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Misconceptions and Realities: The Working Relationships of Older Workers and Younger Managers

Graeme Tonks, Katie Dickenson & Lindsay Nelson

ABSTRACT

As Australia's workforce ages, the incidence of younger managers supervising the work of older employees is increasing. However, research into issues arising from this phenomenon is in its infancy. This study investigates the perceptions of younger managers and older workers regarding their interactions. Results suggest that certain factors, including aspects of stereotyping and attitudes are salient to these relationships. By revealing such perceptions and differences between the cohorts, a better understanding of intergenerational differences and their effects on working relationships can be achieved. This, in turn, provides a framework upon which human resource management (HRM) might develop policies and procedures to manage emergent issues. Using data from 36 informants, this inquiry discovered that younger managers and older workers hold widely divergent perceptions of their interactions in the workplace, and many elements of these interactions affect working relationships in both a negative and positive manner. The implications of these findings are considered, and avenues by which intergenerational issues might be addressed by HRM are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Like most developed countries, Australia's population is ageing due to increased longevity and proportionately lower birth rates (Henry 2004, Kanfer & Akerman 2004). While the effects of the ageing population will have an impact on society in general (Sahari 2006), organisations will also be affected (Arnwine 1990, Bridgers & Johnson 2005) and will increasingly rely on human resource management (HRM) for solutions to manage the employment relationship, particularly in intergenerational workplaces where age stereotyping emerges. The context of the present study is, therefore, age differences between managers and workers and the consequential role of HRM where younger managers are required to direct older workers. Previous studies, such as Chui, Chan, Snape and Redman (2001), highlight age stereotyping and discrimination, but do not directly tackle the issue of younger managers and older workers.

Research suggests that various benefits accrue to organisations which incorporate a mix of generations. Older workers offer occupational stability, quality work processes and outputs, and organisational loyalty, compared to younger workers (Magd 2003, Hill 2004). The advantages of younger workers include flexibility, the ability to learn new skills, willingness to change, technological skills and faster training (Hill 2004, Guest & Shacklock 2005). Workplace diversity concerns heterogeneity in organisations (Bhawuk, Podsiaclowski, Graf & Triandis 2002), in which people in organisations are as demographically and socially dissimilar as the general population (Baron & Kreps 1999). However, while workplaces today generally encourage diversity, age prejudice remains deeply entrenched, despite almost universal recognition that valuing all human qualities, including age, is a key plank in maximising individual and organisational performance (Ross & Schneider 1992, Blytheway 1995, Kramar 2002, Burchett 2005, Alker 2006).

One of the outcomes of the ageing workforce, which organisations have largely ignored, is the nature and quality of workplace relationships as the incidence of younger managers supervising older employees increases (Chiu, et al. 2001, Pelletier 2005). Whereas Chui, et al. (2001) recognise the negative part played by stereotypes in attitudes towards older workers, Pelletier (2005) deals with the issue as a difference between generations, and in a short

article gives several tips on how younger managers may gain the respect of older workers. Although possibly useful, this does little to analyse the underlying problems. Chui, et al. (2001: 653) examine the matter of stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, giving some hint of the central problem when they state, "It seems that closer age proximity leads to a more favourable and perhaps more sympathetic assessment of older workers, providing support for the ingroup bias hypothesis." thus, supporting an earlier study by Finkelstein, et al. (1995) that younger raters tend to give less favourable ratings to older workers.

Ageist stereotypes are widespread in the workplace (Kite & Johnson 1988, Nelson 2002, Whitbourne & Sneed 2002), and are most evident in cultures where youth is highly valued yet older people commonly attract unfavourable stereotypes. For example, in New Zealand, UK, USA, and Australia (Vaughan & Hogg 2005) organisations are experiencing these phenomenon. Such stereotypes hold that older workers, compared to younger, are intellectually and technologically less competent, possess outdated skills, have poor health and fitness are bound by entrenched habits, lack energy, and are inflexible (Tillsley 1990, Shah & Kleiner 2005). A pernicious aspect of negative stereotyping is its potential to generate a burden of suspicion which acts as a threat to its members (Steele & Aronson 1995, Steele 1997), in the workplace. This emerges as perceptions that older workers have 'had their day' and should make room for the next generation (Chiu, et al. 2001, Shah & Kleiner 2005). While the stereotyping of older workers has been researched widely, the reverse, stereotyping of younger workers, has received only limited attention (Hassell & Perrewe 1995, Chiu, et al. 2001). The rationale for this study is thus, to extend ageist stereotyping by analysing whether interactions between younger managers and older workers may be influenced by stereotype images. The context of these interactions comes within the ambit of HRM and its ability to achieve a harmonious and productive workplace.

It seems clear that HRM, in terms of communication and leadership (see, for example any standard text such as De Cieri and Kramar 2003), has a responsibility to ensure that any negative effects of younger managers and older workers are addressed and minimised. The quality of interaction between younger managers and older workers, therefore, may be influenced by HRM and two broad aims thus, emerge for investigation. The first relates to the perceptions of these managers and workers, which, in turn, raise three research questions.

- What perceptions do younger employees have of managing older employees?
- What perceptions do older employees have of being managed by younger employees?
- In what ways, if any, do these perceptions have an impact on the working relationships of these two groups?

