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STEREOTYPES IN MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEES 50+

A b s t r a c t: The article presents the definition of a stereotype and discusses the mechanisms of its impact. As part of the study, the author identifies selected stereotypes in the workplace, focusing on employees aged 50+, and then describes them. The basis for the deliberations is a review of scientific literature, with particular emphasis on the results of several international empirical studies. The aim of the article is to discuss selected stereotypes, both positive and negative, regarding employees aged 50+. Based on the interpretation of stereotypical views, guidelines for managers were formulated.

K e y w o r d s: stereotypes, 50+ employees, diversity management.

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INTRODUCTION

In the literature, stereotypes have been the source of interesting deliberations leading to important conclusions from science point of view. Polish researchers include: B. Wojciszke [1991], H. Pietrzak [2000], M. Kofta [2000] i J. Strelau [2003]. Foreign researchers include: Gordon Allport [1954], Walter Lippmann [1992], Susan Fiske [2002] and Amy Cuddy [2005]. It is worth noting that considerations about stereotypes in social and humanistic sciences have a long history, however research on economic aspects is significantly less popular.

Scientific literature in the field of management mainly focuses on methods of breaking stereotypes in the workplace [Stankiewicz, Ziemiański, 2012]

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and on managerial decisions made on the basis of stereotypes [Gajda 2015, Gruszczyńska-Malec and Rutkowska 2015]. Meanwhile, it is believed [Moczyłowska, Kowalewski, 2015, pp. 72] that in Poland publications focusing on stereotypes, discrimination and unequal treatment of older workers are usually fragmented. Perhaps this is because the analyzed area is difficult to measure in surveys.

This article focuses on the review of scientific literature, with particular emphasis on the results of several international empirical studies. It is an attempt to systematize knowledge about older employees in the workplace. The aim of the article is to discuss selected stereotypes, both positive and negative, regarding employees aged 50+.

1. PROSPECTS OF 50+ EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

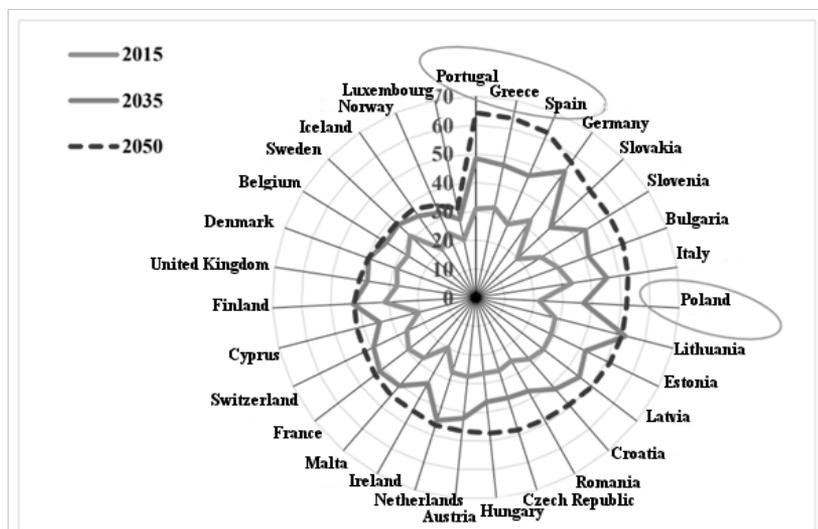
The demographic situation in Poland does not differ from European trends. The ongoing aging of society is the result of life extension with a simultaneous low fertility rate. The aging process is inevitable. Europe is getting old, and Poland - as part of it - also [Stańczak, Szałtys, 2017]. And although at present it may seem that compared to the western countries, Poland still is in a very favorable place - definitely below the average for the European Union. However, the forecast prepared by Eurostat (Figure 1) for EU and EFTA countries [EC, 2013] shows that apparently favorable - in relation to other EU countries - the current demographic situation of Poland will change radically in the next decade, and in 2050 Poland will become one of the countries with the most advanced aging population [Stańczak, Szałtys, 2017]. The figure below shows the ratio of demographic load to people 50+.

For an organization, this situation means that in the next few decades, the number of younger employees will decrease, while the number of older employees will grow. It is worth noting that the changes in demographics imply decrease in the number of job applicants. Thus, the problem related to the supply of labor in the future will be a big challenge for the organization [Gross-Gołacka, 2018], which will have to face all the problems resulting from unfavorable trends. Forecasts indicate that for the next 25 years, ie until 2040, the population of Poland will decrease by 2.8 million persons [Stańczak, Szałtys, 2017]¹.

