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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Diversity Climate and Job Crafting: The Role of Age.

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Abstract:

Introduction:

In recent years, scientific interest in generational differences has increased. More attention has been paid to the younger (Y generation) and to older workers (baby boom generation), little attention has been given to the X generation, composed of people who are between 35 and 50 years old. This paper aimed to examine the role of age in the relationship between diversity climate and job crafting, focusing on the middle aged (X generation).

Objective and Methods:

Based on lifespan development, self-regulation and job demands-resources theory, we postulated that the association between diversity climate and job crafting weakens with age. Specifically, we hypothesized that age can moderate the positive relationship between diversity climate and job crafting. The participants were 271 employees from different Italian organizations.

Results:

The results from hierarchical regression analysis showed that the relationship between diversity climate and job crafting is stronger in middle aged workers rather than in older workers.

Conclusions:

The findings suggest that diversity climate, in terms of organizational fairness, inclusion and personal diversity value can play a crucial role in the influence of job crafting which is, in turn, essential to improve positive organizational outcomes. Limitations and theoretical and operative implications are discussed.

Keywords: Diversity climate, Job crafting, X generation, Middle aged workers, Older workers, Y generation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Age represents a key element of diversity management, because it can be an added value for career and organizational development. While, in the past, diversity in human resources was considered as a limitation on the development of an organization, rather as an additional resource used to expand the empowerment and know-how of the company, nowadays, the diversity of human capital is becoming accepted as a normal evolution of human gender. In the current scenario, a diverse workforce is a fact of life. Most of the research in this area [1] indicated that diversity must be examined more deeply because it can be a crucial key in developing new strategies for organizations. Diversity management, in the global economy, has a strong impact on the workplace and affects the workforce and productivity in a significant way. Furthermore, recent sociological and psychological research on the ageing phenomenon revealed progressive socio-demographic changes, in particular among older workers in the workforce [1, 2]. In sum, while, in the past, age was considered as just a control variable, recently it has been considered to be an important factor studied by scholars and practitioners who work in job design. Moreover, current organizational environments are becoming multi

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-dimensional and, consequently, too complex to be managed. Age can be studied in terms of generational groups which are part of a diversity management in human resources. Diversity management in companies is becoming a priority; new actions and strategies are developing to cope with change as a result of the economic crisis. Generational theory explains changes and attitudes and behaviors over time [2]. Studying generations and analyzing their differences is becoming a key issue in recent years. Companies have been forced to manage diversity in different contexts and to consider different factors. One of these concerns the diversity of ages in the workforce. Workforces are aging around the world and they are doing so successfully. As the workforce ages, companies and societies have to maintain workers' well-being, quality of life and health in order to contain health-care costs [3]. So, studying generation differences can be considered a necessary condition to develop new actions and interventions for the active workforce and for the future of work. The term "generation" has been used to define people who were born within a certain range of dates, where they lived, and the significant life events and historical facts they lived and experienced [2, 4]. Scholars who studied generations theory, found four generations in the workplace: Traditionalists (born 1928-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) [5], Generation X (Gen X) and Generation Y (Gen Y) [6]. Most of the research, in work and organizational psychology and in human resources management focused on generational differences, especially between Gen X and Gen Y or between Gen Y and the Baby Boom Gen [2]. There are very few studies on the differences between Gen X and the Baby Boom Gen, that is, between people and their parents. Each generation started their professional careers in very different economic scenarios. Gen X people have both parents in the workforce; they are described as individuals who experience social insecurity and rapidly changing contexts [7]. They are defined as the Erasmus generation [8]. Work values of these individuals can be affected by age cohort or generation [9]. People from gen X do not like to network but they prefer advertising and recommitment. They initiated the free-agent workforce and they are likely to find a way to get things done smartly, quickly, and better, even if it means bending the rules. The gen X tends to respond well to a coaching management style that provides prompt feedback and credit for results achieved [10]. Gen X workers often lose their trust in, and loyalty to, their organizations and worry about getting bored and losing interest. For these reasons, companies should retain them if they wish to create and sustain their competitive advantage [11]. While Baby Boomers respect authority, desire to have more control over their career life, and prefer a consensual leadership style, at the opposite, people from gen X are considered cynical, pessimistic, and individualistic [12]. They tend to be family-oriented, realistic, and tolerant of both alternative lifestyles and cultural diversity. Moreover, they used to accept atypical contractual forms and live cyclically, alternating periods of work to periods of search of a job.

