GISo
Society | the Individual | Socialisation

JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIALISATION

OLDER WORKERS – YOUNGER BOSSES: CHALLENGES IN AN AGE DIVERSE WORKPLACE IN SOUTH BRAZIL

Eduardo Danilo Schmitz and Natália Viega de Souza Schmitz and Johannes Doll

UFRGS, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

E-Mail: professor.eduardods@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/9400407033309251

UFRGS, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

E-Mail: nati.viega@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/2777578342389132

UFRGS, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul

E-Mail: johannes.doll@ufrgs.br and johannes.ufrgs@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/6630859941080575

Suggested Citation:

Schmitz, Eduardo Danilo/Viego de Souza Schmitz, Natália/Doll, Johannes (2022): Older Workers – Younger Bosses: Challenges in an Age Diverse Workplace in South Brazil. In: Gesellschaft – Individuum – Sozialisation (GISo). Zeitschrift für Sozialisationsforschung, 3 (1). DOI: 10.26043/GISo.2022.5.5

Link to the article:

https://doi.org/10.26043/GISo.2022.5.5



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Namensnennung – Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 4.0 International Lizenz.

OLDER WORKERS – YOUNGER BOSSES: CHALLENGES IN AN AGE DIVERSE WORKPLACE IN SOUTH BRAZIL

Eduardo Danilo Schmitz, Natália Viega de Souza Schmitz, Johannes Doll

In a graying world, age diverse workplaces are becoming more common, even in Brazil. On the one hand, age diversity in a working group can contribute to a broader range of perspectives and ideas. On the other hand, different generations working together can prove to be challenging, especially when classic hierarchical patterns are reversed, as it is in the case of older workers and younger bosses working together. The present qualitative study in a Brazilian service company examines how this relationship is perceived by both sides, using interviews and focus groups. It is possible to illustrate the self-perception of the aging process on the worker's side as well as tensions caused by ageism. The findings show that managers are aware of ageism in the workplace, which is, in many situations, also intersected with gender. In addition to these observed tensions and problems, the results also indicate that learning processes towards a new approach to age diverse workplaces can be initiated on both sides.

Keywords: Aging workforce, age diverse workplace, ageism, intergenerational relation, informal learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Population aging is a worldwide phenomenon (WHO 2017) that impacts all spheres, including economic growth (Bloom et al. 2011) and the work environment (Calzavara et al. 2020). As a result, the presence of older workers in the workforce is increasing, which also depends on other factors, such as public policies, company policies on hiring and retaining older workers, workers' individual plans and desires, behavioral trends in the population, and discourses and stereotypes about aging (Taylor/Walker 1994; Bloom et al. 2011; Calzavara et al. 2020). Young and old working together has the potential to cause tensions, especially when traditional structures, such as the master (older) – apprentice (younger) relationship, are reversed and when young people take on the position of teaching older colleagues about new equipment or productive structures (Hirsch 2020), or even turn out to be the managers of the older workers. These tensions could be reinforced by stereotypes on both sides (Smith/Harrington 1994).

The perception of the aging labor market is quite recent in Brazil (Tavares 2015) for which reason we have limited data on the character of age diverse workplaces and about the constitution of these work relations. Against this backdrop, the present article analyzes the perceptions and perspectives of older workers and younger managers about intergenerational relationships in the work environment. Concerning the establishment of a relationship between generations, imaginaries, stereotypes, and discourses exert a certain influence, which can be viewed as a barrier for productive collaboration (King et al. 2019; Hirsch 2020).

This process takes place in specific socio-historical constellations. Thus, we start by introducing some characteristics of the Brazilian labor market. Secondly, three central concepts will be outlined in depth: (i) age diversity in the workspace, (ii) stereotypes and ageism in work relations, and (iii) learning to work together in an age diverse workplace. Next, the study design, methods, and research context will be described. Finally, the results and the discussion of the data gathered in the study will be presented.

2. THE BRAZILIAN LABOR MARKET

Certain current global trends in the labor market, such as the aging of the workforce (Martin 2018) or adaptations of retirement systems to population aging (OECD 2021), are similarly found in Brazil. For instance, the number of older employees almost doubled from 2010 (1.203.000) to 2020 (2.159.000) (RAIS 2021) and since the constitution of 1988, three reforms of the

retirement system have been implemented (Pierdoná/Leal 2020). However, some particularities of the Brazilian context are important to be considered, such as the fact that the country was a Portuguese colony until 1815, that its economic structure were mostly based on slavery, and that it had a late industrialization period during the 20th century, driven by the Brazilian State (Brum 1998).

The ageing of the population in Brazil started in 1960 with a rapid decline in infant mortality (1960 – 124%; 2000 – 27,36%) and fertility (1960 – 6.28; 2000 – 2.38) as well as an increase in life expectancy (1960 – 51.64 years; 2000 – 70.43 years) (IBGE 2022). In 2021, Brazil counted a population of 37.7 million over the age of 60 (DIEESE 2021). Despite this, the ageing of the Brazilian workforce has only caught the attention of administrators in the last 15 years (Tavares 2015).

In the process of industrialization, a pension system was developed which, based on the Federal Constitution of 1988, guaranteed a minimum (annually adjusted) wage as a basis. However, retirement has a ceiling of R$ 7.077 (1.100 EUR) and the vast majority of pension receivers earn only the minimum wage (currently R$ 1.100 or 170 EUR), which forces many people to continue to work in order for them to supplement their retirement. Research shows that around 21% of elderly people continue to work after entering retirement and 47% of these indicate the need to supplement their income (Giardino et al. 2018). Data from the National Household Sample Survey on this subject shows that only 26.6% pursue formal work, while most engage in work informally, especially in a self-employed capacity (46%) (IPEA 2018).

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND KEY CONCEPTS

In this next section, we will elucidate three essential theoretical key aspects: (i) (age) diversity in the workplace, (ii) stereotypes and ageism in work relations, and (iii) learning processes in age diverse environments.

