

A STUDY ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF MULTIGENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IN ACADEMIC WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary organizations are motivated by racial, religious and socio-economic diversity, but, awareness regarding a new diversity has begun to creep in corporate as well academic India, called Multi-Generational Diversity. There are two major generations working side by side across Indian educational institutions, today, the Generation X and the Generation Y. Every generation has its own attitude and style, which leads to frequent misunderstandings among them. The better each generation understands the other, the better they will work together. The study explores some issues, both positive and negative, which are inherent in managing an intergenerational workforce at academic places of work. The study has examined the potential generational and demographic differences on several work related beliefs, using the data collected primarily through a structured questionnaire from employees, currently, working in various institutes. The result of the survey has yielded important and valuable insights into the landscape study of multi-generational workforce in the educational institutions of India.

Keywords: Generation, Age Groups, Employees, Diversity, Generational Differences.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, educational institutions around the world are facing demographical and societal changes, economic landscape alterations, globalization, and the ongoing rise of the knowledge worker, which are leading us to a workplace where members of four generations sit side-by-side, for the first time. For academic workplaces of all sizes, this is both an opportunity and a challenge. Each individual brings deeply rooted cultural experiences based on state or location, caste, religion, beliefs, norms, ethics, behavior and attitudes to the workplace.

A simple definition of generation is a group of individuals born and living at the same time, with the same approximate age having similar ideas, attitudes and problems. As per a sociologist's view, 'generation' is viewed as a group of individuals of similar ages whose members have experienced a noteworthy historical event within a set period of time and hence the socio, political and cultural environment during the formative and growing years influences and shapes their attitudes and beliefs forming a collective world view.

The work environment of an academic workplace and its inhabitants are very different from that of businesses and

corporations. Although many of the problems may be the same, they will manifest themselves differently, thereby requiring different solutions. Researchers generally agree that two generations currently dominate the academic workplaces in India: Generation X and Generation Y. People who were born between the years 1965 & 1984 constitute Generation X, while people who were born between the years 1985 & 2004 constitute Generation Y.

Generation X are called Baby Bust generation because of their small size, as relative to the generation of Baby Boomers. They aspire to achieve a balance between work and life, than previous generations. They are strongly loyal towards their family and friends. They value continuous learning and skill development. They have strong technical skills, are results focused and are ruled by a sense of accomplishment. They are not intimidated by the authority figures and feel free to question them. The absence of money might lose their motivation but it is not the sole motivator for them. They are pragmatic, self-reliant and adaptive to changes and like to receive feedback.

Generation Y are also called the Millennial and the Digital Generation because they have been shaped by parental excesses, computers, and dramatic technological advances.

They value team work and collective action as they embrace diversity. They desire flexibility, freedom and a more balanced professional and personal life. They tend to overlook differences among people and treat everyone in the same manner. They are deeply committed to authenticity and truth-telling. They believe to live in a "no-boundaries" world where they can make short-term decisions and expect the outcomes to be rather grandiose. It is the most confident generation, who purports to be entrepreneurial.

The two major generations of personnel bumping into one another in higher education represent the most diverse age composition in academe ever. They bring baggage outlined and described previously into every department and meeting they attend, which can affect the emotional intelligence, especially interpersonal relationships, of everyone and, ultimately, their job satisfaction and productivity (Fisher-Bando, 2008).

Among the various generational differences, there seem to be at least a half dozen that bubble to the top as potentially the most common sources of conflict: dress/appearance, work hours/work ethic, technology, expectations for advancement, communication, and respect/professionalism. So, at the time new generations join the workforce, others should try to adjust and remain flexible with their values, beliefs and behavior. On the other hand, the new talent should respect and assimilate the older workforce. As society continues to adapt to the prevalence of a multi-generational workforce, it is essential that academic institutions proactively address this change and apply the same inclusive philosophies they often exhibited with regard to other forms of diversity, to the generational diversity trends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For perhaps the first time in recorded history, academic markets in the 21st century are presented with some real challenges and opportunities to organize members of different generations and address their issues of talent engagement, leadership development and people management.

Iden (2016) conducted a study in organizations employing more than 500 employees, to explore various strategies used by the managers of Franklin County, Ohio State, USA for managing multi-generations. To analyze the data, a psycho-phenomenological method called, van Kaam was used which separated the collected data. The four major themes which emerged out of them were generational cohort differences, required multigenerational managerial skills, most effective multigenerational management strategies and least effective

multigenerational management strategies.

Becton et al. (2014) in their empirical research provides mixed evidence for generational differences in important values and attitudes. The study extends generational effects research by examining differences in actual workplace. The correlations among age, longest number of months spent in a single job, and number of jobs held in last five years were computed using Pearson's product moment correlation. Their results suggest that organizations should be cautious in taking the advice of some scholars to implement HR strategies that recognize the unique values and characteristics of each generation versus general strategies applied to all generations of employees.

