

Employee communication challenges in multi generation workplaces

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ABSTRACT

Employees are expected to stay in their jobs until a later age and therefore, increasingly, generations need to work together in the workplace. As a result there are more differences in communicational preferences and organisations have to effectively navigate these differences. To understand how organisations might effectively navigate generational differences in communication this thesis has set out to research policies, and general attention, concerning intergenerational communication within companies. To answer, the research question a case study was conducted within a company. The case study consisted of interviews, as well as a content analysis. The company provided employees for the interviews and these employees differed in age and position as to give a full overview. Furthermore, the content analysis used messages from the LinkedIn page of the company, internal news channel while also analyzing the website of the company. The selection of messages was based on the length of the thesis, so three months, as to give a sufficient overview of different messages used. The website was analysed as a whole as most pages discuss topics relevant to the research question. Results from the interviews showed that several stereotypes concerning both older and younger generations are present within the company. Furthermore, that attention for generational differences concerning communication is beneficial for the company as a whole. Consequently, differences in communication concerns not only style but also method. The results therefore also indicate that there is a difference in preference for communication methods which can potentially create conflict within the workplace. Additionally, results from the content analysis showed that the different communication medium illustrate the values of the company. The different communication mediums directed externally mostly discuss values of the company and the importance of being a team, while the internal news channel also calls its employees to participate and help in developing the company. Furthermore, the structure of an organisation is of influence in how generations work together within the workplace, and the structure of the organisation becomes apparent on for example the website. This study, therefore, underlines the importance of mutual understanding between generations and the need for a company to have an open organisational structure while also having sufficient attention for generational differences and communication preferences.

KEYWORDS: *Stereotypes, workplace, intergenerational communication, policies*

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1 Introduction

Employees are continually expected to work longer resulting in the presence of more generations within the workplace. Although the presence of older employees becomes more prominent within the workplace they often face stereotypes (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021). Current research focuses on the stereotypes older employees encounter and shows that these stereotypes are very much alive and can present some negative consequences for older employees (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021; Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Stereotypes can namely be used to justify biased treatment of people based on their age, which poses a problem as most of the differences between age groups are not empirically supported (Finkelstein et al., 2014). As currently a lot of research centres around stereotypes of older employees the connection between younger and older employees is sometimes a bit lost. This thesis will, therefore, address stereotypes about both younger and older workers and emphasize the connection between them by focusing on communication within companies. Furthermore, as the younger generation of employees also encounter stereotypes when it comes to the work place (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Gharzi et al., 2020); these stereotypes will also be taken into account. Consequently, there should be more of a focus on the balance between older and younger employees that focuses on the communication between generations within a company, both in work related interpersonal communication and more structured communication in for example company newsletters. The concept of intergenerational communication is especially relevant today as many companies seek to implement policies concerning the integration of older workers (Kroon et al., 2017). The research will then add to the existing research by reflecting on the stereotypes of both younger and older employees and focusing on the connection between those stereotypes within intergenerational communication.

The current population can be divided into several generations. These generations can be on the one hand, divided based on birth years and, on the other hand, based on a set of worldviews that has been based in social or historical events which were defining during the development years of that particular generation (Mannheim, 1922/1924; Cugin, 2012). Studies can differ in their definition of generations, as is described by Costanza et al. (2012), although most studies use similar characteristics

to determine a generational group. Namely; that individuals within the group are roughly the same age and are influenced by the same significant historical events that occurred during periods in their lives where they developed (Costanza et al., 2012). However, the way in which generations are divided and which people belong to which generation can differ between studies. Most studies follow largely the same division of generations dividing the current population into four separate generations named the baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z. In order to have a clear distinction between generations, and which ages fall within which generation, this thesis will follow the following definitions of generations: baby boomers born between 1946-1964 (ages 59 to 77), Gen X born between 1965-1980 (ages 42 to 58), millennials born between 1981-1996 (ages 27 to 42), and Gen Z born between 1997-2012 (ages 26 and younger) (Pew Research Center, 2018). The division of generations mentioned above is based on research that takes the American population into account. However, the definition overlaps with most current research discussing generations within the workplace which is why it is useful in this thesis. For generations research agrees on a largely similar range of years in which each generation is born (Cogin, 2012) and in that there is no great difference between the United States and the Netherlands. Therefore, the thesis will follow the above mentioned definition in defining the four generations. Furthermore, in this thesis I will combine insights regarding generations with notions on what defines an older or younger worker.

Within the workplace employees are becoming older resulting to an increase in generations that are present within a company (Cogin, 2012). The presence of multiple generations has some consequences for a company as the company has to navigate different working and communicating styles (Cogin, 2012). The communication between generations can encounter some difficulties as young employees often start full enthusiasm forgetting the experience of older employees (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). Consequently, the difference in work strategies and communicating styles can lead to difficulties in the workplace (Abrams and Von Frank, 2014), such as conflict (Smola & Sutton, 2002). In addition, discrimination based on age was found to be the most common form of discrimination in Europe in a study by Abrams, Eilola & Swift (2009). Furthermore, given the context of a society where the workforce is becoming older research in how discrimination based on age

occurs especially within the workplace is necessary (Abrams, Eilola, & Swift, 2009). In addition, research has indicated that within organisations with 500 or more employees conflict between older and younger workers often occur on the perception of the work-life balance as well as work ethics (Burke, 2005; Cugin, 2012). The differences in perception of work-life balance as well as work ethics can lead to differences in communication as well as working styles which is why it is essential to understand these differences between generations.

My thesis will therefore centre around the following question: how do companies navigate intergenerational communication within their company policies? The research questions will also focus on the different types of intergenerational communication within organisations as well as the different types of company policies, such as existing courses concerning intergenerational communication, when it comes to managing generations within the workspace. These company policies can contain both existing policies as well as attention for generational differences within the workplace. If these policies are existent they will be researched. In addition, the amount of attention for intergenerational communication will be evaluated. A case study will be made from one company which has not yet companywide policies in place concerning the integration of older workers and the communication between generations. However, they do have attention for the integration of older workers and the importance of intergenerational communication. Furthermore, the research question will be divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What stereotypes about younger workers are present in organisations?
2. What stereotypes about older workers are present in organisations?
3. What do organisations do to bridge the gap between generations within interpersonal communication settings?
4. What do organisations do to bridge the gap between generations within mediated communication (organisational communication outlets)?

In order to research the above mentioned research question and sub-question I will use existing literature on stereotypes both concerning older and younger workers. In addition, I will review literature on communication between generations in both a mediated and interpersonal context. The literature used will be mostly of recent research projects which also take into account the changes within the workplace when it comes to multiple generations being present, as well as, older

generations who are working longer. Furthermore, the literature used on communication between generations will focus on both generational preferences, potential differences as well as possible preferences between generations when it comes to different communication mediums.

Communication between generations is a subject that is consistently becoming more important for companies. As mentioned before, employees are working longer (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021; Kroon et al., 2017) and there are more generations present on the work floor (Cogin, 2011). These generations all have their own preferences when it comes to style of communication as well as which medium is used. Therefore, in order for a company to successfully navigate these changes it is essential to understand the differences between generations. Furthermore, in order to fully understand the different preferences between generations when it comes to communication it is necessary to have some idea of the potential stereotypes underlining communication choices. Therefore, the research focuses on both stereotypes of older and younger workers in combination with communication in order to give a full understanding of where generations might differ in their communication styles and how a company might navigate this. The topic of intergenerational communication, is thus important for companies as understanding the different aspects of intergenerational communication helps them to successfully manage the different generations on their work floor, and therefore their company as a whole.

Having an understanding of potential, unconscious, stereotypes is not only of importance for companies, or employees, but also society as a whole (Abrams and Von Frank, 2014). Firstly, as most people are in some way active on the labour market understanding generational preferences when it comes to communication might be helpful when working together with different generations. However, the advantages are not solely restricted to the workplace as communication between generations happens every day and everywhere. Therefore, being aware of one's, perhaps unconscious, stereotypes can help in addressing others more productively. In addition, research on existing stereotypes can make people aware of the stereotypes they are using (Perry et al., 2013). People from different generations can think about how they address people from other generations, perhaps take their preferences into account, but most of all learn more about where the preferences are based on

(Abrams and Von Frank, 2014). Discussing stereotypes in relation with possible origins can create a better understanding of each generation and why they prefer certain communication styles.

2 Theoretical framework

Different generations bring different insights and work attitudes to the workplace a good understanding of the values of each generation at the workplace is crucial. Furthermore, older employees often encounter stereotypes concerning their age and behaviour in the workplace as older employees are expected to achieve less (Van Selm, 2019). However, age has proven to be a weak predictor of accomplishments in the workplace (Van Selm 2019, Ng & Feldman, 2012). Additionally, not only older employees but also younger employees deal with stereotypes within the workplace (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Gharzi et al. 2020; Snape & Redman, 2003). Making assumptions based on age is part of ageism which is defined by Greenberg et al. (2002) as “negative behaviors towards an individual solely based on that person’s age” (27). Ageism therefore can entail assumptions to both the young and the elderly (Abrams, Eller, & Bryant, 2006); however, Bousfield & Hutchison (2010) state that youth-based prejudice can be escaped through time. In contrast prejudice based on old age does not have this opportunity (Bousfield & Hutchinson, 2010). Furthermore, generational differences affect every aspect of the workplace which is why it is important to have understanding between generations (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Different views within the workplace can have an impact on the profitability, increase turnover rates and decrease morale (Simons, 2009 qtd in Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Smola & Sutton, 2002) as most workplaces are not designed to take the needs of each generation into account (Behrens, 2009, as cited in Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Furthermore, companies need to be aware of the political, social and economic events that have influenced each generation (Simons, 2009 as cited in Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Consequently, communication is seen as potentially capable of eliminating stereotypes and “stigmas” (Simons, 2009 as cited in Kapoor & Solomon, 2011) between generations thus helping in eliminating potential conflicts within the workplace. Therefore, in order to understand how communication can positively impact the relation between generations in the workplace it is essential to understand the stereotypical beliefs underlying communication. In order to do so stereotypes regarding both younger and older works will be discussed as well as intergenerational communication in the workplace divided into mediated and interpersonal communication.

2.1 Stereotypes: younger generations

Stereotypes or perceptions of others can have an impact on how different groups view themselves and others (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). In order to process information people often categorize or use stereotypes to store different kinds of information within different categories (Brewer, Dull & Lui, 1981). These categories can range from remarks on someone's characteristics as well as opinions on work attitude. At the same time individuals can put themselves in a group (Brewer, Dull & Lui, 1981). The people in the group relate to one another as they share for example similar values or the same generation, which is also known as social identity theory (Turener et al., 1979). In addition, people within a group have a tendency to overestimate similarities between the people in the group and underestimate differences with people outside the group (Van Dalen et al., 2010). As a result differences are perceived as being greater. Furthermore, this process plays into the occurrence of stereotypes as categorizing and stereotyping can result in people connecting positive characteristics to their own group and more negative ones to other groups (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Both older and younger workers can encounter stereotypes regarding work attitude, work ethic, values and so on. A study by Van Dalen et al., (2010) found that in contrast with older workers, younger workers are perceived to be more qualified when it comes to new technology skills, mental and physical capacity willingness to learn and flexibility. In contrast, they scored lower on being reliable, accurate and committed to work (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Therefore, when it comes to communication between generations it is crucial to be aware of the existing stereotypes and how these stereotypes have come into play.

