

**GENERATIONS AND TEAM COOPERATION  
IN THE BELGIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

Research into intergenerational cooperation in the Belgian federal government.  
What are the levers for and obstacles to good team cooperation?  
Does generation management deserve specific attention here?

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## **Words of thanks**

This study highlights opportunities to work further on intergenerational cooperation in teams and hopefully offers many organisations inspiration and motivation to build on it further in the future. We warmly thank the Federal Public Service Personnel and Organisation, the initiator and principal for this study, for studying this topic further, for allowing their expertise to express itself during this project, and for their guiding force in implementing the ambitious research plan. We particularly wish to thank the three participating institutions, the Federal Public Service Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, the National Employment Office (NEO), and the National Archives and State Archives in the Provinces. Our contacts in these institutions enabled the collection of very high quality data through smooth cooperation. They adjusted the study thanks to their critical view based on practice and enriched our reflection on the implications and next steps for their institution, as an example for other organisations. Of course, our thanks also go to every employee in these organisations, for the time that they invested in participating in thought on this topic during one of the focus groups or by completing the questionnaire.



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## Introduction

Today the 50+ generation forms 40% of the Belgian federal personnel population ([www.pdata.be](http://www.pdata.be), 01/01/2010). Furthermore, the development of the age pyramid shows that the middle population, the traditional link between the youngest and the oldest employees in an organisation, is getting smaller.

This demographic development is forcing the federal government to face a series of challenges which reach farther than simply anticipating the outflow of a large number of employees. The knowledge flow-through and exchange of experience between older people and young people have to be placed on the right track, and to continue to motivate all employees regardless of their age; account must be taken of the diversity of expectations. Every generation has its own characteristics and has specific expectations with respect to the work relationship.

Cooperation between generations in teams is an answer to these challenges. After all, good cooperation between generations is essential for the continuity and renewal of the federal government and significantly determines the motivation and satisfaction of individual employees.

Federal Public Service Personnel and Organisation wishes to develop a personnel policy that stimulates cooperation between different generations in teams and which derives added value from employees' age diversity. To be able to take targeted actions at the level of (HR-) policy, internal communication and knowledge management, an answer is first needed to the following questions:

- How do the different generations work together in federal organisations?
- Which factors have an influence on this cooperation? How does age play a role here?
- What actions can be taken to improve cooperation?

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School was therefore asked to carry out a study that can offer an answer to these research questions. The results will be used as a basis for the action plan that the federal personnel managers will develop.

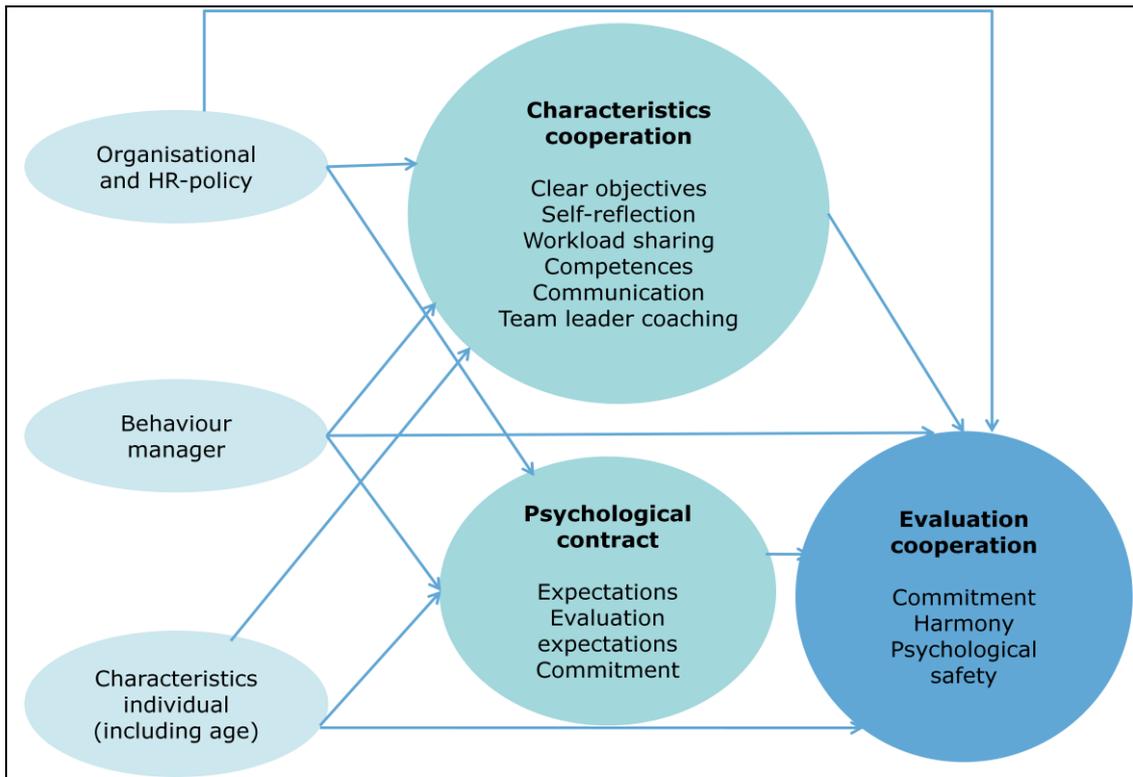
## 1. Scientific framework

In the literature a generation is referred to as 'a category of contemporaries, who show the effects of one or more discontinuous micro-changes in their behaviour, which its members have experienced during their formative period' (Deal, 2007). A frequently used classification into generations is that of Generation Y (°1980-2003), Generation X (°1968-1980), Baby boom 40 (°1957-1968), Baby boom 50 (°1945-1957) and Veterans (°1930-1945).

In addition to the concept of '**generation**' two scientific frameworks are relevant for the study of cooperation between generations.

- Firstly, the concept of '**psychological contract**' offers a useful framework for studying differences in attitude to work and expectations with respect to the work relationship.
- Research into '**team performance**' or team cooperation also gives a greater insight into the factors that influence cooperation and the impact that the team leadership has on this cooperation.

The following diagram shows the conceptual model that was retained in this study. The two frameworks are centrally important in it.



**Diagram 1 - Conceptual model: cooperation between generations**

### 1.1 Psychological contract

The psychological contract refers to employees' perceptions of their work relationship: how do they describe their commitment to the organisation, what do they expect for this in return and are these expectations satisfied?

The dimensions of the psychological contract which get a lot of attention in the literature are:

- **Expectations** towards the organisation relating to job content, career prospects, development opportunities, remuneration, work-life balance, social atmosphere and support, and job safety on the one hand, and the **evaluation** of these aspects on the other.
- **Own commitment** in terms of performance, flexibility, loyalty, availability, ethical behaviour and collegiality.

What is striking is that these dimensions are also frequently cited as 'fault lines' between employees of different ages. Thus, recent international studies show that among employees and their managers of different generations pronounced differences often exist concerning dimensions such as career prospects, flexibility, work ethic, loyalty, etc. Cooperation between generations does not automatically appear to run smoothly (inter alia see Deal, 2007; Macky, Gardner & Forsyth, 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Wesner & Miller, 2008).

However, we believe that it is important to look further than what exists on the surface. After all, the literature teaches us that what appear to be major differences at first sight often have a common foundation (Deal, 2007). The orientating factor here is the idea that employees from all generations have a need for respect and appreciation, and need to obtain opportunities to contribute to the organisation and have the feeling that they belong to the organisation. A focus on agreements in the psychological contract can

therefore also be an appropriate starting point for good generation management. What binds generations together and where does intergenerational cooperation offer added value for everyone involved?

## 1.2 Steering high-performing teams

To achieve good cooperation between generations, it is not only necessary to have insight into the psychological contract, but also the dynamic and steering of existing cooperative links. Teams, defined as '*a group of employees who report to the same manager and who cooperate on a permanent or long-term basis*' (Van der Vegt and Janssen, 2003), also form the focus of this study.

What makes the difference between a high-performing and less-well performing team? Five different dimensions appear to be decisive here (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Van den Broeck & Debussche, 2007), namely:

- (1) 'Clear Direction' or '**Clear objectives**': Do the employees obtain clear goals and objectives?
- (2) 'Reflexivity' or '**Self-reflection**': does reflection occur on how work is done, on the method?
- (3) '**Workload sharing**': is each team member's individual contribution clearly defined and does everyone take on his or her responsibility?
- (4) 'Team Composition' or '**Competences**': do the employees have the required competences and complementarity?
- (5) '**Communication**': does communication occur sufficiently and effectively in the team?

We add a further sixth dimension to this, which explicitly covers the role of the team leader in steering a high-performing team, namely '**Team leader coaching**'.

When we examine team cooperation in the federal government in this study, we keep these dimensions in mind. We view the evaluation of team cooperation using three dimensions, i.e. the commitment that employees and managers feel to their team ('**Commitment**'), their evaluation of the harmony in their team ('**Harmony**') and their feeling that they can learn and dare to take risks (called '**Psychological safety**').

For clarity and to facilitate reading, we shall only use the names highlighted in **bold type** for these concepts from now on.

In the following section, we first clarify the methodology that we used to study cooperation between generations in the federal government. We then discuss the most important findings and conclusions.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology that was followed to obtain an answer to the different research questions comprises different phases and surveying rounds (qualitative and quantitative). The data were collected in the three different organisations belonging to the federal government.

### 2.1 Selection criteria for participating institutions

The federal government is a complex organisation which has a very large number of employees, distributed across varied institutions. We selected three institutions to participate in this research based on different criteria, namely the National Employment Office, FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment and the National Archives and State Archives in the Provinces.