Berk (2013) published an article describing four generations in academia-Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Net Generation. He examined the extent to which generational bullying is prevalent in higher education and considered the implications of various generational issues for training and developing faculty and other staff members. It was found that, there is a severe need for university heads and other developers of faculty to take the responsibility and address multi-generational issues by organizing workshops, seminars and training programs, etc. They must create an academic workplace where employees and students of all the generations can prosper together, but being individually.

Hornbostel et al. (2011) introduced a research paper whose primary goal was to highlight the techniques for better targeting the needs of specific generations and life-stages, while honing engagement practices that may formally have been age-independent. In the research paper, the differences were referred using two terms: "Life-stage" and "Generation". The study found reverse mentoring as a tangible way companies can better utilize their multi-generational workforce, increase engagement between workers, both young and old, and bridge generational gaps.

Platteau et al. (2011) tried to link the concepts of generation and intergenerational conflict to the concept of organizational culture for which a survey was conducted among civil servants from a local government. As per the research paper, differences between age groups must not merely be considered as a result of age-effects but also from generation-effects. A generational perspective acknowledges that people change as they grow older and experience successive life course transitions, but also stresses the fact that the concept of generations is fruitful for understanding and interpreting differences between age groups.

Hoff (2010) aimed at getting more insight in the work preferences of the youngest generation (born after 1985) and the differences with work preferences of older generations. The results showed that there were two types of differences. On the one hand differences in kinds of preferences, expressed by different operations of the constructs. This was the case for the constructs; 'challenge', 'task significance', 'transformational leadership' and 'promotion opportunities'. On the other hand differences in the levels of preferences were found which indicate that some aspects were preferred more or less by the youngest generation.

Meriac et al. (2010) examined the differences across three generational cohorts (Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers) on dimensions of the work ethic construct using the multidimensional work ethic profile (MWEP). According to the study, generational cohorts develop similarities in their attitudes and beliefs based on shared life experiences. As a result, generational cohorts have identifiable characteristics on which they differ. The large differences in several dimensions of work ethic may contribute to misunderstandings, differences in work-related expectations, or other sources of conflict among members from different cohorts.

MetLife Mature Market Institute (2009) conducted a study, according to which, when employees derive a sense of meaning and fulfillment from their work, they tend to experience positive personal outcomes as well. Some important questions addressed in the study were what is employee engagement and why is it important, how can employers recognize employee engagement, how does age affect employee engagement, what are drivers of engagement for employees in different generational groups and what can employers do to maximize employee engagement.

Fraone et al. (2008) discovered a new term called 'generational competence', which describes the adaptations that organizations must make in order to meet the diverse needs of the four generations in today's workforce and marketplace. A generational perspective enables managers to leverage employee uniqueness as a source of learning, productivity, and innovation and to create and role model a shared vision of positive co-worker relationships.

Leahy et al. (2008) conducted a research to establish employee preferences in two areas: workplace motivational needs and reward and recognition preferences. Its findings that some common motivational needs are shared across workforce cohorts may challenge a rethinking of the perception that divisive generational differences may exist

within the workforce.

Parker (2007) planned a study to look at generational differences with respect to participant's perceptions of work and career. Generational differences represent the set of values that people within the same age group possess. The results showed that while there is no significant difference in each generation's perception of their work life balance, there are differences in the beliefs and behaviors with respect to work life balance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand in depth how the presence of multiple generations impacts the employees at academic workplaces, both qualitative methodology and quantitative techniques have been used. The objectives of the study are:

1. To study the relationship between demographic variables and types of generation currently working in academic workplaces.
2. To determine the factors affecting academic workplace culture and types of generation.
3. To identify the effective methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The overall strategy been chosen is Hypothesis Testing Research, under which Non-experimental Hypothesis Testing Research has been selected. Thus, the hypothesis statements framed for the study are:

H01 : There is no significant relationship between Generation X and Generation Y on the basis of factors affecting academic workplace culture

H02 : The methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace are insignificant of Generation X and Generation Y

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The primary sources used for this study are discussion Interviews with the employees and data collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed personally as well as through Google Forms.

Design of questionnaire. The questionnaire instrument of present study is divided into three broad categories. The first category represents the demographic variables. The second part deals with statements intended to find out the impact of Generation X and Generation Y on factors affecting workplace culture and some basic questions. The last category includes employee feedback on the effectiveness of

several methods in managing an intergenerational academic workforce. In the questionnaire, the types of variable being used are on the basis of unit of measurement i.e. categorical polytomous variables and continuous variables. And, to assess the responses for various statements included in the questionnaire, Likert's Five-Point Scale has been used.

