

## THE ROLE AND PRESENCE OF INTERGENERATIONAL SYNERGY IN MEDIUM AND LARGE SLOVENIAN COMPANIES

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**Abstract:** *Intergenerational synergy and thus the exchange of knowledge, is the key element in the implementation of various tasks, finding solutions, obtaining and exchanging important information. The main aim of the paper is to present intergenerational synergy and to determine the impact of intergenerational synergy on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. In the empirical research 407 companies and 814 employees were included by random sampling. Research results revealed that employers on general pay attention to intergenerational synergy in companies in Slovenia, but there are still opportunities to raise awareness among employers about intergenerational synergy and their emphasis on intergenerational synergy for better performance of business operations, such as sales activities to customers of different age profiles, and similar. Results also suggest that intergenerational synergy in companies has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. In this context, an appropriate environment should be created to respect the diversity of the workforce.*

**Keywords:** *Intergenerational synergy, employees, work engagement*

**JEL Classification** J24 · C12

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of the workforce is rapidly changing. One remarkable shift is the steady increase of older employees in the workplace. Aging of the global workforce will be the dominant issue faced by business and organizations in the next two decades (Cheung and Wu, 2013). Due to demographic changes, managers will have to pay more attention to generational differences and to the creation of intergenerational synergies (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Companies that are aware of the importance of age diversity of their employees have a great advantage over others since they can best respond to faster and faster changes in the global environment. Age diverse employees bring to such company different opinions, knowledge, experiences, values and lifestyles. Age diverse employees, and thus the establishment of intergenerational synergy in company, contribute to greater productivity, innovation, creativity, motivation, satisfaction, work engagement, competitiveness and easier adaptation and acceptance of changes (see, e.g. Naegele and Walker, 2006; Hertel et al., 2013). Diversity in role expectations, working styles, and general values causes various needs for communication, coordination and conflict management. In the future, intergenerational teams will be the dominant characteristic of cooperation in organizations (Ellwart et al., 2013). Companies that know how to handle the age diversity of their employees are gaining competitive advantage and are far ahead of those organizations that are not aware of the importance of intergenerational teams and intergenerational cooperation between their employees (Agrawal, 2012).

An important task of the management is to increase concern for the work engagement of age-diverse employees. Employers must consider the factors that can influence the work engagement of employees. By promoting intergenerational synergy in the workplace, the work results of employees are improved, the level of their work performance is increased, the exchange of knowledge and experience is implemented, and work engagement of employees is strengthened. This contributes to the development, growth, performance, innovation, and competitiveness of a company (see, e.g. Albrecht et al., 2018; Sanyal et al., 2015). Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) summarize that vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. May et al. (2004) argued that engaged employees have high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) assert that engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; experience better health; create their own job and personal resources; and transfer their engagement to others.

The main aim of the paper is to present intergenerational synergy in companies in Slovenia and to determine the impact of intergenerational synergy on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. This paper aims to verify the following hypothesis

**H1:** Intergenerational synergy has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Data and Sample

We carried out an empirical study on intergenerational synergy in 1.000 randomly selected large- and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. The main survey involved 407 companies (the response rate was 40.7%) and 814 employees who responded to the questionnaire. In each large- and medium-sized company we selected up to 4 employees to participate in our research.

The questionnaire for intergenerational synergy was assessed by employers, because we wanted to find out if employers pay attention on intergenerational synergy in their companies. The questionnaire for work engagement was assessed by employees, because we wanted to find out if intergenerational synergy has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in companies in Slovenia.

