

AGE DIVERSITY: EMPLOYING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKERS IS FORMED

ABSTRACT

As populations in many countries continue to get older, so do workplaces continue to increase in age diversity. Understanding how age diversity is experienced by workers is an important step in optimizing outcomes associated with it. This paper uses in-depth interview interviews with young and old Dutch workers to learn about their experiences with age diversity. It is revealed that workers greatly value the skills and knowledge of their age-diverse coworkers. The results suggest that information and skill transfer is a two-way street that benefits both young and old workers. An approach from grounded theory is used to propose a conceptual model that describes how worker complementarities shape how age diversity is experienced.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Changing demographics and age diversity

It is no secret that the Dutch population is currently experiencing a significant demographic change: the “greying” of society. This process is caused primarily by an increase in life expectancy and further supported by decreased fertility rates (Smits *et al.*, 2013). As a result, the average age of the population is increasing and the relative size of the working population is shrinking – and will continue to shrink until 2040 (Smits *et al.*, 2013; Adema and van Tilburg, 2019). Nevertheless, the Dutch government is expected to provide the same level of services to future generations despite increasing healthcare and pension expenses and decreasing tax income (Adema and van Tilburg, 2019). In an attempt to make up for this deficit, the Dutch government has changed pension and retirement policies, most notably increasing the state pension age from 65 to 67 years (Oude Mulders, Henkens and van Dalen, 2020). The primary goal of this measure was to reduce government expenditure, while increasing the employment participation among older workers was only a secondary goal (Ybema, et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, participation of older people in the working population has seen a significant improvement. Oude Mulders, Henkens and van Dalen (2020) looked at the change in participation rates between 2005 and 2015. All age cohorts show an increase, with the largest change being found in the age group 60-64 where labor force participation nearly doubled from 22% to 51%. Not only has the average age and employment participation of workers increased, there is also a greater age diversity in the Dutch labor market. Smits *et al.* (2013), for example, note a sharp increase of the generation-index, a comparison between workers who are between 50 and 60 years old and those between 30 and 40 years old (fig. 1). Whereas the generation-index stood at 0,57 in 2001, it nearly doubled to 1,04 in 2014. Similar results are presented by the Dutch Employment Insurance Agency (UWV) in their report comparing the change in workforce composition between 2008 and 2018 (fig. 2). During those 10 years, the share of workers over the of 60 more than doubled from 3% to 7%. The 50-59 year cohort also grew from 20% to 23% whereas the share of workers between 27 and 49 years old shrunk from 55% to 48%. Notably, the share of workers below the age of 27 remained unchanged at 22% of the total working population (UWV, 2020). On top of this, the graying of society is spread unequally across The Netherlands (fig 3.1), which further contributes to a more extreme distribution of ages in different parts of the country.

In summary, the available data shows that age differences between Dutch workers are increasing (Smits *et al.*, 2013; UWV, 2020) and workers at both ends of the age spectrum account for a larger share of the total workforce as (fig. 1.2). As such, the combination of young workers and old workers has likely become more common in workplaces across The Netherlands, thus creating more age diversity in workplaces.

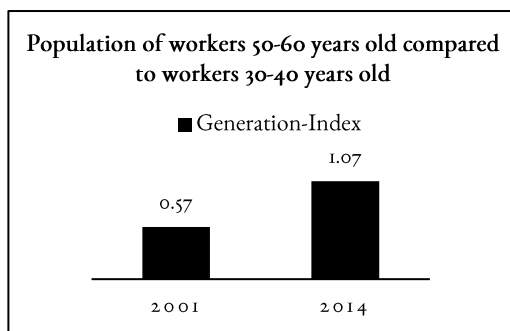


Figure 1.1 Chart made by the author for the change in Generation-Index value over time (Smits *et al.*, 2013).

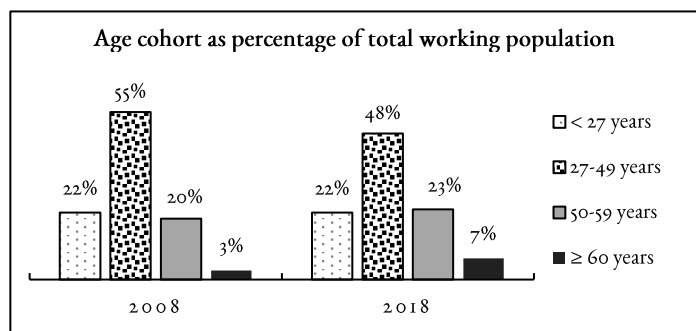


Figure 1.2 Chart made by the author for the change over time in age cohort composition of the working population (UWV, 2020).