2.1.1 Work attitude

Younger workers often start out at their job full of enthusiasm and ideas, however, similar to older workers they can encounter stereotypes (Matheson et al., 2000). Abrams and Von Frank (2014) define the different generations and describe their attitude within the workplace. The younger generations such as Gen Z (ages 26 and younger) are described as informal, casual and direct. They

rely on themselves, value independence (Keene et al., 2015) and want a clear work life balance. The millennials are confident and assertive, but according to Abrams and Von Frank (2014), they are also used to praise, supervision and structure. They like and expect continuous feedback and work well when given detailed instructions (Glass, 2007). In addition, they value work-life balance over money or status and require regular feedback (Keene et al., 2015). These attitudes can sometimes clash with that of older employees who have grown up differently, have worked longer and perceive situations differently. This is underscored in a study by Cugin (2012) where differences in work values between generations were researched. The study divided the participants based on shared experiences at similar ages into generations and found that generations find different things important when it comes to work values. In accordance with Abram and Von Frank (2014) younger generations were found to respond more positively to regular feedback and recognition, where older generations are accustomed to annual performance reviews. Furthermore, according to Gharzai et al. (2020) during the pandemic the actions of especially Generation Z and millennials increased the presence of stereotypes surrounding these generations as the responses of these generations to the pandemic played into the existing stereotypes. During the pandemic Generation Z and millennials responded to the pandemic by continuing to live life normally or trying to avoid isolation. As a result they were seen as impatient, lazy and overly social also when it comes to work attitudes (Gharzai et al., 2020). However, the change in work attitude is partly a result of a changed job market. Instead of stability they pursue meaning and that is something they also take with them into the workplace (Gharzai et al., 2020). The different challenges they faced growing up, especially during a pandemic, has influenced their outlook on life and work (Gharzai et al., 2020). In addition, the preference of younger generations to work remotely can lead to conflict between generations, as a study shows that a lack in understanding these preferences of generations when it comes to working, for example, remotely can create conflict (Glass, 2007). Older generations, such as baby boomers, view working remotely or having a virtual office as not being as productive while Gen Z is of the opinion that as long as the work gets done where and how does not matter (Glass, 2007). Consequently, younger workers are more focused on results and do not place as much value in the method (Glass, 2007). Thus, younger generations can encounter stereotypes when it

comes to their work attitude, and their preferences when it comes to working can clash with that of older generations which can sometimes create conflict.

2.1.2 Loyalty

Loyalty to an organisation is important for employers, however, commitment to an organisation can differ between generations. Currently, millennials are perceived as self-centred, unmotivated, disrespectful and disloyal and there are concerns regarding their communication within the workplace as research has shown that it is quite different than that of other generations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Furthermore, when it comes to loyalty or commitment to an organisation there are some differences between generations. Loyalty is dependent on a generations outlook on long-term commitments to organisations. For a younger generation, such as Generations Y, long term may incorporate a one year commitment while that might be fundamentally different for an older generation. Older generation might feel that a one year commitment does not fall within the long term span and that therefore younger generations are less loyal and committed. However, the question of loyalty spans larger than just assumptions towards the potential commitment of the younger generations. In their study, Brody and Rubin (2011) go into the question of loyalty and argue that the older generations might encounter more negative consequences from the current structure of the workplace as they have experienced the most change. The change they refer to is that within the workplace flexibility has become increasingly more important than stability. Younger workers have only known the job market the way it is, but older workers have known how it was and have grown accustomed to security. Furthermore, they argue that each generation encounters different general normative expectations when it comes to employment relationship. These generalized expectations than in turn influence loyalty or company commitment (Brody and Rubin, 2011). The occurrence of insecurity when it comes to work especially with companies downsizing or employment not being solely based on performance but rather also dependent on company structure has changed the perception of younger workers towards company loyalty. Younger workers have perceived insecurity as part of the job market and in return favour flexibility over security and hard work for pay for the

possibility to move flexibly within an organisation (Brody and Rubin, 2011). These preferences when it comes to work values have changed the perception on company loyalty as commitment to a company is for them no longer static but rather dynamic and more flexible. In contrast, older generations have been accustomed to more security and therefore it might be more difficult for them to participate in a more flexible organisational environment. Thus, the question of loyalty or commitment depends not only on a generations perception of the concept but also the nature of the job market. Stability and security have been traded in for flexibility, thus also changing the general

2.1.3 Work motivation

Work motivation can differ between workers, and perhaps between generations. However, it is not necessarily the case that age predicts work motivation. Research has shown that position within in organisation has an impact on work motivation (Keene et al., 2015). When someone has a higher position within an organisation that person is more intrinsically motivated to work. The position makes sure that someone is more invested in the potential success of the organisation and thus more motivated to put in effort for that success (Keene et al., 2015). In addition, motivation can differ between generations as older and younger generations might differ in their reasoning behind motivation to work. For example, millennials are motivated to have an impact and construct their work attitude accordingly. Furthermore, they often work well in teams, are motivated to have an impact and prefer open communication (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Thus, younger employees encounter both negative and positive stereotypes that can influence perception of their work.

2.2 Stereotypes: older generations

In many Western countries adults are expected to participate longer within the labour market; however at the same time older workers are perceived as less able to cope with the demands of the workplace (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021). Studies have shown that older workers are seen as reliable, trustworthy and loyal (Venter, 2016). However, there is also the perception that older workers are less

able to adapt to new situations, they lack motivation and are overall less capable compared to younger workers (Bal et al., 2011; Van Dalen et al., 2010b). In short most stereotypes regarding older employees contain the following assumptions: poor performance, resistance to change, they cost more and are less able to learn (Finkelstein et al., 2014). Although these stereotypes are present they are not supported by empirical evidence (Nauta et al., 2004; Ng & Feldman, 2012). However, they can influence the treatment of older employees (Finkelstein et al., 2014) as well as retirement decisions of older workers (Gaillard & Desmette, 2010; Tang & Burr, 2015). Research has not shown that older workers perform less or are less motivated, however, they still encounter these stereotypical beliefs (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021; Kleissner & Jahn, 2019). A study by Van Selm and Heijkant (2021) on communication surrounding older employees remarks on the presence of stereotypical beliefs and the way they can impact communication both in media and from employers. Communication surrounding older workers makes apparent stereotypical beliefs in the way certain qualities are asked and presented. Thus, stereotypes older workers encounter can change their place within the labour market.

Generations have different values when it comes to work and the workplace (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). The values of assumptions for the younger generations have been discussed previously. The generation of baby boomers are idealistic and work and personal sacrifice equal financial success (Glass, 2007). The generation has brought those opinions with them while being part of an organisation. The generation of baby boomers is used to being in charge and is of the opinion that one should play by the rules. They want to be respected and value authority in the workplace. At the same time they have an affinity for millennials which is why mentoring between those generations often works well (Keene et al., 2015). When it comes to communication older generations can be more indirect as opposed to direct and consider the feelings of the other when giving for example feedback. In addition they think diplomacy is important and have required people skills which are useful when conducting themselves within the workplace. At the same time, there are also a number of positive attitudes and stereotypes towards older workers. Older workers are often perceived as being loyal to an organisation, reliable, they have experience and interpersonal skills (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Furthermore, the study by Van Dalen et al., (2010) found that when it comes to productivity older

workers scored higher for qualities such as being reliable, more accurate and more committed. Consequently, they scored lower for acquiring new technology skills, mental and physical capacity, willingness to learn and flexibility (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Thus, older generations differ in their view on the workplace, work ethic and communication. These differences can create some stereotypes concerning authority; however, they are also perceived as being loyal, reliable and have experience

2.2.1 Work attitude

Perceptions of older workers might incorporate that they will take time off more frequently, less able to adapt and have more sick leave. However, in contrast older workers can be seen as less distracted and more committed to work (Young, 2013). In addition, when it comes to working or working with technology there is a difference, or perceived difference, between older and younger workers. Older workers, such as baby boomers, are used to working within set frames. They value a physical office space where everyone is present during set working hours (Glass, 2007). Furthermore, when it comes to technology and attitude towards the use of technology for work the opinions differ between generations. Younger generations view older workers as less able to use new technologies and change. However, in contrast older generations view themselves as being open to change and new technologies as long as using those technologies has value (Glass, 2007). Thus, concerning work attitude older workers can encounter some stereotypes such as being less able to adapt or being gone more frequently due to sick leave. However, older workers are also perceived as committed and they accept changes and new technologies as long as they are useful.

2.3 Effects of a group

Perceptions of both younger and older workers differ between groups, and can also be amplified within a group. Studies have found that older workers are perceived more positively by other older workers (Hassell & Perrewe, 1995), which is defined as in-group favouritism (Turner et al., 1979). These findings indicate that a group can have an effect on how stereotypes are developed

and also on in group bolstering (Weeks et al., 2017). Groups then are set against each other resulting in each group looking more favourable towards themselves thus perceiving the other more negatively (Weeks et al., 2017). These in group favouritism occur from younger workers towards older and vice versa (Kleissner & Jahn, 2019). So both younger and older generations look more favourably towards their own group and more negatively towards the other. Especially, in these situations studies found that contact between groups is affective and can help alleviate stereotypes between groups (Henkens, 2005). Contact between different age groups can therefore help in reducing age bias (Schloegel et al., 2016) and especially in the workplace the quality of contact is important as high quality contact between younger and older workers can result in positive attitudes towards older workers (Iweins et al., 2013; Henkens 2005). Thus, staying within one's own group can result in a more negative outlook on other generational groups while working together can help eliminate stereotypes.

2.4 Intergenerational communication

Communication within the workplace can differ due to the preferences of different generations. Generations differ in their attitudes in the workplace and also differ in their perceptions of the correct medium of communication (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2017). There is a difference in the effectiveness of different communication mediums and the choice of medium is to some degree dependent on the generation and their perceptions (Woodward & Vongswasdi, 2017). Therefore, communication practice can vary for different generations and different style of communication are needed in order to communicate clearly between generations (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). Communication can reveal shared values and indicate goals within the organisation; therefore, it is important to pay attention to communication within the workplace (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). The differences between each generation when it comes to work attitude or values can create conflict within the workplace (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011); which, can be the result of a lack of understanding for the values of each generation (Simons, 2009). Therefore, open communication can help to reduce stigmas, or stereotypes, regarding generations thus diminishing the presence of conflict within the workplace (Simons, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand the different components at the

basis of communication, such as stereotypes, in order to understand the aspects of intergenerational communication.

Intergenerational communication or intergenerational contact in general can help diminish the effects of ageism as explained in the previous paragraphs (Iweins et al., 2013; Henkens 2005). Having contact between different generational groups can help counter the effects of existing stereotypes (Gilbert & Ricketts, 2008). Programmes challenging contact between generations are seen as beneficial for all groups as they create a better understanding and respect between older and younger people (Hatton-Yeo, 2006). For the workplace, this might also be beneficial to actively address differences between generations. Thus communication, or contact, between generations can counter existing stereotypes between generational groups.

2.4.1 Mediated and interpersonal communication

Communication within the workplace occurs in many forms. A company can communicate via an internal communication platform or use email or social media. Colleagues speak to each other during their lunch break or discuss business over the phone or in a videocall. The different forms of communication are for the purpose of this study divided into two; namely, mediated and interpersonal communication. Mediated communication concerns all communication from the company, created by a communication team including messaging on website, social media and an internal communication platform. Interpersonal communication entails all personal communication between colleagues but also between employer and employee. The communication consists of both personal interactions as well as more professional interactions such as business calls.