In these three institutions, the age distribution in the employee population was established in such a way that each generation category was represented by at least 10%. Account was also taken of the degree of centralisation of operation and the scale, in order to study organisations which are as diverse as possible. Finally, they include a good variety of functions, ranging from file processors via project employees to scientific staff.

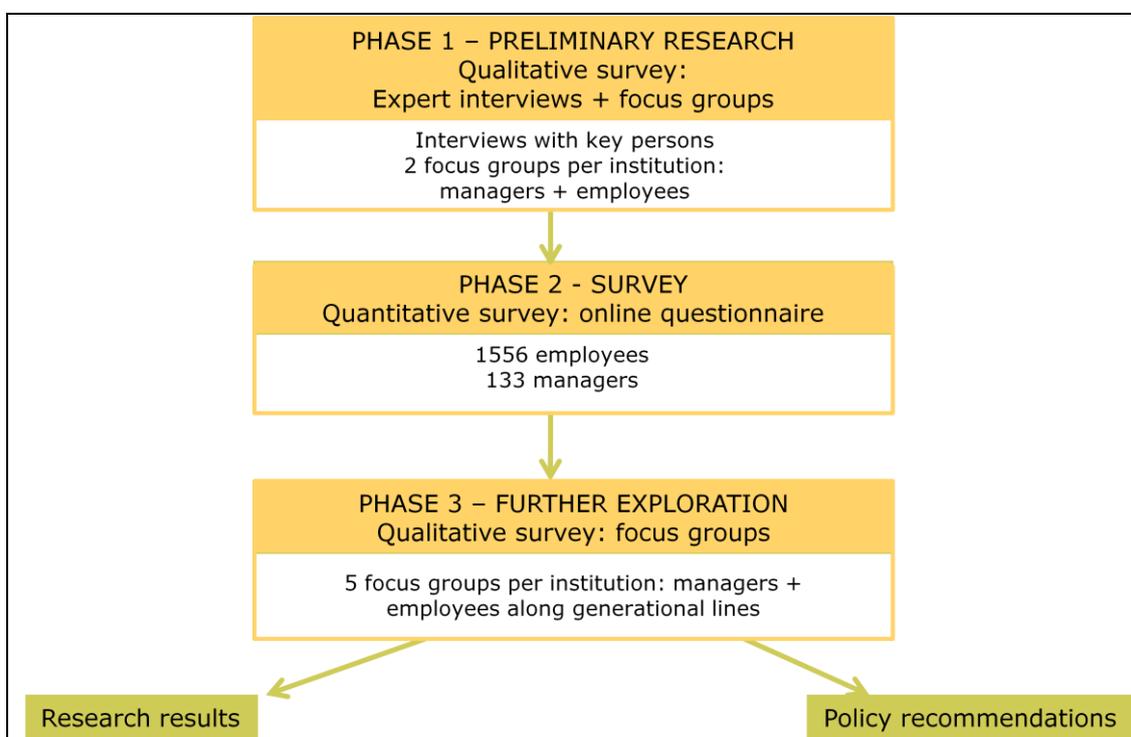
We wanted to make statements about differences in intergenerational cooperation between teams and the explanatory factors. As a result it was also important for variability in age to be present in the teams. We found both age homogenous and heterogeneous teams in the selected institutions.

## 2.2 Research and surveying method

For the empirical survey, we proceeded with a research approach that is made up of three major phases:

- (1) Preliminary research: qualitative survey via expert interviews and focus groups,
- (2) Survey: quantitative survey via an online questionnaire,
- (3) Further exploration: qualitative survey via focus groups.

The diagram below shows our research approach schematically.



**Diagram 2 – Research approach in three phases**

### Preliminary research via expert interviews

Firstly we held a number of conversations with internal experts in FPS Personnel and Organisation and in the three participating institutions. In FPS Personnel and Organisation we held talks with the managers responsible for development circles and modernisation projects in the federal government. We had interviews with the HR managers in the institutions themselves.

### Preliminary research via focus groups

In addition we organised two focus groups per institution whereby ten employees were invited per focus group to engage in an open conversation on the topic of intergenerational cooperation. This enabled us to record experiences in practice, bottlenecks and expectations and to include these in the quantitative research.

One focus group with employees and one focus group with managers were organised for each institution. The main two selection criteria for the employees who were invited to this focus group were variability in age and being part of a team where different generations cooperate, with representation of employees from as many different teams as possible.

To select the managers we set up the following in parallel: the biggest variability possible in the managers' age and variability in the numbers of employees from different generations in their team.

### **Survey via an online questionnaire**

Based on the input from the focus groups and the scientific framework, two questionnaires were then compiled for the quantitative research among the selected teams (employees and their managers).

An anonymous questionnaire, whereby a link could be made between the respondent and the team to which he belongs or which he manages, was disseminated. We based ourselves on the six stated dimensions which count for efficient team cooperation and on the three dimensions which evaluated team cooperation for the content of this questionnaire. In each of these six dimensions we included an existing scientifically validated scale and we added a number of 'tailored' items, specific to the context of this research, based on the input from phase 1. In addition to team cooperation we indicated that the psychological contract was the starting point as the scientific framework, which is why the six dimensions of the psychological contract were gauged (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; De Vos et al., 2003; 2005) (cf. below 3.4).

As an interest in the motivation of older employees and their view of their further career emerged from the expert interviews and the conversations with the principal, a number of items that gauged the end-of-career decision were finally added.

The following demographic variables were surveyed: gender, year of birth, level of education, fulltime or part-time employment, status, level, and seniority in the organisation and in the team. The questionnaire was compiled in Dutch and French.

Depending on the size of the selected institutions, we worked with the complete population or a representative sample. Since the teams were the analysis unit, the sample had to be sufficiently large at team level in each case. In order to be able to capture variability at group level, namely diversity by job, status, professional category and language group in the institutions, and also to reflect the diversity of the generation composition in the teams, it was important to have a sufficiently large number of teams (Hitt et al., 2007).

To determine the sample per institution, we assumed a reliability interval of 95% and an average response quantity of 45%. This led to the following research plan.

**Table 1 – Sample numbers in the three institutions: employees and teams**

|   | <i>Number of employees<br/>(population)</i> | <i>Number of employees<br/>(sample)</i> | <i>Number of<br/>teams<br/>(sample)</i> |
|---|---|---|---|
| National Archives                             | 276 employees                               | 276 employees                           | 28 teams                                |
| FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment | 1419 employees                              | 709 employees                           | 55 teams                                |
| National Employment Office                    | 2768 employees                              | 704 employees                           | 50 teams                                |

### Further exploration via focus groups

Although a quantitative survey gives first indications of possible actions, the results are often insufficient for drawing up an in-depth action plan. This is why a number of focus groups were organised with the aim of further exploring the results and putting them into a framework. Questions such as 'Do you recognise the results based on the questionnaire?' and 'Can you give examples to make the results concrete?' were asked here.

The Delphi technique was used during these focus groups. Two-hour interactive sessions were organised with 10 people in each case.

In practice we organised five focus groups per institution. A first focus group with managers and four focus groups with employees grouped per generation (Generation Y, Generation X, Baby boom 40 and Baby boom 50).

### 2.3 Analyses

The data obtained from the quantitative research were analysed using quantitative analysis methods (statistical software package SPSS).

In an initial stage the measurement quality of our variables was investigated based on the data obtained from the survey of employees and the survey of managers. This included an analysis of the reliability of all scientific scales (e.g. the six dimensions of team cooperation). If new items were used, i.e. added due to the results from the exploratory focus groups, the connection between these questions was first examined via factor analysis. Constructs were then made by calculating the average scores for the questions belonging to the same scientific scale.

The data were analysed both at individual level and at team level so that statements could be made about cooperation between generations in teams and the explanatory factors.

### 3. Results

We surveyed the experiences of participants from the three selected institutions concerning team cooperation and we examined the influence of generations on this, both in the survey and during the focus groups. We can reach a number of conclusions based on these. Before we go deeper into these here, we shall give an overview of the level of response achieved.

**Table 2 - Total response from employees and managers**

|           | <i>Surveys sent out</i> | <i>Received surveys</i> | <i>Level of response</i> |
|-----------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Employees | 1556                    | 877                     | 56%                      |
| Managers  | 133                     | 91                      | 68%                      |

After 'matching' the results of the team members and their team leaders, we turned out to have 78 teams in which at least three employees and their manager had completed the survey.

**Table 3 - Results matching for employees and managers**

|           | <i>Completed survey</i> | <i>Matching possible</i> |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Employees | 877                     | 634                      |
| Managers  | 91                      | 78                       |

The average response per team is 8.87 employees (Standard deviation = 3.61). The team with the largest number of respondents comprises 17 employees.

When we look at the distribution over the generations, we see the following results.

**Table 4 - Response per generation by employees and managers**

|              | <i>Employees</i> | <i>Managers</i> |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Generation Y | 178              | 5               |
| Generation X | 184              | 10              |
| Baby boom 40 | 258              | 41              |
| Baby boom 50 | 257              | 35              |

In the following paragraphs we take a deeper look at the evaluation of team cooperation inside the federal government. We then examine which dimensions of high-performing teams play a role here. Thirdly we closely review the psychological contract before concluding with the end-of-career decision and which factors play a role here.

### **Fge3.1 How is team cooperation evaluated?**

To study how personnel members of the federal government evaluate the operation of their team, we used three scientifically validated scales, namely 'Commitment', 'Harmony' and 'Psychological safety' (cf. above 1.2).