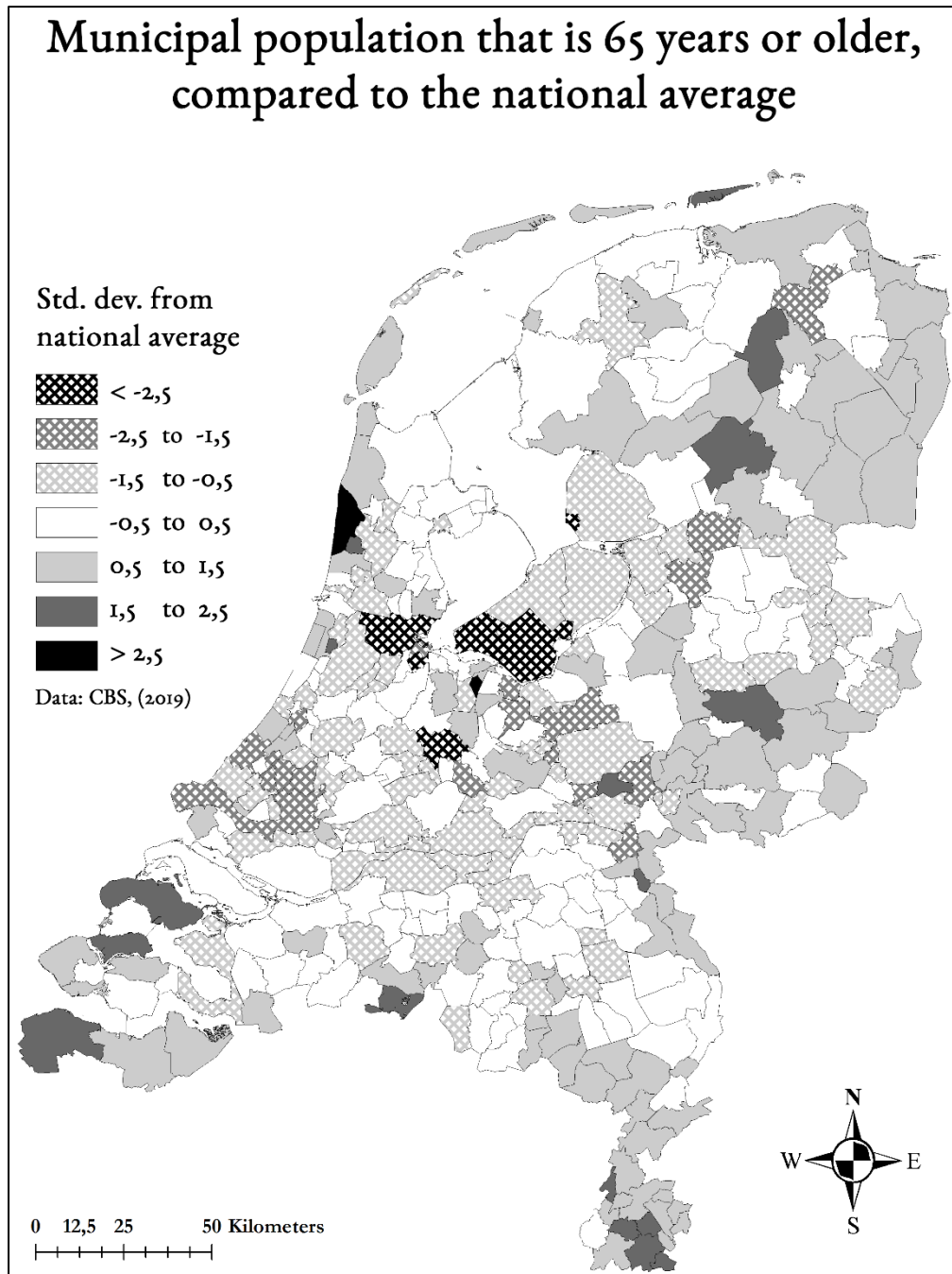


Figure 1.3 Map of the comparative differences in aging population between municipalities in 2019 (CBS, 2019), shown as the difference in standard deviation from the national average (Author, 2022).

1.2 Societal relevance

The changing demographic composition of the Dutch workforce introduces new concerns and potential challenges for Dutch employers. In a survey sent to over 2,800 Dutch companies and organizations (37% response rate), Remery et al. (2003) identified the most common thoughts about age diversity among Dutch employers. The most commonly expected consequence of an aging workforce is an increase in labor costs, which 73% of employers believe to be (highly) likely. Further (highly) likely expected outcomes are: greater resistance to change (57%), increased in absenteeism (56%), increased in know-how and experience (55%), review of the way in which work is organized (52%), need to improve working conditions (50%) and less enthusiasm for technology (50%). Furthermore, other studies show that employer sentiment about an aging workforce has become increasingly pessimistic. Oude Mulders, Henkens and van Dalen (2020) compared the survey responses of over 1,000 companies and organizations in 2008 and 2017. In 2008, for example, 34% of employers who replied expected labor productivity to decrease because of an aging workforce. In 2018, this number jumped to 56%. According to Oude Mulders, Henkens and van Dalen (2020) the sharp increase is likely related to national changes in retirement policy which make it more difficult for employers to provide an easy exit to (less productive) older workers. Thus, employers are faced with the relatively new reality of a workforce that consists out of more old workers.

Although the concerns by employers regarding an aging workforce are very real, it is not entirely clear to which extent they are warranted as well. For example, meta-analyses have shown no significant relationship (Schneid *et al.*, 2016) or a modest negative relationship (Joshi and Roh, 2009) between age diversity and team outcomes. Yet, the usefulness of the conclusions from these meta-analyses has been called into question because they focus on main effects without taking into account contributing factors (Wegge and Meyer, 2019). Moreover, fears of lower company productivity due to an aging workforce tend to be exaggerated and generally lack strong scientific support (Waldman and Avolio, 1986; Ng and Feldman, 2013). In fact, age-related research shows several benefits associated organizational and team age diversity. To begin with, in some cases it is found to have a positive effect on performance in contexts with a high cognition requirement (Kearney, *et al.*, 2009) and within teams that must solve complex tasks (Wegge *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, Ilmakunnas and Ilmakunnas (2011) find a positive general relation between age diversity at the plant-level and productivity in the Finnish industrial sector. Finally, age diversity can have a positive effect on organizational performance through increased human and social capital – and this effect can be further increased by age-inclusive management (Li *et al.*, 2021). In summary, the fact that Dutch companies will be more age diverse (and have more old workers) does not necessarily have to be detrimental to the company. In fact, under the right circumstances (e.g. in teams with high cognition requirement, with age-inclusive management), companies can benefit from an increasingly age diversity workforce (Kearney, *et al.*, 2009; Wegge *et al.*, 2008; A. Hammermann, Niendorf and Schmidt, 2019).

1.2 Knowledge gap

The inconsistent conclusions of age diversity research present a challenge for workers and workplaces. If they are to benefit from age diversity, they must know when positive outcomes can be expected. To predict this, it is necessary to understand how age diversity interacts with workers and workplaces. As of yet, there is a lack of research that attempts to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which age diversity influences workers and workplaces (Wegge and Meyer, 2019; Guillaume *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is an area where this paper can create added value by describing one of the relevant mechanisms.

