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Workshop 1

Four generations of workforce: Stereotypes and meta-stereotypes

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General background

Interest in generational issues has gained a lot of attention, as today the workplace is populated by multiple generations (i.e., Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Gen Y'ers or Millennials, and recently Gen Z is entering the workplace (Ng & Parry, 2016)).

Although there is extant literature on generational differences, the least we can say that findings concerning intergenerational differences are fractured and contradicting (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Ng & Parry, 2016; Parry, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011). Some scholars even argued that the effect sizes are small and the differences are not meaningful (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015).

Nevertheless, generational differences appear to be a real phenomenon, if only in the perceptions of employees and managers (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Foster, 2013; Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Urick, 2014). Van Rossem (2019) drawing on a social identity perspective (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1985), demonstrated how perceptions of their own and other generations can direct social categorization and generational stereotypes of the in-group and outgroup(s). Stereotypes are beliefs about the attributes and behaviors of members of certain groups and can be positive or negative (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes may provide the perceiver with an evidence base that gives cognitive reality to any traits that (s)he may have erroneously attributed to a target individual and may serve as grounds for predictions about the target's behavior (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996; Hogg & Turner, 1987). Stereotypes are self- and socially relevant, as they promote cognitive economy, enhance feelings of self-worth and explain and justify the social order (Sherman, Sherman, Percy, & Soderberg, 2013). Hence, generational stereotypes may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies (Van Rossem, 2019b), prejudice, discrimination and conflicts in multigenerational work situations (Urick & Hollensbe, 2014). Furthermore, insights into these

stereotypes may guide the development of more effective practices that enhance intergenerational synergy (Van Rossem, 2019b).

Generational stereotypes are but one side of the coin. Meta-stereotypes or what individuals believe other generational groups think about their own generation is a critical aspect as well of intergenerational perception influencing generational interactions (Van Rossem, 2019a). Interaction in an organization requires multiple viewpoints—not just what a group believes about other groups (stereotypes), but also what they think those other groups believe about them (meta-stereotypes) (Finkelstein, King, & Voyles, 2015; Finkelstein, Ryan, & King, 2013; Ryan, King, & Finkelstein, 2015). Termed differently, generational meta-stereotypes or what individuals believe other generational groups think about their own generation is a critical aspect of intergenerational dynamics as well (Gordijn, 2002).

Aim of the workshop

The aim of this workshop is **NOT!** to discuss the plagues that generational research is confronted with, such as the confound of the cohort in which the individual is located, the individual's age/life course, and the influence of particular historical giving rise to problems in identifying their separate effects (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Ng & Parry, 2016; Parry, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011), and the fact that generations are often demarcated as groupings of birth cohorts implying that generations have specific boundaries corresponding to a set of birth years that seems arbitrary (Joshi, Dencker, & Franz, 2011; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

In this workshop, participants will learn how they perceive their own and the other generations. Participants will be confronted with their self-views and the stereotypes they hold about colleagues belonging to the other generations. But also, participants will learn how colleagues belonging to other generations think about them as belonging to a certain generation. Termed differently, participants will learn that generations can be considered salient social categories that form the basis of a social world that is enriched with meaning. Participants will understand how generational stereotypes can lead to prejudice, discrimination and conflicts in multigenerational work situations, in their own work situation. Both employees and managers should be aware how (self)stereotypes are often inaccurate and how easily they occur as they enhance understanding and control (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Moreover, the diversity literature shows that anticipation of being judged stereotypically induces feelings of threat and anxiety (Jetten, Hogg, & Mullin, 2000), which could set into motion defensive reactions and self-fulfilling behaviors that further handicap interactions (Finkelstein, Ryan, & King, 2013; Urick, Hollensbe, Masterson, & Lyons, 2016). However, as noted above, not all stereotypes are negative (Van Rossem, 2019c).

Method

In this workshop we invite participants to explore their own experiences of generational diversity in an entertaining way. Generational groups will be asked to think about how they perceive their own and other generations. The several viewpoints will be confronted and

discussed. Next, it will be conversed how the generational groups think the other generations think about them and what kind of coping mechanism they use. Finally, it will be debated what kind of practices can be used to manage generational stereotypical and meta-stereotypical thinking.

Participants in the workshop must have no prior knowledge of the theme.

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