

CEPAR Summer Scholarship Project Nomination Form 2021/2022

Project Number: CEPARSP2021_06

Project title

Provide a short descriptive title of no more than 20 words.

Task and relationship cooperation among age diverse employees: a social comparison lens

Supervisor

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Project summary

The demographic trends towards an ageing workforce bring an associated increase in age diversity at work, with employees of very different age cohorts having to interact, collaborate, and share knowledge and expertise. Despite the potential advantages of increased age diversity, existing evidence points towards very inconsistent and varied results, from small positive, small negative and null associations with employee and organisational outcomes (Bell et al., 2011; Joshi & Roh, 2009; Li et al., 2021; Schneid et al., 2016). While research at the team level has highlighted the role of boundary conditions such as leadership, or positive diversity climates, more recent research suggests that more intra-personal processes resulted from status differences and social comparisons are involved in explaining the inconsistent results around age diversity (Li et al., 2021). However, theory on the role of social comparisons in the context of age diversity is only emerging (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021) with no empirical evidence yet how these comparisons and resulting conclusions about one's organizational status unfold in an age-diverse context.

Previous research linked unfavourable social comparison processes to negative interpersonal behaviours at work such as sabotage or social undermining (Duffy et al., 2012, Lam et al., 2011). While the implicit assumption is that these behaviours lead to social costs for organizations because employees hinder each other in doing their work as well as they could (e.g., Larkin, Pierce, & Gino, 2012; Lee & Gino, 2016) extant social comparison studies have not yet investigated task related cooperation behaviours or outcomes.

Existent evidence employing a social comparison lens on cooperation points toward the idea that negative interactions can occur when comparisons with co-workers lead to employees feeling their status being threatened which then tempts them to respond with negative behaviours towards their co-workers. These negative behaviours have the potential to improve their own status and reduce the negative emotions associated with status threat (Duffy et al., 2012). Recent research conducted by Reh and colleagues (2017) used a multi-method, multi-study design to show that not only current status threat, but also future status threat resulted from temporal social comparisons can lead to negative interactions between co-workers. By introducing a temporal perspective into the study of social comparison, this study better accounts for the dynamic nature of status in organizations, and how it relates to negative social interactions at work. Furthermore, in their

discussion, Reh and colleagues (2017) argue that both career stage and present versus future focus might influence the extent to which employees rely on static versus temporal social comparisons. As career stage and present/future focus have both been shown to be directly influenced by ageing, with older employees being more likely to achieve high status positions in organisations as well as more likely to have a present focus (Carstensen et al., 1999), it becomes apparent that age and dissimilarity in age might shape the social comparison processes and resulting behaviours. However, these propositions have remained untested despite their potential in advancing our understanding of the ways in which positive and negative interactions occur between age diverse co-workers. In particular, the extant social comparison literature largely focused on individual differences or contextual factors as boundary conditions in the social-comparison-behaviour relationship (e.g., Crusius & Lange, 2017). In contrast, this study will zoom into the dyadic characteristics (i.e., age dissimilarity) of the co-workers comparing with each other.

Therefore, with this project, we aim to extend the model proposed by Reh and colleagues (2017) to investigate the role of age and age dissimilarity in social comparisons and to identify when and how they can support or hinder interpersonal and task cooperation outcomes.

We will work directly with Dr. Reh to adapt the initial experimental paradigm in order to address the research questions related to the role of age and age diversity in the social comparison process. This research has practical implications for understanding how organisations can lessen the impact of the social comparisons that inherently occur in interactions between employees of different ages, and consequently prevent negative effects on interpersonal and task related cooperation between age diverse employees.

Role of the scholarship holder(s) in the project

The scholarship holder will assist the research team, comprised of Dr. Daniela Andrei and Dr. Susan Reh, in adapting and refining the research paradigm developed by Reh et al., (2017) to investigate the processes and outcomes involved in social comparisons between employees of different ages. They will also assist in collecting preliminary data using the research design and conduct initial analysis to ensure that the experimental paradigm is working as intended before collecting data from a wider sample.

Required knowledge, skills and/or training

The scholarship holder is expected to have some knowledge and skill in research design, setting up electronic surveys (e.g., using Qualtrics) and/or using panel data providers (e.g., Prolific, Amazon M-Turk). The scholarship holder will also be expected to have basic competence in using a statistical package (e.g., SPSS) to conduct univariate and multivariate analysis.

Preference

Students with backgrounds in Organizational Behaviour or Industrial-Organizational Psychology are likely to have the type of interests and training that is most consistent with the literature and research field that this project addresses. Experience in having used vignette-based or experimental research designs, or awareness of research on social comparison, interpersonal behaviour, or age diversity might represent a plus, but not a requirement for full participation in the project.

Work period

The work period may be broken into two parts as students will not be expected to work during any university shutdown period over Christmas/New Year. You may either specify dates the student must be available to work over the summer period (i.e., to fit in with any leave you may have planned) or leave the exact dates open to negotiation with the successful applicant.

<p>Total work weeks:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4 weeks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 weeks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6 weeks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7 weeks</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 8 weeks</p>	<p>Please tick one box</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exact dates will be decided in consultation with the successful applicant</p> <p>OR</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The project must be conducted during the following period: --/--/-- to --/--/--</p>
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References:

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