#### **3.1.1 Commitment**

The 'Commitment' dimension examines to what extent someone is proud to be part of the team, is satisfied with colleagues and also feels strongly committed.

Table 5 reproduces the results at item level. For each of these dimensions, respondents were presented with a series of attitudes to which they could answer how much they agreed (from 1, 'completely disagree' to 5, 'completely agree'). The questions for employees on the one hand and for managers on the other are shown below each other. The average score is taken in each case, but also the standard deviation (St. Dev.). This is an indicator of distribution around the average score. So it gives the variation in the observations. In order to interpret the averages, we also point out that we speak of a positive result from a score of 3.5 on a five point scale.

**Table 5 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Commitment'**

|  | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|  | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| I am proud to be part of this team.  | 3.60             | 0.996           | 4.33            | 0.712           |
| I am proud that I can manage this team.  |                  |                 |                 |                 |
| I am happy that I am part of this team and not another team in our organisation. | 3.59             | 1.020           | 3.90            | 0.979           |
| I am happy to manage this team and not another team in our organisation.         |                  |                 |                 |                 |
| I feel strongly involved in this team.   | 3.65             | 0.967           | 4.34            | 0.684           |
| I am prepared to make an extra effort to increase our team's results.            |                  |                 |                 |                 |
| I am prepared to make an extra effort to increase my team's results.             | 3.89             | 0.868           | 4.39            | 0.660           |
| I am satisfied with my colleagues in this team.                                  |                  |                 |                 |                 |
| I am satisfied with my employees in this team.                                   | 3.73             | 0.976           | 4.15            | 0.706           |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>3.69</b>      |                 | <b>4.22</b>     |                 |

Both employees and managers are mostly positive about commitment to the team. Employees have an average score of 3.69 on a five point scale, while managers score 4.22 on average.

There are no intergenerational differences for the 'Commitment' dimension, either among employees or managers. For the remaining demographic variables, we only note a significant link at the level of employment. The lower the level, the lower the score for 'Commitment'.

### 3.1.2 Harmony

The second dimension in team evaluation is 'Harmony'. Is there a 'we' feeling in the team? Do colleagues support each other's ideas? Does a pleasant atmosphere exist?

In the table below and following tables, we shall only take over the items from the employees' questionnaire. The same questions are included in the managers' questionnaire, but formulated from their perspective.

**Table 6 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Harmony'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| The colleagues in our team support each other's ideas.                        | 3.36             | 0.908           | 3.60            | 0.678           |
| The colleagues in our team are friendly to each other.                        | 3.69             | 1.042           | 3.86            | 0.815           |
| There is a 'we' feeling among colleagues in our team.                         | 3.34             | 1.158           | 3.83            | 0.868           |
| Regular consultation occurs in our team about who has to take on which tasks. | 3.10             | 1.109           | 3.63            | 0.953           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.37</b>      |                 | <b>3.73</b>     |                 |

The employees score an average of 3.37 on this dimension. Managers have an average score of 3.73.

There are no intergenerational differences among employees for this dimension. However, there are among managers. Team leaders belonging to Baby boomers 50 are more positive about 'Harmony' than Baby boomers 40. When we look at age as a demographic variable, we see that the older the team leaders, the higher they score on 'Harmony'.

In addition to age, seniority in the team and a higher level of training ensure higher scores. The score for 'Harmony' falls again when employees work for longer in the organisation and work at lower hierarchical levels.

### 3.1.3 Psychological safety

'Psychological safety' indicates the degree to which problems and difficult matters can be discussed, to what degree room exists for errors, or to what extent team members appreciate each other.

**Table 7 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Psychological safety'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| The colleagues in this team can make problems and difficult matters open for discussion.          | 3.36             | 1.041           | 4.20            | 0.700           |
| If you make a mistake in this team, this is often used against you (reverse scoring).             | 3.59             | 1.091           | 4.12            | 0.893           |
| It is safe to take a risk in this team.   | 2.93             | 0.895           | 3.24            | 0.743           |
| Sometimes people in this team do not accept others because they are different (reverse scoring).  | 3.34             | 1.155           | 3.52            | 1.100           |
| There is no one in this team who would consciously do something that would undermine my efforts.  | 3.56             | 1.115           | 3.98            | 1.073           |
| It is difficult to ask colleagues for help in this team (reverse scoring).                        | 3.73             | 1.059           | 3.48            | 1.069           |
| When I cooperate with colleagues in this team then my experience and competences are appreciated. | 3.62             | 0.836           | 4.01            | 0.667           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.45</b>      |                 | <b>3.79</b>     |                 |

This dimension scores an average of 3.45 among employees and 3.79 among managers. Before calculating the figure, the score on three items which expressed a negative evaluation was recoded so that a higher score each of the items indicates a higher degree of 'Psychological safety'.

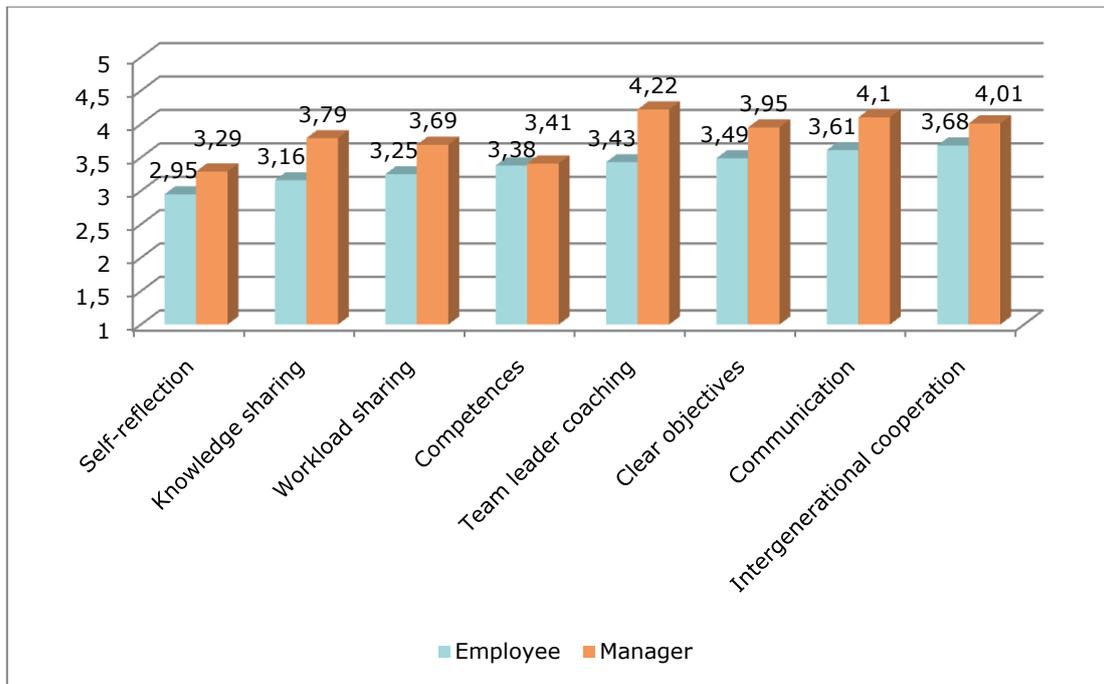
Intergenerational differences do not exist either for employees or for managers on this dimension. We do see that men score significantly higher than women and permanent staff score significantly higher than contract staff. In addition, it appears that the higher the level in the organisation, the higher a person scores on 'Psychological safety'. Higher education also ensures a significantly higher result.

### **3.2 Which characteristics of team cooperation have an impact on the evaluation of team cooperation?**

An important question is how the characteristics of team cooperation have an influence on the abovementioned team evaluation. To study this link we carried out a number of hierarchical regression analyses. Different significant links emerge from the analyses. Furthermore, analyses showed that in addition to the six proposed dimensions derived from the scientific framework used, two new dimensions are determinative for high-performing teams, namely 'Knowledge sharing' and 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation'.

We briefly discuss each of the eight dimensions, the scores from the quantitative survey, the findings from the focus groups and how these dimensions are related to the evaluation of team cooperation. To interpret the results of the survey we also indicate that respondents were presented with a series of attitudes for each of the dimensions, to which they could answer how far they agreed (from 1, 'completely disagree' to 5, 'completely agree').

The diagram below reproduces the results already summarised.



**Diagram 3 - Average scores of employees and managers for the eight dimensions of team cooperation**

### 3.2.1 Self-reflection

A first dimension which is viewed as essential for team performance in the literature is that of 'Self-reflection'. The question is asked, in this dimension, about whether discussions are held regularly in a team to reflect on its operation, the working method used and the communication method. Reflecting on how the team works could accordingly facilitate the possibility for positive changes.

The results appear as follows at an itemized level.

**Table 8 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Self-reflection'**

|  | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|  | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| We regularly discuss whether the team is working well.                                   | 2.92             | 1.157           | 3.60            | 0.911           |
| We regularly discuss the method that we adopt to perform our assignments in the team.    | 3.05             | 1.122           | 3.63            | 0.857           |
| We regularly reflect about how we communicate.   | 2.78             | 1.080           | 3.37            | 0.942           |
| It is difficult to make changes in the approach to work open to discussion in this team. | 3.08             | 1.136           | 2.55            | 1.156           |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>2.95</b>      |                 | <b>3.29</b>     |                 |

The quantitative survey reveals that this dimension is the weakest. On a scale from 1 to 5 employees score an average of 2.95 whereas managers score an average of 3.29.

As a marginal note, we indicate that the score for 'Self-reflection' falls as the employees grow older. Older employees therefore have the perception that less consideration is given to team work. There is also a significant negative link with seniority in the organisation. As regards the remaining demographic variables, it appears that neither gender nor status is correlated to 'Self-reflection'. However, the lower the level in the organisation, the lower a person scores on this dimension.