SAMPLE DESIGN

The sample population for the study is approximately 500 employees (or professors) of different academic institutions. In order to obtain the information required to meet the objectives of the study, a sample of 112 employees were surveyed. These employees are from different institutions like management, arts, science, law, and journalism etc.

To carry out this study, Non-probability sampling technique is used. Under the non-probability, the convenience and snowball sampling techniques have been used.

DATAANALYSIS METHOD

SPSS &Ms-Excel were used extensively to analyze the data in the form of SPSS tables, percentages and numerical forms.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study represents only a small percentage of the employees at academic workplaces. As all the respondents were from one location only i.e. Delhi. Therefore, the study is not truly indicative of employees at other educational institutions.

DATAANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

In order to measure the reliability of the scale used in this study, an internal consistency measure called Cronbach's Alpha has been used. In table 1, since the value of Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.7, it means that the items of the scale used have relatively high internal consistency with coefficient of alpha 0.937.

Table 1
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.937	.935	22

The crosstabs has been used to study the relationship between demographic variables (i.e. gender, marital status, highest educational degree and current role) and types of generation (i.e. Generation X and Generation Y) currently working in academic workplaces. In table 2, patterns have been detected that might indicate relatedness between the study variables.

Table 2

Relationship between Demographic Variables and the Type of Generation

	Generation X	Generation Y	Total	
Gender	Male	33	19	52
	Female	33	27	60
	Total	66	46	112
Marital Status	Single	10	20	30
	Married	51	18	69
	Divorced	05	08	13
	Total	66	46	112
Highest Educational Degree	Post Graduation	19	27	46
	Doctoral	38	10	48
	Other	09	09	18
	Total	66	46	112
Current Role	Professor	29	04	33
	Associate Professor	23	14	37
	Assistant Professor	14	28	42
	Total	66	46	112

Out of 112 respondents, majority of the respondents i.e. 60 are females. And, male respondents belonging to Generation X are significantly higher (i.e. 33) as compared to those belonging to Generation Y (i.e. 17). Majority of the lecturers are married with 51 belonging to Generation X and 18 belonging to Generation Y. And, as compared to Generation X, single and divorced lecturers belong majorly from Generation Y. Our respondents constitutes a fairly similar number of post graduates and doctorates, with majority of doctorates (i.e. 38) belonging to Generation X and majority of post graduates (i.e. 27) belonging to Generation Y. Furthermore, academic workplaces have highest number of assistant professors, majorly belonging to Generation Y. And, most of the professors and associate professors belong to Generation X.

H01 : There is no significant relationship between Generation X and Generation Y on the basis of factors affecting academic workplace culture

To test this hypothesis statement, a parametric test called Independent samples t-test has been used. We have compared the means of two independent groups i.e. Generation X and Generation Y employees at academic workplaces in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

Table 3

Analysis of Factors Affecting Academic Workplace Culture with respect to the Type of Generation using Independent Samples t-Test

Factors	Type of Generation	Mean	t-value	Sig.
Quality of work	Generation X	3.33	-0.493	0.623
	Generation Y	3.46	-0.498	
Inter-generational learning	Generation X	3.52	2.521	0.013
	Generation Y	2.96	2.424	
Team work	Generation X	3.02	-0.421	0.675
	Generation Y	3.11	-0.429	
Communication breakdowns	Generation X	3.29	0.742	0.460
	Generation Y	3.11	0.749	
Conflicts (or resentment)	Generation X	3.38	0.378	0.706
	Generation Y	3.28	0.374	
Level of respect	Generation X	3.56	3.782	0.000
	Generation Y	2.70	3.662	
Reliance on technology	Generation X	3.48	0.794	0.429
	Generation Y	3.30	0.770	
Level of seriousness	Generation X	3.18	2.250	0.030
	Generation Y	2.67	2.207	
Note : Significant at 5 % level				

The table 3 shows that according to Generation X lecturers i.e. who were born between years 1965 & 1984, the highest factor which occurs in an academic workplace due to generational differences as a primary reason for occurrence is, the level of respect with a mean score of 3.56. According to them, the employees feel that coworkers from other generations do not respect them. It is then followed by inter-generational learning, reliance on technology, conflicts (or

resentment) between workers of different generations, quality of work due to variety of generational perspectives, communication breakdowns and level of seriousness with mean scores of 3.52, 3.48, 3.38, 3.33, 3.29 & 3.18, respectively. They think that team work with mean score 3.02, is the least important factor which occurs due to generational differences, as it involve workers from different generations who work together effectively in order to attain their pre specified mutual goals.

In contrast to this, according to Generation Y lecturers i.e. who were born between years 1985 & 2004, quality of work due to variety of generational perspectives with a mean score of 3.46, occurs most in an academic workplace. Then, reliance on technology, conflicts (or resentment) between workers of different generations, team work, communication breakdowns, inter-generational learning and level of respect follows it with mean scores of 3.30, 3.28, 3.11, 3.11, 2.96 & 2.70, respectively. And the least significant factor occurring at an academic workplace believing generational differences as the reason is the level of seriousness with a mean score of 2.67.