One of the forces that has been proposed as a partial explanation for benefits associated with age diversity is the presence of complementarities between aged-diverse workers. Li *et al.*, (2021), for example, find support for the “theoretical plausibility” of complementarities in the experience, knowledge and skills of age-diverse workers when tested from an intellectual capital perspective. The existence of such a mechanism would also be consistent with results that find age diversity to only be beneficial in complex and creative tasks (Wegge *et al.*, 2008; A. Hammermann, Niendorf and Schmidt, 2019), as one can assume there is less potential for complementarities to add value in simple tasks. It is also worth considering how complementarities between age-diverse workers are related to informal and incidental learning in the workplace, which has been shown to improve company performance (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). To put it another way, the mere existence of complementarities between different people does not by itself explain when or why they benefit the persons. So, if it is the case that age diversity creates a condition in which two individuals can benefit from the experience, knowledge or skills of the other, then informal and incidental learning could constitute a pathway that enables the expression of these complementarities. Understanding how this mechanism is experienced by age diverse workers will be a step towards creating a better overall understanding of the role that age diversity plays in companies and organizations.

1.3 Research objective

The objective of this paper is to provide insight about the role that complementarities between age-diverse workers play. More specifically, this paper sets out to answer if, when and how differences in competencies between age-diverse workers are experienced. Additionally, it will explore if workers experience benefits from complementarities through informal and incidental learning. By collecting and comparing the personal experiences of workers, this paper will attempt to form a theory grounded in those experiences. To this end, the following central research question will be answered:

“How do young and old workers experience differences in work experience, knowledge and skills between age diverse employees in Dutch workplaces?”

To help answer the central question, the following secondary questions will be used:

- i. How does the type of work shape how young and old workers experience age-related differences in competencies between age diverse workers?
- ii. What perceived value of age diversity in their workplace is experienced by old and young workers?
- iii. How do young and old workers interact with the different amounts of work experience, knowledge and skills that age-diverse coworkers have?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Defining relevant concepts

To avoid confusion, it is important to define a number of terms and theoretical concepts that are mentioned throughout this paper. Firstly, in this paper, the term “workplace” refers to the location in which a worker carries out their job. For some individuals this is an office, for others it could mean a nursing home, a client’s house or a combination of a home-office and work location. Additionally, this paper follows the reasoning used by Ilmarinen (2001) and defines workers below the age of 30 as “young” and those over the age of 50 as “old”. Subjective age, on the other hand, is understood to be a fluid concept that is dependent on how individuals self-categorize (Wegge, Meyer and Wang, 2020a). Furthermore, “age diversity” is another rather flexible concept that must be specified for practical reasons. Age diversity will be considered a form of general diversity and as the distributional difference of ages between individuals (Becker, Richards and Stollings, 2020). Which means that groups of people can be more or less diverse depending on the ratio of ages and age differences. Finally, this paper will use 15 years as a measure for when there is “age diversity” between exactly two individuals. A difference of 15 years has been chosen because it is the amount of age difference that is commonly used by scholars to demarcate one generation (Burmeister *et al.*, 2021).

2.2 The double-edged sword of age diversity

Meta-analyses of age diversity have shown no significant relationship (Schneid *et al.*, 2016) or a modest negative relationship (Joshi and Roh, 2009) between age diversity and team outcomes, but as Wegge and Meyer (2019) point out, these studies fail to incorporate the complexities of age diversity and as a result do not provide a useful basis for research. Additionally, meta-analyses do not provide in-depth insight into the factors and processes through which age diversity influences workers and workplaces. Namely, Wegge and Meyer (2019) expect the effects of age diversity to be contextual and that positive and negative effects can counteract each other which can lead to misleading results that show no effect. Similarly, Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2021) posit that positive and negative effects of age diversity are separate from each other and work through separate mechanisms. Positive effects of age diversity are chiefly experienced within the context of complex and creative work processes. For example, Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2021) suggest that age diversity facilitates improved information sharing between work teams and consequently results in better decision-making of teams. Similarly, Burmeister *et al.* (2021) propose that the age differences between workers are accompanied by nested educational and social experiences. As a result, age-diverse workers (Burmeister *et al.* (2021) use a minimum gap of 15 years as to define age diversity) will have unique knowledge and perspectives from their nested experiences. Furthermore, Li *et al.* (2021) carried out a quantitative analysis using a survey of American workers in HR-related positions (5,641 responses, response rate 9.5%) and measured the effect that age diversity has on human and social capital in organizations. This was measured with items that asked managers to assess human and social capital in their organization. They conclude that age diversity can increase human and social capital but do not elaborate upon the underlying mechanisms that cause the increase. Overall, existing research on age diversity in the workplace provides ample opportunity to build upon by describing (part of) the underlying mechanisms that give form to the experience of age diversity in a workplace.

2.3 Conceptual model

This paper builds upon existing theory by introducing a conceptual model partially that was derived from the theoretical framework and refined through the analysis of primary data. The conceptual model explains one of the potential mechanisms through which age diversity can be experienced by workers. To begin with, the model includes the idea that age diversity facilitates the existence of Complementarities between workers (Li *et al.*, 2021; Burmeister *et al.*, 2021; Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021). These complementarities are specified as a difference in the amount of work experience young and old individuals have (2), different kinds of knowledge that is held by young and old individuals (3) and the difference in skills between young and old

workers (4). Next, the model visualizes the theorized relevance of the Type of Work that a worker does. Specifically, it incorporates the assumptions that complex (5), creative (6) and physically demanding (7) tasks benefit from complementarities between age diverse workers (Wegge et al., 2008). Additionally, the model shows the reciprocity between Complementarities and Type of Work. Input from both groups is required to create a situation which shapes the experience of a worker. The steps (1) up to (7) are grouped together because these steps represent the mechanism that shapes how an individual experiences age diversity in a workplace. A dotted line is used because all of the steps need to be understood together in how they shape the experience of a worker, yet it is not a closed system. Old (8a) and young (8b) workers are separated because the model presupposes differences as a result of different ages in the previous steps. As such, the experiences of age-diverse workers should also be different because of this. The two ends of the working age spectrum are used because this is consistent with the primary data used in this paper. Finally, the model proposes that between the two groups of worker, Informal and Incidental Learning (9) can take place. This is shown with a two-way arrow because a worker provides input for this process, but also receives output from it. A dotted line is used once more to visualize that this type of learning (9) provides an open space through which different persons can exchange information. Taken as a whole, the conceptual model should be representative of how the experience of an Old Worker and a Young Worker is shaped through the combination of Complementarities and Type of Work.