Due to the lower scores (under 3.5 on a five point scale) on this dimension, we can conclude that there is still room for improvement as regards self-reflection in teams in the

federal government. The results of the focus groups confirm this. The employees have few moments for consideration and consultation about their team work.

- *'More regular consultation would certainly be welcome. It should be very easy to sit down together each month.'*
- *'For me it is sufficient to sit down together formally once or twice per year, but informally it would be nice to tune in to each other weekly or fortnightly.'*
- *'I really do not know what colleagues do, there is little team consultation.'*
- *'Sometimes it is good to discuss something together or to look at it as a group.'*

Although references are occasionally made to team meetings, we cannot conclude that this is a standard practice. After all, while one person refers to weekly team consultation, others rarely have an opportunity to consult inside their department or institution. Furthermore, it is emphasised that a team meeting is more than a moment when information is given top-down. It must also and primarily be a moment where consultation is engaged in and bottom-up information is obtained.

The 'Self-reflection' dimension is nonetheless a very important dimension. It has a significant influence on how team cooperation is evaluated by team members. Thus team members with a higher score on 'Self-reflection' score higher on commitment and commitment in the team ('Commitment'). The feeling of safety ('Psychological safety') is also stronger in that case. When team reflection moments exist, the person feels that problems can be discussed and feels that he or she has a certain freedom to take risks.

### 3.2.2 Knowledge sharing

Although this dimension was not defined in advance by the literature on high-performing teams, this study indicates that 'Knowledge sharing' can be included as a determinative factor for a team that works well. The dimension asks whether older colleagues are encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with younger people and vice versa. Furthermore, it examines whether knowledge is transferred when an employee leaves the organisation.

**Table 9 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Knowledge sharing'**

|   | Employees   |          | Managers    |          |
|---|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|   | Average     | St. Dev. | Average     | St. Dev. |
| When an employee leaves the organisation, his/her knowledge is transferred.                       | 2.94        | 1.083    | 3.37        | 1.159    |
| Young colleagues are encouraged to share their knowledge with older colleagues.                   | 3.22        | 0.960    | 3.98        | 0.834    |
| Older colleagues are encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with younger team members. | 3.32        | 0.995    | 4.03        | 0.814    |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.16</b> |          | <b>3.79</b> |          |

The scores make it clear that there is only a limited question of such knowledge transfer. Thus employees score an average of 3.16 while managers score 3.79.

This dimension does not differ significantly between the generations. Gender is significant here. In practice, women score higher than men. In addition, employees at lower levels and lower trained employees score higher on 'Knowledge sharing'. Seniority in the team or organisation does not play any significant role again.

The results of the focus groups confirm the relatively low scores. Employees state that knowledge sharing takes place rather informally and primarily depends on the 'goodwill' of colleagues. It is rarely structurally embedded or really planned. The work pressure and a lack of time often appear to be factors that are obstacles to knowledge sharing. Everyone

is so involved in completing his or her own set of tasks that little time is left over to support others.

Reference is certainly made to this on different occasions when new employees are being inducted. Although everyone is familiar with the sponsor system, which is responsible for the induction of new employees, it appears that in reality it is only applied on a limited scale. People also suggest offering more training courses after new recruitment. New employees often have to 'get working along with the others' very quickly. Some employees with quite a lot of experience find this a dangerous development: *'But give them some time to fail'*.

The importance of the direct manager is emphasised in the focus groups. What counts here is for a manager to act as an example and to encourage all employees to share their knowledge. It is suggested that sharing knowledge promotes the versatility of employees, which in turn is positive for team operations as a whole. Baby boomers (40) in particular find that sharing and transferring knowledge is a motivator. They also admit that it is important to develop a culture of knowledge sharing, because some older employees may be inclined to hold their knowledge back and can demonstrate an unwillingness to transfer their knowledge to younger people.

In general employees agree that knowledge transfer is thought of too late when someone leaves the organisation.

- *'Transfer of knowledge is only thought of at the very last moment.'*
- *'A replacement is often thought of too late because of budgets, and the knowledge is therefore already gone.'*

The 'Survival kit' is a methodological instrument available in the federal government, with the aim of facilitating this transfer. It helps the senior whose successor has not yet been appointed to set down his essential knowledge. Although this is known to and appreciated by some people, its dissemination remains limited and participants in the focus groups believe that it should be made better known and used more.

When we look at the link to the evaluation of team cooperation, 'Knowledge sharing' appears to play an important role with respect to 'Commitment'. The more space there is for knowledge sharing, the more committed employees feel.

### 3.2.3 Workload sharing

The 'Workload sharing' dimension looks at the contribution by all colleagues in a team. Does everyone do an honest and equivalent share of the work? Does everyone take on responsibility for performing his own tasks and helping each other? The results are displayed in table 10. The employees' questions were slightly adapted in the managers' questionnaire.

**Table 10 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Workload sharing'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| All employees in the team do their share of the work honestly here.         | 3.13             | 1.219           | 3.65            | 0.917           |
| Everyone in this team takes on his responsibility to perform his own tasks. | 3.33             | 1.151           | 3.82            | 0.807           |
| All employees make an equivalent contribution to the work.                  | 2.86             | 1.167           | 3.24            | 1.067           |
| Employees help each other with the performance of their work.               | 3.67             | 1.007           | 4.03            | 0.683           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.25</b>      |                 | <b>3.69</b>     |                 |

Employees score an average of 3.25 on these questions. The managers achieve a score of 3.69.

What is striking is that the score for 'Workload sharing' falls significantly with age. Older employees therefore have less of a feeling that tasks are distributed evenly. The same applies to employees with higher seniority in the organisation and the team. Gender does not have any significant influence again. The function level does: the lower the function level, the higher the scores on this dimension.

During the focus groups it appeared that employees from different generations are satisfied in general about everyone's contribution to work. Experience seems to be important here and is acknowledged as a valid criterion for distributing the package of tasks. But one comment was made regularly. In particular, it appears that IT tasks are one of the criteria for distributing the workload. Young people, mainly Generation Y, are more burdened with computer tasks than Baby boomers. Although some have no problems with this, this is not the case for everyone. Once again, older people admit that they often get the more complex files that demand greater experience.

- *'Not too much account can be taken of age, otherwise resentment would develop.'*
- *'As a manager I may take account of the content, perhaps older people sometimes get more complex files.'*
- *'Age does play a role in the distribution of tasks. For example, young people always have to work with Excel or Word. I do not think that is ok. If someone says 'I cannot do that', then it is simply pushed over to us.'*

Finally, the 'Workload sharing' dimension is a decisive factor for all aspects of team evaluation. It is also not unimportant as a manager to ensure that employees perceive that there is an honest distribution of work.

### 3.2.4. Competences

The fourth dimension, 'Competences', asks whether the team is composed of employees who have the relevant competences. In addition, this dimension examines whether team members obtain sufficient training and have sufficient experience for the work that they have to do. The results are displayed in table 11. The employees' questions were adapted slightly for the managers' perspective.

**Table 11 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Competences'**

|  | Employees   |          | Managers    |          |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|  | Average     | St. Dev. | Average     | St. Dev. |
| Most people in this team have the right knowledge and experience to solve the problems that arise in our work. | 3.61        | 0.938    | 3.65        | 0.816    |
| All team members have more than adequate training and experience for the work that they have to do.            | 3.34        | 1.054    | 3.47        | 0.842    |
| There are people in this team who lack a number of skills that would allow them to cooperate well in the team. | 3.20        | 1.078    | 3.12        | 1.020    |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>3.38</b> |          | <b>3.41</b> |          |

The employees achieve a score of 3.38 while the managers' result is 3.41.

The generations do not score significantly differently on this dimension. Gender and status are equally unimportant. The seniority in the organisation or team does not have any significant impact either. However the function level does. The lower the function level, the lower the score on 'Competences'.

A number of results that deserve our attention emerge from the focus groups. Thus all generations state that they would opt for a mix of ages in their team above a homogeneous team. People are not only thinking of age here, but also the knowledge, experience and differences in perspectives associated with this.

- *'Faster, more direct young people supplement calmer, more experienced colleagues.'*

An age-specific competence which is recognised by all generations is mastery of new communication technologies. Both young and old admit that fewer older employees than younger ones master these. Some even refer here to a fault line that divides the staff into two groups.

- *'Age-specific skills are the fact that older people cannot work with Word and Excel.'*
- *'Older employees do not master new communication technologies.'*

The importance of training is highlighted in this context. As already mentioned, it is believed that new employees must be monitored better. In addition, people want to be more involved in the training plan.

- *'Too little input from below is sought for training.'*

Finally, in addition to function-specific competences the employees also emphasise the importance of relational competences, which are essential for being able to work well in a team. According to them, the employees' personality, motivation and "drive" must be the decisive criteria during recruitment: *'You can always learn the rest'*.

The 'Competences' dimension does not have any significant influence on how team cooperation is evaluated. Nonetheless we hold the view that, as a result of the input that we received during the focus groups, this dimension deserves further attention.

### 3.2.5. Team leader coaching

The 'Team leader coaching' dimension asks whether the manager provides support and coaching, adapted to the age of the employees. Does the manager attempt to allow implicit knowledge to arise and to have it shared? The results at item level are displayed in the following table. The questions for employees on the one hand and for managers on the other are placed under each other.