The structure of employers that participated in the survey was as follows:

- Regarding the achieved education level of employers who participated in the research, 53.1% of the respondents finished high professional or university education, 23.3% of the respondents had a master's degree or doctorate, 20.4% of the respondents finished college, and the smallest percentage presents respondents who finished vocational training or high school (3.19%).
- According to the years of working experience of the respondents, 42.7% of employers with the length of service from 31 to 40 years were included in the research. In second place were respondents with a length of service from 21 to 30 years (40.8%). A low percentage of respondents had a length of service of more than 41 years (15.0%) and respondents with a length of service from 11 to 20 years (1.5%).
- The biggest share in the research sample represented large companies which employ over 250 employees (58.2%). Medium-sized companies comprised 41.8%.
- The most companies included in the survey (27.5%) were operating in the processing industry. This is followed by trade, maintenance, and repair of motor vehicles (19.0%); professional, scientific, and technical activities (14.5%); financial and insurance activities (11.8%); information and communication activities (5.6%); construction sector (3.7%); other diverse business activities (3.7%); real estate services (3.0%); health and social security (2.4%); catering (1.7%); supply of electricity, gas, and steam (1.7%); traffic and storage (1.5%); agriculture and hunting, forestry, and fishing (1.2%); water supply, sewage and waste management, and remediation activities (1.0%); mining (1.0%); and other activities (0.7%).

The structure of employees that participated in the survey was as follows:

- According to the years of working experience of the respondents, 27.4% of employees with the length of service from 21 to 30 years were included in the research. In second place were respondents with a length of service from 31 to 40 years (26.9%). In third place were respondents with a length of service from 11 to 20 years (25.9%). A low percentage of respondents had a length of service of more than 41 years (19.8%).

### 2.2. Research instrument

When designing the instrument for measuring the intergenerational synergy and work engagement of employees, we relied on the various theoretical principles and research of several authors. Using the listed statements, we completed the questionnaire regarding intergenerational

synergy by following the compilation of theoretical backgrounds of Naegele and Walker (2006) and Agrawal (2012). Statements for the work engagement were formed by Macey and Schneider (2008), Robertson and Cooper (2010). To determine the intergenerational synergy and work engagement in companies in Slovenia, the respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale their agreement to the listed statements, indicated as follows: 1-I completely disagree, 2-I do not agree, 3-I partially agree, 4-I agree, 5-I completely agree.

### 2.3. Statistical Analysis

There were three main focuses of our research. Firstly, we were analyzing the perceived intergenerational synergy and perceived work engagement, by analyzing several different dimensions of both multidimensional constructs, where the dimensions were measured by the degree of agreement with statements (measured variables) in the questionnaire that was developed. The non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples was used to find out the significant differences between the individual dimensions.

Secondly, factor analysis was used to form constructs, by replacing a large number of measured variables with a smaller number of factors – new variables, that explain high share of variation of measured variables; namely, the perceived intergenerational synergy and perceived work engagement constructs were formed. We wanted to establish whether the use of factor analysis is reasonable on the basis of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO \geq 0.5$ ) (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Based on the results of factor analysis, we did not eliminate any variable, because communalities were higher than 0.40 (Costello and Osborne, 2005). We checked the reliability of the measurement of research within the scope of inner consistency with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Chronbach, 1951). Hertel et al. (2013) define the indicators of highly reliable constructs as highly connected and show that all of them measure the same latent construct. The authors state that the reliability of the measurement that has a coefficient of  $\alpha \geq 0.80$  is marked as exemplary, as very good if the coefficient is in the interval  $0.70 \leq \alpha < 0.80$ , as moderate in the interval  $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.70$ , and as barely acceptable if the coefficient  $\alpha$  is smaller than 0.60.

