

Workforce ageing in Public Administration:

The influence of age-diversity climate on affective commitment and turnover intentions

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Purpose

An ageing workforce is one of the greatest challenges that organisations face today. With the postponement of retirement age to 66 years old and three months (Ordinance no. 67/2016) and the budgetary constraints for the recruitment of new workers, Public Administration is no exception. According to data from the Department of Statistics of Public Employment, in 2016, the average age of workers in Public Administration was 46.1 years old. Figures indicate that 33.7% of the 659 149 workers were aged between 45 and 54 years, and 23.6% were 55 or more years old.

On behalf of organisational sustainability, Human Resources Management (HRM) in Public Administration will have to ensure that its workers will remain active, productive and motivated in the future. Previous research shows that workers' needs change with age (e.g. Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers & De Lange, 2010). Hence, HRM has to develop organisational practices that meet the needs of people of all ages (Truxillo, Cadiz & Hammer, 2015; Walker, 1999) in order to create an age-diversity climate (Boehm, Kunze & Bruch, 2014). Age-diversity climate refers to the extent that workers perceive the nondiscriminatory treatment of workers of all age groups with regard to all relevant organisational practices, policies and procedures (Boehm et al., 2014).

If workers believe they receive a nondiscriminatory age-related treatment, they will likely report an increasing level of emotional attachment to the organization, the so-called affective commitment. So, our first hypothesis proposes that age-diversity climate positively influences affective commitment.

Also, workers who feel that are treated in an unfair and discriminatory manner will be more prone to leave the organisation. Therefore, our second hypothesis states that age-diversity climate negatively affects turnover intentions.

Methodology

The sample consists of 107 workers of Public Administration (aged between 22 and 65 years old; mean= 45.8; sd= 9.7) who completed a questionnaire. Age-diversity climate was measured with a 7-item scale (adapted from Boehm et al., 2014). To measure affective commitment, Allen and Meyer's 6-item affective commitment scale was used (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Turnover intentions were measured using a 3-item scale that assessed a workers' tendency to continue as an organisational member. In all scales, participants answered to a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree to 6 = Totally agree).

Results

Findings support hypothesis 1 ($F(1, 103) = 36.597; p < .000$), with an R^2 of 25.5%, and hypothesis 2 ($F(1, 104) = 18.547; p < .000$), with an R^2 of 14.3%.

Implications

This study contributes to the public human resource management literature by showing that age-diversity climate explains part of the variables affective commitment and turnover intentions. The findings have also implications for HRM, drawing attention to the importance of workplace practices perception in Public Administration.

The legal framework for Public Administration imposes several limitations to HRM whereby its main focus has been on the administrative aspects of career management. However, a new paradigm is emerging, where HR practices are more flexible and differentiated (Boyne, Jenkins & Poole, 1999). Age is a form of differentiation in the development of HR practices and results show that workers' perception about these practices can predict affective commitment and turnover intentions. For that reason, and in a context of an ageing workforce, HRM in Public Administration should develop practices, policies and procedures that foster a positive age-diversity climate.

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