**Table 12 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Team leader coaching'**

|  | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|  | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| Our manager regularly organises meetings to discuss the progress of our work.<br>I regularly organise meetings to discuss the progress of the work.  | 3.12             | 1.241           | 3.56            | 0.961           |
| Our manager is available to discuss problems.<br>I am available to discuss problems.   | 3.69             | 1.126           | 4.60            | 0.554           |
| Our manager is genuinely "present" in the team; he/she is someone who is genuinely available for us.<br>I try to be genuinely "present" in the team, to be genuinely available for everyone. | 3.49             | 1.214           | 4.51            | 0.583           |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>3.43</b>      |                 | <b>4.22</b>     |                 |

As regards the question of whether the manager is genuinely present and available in the team and whether it is possible to discuss not only work but also potential problems, the employees' result is 3.43 while managers award themselves a score of 4.22. Furthermore, the results reveal that the degree to which a team leader himself thinks of giving coaching

plays a significant role. After all, teams whose manager scores higher personally on coaching themselves also score higher on this dimension. This means that managers assess themselves well in general.

Neither age, gender, status, education nor seniority has a significant impact on the scores for 'Team leader coaching'. There is only a significant result for function level. The higher the function level in the organisation, the lower employees' score on this dimension.

The importance of managers emerged several times from the focus groups. The expectations with respect to team leaders are also very extensive. Furthermore, the impact of the team leader is deemed significant.

- *'I have the impression that the manager determines the mentality in teams. If this is someone who can cooperate well and expresses appreciation, this is actually one of the elements that enable a department to run well. If he does not do this, then things go wrong.'*

When we examine whether the perception linked to 'Team leader coaching' has an influence on how people evaluate team cooperation, this actually appears to be the case. The higher the score on 'Team leader coaching' is, the higher the reference to 'Commitment' and 'Psychological safety'.

### 3.2.6 Clear objectives

The 'Clear objectives' dimension wishes to know whether employees receive objectives that are understandable for them. The question of whether it is clear which commitment is expected and what the employee receives in return from the organisation is asked. We display the results here question by question. The employees' questions were slightly adapted for the managers' perspective.

**Table 13 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Clear objectives'**

|  | Employees   |          | Managers    |          |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|  | Average     | St. Dev. | Average     | St. Dev. |
| What we as a team have to achieve is clear.  | 3.97        | 0.947    | 4.48        | 0.564    |
| Sufficient time is allocated in our team for ensuring that everyone understands our team's objectives. | 3.41        | 1.023    | 3.91        | 0.780    |
| A lot of time is allocated to clarifying our team objectives in our team.                              | 3.08        | 1.011    | 3.45        | 0.866    |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>3.49</b> |          | <b>3.95</b> |          |

Employees give this a score of 3.49 out of 5 while managers give a score of 3.95.

Age, gender and status do not play any role again. The lower the function level, the higher a person scores on this dimension. We find the same link by training level. Seniority in the team is also significantly linked to 'Clear objectives'. We observe major positive links here.

A number of results worth mentioning emerge from the focus groups. In general, the different generations agree here: age cannot play any role when determining objectives. Only experience and competences count here.

- *'No age-related objectives are necessary.'*
- *'Experience is more important than age.'*
- *'Objectives do not have to be adapted to age, but the qualities of all generations do have to be exploited to a maximum extent.'*

No clear answer emerged to the question of whether people had a preference for team or individual objectives. Although older people feel that young people are more individualistic, this is not endorsed by Generation Y.

- *'You have to be versatile in our workplace, everyone has to be able to do a little of everything. So team objectives are actually important.'*

The discussions in the context of development circles are cited as moments when objectives are defined. However, it is often said that such events do not occur in the organisation. Whereas they cannot be allowed just to remain idle talk, this is how they are often experienced. Young people in particular see the advantage of having development conversations. Opinions are rather divided among Baby boomers. Although people appreciate a talk with the manager, and this therefore ensures that task distribution is kept in sight and more attention is given to training, people do not always feel that conversations are carried out objectively. Furthermore, people often see the objectives as unrealistic which in turn generates stress and dissatisfaction.

- *'I am at level C and I also have the feeling 'why do you have to start to define all of these objectives?' Just simply say 'you are doing that well', we have been doing it like this for years.'*
- *'The annual evaluation leads to moments of stress and dissatisfaction.'*

From the manager's perspective it is confirmed that development circles make some things more open for discussion. Sufficient time must be available for feedback. Furthermore, people want to be able to follow up what was discussed during such conversations. This does not always appear to be what is experienced. Penalising employees who perform less well appears to be almost impossible. As a result some managers feel that they are impeded in their assignment of steering and motivating their team.

- *'You cannot punish or reward.'*
- *'Development circles are good for new people but are pointless for longstanding staff.'*
- *'Development circles sometimes make things more open to discussion.'*

Although the survey reveals that the 'Clear objectives' dimension does not correlate significantly with the team evaluation dimensions, these reactions from the focus groups nonetheless indicate that policy cannot overlook this aspect of team cooperation.

### 3.2.7 Communication

The 'Communication' dimension examines whether active communication and exchange of information exists in a team. The scores can be found at item level in the table below. The employees' questions were slightly adapted for the managers' perspective.

**Table 14 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Communication'**

|  | Employees   |          | Managers    |          |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|  | Average     | St. Dev. | Average     | St. Dev. |
| The colleagues in our team are always ready to share information about their work with others. | 3.60        | 1.028    | 3.91        | 0.717    |
| The exchange of information between people who work on the same task is encouraged.            | 3.58        | 0.997    | 4.28        | 0.632    |
| The colleagues in this team cooperate to get the work finished.                                | 3.65        | 1.013    | 4.10        | 0.677    |
| <b>Average score</b>   | <b>3.61</b> |          | <b>4.10</b> |          |

The scores reveal that employees are predominantly satisfied with the communication in their team. Employees have a result of 3.61, while managers score 4.1.

However, it is striking that this dimension demonstrates a significant negative link with age. The older the employee, the lower the perception of active communication and information exchange in the team. Gender and status do not play a role once more. The

lower the function level, the lower a person scores on 'Communication'. There is also a question of a negative link between seniority in the organisation and communication.

The focus groups show that people are largely satisfied with communication in teams. There is only room for improvement at the level of team meetings. Employees have more objections about communication at the organisation level. A flow through of information does not always take place. Employees are looking for consistent, full information about things that affect them. Both written and verbal communication can make a contribution to this.

Good communication is significantly linked to the three dimensions on which team cooperation is evaluated, i.e. 'Harmony', 'Commitment' and 'Psychological safety'. It is therefore self evident that this is a topic that deserves attention.

### 3.2.8 The quality of intergenerational cooperation

Just as with 'Knowledge sharing', the 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation' scale is formed on the basis of respondents' answer patterns and we can add this as an important dimension to the original scientific framework on high-performing teams. This can be put forward as an important conclusion.

The employees' questions were adapted slightly for the managers' perspectives. The table below reproduces the scores.

**Table 15 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| Employees of different ages work well together in our team.   | 3.93             | 0.985           | 4.26            | 0.674           |
| It is good that people from different age categories cooperate in this team, each with their own skills and experience. | 3.92             | 0.814           | 4.16            | 0.631           |
| Colleagues from other generations are open to new ideas.  | 3.41             | 1.034           | 3.60            | 0.946           |
| Mutual respect prevails between colleagues of different ages.   | 3.76             | 1.036           | 4.14            | 0.731           |
| I feel respected by my colleagues from different generations.   | 3.83             | 0.973           | 4.34            | 0.634           |
| The effort of colleagues depends more on the nature of their work than their age.                                       | 3.82             | 0.931           | 4.13            | 0.797           |
| Attention and respect exist for age-specific skills.  | 3.24             | 0.909           | 3.52            | 0.816           |
| Respect exists for how each team member works, regardless of the person's age.  | 3.51             | 1.147           | 3.95            | 0.799           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.68</b>      |                 | <b>4.01</b>     |                 |

The federal government's scores are very positive (higher than 3.5). The employees score 3.68 while managers have a result of 4.01.

What is striking is that the older the employee, the lower this person scores on perception of intergenerational cooperation. As regards the remaining demographic variables, gender and status are irrelevant again. A lower function level again leads to lower scores. The results move in the same direction for training. The more highly educated a person is, the higher the person scores on 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation'. Seniority in the organisation and in the team is negatively linked to the perception of cooperation between generations.

A positive result also emerges from the focus groups, although all generations occasionally admit that they experience a lack of respect. Both young people say that they do not feel respected by older people and vice versa. Young people (Generation Y and Generation X) also admit that they find it difficult to offer Baby boomers even constructive criticism, because this is often interpreted as a lack of respect.

