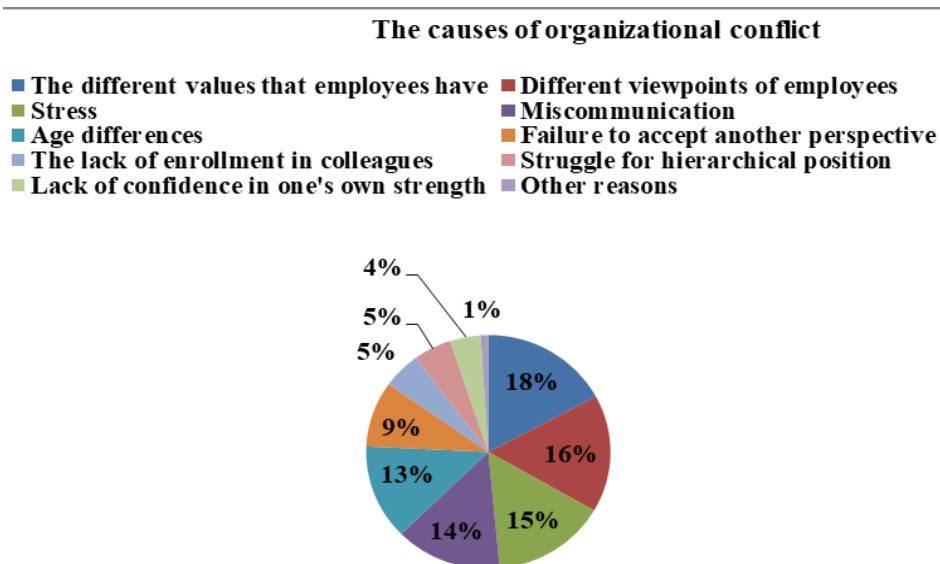
We notice that the organizations under research include **employees of difference ages** working together, **they also experience conflicts between employees of different generations**; nevertheless,

most of the times, they are **constructively solved**, though certain respondents (26%) **stated that conflicts remain unresolved**.

The previous question confirmed that conflicts do arise in organizations, so we wanted to identify some of the causes why respondents believe conflicts arise.

Figure 2 shows causes and respondents' options:

Figure 2: The causes of organizational conflict



Source: Composed by the author on the basis of the information from the research

Therefore, we notice that the **main causes of conflicts** are considered as below:

- (1) the different values of employees (18%);
- (2) different viewpoints of employees (16%);
- (3) stress (15%);
- (4) miscommunication (14%);
- (5) age differences (13%).

The respondents were able to add their own answers to this question, by choosing “Others”.

We notice that one of the respondents mentioned **a new cause that was not represented in the items designed for this question**, i.e., **management/leadership gaps**.

The gap is synonymous with terms such as:

- (1) lack of;
- (2) insufficiency;
- (3) deficiency, which leaves us underlining the importance of management and leadership, more precisely the importance of a leader and the way they “lead/manage” the team/organization.

4. Conclusions

Below, we shall highlight the main conclusions of our research. The research we conducted **confirms that, on the tourism field labour market, leaders have to manage a diverse work force from the standpoint of the demographic factor age**. At the same time, we were interested in elements such as **team and conflict**; in this sense, we noticed that this industry does face **generational (professional) conflicts** at work and teams face the challenge of understanding and valuing the characteristics of each generation; the main causes of age difference-related professional conflicts are the different values of employees of difference ages, different viewpoints, stress, miscommunication, age differences, unacceptance of other opinions.

We believe this research is useful as it underlines a problem that is more and more common in practice, shows a series of causes leading to generational professional conflicts, and offers an overview to leaders facing this issue. This way, leaders become aware of the causes that give way to certain tensions at work and can thus look for ways to remedy the problem and create high-performing teams that value the traits of each member, regardless of the generation to which they belong.

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