Therefore, it seems that the chance to avoid future staffing problems is to implement the concept of diversity management. In this context, it is worth emphasizing that business success largely depends on the resources that the organization has at its disposal [Arnania-Kepuladze, 2019]. The 50+ employees undoubtedly constitute a valuable resource for the enterprise.

¹ As a reminder – in the last 25 years, the population of Poland Has increased over 360,000.

Fig. 1 Demographic load factor for the elderly in the EU and EFTA countries.



Source: Eurostat [in:] Stańczak J., Szałtys D. (2017), *Regionalne zróżnicowanie procesu starzenia się ludności Polski w latach 1990-2015 oraz w perspektywie do 2040 roku*, Departament Badań Demograficznych i Rynku Pracy; Główny Urząd Statystyczny.

Meanwhile, it turns out that older employees are exposed to stereotypes and discrimination [Mockało 2015], which can cause a number of complications in the workplace, i.e. affect productivity, commitment or motivation, etc. It should be noted, that in Poland publications focusing on stereotypes, discrimination and unequal treatment of older employees are usually fragmentary [Moczydłowska, Kowalewski, 2015, pp. 72].

2. STEREOTYPES

The problems of modern business are increasingly showing that organizations lack good moral standards [Turek 2011, pp. 41]. Because many people are still perceived themselves as victims of discrimination, whose stereotypes are deprived of prospects in the fight for a better position or higher salary [Borowska, 2013, pp. 153].

According to literature review [Sherman, Lee, Bessenoff, Frost, 1998; Operario, Fiske, 200; Pickering, 2007; Newman, 2009; Hamilton, 2015; McCarthy, Heraty, Bamberg, 2019], the first definition of the stereotype was formulated by Walter Lippman [1992] comparing it to a set of permanent opinions obtained by

individuals in the process of social contacts, but not as a result of observation of reality. This definition can be confirmed by referring to the well-known opinion of the author himself: where everyone thinks the same way, nobody thinks too much [Lippman, 1932, pp. 51]. Since Lippman, most theoreticians dealing with social issues, whether within management, psychology or sociology, in their considerations pay attention to the cognitive saving of man [Macrae, Milne and Bodenhausen 1994; Benhabib and Bisin 2002; Strelau 2003].

The article adopted as the binding term formulated by Aronson, Wilson and Akert [1997], according to which stereotypes are generalizations referring to a given social group, which is assigned positive or negative features, regardless of the real differences between them.

Although stereotypes are currently the subject of broad discussion, they most often relate to the area related to gender [Armania-Kepuladze, 2019; Hentschel, Heilman and Peus, 2019], this is why this article focuses on employees aged 50+.

3. STEREOTYPES REGARDING 50 + EMPLOYEES

The strength of the stereotype that affects employees due to age causes numerous complications in the workplace, not only does not favor their retention, but also can affect their productivity, commitment and motivation.

Raising competences in present times seems to be something extremely important in the context of professional work. In Poland, the decline in educational and training activity can be observed after the age of 45 [Górniak, 2013]. At the same time, researchers point to the reluctance of managers to send 50+ employees to courses and trainings improving their competences. It turned out that with age, activity for self-education has decreased [Mockało, 2015, pp. 12], because older employees are no longer interested in their own development [Górniak, 2013], they are less eager to learn, are afraid of new technologies, and trainings are treated by them as a problem [Gray, McGregor, 2013]. Employers prefer to invest in younger people who will work longer, so the investment will be more „worth it” [Mockało, 2015, pp.12].

Meanwhile, research has shown that representatives of younger generations are characterized by a relatively high tendency to frequent change of employment [Jurek 2014]. In turn, Mountford [2011] recalls results in which employees 50+ assigns loyalty to the employer and less sick leave.

It is worth emphasizing here that the professional career model in which the employee worked in one place during the entire period of professional activity, that is from the completion of formal education to retirement, is nowadays less and less frequent. And the decision to change jobs is rarely made on one reason. Most often this is the effect of many diverse factors such as:

- promotion to a higher position,
- greater comfort of work,
- more modern work tools,
- attractive development prospects of the employer,
- better payment,
- the possibility of implementing more interesting projects,
- willingness to work in a more stable or prestigious company,
- willingness to work among other people,
- willingness to change the boss,
- willingness to change the style of management, etc.

The given variables may have a different impact: some may have a dominant influence on making a decision to change jobs, and others may only lead to reflection.

Despite this, compared to younger employees, older people have fewer opportunities to participate in various forms of professional skills development, have less control over their work and feel treated by their superiors in a less just manner [De Lange et al., 2010]. Stereotypes undermine the effectiveness, efficiency and preparation for the work of older people, citing difficulties in adapting to new solutions, technologies [Górniak, 2013] and changes [Chiu et al., 2001].