3.1 Diversity in the Workplace

Demographic changes require reflections on age diverse working groups (Calzavara et al. 2020), especially by managers and human resources (Gordon 2018). On the other hand, companies' products and services must constantly adapt to a complex and diverse consumer world. One possible solution is to remain open to new perspectives and new instruments and diversity in working groups, including age differences, can be viewed as an interesting path to pursue in this context (Sobrino-De Toro et al. 2019).

Regarding diversity in working groups, there are two basic theories (Horwitz/Horwitz 2007). The *similarity-attraction paradigm* points to the advantages of more homogeneous groups for making workers feel more comfortable in open conversations, in the exchange of information, and in common values, which would lead to greater productivity, while heterogeneous groups supposedly influence social integration negatively and, with it, performance. The *cognitive resource diversity paradigm* highlights that diversity in a working group allows for a wide range of perspectives and experiences, which would qualify the results of the working group. Empirical studies, however, were not conclusive (ibid.).

The intergenerational relations become especially challenging when the hierarchical structure inverts common age norms (Lawrence 1987) with young managers supervising older workers. One of the first studies on this subject (Smith/Harrington 1994) reported young managers perceiving older workers to be less cooperative and to show more resistance towards them, while older workers mentioned the exact opposite. Stereotypes exist on both sides, as Mary Collins et al. (2009) point out in their study, which states that older workers expect less leadership from younger supervisors than younger workers. As a matter of fact, ageism, which means stereotyping because of age (Butler 1969), can be directed against older people as well as younger ones. In this context, age diverse workplaces can be challenging, especially regarding social relations and communications based on mutually negative stereotypes among different generations.

3.2 Stereotypes and Ageism in Work Relations

The concept of ageism was coined by Robert Neil Butler in 1969 to describe the discrimination that older people experience from middle-aged adults, while also including discrimination against younger people. According to him, ageism runs along the same lines as other "isms," based on social class or race. Since the emergence of ageism, this subject matter has remained relevant in the gerontological discourse (Ayalon/Tesch-Römer 2018).

In the workplace, stereotypes of older workers are quite common. Some of them can be classified as positive, for instance, certain qualities, such as experience and dedication, are often linked to older workers. However, most stereotypes have a negative connotation, such as being less motivated, less willing to participate in training, more resistant to change, less trusting, less healthy, and more vulnerable to work-family imbalance (Fasbender 2016). Thomas W. H. Ng and Daniel C. Feldman (2012) evaluated these six common stereotypes in a meta-analysis and stated that the only stereotype providing empirical evidence is the one in which older workers are less willing to participate in training.

One of the specific problems of stereotypes is that they influence the stereotyped person up to the point where some of them start to behave in accordance with the stereotype, thus becoming a "self-fulling prophecy" (Ayalon/Tesch-Römer 2018). The individual perception of ageism might be reinforced by interactions with colleagues and supervisors, contributing to the permanence of ageism at the company level.

In their analysis of 20 studies, Eden King et al. (2019) found only minor and inconsistent differences in job attitudes between the different generations. This result is in line with the study of Ng and Feldman (2012), which affirms that most stereotypes regarding older workers are not consistent. This does not mean that they have no importance. Even if the stereotypes are not true, the influence on all levels of the workplace, such as in hiring, promoting, and social relationships, remains strong.

The increasing number of older workers in numerous companies raises the question of the changeability of the ageism issue. Hendrik P. Van Dalen and Kène Henkens (2020) are evaluating the managers side in a longitudinal study to detect possible changes. They confirm that attitudes are not very susceptible to change – even if there are some changes in the so-called "soft skills,"- such as reliability and loyalty. However, attitudes toward "hard skills," such as physical strength, new tech skills and disposition to train, have not changed. The general attitude towards elderly workers mainly depends on the respective manager's age: Older managers tend to have a more positive vision of older workers.

3.3 Learning to Work Together in an Age Diverse Workplace

In the context of professional work, learning processes take place at different times, in different places, and in different ways. There are planned, organized learning processes, such as refresher courses, lectures, and instructions, but there are also forms of informal learning, which are acquired through coexistence in the work context, inter alia when a newly recruited person learns the organizational functions of his/her position through contact with other workers. In fact, Jay Cros (2011) estimates that 80% of learning in organizations is informal. Although informal, a company can introduce some kind of structure into this type of learning through apprenticeship, group mentoring with older workers, or multigenerational work teams (Ropes 2013). These types of informal learning generally have positive effects, one the one hand, for elderly people who feel valued for passing on their knowledge and, on the other hand, for younger people who feel welcomed and well introduced into the new workspace.

Older workers teaching younger ones is a practice that usually works well because it is in accordance with age norms, as the organizational theory of age effects points out (Lawrence 1987). Teaching becomes more challenging when roles are reversed, as when younger people take on the role of an instructor. As mentioned, these difficulties might even increase when the younger person is not only categorized as a colleague but also as the supervisor, a

situation which is marked by negative stereotypes on both sides (Smith/Harrington 1994).

At a first glance, tensions, conflicts, and problematic relations might not be very productive for companies, but they could represent the beginning of a learning process. In his model for adult education, Peter Jarvis (2010) points out that the starting point of a learning process in adult life usually stems from a problem or a conflict – e.g. when a person perceives the challenges of a certain situation as being too difficult to be mastered with previous strategies. Jarvis calls this initial situation *disrupture* and, according to him, this is the decisive starting point for a possible learning process. At this point, a person can either decide to maintain the tension of the disruption or change something about it, which means initiating the learning process. Jarvis (ibid.) developed a complex model of the learning process, which is embedded in a social context as well as a historical moment and includes activities of experience, perception, transformation, and integration in his/her biography, involving cognition, emotion, and practice.