So, in the current scenario, the aim of the strategic management of human resources becomes, thus, the development of new proactive behaviors that are useful in coping with changes and with challenging demands arising in the world of work. From this perspective, job crafting, as a specific form of proactive behavior, can be a solution and a crucial aspect for researchers and professionals because it functions as a variable mediator related to positive organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction [13] and job performance. Furthermore, job crafting can work as an advantageous strategy in managing new challenges, addressing them to bring about an improvement in well-being at work [13, 14]. Job crafting is a process through which employees adapt their job to their preferences and needs [13, 15]. It represents a key indicator for the organization, and for its strategic role in global markets, because it can affect performance at work and may increase the development of new strategies for both workers and organizations [16, 13, 17]. The concept of job crafting has been extended within the theoretical framework of Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model [18 - 20], it involves the changes made by employees to balance the demands and the resources of their job with their abilities and needs. According to the JD-R Model, research [18 - 20] identified four principal job crafting dimensions related to resources and to demands. Job resources are aspects of the job that help people in achieving goals and in managing job demands with mediating effects [19]. Tims and colleagues [19, 20] recognised the dimensions of "increasing structural job resources" (e.g., creating opportunities for growth and development, autonomy and variety) and "increasing social job resources" (e.g., active capability in searching support from supervisors and colleagues, or feedback as opportunity of coaching). On the other hand, the job demands concern aspects of the job that require psychological and physical efforts they have been identified considering two dimensions: "increasing challenging job demands" (situations that workers have to overcome to learn and achieve goals) and "decreasing hindering job demands" (requests that impede worker's personal growth and goal achievement).

In line with this theoretical framework, the aim of this study is to contribute to a particular stream of research, investigating the relationship between diversity climate and job crafting by examining whether the relationship can be moderated by age. Starting from the theoretical perspective of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory [18], on the one hand, and from the lifespan theories such as the Selection, Optimization and Compensation (SOC) theory [7] on the other hand, we assume that diversity climate is positively related to job crafting and we postulate that this relationship

changes with age. Furthermore, we would expect that this relationship is moderated by age.

To our knowledge there is a lack of research about the relationship between diversity climate and job crafting.

Therefore, we aim to contribute to the literature on job crafting and diversity management for aging workers in two ways: first, by introducing the relationship between diversity climate and job crafting, and second, by providing and exploring a theoretical model that can explain why diversity climate can be more associated with the job crafting of Gen X workers, that is individuals at work who are between about 35 and 50 years old. A further aim of the paper is to contribute to this theoretical and empirical gap, investigating, for the first time, middle age as a crucial variable in the workforce.

1.1. Diversity Climate and Job Crafting

Diversity concerns gender, race, ethnicity and age Diversity is also related to the background and provenance of people in terms of familiar, personal and professional contexts, and also in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities [18]. In research focused on generational differences at work [19], significant differences are observed in organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction [20]. As described above, these differences in work values and attitudes, involve Gen X and Gen Y, that is, young people and middle aged people at work. There is rather modest evidence of generational differences between Gen X and the Baby Boom Gen, and this gap also involves studies about proactive behaviors at work. Recently, job crafting behaviors have been studied as a mechanism useful to the management of different career stages [21]. Job crafting works as a proactive tool which supports employees and employers in controlling the risk of changes occurring in the labor market [2]. For instance, according to one particular framework [22], job crafting for older workers can help them to stay motivated and healthy. Job crafting was developed in order to specify how job crafters are those workers who proactively introduce changes in their work environment in order to fit their personal needs and their abilities with their job [23]. Further research suggested how job crafting can be studied as an approach to job design directed at achieving individual and organizational positive outcomes [24, 25].