The second aim focuses on the manner in which HR practitioners might respond to any tensions arising in the intergenerational workplace. The emergent research question is presented.

- If each or either group's perceptions are found to impact on working relationships, what actions might HRM instigate to manage this situation?

Having reviewed the literature, this paper then address the stated aims by firstly describing the research methodology, followed by the presentation of results, and a discussion, which emphasises appropriate HRM interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Sites

Informants were currently employed as either younger managers or older workers. In this study, 'younger managers' self identified as directing the work of employees perceived to be clearly older than themselves. Similarly, 'older workers' perceived that they were older than their corresponding managers. This definition of age, therefore, is limited to chronological age not maturity of work life, experience or job seniority. In this way the study follows on from previous work of Chui, et al. (2001), Magd (2003), Hill (2004), and Pelletier (2005).

To ensure that informant participation was based on 'relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness' (Flick 2002), a three stage, non probability sampling technique was adopted. Informant identification was executed by the 'snowballing' approach whereby each relevant subject is asked to recommend others who 'fit' the requirements of the inquiry (McCall & Simmons 1969). To minimise sampling bias, participants were drawn from a range of businesses, including the retail, building and construction, HR, accounting, banking, legal, employment, government and industrial sectors. This process identified 36 respondents who were suitable for the aims of this project. Of this sample 18 were younger managers who supervised older subordinates, and 18 were older workers who answered to younger managers. Of the 36 participants, ten were in a current manager-subordinate employment relationship. The rest were independent parties.

Design and Procedure

This inquiry required an exploratory, qualitative research design because it sought to access, in fine grained detail, the perceptions held by the subjects (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, Hewitt-Taylor 2001, Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson 2002, Maylor & Blackman 2005, Whitely & Crawford 2005). An important reason for selecting a qualitative methodology is the opportunity it affords to probe and explore the views of participants which questionnaires do not always examine. As argued by Miles and Huberman (1994) qualitative methods provide: realism, richness, go beyond 'snapshots', give meaning to events and are often useful in developing hypotheses. Data were collected by way of semi structured interviews; a method recommended for exploring meaning in social science research as it provides freedom to examine reasons and motives, as well as pursue unanticipated thoughts and insights (Kvale 1996, Herzog 1996, Bouma 2000, Sekaran 2000, Jennings 2001, Berg 2004, Babbie 2005, Dawson 2006, Veal 2006, Walter 2006). Two interview schedules were used; one was administered to older workers, the other to younger managers. Interviews were recorded, and were of approximately one hour's duration. Two series of interviews were conducted; 20 in the first instance, followed by 16 some months later.

Measures

Accessing the participants' perceptions were achieved through the use of semi structured interviews. Each of the two interview schedules comprised 12 questions, eight of which were derived from both the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1982), literature. These are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 Interview schedule (younger managers)

<p>Participant Eligibility</p> <p>Does your job require you to supervise the work of colleagues who are older than you?</p> <p>Your age?</p> <p>15-18 19-21 22-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-50 50+</p> <p>What, in years, do you estimate to be the difference between ages?</p> <p>2-5 5-10 10-15 15-20 20+</p> <p>Do you consider this to be a significant age difference?</p> <p>Perceptions/Opinions of younger managers of the interactions between younger managers and older workers: (for further clarification examples will be asked for)</p> <p>In your capacity as a younger manager, have you come across any issues in your interactions with older workers?</p> <p>In your capacity as a younger manager, would you say you tend to exhibit more attention to workers younger or of similar age, or older workers? Why do you think this might be?</p> <p>Do you think the attitudes of older workers towards younger managers differ to those of younger workers being managed by a younger manager?</p> <p>Does your level of trust differ in an older worker to that of younger workers? How does this affect your perceptions of older workers?</p> <p>Do you feel that older workers stereotype younger managers? If so, does this create tension between the older workers and younger managers? How does this affect your perceptions of older workers?</p> <p>As a younger manager, do your feelings of satisfaction differ when supervising younger or older workers? How does age difference affect satisfaction?</p> <p>In your own experience, what do you find to be (a) the benefits and (b) the limitations of managing older workers?</p> <p>Australia's workforce is ageing and the incidence of younger managers and older workers is going to increase. What, in your opinion can be done to bridge the gap between older workers and younger managers? (Only for those who perceive a gap)</p>

Figure 2 Interview schedule (older workers)

Participant Eligibility

Does your job require you to report to a colleague who is younger than you?

Your Age?

15–18 19–21 22–25 26–30 31–35 36–40 50+

What, in years, do you estimate to be the difference in age?

2–5 5–10 10–15 15–20 20+

Do you consider this to be a significant age difference?

Perceptions/Opinions of older workers of the interactions between younger managers and older workers: (for further clarification examples will be asked for)

In your capacity as an older worker, have you come across any issues in your interactions with younger managers?

Do you feel that you are provided with more or less attention from a younger manager compared to one of your age or older? Why do you think this might be?

Do you feel that the attitude of younger managers towards older workers differs to that of younger workers? If so, is this in a positive or negative way?

Does your level of trust differ in a younger manager to that of an older manager? How does this impact your perceptions of younger managers?

Do you feel that younger managers stereotype older workers? If so, does this create tension between the older workers and younger managers? How does this affect your perceptions of younger managers?