4. DATA AND METHODS

The presented research aimed to analyze the perceptions and perspectives of older workers and younger managers about intergenerational relationships in the work environment. The configuration with younger managers supervising older workers was of interest to the present study, as it may reveal tensions in intergenerational relationships due to the inversion of the traditional structure in which older people supervise younger people (Hirsch 2020). The field of study was a private Brazilian organization maintained by entrepreneurs of goods, services, and tourism in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It is, therefore, a formal work context in a corporate organization. The organization has approximately 1900 employees who work in different professional fields, such as in gyms, dental clinics, cultural events, sporting and recreational events, libraries, restaurants, and kindergarten schools, among others. The average age of the workers in this organization, at the time of the study, was 39 years, with 15.05% of the workers being over 50 years old.

The research was developed as a case study, which is defined as "an empirical investigation that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and in its real-world context" (Yin 2015, 17). In order to answer the research question: "What are the perspectives and perceptions of older workers and younger managers about intergenerational coexistence in the work environment?", four workers and five managers were invited to participate. The older workers were at least 50 years old (Neri 2005) and were chosen in the light of diversity in their professional fields (maintenance technician, cultural events technician, cleaning, administration). Regarding the managers, the five youngest of the state were interviewed. All of these have had more than one year of working experience at the company and their field of work involves managing people who work in different activities.

Data collection was carried out through four individual interviews with the older workers (aged 50 to 65), identified by the letter "T," followed by the numbers 1 to 4 in the description of the results. We interviewed one woman – T1 (aged 50) – and three men – T2 (aged 59), T3 (aged 59), and T4 (aged 65). To understand the perspective of young managers, a focus group was held with all five managers (aged 33 to 39) who were identified in the results by the letter "G," followed by the numbers 1 to 5. We interviewed one man – G1 (aged 34) – and four women – G2 (aged 33), G3 (aged 37), G4 (aged 36), and G5 (aged 39). Concerning older workers, we opted for individual interviews, as in these cases biography-related questions could emerge, which require a longer listening time. Regarding the managers, the focus group method was chosen to better identify the implications they share as group.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was performed using the content analysis technique, which is a set of systematic procedures that allows organizing the ideas arising from the research participants into categories of analysis (Bardin 2009). The thematic analysis allows to identify the "nuclei of meaning that make up a communication, whose presence or frequency mean something to the analytical object in view" (Minayo 2014, 316). Thus, the process started with a first perusal and analysis of

the data, going through the process of unitarization, and grouping of ideas by similarity and ended with the finalization of categories.

5. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

In the following, we will present two main categories of analyses: (i) the perceptions and perspectives of older workers as well as (ii) the perceptions and perspectives of young managers.

5.1 Perceptions and Perspectives of Older Workers

Initially, the older workers reflected on the differences between themselves and the younger people. They presented their perceptions regarding age-specific physical, cognitive, and communication changes that can be characterized as "a different pace of productivity" (T3, 59 years old) as well as a different way of learning compared to younger people in the work environment. A possible decline in the productivity of older workers is a widely discussed topic. However, it is difficult to be measured (Naegele et al. 2018) and, therefore, leads to inconclusive results (Bryson et al. 2020). In the quote below, an older worker refers to a change in productivity in old age, but he does not indicate the elements usually mentioned in research as a cause, such as health, decreased cognitive abilities, or lack of training (Lallemand/Rycx 2009). He rather attributes this to differences in communication that changed across generations: Young people do everything fast nowadays, cutting words without the time to complete a sentence. This can be viewed as an interesting indication for further thoughts on the topic of intergenerational relationships and informal learning processes in the workplace. "This happens a lot with youth today. They understand in 'half a word.' Perhaps for an older person, it has to be more didactic, you have to say the entire sentence" (T2, 59 years old).

At the same time, older workers reported that differences between generations could represent an opportunity for learning and even be complementarity in teamwork (Rozman et al. 2016; Truxillo et al. 2012). In this sense, managers should not only mix older and younger workers but also "know where to place each one," as highlighted by T1:

I can't often keep up with technological innovation with the same agility [...]. But I have more intelligence, often emotional control, and more persistence. We are different generations with different characteristics; I just have to know where I'm going to put one and where I'm going to put the other. (T1, 50 years old)

It is necessary to draw attention to the stereotypes presented in the speech above, according to which older people have more intelligence, emotional control, and persistence, while younger people are viewed to be more innovative and agile. As these groups are considered as "two generations with different characteristics," they have to be considered and positioned differently, which should be the duty of the leading manager. It is worth considering that generalist statements based on age groups can give rise to ageism (Butler 1969), since the judgement in this case is merely based on age, disregarding the singularities of the subjects. In T1's statement, it becomes apparent that the complexity of the phenomenon of ageism is perceived in relation to older colleagues of the same age group but also younger ones.

In the conversation with one of the older workers (T4) about the relationship with younger bosses, interesting elements emerged, such as how a "good boss" should behave in order to prevent the emergence of barriers between the two age groups. These include, for example, knowledge and respect for the physical limitations of older workers and the ability to listen and respect the opinions of older workers who often have little say in age diverse workplaces. The way T4 expressed this last point exemplifies how witnessing the described situation in working practices between younger bosses and older workers had embittered him: "First thing, a good boss, if he knows his employee and already knows how old he is, he knows the limits, he will not force: 'Look, carry this, bring that'" (T4, 65 years old) and: "The good boss is the one who listens. There are bosses who don't listen, not even the opinion of the other, go by themselves and don't care. I've seen that" (T4, 65 years old).

The aspect highlighted by T4 in relation to not being listened to by younger managers corroborates with the reflections of T2 (quote below) about feeling left out of work relationships. In the first case, older workers' ideas are not taken into consideration; they appear to be voiceless as their opinions are not being taken into account. In the second case, older workers are clearly and physically marginalized, being somehow excluded from the working space. Thus, when T2 is asked if there are any possible unpleasant situations in his daily work regarding his age, his response is: "When you start to be sidelined because of age [...], when you start to notice that there is any kind of prejudice regarding your stay in some space, then you will tend to withdraw" (T2, 59 years old).