Thirdly, factors obtained were used to perform a simple linear regression. We checked the quality of the obtained regression model with correlation coefficient, determination coefficient, F-test and t-test.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Results for intergenerational synergy, assessed by employers

Table 1 presents the results of descriptive statistics for sample of employers about the measured variables - items of the intergenerational synergy in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

Descriptive statistic for answers about the intergenerational synergy in companies in Table 1 shows that on average employers agree with all statements (the mean value well above the average scale value, 3). The highest average agreement is achieved by the statements "Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work" ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = 0.879$ ) and "Through intergenerational cooperation we exploit the benefits of age diversity of our employees" ( $M = 3.81$ ;  $SD = 0.891$ ). The highest dispersion of responses (standard deviation) is noted in the statement "Through intergenerational cooperation, we give emphasis on better understanding of different age profiles of customer and their needs." ( $M = 3.75$  ;  $SD = 0.953$ )

**Table 1:**

Descriptive statistics for answers about the construct intergenerational synergy in companies

Statement	N	Median	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
In the company we emphasize the intergenerational synergy.	407	4.00	3.74	0.894
Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work.	407	4.00	3.81	0.879
Through intergenerational cooperation we enable that employees make quicker solutions and decisions.	407	4.00	3.78	0.914
Through intergenerational cooperation, we allow the distribution of work tasks and with this we thereby reduce the workload of employees.	407	4.00	3.76	0.901
Through intergenerational cooperation, we give emphasis on better understanding of different age profiles of customer and their needs.	407	4.00	3.75	0.953
Through intergenerational cooperation we exploit the benefits of age diversity of our employees.	407	4.00	3.81	0.891
Valid N (list wise)	407			

Based on the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples, we wanted to find out the significant differences between the statements with the highest average agreement and other statements that describe the construct intergenerational synergy.

Table 2 shows the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples for statement “Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work” and other statements that describe the construct intergenerational synergy.

**Table 2:**

The non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples for statement “Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work”

The median of differences between “Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work” and ...	Z	Significance (2-tailed)
„In the company we emphasize the intergenerational synergy“ equals 0.	-3,501	0.000
„Through intergenerational cooperation we enable that employees make quicker solutions and decisions“ equals 0.	-1,718	0.086
„Through intergenerational cooperation, we allow the distribution of work tasks and with this we thereby reduce the workload of employees“ equals 0.	-1,438	0.150
„Through intergenerational cooperation, we give emphasis on better understanding of different age profiles of customer and their needs“ equals 0.	-2,065	0.039
„Through intergenerational cooperation we exploit the benefits of age diversity of our employees“ equals 0.	0.000	1.000

Based on the results (Table 2), we found that there are statistically significant differences between the average agreement with the statement “Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase

the innovation and creativity of our employees at work” and two statements „In the company we emphasize the intergenerational synergy” and „Through intergenerational cooperation, we give emphasis on better understanding of different age profiles of customer and their needs” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Other differences are not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ),.

Results show, that employers assess that the intergenerational cooperation brings the most important benefits to enhancement of innovation and creativity at work, they also emphasized the benefits of age diversity to the same extent ( $p > 0.05$ ), they also believe that the enhancement of intergenerational cooperation enables that employees make quicker solutions and decisions ( $p > 0.05$ ), better distribution of work tasks and reduction of the workload of employees ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, we can conclude, that there are several benefits of the intergenerational cooperation that are reflected through more efficient performance of activities of the company. It seems that only the emphasis of intergenerational integration itself is not enough or not important for employers; it is important that it brings real added value to the companies in different areas.

### 3.2. Results for work engagement, assessed by employees

Table 3 presents the results of the descriptive statistics for agreement with statements – items regarding the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics for agreement with statements – items regarding the work engagement of employees in companies

Statement	N	Median	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation(SD)
I do my work with passion.	814	4.00	3.62	1.028
I am engaged to the quality of my work.	814	4.00	4.18	0.792
I am engaged to achieve successful business results	814	4.00	4.15	0.847
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company and I am helping to develop the company.	814	4.00	4.05	0.911
I trust in my colleagues and the manager	814	4.00	4.04	0.879
I feel that my work and job are important.	814	4.00	3.76	1.135
I am proud to be employed in this company.	814	4.00	3.86	1.022
I believe in the successful development and operation of our company.	814	4.00	4.04	0.858
Valid N (list wise)	814			

Descriptive statistic for answers about the work engagement of employees in Table 3 shows that on average employees agree with all statements (the mean value well above the average scale value, 3). The highest average agreement is achieved by the statement “I am engaged to the quality of my work” ( $M = 4.18$ ;  $SD = 0.792$ ), along with the lowest standard deviation. The highest dispersion of responses (standard deviation) is noted in the statement “I feel that my work and job are important.”