As an older worker do your feelings of satisfaction differ when you are being managed by a younger worker? How does age difference affect satisfaction?

In your own experience, what do you find to be (a) the benefits and (b) the limitations of working with younger managers?

Australia's workforce is ageing and the incidence of younger managers and older workers is going to increase. What, in your opinion can be done to bridge the gap between older workers and younger managers? (Only for those who perceive a gap)

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using QSR NUD*IST 6 software, a programme designed for the storage, management and retrieval of qualitative data (Richards & Richards 1991). Interview material was transcribed and imported into the software database, following which categories of information were established as a series of nodes. The nodes emerged from the themes which arose consistently from the transcripts, and formed part of an index system which the software presents as a 'stem and leaf' system of association. A pattern of nodes emerged which enabled the interpretation of the data in greater depth. The node 'tree' appears as Figure 3. The application of computer-based analysis in social research is recommended by Kelle (1995), and Ticehurst and Veal (1999).

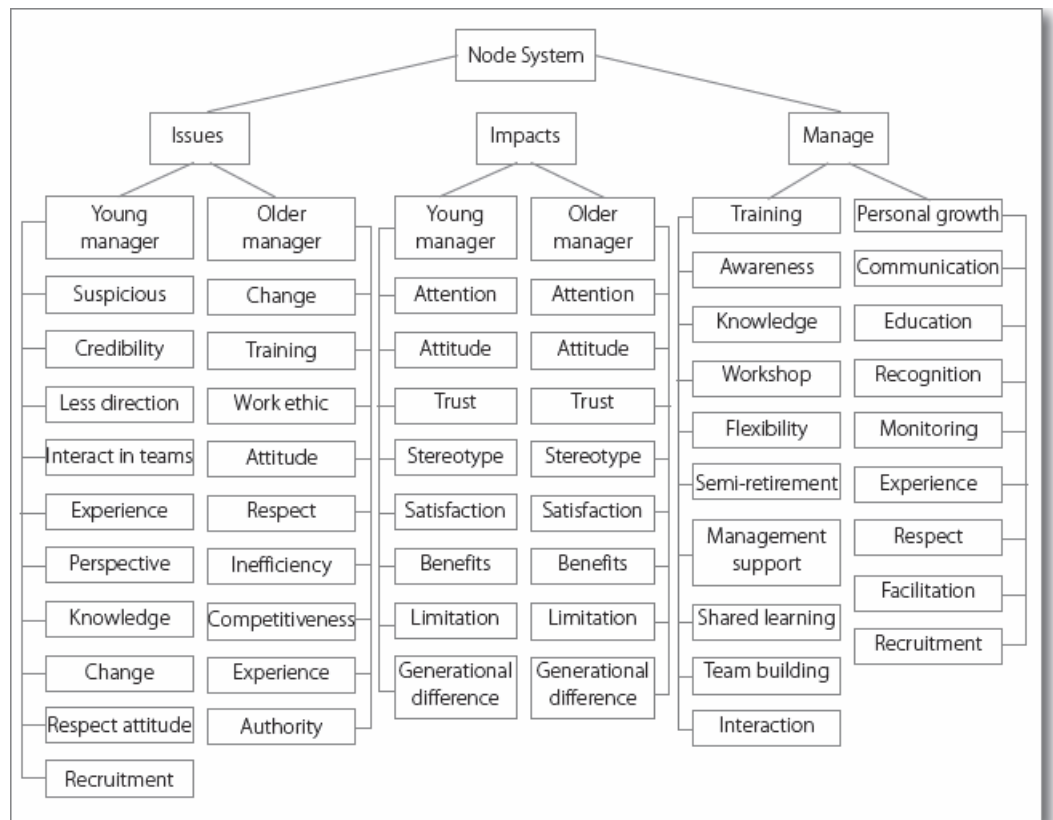


Figure 3 Node tree

RESULTS

Demographic Findings

Three demographic characteristics were defined: the participants' age, the difference between participants' age and that of their manager/worker, and whether or not each participant considered the difference between ages to be significant. Ages of the participants ranged from mid teens to late middle age. Of the younger manager sample, the majority of participants were under the age of 30, whereas the majority of the older worker sample were 40 years or older. Differences in ages between older workers and their younger managers ranged from five years to over 25 years. Of the 36 participants, 21 believed the difference in ages between themselves and their older employees/younger manager were significant.

Impacts on Working Relationships

The content of the interviews identified many issues, both positive and negative, arising from the perceptions held by (i) older employees about being managed by younger employees, and (ii) younger employees about managing older workers. Those issues considered most significant by both parties are presented in Table 1. This content shows all the perceptions held by older workers about younger managers tend to be negative, suggesting that managers should not assume that they will be immediately or automatically accepted by older workers. However, younger managers report positively about older workers in three areas: needing less supervision, having valuable experience and possessing greater knowledge. Although the participants were asked to identify those issues they considered significant, they were not required to rank them.