From a theoretical point of view, job crafting has been described as consisting of three dimensions [23]: Task, cognitive and relational aspects to build relations at work, through which workers can modify their social environment. According to the idea that job crafting concerns change in job design, we followed theoretical suggestions deriving from JD-R theory [6]. The JD-R theory aims to explore how and which job characteristics can lead to positive individual and organizational outcomes. Job crafting is a key approach useful in developing a proactive work behavior used by employees to adjust their jobs to their needs, skills and decisions [26, 27]. In short, according to the above mentioned authors, and in line with the above described research, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: there is a positive association between diversity climate and job crafting.

Hypothesis 1a: age moderates the association between diversity climate and job crafting; in particular we expect that this association will be stronger among middle aged workers than among older workers.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Procedure and Participants

Data for the study were collected in different organizational contexts among employees in the public and private sectors. The survey was designed to respect privacy and anonymity, ensuring information confidentiality. Participants signed an informed written consent form, with the description of the purpose of the research.

The participants were 271 employees (52% men and 48% women). The response rate was about 81%. The average age of the employees was 38.87 years (SD = 13.02), ranging from 19 to 60 years old; 72.7% of the participants were under 50 years old while 27.3% were over 50 years old. In regards to education, 29.6% had a university degree, 52% had a High School degree and the remaining had a low level or professional qualification. About 43.2% of the participants were single, 52% were married (or lived with a partner) and the remaining 4.4% were divorced (or widowed (0.4%). Regarding occupational status, 62.5% had a permanent contract whereas 35.4% had a temporary job (2.1% missing).

2.2. Measures

Diversity climate was assessed by a nine-item set of questions from the Italian adaptation of the Diversity Climate Scale [28]. Each item was answered on a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree”).

The scale consists of three dimensions: organizational fairness (sample item: “Managers here give feedback and evaluate employees fairly, regardless of employees’ race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or social background.”), organizational inclusion (sample item: “The company spends enough money and time on diversity awareness and related training”) and personal diversity value (Sample items: “Knowing more about the cultural norms of diverse groups would help me be more effective in my job.”). The scale may be also used successfully as a global measure of diversity climate [28]. Cronbach’s alpha was .84.

Job crafting was measured with the 21-items of the Job Crafting Scale [29]. The scale consists of items that cover four dimensions: Increasing structural job resources (*e.g.*, “I try to develop my capabilities”), decreasing hindering demands (“I make sure that my work is mentally less intense”), increasing social job resources (“I ask whether my supervisor is satisfied with my work”) and increasing challenging demands (“I regularly take on extra tasks even though I do not receive extra salary for them”). Possible answers ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). In line with the previous studies [*e.g.*, 21], in the present paper we used the global measure as indicator of job crafting factor. Cronbach’s alpha reached .80. Age was measured by asking employees how old they were. Then, we categorized the age into two main categories: middle = under 50 years, older = over 50 years. Control variables included gender (0 = male; 1= female), educational level (ranging from 1 = low level to 6 = higher level such as a Ph.D.) and type of contract (0 = permanent contract; 1= temporary contract). The demographic variables were correlated with job crafting and other study variables. We controlled for these demographics in our analyses.

2.3. Statistical Data Analyses

To test our hypotheses, we used regression analyses with two-way interaction effects. Following suggestions by Aiken and West [30], the independent variables were centered; significant interactions were plotted with one SD below and one above the mean. Data were analyzed using SPSS (23th version).

3. RESULTS

We calculated means, SDs, correlations and reliability coefficients for the variables studied. The descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations (N= 271).

–	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Sex (male =0)	0.48	0.50	–	–	–	–
2. Age (1= over 50 years)	.27	0.44	.11	–	–	–
3. DC	4.23	1.34	.09	-.06	(.84)	–
4. JC	2.92	0.57	.12	-.14*	.24**	(.80)

Notes. JC = job crafting. DC= diversity climate. Cronbach’s alpha on diagonal in parenthesis. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

The scaled variables reached good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of between .80 and .84. Moreover, diversity climate was positively correlated to job crafting (.24), while job crafting was negatively correlated to age (-.14). We used hierarchical regression to test the H1 hypothesis. The dependent variable in this equation was job crafting, diversity climate (centered) and the target age condition (middle target versus older target workers, coded = 0 and 1 respectively) were entered in Step 1. The interaction term, which was the product of diversity climate and the age of the cohort considered, was entered in Step 2. Hierarchical regression analysis of findings and standardized betas are reported in Table 2. The results showed that diversity climate was significantly and positively related to job crafting, $\beta = .39$ $p < .05$, supporting H1. In addition, in interaction terms, diversity climate X age groups was significant, $\beta = -.43$ $p < .01$ supporting H2. Finally, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p < .05$. The effect of diversity climate on job crafting was stronger for middle workers and not significant for older workers.