The attitude of "putting aside" the older worker is clearly related to stereotypes and ageism (Cuddy/Fiske 2002; Appelbaum et al. 2016). According to Liat Ayalon and Clemens Tesch-Römer (2018), ageism is a complex and often negative construct, with effects manifested at an individual and social level. In the quote below, T2 points out that it is not easy to be an older worker. At work, he has "to kill a lion a day." His reflections on his work practices illustrate that, because of his age, he feels he must do more than the other, younger workers, daily justifying his ability and position in the working place. He feels like he is out of place:

I feel it in my flesh sometimes: "Look, the old dude came up with a dumb idea about [how to solve a working problem]." Sometimes you notice it like: "This one is old; we do not need to listen to him much," do you see? [S]ometimes we need to kill a lion a day after a certain age. At work, you need to look like you're much better than everyone else to justify your stay there, that's a complicating factor. (T2, 59 years old)

According to Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2018), ageism can manifest itself in a subtle way in the environment, shaping the view that older people have of themselves – and the view of the people around them – and bringing to light considerably negative effects, as described in the example by T2. However, despite perceiving these differences and prejudices in their working environments, T2 also points out positive aspects related to age diverse working places: "Why not to put two other people a little more mature to work together [referring to a sector where only young people work] ? [...] I think this mixing works well" (T2, 59 years old). For T2, this mix between older and younger workers is perceived as positive, due to the fact that it puts him in the situation of being able to learn new things. In the quote below, T2 even makes clear his preference for working with younger generations rather than with his own age group, as he perceives younger people as more 'open minded' than older ones. Thus, T2 himself also acts in an ageist form, bringing stereotypes towards both generations. "I work easier with young people because the issue of youth urges me to be able to learn things, and very soon to teach things [...]. I prefer to work with young people because it seems that young people have the most open path" (T2, 59 years old).

Thus, in the opinion of older workers, there is a diverse set of generational differences. In this sense, older people are categorized as having "more intelligence," emotional control, and persistence. In addition, they are classified as having more difficulty in learning and as closed-minded, whereas young people are viewed as being more comfortable with technologies, "less intelligent" and persistent, more open-minded as well as having less emotional control. It is important to point out that these characteristics – or stereotypes – were mentioned by the older workers based on a general perspective on old and young people. Thus, in this case, ageism occurs in both directions: in relation to the same age group and in relation to the younger generation. It was also evident that older workers suffer the effects of ageism when feeling ignored in their work environment and, therefore, having to prove their value and competence daily, due to their age.

5.2 Perceptions and Perspectives of Young Managers

Initially, when asked about their perceptions of older workers, young managers expressed characteristics they considered positive, such as commitment, responsibility, dedication, and focus at work, indicating the perception of several advantages in working with people of this age group. It is worth mentioning that there is a

possibility of young managers having stated/mentioned "positive aspects" at the outset of the conversation because they might have thought about what was "politically correct" to be voiced in an interview and also because they might not have felt at ease in front of other managers, while being in a focus group session together. In any case, younger managers highlight various positive aspects, emphasizing that recruiting older workers may represent a positive initiative: "Mine are never absent, I think they have this feeling of great responsibility, and of valuing work" (G2, 33 years old); "The three of the general services, all of them are over 50 years old [...]; there is that issue of commitment because they see the service as something worthy" (G1, 34 years old); "She is the best in general services, she is the one most focused on work" (G3, 37 years old).

Other studies carried out with managers corroborate the perceptions of the participants of the present study. In the research of Helen Dennis and Kathryn Thomas (2007), older workers were valued for their experiences, knowledge, and work habits, highlighting a greater commitment to quality, loyalty, punctuality, the ability to remain calm in times of crisis, and respect for authority. In Lara Pinto's research (2014), positive aspects such as availability, commitment, connection with the company, and experience were also mentioned. In the Brazilian context, the study by Vanessa Cepellos and Maria J. Tonelli (2017) revealed the five main benefits of having older workers from a manager's perspective: professional experience and knowledge acquired throughout their career, commitment and sense of responsibility, diversity of ideas within the team, the ability to disseminate the company's culture among the youngest workers, and the ability to disseminate the behaviors expected by the company among the youngest workers.

It is, therefore, worth reflecting on these positive perceptions that have emerged and are recurrently attributed to older workers. On the one hand, it is possible for older workers to feel vulnerable and afraid of losing their job when inserted in an unstable (Pereira et al. 2019) and ageist (Ayalon/Tesch-Römer 2018) labor market; therefore, they also feel the need to value work more than younger people – as indicated by T2 above –, thus, manifesting characteristics such as greater commitment, responsibility, punctuality, and respect for authorities. In G3's statement, the older worker under her supervision "is [simply] *the best* in general services," while in G1's description, older workers are those who "see the service as something *worthy*" and G2 states that "they have this feeling of *great responsibility*." However, one should also consider that these behaviors could be generational traits acquired in a past socialization of these subjects working life in which specific cultural values were existent. It is also necessary to point out the presence of ageism of young managers towards their own generation, since these positive characteristics that were attributed to older workers were placed in opposition to the posture of young people who, according to this discourse, do not possess these qualities.

Furthermore, portraying G3's statement in full, another important aspect emerges:

She is the best in general services, she is the one most focused on work. The others are dispersed in conversations. It turns out, they are more absent because they have small children, so the woman is already a grandmother, she no longer has this commitment to children. (G3, 37 years old)

G3, a young female manager, states that other women are often absent from their/the workplace because of their children, which is not seen as a positive aspect, and stands in contrast to the older female worker who might already be a grandmother and, thus, no longer has a commitment to children. Although one must consider that grandparents in a country like Brazil where these notably participate in their grandchildren's care could have commitments towards their (grand)children and might be working for exactly this reason: to support their children and grandchildren. Research has shown that this is one of the biggest reasons for older people's indebtedness (Buaes 2012; Schmitz 2020) and, therefore, probably also for their continuation of work. Thus, gender is also an important aspect to take into consideration when analyzing ageing in the workplace, as these categories might strongly intersect.