Interpersonal communication can occur in many forms and how people communicate interpersonally has also changed continuously through the ages (Venter, 2016). Communication entails both verbal and non-verbal communication but also digital and face-to-face communication (Venter, 2016). Both digital and face-to-face communication are incorporated within the term interpersonal communication as the nature of the communication suggests a personal connection

between the people participating (Venter, 2016). As mentioned before, interpersonal communication has changed through the years mostly with the development of technology. Where people first used to write letters or communicate mostly face-to-face the development of technology has given people more options (Venter, 2016). With the continuous development of technology more options for communication are available. However, different generations use different technologies when communicating and the difference in these choices can potentially create conflict or misunderstanding. Different generations prefer different medium when it comes to communicating and especially between older and younger generations these differences are apparent. The generation of baby boomers, for example, prefers face-to-face communication while Generation Y has grown up in the digital era and prefers the use of technology when communicating. As a result, the differences between these generations when it comes to communicational preferences can result in conflict due to misunderstanding (Venter, 2016). Generation Y and baby boomers have a different preference when it comes to communication media, also because they have grown up with different communication options, thus the way they communicate interpersonally differs (Venter, 2016). Thus, due to a gap in communication between generations misunderstanding and conflicts can occur.

2.4.1 Communication preferences

Communication preferences differ for generations and are influenced by generational differences. For older generations, such as baby boomers, face-to-face communication is valued most (Glass, 2007; Venter, 2016). They see no problem in walking someone's office to ask something in person. Younger generations, however, often rely on using technology or what is most convenient. Younger millennials prefer digital messaging over face-to-face communication or calling. As a result preferred communication methods can differ between generations resulting potential conflict. At the same time, both younger and older generations are aware that keeping up with technological changes is important when it comes to work and life (Venter, 2016). Although the way in which they deal with technological changes might differ they are both willing to do what it takes. Therefore, when it comes

to interpersonal communication it is important to be open-minded as each generation can learn from the other (Venter, 2016). When it comes to communicating company policy it is important to keep in mind what each generation prefers. For example when communicating through a website millennials will respond well to blogs and so on that give an informal view of the company (Glass, 2007). In addition, baby boomers value an environment where they are challenged so communicating that will attract workers from those generations. Lastly, Gen X is more focused on the benefits a company offers as they value flexibility (Glass, 2007). Keeping these preferences in mind can help when planning and executing strategic communication in organisations targeting a specific generation.

3 Methods

In order to empirically study the research question this thesis uses a case study. This chapter focuses on the methodological choices that were made. First, the research design will be presented. Second, a detailed prescription of the procedures will be provided concerning both qualitative interviews and qualitative content analysis. This is then followed by an overview of the sampling after which the operationalization is discussed.

For this thesis the division between older and younger worker is important in order to research intergenerational communication. Therefore, in addition to using the above mentioned generations a division between those generations in the workplace will be added in order to create two separate groups of employees. The first group contains the first two generations and will be used within this thesis as the group young workers. The last two generations mentioned are incorporated within the group of older workers. Previous research has differed in their opinion on the ages of older workers. Often the term older worker is used to describe workers who are aged 40 or older (Bourne, 1982; Warr, 2000). However, other use the ages 50 or 55 as a basis for division as workers at that age participate less within the labour market (Kooij et al., 2007). In addition, when researching organisations age 40 and older is often used to divide older and younger workers. Workers aged 40 and older are referred to as old as knowledge, skills and attitudes are taken into account. Therefore, the specific definition of age can have an impact on defining which age groups are incorporated in the term older workers. Kooij et al. (2007) differentiates between five different definitions when it comes to age including chronological age as well as functional, subjective and organisational. These different definitions can all impact the division of age groups as well as the definition of older workers.

3.1 Description of methods

This thesis has set out to research how companies deal with intergenerational communication. In order to see how company policies might contribute to efficient and positive communication between generations, as well as ethical considerations at the work floor, a case study has been conducted. A case study consist of research on multiple aspects within one company. As this thesis has

set out to research how companies navigate intergenerational communication, it is interesting to see how different aspects of company communication deal with this; which, becomes apparent within a case study.

3.1.1 Interviews

The thesis researches how companies navigate intergenerational communication within their company policies, which is something that occurs in the heads and hearts of people. It is something that is present in the thoughts of people, therefore, in order to understand exactly how people think about it the best way is to ask. Qualitative interviews as research method, therefore, are appropriate as a survey would require knowledge on possible answers which is not yet present (Van Selm & Helberger, 2019; Johnson, 2011). Consequently, this can be done by qualitative interviews. Although I am not quite sure what the answers will be I do want to structure it in certain themes therefore the interviews have been semi structured. Conducting interviews in such a way gives people the opportunity to share their perspectives which might give me new insights on the topic.

3.1.2 Content analysis

Furthermore, I wish to research communication towards certain generations a bit broader than just through interviews which is why I will also analyse text materials that contain communication within the company. Thus, a case study of an organisation has been made in which both interviews and qualitative content analysis will be used to answer the research question. For the qualitative content analysis data has been gathered from the company in which reflection on the gathered data has guided the process (Saldana, 2016; Wester & Peters, 2000). Shortly, the research is qualitative as I have aimed to understand meanings participants have added to reality (Van Selm & Helberger, 2019), the method is a combination of interviews and qualitative content analysis, in which a semi structured interview guide has been used, as well as a semi structured content analysis instrument.

3.2 Sampling

3.2.1 Interviews.

For this thesis one company has been chosen for a case study; namely, Visser & Visser an accountancy firm within the Netherlands. The company consists of multiple branches in different cities and the informants worked in several different branches. Within the company several informants have been selected who occupy key positions within the organisation ranging from employees to managers. In order to research communication between generations, interviews were conducted. For these interviews having a representative sampling is important. I selected participants who occupy different positions within the company while also ranging in age. The choice of participants was primarily with the company itself. However, the company did use set guidelines in order to ensure that there was a sufficient range of positions and ages. Positions occupied by the participants contained the three different categories present within the company; namely, junior, medior and senior. These positions have different level of required skills and differ in their level of authority managing tasks. The research is qualitative and works towards saturation; namely, when new observations do not lead to new insights (Van Selm & Helberger, 2019). Research by Hennink et al. (2016) has shown that code saturation occurs at nine interviews and data saturation between seven and 12 interviews. Therefore, in this thesis between 10 interviews have been conducted.

Furthermore, the participants within these interviews have been selected in order for the sample to consist of an equal number of participants within the categories older and younger as well as a range in positions. The participants range in age between 27 and 60 and all occupy different position within the company. From the ten participants five fall within the category of older workers and five within the category of younger workers. Within both categories there are participants with more leadership positions and participants with less of a leadership role. This thesis will use the chronological age division between those below and over 40 years to create two groups. However, the use of chronological age in order to determine older and younger workers does not cancel out the occurrence of functional or organisational differences between those groups. The research will focus on the potential differences between the two groups especially when it comes to communication and

stereotypes. The division at age 40 in this incorporates the expectation that the communication between those groups will differ. In addition, division at 40 ensures that both groups consist of two generations making the size of both groups equal.

Table 1: Participants of interviews with age and position

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	AGE	FUNCTION
PARTICIPANT 1	27	Junior
PARTICIPANT 2	42	Medior
PARTICIPANT 3	27	Junior
PARTICIPANT 4	57	Junior
PARTICIPANT 5	37	Junior/medior
PARTICIPANT 6	60	Senior
PARTICIPANT 7	28	Senior
PARTICIPANT 8	38	Medior/senior
PARTICIPANT 9	49	Medior/senior
PARTICIPANT 10	61	Senior

3.2.2 Content analysis

For the content analysis different communication media have been selected, including both internal and external. The different media that have been selected are the website, LinkedIn and the internal news channel “Serviceplein”. Messages on the website, social media accounts and internal communication platform were analysed. order to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of the sources (Schreier, 2014) messages from each medium has been selected making sure the sample consists of materials from each different messaging platform. For the website the whole of the website was analysed. However, for the social media platforms as well as the internal news channel messages over a period of three months were analysed. The period consists of the months March, April and May; which are the months in which I wrote the thesis. These materials, therefore, present different ways in which the company communicates towards different generations making them interesting to research within this study. Furthermore, the table below shows how many messages from each channel were analysed.

Table 2: Analysed materials

COMMUNICATION MEDIUM	AMOUNT	CONTENTS
LINKEDIN	27 messages	Articles Activities

WEBSITE	35 web pages	Home page Information about company Vacancies / working at Visser & Visser
SERVICEPLEIN	28 messages	Sporting events Accomplishments employees Expertise knowledge General information

3.2.2.1 Social media

The company uses both Instagram and LinkedIn although they only posted frequently on LinkedIn which is why only that platform was analysed. The LinkedIn posts are targeted mostly towards people outside of the company, both clients and potential employees which is why it is interesting to analyse it. For the analysis several messages from LinkedIn have been selected; namely, in the period March, April and May. The total of the messages analysed are...

3.2.2.2 Website

The website is mostly used for external communication and elaborates on the company's values as well as showing their expertise and job offers. The different components within the website allow for a good overview of how the company is. The pages on job offers are written specifically for potential employees thus elaborating on the company and why someone should work there. Therefore, the communication on the website is interesting to analyse as it determines for many their image of the company. The web pages analysed consisted of the home page as well as several pages on the company. The pages elaborated on the core values of the company as well as the different expertise's they have. Additionally, there are several web pages dedicated to attracting new potential employees. These pages discuss the kind of employee the companies is looking for as well as an overview of the current vacancies. The webpages, therefore, present communication directed towards all generations. Furthermore, even though the website is used for external communication it does give insight in how the company functions internally by stating their core values as well as the type of employee they are looking for.

3.2.2.3 Internal news channel

The internal news channel “Serviceplein” is only used for messages internal. Therefore, it gives a good insight into how the company communicates internally. The messages from the news channel contained several types of messages ranging from sporting events to new board members or new employees. The difference in types of messages therefore also ensures that it gives an overall view of how the company communicates in different situations. In total 28 messages were analysed.

3.4 Operationalization

3.4.1 Interviews

For the thesis, interviews will be conducted in a company that has no policies in place regarding intergenerational communication. However, the company does have attention for the integration of older works and sees the importance of paying attention to the communication between generations. Conducting interviews within the companies will provide an inside in company policy and how they deal with generations within the company.

The analysis of communication will be divided into interpersonal and mediated communication. The interviews will focus on interpersonal communication. The focus will be on how the participants experience the different types of communication. For participants holding a manager position the construction of their team will be questioned when it comes to different generations. Furthermore, questions will be on how people work together and how work is organised regarding generational differences. Additionally, the interview guide will be flexible and open in order to allow participants to share their personal views (Van Selm & Helberger, 2019). A shortened version of the interview guide can be found below the full interview guide can be found in the appendix.

Interview guide

- Introduction
- Stereotypes older generation
 - o Which stereotypes do you encounter within the company?
- Stereotypes younger generation
 - o Which stereotypes do you encounter within the company?
- Are stereotypes about younger or older workers more present?
- Intergenerational communication
 - o Interpersonal communication

- Is there difference in addressing generations?
 - Mediated communication
 - Mediated communication
 - How would you describe communication from Visser & Visser on website, newschannel and social media?
 - Concluding
 - What are generational preferences for your generation

3.4.2 Internal communication messages

The analysis of internal communication messages will focus on how the company addresses topics connected to intergenerational communication within mediated communication. The qualitative content analysis will use coding frames to focus on certain aspects within the documents in order to answer the research question (Scott, 2014). In this research the sensitizing concepts will include stereotypes within the workplace, communication, generations and their differences. The content analysis has been conducted with the use of a guide. The shortened version of the interview guide can be found below, the full version can be found in the appendix.

Guide content analysis

- Stereotypes
 - Do the materials contain references to stereotypes
- Communication
 - Do the materials discuss anything regarding communication?
 - Do the reference certain communication media?
 - Are the materials written for a younger or an older audience?
 - Does the medium influence the choice of wording?