Table 2. Hierarchical OLS regressions for predicting job crafting of middle and older workers.

Variable	Job Crafting		
	R ²	ΔR^2	β
–			
Step 1	.26*	–	–
Age groups	–	–	-.62*
Diversity climate	–	–	.39*
Step 2	.29	.035**	–

(Table 2) contd.....

Variable	Job Crafting		
Age groups*Diversity climate	-	-	-.43**

Notes: n=271: age groups refer to the age of the cohort being rated; 0= middle worker, 1= older worker; betas are for the final equation (note that the betas of the first step are reported in the text); *p<.05; **p<.01.

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, we described the diversity climate perceived by employees and their job crafting behaviors, and we examined how these variables may change with age. The effects of age were as expected; the association between diversity climate and job crafting weakens with age. From a social perspective, the term “generation” has been used to define a group of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural context. A generation faces similar experiences, handles threats and opportunities in terms of type of legal contracts, changes with new ways of managing human resources, historical transformations, new frameworks and scenarios of the concept of family and life style. In short, each generation has a history and has collective memories that have been used as a basis for future attitudes and behaviors [31]. Another important topic concerns age. The age variable has been used mostly as a control variable. Recently, it has attracted more and more attention, because the workforce is ageing, so it has become necessary to re-consider the differences between younger and older workers in order to develop new strategies to cope with change and to reduce risk and failure. This is a crucial goal for both employees and companies. Therefore, it becomes essential to modify work attitudes and to craft one’s own job in order to increase performance, well-being and, in the long term, the productivity of the organization. Job crafting, from this perspective, can play a role as a proactive behavior. It is able to affect personal and organizational outcomes in a positive manner. This study contributes to the literature on diversity management and job crafting in several ways. Firstly, to the best of our knowledge, there is a lack of research about diversity climate and job crafting. Age as a moderator has been studied by scholars in recent decades, but very little importance has been given to the cohort of older workers and to the cohort of younger workers. The workers between 35 and 50 years, that is people from Gen X, can have an impact on the future of human resources and diversity management that may change the way we work.

4.1. Practical Implications

A first practical implication of this study involves the role of organizations which could enhance diversity management to improve job crafting behaviors useful in increasing positive organizational outcomes. Managers and employers could sustain the development of human resources diversity practices in different age cohorts in order to motivate middle aged people and to use strategically the expertise and skills of older workers to perform better and to improve the productivity of the company. Another topic concerns job insecurity. We used the type of contract as a control variable, but we did not find significant results in the relation between diversity climate and job crafting. The scenario nowadays includes an increasing number of temporary contracts and job insecurity [5, 4]. Many employees try to find different ways to manipulate their job to adapt it to their own needs. Job crafting can become a decisive approach to deal with change with important implications for performance [32], interventions and well-being at work. Organizational processes are very complex; managers and employers could implement new interventions for diversity in general [33] and for gender in particular [34, 35]. The development of transformative strategies could serve to help to understand and to manipulate the different ways in which work is divided, organized and valued. This could contribute to giving the right value to the diversity present in the organization but also to use diversity for the advantage and benefit of the company thereby improving productivity.

CONCLUSION

This study has key strengths, including a theoretical analysis of job crafting and diversity management but it also has several limitations. The first limitation concerns the sample: it was a convenience sample, not representative of the entire population of Italian workers. Secondly, we used a cross-sectional data collection method. Future research could consider a longitudinal design to control the variables over time.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

No animals/humans were used for studies that are the basis of this research.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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Declared none.

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