Table 1 Perceived issues arising from the interactions between younger managers and older workers

Perceptions reported by younger managers of supervising older workers	Perceptions reported by older workers of being supervised by younger workers
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Older workers are suspicious of younger managers

Younger managers lack training

Younger managers need to prove their credibility to gain older workers' respect

Younger managers have a poor work ethic

Older workers require less direction

Younger managers have a poor attitude towards older

Perceptions reported by younger managers of supervising older workers

Perceptions reported by older workers of being supervised by younger workers

	workers
Interaction in teams is poor	Younger managers' lack of respect towards older workers
Experience, both work and life, of older workers is valuable	Inefficiency of younger managers
Different focuses/perspectives between two parties on many issues	Competitiveness of younger managers has a detrimental impact on the workplace
Older workers tend to have greater knowledge which can be 'tapped'	Lack of experience of younger managers depletes managerial abilities
Older workers are resistant to change	Too much authority is given to younger managers
Older workers show a lack of respect/poor attitude towards younger managers	Younger managers tendency to change procedures at a whim

Having identified the issues perceived by the two groups, the research turned to ascertaining the impact these issues had on working relationships. Interpretation of the interview data was facilitated by NUD*IST 6 software according to the dimensions identified in the SIT and LMX literature. These dimensions were distilled into seven aspects of older worker—younger manager interactions: attention, attitude, stereotyping, trust, satisfaction, benefits and limitations of working with either party. Originally, an eighth aspect (general differences) was devised, but this node was subsequently incorporated in the other seven.

Younger Manager Responses

Following is a representative sample of younger managers' views of the impact intergenerational issues have on working relationships.

Attention

Younger managers reported giving more attention to younger, or similar age workers.

I must admit I feel more comfortable in interacting with people of the same or similar age. Whether it is right or wrong, I think I tend to feel as though we are coming at things from a similar angle. [I'd] probably [give more attention to] the same age people, but depends who it is; usually the similar age people and leave the older workers to do what they want, it's easier. It is easier to relate to the younger people. I can relate to them [younger or similar age workers] better and I feel that they will listen to what I say more so than an older worker, and that I have things in common with them.

In contrast, one younger manager suggested more attention went to older workers in some situations:

I probably spend more time on older workers in terms of technology and change. ... every week is there is something different to learn, I spend more time getting it across to older workers. I guess older workers are more challenging as sometimes they are unwilling to accept change.

Attitude

Perceptions of younger managers reveal that the attitudes of older workers towards them is different to those of younger workers.

I think the older workers have the attitude "I'm older, I've been here longer than you and I should have that job. I'm not going to pay attention to what you have to say, you don't know what you're talking about and you haven't been around long enough". Some of the time the older workers feel that because we don't have the experience ... and we've only just come into [a management position] that maybe we

don't know and a lot of the time they do know probably more than me. They [older workers] just won't listen. You ask them nicely or you give direct instructions, it doesn't matter. They have been here forever, they know everything and we know nothing.

Notwithstanding, an alternative perception was expressed by three younger managers:

Older workers tend not to have an attitude. It's younger workers who tend to have an issue with younger managers I think. Older workers tend to know what is expected of me as a younger manager so they help more I guess and they don't give you 'cheek'. Younger workers do give 'cheek'. Actually, I'd prefer working with older people. They don't have anything to prove, and if they don't agree with you, they have a gentler way of expressing it. Maybe it's because they have raised kids and know how to deal with young people. They are more comfortable with themselves than us. No need to be competitive, have been successful in whatever fields and don't need to win all the time.

Stereotyping

Despite two younger managers suggesting that older workers do not stereotype younger managers, the majority of participants advise that the opposite applies.

Stereotyping depends on the way the younger manager displays themselves, ... they might think they know what they are doing, but they really don't because they don't have the experience, they might be full of theory but they aren't practical. Do you get to 40 and then forget that you were young? There's not much about us that some of the oldies like. The older people can be pretty isolated in their work; they don't like working in teams much. And as for any of those training programmes to increase communication and interaction—forget it.

Trust

In general, younger managers tend to trust older workers more than younger workers.

[I] probably trust the older workers more because they are more experienced and ... the younger workers ... don't have the experience and are more unreliable. Yes. I trust an older worker a little bit more with some of the tasks that I usually ask of my staff, because of the experience they have had with the job. ... sometimes older people are more trustworthy than younger people because they are more reliable. [Compared to younger workers being what?] More carefree, like not turning up to work, not being motivated.

However, two participants suggest that trust, for them, is not be linked to age.

... trust for me is something that you have to earn as an individual and whether they are older or younger does not matter. [It] depends on the individual, probably isn't age dependent. Comes down to the people involved.

Satisfaction

It was reported that younger managers' level of satisfaction was not significantly affected by older workers.

At times I find the attitudes and behaviour of some of the older guys gets me down, so, yes, it reduces both personal and job satisfaction. But I cannot say that the younger workers are any different. Well, personal satisfaction is not an issue here. Sometimes the workers get me down, but hey, it is not just the older ones ... in fact, I'd say the younger ones wreck my satisfaction with my work more often. Probably the opposite. I enjoy the "wrinklies". They tend to give, rather than take. So I think they increase my satisfaction with life and with the job.

Benefits of Older Workers

The sample of younger managers reported many advantages of supervising older workers.

Older workers have realistic expectations and in turn they have a realistic work ethic. As a general rule they have greater stability and more commitment. They [older workers] have been in the job for so

long that they know what is expected of them and they know what needs to be done. They require less direction. You can gain experience from their experience, they are reliable, they need less supervision, they are hardworking and have a lot more initiative.

Limitations of Older Workers

Some younger workers had negative experiences of supervising older workers.