3.5 Process and analysis

3.5.1 Interviews

The interviews will be transcribed and analysed based by using the principles of thematic analysis. The thematic analysis will consist of thematic coding in which themes will be identified within the interviews (Alsaawi, 2014). The interviews will be transcribed and coded into themes and categories after which will be reflected on the process. The qualitative content analysis of internal and external communication materials will use a similar coding frame to analyse the content. Furthermore, the analysis will use trial coding in order to evaluate and modify the coding frame (Scott, 2014). For the qualitative analysis of interviews a coding frame has been constructed. The frame consists of

several main categories which each in turn consist of multiple sub-categories. Furthermore, the main categories are concept-driven as they are based on prior research, theory, and the interview guide (Schreier, 2014). The sub-categories are data-driven and derived from the analyses of the materials. Subsumption has been used to create subcategories until saturation is reached (Schreier, 2014). Subsumption is strategy to create sub-categories for the main categories that already exist. In order to do so several steps are followed. Firstly, reading the material until a concept that is relevant is found. Secondly, checking if the sub-category has already been created. Thirdly, if the sub-category has already been created the concept can be placed in that category. If not, a new sub-category is created. These steps are then repeated until all materials have been covered and now new categories are found. Consequently, the categories are defined and definitions are given for the main and sub-categories. In addition the analysis will use thematic criteria for segmentation, meaning that the coding units correspond to different themes. In order to analyse the materials (Schreier, 2014). For the analysis of the interviews open coding presented themes which were then used to structure the further analysis.

Table 3: Coding frame interviews

Topic	Sub-topic	Sub-themes	Text/example
Work-attitude		More relaxed Responsibility Age Active attitude	
Motivation		Work motivation at work [attitude]	
Loyalty		Team building	
Negative stereotypes younger	Flexibility Reliable		
	Accurate Committed	Initiative	
Negative stereotypes older	Technology skills Adaptability Development	Own development	
Work-life balance		More focus on home Work second place	

Feedback	
Age	Workfloor: age neutral
Function	Function not depended on age
Communication	
	Clear Informal Formal Open Direct
	Stereotypes Communicating norms Hierarchy Link content and form
Communication media	Mail
	Face to face
	Phone
	Teams
	Chatting

3.5.2 Content analysis

In contrast with interviews materials cannot reflect themselves on the same topics which is why a content analysis guide was constructed that guided the analysis of the materials. The questions, which were based on the interview guide, allowed for a better understanding of how the materials addressed and discussed certain issues. These questions discuss the different topics also discussed in the theoretical framework; namely, different stereotypes surrounding older and younger employees, communication preferences in general and the use of different communication medium. Based on these questions and the analysis of the materials a coding frame was developed. The frame is similar to that of the interview analysis as it researches similar topics. Presenting a company can be done on many different media, including social media. At the same time the website of a company is often most complete when it comes to a company's values and ideas.

Table 4: Coding frame content analysis

Topic	Sub-topic	Sub-themes	Text/example
Work-attitude			
Motivation			
Loyalty			

	Flexibility
Negative stereotypes younger	Reliable
	Accurate
	Committed
Negative stereotypes older	Technology skills
	Adaptability
	Development
Work-life balance	
Feedback	
Communication	
Communication media	Mail
	Face to face
	Phone
	Teams
	Chatting

4 Results

Age can play a part in how an organisation deals with its employees. The interviews with employees mostly focused on how employees experience communication between generation but also addresses potential attention for age. The content analysis focuses on both internal and external communication that is used on several communication mediums.

4.1 Interview analysis

The analysis of the interviews has given several codes that returned frequently. Therefore, to give a clear overview the findings have been structured according to six themes. The themes, and sub-themes are also presented in the table below. The six general themes are the younger generation, older generation, workplace, communication, connection between age and position and attention for generations. These six themes are also in correspondence with the interview guide, thus making sure that each section in the interview has been sufficiently analysed. However, since the six general themes are quite broad several sub-themes have been constructed for each general theme together with exemplary quotes that express where the theme was derived from. Especially, the theme of communication has quite a few sub-themes as the content of the interviews required a separation between general communication, communication from the younger generation, communication from the older generation and communication methods or channels. Furthermore, each theme and sub-theme will be discussed in more detail below.

Table 5: Themes and sub-themes found within interviews

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	SUB-THEMES	EXAMPLE QUOTES
YOUNGER GENERATION	Development	Ask for help quicker	“healthy growth, development, growing up”
		Work attitude	“Yes just really easy, relaxed”
		More careless Easier distracted More relaxed	“stereotype of being a bit more carefree. Yes carefree indeed coming in at 09.05 and sometimes just leaving at 5”

			“also easily distracted. A mobile phone on the desk is not a good sign”
	Work / life balance	Work less overtime / Work less in general Work not priority [door krappe arbeidsmarkt > veel beloven]	“younger generation would say, yes. I have a contract for 40 work hours or 32, so after those 32 hours I am done” “that the younger generation does have a broader focus and not only on working hard and making promotion, but rather try to find more in their work for example through societal and social impact or something. That is something that the older generation does not see, that when it comes to that the younger generation does a lot”.
		Stay at home quicker / More leave of absence	
	Social attitude	Willing to help Less social	“Younger employees are really willing to help” “That they are less open, more individualistic and not necessarily negative, but more in their own world and don’t necessarily need to communicate with colleagues”. “Something the younger generation does a lot less. You know the social part”
	Responsibility		“And when it isn’t done, for example in the before hand agreed time they will continue. Or they will make time and with younger employees you see that they are I have done the hours. I need to move on to the next thing, this is what I have done so good luck and they give it back”
	Ambition	Less enthusiasm Sloppy Less ambitious	“less, how do I say it, ambitious. They seem to be less ambitious and find everything just fine” “Sometimes I miss the enthusiasm a bit” “a bit sloppy”
OLDER GENERATION	More dependent on company		“they grow with the company for long periods of time “alright, do I want to this 10 or 12 years until I am retired. Do I want to take on a new challenge? I am not going to shop around when it comes to jobs”.
	Development	Willingness to change	They have seen everything a thousand times. So this will not

		work. That is a stereotype I do recognize around me a degree of resignation or even resistance in older employees”.
	Learn slower	Older people, you are not that fast, you know, you hear that from time to time” and “a younger person is going to work in your team who will adapt faster because they are younger. You will probably struggle a bit more
	Technology	“A few older colleagues aren’t used to it [using technology to work together in a document at the same time] and work locally more often, and when they are done with their changes they send it via mail” more technical things are not that clear”.
	Work_attitude	Work harder “Really willing to fight and just go on and on and not complain”
		Ask less for help “we are really willing to fight and just go on and on and not complain”
	Social attitude	social “with older generation you see that they come by to wish you a good holiday or to ask: how was your holiday?”
	Responsibility	More responsible “The generation has more of a sense of responsibility” “this can be because of age but also because of number of years, expertise and responsibility that is a part of a certain position”.
	Expertise	“for example add to a development that is going on and share something from their experience”. “when I look at my older employees, they have a mountain of experience”.
WORKPLACE	Composition company	Young
	Personal development	“Also a lot of space. Or that it has real focus in the communicatio: self development. Instead of just going this is good for the company and this is what we should do.”
	Hierarchy	“Or in that sense it is a really flat organisation with clear and open communication.” “No threshold [drempel], like between someone in a management position and a younger employee.

	Team		“despite the many branches, disciplines and so many teams they have still achieved that people are really working with not just their own team but outside that as well. They do not look down on each other”
	Flexibility		“working at home and such” “facilitate and give those possibilities”
	Efficiency		“It needs to happen efficiently”
COMMUNICATION	Communication general	Open Direct Accessible Informal Efficient Personal	“really informal and focused on personal attention” “that is also what you see in internal communication. There aren’t really guidelines. You are really free to choose yourself” “There is space and understanding for everything”
		Feedback	“quite a few feedback moments, conversations and the communication is then so open that below and above you are able to address things” “The older generation, I think, does have a thick skin”
		Transparent	“communication from Visser & Visser is good and transparent”
	Communication younger generation	Flexible communication methods No calling Efficiency Digital	“fear of calling”. “a bit scary ofcourse calling” “when you call, you have small talk before and it costs more time, and with chats it is immediately documented”. “they are all in their twenties so you should really chat or call. Otherwise they do not react, because the mail immediately goes. They immediately archive it”.
	Communication older generation	Face to face Prefer calling over chatting	“preference for calling instead of chatting” “when colleagues are getting older you do see a preference for meeting in person or calling instead of sending a chat”
	Communication methods	LinkedIn Facebook/Instagram	“LinkedIn is for business” “LinkedIn is solely business” “Instagram is for personal and less business. LinkedIn is really for business” “Instagram could be generational difference that the younger generation is really why not use Instagram” “To reach younger generation Instagram is good”

	Website	<p>“website up to date”</p> <p>Shows how Visser & Visser is as a company: “young and trendy” but also “focus on quality, no hierarchy and local”</p> <p>Every generational group is represented in vacancy section</p> <p>“saw someone who was also started when she was 50 [...] that really spoke to me”</p>
	Many channels	<p>“But yeah what I said there are quite a lot of communication channels, which surprised me a bit”</p> <p>“sometimes it is a bit difficult to find things”</p> <p>“there are also just a lot of channels or mediums to communicate. Offcourse you use teams, so that already has a lot of options with chat, calling, facetimeing. Then offcourse Outlook and the phone”</p> <p>“which was also a bit longer that five minutes and I was like it is almost too long, like you loose attention. You see that it is better to put out a short message three times a week than once a week a long one”</p> <p>“Yes, just everything short”</p>
CONNECTION AGE / POSITION	Position based on merits instead of age	“according to me, they do not really look at age. They take more into account how you function and how you are, so how smart you are and how you take on your work”
ATTENTION GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES	Training Cursus	At each individual branch

4.1.1 Younger generation

For the younger generation several topics are mentioned on their attitude within a company as well as work ethic and attitude towards others. The comments on the younger generation and the perceptions of their attitude within a company have been divided into the following six sub-themes: development, work attitude, work/life balance, social attitude, responsibility and ambition. Development is an important aspect within the organisation as will also become clear from the content analysis below. Within the interviews development is mentioned several times and often in combination with the younger generation. Personal development and growth is seen is important and

essential for younger employees: “healthy growth, development and growing up”. In addition, it is mentioned that the nature of the company is to grow and develop and as a result employees are expected to do the same. It is seen as natural to do so: “you just go with it” which refers to developing and learning. Development when it comes to the younger generation is also often linked with responsibility and the need for the younger generation to be more responsible, but also to get more responsibility when it comes to their work. Within those aspects it is seen as useful to “place responsibility with your colleagues who are still developing”. On the other hand, the degree of responsibility within younger employees is often referred to as lacking a bit. When describing the work attitude of younger employees it is mentioned that “And when it isn’t done, for example in the beforehand agreed time they will continue. Or they will make time and with younger employees you see that they are I have done the hours. I need to move on to the next thing, this is what I have done so good luck and they give it back”. The comparison between older and younger employees shows that in the opinion of the interviewee the younger generation is a bit less responsible when it comes to finishing their work even when it might exceed the previous agreed upon time. They are quicker in stating that they have done their time and whatever is not finished they do not perceive as their problem or responsibility. This also links into the work / life balance of the younger generation. The younger generation has a different work / life balance, as perceived by older employees, where they do not make their work priority but rather put it second. In addition, they work less overtime and perhaps less in general: ““younger generation would say, yes. I have a contract for 40 work hours or 32, so after those 32 hours I am done”. Younger workers stay more within their contractual hours and are not as keen to work overtime. Additionally, they stay at home quicker to take care of for example children and have more leave of absence. However, it is also mentioned that this focus is not necessarily a bad thing. While it is agreed that the younger generation does often work less, and does not always put their work as priority the following is also mentioned: “that the younger generation does have a broader focus and not only on working hard and making promotion, but rather try to find more in their work for example through societal and social impact or something. That is something that the older generation does not see, that when it comes to that the younger generation does a lot”. Therefore, the shifted focus of the younger generation from work to perhaps more societal impact has an impact on

the work / life balance as is perceived by older generations, but is ultimately seen as not necessarily negative as the previous mentioned quotes about work ethic of the younger generation might suggest.