In contrast, aspects about the challenges of working together with older people were also mentioned, such as the lack of flexibility to change, resistance, and accommodation. These characteristics are recurrently associated with older workers, due to the stereotypes towards this age group (Bryson et al. 2020; Calzavara et al. 2020; King et al. 2019). "I have a 47-year-old woman at SAC who is resistant to change [...]; you can't move a printer, because the printer has always been there" (G1, 34 years old); "One of the negative points of this generation is the difficulty in changing" (G5, 39 years old).

While one of the managers (G1) speaks about a concrete experience, the other (G5) attributes these characteristics to the entire older generation, demonstrating a stereotyped perception. In Pinto's (2014) research, managers indicated perceiving too much habituation in daily habits that constitute a disadvantage in having older workers. In other studies, the difficulty with changes and accommodation also emerged as a characteristic of older workers (Henkens 2005; Warr 2001). Cepellos and Tonelli (2017) revealed unfavorable points associated with older workers: a lack of flexibility, professional outdatedness, and difficulty in recognizing leadership when leaders are younger. In addition, concerns arose about health problems and physical issues of older workers that could have an impact on work. "Two general services people who were hired in the same selection, aged more than 50 years at the time [...], soon afterwards they were both on sick leave. And that's the fear we have as a company" (G4, 36 years old).

In regard to workers' performance and work pace, Thierry Lallemand and François Rycx (2009) have shown that an older workforce has the potential to be less productive. In other studies, managers mentioned the same perception of older workers not being able to perform at the same pace of work (Brooke/Taylor 2005; Henkens 2005; Pinto 2014). There are, however, different results regarding this issue, revealing that the question concerning the productivity of older people remains inconclusive (Aubert/Crépon 2003) and that productivity itself is a difficult aspect to measure (Naegele et al. 2018). Van Dalen et al. (2010), when distinguishing the different dimensions that influence the productivity of workers, observed that both employers and employees, older and younger, considered hard skills to be more important than soft skills, which can impact the perceptions of productivity. Thus, one can determine a consensus among several authors that productivity depends on the work environment as a whole, including the field of activity, the physical structure of the environment, and the organization's culture, among others, which should all be in harmony with the needs and potential of the worker (Bryson et al. 2020; Countryman 2016; von Hippel et al. 2013).

Other negative perceptions reported by the managers in our study were related to some "difficulty with technologies" (G4, 36 years old), which also appeared in other studies. Henkens (2005) investigated the image attributed to older workers and revealed that the managers participating in the study had a stereotyped view of these subjects, including the assumption that older people have difficulties with technologies. Pinto (2014) studied how companies in the textile sector in Portugal dealt with the issue of the age of their workers and revealed that, among the disadvantages that companies saw in having older workers, the difficulty of these professionals with technologies was emphasized. The same conception also emerged among managers participating in the study by Cepellos and Tonelli (2017).

It is also interesting to observe that young managers recognize their own prejudice towards older ones. In the quotes below, G5 mentions that "maybe [she does] have a prejudiced look" towards older workers while in G3's statement, ageism is manifested by her understanding of an older person not being able to be the supervisor of a school.

Maybe I do have a prejudiced look [...], maybe the person doesn't have so much vitality to do the job anymore, because it's one thing to hire a 50-year-old person for a more administrative sector where he will have to work more intellectually than work in the more manual service. (G5, 39 years old)

If I had made the selection without knowing her, maybe I wouldn't have hired her [...], her hair is practically all white, you look at her, she's a

grandma! But I'm not going to hire a grandma to be a supervisor, right?! But as I already knew her work [...], I hired her and the time she stayed with us was really excellent. (G3, 37 years old)

The physical appearance, such as the almost completely white hair, classifies the older woman as a "grandma" – another stereotype, as grandparents are not necessarily old and not every old person is a grandparent (Ramos 2011) –, and a grandmother seems unsuitable for managerial tasks. Moreover, G5 even seeks for endorsement for her perspective, pointing out that her view about the grandmother is obvious and universal and, thus, would clearly be supported by the group: "I am not going to hire a grandma to be a supervisor, *right*?!" Furthermore, a clear recognition of their own prejudices is detectable in both quotes. In the first, the manager reflects that despite possible physical limitations that may arise with age, these workers could be used in more administrative tasks, which do not require physical vigor. The second quote states that besides her prejudices towards older people, "the time she stayed with [them] was really excellent." Thus, these examples show that younger managers show a capacity of reflecting and individuating some of their own stereotypes, which could be an important step towards dealing with them.

As older women may suffer from a dualism at the workplace, being judged through ageism and sexism, the same can occur in relation to young female managers, but in a reversed direction: "I still suffer from it today: There are people who look and say: "Who is the manager?" Then I see that they are looking for an older person, an older, taller man. No! Here is a short woman, younger" (G4, 36 years old). As G4 pointed out, management positions are not expected to be occupied by women, especially when they are young and small in height. The ageism towards younger people that creates stereotypes like not being capable or being uncommitted and inexperienced intersects with the aspects of body and gender in the present research. In G4's statement, she clarifies that occupying an older man in a management position is not only something that is expected, but it is also something that is desired. Being an older man, and especially being a taller older man, appears to be a synonym for capability. Based on the argumentation of Barbara S. Lawrence (1987), it can be said that women in managerial positions are opposed to gender norms, given that even in work areas where women represent most of the workforce, very few women are in leadership positions (Place/Vardeman-Winter 2018). Thus, we need to consider that ageism in workplaces may intersect with other structured power relations, such as sexism and (able-)bodyism – and presumably also with racism and classism, among others.