Bit narrow focused—this is the way we have always done things, always worked this way, why do we need to change. Set in their ways [and] reluctant to see change happen. [An older worker's] attitude can be poor and narky—especially if you have asked them to do something. They [older workers] are set in their ways, and they don't always like listening to younger managers.

Older Manager Responses

A representative sample of older workers' views of the impact of intergenerational issues on working relationships follows.

Attention

On the whole, older workers believed they received less attention from a younger manager.

I find it very hard to approach a younger manager. There's a bit of a generation gap. I haven't got as much in common with them as the younger generation. I reckon that some younger people are just less likely to want to get to know you. Why would they? They associate with their own age group, and that's natural. I wouldn't want to spend much time with a bunch of kids.

Attitude

Older workers feel the attitudes of younger managers towards themselves and the managers' peer group is different.

I think the younger people have more rapport with one another. They may empathise with someone more their own age. There's some lazy little buggers amongst them, even though they are supervisors. It gives us who report to them no incentive to work hard, I can tell you. Thinking she knows more than she does. Sometimes comes across that she [younger manager] is better than you.

Stereotyping

Older workers noted widespread stereotyping on the part of younger managers.

They probably think that because we might be a bit older, a bit past it, not up with the new modern trendy ways of doing things and experience doesn't count when you come in young [as a manager]. There's certainly the age gap and different thinking for example old school, or not up with things these days such as technology. Look, you can't take kids seriously, as managers or anything else. They are feeling their way in the world because most situations are new to them. And that's great. I generally just agree with my young supervisor and then carry on as usual.

Trust

Trust, reported by older workers, compared with reports from younger managers, differs. Older workers claim that their level of trust in older or younger managers does not differ.

Trust does not differ based on age, [it is] based on individual relationships. My trust in a manager is based on their efficiency, how calmly they do the job and their attitude towards me. I know older people I would not trust, and younger people I would not trust. Actually, I reckon the young ones are too green to be deceitful ... you need experience to be a devious boss. I would probably have more trust in an older manager. I'd have a little more trust in their discretion and understanding of my situation.

Satisfaction

Younger managers had no impact whatsoever on older workers' level of satisfaction.

I have four grown-up kids. I'm not about to let someone else's kid upset me. I enjoy my job. ... they can get on your goat, but generally they don't affect my satisfaction levels. I'm here to work, not find fulfilment. Managers, old or young, are not an issue. They ask me to do something, I do it ... I don't get into an emotional state about it.

Benefits of Younger Managers

Older workers recognised many advantages associated with younger managers.

[Younger managers] have up-to-date, fresh ideas, they are not stuck in their ways, and they will look outside the square and try new things and put in a bit of enthusiasm. Most [younger managers] are easy going and easy to talk to, [and] approachable. It's a really important thing for me. "[Younger Managers have] younger thinking, new ideas and ways of doing things.

Limitations of Younger Managers

Older workers perceived some limitations of younger managers, but these were outweighed by the benefits.

Sometimes they want to change things that are working. Lack of life skills and dealing with people would be the main things. The way they talk to people. [They] may come in with set way things are going to be done whether it is right or wrong until they work out it doesn't work and then have to change it all again.

DISCUSSION

Questions as to whether intergenerational differences intrude into manager-subordinate interaction is a matter of increasing importance in the contemporary workplace (Pelletier 2005). The present study suggests that such differences are an issue, and that some critical concerns face contemporary management where the supervisor is younger than subordinate employees.

Perception of Younger Managers

That younger supervisors were suspicious of older workers' intentions and felt that they had little confidence in their management abilities points to a lack of understanding between the cohorts. This observation suggests that younger managers were largely deficient in supervisory experience, and both groups had difficulties communicating openly with each other. Expectedly, younger managers felt that older workers resisted change, but there is little evidence as to whether this was in fact the case, or whether it was merely a subjective impression. With respect to perceptions that older workers did not show respect to younger managers, and had a poor attitude towards their authority, it is possible that the latter expected esteem automatically accompanies position rather than having to be earned by the incumbent; this aligns with observations regarding 'entitlement' by Moss Kanter (2001). It is interesting to note that although younger managers were not certain of the intentions of older workers, they were confident in leaving them to complete tasks unsupervised. It is also possible that the level of managers' trust was deeper than they themselves recognised. The fact that the experience and knowledge of older workers was valued by younger workers indicates that they were aware of the benefits of an intergenerational workplace, and not so self confident or experiencing 'like me' syndrome as to overlook the contribution made by the older workers.

Perception of Older Workers

Younger managers expressed varying appraisals of their interactions with older workers. Nevertheless, the latter generally held more critical views. The 'bundle' of generally negative perceptions conveyed by older workers support the notion, that in many ways, younger managers trusted older workers more than older workers trusted younger managers. In the main, this stems from the older workers' view that younger managers lack managerial experience and training.