When it comes to the attitude of the younger generation two different aspects can be derived; namely, work attitude and social attitude. Work attitude entails how the younger generations present themselves at work. More careless, easier distracted and more relaxed are some of the things mentioned most when it comes to the work attitude of younger employees. Consequently, younger employees are perceived as “just really easy, relaxed” as well as “being a bit more carefree. Yes carefree indeed, coming in at 09.05 and sometimes just leaving at 5”. The time employees come in and leave is linked to their work attitude, thus in the perception of older employees showing something of focus on work. In addition, it is mentioned that the younger generation is often easier distracted: “also easily distracted. A mobile phone on the desk is not a good sign”. Technology is often praised and the younger generations understanding of it is also mentioned frequently, however, the technology is also seen as something negative when it distracts employees. In connection with a work attitude where a focus on private life is mentioned, this seems to come back in the description of people’s work attitude. Lastly, the ambition of younger employees is described. Younger employees are perceived as less enthusiastic, less ambitious and bit more sloppy when it comes to their work. Again, this can be linked to the work / life balance of younger employees where it is seen that they are not solely focused on work and are therefore a bit less ambitious when it comes to their work: “less, how do I say it, ambitious. They seem to be less ambitious and find everything just fine”. In addition, it is mentioned, by older employees, “sometimes I miss the enthusiasm a bit”, referring to younger employees and their reluctance to work hard for the company or even that they are “a bit sloppy” in their work. Additionally, the social attitude of younger employees is mentioned as is stated that they are often willing to help “younger employees are really willing to help”. However, in contrast they are also described as being less social: “That they are less open, more individualistic and not necessarily negative, but more in their own world and don’t necessarily need to communicate with colleagues”. The older generation, therefore, perceives their younger colleagues as having less of a focus on the social aspect: “something the younger generation does a lot less. You know the social part”. This also comes to the fore, as is mentioned by an interviewee, in the communication though chat or face to

face. Thus, the attitude of younger employees has both negative and positive aspects when it comes to their work and social attitude. While they are perceived as less social, they have a different focus when it comes to their work, and might be a little less in need of the social aspect they are willing to help and have chosen to set their priorities broader than just work.

4.1.2 Older generation

For the older generation, several topics are mentioned about their work attitude or perception of their skills within the workplace. The following sub-themes have been derived from the interviews: more dependent on the company, development, work attitude, social attitude, responsibility, and expertise. The older generation views themselves as being more dependent on a company and less willing to change companies. It is mentioned that for younger employees it is easy to change a company or leave when they do not like certain aspects, but when employees are older they make the change less easily: “alright, do I want to this 10 or 12 years until I am retired. Do I want to take on a new challenge? I am not going to shop around when it comes to jobs”. The decision to change companies is therefore quite a difficult one and something older employees might not do as easily. Confirming this is the mention of older employees at the company as it is stated that “they grow with the company for long periods of time”. This underscores the statement that older employees change less but rather commit to a company and stay there for long periods of time. Furthermore, the development of older workers is mentioned. On the one hand, it is stated that Visser & Visser is a dynamic and young company that demands a degree of flexibility from its employees. On the other hand, it is also mentioned that older employees are a bit less willing to change. They can have an attitude where they have seen “everything a thousand times. So this will not work. That is a stereotype I do recognize around me”. Furthermore, some have “a degree of resignation or even resistance”. The expertise of the older employees can therefore sometimes hold them back a bit as they are more hesitant to change and adapt to new ideas. In addition, it is perceived that older employees are slower when it comes to learning and this is also expressed to older employees: “Older people, you are not that fast, you know, you hear that from time to time” and “a younger person is going to work in your team who will adapt faster because they are younger. You will probably struggle a bit more”. These

comments are in view of the older employees not always reflective of the situation but rather a perception of the younger generation. Consequently, when it comes to technology older generations are also perceived to struggle a bit more. This is underscored by both younger and older generations as they mentioned that older generations are a bit hesitant in using all features of technology: ““A few older colleagues aren’t used to it [using technology to work together in a document at the same time] and work locally more often, and when they are done with their changes they send it via mail”. In addition, older employees agree that “more technical things are not that clear”. Therefore, there seems to be a difference in knowledge about technology between older and younger generations resulting in sometimes different work strategy when it comes to using functions of communication mediums.

Work attitude and social attitude of older employees are also mentioned. Firstly, in comparison with younger employees, older employees state that they work harder and ask less for help. Older employees are “really willing to fight and just go on and on and not complain”, which is in their view in contrast with younger employees who are not as willing. Furthermore, older employees view themselves as less quick to ask for help, which they do not necessarily view as a good thing. In comparison, with younger employees they find it harder to ask for help when needed resulting in it sometimes taking a bit longer. Furthermore, when it comes to social attitude older employees are more socially oriented. In contrast with younger employees they are more likely to come by and ask how a holiday has been or to wish someone well before going on holiday: “you see it more with older colleagues that they come by to wish you well on your holiday or ask how your holiday has been”. Lastly, when it comes to skills older generations are perceived as more responsible and having more expertise and knowledge. They older generations “have more sense of responsibility”; however, this might not be solely due to age “this can be because of age but also because of number of years, expertise and responsibility that is a part of a certain position”. Therefore, responsibility is not solely linked to age, however, higher position are often occupied by people with a higher age thus age seems to have some sort effect on the level of responsibility. Especially, since younger generation are often viewed as less responsible and older generations almost always as more responsible. Lastly, older generations have more expertise because they have experienced more. Therefore, older employees are able to “for example add to a development that is going on and share something from their

experience”. Furthermore, it is mentioned that “when I look at my older employees, they have a mountain of experience”. The experience is valued within the company but employees are also always happy to share their knowledge and experience with others.

4.1.3 Workplace

The workplace consists of several aspects that can influence the experience of employees. Within a workplace there are several norms and expectations that are often placed upon employees in the expectation that they comply with those expectations. In the interviews the following aspects came to the fore repeatedly: Composition of the company, personal development, hierarchy, team, flexibility, and efficiency. All interviewees mentioned that the majority of employees are young or “really young”. There are not a lot of older employees and some teams do not even have an employee that is part of the older generation. Furthermore, the company prioritises personal development. When mentioning the relation between older and younger employees it is often stated that there is almost no hierarchy. This is something that is encouraged within the company structure as “In that sense it is a really flat organisation with clear and open communication.”. Furthermore, there is “No threshold [drempel], like between someone in a management position and a younger employee”. Such a structure ensures that every employee feels valued and able to express themselves which is also mentioned often by interviewees. The structure of the company is open, flexible and transparent. Furthermore, being a team is important as “despite the many branches, disciplines and so many teams they have still achieved that people are really working with not just their own team but outside that as well. They do not look down on each other”. Relations both within and between teams is encouraged adding to the overall atmosphere within the company. Additionally, the company is flexible and its flexibility is also reflected in their policies towards working: ““working at home and such”, “facilitate and give those possibilities”. Employees are encouraged to work from home and even more important given the opportunities to do so. Lastly, efficiency is important within the company. While the company is flexible, open and without a clear hierarchy it is important that things “happen efficiently”. The need for efficiency is understood by employees from all generations however there are some comments made that older generations might sometimes experience a lot of pressure to work

efficiently. Summarizing, the company focuses on a flexible, open, efficient atmosphere and while the company is quite young, personal development is prioritised as well as team building.

4.1.4 Communication

Communication is a big part of a company and also says a lot about its employees. The theme of communication has been divided into three sub-themes, which will each in turn be divided into another set of sub-themes. These sub-themes are the following: communication in general, communication younger generation, communication older generation. Together these sub-themes discuss the whole of the theme communication.

4.1.4.1 Communication general

In general the following things are mentioned about communication within the company: open, direct, accessible, informal, efficient, personal, feedback and transparent. When asked to describe communication in the company in general open, direct, informal and personal communication is often mentioned. There is not really a difference between younger and older employees in what they mention. In addition, both older and younger employees are described as using open and direct information: ““really informal and focused on personal attention” . Additionally, the company does not really put guidelines or rules on the communication but rather let the employees choose whatever works best for them: ““that is also what you see in internal communication. There aren’t really guidelines. You are really free to choose yourself”. Therefore, in order to let this take place “there is space and understanding for everything” which ensures that the employees are comfortable choosing their own communication style. Furthermore, all interviewees prefer informal and personal communication. Although younger employees sometimes feel that older employees prefer a more formal setting, or are more inclined to communicate in a more formal manner. Additionally, feedback is an important theme within the company: “quite a few feedback moments, conversations and the communication is then so open that below and above you are able to address things”. Feedback is seen as important and employees are encouraged to give feedback often. However, giving and receiving

feedback between generations is viewed differently. Some perceive that younger generations are less able to handle feedback, while older generations “have more thick skin” and are thus able to handle feedback better. At the same time it is mentioned that some older employees are perhaps less used to the concept of feedback and might find it more difficult to accept. Either way feedback is generally an important theme and most interviewees describe it as part of the company. Lastly, the communication from the company is described as “good and transparent” thus installing trust in its employees.

4.1.4.2 Communication younger generation

Communication from younger generations is described as flexible when it comes to their use of communication methods. Furthermore, several interviewees mention that younger employees do not like calling and will often use that as a last resource as they find it “a bit scary of course calling”. Furthermore, it is mentioned that for the younger generation “the last option is always calling”. So whenever they can choose for example between chatting, calling or mailing they do not really choose to call as it something “they do not really do that often” perhaps due to “fear of calling”. Younger employees often prefer digital methods of communication and are quicker to use a chat: “when you call, you have small talk before and it costs more time, and with chats it is immediately documented”. The quote illustrates a few reasons why the younger generations prefer to use chats over phones. On the one hand, they value the efficiency chats give as with calling you are often obliged to engage in small talk. On the other hand, they see the value in messages being immediately documented something that does not happen when calling. However, not all digital communication methods are preferred by the younger generation as they use email not frequent at all: “they are all in their twenties so you should really chat or call. Otherwise they do not react, because the mail immediately goes. They immediately archive it”. Therefore, it seems that the younger generations prefers chatting when it comes to different communication methods.

4.1.4.3 Communication older generation

Communication of older generations is quite different from younger when it comes to preferences. Older employees still prefer face to face above everything: “preference for calling instead

of chatting”. Furthermore, it is mentioned that when employees get older they appreciate meeting in person or calling more: “when colleagues are getting older you do see a preference for meeting in person or calling instead of sending a chat”; which shows the generational aspect of the preference of communication methods. When employees get older they seem to prefer face to face and calling over sending chats. In addition, it was mentioned previously that older employees are often more social within the workplace. They value the social aspect and are quicker to ask how someone’s “holiday was” or to wish someone well when leaving for holiday.