This statement of G4 was followed by a group consensus, which enables us to expand the reflection on the phenomenon of age prejudice, noting that it does not only occur towards older workers but also towards the younger ones, an aspect already mentioned in the article by Butler (1969). Ageism against younger managers illustrates that the traditional age norm attributes leading positions to older persons. This age norm produces consequences, as Lawrence (1987) explains in her organizational theory of age effects. Other authors validate these stereotypes against young people by categorizing them as being less loyal, less professional, less trustworthy, less experienced (Rozman et al. 2016), less emotionally stable (Gibson et al. 1993), immature, and more likely to change jobs (Newton et al. 2005). Stefan Alexander Grandl's (2016) study also provides support for this conception, revealing that in a managerial position, stereotypes can pass on from older to younger workers. Also interesting to note is that these prejudices are even stronger when intersecting with gender and body.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study analyzed how older workers and younger managers perceive intergenerational relationships in the work environment within a Brazilian organization by using a qualitative approach. When listening to older workers, it became apparent that they are aware of changes regarding their aging process and that they try to cope with tension that emerges from intergenerational differences. Ageism proves to be a challenging obstacle, one that subjects must live with and which limits the potential of relationships. In the present study, ageism appears as a multidimensional phenomenon. Older workers expressed ageism towards younger people

but also towards their own generation, just like young people who revealed a prejudiced view towards their own generation and towards the older workers. While these daily tensions represent a source of suffering, they can also constitute opportunities regarding workers' reflection, adaptation, and learning. The example given by the worker T2 who mentioned "having to kill a lion a day," might be a clue as to how older workers learn to live with younger generations in the work environment, i.e. managing prejudices and relying on positive facts in relationships.

Regarding the statements of younger managers, positive and negative aspects of coexistence emerged. Younger workers recognize the prejudice they have towards older people, also manifesting the prejudice they themselves suffer in the work environment, not only because of their age but also because of their gender and other body characteristics, revealing the possibility of coexistence of various types of prejudices. This fact demonstrates the need to expand the discussion about the impact and nature of prejudice in the work environment.

As previously mentioned, the present study made it possible to deepen the understanding of the perspectives that different generations have on intergenerational coexistence in the work environment. The results illustrate that older workers' perceptions of intergenerational employment have the potential to turn negative when younger people are employed as supervisors, resulting in greater tensions. In addition to the social roles played by the subjects, personal characteristics also influence the relationships between generations. The fact that older workers and younger managers are able to reflect on their own ageist stereotypes based on concrete experiences indicates the possibilities of developing better interactions between generations through open dialogue. In this sense, we can coincide with Jarvis (2010), when he states that learning is an intrinsic phenomenon of life, which occurs throughout the entire lifespan, not necessarily connected to a formal educational process but to experiences transformed into knowledge, emotions, and practices, resulting in a modified and more experienced human being. Above all, the present research reveals the need to develop people management policies that enable education about intergenerational coexistence.

The limitations of the present study are the specific context of data collection and the formal work environment of a given organization with a small number of participants. However, it is important to point out that the existence of ageism directed at different age groups also appears in several other studies, which signals the need to generalize the analysis of this phenomenon. We suggest that further studies in different scenarios should be carried out, such as, for example, in informal work. In addition, research should try to better understand the intersection of age, gender, and body, as it has proven to be an important aspect for understanding intergenerational work relationships. Age prejudice might not occur in isolation, being linked to other types of discrimination both towards old and young (Hirata 2009; Fontoura/Piccinini 2016). Thus, it becomes crucial to analyze ageism from an intersectional perspective. This article presents existing structures in organization's intergenerational relationships which might also exist in other organizations. On this basis, further comprehensive qualitative and quantitative studies, showing intergenerational relationships in the context of work in a more general sense, would be of great interest.

REFERENCES

Appelbaum, Steven H./Wenger, Richard/Pachon Buitrago, Carolina/Kaur, Ravneet (2016): The effects of old-age stereotypes on organizational productivity (part one). In: Industrial and Commercial Training, 48 (4), 181–188.

Aubert, Patrick/Crépon, Bruno (2003): Age, Wage and Productivity: Firm-Level Evidence. In: Economie et Statistique, 363, 95-119.

Ayalon, Liat/Tesch-Römer, Clemens (2018): Introduction to the section: Ageism – Concept and origins. In: Ayalon, Liat/Tesch-Römer, Clemens (Eds): Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism. Cham: Springer, 1–10.

Bardin, Laurence (2009): Análise de conteúdo. 4th ed. Lisboa: Edições 70.

Bloom, David E./Canning, David/Fink, Günther (2011): Implications of Population ageing for Economic Growth. NBER Working Paper No.

16705. Available at: https://www.nber.org/papers/w16705#:~:text=Population%20ageing%20will%20tend%20to,the%20rate%20of%20economic%20growth (January 5, 2022).

Brooke, Libby/Taylor, Philipe (2005): Older workers and employment: managing age relations. In: Aging and Society, 25 (3), 415–429.

Brum, Argemiro (1998): Desenvolvimento Econômico Brasileiro. 19ª ed. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Bryson, Alex/Forth, John/Gray, Helen/Stokes, Lucy (2020): Does Employing Older Workers Affect Workplace Performance? In: Industrial Relations, 59, 532–562.

Buaes, Caroline Stumpf (2012): Sobre a construção de conhecimentos: uma experiência de educação financeira com mulheres idosas em um contexto popular. Dissertation. Porto Alegre: UFRGS/PPGEDU.

Butler, Robert Neil (1969): Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry. In: The Gerontologist, 9 (4), 243–246.

Calzavara, Martina/Battini, Daria/Bogataj, David/Sgarbossa, Fabio/Zennaro, Ilenia (2020): Ageing workforce management in manufacturing systems: state of the art and future research agenda. In: International Journal of Production Research, 58 (3), 729–747.