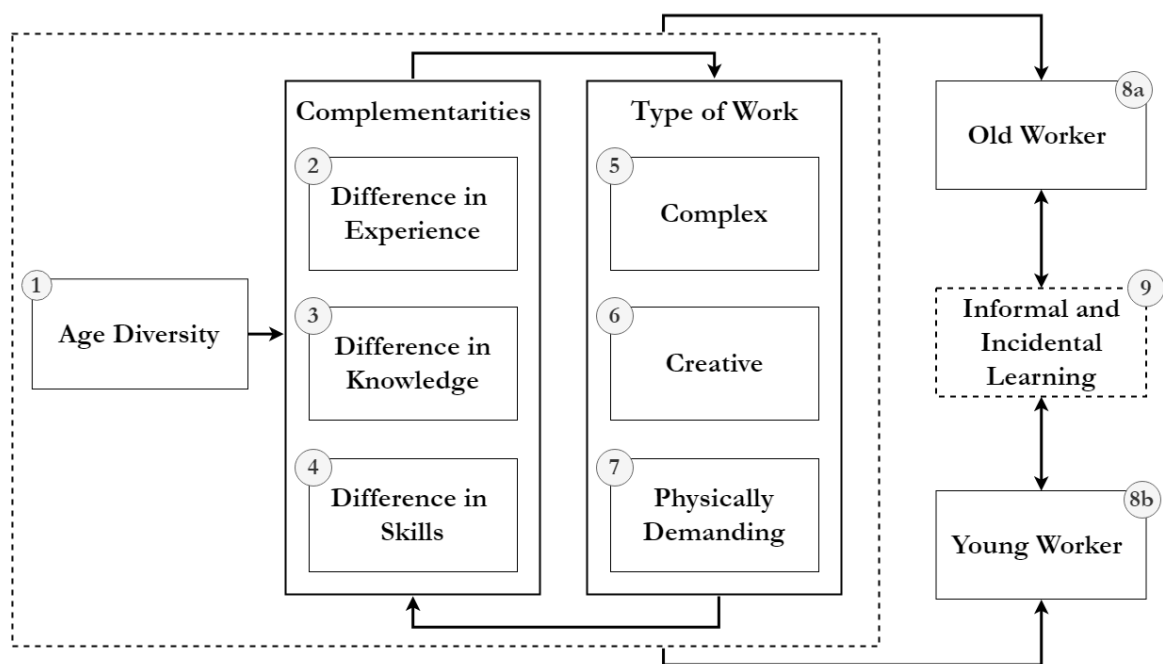


Figure 2.1 A conceptual model for a theory of individual experience of group age diversity, as based on the theoretical framework and grounded in the research within this paper (Author, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research method

The aim of the data collection has been to test and refine the conceptual model (fig. 2.1) by comparing it to the personal experiences of individual workers. The conceptual model should be a representation and description of the mechanisms – which emerged from the primary data – that shape how workers experience age diversity. The questions this paper set out to answer are of descriptive and qualitative nature. As such, a qualitative research design was chosen for the study. A qualitative approach was most suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to learn about the personal experiences of workers by creating an understanding of “meanings and interpretations given to events and things” by people (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, grounded theory was used to provide descriptive answers to the research questions and to create a conceptual model that is grounded in the primary data (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2015).

Data collection was done through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 1). Earlier interviews were supplemented with a survey and in later interviews a list of structured questions was used instead (this is elaborated upon in the next paragraph). Semi-structured interviews were a suitable middle-ground between the rigidity of structured interviews and the lack of direction in freeform interviews. They allow for deviations beyond the interview guide, but reduce the risk of failing to collect relevant data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.2 Data collection and limitations

The initial data collection strategy would not have been possible within the short timeframe in which data collection had to be conducted. The aim became to achieve a sample of old and young workers in different careers and from different companies. These changes to the research increased the pool of potential participants thereby making data collection more feasible. However, it also broadened the scope of the study in a way that was detrimental to its representativity. Narrowing the data collection to a single company, for example, would have provided greater possibilities for generalizing results. The validity and representativity of the data remain a concern that has to be taken into consideration. Although it is possible that the experiences of the respondents will be similar to the experiences of other Dutch workers, it is unknown to which extent this is true. The primary data does not show if the experiences are specific to the form of employment, company position or type of workplace. Moreover, it is possible that the experiences of the respondents in this study are singular in nature and are not representative of the experiences of any other workers. This limitation is compounded by the method used to reach respondents, which potentially created a data sample taken from the population of individuals within the network of the researcher rather than the Dutch working population as a whole.

3.3 Data collection, processing and limitations

Reaching potential participants for the study was accomplished by employing the social network of the researcher. This approach made it feasible to reach a sizeable group of participants within a relatively short amount of time. A “call for participants” was sent on social media, in text messaging groups and by talking to people in person. A total of ten individuals expressed willingness to participate in the study, of which seven could be interviewed. Two of the participants were immediate acquaintances of the researcher (R₁, R₂) and were asked to participate primarily because of their age and their potentially interesting experiences with the research topic. A limitation of this method is the risk that the sample primarily reflects the extended social network available to the researcher rather than being representative of typical young and old Dutch workers.

Before every interview, participants were asked to fill out a consent form (see Appendix 2). The conversation was recorded digitally and transcribed manually afterwards by the researcher with the use of a text processing software (Microsoft Word). The data collection was done in three “batches” and the interviews were transcribed and thematically coded between each batch. After interviews were transcribed into text, the

transcripts were imported into coding software (Atlas.ti 22) and underwent an initial round of content analysis to identify interesting initial results (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2015). To improve consistency throughout the coding process, a coding book (see Appendix 3) was created to establish a baseline for the thematic coding.

