

Age-Stereotypes of Emerging Adults within the South African Work Environment

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Abstract : Workplaces of today are populated by employees from different generations; emerging adults being the most recent demographic group entering the workplace. These individuals form part of Generation Y and are between the ages of 18 to 25. Emerging adults bring unique and different characteristics to the workplace. These individuals also differ from other generations with regards to their employment desires and ways of working. Age-stereotypes of emerging adults is, therefore, a common occurrence within workplaces. The general objective of the study was therefore to explore age-related stereotypes experienced regarding emerging adults within the South African work context and to determine the influences thereof. A qualitative research design from the social constructivism paradigm was employed in order to reach the objectives of this research study. A phenomenological approach using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling was employed within this study. A sample of 25 employees (N = 25) from various South African organisations were interviewed for the purpose of this study and formed part of three generations namely Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers. In order to analyse the collected data, the steps of thematic analysis were used. The main findings of this study indicated that emerging adults experience various positive and negative stereotypes within the workplace. Results further indicated that these stereotypes influence emerging adults in a behavioural, cognitive and emotional manner. These stereotypes also influence the way emerging adults are treated by older employees within the workplace. Recommendations based on the results of this study were made for future research and practice. This study creates awareness within organisations regarding age-stereotypes of emerging adults. By being aware, employees can manage the influences thereof within the workplace.

Keywords : age-stereotypes, baby boomers, emerging adults, generation x, generation y, South African work environment, stereotypes

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