Theory Relevance

The findings of this inquiry reflect LMX and SIT theories, both of which illuminate issues on the working relationship between younger managers and older workers. LMX describes how the quality of exchange relationships between leaders and followers can vary, and how these relationships are based on factors such as mutual trust, respect, and liking. Concerning trust, the findings of this study ran contrary to expectations. It was anticipated that lack of trust may have been an issue between the cohorts, but this was not the case. In fact, generational differences were shown to increase trust. While older workers believe their level of trust does not differ based upon the age of the manager, younger managers feel they have higher levels of trust in an older worker compared to that of a younger worker. It seems that respect, on the part of both parties, is problematic, however. Across all categories of impact of intergenerational issues, especially 'attitudes', 'stereotyping' and 'limitations', indications of a lack of respect were evident. The degree to which younger managers' like older workers and vice versa can be best described as tepid. Just as there was no consistent hostility between any of the respondents, there was no particular 'connection'. At the root of this indifference is a lack of common interests between the groups.

A premise of LMX theory is that the nature of each of the dimensions in the exchange relationship will, in aggregate, determine whether subordinates are designated to the leader's in group or out group. Those excluded from the in group receive less consideration from the leader. Using age related criteria, this study determined that the quality of the relationship on two of the three central constructs (respect and liking) were far from optimal, and as a result, in groups and out groups were formed. In support of the literature, younger managers were found to believe that they paid more attention to younger or similar aged employees. A notion of LMX of theory was further sustained by older workers who claimed that they generally preferred older managers. Their preference was acquired through experience they received less attention from younger managers because they did not have common interests.

The SIT theory provides a foundation on which to understand relationships between social categories and the self concept. The underpinning is particularly instructive with regard to behaviours such as ethnocentrism, intergroup bias, intergroup discrimination, group solidarity, normative behaviour and stereotyping. Ethnocentrism was not expected and not detected, however, 'age-centrism' was evident. Just as ethnocentrism leads individuals to view the world from the perspective of their own culture, in this study some employees seemed to view the world from the perspective of their own age group. This, in turn, led some participants to judge their older/younger colleagues in relation to the mindsets and behaviour of their contemporaries. Explicit manifestations of intergroup bias and intergroup discrimination were not reported. However, it was clear that each cohort held latent preconceptions of their older/younger co workers. Similar to the previous two dimensions, group solidarity was extant, but dormant. The older workers were fairly consistent in their dissatisfaction with some aspects of younger managers, but there was no suggestion of any organised undermining of the authority of the latter. Violations of normative behaviour, although mild, were evident. Whilst the older workers did not overtly rebel against the younger managers, some were dismissive of their supervisors' authority and/or directives. Stereotyping was found to be a factor, which significantly influenced the working relationship between the two groups. Both younger managers and older workers felt they were stereotyped unfavourably by the other party.

Each of the identified dimensions had at their foundation two age based issues. These two issues can be succinctly presented as (i) older workers preferred older managers, and (ii) the attitudes of both groups differ when interacting with the opposite cohort. Specifically, older workers show a different attitude towards younger managers compared to older managers, and younger managers exhibit a different attitude to older workers compared to younger workers. In addition, SIT theory asserts that leadership in groups rests on prototypicality; that is, members generally prefer a leader who is similar to themselves. Leader prototypicality is evident in the present study. This sustains the in group and out group categorisation process of LMX which suggests that leaders pick group members based upon similarities in their own characteristics.

Despite the generally negative perceptions respondents in the present study report benefits accruing from the intergenerational workplace. Younger managers believed older workers possess high skill levels, and have experience and knowledge upon which the younger managers can draw. Further, in comparison to their younger colleagues, the older workers were perceived as having realistic expectations of the job, reliability, stability, commitment, strong work ethic, and initiative. These factors were generally viewed as having a positive impact on the working relationship of the two cohorts. Older workers perceived the advantages of younger managers to include flexibility, new ideas, high level of enthusiasm and stamina, differing perspectives on things, easy going and approachable.

The foregoing addresses the first three research questions by determining the perceptions both groups have of each other, and by ascertaining how these perceptions influence the working relationship between them. The final research question will now be considered.

HRM and the Intergenerational Workplace

Five participants thought that tensions between older workers and younger managers were no different from those which occur in the any supervisor/subordinate relationship, and thus, was not a particular issue. Conversely, the remaining 31 people did perceive tensions specific to the older worker—younger manager relationship, and were asked how these might be addressed. Responses fell into two broad categories. A total of eight respondents were of the opinion that intergenerational disagreement is an inevitable, and possibly welcome, dimension of a diverse workplace which should be accepted rather than managed. The remaining 23 informants believed the problems could be addressed through managerial channels and suggested various domains in which HRM could become involved in order to manage the issues they had detected in their workplaces. Arranged by the seven dimensions identified previously, the full list of HRM domains proposed by the informants is noted in Table 2. The following are representative of their responses:

Like anything, it comes down to training, personal growth and awareness. Both [groups] need to be sensitive to stereotypes, and learning to take people as people and not reading all those articles about Generation X and Y, and know that we are all different and take that on board.

... if it is about change, it's all about communication and knowledge and training and education. The more that we can do that, the more successful those relationships will be.

There needs to be better understanding from both sides. The younger managers need to understand that the older workers were brought up in a different generation with different values and beliefs; work ethic mainly and loyalty to the organisation.

In terms of recruitment practices make known that while you have the skill set and competences required, however we have concerns about team fit, how do you feel about this, before we recruit you what can we do with this. Have the confidence to discuss with both younger and older workers as to team fit with the values and mission of the organisation.