3.4 Preliminary data analysis

Despite the complications in data collection, the resulting dataset is relatively diverse and includes individuals with a range of different work experiences (table 3.1). The respondents work in six different economic sectors across four different provinces with a majority working and living in the province of Drenthe. All respondents work with multiple coworkers, ranging from two to seventy. Additionally, two of the seven respondents (R2, R6) have experience in a position where they manage workers or are involved with management policy. Thereby providing a set of experiences from a worker management perspective as well. Most importantly, all study participants indicated that they consider their workplace or team to be age diverse based on their personal interpretation of what constitutes age diversity. In some situations, a workplace was considered age diverse because it contained one or two significantly younger or older workers (R1, R3, R6) whereas in other cases respondents indicated a large amount of young and old workers in the same workplace (R2, R5, R7). Figure 3.2 provides a visualization of workplace age diversity as experienced and discussed by the respondents. These experiences, 46 in total, were coded under the category “Workplace Experience” and then further divided into subcodes which are colored brown in the figure. The subcodes paint a picture of what age diversity means to the respondents.

The experiences of each participant that related to age diversity have been listed in a table that was made using the a “code-document” comparison function available in the coding software (table 3.2). What stands out is the fact that all interviews contain a roughly equivalent amount of age diversity experiences but the distribution across the different categories is different when comparing respondents. Additionally, “Experience of Complementarities” is the only category in which all respondents share at least some experiences. Overall, the experiences of age diversity in the workplace are predominantly positive throughout all the interviews. The strong association between age differences and complementarities of workers is a potential explanation for this. As both young and old respondents find support in age diverse coworkers and value their unique skills, experiences and knowledge. Another potential explanation is that the data collection is biased towards positive experience. This could be caused by individuals with positive experiences being more likely to participate in the study or perhaps the in-depth interviews did not succeed in bringing unpleasant experiences to the surface.

Respondent	Age	Gender	Job Title	Employment	Total work experience	Work location	Co-workers	Considers their workplace age diverse
R1	26	F	Lawyer	Part-time	4 years	Noord-Holland/Drenthe(remote)	6	Yes
R2	70	M	Director of Operations	Retired	35 years	Overijssel	70	Yes
R3	58	F	Peripatetic Counselor	Full-time	39 years	Drenthe	2-3	Yes
R4	29	F	Healthcare Assistant	Full-time	7 years	Overijssel	1-3	Yes
R5	62	M	Warehouse Manager	Full-time	23 years	Drenthe	50	Yes
R6	67	M	Teacher/Administrative Secretary Works Council	Retired/Part-time	42 years	Groningen	13	Yes
R7	26	F	Intern Instructive Biomaterial Engineering	Internship (full-time)	1 year	Noord-Holland	10-15	Yes

Table 3.1 Descriptive information of the interview respondents (Author, 2022).

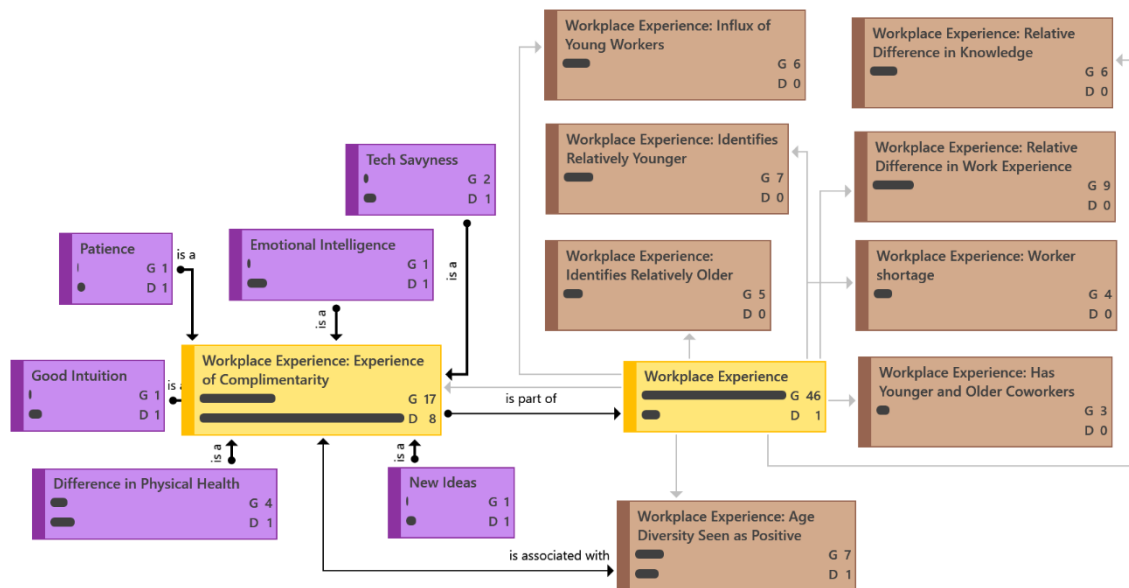


Figure 3.2 Network visualization of how workers experience age diversity in their workplace, made using Atlas.ti 22 using the coded interview transcripts (Author, 2022).

Workplace Experience	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7
<i>Experience of Complementarities</i>	2	4	1	3	1	4	2
<i>Age Diversity Seen as Positive</i>	1	3			1	1	1
<i>Has Younger and Older Coworkers</i>				1		1	1
<i>Identifies Relatively Older</i>			2		1	2	
<i>Identifies Relatively Younger</i>	3			1	1		2
<i>Influx of Young Workers</i>		1	1		3		1
<i>Relative Difference in Knowledge</i>	4	1	1				
<i>Relative Difference in Work Experience</i>	2	2	1	2		1	1
<i>Worker Shortage</i>			1	1	2		

Table 3.2 Code-Document comparison table which shows the frequency of each code for every respondent (Author, 2022).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Code co-occurrence compared to conceptual model