Table 3 shows the value of computed t statistic also. It measures the size of difference in relation to the variation of our sample data. The positive t value indicates that the mean for the first group i.e. Generation X employees, is significantly greater than the mean for the second group i.e. Generation Y employees. While, negative t value indicates that the mean for Generation Y employees is greater than the mean for Generation X employees.

As per table 3, the significance level for all the factors, except second, sixth and eight factors, is greater than our alpha value, 0.05. Therefore, we partially accept null hypothesis that the factors affecting academic workplace culture are insignificant of Generation X and Generation Y. Thus, the factors which significantly vary from generation to generation are effectiveness of inter-generational learning, levels of respect and levels of seriousness. According to the respondents, workers from different generations learn from one another, they feel that coworkers from other generations do not respect them, and take them less seriously.

The table 4 shows us the mean scores, t values and significance levels of Generation X and Generation Y respondents with respect to the impact on them from methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace.

H02 : The methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace are insignificant of Generation X and Generation Y

Table 4

Analysis of Workforce Management Methods with respect to the Type of Generation using Independent Samples t-Test

Methods	Type of Generation	Mean	t-value	Sig.
Collaborative discussion, decision-making or problem-solving	Generation X	3.97	3.131	0.002
	Generation Y	3.24	3.076	
Creating intergenerational mentoring programs	Generation X	3.47	0.852	0.396
	Generation Y	3.28	0.851	
Introducing training on multigenerational issues	Generation X	3.27	0.550	0.583
	Generation Y	3.15	0.548	
Offering flexible learning opportunities	Generation X	4.21	1.735	0.086
	Generation Y	3.83	1.743	
Performance management systems addressing each generation	Generation X	3.76	2.802	0.006
	Generation Y	3.13	2.696	
Creative rewards and recognition programs	Generation X	4.32	3.355	0.001
	Generation Y	3.72	3.276	
Note : Significant at 5 % level				

In table 4, according to the Generation X lecturers, the most successful factor for managing an intergenerational workforce is creative rewards and recognition programs with a mean score of 4.32. It is then followed by flexible learning opportunities, collaborative discussion, decision-making or problem solving sessions, performance management systems addressing each generation and intergenerational mentoring programs having mean scores 4.21, 3.97, 3.76, & 3.47, respectively. And, the least successful factor is the introduction of training on multigenerational issues which has a mean score of 3.27.

Whereas, for lecturers belonging to Generation Y, the flexible learning opportunities should be improved first for intergenerational workforce as it has the highest mean score of 3.83. And, performance management systems addressing each generation should be administered in the last as it has the lowest mean score of 3.13.

In table 4, since the significance level for first, fifth and sixth method is smaller than our alpha value, 0.05, and the significance level for second, third and fourth method is greater than our alpha value, 0.05. Therefore, we partially accept null hypothesis and partially reject it. Thus, the methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace such as collaborative discussion, decision-making or problem-solving, performance management systems addressing each generation and creative rewards and recognition programs are significant of Generation X and Generation Y. While the methods such as

creating intergenerational mentoring programs, introducing training on multigenerational issues and offering flexible learning opportunities are insignificant of Generation X and Generation Y.

FINDINGS

Today, workplaces have employees from multiple generations and the varying ideas, values, and experiences affect the workplace. The academic institutions are reaping the benefits of diversity provided by the workers of different generations as multi-generational workforce is prevalent in every workplace now. The variability in age changes the interpersonal dynamics in the academic work environment. A careful synthesis of the responses revealed the following results:

Generation Y constitutes of more female respondents as compared to the male respondents. While, Generation X includes equal number of males and females.

The respondents who were single and belongs to Generation Y are twice of single respondents belonging to Generation X. 46% of the respondents who were born between years 1965 & 1984 are married while only 16% married respondents were born between years 1985 & 2004.

The proportion of respondents who were born between years 1965 & 1984, and possess post-graduation as their highest educational degree is smaller in comparison to those born between years 1985 & 2004.

Most of the respondents who belong to Generation X are designated either as Professors or as Associate Professors in academic institutions. While, Generation Y employees are majorly working as Assistant Professors.

The factors which are significant of Generation X and Generation Y employees in academic workplaces are effective learning, respect and seriousness.

According to the respondents of our study, the employees at academic workplaces think that workers from different generations effectively learn from each other, they feel that coworkers from other generations do not respect them and also the employees take coworkers from other generations less seriously.

The effective methods for managing an intergenerational workforce at academic workplace which are significant of Generation X and Generation Y are collaborative discussion, decision-making or problem-solving, performance management systems addressing each generation, and creative rewards and recognition programs.