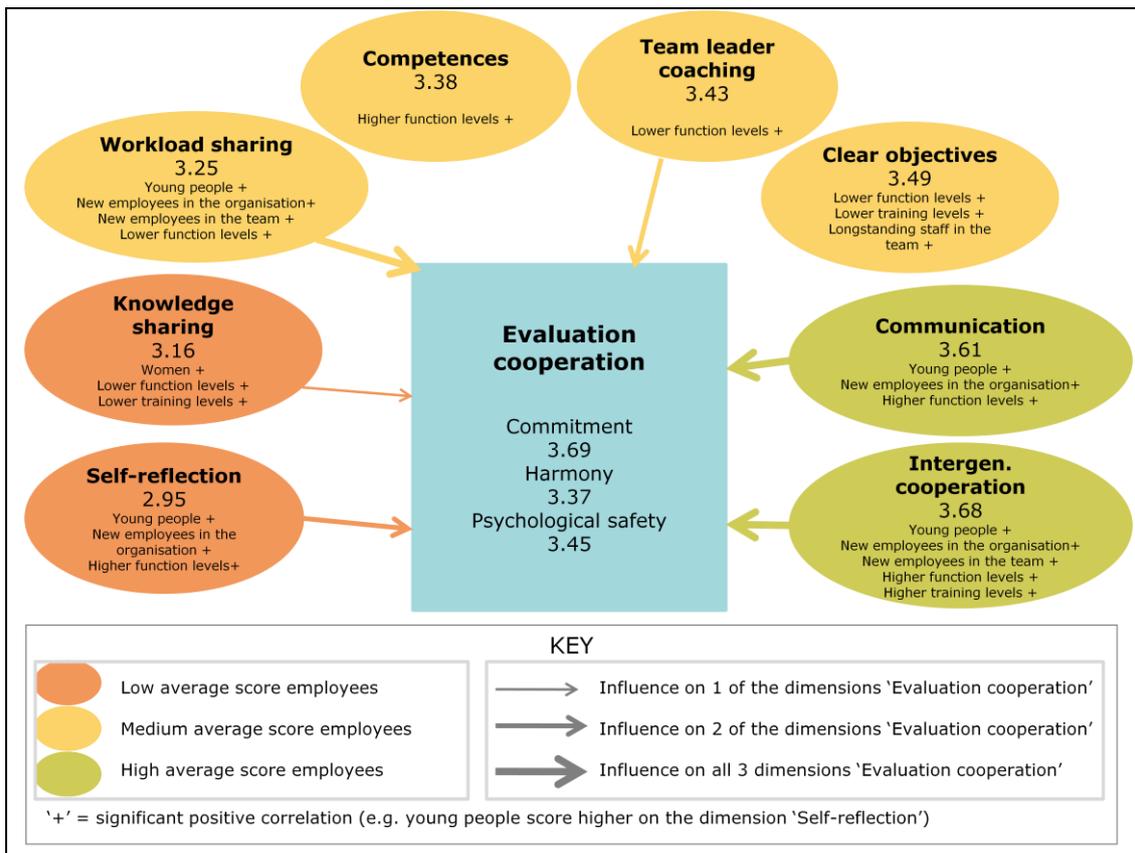
- 'Sometimes it is difficult to criticise someone who has been working for a very long time.'
- 'Sometimes it is also difficult to criticise older generations.'
- 'When a lack of respect exists, this is in two directions, from old to young and from young to old.'

Baby boomers emphasise the importance of managers here. They must take on an exemplary role.

How employees experience the quality of intergenerational cooperation has a positive effect on the three dimensions of team evaluation. Cooperation between generations is therefore an important lever for a positive team evaluation. This indicates that it is important for organisations to ensure that employees of different ages cooperate well and that respect exists for how each team member works regardless of his or her age.

### 3.2.9 Summary

The diagram below gives an overview of the characteristics of team cooperation and the possible impact of each of these characteristics on the evaluation of team cooperation. The average scores of employees on all dimensions are also displayed plus the demographic characteristics significantly correlated to these dimensions.



**Diagram 4 – Characteristics of team cooperation and the impact on its evaluation**

### 3.3 How do managers play a role?

Employees, of all generations, have many expectations of their team leader. During the focus groups they listed a whole range of characteristics which in their view are found in a good manager: has sufficient knowledge in the team's field of expertise, ensures equal treatment and an honest distribution of tasks, shows respect and appreciation and creates a respectful and appreciative atmosphere, takes on his/her responsibilities, sets clear objectives and gives support with tasks, has experience, ensures freedom and trust, communicates clearly, gives feedback, is able to delegate and has an impact.

The importance of a good manager also emerges from the survey scores. After all, the higher the score for coaching, the better the team members evaluated their team cooperation.

One important challenge is to prepare younger team leaders for their role as a manager, including managing employees who are older than themselves. The survey reveals that the younger a manager is with respect to an employee, the more negative the latter is for the dimensions 'Competences', 'Communication', 'Team leader coaching' and 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation'.

This was also expressed during the focus groups. The younger generations said:

- *'Some older colleagues do not wish to cooperate with a younger manager.'*
- *'When young managers start out this can create problems for older colleagues.'*

But the Baby boomers also confirm this and state that younger managers sometimes have to compete with their older employees.

- *'I was very annoyed when I got a young manager. He changed everything and wanted to prove himself too hard.'*
- *'Younger managers often do not dare to say anything against older colleagues.'*

Finally, younger managers themselves admit that they sometimes experience difficulties.

- *'In practice there are few things that help you to guide your team. You have to acquire experience. When you are a young manager you are less comfortable because you have less experience.'*

In addition to age, managers express a further concern. They state that they lack resources for steering their team effectively. *'You cannot punish or reward.'* Although development circles could be a way of dealing with this, this is not what has been experienced. Furthermore, people state that development circles do not lend themselves to a quick response, as these discussions occur very sporadically. Development circles can be called on to make mutual expectations explicit and to launch a dialogue. For the remainder, team leaders struggle to find the right balance between operational tasks on the one hand and personnel management tasks on the other.

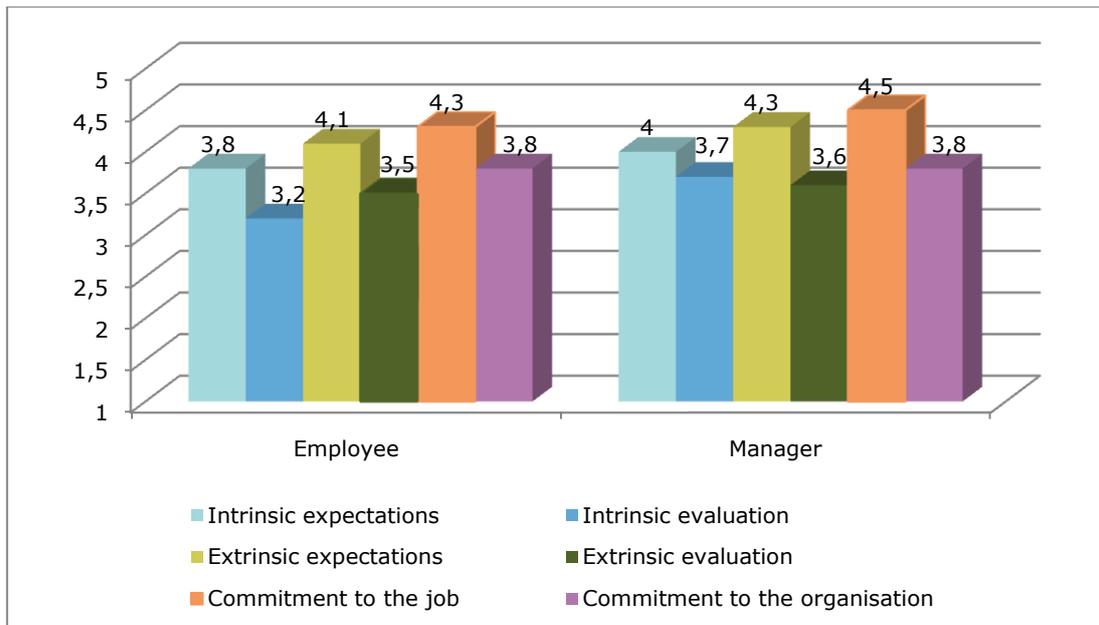
A final point that different managers mention as a possible impediment to optimum team cooperation is the difference in status (contract versus permanent). This does not involve a difference in motivation linked to the difference in status, but is based on unfair differences (leave, remuneration, etc) due to the status, which could have a negative impact on team cooperation.

### 3.4 How do generations play a role in the psychological contract?

In addition to team cooperation the psychological contract is also part of the scientific framework of this study. Six dimensions were gauged (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; De Vos et al., 2003; 2005).

- **Intrinsic expectations and Evaluation relating to**
  - Possibilities for promotion
  - A job with responsibilities
  - A career development opportunity
  - A job with a lot of variety
  - Opportunities to show what I can do
- **Extrinsic expectations and Evaluation relating to**
  - A chance to participate in training activities for managers (only questionnaire for managers)
  - Professional cooperation between colleagues
  - An attractive remuneration package
  - Job safety
  - Acceptable work pressure
  - A good atmosphere at work
  - A flexible arrangement in the adjustment of my work to my private life
- **Commitment to the job**
  - Helping colleagues in their work
  - Exchanging information with my colleagues
  - Acting loyally with respect to my employer
  - Working fast and efficiently
  - Committing myself fully in order to achieve the requested results
- **Commitment to the organisation**
  - Doing overtime to get my work finished
  - Attending additional training at my own initiative
  - If necessary, doing tasks that do not belong to my function
  - Taking initiative myself to keep my knowledge and skills up to the correct level

The respondents were presented with a number of expectations and a number of commitments to which they could answer how these matched their expectation (1, 'completely not' to 5, 'yes certainly') or to what degree they plan to maintain their commitment. In the case of evaluating expectations the respondents were able to answer the question 'are your expectations about this currently met?' on a scale from 1 ('completely not') to 5 ('certainly and definitely'). Visually the results appear as follows.



**Diagram 5 - Average scores of employees and managers for the dimensions of the psychological contract**

The results reveal that the managers' intrinsic expectations are slightly higher on average than those of employees. On the other hand, these expectations are also more fulfilled among them. This is also the case for extrinsic expectations and evaluations.

What is the attitude to these expectations? People say that they are very committed. In fact, high average scores (higher than 4) occur for both managers and employees on questions about their personal commitment to their job. The commitment that they show to their organisation also remains high, with an average of 3.8 on the five point scale.