Collins, Mary/Hair, Joseph F. Jr./Rocco, Tonette S. (2009): The older-worker—younger-supervisor dyad: A test of the Reverse Pygmalion effect. In: Human Resource Development Quarterly, 20 (1), 21–41.

Cepellos, Vanessa M./Tonelli, Maria J. (2017): Envelhecimento profissional: percepções e práticas de gestão da idade. In: Reach Magazine (Electronics), 24 (1), 4–21.

Countryman, Cheryl A. (2016): Stereotype Threat and Work Attitudes of Older Workers. Dissertation. Minneapolis: Walden University. Available at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/2475/ (June 16, 2020).

Cros, Jay (2011): Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways That Inspire Innovation and Performance. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons.

Cuddy, Ami J. C./Fiske, Susan T. (2002): Doddering but dear: Process, content, and function in stereotyping of older person. In: Nelson, Todd D. (Ed). Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons. Cambridge: Bradford Books, 3–26.

Dennis, Helen/Thomas, Kathryn (2007): Ageism in the workplace. In: Generations, 31 (1), 84–89.

DIEESE (2021): Perfil das pessoas com 60 anos e mais. Available at: https://www.dieese.org.br/outraspublicacoes/2021/graficoPerfil60AnosMais.html (February 13, 2022).

Fasbender, Ulrike (2016): Stereotype, prejudice and discrimination toward older workers: A wind of change? In: Burke, Ronald J./Cooper, Cary L./Antoniou, Alexander-Stamatios (Eds.): The Aging Workforce: Individual, Organizational and Societal Challenges. London: Emerald Publishing, 159–184.

Fontoura, Daniele dos Santos/Piccinini, Valmiria (2016): A Casa e o Hotel: o reprodutivo e o produtivo na configuração do mercado de trabalho no Setor Hoteleiro Brasileiro e Português. IV Brazilian Congress of Organizational Studies. Porto Alegre, Brazil, October 19 – 21, 2016 .

Giardino, Andrea/Bruno, Vinícius/Wall, Amanda (2018): Mesmo aposentados, 21% dos idosos continuam trabalhando, revela pesquisa CNDL/SPC Brasil. Available at: https://www.spcbrasil.org.br/wpimprensa/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/release_idosos_vida_profissional_dezembro_2018.pdf (December 14, 2020).

Gibson, Kevin J./Zerbe, Wilfried J./Franken, Robert E (1993): The influence of rater and rate age on judgments of work-related attributes. In: Journal of Psychology, 127, 271–280.

Gordon, Pamela Ann (2018): Age Diversity in the Workplace. In: Aquino, Carlos/Robertson, Robert (Eds): Diversity and Inclusion in the Global Workplace. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Grandl, Stefan Alexander (2016): Differences in the Perception of Young Compared to Old Managers. Dissertation. Lisbon: Universitas Catholica Lusitana. Available at: https://repositorio.ucp.pt/bitstream/10400.14/22758/1/152115023%20Stefan%20Grandl%20W%20NEW%20PDFA.pdf (April 2, 2020).

Henkens, Kène (2005): Stereotyping older workers and retirement: the managers' point of view. In: Canadian Journal on Aging, 24 (4), 353–366.

Hirata, Helena (2009): A precarização e a divisão internacional e sexual do trabalho. In: Sociologies, 11 (21), 24–41.

Hirsch, Peter Buell (2020): Follow the dancing meme: intergenerational relations in the workplace. In: Journal of Business Strategy, 41 (3), 67–71.

Horwitz, Sujin K./Horwitz, Irvin B. (2007): The Effects of Team Diversity on Team Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review of Team Demography. In: Journal of Management, 33 (6), 987–1015.

IBGE: Séries históricas e estatísticas. Available at: https://seriesestatisticas.ibge.gov.br/lista_tema.aspx?no=10&op=0 (March 15, 2022)

IPEA (2018): Carta de conjuntura, nr 39 — 2° trimestre de 2018. Available at: https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/conjuntura/180622_cc_39_secao_mercado_trabalho.pdf (March 12, 2022).

Jarvis, Peter (2010): Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Praxis. 4th ed. London: Routledge.

King, Eden/Finkelstein, Lisa/Thomas, Courtney/Corrington, Abby (2019): Generational differences at work are small. Thinking they're big affects our behavior. In: Harvard Business Review, 1 May, available at: https://hbr.org/2019/08/generational-differences-at-work-are-small-thinking-theyre-big-affects-our-behavior (February 18, 2020).

Lallemand, Thierry/Rycx, François (2009): Are Older Workers Harmful for Firm Productivity? In: De Economist, 157 (3), 273–292.

Lawrence, Barbara S. (1987): An organizational theory of age effects. In: Research in the Sociology of Organizations, 5, 37–71.

Martin, John P. (2018): Live Longer, Work Longer: The Changing Nature of the Labour Market for Older Workers in OECD Countries. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3177386 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3177386 (January 10, 2021).

Minayo, Maria Cecília de Souza (2014): O desafio do conhecimento: pesquisa qualitativa em saúde. 14th ed. São Paulo: Hucitec.

Naegele, Laura/De Tavernier, Wouter/Hess, Moritz (2018): Work environment and the origin of ageism. In: Ayalon, Liat/Tesch-Römer, Clemens (Eds.): Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism. Cham: Springer, 73–90.

Neri, Anita L. (2005): Palavras-chave em Gerontologia. 2nd ed. Campinas: Editora Alínea.

Newton, Becci/Hurstfield, Jennifer/Miller, Linda/Bates Peter (2005): Training a mixed-age workforce: practical tips and guidance. Brighton: Department for Work and Pensions, Institute for Employment Studies.

Ng, Thomas W. H./Feldman, Daniel C. (2012): Evaluating six common stereotypes about older workers with meta-analytical data. In: Personnel Psychology, 65 (4), 821–858.