4.1.4.4 Communication methods

There are different communication methods and channels and Visser & Visser uses quite a few. When asked about when to use each channel interviewees respond that LinkedIn is a more professional channel which almost everyone uses. Several interviewees mentioned that “LinkedIn is for business”, “LinkedIn is solely for business”. Furthermore, they compare Instagram and LinkedIn and state that ““Instagram is for personal and less business. LinkedIn is really for business”. Thus, Facebook and Instagram are seen as more for personal use, and are also used more often by younger people as “to reach the younger generation Instagram is good”. Although, a lot of interviewees express that in their opinion Instagram is more for personal instead of business they do state that that might be different for younger generations: “Instagram could be a generational difference that the younger generation is really why not use Instagram”. Therefore, it seems there might also be a function to use Instagram more for business especially when it comes to reaching younger generations. Furthermore, when asked about the website most answers mentioned that the website is “up to date” and that it shows “how Visser & Visser is as a company: “young and trendy” but also “focus on quality, no hierarchy and local”. The website is not only a good representation for the company but it also represents the different generational groups as every generational group is represented in the vacancy section. Representing different generations within the vacancy section really speaks to people as an interviewee mentions that they “saw someone who was also started when she was 50 [...] that really spoke to me”.

Lastly, there are quite a few communication channels used by the company and the use of those does pose some problems. The amount of different channels can make finding information a bit difficult as becomes clear from the interviewees: “But yeah what I said there are quite a lot of communication channels, which surprised me a bit”, “sometimes it is a bit difficult to find things”, “there are also just a lot of channels or mediums to communicate. Off course you use teams, so that already has a lot of options with chat, calling, facetime. Then of course Outlook and the phone”. All these different channels have a function, however, when it is not quite clear which channel is used when it can slow down the process of getting information. Furthermore, on the amount of information given within message on the internal news channel most interviewees are in accordance that it should be short and rather more frequent and short than less frequent and less often: “which was also a bit longer than five minutes and I was like it is almost too long, like you lose attention. You see that it is better to put out a short message three times a week than once a week a long one”. When describing messages on the news channel the interviewee states that it is better to put out a short message multiple times a week than a long message once a week. In addition, it is stated that video messages are preferred over text because they are easier to watch. Therefore, overall opinion on news channel messages is “just everything short”.

4.1.5 Connection age and position

Within the company position and promotion are not based on age but rather on merits as becomes clear from the interviews. When describing how they evaluate employees an interviewee states: “according to me, they do not really look at age. They take more into account how you function and how you are, so how smart you are and how you take on your work”; which illustrates that one’s actions are more important for a function than one’s age. However, at the same time when describing communication with someone higher in function and lower or higher in age it becomes clear that most often higher positions within the company are also accompanied by a higher age. When asked if higher positions in the company are often accompanied by a higher age the interviewee agrees “yes that is definitely the case”. However, it is not that a higher age automatically gives you more of an

opportunity to be promoted to a higher position as the company primarily takes in to account “how you take on your work”.

4.1.6 Attention for generational differences

Currently there is some attention for generational differences in the internal training programme. However, employees see the importance of understanding generational differences especially within their own branch. Therefore, attention generational differences in each separate branch might be beneficial. Additionally, when asked about stereotypes about generations and then especially ones that occur in the workplace, interviewees mention that there is not a lot of attention. There is some attention for the integration of older employees, however, most of this is done personally and there does not seem a general programme. Furthermore, there is not really attention for younger employees and how they might integrate best within a company. Several interviewees see the benefits of a “long term [...] policy” regarding generations, their differences, stereotypes and integration of both older and younger employees. Especially, when it comes to communication attention seems to be appreciated, not necessarily to decide communication style for employees but rather to underscore that personal attention is really important within accountancy and especially when communicating with clients. Therefore, when younger employees are perceived as “communicating insufficiently” to an extent when it might influence a clients relationship with the company attention for communication in general within the company and towards clients might be beneficial. However, this does not mean that communication at the moment is perceived as problematic but rather to prevent potential problems a long term strategy regarding the above mentioned is seen as positive but interviewees.

4.2 Content analysis

4.2.1 Stereotypes

Concerning stereotypes surrounding older and younger employees several topics are mentioned which could be part of stereotypes concerning certain generations. The LinkedIn messages

do not really mention anything related to stereotypes. The website does mention several things on the job offer pages. For one job offer an older employee is wanted which becomes also clear from the framing as the following is mentioned: “accurate, skilled, feeling for quality and compliance”. Mentioning accuracy and skills underscore findings from literature where it was mentioned that older employees are often seen as more accurate (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Lastly, most job offers that are written for a specific audience are written for a younger audience. These texts mention things such as being part of a “young and dynamic team”, “immediately putting the theory learned at school into practice”, “studying and developing”, “balance between work and private life” and getting the freedom to do so. Thus, the website uses underlying stereotypes when describing job offers. Within the internal news channel there are also no stereotypes present within the messages.

4.2.2 Work attitude

Working within a company can differ especially when it comes to a company’s view on how someone should work. Especially, with the balance between work and life this becomes important. Visser & Visser stresses the importance of a work-life balance in their mentioning of flexibility on their website. The LinkedIn message and the internal news channel do not mention flexibility or work-life balance. On the website, however, they emphasize the possibility to plan your work and be flexible in all of their job offers. In addition, they mention that they stand for a good balance between work and private life. However, they do not only focus on the balance between work and life but also within work itself. Employees are given a lot of freedom also in deciding how they want to work, and where they will work. A budget for creating a workspace at home is often present. In addition, they are able to give both more freedom and structure as they mention both freedom to develop and people who might prefer “a clear assignment”. Thus, the freedom to choose whatever fits each employee is emphasized.

4.2.3 Loyalty

One of the core concepts for Visser & Visser is loyalty and commitment. Commitment occurs in several communication platforms both from employer to employee and from employee to employer. First, Visser & Visser stresses the importance of loyalty. Loyalty towards the company and the team, but also loyalty from the company to their employees. Mentions of general commitment can be found on the internal news platform 'serviceplein'. In a message they mention that for the national secretary day everyone should complement the secretary's for everything they do. In addition, a message mentions that they welcome questions about their policy and are always happy to think with the team. The posts that do discuss some more topics that are more concerning the company and their view on employees discuss mostly loyalty. Loyalty towards the company comes to the fore on the website as it mentions that "together you get further", and "doing it together". In addition, "building together for the future" is used to attract potential new employees.

4.2.3.1 Team

For example, "We find a good relation between colleagues important" occurred multiple times on the website in the job offers section. In these sections they describe the workplace where someone would work if they applied to the job offer. In addition, the sections in the job offers that describe the workplace mention the importance of "teambuilding", having a "close team", and "focused attention for employees". The importance of teambuilding and being a team also comes to the fore on their internal news platform 'serviceplein'. The company actively engages its employees to build team relations by organising team activities such as sporting events as well as presenting a challenge for acquiring potential employees where the whole team can win an outing. The company aims to "strengthen the team spirit" and tries to "create a connection between all employees of Visser & Visser". In addition, to these things they actively encourage employees to do activities together as they state that doing it together "makes training even more fun". To encourage their employees even more to participate they reward active participation: "when there are more than 20 participants [...] Visser & Visser will take care of the registration fee of this sportive initiative and we will provide shirts". In addition, they make apparent that doing it together has certain advantages: "as we as Visser & Visser

achieve more together”, “as a team we are able to tackle every challenge”, “we face each challenge together”. In these statements both the advantages of doing things together and as a team as well as an emphasis on facing each challenge come to the fore. However, the company not only focuses on building relation within a team but also stresses the importance of relations with people outside of one’s own team as they state “both your direct colleagues as well as interdisciplinary”. In addition, the company focuses on helping each other in order to move forward. Several messages on the internal news platform ‘serviceplein’ mention desks or teams that are available for questions.

4.2.3.2 Commitment

4.2.3.2.1 Employees

Commitment within a company incorporates both dedication from the employer as well as the employees. Visser & Visser mention the commitment from their employees in a message on “serviceplein” where they ask their employees to “keep an eye on Soworker to share video’s and messages within their own network”.

4.2.3.2.2 Employer

Commitment also says something about the relation of an employer to their employees. As mentioned before, Visser & Visser expects loyalty from their employees but also sees their own tasks as comes to the fore in messages on the internal news platform. Firstly, they mention something about their general commitment; namely keeping their employees informed: “We will of course keep you up to date about the development and progress”. Furthermore, they mention their commitment in the following messages: “Get in contact with the head of your .. to find a fitting solution”, “HR is happy to talk with you about the content, starting moment and supervisor”. These messages all show a commitment from the company to provide a good environment for their employees. In addition, they also show their flexibility as they are willing to “find a solution that is fitting”. Flexibility within the company is also mentioned on the website where all job offers mention something about the possibility to be flexible with your time. Discussing loyalty within the company in a such a manner

ensures that potential employees are aware of the expectations regarding the company. Furthermore, when it comes to differences between generations mentioning the relation between colleagues and the attention for employees can speak to both younger and older employees. For older employees the attention and focus on loyalty can give a sense of security which is something they value (Brody & Rubin, 2011). At the same time for younger employees the mention of flexibility ensures that company understands that for the younger generations loyalty incorporates more of a flexible and dynamic environment. In addition, freedom is mentioned several times. Employees are given the freedom to plan their workload as well as freedom to develop themselves. Lastly, the company shows their commitment to not only their employees when they are in the workplace but also in their personal lives. A message about loaning their bouncy castles mentions “limitless fun and parents carefree meeting time”; furthermore, “loaning the bouncy castle is free as it provides fun promotion of Visser & Visser”. Subsequently, personal achievements are celebrated as the internal news platform mentions an achievement after which the person is congratulated with the news.

4.2.4 Development

A company constantly needs to develop and developing also of importance within Visser & Visser. The concept of development includes both the development of a country as well as the development of employees. Firstly, the development of a company. The internal newsplatform of Visser & Visser references the development of the company multiple times. Several messages mention that teams or services have been expanded. For example, “the service has been expanded at the start of the year”, “with the establishment of our agri-team”, “branchgroup launches a wtza-desk”, and even the start of building a new company building in Dordrecht. In addition, new materials are developed as “IT specialists have worked on manuals that help with gathering data”. Development of the company as a whole also comes to the fore on the website where is mentioned that the company is a progressive company. On a page where employees tell about their experience the progressiveness of the company is mentioned in connection with work being challenging.

At the same time, employees are encouraged to develop themselves within their own field in order to do their work to the best of their ability. Messages on the internal news channel read: “In this

way we can take hours for studying into account when planning”, and “than you are obligated to have knowledge of the changed manual on quality”. In addition, the website mentions that “personal development is central”, there are several mentions of the word “development” on for example pages for job offers as well as a description of tasks as a junior working at Visser & Visser. In addition employees are expected to be motivated to develop themselves. In order to do so people are given “space to grow”.

The company is happy to be innovative, and requires their employees to be part of that innovation. However, they also offer possibilities to develop oneself. As a result all job offers on the site mention something about personal development. They mention that the work is challenge because of the innovative nature of the company. In addition, when describing potential employees the website mentions that put personal development central and that they give their employees the space to develop.

4.2.4.1 Feedback

Feedback can be part of the development of a company as well as the development of employees individually. The communication media used by Visser & Visser shows instances of both being used. Firstly, the website mentions both the possibility to give clear instructions if one prefers it or to have more freedom in developing oneself. Both statements occur on the website pages that discuss the kind of employee they would like as well as what people can expect from the company if they were to work there. In addition, the company also sees the importance of having feedback from their employees and messages on the internal news channel mention this. Firstly, they state that according to them documents are not static but constant under development: “according to us these are living documents”. Secondly, they emphasize that they appreciate receiving feedback “for any further corrections and updates of the documents”. These statements show that feedback is appreciated and encouraged and that it can help the company to grow and develop.