Throughout the coding process, a total of 39 different codes were used roughly 449 times across the transcripts. At the end of the process, codes were merged into relevant categories. This ensured a level of granularity in the analyses while also enabling meaningful comparisons. By using a “Code Co-Occurrence Table” in the coding software (Atlas.ti 22), it is possible to compare which codes occur together throughout the transcripts. In other words, it is a way to uncover which experiences appear to be related in the data. This method was used to compare the factors that are used in the conceptual model to the experiences of the interview participants (see Appendix 4). The categories were formed at the very end of the process by merging the numerous codes that were used throughout the coding process, before it was entirely clear what the theory would emerge from the data. Additionally, the table cannot show the context in which the codes co-occur. That is to say, the table only shows that the codes occur together, it does not necessarily suggest any meaning behind it. Even so, by comparing which concepts were most likely to be experienced together, the table provides a useful overview how consistent the data is compared to the conceptual model. To begin with, the table shows that complex work was the most frequently occurring code. Additionally, out of the codes in the table, “Type of Work: Complex” also appears most frequently overall. This makes sense when compared to the types of work that the respondents had experience in, which showed a bias towards work that requires higher education. Additionally, experiences coded under “Informal and Incidental Learning” most frequently co-occur together with “Type of Work: Complex” coded experiences. This result is consistent with the hypothesis that complex types of work are suitable for information exchange between workers. Moreover, experiences coded as “Differences in Knowledge” also predominantly co-occur together with experiences that were coded as complex work. Likewise, this result is consistent with the conceptual model. Finally, the Co-Occurrence Table provides support for the idea that young workers and old workers have different experiences, as there is a large difference between these two groups in terms of which types of experiences tend to co-occur. Overall, the co-occurrence of the codes as shown in the table is a promising result. It shows partial consistency with the conceptual model and it meets the expectation of the researcher based on the coding of all transcripts.

Another way to compare the data to the conceptual model is through a “Network Map” that visualizes the underlying connections between the coded experiences (see Appendix 5). Basic connections between the codes (e.g., “is a part of”) were created manually to establish a hierarchy in the map. Additionally, the results from the Co-Occurrence Table were used to justify further connections between the codes (e.g., “is associated with”). Codes categories that co-occurred at least five times, were connect to each other. Through this process a code map emerges that offers useful insights into how the coded experiences are related. Most notably, it shows a visual indication of the interaction between “Differences in Experience”, “Differences in Knowledge” and “Type of Work: Complex”. Providing further support for the idea that these experiences are related. Furthermore, it also shows how “Informal and Incidental Learning” is linearly connected to the previous categories. The map also once more creates a separation between the experiences of the young and old workers. Additionally, the map visualizes how young workers experience complementarities based on their relatively lower work experience. Whereas old workers experience complementarities based on difference in knowledge. These connection between the code categories are consistent with the conceptual model as well as the theoretical framework.

The results only show a partial interaction between factors used in the conceptual model and this finding is inline by the experience of participants as interpreted by the researcher throughout the interviews and analysis. Chiefly, there appears to be a lack of data to establish or contradict connections made in the conceptual model. Possibly, this is indicative of a dataset that is not large enough or of a coding process was not thorough enough.

4.2 Discussion of results and research objectives

4.2.1 How does the type of work shape how young and old workers experience age-related differences in competencies between age diverse workers?

The analysis of the data shows that the experience of a worker is influenced by the type of work that they do. In particular in work that is experienced as complex by the participant, the complementarities between age-diverse workers strongly present in their personal experience. This is visible in the co-occurrence of the experience, the connections in the code map and is consistent with how these experiences were shared by respondents. Many respondents shared experiences in which they expressed positive feelings in regards to the different competencies of a young or old worker, because it provided a benefit to their work. Examples in which age-related differences in competencies were experienced negatively were rare throughout the interviews. However, the experiences that were shared show the importance that the type of work place. For example, respondent 7 had only positive experiences of age differences in her work as an intern in instructive biomaterial engineering. However, this was completely different in her student part-time job as supermarket manager. Her experience showcases the impact that the type of work can have in relation to age diversity.

“In my part-time job I’ve had situations where I for example started [relocated] as supervisor at a new store and people who were much older would look at me like: “So this brat is now going to be telling me what to do?!” You do tend to run into that sort of stuff, especially if you hold a higher position at an early age compared to coworkers who have been with the company much longer.” –

R7

4.2.2 What perceived value of age diversity in their workplace is experienced by old and young workers?

The difference in various types of knowledge and skills between age diverse workers is an experience shared by all of the respondents. Predominantly, these experiences were considered positive or beneficial. Generally speaking, young respondents had experiences of old workers having superior in-depth knowledge within their profession, experiences of older workers having more refined or developed inter-personal and social abilities, and respondents felt that old workers benefitted from better job-specific skills due to having more experience in their profession. Respondent 1 shares the following experience:

“I would say that I notice, in a positive sense, that older colleagues are often a bit more level-headed, they are willing to provide a great amount of guidance and they bring a certain tranquillity [to the workplace]” – R1

It bears mentioning that respondent 1 additionally felt that more experienced coworkers had specialized knowledge that is difficult to replace within an organization. Indeed, the emphasis on highly specialized and in-depth knowledge that older workers usually have was brought up in multiple interviews. Though in these cases it must be added that the discerning factor is not so much a workers’ age, but the amount of experience they have within their field. Furthermore, the context of these experienced is usually within that of complex, creative or highly specialized work. This is also seen in an example from respondent 5 in which he talks about the difficulty his employer has with retaining old, experienced, workers with highly specialized skills:

“Yes, you do feel the loss of that experience. One of those [experienced] people has been given a 0-hour contract [flexible employment], that knowledge hasn’t been lost yet, so we’re hoping to pass it on but that’s easier said than done. It’s rather specialized work, renovating [old] churches” – R5

Overall, the experiences of participants indicate a high perceived value associated with age diversity and they motivate this feeling largely by perceived competencies that age-diverse coworkers can offer.

4.2.3 *How do young and old workers interact with the different amounts of work experience, knowledge and skills that age-diverse coworkers possess?*

Respondents, regardless of age, felt that they had a lot to learn from younger and older coworkers. This finding is especially interesting through the lens of informal and incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) because many respondents felt that incidental learning played a significant role in the transfer of knowledge between coworkers. The places at which these exchanges take place are different between the respondents, but they generally involve a space where coworkers can have casual conversations:

“*At the copier machine, you’ll walk into many colleagues there. It’s a place where you can take a moment to bring up things or ask questions.*” – R6

“*A lot of the work gets done during a cup of coffee in the canteen.*” – R1

5. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study has been to provide a contribution to age diversity research by creating an in-depth understanding of how young and old workers experience age diversity in Dutch workplaces. Additionally, this study set out to add onto the existing literature by identifying the underlying processes in worker experiences that shape how workers feel about age diversity. Lastly, the aim was to propose a theory and conceptual model based on the primary data. This chapter discusses the main findings and their compatibility with the existing literature.