Table 2 Options HRM may adopt to manage the issues arising between younger managers and older workers

Areas of impact of intergenerational issues	Manifestation of intergenerational issues	Participants' domains for HRM involvement	HRM interventions
Attitudes	Lack of consideration	Creating awareness	OD aimed at creating a culture of self awareness and awareness of the needs of others
	Lack of inclusion	Recognising intergenerationality	Assuring staff that generational differences exist, are natural, and can enhance the organisation
	Lack of sympathy and/or empathy	Creating awareness	OD aimed at creating a culture of self awareness and awareness of the needs of others
	Lack of communication	Communication training	Aimed at reducing misunderstanding and increasing effectiveness of communication channels
	Psychological 'distance' between the two cohorts	Provide for informal interaction	Opportunities for interaction beyond the work environment
	Nothing in common	Appropriate staffing	Attracting and retaining employees who 'fit' the intergenerational workplace
Attitudes	OWs lack confidence in YMs	Instil knowledge	Management development

Areas of impact of intergenerational issues	Manifestation of intergenerational issues	Participants' domains for HRM involvement	HRM interventions
			aimed at providing younger managers with supervisory competencies
	OWs think they should be in a managerial position	Performance monitoring	Performance management systems which encourage and reward productive employees
	No attempt to communicate across generations	Communication training	Aimed at reducing misunderstanding and increasing effectiveness of communication channels
	OWs see YMs as having a poor work ethic	Introduce mentoring	Not only older to younger, but younger to older
	YM portray air of superiority	Team building	Increased use of team projects, with training and management of team behaviour and outcomes
Trust	YMs trust OWs more than they trust YWs	Educate staff in intergenerational workplace	Programmes to develop an understanding of intergenerational values and perspectives
	Both cohorts believe they are stereotyped by the other	Creating awareness	OD aimed at creating a culture of self awareness and awareness of the needs of others
Stereotyping	YM believe OW refuse to learn new approaches	Managing conflict	Introduce systems which recognise, diagnose and address dysfunctional intergenerational differences
	OW ignore instructions of YMs (passive resistance)	Managing conflict	Introduce systems which recognise, diagnose and address dysfunctional intergenerational differences
Satisfaction	Because OW dismissive of YM, satisfaction not an issue	Managing conflict	Introduce systems which recognise, diagnose and address dysfunctional intergenerational differences
YMs' views of benefits of OWs	Realistic work expectations	Shared learning	As far as practicable, T & D efforts are inclusive, involving both older and younger employees
	OWs have greater stability	Appropriate staffing	Attracting and retaining

Areas of impact of intergenerational issues	Manifestation of intergenerational issues	Participants' domains for HRM involvement	HRM interventions
	than YMs		employees who 'fit' the intergenerational workplace
	OWs more committed to the job/organisation than YMs	Introduce mentoring	Not only older to younger, but younger to older
	OWs require less direction/supervision	Instil knowledge	Management development aimed at providing younger managers with supervisory competencies
	YMs can learn from OWs	Introduce mentoring	Not only older to younger, but younger to older
YMs' views of limitations of OWs	Reluctant to change	Encourage flexibility	Development programmes promoting creativity and innovation
	OWs can be disagreeable	Training interpersonal skills	in Training in areas such as sensitivity, interpersonal skills, diversity
OWs' views of benefits of YMs	Innovative, enthusiastic	flexible, Introduce mentoring	Not only older to younger, but younger to older
	Easy to talk to	Personal interaction workshops	Practical sessions in which the two groups interact in nonthreatening environment
OWs' views of limitations of YMs	Re-invent the wheel' or make changes for sake of change	Instil knowledge	Management development aimed at providing younger managers with supervisory competencies
	Poor interpersonal skills	Communication training	Training aimed at reducing misunderstanding and increasing effectiveness of communication channels

Having presented the findings of this research within the context of the two theoretical models, attention turns to suggested remedial activities in terms of the domains for HRM involvement identified by both parties. As detailed in Table 2, each domain may be addressed by a specific HRM intervention; from this emerges a series of broad HRM approaches aimed at ameliorating the tensions identified in the present study. It is shown in Table 2 these approaches embrace communication and leadership via training and development strategies, aimed at changing attitudes and reinforcing behaviour change.

Problems associated with imbalances of attention are in essence a developmental issue because they emanate from perceptions of heterogeneity. Both cohorts perceive the workforce as divided according to age, with younger managers directing their attention according to that division. Although individual training may be helpful, HRM should focus on cultural change aimed fostering inclusiveness. Given the rather complex and fluid nature of the relationships under consideration, it seems that the sudden imposition of a rational change model (e.g., Lewin, 1951) would be inappropriate. Rather, the approach needs to account for the political and generational realities of the workplace and provide continuity during the change process. An incremental approach is suggested, whereby endeavours to modify employee attitudes and behaviour are 'built in' to structures, processes, and HRM functions.

Greenwood and Hinings (1996), and Ulrich and Lake (1991) argue that the process of adjusting and learning should be ongoing, and subject to fine tuning.