Further analyses reveal a number of significant differences that exist between generations with respect to the psychological contract. Thus employees from Generation Y and X score significantly higher on the 'Expectations' dimension both intrinsically and extrinsically. Furthermore, there is a significant difference on the 'Commitment to the organisation' dimension between the Baby boomers 50 and employees from Generation Y. Older employees score lower here.

As regards managers we note that those who belong to Baby boom 50 score significantly higher on the evaluation of their intrinsic and extrinsic expectations than managers who belong to the Baby boom 40 generation.

The psychological contract as it is experienced in practice was only dealt with very briefly during the focus groups. A number of items always appeared to emerge here, such as the expectation of a reliable salary, a nice atmosphere among colleagues, prospects in the organisation, a good manager, the possibility of getting training, interesting job content and a bearable work pressure. As 'service in return' people said that they wanted to do their best for the organisation. There was nothing noticeable from the group discussions in terms of a difference between generations concerning expectations or evaluation. As regards commitment, people did sometimes feel that employees from a different generation may be less committed. This occurred among both older and younger people.

We see that the degree to which employees evaluate their psychological contract positively has a positive impact on their team evaluation. This means that it is important

that they feel that the promises that the organisation makes are also fulfilled. The interviews during recruitment are decisive moments at this level.

However, differences in the psychological contract at the level of generations do not lead to differences in the evaluation of team cooperation. After all, precisely the factors of the psychological contract that are significantly linked to the dimensions of team evaluation, namely 'Intrinsic evaluation', 'Extrinsic evaluation' and 'Commitment to the job', are not influenced by generations. Expressed otherwise, although different generations have different expectations, these differences do not translate into a different evaluation of team cooperation. This is an important finding, as certain investigations, e.g. about stereotypes, indicate that employees often have the impression that intergenerational differences in this psychological contract are a brake on cooperation. The results from our study show that this perception is unfounded.

### 3.5 How do different generations look towards the end of their career?

In the context of employees' motivation to continue their career at the federal government we presented seven positions in the survey. We can derive two dimensions from the answer patterns:

- **'End-of-career perspective'**, described as the prospect that a person has of staying working in the organisation until retirement age.
- **'Intention to work after reaching 60'**, i.e. the degree to which employees expect to work until after their sixtieth birthday and the degree to which they also want this.

**Table 16 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'end-of-career perspective'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| I can calmly continue to do the job I am doing now until I retire.                | 3.36             | 1.201           | 3.56            | 1.147           |
| I see sufficient prospects in this organisation to stay here until my retirement. | 3.28             | 1.147           | 3.69            | 1.040           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>3.32</b>      |                 | <b>3.63</b>     |                 |

**Table 17 - Average scores of employees and managers for 'Intention to work after reaching 60'**

|   | <i>Employees</i> |                 | <i>Managers</i> |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | <i>Average</i>   | <i>St. Dev.</i> | <i>Average</i>  | <i>St. Dev.</i> |
| I would like to reduce my working hours.  | 2.89             | 1.203           | 2.79            | 1.160           |
| I expect to work through until after my 60th birthday.  | 2.89             | 1.330           | 3.47            | 1.285           |
| I would like to stop work before the age of 60.   | 2.83             | 1.283           | 2.23            | 1.248           |
| If my package of tasks is adapted, I could continue to work calmly until after the age of 60. | 3.26             | 1.156           | 3.40            | 1.074           |
| As long as I feel useful for my team I want to continue to work calmly past the age of 60.    | 3.07             | 1.301           | 3.58            | 1.155           |
| <b>Average score</b>  | <b>2.99</b>      |                 | <b>3.09</b>     |                 |

The scores show that employees have little inclination to continue working until after their sixtieth birthday. They are also moderately positive about the prospects in their organisation until their retirement. Managers see sufficient prospects in the organisation to stay until their retirement, but are not very inclined to work until after their sixtieth birthday.

Before dealing with the influence of age and generations on these dimensions, we discuss a number of other demographic variables. Thus, men, employees with a higher function

level, and those with a higher diploma have a significantly greater intention to work after they reach the age of sixty. Employees who have been made permanent and employees with greater seniority in the organisation and team again score significantly lower on the intention to work after reaching sixty.

This latter group, employees who have been made permanent and those who have greater seniority in the organisation and the team, are again more inclined to continue to work for their organisation until their retirement. Finally, employees with a high function level and employees who are more highly educated score significantly lower on questions relating to their end-of-career perspective.

How do generations play a role here? When we closely examine the 'end-of-career perspective' dimension, we see that Generation Y scores the lowest. Furthermore, there is a significant difference with Baby boomers (40 and/or 50). So the younger the person is, the less he or she is inclined to continue working for the current employer until retirement.

Age plays a role again for the 'Intention to work after reaching 60' dimension. For example, young people (Generation X and Y) expect that they will have to continue working until after their sixtieth birthday more than Baby boomers (40/50). This can be explained by the social and economic situation, which means that younger employees are aware that working longer is a necessity.

However, not many differences between generations emerge from the focus groups. Hardly anyone among the surveyed employees indicated that they wanted to work until after their sixtieth birthday if they had the choice. When they reflected on motivators for continuing to work for the federal government, the different generations referred to a need for variety in the job and a bearable work pressure. Internal mobility and having prospects in the organisation also appeared to count. The question of whether reducing working hours could stimulate employees to work longer produced the reaction that this measure (part-time work) could be positive provided that it is financially feasible and you can still do an interesting job. The suggestion of 'job sharing', where two people who each work part-time work are responsible for the results linked to one function, was put forward.

Finally we point out that a positive link exists between the evaluation of team cooperation, i.e. 'Commitment', on the one hand, and the intention to work longer and the end-of-career perspective on the other. The evaluation of the psychological contract is positively linked to the intention to work longer and the end-of-career perspective. Perhaps this is a link that goes in two directions. On the one hand, it is plausible that employees who are more satisfied with their team cooperation and their psychological contract are less inclined not to favour a longer career. On the other hand, we can also expect that employees who are motivated to stay active in the federal government and until after their sixtieth birthday look more positively on team cooperation and their psychological contract.

### **3.6 Age diversity in teams**

Analyses were also carried out in the study based on the composition of the team by age. The survey reveals a difference between mixed teams at the level of age and teams where mainly older employees are working. Thus predominantly older teams score lower on some dimensions of team cooperation ('Self-reflection', 'Workload sharing', 'Psychological safety', 'Commitment' and 'Harmony') and employees of homogeneous young teams systematically score higher on other dimensions ('Team leader coaching', and 'Intrinsic and Extrinsic expectations'). Teams which are exclusively composed of employees from Generation Y with Baby boom 50 have the lowest scores. Polarised teams in terms of age

appear to experience greater difficulty at the level of team cooperation and must therefore be a point for attention.

## 4. Recommendations

### 4.1 Generation management deserves attention

The extent to which different generations cooperate well in teams influences how employees evaluate their team. Intergenerational cooperation is a lever for satisfied employees! This message, that diversity in generations, if well managed, has a positive effect on the general feeling of satisfaction among employees in teams, is therefore a very important message, which must be made known. Creation of awareness of the importance of this topic, which emphasises the strengths of diversity, will make managers, departments and employees pay attention to this important key which they have in their hands to influence the evaluation of team cooperation positively. Active management of generations is therefore something to put on the agenda. Based on the respondents' answer patterns, two dimensions can be added to the original scientific framework, i.e. 'Knowledge sharing' and 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation' as factors that have an impact on the team evaluation.

The fact that polarised teams, composed of Generation Y with Baby boomers 50, score the lowest on various dimensions of team cooperation and their evaluation indicates that proactive management of generations is advisable.

This also appeared from the focus groups. Although people made no direct reference to a generation gap or felt the need to work on age, a number of comments sometimes crept in that nonetheless create the suspicion that managing good intergenerational cooperation does deserve attention. Just think of the difference as regards computer competences, the reference to the importance of respect between young and old and the role which the manager's age can have.

Every initiative which highlights this message, that the quality of intergenerational cooperation is a powerful lever for satisfied employees in the team, can help to raise awareness and to generate the required attention. For example, a training module on intergenerational cooperation could be offered or it could be incorporated into general organisational communication.

### 4.2 Keys which positively influence cooperation between generations

This study gives insight into some important keys which team leaders or HR managers can use to influence team cooperation positively. We discuss these points for attention on the basis of the different dimensions of team cooperation. We first go into greater depth into the aspects which employees currently perceive as the least positive and end with the dimensions where we observe more positive scores (higher than 3.5). We already discussed the 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation' dimension in paragraph 4.1. The 'Team leader coaching' dimension is discussed separately in paragraph 4.3 by investigating the importance of the manager in greater depth.

1. As a high score on the '**Self reflection**' dimension goes together with a positive team evaluation, incorporating moments of reflection is recommended. 'Self-reflection' is the dimension with the lowest score among employees, but which has a high impact. Furthermore, it appears that older employees score lowest on this dimension. We also recommend a number of items here.
  - Sufficient **consultation moments** are needed in the team for reflection on how the team is operating, the working method used and how communication occurs. Such moments can represent an important lever for good team cooperation.

During this team consultation or these team meetings it is important not only to inform top-down, but also to engage in genuine consultation and to collect bottom-up suggestions about how the team is operating, the working method and the distribution of tasks. Team consultation or team meetings make it possible to reflect on how the team works. They allow the direct manager to ask for everyone's opinion and to probe for suggestions for improvement. It is important to ensure regularity here. Team meetings must be planned weekly, fortnightly or monthly. In this way all team members know where they stand. In practice, a number of agenda points that promote team reflection can be discussed each time. We are thinking here of agenda points that constantly recur such as 'lessons learned' or 'suggestions'.