This study contributed to age diversity research by offering a theory that partially explains one of the mechanisms through which age diversity is experienced by workers. The conceptual model that visualizes this theory was tested against qualitative primary data and was found to partially correspond with the data. Specifically, the proposed interaction between type of work and complementarities is partially supported by the results. The strongest support is provided for the link between complex work and complementarities from differences in work experience. This conclusion is consistent with the previous research that suggested similar mechanisms (Li *et al.*, 2021; Burmeister *et al.*, 2021; Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021).

Additionally, results indicate that workers actively and consciously experience age diversity in their workplace. Both young and old workers have a large appreciation for the complementarities of knowledge and skills in age diverse workplaces. On top of this, there is some evidence that the type of work(place) has an important role in how age diversity is experienced. However, the sample in this study did not contain sufficient examples of experiences by workers with low-skill and low-complexity tasks in their workplace. As a result, it is only possible to hypothesize that this group would not have experienced the same perceived benefit of an age diverse workplace.

Lastly, the results provide support for the idea that complementarities in age diverse workplaces are partially experienced through informal or incidental learning as a result of interactions with age-diverse coworkers. This finding suggests that facilitating these interactions between age diverse workers might be a method through which workplaces can benefit from age diversity.

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APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW GUIDE

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Datum: _____ Interview nr.: _____

Vragenlijst (a) (Gesloten vragen)

1. Wat is uw geboortedatum?
2. Wat is uw geslacht?
3. In welk land bent u geboren?
4. In welke arbeidssector heeft u het grootste deel van uw carrière gewerkt?

Gezondheidszorg en -welzijn, Media en communicatie, Handel en dienstverlening, Onderwijs, cultuur en wetenschap, ICT, Techniek, productie en bouw, Justitie, veiligheid en openbaar bestuur, Toerisme, recreatie en horeca, Milieu en Agrarische sector, Transport en logistiek

5. Hoe lang bent u werkzaam (geweest) in uw sector
6. Wat is uw huidige of meest recente functietitel?
7. Hoe lang heeft u tot op heden binnen deze functie gewerkt?
8. Met hoeveel collega's werkt u open een gemiddelde dag samen?



Vragenlijst (b) (Open vragen)

ALGEMEEN

Wat voor werk doet u?

- Wat houdt dat werk in? Hoe ziet een gemiddelde werkdag er een beetje uit?
- Wat vindt u van uw werk?

Wanneer u denkt aan de term "leeftijdsdiversiteit" op de werkplek, roept dit dan specifieke gedachten of gevoelens bij u op?

- o Wanneer/waar/waarom zijn deze gedachten/gevoelens ontstaan?

Hebt u het gevoel dat uw werkplek leeftijdsdivers is?

- o Waarom vindt u dat dit wel/niet het geval is?
- o Specifieke acties? Werkstromen? Plaatsen? Enz.

Wat voor rol speelt uw eigen leeftijd m.b.t. uw carrière en huidig werk?

Kunt u voorbeelden bedenken waarin leeftijdsverschillen hebben bijgedragen tot een positief resultaat op de werkplek?

- o Hebt u dingen geleerd van oudere/jongere werknemers die u anders waarschijnlijk niet zou hebben geleerd?

INFORMEEL LEREN

Leert u nieuwe dingen van uw collega's?

- Om wat voor soort dingen gaat dit?
- Van welke collega's leert u dit?

SOCIAAL KAPITAAL

Wat voor rol speelt leeftijd in uw omgang met uw collega's?

- Heeft u veel contact met oudere/jongere collega's op werk?
- Vind u het moeilijk om met oudere/jongere collega's een klik te hebben?

VERSCHILLEN IN ERVARING EN KENNIS

Wordt de leeftijdsdiversiteit die er is goed benut door uw werkgever?

- o Is er een bedrijfsbeleid dat bij u opkomt dat hiermee verband houdt?

Wat doen oudere collega's juist heel goed? Wat jongere collega's?

In wat voor situaties kunt u dingen leren van collega's?

NEGATIEVE VOOROORDELEN

Zijn er manieren waarop u zich actief aanpast met het oog op leeftijdsverschillen?

Ervaat u uw eigen leeftijd anders op het werk dan elders?

- Bijvoorbeeld ouder of jonger voelen?

RELATIEVE LEEFTIJD

Beschouwt u zichzelf als een jongere of oudere werknemer, in vergelijking met uw collega's?

- o Zijn er dingen in uw dagelijks werk die dit idee versterken?
- o Denkt u dat uw leeftijd bepaalde voordelen of uitdagingen creëert?
 - Plaats voorbeelden in hun context, wanneer/waar zijn ze ontstaan, wat betekenen ze voor de werknemer

APPENDIX 2 – CONSENT FORM

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Toestemmingsformulier

Informatie over het onderzoek

Als afsluitend onderdeel van mijn bacheloropleiding doe ik onderzoek naar de persoonlijk ervaring van werknemers m.b.t. *leeftijdsdiversiteit* op de werkvloer. Leeftijdsdiversiteit is in feite de combinatie van jongere en oudere werknemers op dezelfde werkvloer. De leeftijdsdiversiteit is hoog als een bedrijf of team bestaat uit werknemers van veel verschillende leeftijden en als de verschillen in leeftijd groot zijn.

In het bijzonder kijk ik naar de individuele ervaringen van werknemers. Het uiteindelijke doel is om o.a. inzicht te krijgen in wat voor rol leeftijd speelt in de persoonlijke ervaring, hoe het werken met jongere en oudere collega's wordt ervaren en wat voor positieve of negatieve ervaringen men heeft met leeftijdsdiversiteit op de werkvloer. Het doel van het interview is derhalve om informatie op te doen over *uw* ervaring m.b.t. (verschillende) leeftijden op werk. Er zijn daarom ook geen goede of foute antwoorden mogelijk. Daarnaast is het belangrijk om het volgende te weten:

- Deelname aan het interview is vrijwillig;
- U geeft toestemming om het interview digitaal op te nemen en te transcriberen (uitschrijven)
- U geeft toestemming voor het gebruik van informatie uit het interview in het onderzoek, bijvoorbeeld d.m.v. citaten in de tekst
- U kunt op ieder moment uw deelname aan het onderzoek intrekken.
- Om privacy te waarborgen worden uw gegevens gepseudonimiseerd. Dit betekent dat direct identificerende gegevens worden vervangen door een ID-nummer;
- Uw naam, address, etc. worden *niet* opgeslagen en worden *niet* gebruikt;
- Gegevens in publicaties zijn nooit te herleiden naar individuele personen;
- U geeft toestemming voor het gebruik van informatie uit het interview in het onderzoek, bijvoorbeeld d.m.v. citaten in de tekst
- U kunt op ieder moment uw deelname aan het onderzoek intrekken.