OECD (2021): Pensions at a Glance 2021: OECD and G20 Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Pereira, Sandra de Oliveira Gomes/Cabral, José Pedro Cabrera (2019): Informalidade e crise do emprego no Brasil. In: Humanidades & Inovação, 6 (18), 92–102.

Pierdoná, Zélia Luiza/Leal, Bruno Bianco (2020): A proteção previdenciária e as reformas implementadas pelas Emendas constitucionais 20/1998, 41/2003 e 103/2019. In: Revista de direito do trabalho e seguridade social, São Paulo, 46 (210), 59–78.

Pinto, Lara Miguel Pereira (2014): Gestão da mão de obra e idade dos trabalhadores: um estudo exploratório. Dissertação (Mestrado em Economia e Gestão de Recursos Humanos). Universidade do Porto: Faculdade de Economia.

Place, Katie R./Vardeman-Winter, Jennifer (2018): Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations. In: Public Relations Review, 44 (1), 165–173.

RAIS (2021): Sumário executivo Ano-base 2020. Ministério da Economia. Available at: http://pdet.mte.gov.br/images/RAIS/2020/2-sum%C3%A1rio_Executivo_RAIS_2020.pdf (March 10, 2022).

Ramos, Anne Carolina (2011): My grandparents and I: the intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren from children's perspective. Dissertation. Siegen: University of Siegen.

Ropes, Donald (2013): Intergenerational learning in organizations. In: European Journal of Training and Development, 37 (8), 713–727.

Rozman, Maja/Treven, Sonja/Cancer, Vesna (2016): Stereotypes of older employees compared to younger employees in Slovenian companies. In: Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues, 21 (2), 165–179.

Schmitz, Natália Veiga de Souza (2020): Como idosas do Rio Grande do Sul com problemas financeiros lidam com suas finanças. Master thesis. Porto Alegre: UFRGS/PPGEDU.

Smith, Wanda J./Harrington, K. Vernard (1994): Younger supervisor-older subordinate dyads: a relationship of cooperation or resistance? In: Psychological Reports, 74 (3), 803–812.

Sobrino-De Toro, Ignacio/Labrador-Fernández, Jesús/De Nicolás, Víctor L. (2019): Generational Diversity in the Workplace: Psychological Empowerment and Flexibility in Spanish Companies. In: Frontiers in Psychology, 10, article 1953.

Tavares, Márcia Fernandes (2015): Trabalho e Longevidade. Como o novo regime demográfico vai mudar a gestão das pessoas e a organização do trabalho. Rio de Janeiro: Qualitymark Editora.

Taylor Philip E./Walker, Alan (1994): The Aging Workforce: Employers' Attitudes towards Older People. In: Work, Employment and Society, 8 (4), 569–591.

Truxillo, Donald M./Cadiz, David M./Rineer, Jennifer R./Zaniboni, Sara/Fraccaroli, Franco A. (2012): A lifespan perspective on job design: fitting the worker to the job to promote job satisfaction, engagement, and performance. In: Organizational Psychology Review, 2 (4), 340–360.

Warr, Peter (2001): Age and work behavior: physical attributes, cognitive abilities, knowledge, personality traits and motives. In: Cooper, Cary L./Robertson, Ivan T. (Eds.): International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 16, 1–36.

Van Dalen, Hendrik P./Henkens, Kène/Schippers, Joop (2010): Productivity of older workers: perceptions of employers and employees. In: Population and Development Review, 36 (2), 309–330.

Van Dalen, Hendrik P./Henkens, Kène (2020): Do stereotypes about older workers change? A panel study on changing attitudes of managers. In: International Journal of Manpower, 41 (5), 535–550.

von Hippel, Courtney/Kalokerinos, Elise/Henry, Julie (2013): Stereotype Threat Among Older Employees: Relationship with Job Attitudes and Turnover Intentions. In: Psychology and Aging, 28 (1), 17–27.

WHO (2017): The Global strategy and action plan on aging and health. World Health Organization. Available at: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513500 (March 18, 2022).

Yin, Robert K. (2015): Estudo de caso: planejamento e métodos. 5th ed. Porto Alegre: Bookman.

About the authors

Eduardo Danilo Schmitz is a Doctor in Education and a Master in Human Aging. In his doctoral thesis, he investigated the relationship of the older worker with work. His research interests are focused on the themes of Aging, Education and Work.

Natália Viega de Souza Schmitz is a Social Worker, Specialist in Family and Community Health and Master in Education. In her master's thesis, she investigated how elderly women with financial problems deal with their finances. Her research interests are focused on the themes of Aging, Education, Health and Social Work.

Johannes Doll is Full Professor of General Didactics at the School of Education, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, southern Brazil. His teaching and research focus is on aging and education, questions as the aging labor market, the digital inclusion of older people and learning processes in old age. A current focus is the debt problem of older people in Brazil and financial education for this population group. Johannes Doll is editor of the scientific journal "Estudos Interdisciplinares sobre o Envelhecimento", and currently Vice President of the Brazilian Society for Gerontechnology.

Contact

Eduardo Danilo Schmitz
Rua Mauro Guedes de Oliveira 251, apto 1006 A.
Bairro Jardim Lindóia.
Porto Alegre, RS. CEP 91050090
E-Mail: professor.eduardods@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/9400407033309251

Natália Viega de Souza Schmitz
Rua Mauro Guedes de Oliveira 251, apto 1006 A.
Bairro Jardim Lindóia.
Porto Alegre, RS. CEP 91050090
E-Mail: nati.viega@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/2777578342389132

Johannes Doll
Rua Mata Bacelar, 280, apt. 503
Porto Alegre, RS, CEP 90.540-150
E-Mail: johannes.doll@ufrgs.br and johannes.ufrgs@gmail.com
URL: http://lattes.cnpq.br/6630859941080575