- It is important not only to reflect as a team on how the team operates; every employee must also obtain the chance individually to **reflect on his or her role and how he or she operates personally in the team**. The conversations between the team members and the team leader, which take place in the context of development circles, can also focus specifically on this. Both the manager and the employee can explain what they have learned from the past and how improvements can be made. They can also exchange thoughts about mutual expectations at that time.
  - Individual self-reflection and team reflection can be incorporated into both the direct manager's and team members' **objectives**. Their importance can be highlighted by doing this.
2. **Knowledge sharing** often takes place informally and can depend on the 'goodwill' of colleagues. Nonetheless, the degree of knowledge sharing has a significant influence on the team evaluation. Furthermore, people say that sharing knowledge promotes the development of versatile and multi-faceted employees, which again is positive for team cooperation. Knowledge sharing is a topic whose major importance can certainly be disseminated further. We are thinking here of the following.
- The results from this study support the argument for **embedding knowledge sharing structurally** in team cooperation. Work pressure, a lack of time and the lack of a structural framework appear to be factors that act as obstacles to knowledge sharing. It therefore demands commitment and investment from the organisation.
    - Making a good start is essential. This is why a clear **induction policy** for new employees, especially at team level, is one of our recommendations, of course in addition to the organisation-wide introduction programme. A new employee must obtain knowledge about the organisation and the job content. This is possible via different channels such as training courses on the one hand and colleagues (sponsor, coaching, etc) on the other.
    - At team level it may also be interesting to include **knowledge sharing as a team objective**. This is relevant for both young and older employees. The instruments which exist appear to be good for supporting employees in sharing their knowledge, which means that the further dissemination of these instruments can promote more knowledge sharing. Training courses on knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer can also be offered. Once again it is important to provide structural time here.
    - As there is a consensus that knowledge transfer often occurs too late, we propose more **proactive planning of knowledge-transfer**. This is possible in different ways. Thus a new distribution of tasks should be agreed a few months before someone leaves. Planning is essential. This means that there will be a sufficient overlap between the new manager and the future retiree. Furthermore, the person who is leaving the organisation can document his/her package of tasks in the meantime. If older employees gradually leave by first working part-time, the transfer of knowledge can occur more organically by

allowing the older employee and his/her successor to work together for a longer period.

3. Teams that function well are made up of employees who have all of the relevant competences to achieve the team objectives. Attention to and respect for **age-specific competences** and the complementarity between these offer added value for team cooperation. This attention already starts during the recruitment and selection process and permeates the development and training policy.
  - Discussions in the context of **development circles** can act as a framework for listing age-related or otherwise competences and make it possible to fill gaps in required competences in a targeted way.
  - In particular, it appears that there is a need for extra attention to the **development of knowledge of communication technologies** among older generations (via training programmes or e.g. on-the-job learning/coaching).
  - One important point for attention here is the perception which can exist among older employees concerning attending training courses. After all, the idea that 'I have to go back to the classroom to learn something' often does not fit in with their acquired status as an 'experienced colleague'. This can be avoided by working with **alternative forms of learning** and for example by combining polishing up certain skills with an exchange of knowledge about other fields where they have gathered extensive knowledge. Other possibilities in this context include appointing coaches, mentors (both young and older employees), working with learning groups, sharing 'best practices' etc.
  - The generations on the shop floor want to **learn from each other** and if respect prevails in the team, everyone seeks such an option.
  
4. The perception that everyone does an **honest and equivalent share of the work** and that everyone takes on responsibility for performing his own tasks and helping others is part of the ingredients in a good team. The '**Workload sharing**' dimension looks at the contribution by all colleagues in a team. This is a decisive factor for all dimensions of a team evaluation.
  - It is therefore important for managers to steer this work distribution actively and always to have an overview of the team members' competences and preferences in order to achieve an honest and fair distribution of tasks which is accepted by the team members themselves. It is advisable for **managers to obtain support and the required tools** to monitor their team's capacity planning and to get a greater view of the workload per team member. Furthermore the manager must discuss this factor regularly with his employees, during team consultation moments or during individual conversations via the development circles.
  
5. The '**Clear objectives**' dimension wishes to know whether employees obtain objectives that are understandable to them. The question is raised whether it is clear what commitment is expected and what the employee receives in return from the organisation.
  - The different generations agree that age cannot play a role in determining **objectives**. It is important for objectives to be allocated on the basis of experience, competences and personal development objectives.
  - On the other hand, employees, regardless of their age, are only committed to achieving their objectives if they themselves find these objectives **acceptable**. Sufficient attention must be paid to this during development circles. As a manager it is important not to select the 'easiest' way and for example always to give complex files to experienced employees and computer related tasks to young people. Team leaders who invest in coaching to teach IT knowledge to older

people and allow young people to acquire file knowledge and experience quickly are highly appreciated by team members.

- It involves finding the right balance between **individual and collective objectives**. These will preferably be defined in consultation with the team members.
- It is crucial for managers to **be able to reward good performances** and to be able to bring up poorer performances with the person concerned. To do this they have to have sufficient tools at their disposal to reward on the one hand, and to warn on the other. Managers trained in giving feedback are better equipped when they need to communicate on poorer performances.

6. **'Communication'** closes the series of factors in this study which influence the team evaluation by employees as a characteristic of team cooperation and as is often the case with the last factor in a series, is anything but the least important.

- After all, the degree of 'Communication' influences all components of the team evaluation. In particular, we note that the older an employee is, the more his satisfaction about the degree of active communication and information exchange falls.
- It is therefore important to **embed communication structurally** in the organisation. This can be done formally. As we have already stated it is important to establish systematic team consultation in structures and to allow these to go hand in hand with specific guidelines on desired forms of team consultation (e.g. institutionalising team meetings). Employees demand consistent, regular communication and good-quality consultation. The non-obligatory nature of team consultation, which is often the reality today, could be eliminated through stronger steering and monitoring of structural consultation moments in teams.
- But all initiatives that are aimed at **informal forms of communication** will lead to growth in mutual respect among colleagues. Activities such as team building or colleagues who cooperate on projects that fall outside day-to-day tasks are examples of these.
- Although communication at the organisation level was not specifically investigated in the survey on team cooperation, the focus groups revealed that a **communication plan at the organisation level** is necessary. Employees are the ones asking for a clear, consistent communication policy in their organisation.

### 4.3 The competences of managers are crucially important

The crucial role of the manager clearly emerged in the discussion of the eight different dimensions of high-performing teams. Allowing moments for reflection for the team, organising consultation and knowledge sharing, setting objectives, distributing tasks, coaching employees, developing competences, stimulating communication, are all responsibilities of the manager whose effects on team cooperation could be measured and analysed in the context of this study.

So supporting the team leaders and developing their competences appears essential. The development policy can place the focus on dimensions that have a significant influence on the evaluation of the team and which were designated as problematic during the analysis of the data from the survey and the focus groups.

One of the most important challenges is undoubtedly preparing young managers for their role as hierarchical superior of employees who are older than themselves. It is important here to move away from managing solely on the basis of authority. After all, young managers can never claim their authority based on their limited experience and usually expertise. Learning a relational approach is preferred. This is possible via training or coaching in which explicit attention is allocated to the question: what differences in age

exist between myself and my team members, and how do these influence the approach that I have to adopt in order to steer the group?

## **Conclusions**

This study offers enrichment for the research fields that form the scientific basis for this study, i.e. 'high-performing teams' and 'the psychological contract'.

On the one hand we were able to add two new dimensions to the research field on high-performing teams: 'Knowledge sharing' and 'Quality of intergenerational cooperation'.

On the other hand we were able to create new insights into the research into links between the psychological contract and cooperation. Various studies, including into stereotypes, had demonstrated that employees view the intergenerational differences in the psychological contract as a brake on cooperation. In contrast, we discovered that this perception is unfounded, because although there are solid differences between the generations in their expectations relating to work and the employer, these differences are not related to different visions of team cooperation.

In addition to its scientific contributions this study showed that it is important, in the Belgian federal government, to pay attention to cooperation between generations. After all, this influences how employees evaluate their team cooperation and this evaluation is positively linked to employees' willingness to dedicate themselves for longer to the organisation.

We observed that employees and managers of all generations are very involved, that they are open to age diversity and are motivated to share their knowledge.

Some sensitive points also emerged, such as the dissatisfaction of teams that are homogeneous and polarised teams in terms of age, the difficulty that young managers experience when managing older employees or the gap in knowledge at the IT level between the different generations and the tensions that this causes.

Furthermore, we identified the factors with the greatest impact on team cooperation and for which improvements are possible. Here we can primarily cite the lack of reflection and consultation in many teams, the informal and obligation-free nature of knowledge sharing and the difficulties that some managers experience with conflict management and fair distribution of tasks.

We recommend generation management that principally promotes an open culture with respect to diversity. To do this it is necessary to continue the battle against age stereotypes, to develop empathy and mutual respect even further, and to highlight complementarity, to reinforce what is commonly shared and to guarantee a feeling of fairness. It is also advisable to activate cooperation levers in teams where this is necessary. Finally special attention must be paid to candidates' relational attitudes and competencies at the time of their selection and team leaders' 'people management' skills which once again appeared to be very important.

Different processes and tools have been developed and used in the Belgian federal organisations. Tools for knowledge management, development circles and development paths for managers, for example, already help to achieve the objectives described above. Many improvement actions have already been started. It is only similarly observed that these processes and systems are not always implemented or applied equally consistently. So we recommend examining whether they are applied effectively and efficiently in the field and promoting this application further.

It is therefore perfectly possible to build on what is already present.

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