Datum: _____

Interview nr.: _____

Toestemming deelname en het gebruik van u gegevens

Ja, ik geef **toestemming** voor het gebruik van mijn interview en van mijn gegevens voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek

Nee, ik geef **geen** toestemming voor het gebruik van mijn interview en van mijn gegevens voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek

APPENDIX 3 – INDUCTIVE CODEBOOK

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Code</i>
<i>Social Capital</i>	Maatwerk, Talk/Meeting	Compromise, Conflict, Grouping
<i>Age-Based Stereotyping</i>	Prejudice, Stereotype, Discrimination	Openness, Equality,
<i>Differences in Knowledge and skills</i>	Complementarities, Experience	Complex Work, Technology, Young, Old
<i>Informal and Incidental Learning</i>	Informal, Incidental, Nonformal	Initiative, Participation,

Table 4.2 *Initial code book for transcripts (Author, 2022).*

APPENDIX 4 – CODE CO-OCCURRENCE TABLE

	8a Young Worker n=14	8b Old Worker n=9	9 Informal and Incidental Learning n=9	Type of Work: Complex n=17	Type of Work: Creative n=4	Type of Work: Physically Demanding n=4
9 Informal and Incidental Learning n=9		2		5	2	
Complementarities: Differences in Experience n=24	6	3	2	7	1	2
Complementarities: Differences in Knowledge n=15	4	5	3	5	2	1
Complementarities: Differences in Skills n=9		6	1	2	1	3

Table 4.1 Code Co-Occurrence Table based on the factors from the conceptual model, made in Atlas.t 22 (Author, 2022).

APPENDIX 5 – NETWORK MAP

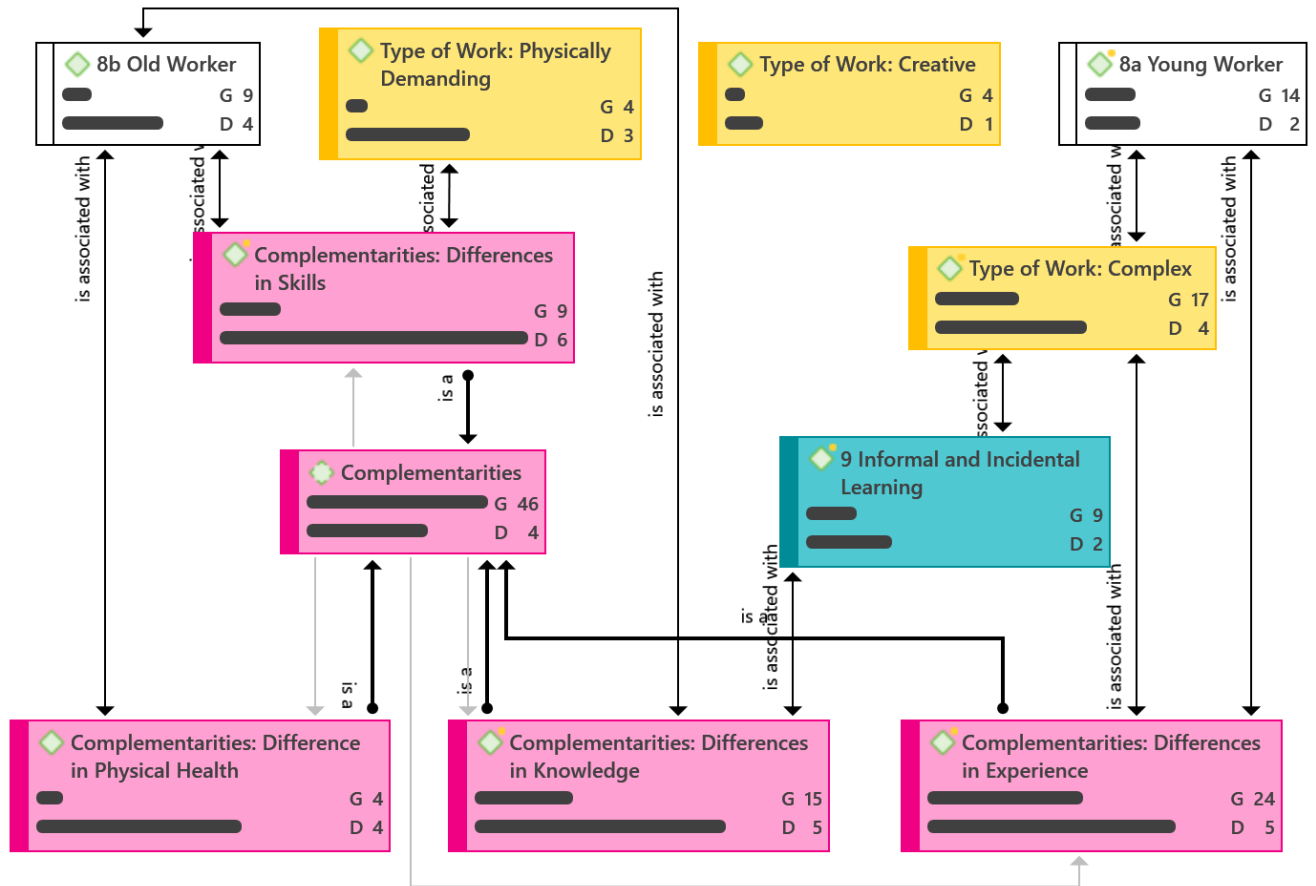


Figure 4.1 Code map based on the conceptual model (Author, 2022).