Although they are perceived as experienced and less error-making, negative stereotypes often refer to their competences: they are considered less talented, less willing to learn new things, less intelligent, creative with less skills, less motivated to work, learning and development than young employees [Mockało, 2015]. Meanwhile, according to research [McCann, Giles, 2002] older workers are at least the same, and sometimes even more competent than their younger colleagues.

Other stereotypes about older employees are associated with emotions: 50+ employees are assessed as more warm, friendly and honest, with better interpersonal skills than younger ones [Mockało, 2015], but also less ambitious compared to younger people [Andreoletti, Maurice and Whalen, 2001] and less effective [Avolio, Barrett 1987].

Stereotypical beliefs about people 50+ are largely responsible for the difficulties associated with finding a job or maintaining it. Often the reason for the situation is unfair and inaccurate assessment of their alleged or actual productivity. Research [McCann, Giles, 2002, pp. 175] conducted among unemployed older people showed that the age of 65+ has become a „magic number”, which means that a significant part of this group can not find a job. And people who want to continue it often feel compelled to retire. This situation may be conducive to the feeling of isolation or disorientation and is particularly difficult for individuals who strongly identify themselves with the work [Cuddy, Norton and Fiske 2005].

There is no doubt that there are also people who declare their willingness to retire because they lack further motivation to work [Górniak, 2013]. It is worth adding that these beliefs may change, the more so because the motivation is an important factor mentioned by the employees, the reduction of which may result from incorrectly chosen management methods.

SUMMARY

The article presents a theoretical outline of the relationship between the employer and the employee, taking into account the role played by the age of the latter. The article focuses on the review of scientific literature, with particular emphasis on the results of several international empirical studies. This is an attempt to systematize knowledge about older employees in the workplace.

In Polish culture, paying attention to the employee's age is not an offensive phenomenon. Conversely, it happens when people's decisions are based on beliefs about age. Unfortunately, prejudices against older people are still present, although good practices in eliminating distorted judgments, such as: caring for appropriate intergenerational contacts [Schwartz, Simmons, 2001] or exposure to incoherent stereotypes are known in the business environment [Jackson, Sullivan, 1988]. Unwavering information about the effects of stereotypes in the organization, sharing knowledge about methods that indicate good practices to combat intergenerational biases and proper management should help combat stereotypes in the organization, restoring a sense of respect to the elderly [Cuddy, Norton and Fiske 2005].

Undoubtedly, the opinions of employers (also stereotypical) on the skills, productivity, costs and employment prospects of older employees are important in combating stereotypes in the organization. Recording age matters, although it does not determine the employee's situation and its capabilities. It does not directly affect the employee's ability to work or productivity, however, it is one of the indicators for employers to assess their adjustment to the requirements of a given job, position in the company structure or career development stage [Turek, 2015]. From the point of view of employers, older people are characterized by a lower „development potential”, which means that investments in their training will bring lower profit. In the expectation of a quick retirement, employers are often less willing to finance their training. The predominance of „cost” expectations for older employees may lead to a retirement mechanism. Employers' attitudes and actions are therefore a central element of the analysis of market mechanisms shaping the occupational situation of older employees.

Can we expect a change in the unfavourable perception of older employees along with the progressive aging of the population? Undoubtedly, today, awareness and caution in succumbing among employers, managers and HR specialists

is growing age stereotypes [Marshall and Taylor 2006]. The problem of the aging of societies and the growing share of post-working age population in the total population is now widespread. In the coming years, employers will have to face a decrease in the number of job applicants [Bombiak 2014]. Therefore, it seems that the chance to avoid future staffing problems is to implement the concept of diversity management.

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STEREOTYPY W ZARZĄDZANIU PRACOWNIKAMI 50+

Z a r y s t r e ś c i: W artykule przedstawiono definicję stereotypu i omówiono mechanizmy jego oddziaływania. W ramach opracowania autorka identyfikuje wybrane stereotypy funkcjonujące w miejscu pracy koncentrując się na pracownikach 50+, a następnie dokonuje ich opisu. Podstawę prowadzonych rozważań stanowi przegląd piśmiennictwa naukowego, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wyników kilku międzynarodowych badań empirycznych. Celem artykułu jest opisanie wybranych stereotypów zarówno pozytywnych jak i negatywnych dotyczących pracowników 50+. Na podstawie interpretacji stereotypowych poglądów sformułowano wskazówki dla menedżerów.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: stereotypy, pracownicy 50+, zarządzanie różnorodnością.