Table 4 shows the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples for the statement “I am engaged to the quality of my work” that was assessed the highest and other statements that describe the construct work engagement of employees.

**Table 4:** The non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples for statement “I am engaged to the quality of my work”

The median of differences between “ I am engaged in the quality of my work ” and ...	Z	Significance (2-tailed)
“I do my work with passion“ equals 0.	-18,047	0.000
“I am engaged in the task of achieving successful business results“ equals 0.	-2,709	0.007
“I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company. ,, equals 0.	-6,465	0.000
“I trust in my colleagues and the manager ,, equals 0.	-7,591	0.000
„I feel that my work and job are important” equals 0.	-12,679	0.000
“I am proud to be employed in this company“ equals 0.	-11,911	0.000
„I believe in the successful development and operation of our company“	-8,358	0.000

Based on the results (Table 4), we found that there are statistically significant differences between the statement “I am engaged in the quality of my work” and all other statements that describe the construct work engagement of employees ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The results show that for employers the engagement at the workplace is the most strongly associated with the quality of their work, although other components are highly important, as well (high average agreement), although less ( $p < 0,01$ ) than the quality of their achieved working results very high.

### 3.3. The results of factor analysis for the construct intergenerational synergy, assessed by employers, and construct work engagement, assessed by employees

Table 5 presents the results of factor analysis for the construct intergenerational synergy. In the questionnaire for employers, intergenerational synergy was measured with six items. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO = 0.811$ ) and the results of Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 5607.985,  $df = 15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggested the use of factor analysis.

The values of all communalities in Table 5 for construct intergenerational synergy are higher than 0.90, therefore we have not eliminated any variable. The total variance explained is 95.05%. Table 5 also shows that all factor loadings are higher than 0.90.

The value of Cronbach’s alpha for the factor intergenerational synergy is 0.986; therefore, the reliability of the measurement scale is high.

In the questionnaire for employees, work engagement was measured with eight statements. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO = 0.935$ ) and the results of Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square = 7426,973,  $df = 28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggest the use of factor analysis. Table 6 presents the results of factor analysis for the construct work engagement of employees.

**Table 5:** The results of factor analysis for the construct promoting intergenerational synergy

Statement	Communalities	Factor loadings
In the company we emphasize intergenerational synergy.	0.949	0.974
Through intergenerational cooperation, we increase the innovation and creativity of our employees at work.	0.972	0.986
Through intergenerational cooperation we enable employees to create quicker solutions and make faster decisions.	0.966	0.983
Through intergenerational cooperation, we allow the distribution of work tasks, and with this we thereby reduce the workload of employees.	0.928	0.963
Through intergenerational cooperation, we place emphasis on better understanding of different age profiles of customer and their needs.	0.913	0.955
Through intergenerational cooperation, we exploit the benefits of age diversity among our employees.	0.976	0.988
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure:0.881		
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	5607.985
	df	15
	p	0.000
Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 95.048 %		

**Table 6:** The results of factor analysis for the construct work engagement of employees

Statement	Communalities	Factor loadings
I do my work with passion.	0.717	0.847
I am engaged in the quality of my work	0.856	0.925
I am engaged in the task of achieving successful business results.	0.823	0.907
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company.	0.781	0.884
I trust my colleagues and the manager.	0.845	0.919
I feel that my work and job are important.	0.702	0.838
I am proud to be employed with this company.	0.760	0.871
I believe in the successful development and operation of our company.	0.841	0.917
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure:0.935		
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	7426.973
	df	28
	p	0.000
Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 79.062 %		

Table 6 shows that the values of all communalities for work engagement of employees are higher than 0.70, therefore we have not eliminated any variable. The total variance explained is 79.06 %. All factor loadings are higher than 0.80.