4.2.4.2 Questions

Part of developing both as a company as well as personally is encouraging employees to take charge of their own development. Asking questions is an easy way to gain knowledge and to make sure that each employee fully understands a topic in order to successfully execute a task [source]. The internal news channel of Visser & Visser plays into this as it mentions several times that employees are encouraged to ask questions. The following statements occur on the news channel: “If you have questions about the manual or suggestions about the changes, please do not hesitate and let us know”, “If there are questions you can contact the branches fiscal person”, “If you have questions contact a colleague from the BTW-team”. These statements show that asking questions is encouraged and that there are always people ready to assist when questions occur. Furthermore, the messages make it clear who to contact ensuring that it is easy to reach someone to ask a question.

4.2.5 Knowledge and expertise

Having knowledge and expertise is mostly attributed to employees. Visser & Visser values knowledge and expertise as can be concluded from their mentions on both the website and the internal news channel. When introducing a new team their experience and expertise is emphasized: “five new specialists are welcomed who will add experience and expertise”. Furthermore, an employee is mentioned who is happy to “use his experience and expertise in the role”. These statements place an emphasis on the role of knowledge and expertise within the company.

4.2.6 Adaptability

Being able to adapt is crucial in a company that values development. The internal news channel of Visser & Visser mentions this in a message where employees are encouraged to be prepared to adapt and use resources in order to complete their tasks successfully. In addition, the website mentions this a few more times as it stresses the progressiveness and innovative nature of the company. As the site states “the world is constantly changing which is why corporations have to constantly adapt”. Subsequently, employees of Visser & Visser are expected to “think outside of the

box” in order to stay flexible and distinguished as an organisation”. Furthermore, on the page that discusses the identity of Visser & Visser it states that they are “always curious to see how something can be done better. That is why we are prepared to put the status quo up for discussion and are always open for new ideas”. Additionally, the pages that discuss each sector mention a progressive way of working and when searching for new employees “flexibility, analytical thinking” is mentioned and thus emphasized within the job offer.

4.2.7 Technology

Technology and digitalization is mentioned a lot on the website. Not only in part because innovation is one of the core principles of the company. Furthermore, they stress the importance of technology, innovating and being aware of the latest innovations. They see innovation as a mutual force as “our professionals connect human and data, because innovation gets us further together”. The key principle of innovation comes to the fore in their emphasis on human and data and the possibilities digitalisation brings. Pages on the different sectors they operate in mention IT, data and automatization 28 times. In addition, the job offers state that one should have a feeling for digitalisation. That the company demands some sort of knowledge on technology also comes to the fore in messages on the news channel. Technology is for everyone as a message mentions that everyone can now access their own digital business card. The card also links to someone’s LinkedIn profile and if someone does not have a LinkedIn profile it is automatically connected to the LinkedIn profile of the company. The initiative ensures a connection between technology used within the company and social media and provides a more personal connection between employee and company. At the same time each employee is somewhat expected to have a LinkedIn profile which can then in turn promote the company. Linking the company’s LinkedIn profile ensures that even if an employee chooses not to have an account the company will still have exposure. Therefore, Visser & Visser does not only emphasize the importance of digitalisation in their work but also for employees personally with the use of social media.

5 Conclusion

In summary, the analysis of the interviews has given a lot of information which will be divided into four different topics; namely, older generation, younger generation, company and communication. The sections older generation and younger generation will summarize the results on stereotypes regarding generations. The section on company will discuss the results regarding to work environment, company in general, company policies but also relation between employer and employee. Lastly, the section on communication will summarize the results on communication in general, communication preferences of different generations as well as communication methods and communication from the company.

5.1 Summary of research

5.1.1 Stereotypes

There are several stereotypes regarding older and younger generations, which are also present within Visser & Visser as becomes apparent from interview and content analyses. Firstly, stereotypes regarding younger generations. Younger generations are often at the beginning of their working career and the focus on personal development reflects that. Within the company it is seen as important for young employees to develop and gradually take on more responsibility. The importance of development becomes clear not only within interviews but also in several messages in the internal news channel and on the website. The company as a whole prides itself on being innovative and as result offer their employees the possibility to develop themselves as well. However, development within the interviews is often connected to the younger employees and also the webpages on the tasks of a junior mention 'development' frequently. Consequently, younger employees are often viewed as lacking a bit when it comes to responsibility, which is also underscored by the findings of Gharzai et al. (2020) in research on Generation Z and millennial responses to the pandemic as they tried to avoid isolation. Avoiding isolation was seen as those generation being lazy and impatient; however, they also neglected to take their responsibility in isolating like other generations (Gharzai et al., 2020).

Furthermore, younger generations prioritize their work – life balance and as a result often work less as

they do not focus as much on making promotion. In addition, they value societal impact over making promotion and organise their work life accordingly. Having a good work-life balance is also promoted by the company on their own website. Furthermore, the focus on a work-life balance is underscored in the literature, as was found by Keene et al. (2015). Younger generations value a good work-life balance over money or status (Keene et al., 2015; Glass, 2007), and thus might put less of an emphasis on working. In addition, younger employees also work less due to leave of absence which they often take more than their older colleagues would have done. When it comes to their work attitude young workers are described as being relaxed, carefree, less focused on work, easily distracted and less ambitious. Additionally, they are also seen as less social, more focused on themselves and less frequent in engaging in face to face interaction as they prefer chats over calling or face to face interaction. The independence of younger generations is underscored by Keene et al. (2015) as they describe the younger generations to rely on themselves as they value independence. Furthermore, research has shown that the position within a company influences the degree of motivation (Keen et al., 2015), which could have an influence on the motivation, ambition and overall work attitude of younger employees when they occupy position that require less of a degree of responsibility. In addition, research also underscores the difference in focus for younger generations as they prioritize for example societal impact and construct their work life and work attitude accordingly (Keen et al., 2015). Furthermore, the company offers a lot of freedom, as becomes clear from their website, and the flexibility is something that resonates with the younger generations.

Secondly, stereotypes regarding older generations. Older generations encounter some of the same topics as younger generations such as development, work and social attitude, but also some different topics such as responsibility, knowledge and expertise, structure, and adaptability. Development is also a topic for older generations, as the company still emphasizes the importance of innovating on their website and they expect all employees to innovate as well. However, for older employees development rather consists of adaptability and using technology. Older generations are viewed as being less able to adapt to changes, which is underscored by Van Dalen et al. (2010) as they show that older workers score lower when it comes to flexibility and willingness to learn. Furthermore, when it comes to technology they are perceived as being a bit slower than the younger

generations when it comes to using and understanding technology; which, is underscored within the interviews as well as literature. In addition to older workers being less able to adapt they also score lower when it comes to acquiring technology skills (Van Dalen et al., 2010). However, in contrast older workers view themselves as being open to change and using new technology as long as it has value (Glass, 2007), which is also mentioned in the interview as an interviewee from the older generation mentions that they are willing to adapt as long as they see the benefits. Consequently, they are often a bit less willing to change and can easily adopt an attitude of where they have seen a situation many times before and are therefore not willing to try something new. However, when it comes to responsibility older generations are seen as being more responsible. The responsibility of older employees also comes to the fore in their loyalty to an organisation and their commitment to their job (Van Dalen et al., 2010). Furthermore, they are more social and will try to establish a social connection with their colleagues by showing interest in for example their colleagues' vacation plans. The social aspect within older workers can be seen as part of fondness for diplomacy and their emphasis on the importance of people skills (Van Dalen et al., 2010). The expertise and knowledge of older employees can help them in navigating around the workplace and communicating with different people (Van Dalen et al., 2010), as becomes apparent in the interviews where the expertise of social skills of older employees are praised. Lastly, knowledge and expertise is something that is often attributed to older employees. The interviews show that older colleagues are valued for their knowledge and expertise and their willingness to share the knowledge with their younger colleagues. Additionally, the company in general places value on the existence of knowledge and expertise as they emphasize it within messages on their internal news channel.

5.1.2 Company

A company has certain values which can influence its policies, which in turn influence employees in how they act within a company. Firstly, the attention for age when it comes to positions within a company. The interviews illustrate that within the company positions are based on merits rather than age. Therefore, qualities and work ethic are taken into account when offering someone a promotion or certain function and not age itself. This is not necessarily underscored by literature as

research shows that position and age are often linked, and for example older employees are judged based on their age instead of the qualities they show (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021; Kleissner & Jahn, 2019). Stereotypical beliefs can therefore influence the treatment of older employees even when those beliefs are not supported by empirical evidence (Van Selm & Heijkant, 2021; Kleissner & Jahn, 2019). Furthermore, when it comes to company policies concerning generational differences there is some attention but more distinct policies are seen as beneficial. Especially, attention at each individual branch for generational differences in addition to the existing courses on generational communication is perceived as positive. Additionally, the company in general consists of a lot of young employees. However, there is not really a distinction between older and younger employees as there is limited hierarchy. The company values a rather flat organisation with clear and open communication and also emphasizes the importance of being a team. The importance of being a team is also emphasized on the website, in the internal news channel and on LinkedIn. The company, for example, promotes team building activities, places an emphasis on doing things together and states multiple times that a good relation between colleagues is important. Being a team is important as collaborations between younger and older workers can increase understanding of both groups, which in turn helps in reducing age bias (Weeks et al., 2017; Henkens, 2005; Schloegel et al., 2016; Iweins et al., 2013). Lastly the relation between employer and employee. The relation between employer and employee comes to the fore mostly within the notion of commitment. Messages on the internal news channel illustrate that the company expects a certain degree of commitment from their employees, for example in sharing messages within their network. Furthermore, the company also realises the importance of keeping their employees informed which is perceived by the employees as positive as they characterise the company as being transparent. Consequently, commitment from employees towards a company requires an understanding of how certain generations commit. Younger workers have a different opinion of commitment than older workers and value flexibility over structure (Glass et al., 2007; Brody & Rubin, 2011). The company recognises these differences as the site shows that employees are given freedom and flexibility but having more structure is also possible. Therefore, they cater to both younger and older workers by offering both possibilities.

5.1.3 Communication

Communication occurs in each company both between colleagues as well as between a company and their employees. Therefore, the topic of communication can be divided into several sub-topics such as communication in general, communication younger generation, communication older generation, and communication methods.

Communication within the company is described as open, direct, informal and transparent. Furthermore, freedom within the company also applies to communication as all employees are free to choose their own method of communication. Additionally, feedback is seen as an important theme within the company. Giving and receiving feedback is important for all employees and ensures the transparent and open nature of communication within the company. Consequently, feedback is seen as an important aspect within development of the company as well as employees individually. The website therefore states that employees are free to choose between more clear instructions or more freedom when it comes to their own development. At the same time, employees are encouraged to express their opinions also towards the company as becomes clear from the internal news channel. Messages on the internal news channel not only emphasize the importance of giving feedback but actively call on their employees to give feedback. The emphasis on open communication can help in reducing potential conflict and stigmas within the workplace (Simons, 2009). Furthermore, the attention for communication and the freedom in choosing one's communication style can help in realising the organisations goals as employees are left free to choose the most effective manner in communicating (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

The younger generation of workers has certain preferences when it comes to communicating and they mostly come out when choosing communication methods. Young workers are reluctant to use phones and prefer chatting over other means of communication. The younger generations, therefore, value technology and prefer to use it instead of face-to-face communication (Glass, 2007; Venter, 2016). Additionally, they do not use email that frequent and when mailing younger employees it is often perceived that they glance quickly over the mail while not necessarily fully reading it. On the other hand, the older generation has a preference for face to face communication and values phones over chatting. Furthermore, they are perceived as being more social within the workplace and have

attention for their colleagues. Older generations are therefore more likely to call or walk into someone's office to ask something in person (Glass, 2007; Venter, 2016). When it comes to style of communication there does not seem such a difference between older and younger generations as all generations prefer a communication style that is open, direct and transparent. Lastly, it is important to be open minded as each generation can learn from the other also when it comes to communication methods and styles (Venter, 2016); which is echoed by the employees of the company.