Both groups perceived that the attitudes of the other differed from their own. Because this emerged across numerous facets of workplace interaction, a variety of HRM measures seem relevant. Again, the need for training is evident with particular emphasis on cultivating effective and empathetic communication between the groups and improving the management skills of younger managers. Appropriate performance management systems are also considered important as not only will this contribute to the assessment and design of the training just mentioned, but also would identify those older workers who may be currently overlooked for supervisory roles. The introduction of team building measures would further assist in attitude change. More care needs to be taken at the recruitment and selection stage. The attitudes of some candidates may be impervious to HRM efforts in enhancing intergenerational harmony, and thus, should not be hired. The orientation process is critical because it provides an occasion to ensure that workers' attitudes to colleagues, whether older or younger, are first formed in the context of organisational life. In other words, notwithstanding any pre existing prejudices, all employees are imbued with the prevailing organisational philosophies and work ethic.

As trust between the parties is not acutely problematic, specific HRM involvement does not seem warranted. Notwithstanding, trust between younger managers and younger workers could improve. Measures to correct this might reasonably be incorporated in other activities suggested in this paper, for example, as a feature of team building, communication training and/or cultural change.

Negative stereotyping is exposed as a serious issue. Whilst the tensions emerging from differing attitudes were largely latent, stereotyping engendered behaviours which threaten organisational and personal performance. Two issues are of particular concern. Firstly, younger managers' perception that older workers cannot or will not learn new 'ways' has the potential to restrict training opportunities being offered to the latter. Secondly, some older workers, casting younger managers as lacking experience and/or ability, are dismissive of their authority. In both cases, HRM action is imperative. Formalised training programmes, closely linked to the performance management system, are critical if inclusive and on going skill development is to be instigated and maintained. With regards to the 'passive resistance' tactics employed by some older workers, HRM must improve younger managers' abilities in the areas of assertiveness and conflict management.

Both groups report that the older worker—younger manager relationship does not impact on satisfaction levels, but for different reasons. Whilst the younger managers believed employees of any age affect their satisfaction levels, some older workers were so indifferent to their younger managers that they were impervious to any impact the latter may have. This frame of mind reflects the dismissiveness noted above; it is potentially harmful and must be dealt with by HRM in a similar manner.

The last two categories—perceptions of benefits and limitations—provide HRM with a conduit for operationalising the activities discussed above. The participants' observations of their opposite number revealed an interesting fusion of frustration, warmth, admiration, envy, sympathy, goodwill, fondness and apathy, but relatively little malice. By incorporating the constructive elements of these eclectic sentiments in the delivery of the requisite interventions, HRM has the opportunity to build on extant strengths to promote a more compatible intergenerational workforce. For example, training sessions might feature younger managers helping older workers become more involved with technology or taking a more flexible approach with people and/or tasks. Equally, older workers could guide younger managers in the development of more efficient work practices or more effective interpersonal communication. In similar vein, intergenerational team development activities could be designed so as to emphasise the established reality that the factors which bind are greater than those which divide. The prospect of capitalising on the perceived advantages and disadvantages in the pursuit of reducing stereotyping and increasing empathy is self evident.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry contributes to the emerging body of research relating to the intergenerational workplace. Viewed against LMX and SIT frameworks, it was found that many issues have a negative impact on the working relationship of two cohorts. This was especially evident in matters concerning the lack of attention younger managers pay to older workers, each group's attitudes towards the other, and stereotyping. Of particular concern is the potential for overt displays of intergroup discrimination and violations of normative behaviour. Trust between the factions was generally sound. Satisfaction was not reported as a critical issue, but examination of this facet exposed a potentially problematic lack of concern on the part of some older workers. Despite considerable tensions being reported by both 'sides', an underlying empathy was also clearly evident. Over 60 per cent of participants considered that intergenerational problems might be solved or ameliorated by HRM involvement and suggested many domains from which this may be instigated. From these comments a number of HRM interventions are proposed. In particular, taking a lead in such areas as improving communication between the parties, mentoring, performance monitoring, team building and organisation development could all be profitably employed.

In delivering these interventions, it is likely that HRM build on the essential goodwill and understanding which each group holds. Although conducted as a preliminary inquiry and thus limited by its sample size, this study has highlighted the need for HRM to be sensitive to, and proactive in addressing, the issues arising from the interactions of younger managers and older workers. Whilst further research is needed, this paper advances a perspective for HRM practitioners to refocus on aspects of the employment relationship by recognising differences among their employees and respecting age diversity, and so maximising outcomes for each individual and the organisation.

AUTHORS

Graeme Tonks, BBus, M.Ed., Ph.D., is a Lecturer with the School of Management, based at the University of Tasmania's Launceston campus. Prior to entering academe, he held management positions in the finance industry. He teaches in the HRM, Organisational Behaviour, and International Business areas. Dr Tonks' research interests include management in developing economies, management education, and human resource management.

Email : Graeme.Tonks@utas.edu.au

Katie Dickenson, BBus (Hons), is a past student at the University of Tasmania. Her studies focussed on Human Resource Management, with an emphasis on workplace diversity. She is currently employed with the Defence Department in Canberra, working in the field of HR strategy and policy.

Email : katie.dickenson@defence.gov.au

Lindsay Nelson, BA (Hons), M.Sc., Ph.D., is a management consultant and clinical psychologist. Prior to entering private practice, he was a Senior Lecturer with the University of Tasmania's School of Management. He has extensive Human Resource Management and Employee Relations experience in the public and private sector, and taught in the HRM and Organisational Behaviour areas. Dr Nelson's research interests include organisational change, workplace change, and occupational health and safety.

Email : lindsay.nelson@bigpond.com

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