The value of the Cronbach's alpha for the factor work engagement of employees is 0.958; therefore, the reliability of the measurement is high.

### 3.4. The impact of intergenerational synergy on work engagement of employees in Slovenia

After saving the factor scores as new variables, we performed a regression analysis to verify the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Intergenerational synergy in companies has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

In the continuation, we present the results of testing of the hypothesis. The value of correlation coefficient between the dependent variable (work engagement of employees; the average value of factor work engagement of 2 employees of a company was calculated) and independent variable (intergenerational synergy – assessed by employers) for hypothesis H1 is  $r = 0.880$ , which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between the variables – this results reveals that higher the intergenerational cooperation, higher on average the work engagement of employees. The value of the determination coefficient is 0.774. The determination coefficient explains that 77.4% of the variance of the dependent variable (work engagement of employees) is explained with the variance of the independent variable (intergenerational synergy). We have established the statistical significance of the derived regression function with the F-test ( $F = 1385.974$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Table 7 shows the regression analysis results.

**Table 7:** Regression analysis results

Hypothesis	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
			B	Standard error	Beta		
H1	Work engagement of employees	Intergenerational synergy	1.001	0.027	0.880	37.229	0.000

The results of the regression (Table 7) indicated that the regression coefficient of intergenerational synergy was 1.001 ( $\beta = 0.880$ ) and was significantly different from 0 ( $p < 0.001$ ). There is a statistically significant positive impact of the independent variable (intergenerational synergy) on the dependent variable (work engagement of employees). Based on the results we confirmed the hypothesis H1:

**H1:** Intergenerational synergy has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The objectives of our research were fully achieved. Firstly, we analyzed the attitudes of employers to intergenerational cooperation and concluded that intergenerational cooperation for employers is a way of achieving greater employee innovation and creativity, a way to achieve faster and more

effective co-operative decisions, and the possibility of more efficient distribution of work tasks a more even workload of employees. Employers see the importance of intergenerational cooperation, above all, in the more efficient implementation of business activities of the company. Secondly, we analyzed the work engagement of employees. Here, one single component was pointed out as more important from the employees' view point as other components, namely, the assessment that employees assess the engagement at their workplace especially through the quality of work they perform. Although other components of engagement are important, as well (above average agreements with statements), it seems that the commitment to achieving high-quality work results is the most important from the employees' view-point. Thirdly, we also confirmed the hypothesis that intergenerational synergy has a statistically significant positive impact on the work engagement of employees in large and medium-sized companies in Slovenia.

Our results have several implications. For companies, creating awareness of the differences and benefits of different generations and accepting and appreciating them, represent the first stage of optimizing age diversity. Age discrimination is detrimental to the success of all organizations, since it causes unnecessary waste of talents, skills, knowledge, and experience of age-diverse employees. A diverse organization breaks down stereotypes related to older employees, does not use age as a criterion for making any personnel decisions, creates a pleasant working environment, cares for employees' engagement, builds competitive advantages on the basis of intergenerational coexistence and motivated employees of all ages, and builds the reputation as an ethical employer (see, e.g. Jorgensen, 2005). Results are also important for higher education management teams, planning and organizing the curricula in management study programs, since our results point to an important aspect of human resource management studies, namely the development of a graduates' competences to be able to create and shaping the intergenerational ecosystems within companies. The results are also important for economic policy makers, who should take appropriate financial measures (for example, tax incentives for successful promotion and co-creation of intergenerational cooperation at workplace) or non-financial measures (incentives when applying for tenders for companies that are successful in creating efficient intergenerational ecosystem) to promote intergenerational cooperation.

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