Communication methods have been discussed in short above for the different generational groups. However, there are also certain points of attention when it comes to communication methods used by the company. The company emphasises the importance of technology multiple times on their website and therefore using technology when communicating is important. The use of the different technologies can bring some challenges, for example when it is not quite clear which channel to use as there are quite a few. Furthermore, due to the attention span of employees messages are received more positively when they are short and distributed multiple times a week. Lastly, the use of LinkedIn is viewed as positive and LinkedIn itself is described as being a platform that is for business. In contrast, Instagram is perceived as more personal but might appeal to the younger generations. Additionally, the website is up to date and represents the values of the company as well as the different age groups that are present within the company. Being aware of generational preferences when it comes to communication methods is important (Glass, 2007). Especially, on a website it is beneficial to take into account the preferences of each generation also when it comes to degrees of formality (Glass, 2007). Summarizing, both older and younger generations have certain preferences when it comes to communicating but are in accordance when it comes to the preference for open, transparent and informal communication. The company has to navigate the difference in style and communication methods between generations and create, for example, a website that reflects the image of the company while also speaking to different generations.

5.2 Answering RQ

This thesis has set out to answer the following research question: how do companies navigate intergenerational communication within their company policies? In order to answer the research question the following four sub-questions have been created: . What stereotypes about younger workers are present in organisations?

1. What stereotypes about younger workers are present in organisations?
2. What stereotypes about older workers are present in organisations?
3. What do organisations do to bridge the gap between generations within interpersonal communication settings?
4. What do organisations do to bridge the gap between generations within mediated communication (organisational communication outlets)?

Firstly, the first sub-question concerning stereotypes about younger generations. Young workers encounter several stereotypes within the workplace; namely, being sceptical, less loyal, independent and valuing other things above work or valuing a good work/life balance. Furthermore, they are seen as being more aware of technology and technological changes and an easily adapt. However, they are also perceived as being a bit less responsible and a bit less social when it comes to their colleagues.

Secondly, the second sub-question concerning stereotypes about older generations. Older workers are seen as being less able to change, more reliable, trustworthy, but also less knowledge about technology, slower to adapt and learn. In contrast, with younger workers that are more social and value face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, they have more knowledge and expertise and as a result are also seen as more responsible.

Thirdly, the third sub-questions about things organisations might do to bridge the gap between generations in interpersonal communication settings. The company does not necessarily have policies in place when it comes to interpersonal communication but rather lets its employees choose. Furthermore, the place an emphasis on the importance of open, direct communication which also becomes apparent in the organisational structure which also shows employees the importance of communicating clearly with each other. Therefore, the organisational structure influences interpersonal communication to some degree, for example with an emphasis on the importance of feedback, development and limited hierarchy, but ultimately the employees are allowed to choose themselves. Consequently, this gives each employee the opportunity to choose a

communication method and style that suits their own preferences and skills and the freedom to use one's own communication style can decrease the potential for conflict within the company. Lastly, the fourth sub-question on things organisations might do within mediated communication to bridge the gap between generations. The organisation caters to all generations within mediated communication by not placing an emphasis on generational differences but rather using professional texts that speak to all. In addition, they make sure that each generation is reflected on for example their website and they frequently state the company's core values such as being a team, giving feedback, helping each other as well as the importance of knowledge and expertise. Lastly, the freedom employees are given within their work as well as communication methods is reflected on their website, thus speaking to all generations. Therefore, to answer the overall research question on how companies navigate intergenerational communication within their company policies. Companies can navigate these differences by offering training programmes on generational differences and communication preferences. However, in addition to this, the general structure of a company can help in navigating generational differences. Thus, having an open structure where all communication preferences are respected but open, direct and transparent communication is valued makes sure that each generation can feel at ease and valued within the company. Rather than forcing a certain communication method or style, workers are free to choose themselves as long as they adhere to the company values. Thus, navigating generational differences is to some degree based on a mutual understanding between generations and confidence in the freedom to choose.

5.3 Practical implications

This thesis has set out to research intergenerational communication within the company of Visser & Visser which has given some practical insight into how a company might navigate different generations. Therefore, there are some practical implications which can be derived from this study for Visser & Visser but also for companies in general. Firstly, it is important to be aware of generational differences when it comes to communication, both in communication method and styles. For example, being aware that older generations prefer to discuss face-to-face and younger generations prefer chats

can help in effectively communicating between generations. Secondly, creating workplace where different types of communication style are valued and where employees feel the freedom to choose a style that suits them best can be positive for the company as a whole. Important is that the success of communication is based on a mutual understanding for each communication style and the company can help achieve this by promoting open, direct and transparent communication. Thirdly, representation is important and making sure that each generation is presented on for example website or social media ensures that each generation feels valued. Thirdly, the use of different social media platforms can differ for each generation. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the generational differences when it comes to social media preferences while also taking the degree of professionalization or business orientation of each platform into account. Lastly, having attention for generational differences within the company, companywide and within individual branches, is advisable. Discussing generational differences not only when it comes to communication, but also concerning work attitude, work/life balance, feedback and social attitude can help improve understanding of each generation and therefore decrease the potential of conflict within the workplace.

5.4 Limitations and future research

The topics researched within this thesis have to some degree been researched before. However, the research of stereotypes concerning both older and younger workers have not been done as much. Most research focuses on either younger or older employees (Bal et al., 2011; Gaillard, 2010; Matheson, 2000; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Weber & Muller, 2019), however, researching both creates a better understanding of how they might work together. Therefore, this thesis adds to the research by discussing intergenerational communication through the comparison of older and younger workers instead of focussing on just one. Furthermore the combination of interviews and content analysis gives an insight into how a company navigates these generational differences. However, this thesis has focused on just one company therefore for future research it might be interesting to research several companies within different fields as to get a full understanding of how companies navigate intergenerational communication. Additionally, the study has not taken gender difference into account

but focused solely on age difference; therefore, taking gender differences into account might be interesting in future research, as gender might also play a part in how generations view each other.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Toestemming

- Vind u het goed dat dit interview wordt opgenomen om het later te analyseren? Bij het gebruik van het interview zal u uiteraard geanonimiseerd worden.

Introductie

- Naam, leeftijd, hoe lang werkzaam bij bedrijf
- Hoe ziet u de verdeling van generaties binnen Visser&Visser?
 - o Is dit in uw ogen een gebruikelijke verdeling?
- Hoe ziet u de communicatie binnen Visser&Visser en vanuit Visser&Visser in het algemeen?

Stereotypen oudere generatie

- Uit onderzoek blijkt dat oudere werkers vaak te maken krijgen met stereotypen rondom werkhouding, motivatie enzo. Wat is uw eigen ervaring met deze stereotypen?
- Zijn dit stereotypen die u tegenkomt binnen Visser&Visser?
 - o Wel > voorbeelden van hoe u het tegenkomt
 - o Hoe denkt u dat het komt dat ze aanwezig zijn?
 - o Hoe reageert het bedrijf hierop?
 - o Niet > heeft het een bepaalde oorzaak dat ze niet aanwezig zijn?
 - o Niet aanwezig in uw omgeving of helemaal niet?

Stereotypen jongere generatie

- Onderzoek laat ook zien dat jongere werkers ook te maken krijgen met stereotypen zoals egoïstisch, alleen opzich zelf gericht, minder werken. Wat is uw eigen ervaring met deze stereotypen?
- Zijn dit stereotypen die u tegenkomt binnen Visser&Visser?
 - o Wel > voorbeelden van hoe u het tegenkomt
 - o Hoe denkt u dat het komt dat ze aanwezig zijn?
 - o Hoe reageert het bedrijf hierop?
 - o Niet > heeft het een bepaalde oorzaak dat ze niet aanwezig zijn?
 - o Niet aanwezig in uw omgeving of helemaal niet?
- Zijn de stereotypen rondom jongere werknemers minder aanwezig dan rondom oudere werknemers?

Intergenerationele communicatie

Interpersoonlijke communicatie

Interpersoonlijke communicatie gaat over persoonlijke communicatie tussen mensen. Dit kan tussen collega's onderling zijn, maar bijvoorbeeld ook tussen een leidinggevende en medewerker en andersom.

- Binnen bedrijven gaat communicatie vaak tussen mensen met verschillende generaties. Hoe ziet u de communicatie persoonlijk tussen mensen op de werkvloer en dan tussen verschillende generaties?
- Is er een verschil in hoe generaties worden aangesproken?
- Is er een verschil tussen medewerkers onderling en bijvoorbeeld een medewerker en een leidinggevende?
- Hoe ziet u zelf de communicatie met mensen uit een andere generatie?
 - o Is dat iets wat lastiger is?
 - o Denkt u daar bewust over na?

Voor leidinggevende

- Heeft u een verschillende aanpak qua communicatie als het gaat om verschillende generaties?
- Denkt u erover na hoe u met verschillende generaties communiceert?

Gemedieerde communicatie

Gemedieerde communicatie gaat over communicatie vanuit Visser&Visser en u kunt hierbij denken aan bijvoorbeeld een nieuwsbrief, de website of algemene berichten (maar ook social media) vanuit Visser&Visser.

- Algemene communicatie binnen het bedrijf heeft als doel verschillende generaties aanspreken. Hoe is deze communicatie binnen Visser&Visser precies gestructureerd als het gaat om verschillende generaties? Zijn er verschillen merkbaar als het gaat om verschillende generaties?
- Heeft u het idee dat er rekening wordt gehouden met verschillende generaties en hoe ze graag willen aangesproken worden?
- Mening over bijvoorbeeld lange berichten of video?
- Zijn er dingen die u zou willen veranderen binnen deze communicatie?
 - o Dingen die u aanspreken of juist niet?
- Als het gaat om communicatie via social media of de website. Spreekt u dat aan?
 - o Kijkt u bijvoorbeeld naar communicatie via social media?
 - Welke?
 - Spreekt u dat aan?

Conclusie

- Als u uit eigen ervaring spreekt wat vind u fijn als het gaat om communicatie als het gaat om persoonlijke communicatie?
 - o Waar zouden medewerkers rekening mee kunnen houden?
 - o Waar zouden leidinggevenden rekening mee kunnen houden?
- En als u uit eigen ervaring spreekt waar zou Visser&Visser aan moet denken als het gaat om communicatie met uw generatie?
 - o Wat zijn dingen die u prettig ervaart?
 - o Wat zijn dingen die beter zouden kunnen?
- Hoe ziet u de communicatie binnen Visser & Visser en vanuit Visser & Visser in het algemeen?
 - o Aanvulling hierop?
- Zijn er nog dingen die u wil toevoegen?

Appendix 2: Guide content analysis

Stereotypes

- Do the materials contain references to stereotypes
 - Do the materials remark on anything related to work attitude?
 - Do the materials remark on anything related motivation?
 - Do the materials remark on anything related loyalty?
 - Flexibility (preferred by younger generations) vs security (preferred by older generations)
 - Are any of the following negative stereotypes regarding older generations referenced?
 - Reliable
 - Accurate
 - Committed
 - Are any of the following negative stereotypes regarding younger generations referenced?
 - Technology skills
 - Adaptability
 - Flexibility
 - Do the materials mention anything about work/life balance?
 - Do the materials mentions anything about giving feedback/frequency of giving feedback?

Communication

- Do the materials discuss anything regarding communication?
- Do the reference certain communication media?
 - Mail
 - Face to face
 - Phone
 - Teams
 - Chatting
- Are the materials written for a younger or an older audience?
- Does the medium influence the choice of wording?
 - Is the medium targeted to a specific audience