Generation Gap in the Workforce: A Comparative Analysis of Staff and Technician Perspectives (Study case in manufacturing company PT XYZ)

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Abstract – The idea of the generation gap has evolved as a crucial aspect of the contemporary employment landscape, encompassing variations in values, attitudes, and expectations across generational cohorts like Generation Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. This study, conducted at Cikarang's PT XYZ manufacturing business, investigate the complex dynamics of the generation gap, focusing primarily on the final assembly area. Utilizing a qualitative study method, this study explores the underlying reasons for these phenomena and examine management techniques aimed at effectively navigating intergenerational differences. This research evaluates the existence and complexity of generational gaps within the company and highlights management's efforts to address them, employing strategies such as training programs and mentorship initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing and managing these gaps, emphasizing the necessity for ongoing adaptation by management to ensure sustained organizational success in an evolving workplace environment.

Keywords: Gap generation, Staff, Technician, Work Level

Introduction

In the productive working world of 2023, four generations are still actively engaged, including within government institutions. According to the Pew Research Center (2020), these consist of the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y, also known as the Millennial Generation (1981-1996), and the most recent, Generation Z, or Gen Z (1997-2012). Many articles and books focus on assumptions of generational conflicts in the workplace arising from differences in values, attitudes toward leadership, and behaviors (Kasih, 2023). This occurs due to a need for more understanding among generations regarding these differences. If it continues, it may lead to intergenerational conflicts and harm workplace relationships and communication (Gabriela et al., 2021).

A recent survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that differences between people caused 40% of conflicts at work. In companies with 500 or more employees, 58% of HR professionals reported conflicts between younger and older employees. This happened because they saw their jobs and work-life balance differently. These differences in how different generations see things can make them feel like it is 'us against them,' which often leads to more conflicts and makes it hard to work together efficiently (Yang & Guy, 2006). According to PR Newswire, (2006), employees usually feel more comfortable reporting to an older manager. Every generation brings a unique way of thinking to the company. For example, Generation Y encourages older generations to think differently, while the older generations serve as mentors to Generation Y, helping them succeed (Townsend & Joanne, 2011).

Several researchers have completed their research on the generation gap in the workforce. The study Abdul Rashid et al., (2021) explains that each generation is influenced by a series of experiences that shape their behaviour and attitudes in daily life. According to Stillman & Stillman, (2017), employers need to understand the different generations, namely Gen X, Y, and Z, due to their variations in preferences and interests.

Gen Y is depicted as an adventurous generation, spending time travelling instead of

saving for a house, dining out rather than cooking at home, and investing in the latest gadgets rather than saving in banks (Priono & Darma, 2021). Younger generations (Gen Y and Gen Z) entering the workforce initially seek good and open communication with colleagues and superiors, a respectful and professional work environment, a supportive system, and constructive feedback for guidance and effective management (Baum, 2020).

According to Gabriela et al., (2021), Gen Y desires leaders who prioritise interpersonal relationships, are good listeners, offer personal attention, and engage in frequent communication. The Millennial or Gen Y generation has specific expectations of their leaders, seeking a harmonious relationship between superiors and subordinates (Hodges & Sugg, 2019). While Gen Y and Gen Z share some common characteristics, each generation possesses distinct and unique traits (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

It is important to build a more personal connection while talking to a baby boomer. To motivate and communicate effectively with them, let them know they play a significant role in the company, acknowledge their contributions, and ask for their insights on various matters (Watkins, 2013). For Generation X, being direct and concise in communication is best to respect their time. Sending clear and straightforward emails or voicemails is the way to go (Murphy & Raines, 2007). To motivate Generation X, encourage them to approach their tasks uniquely (Watkins, 2013). When communicating with Generation Y, maintain a positive tone through text messages or face-to-face meetings. Connect the message to their personal goals or the team's objectives. Avoid being patronizing, cynical, or sarcastic (Murphy & Raines, 2007). To motivate and effectively communicate with Generation Y, assure them they have equal opportunities and that their opinions are valued (Watkins, 2013).

In this study, the researchers conducted their research within a manufacturing industry company. According to (Ali, 2011), the definition of industry is a location or place where production activities are conducted. One of the industrial processes is manufacturing, characterized by transforming inputs into outputs (Ali, 2011). According to Griffin, et. al., (2017), generational diversity in the workplace is a key pressure for organizational change, while it includes the people, technology, information and communication processing.

The purpose of this research is to identify how the generation gap problem develops in manufacturing organizations, the effect of this problem, the variables that influence the occurrence of this problem, and the best strategy to lessen and overcome this problem. The study's novelty is exploring generational gaps within the manufacturing industry, particularly at PT XYZ. It uniquely employs a qualitative approach to understand the factors contributing to these gaps while emphasizing the importance of management action to address the issue. The research highlights the prevalence of conflicts between younger and older workers due to varying work ethics and work-life balance perspectives, underlining the 'us vs. them' mentality. It also points to the significance of older managers, as younger employees tend to report more comfortably to them. Moreover, the study recognizes the value of each generation's distinct thinking in the workplace, with Generation Y challenging older generations and receiving mentorship in return. The comprehensive approach to understanding and bridging these generational gaps presents a fresh perspective, offering practical recommendations for management. Provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other related findings. This section should be combined in the Introduction. This section provides examples from previous and current studies and helps Authors to identity any gap to signify the importance of this study. It may consist of primary references (grand theory, concept, major framework); journal articles (preferably published in the last 10 years); main idea from text book or electronic articles. Overall, review of the literature serves as an integrative, critical evaluation of relevant issues, building bridges among topics, or the identification of central issues. A simple example of review includes definition, details, examples from current articles and news.

Method

This research employs a qualitative research method, as described by Moelong (2014), which aims to comprehensively understand phenomena experienced by researchers. Qualitative research focuses on exploring behaviors, observations, and actions through descriptive means using words and language, within natural contexts, and employing various natural methods.

In this study, both primary and secondary data sources contribute to the research findings. Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews, offering insights into cross-generational communication among Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Secondary data, on the other hand, were obtained from relevant information, journal references, articles, and related books, providing additional dimensions to support the research.

The population of interest refers to the complete group of people or things with specific characteristics relevant to the researcher's subject or object of study, as outlined by Sugiyono (2017). For this study, the population consists of all employees working in the final assembly area of PT XYZ. This encompasses employees from various generations, including Gen Z, Gen Y (millennials), Gen X, and Baby Boomers.

To select participants for the study, the researcher employed purposive sampling, a methodical approach that ensures the chosen sample is appropriate for the study and capable of providing the needed information. The size and composition of the study sample were determined to be proportional to the population's size and design, following the guidelines provided by Sugiyono (2017).

This research had ten participants separated into three perspectives: management, staff, and technicians. The management group is made up of two members: the manager of the human resources development division (PT XYZ) and the manager of the packout division (the region under investigation). Second, the staff group has four members, which is the same as the technician group, which has four members. Each staff member will essentially have one technician who will collaborate to create line tooling, machines, jigs, and layouts for each new product development. As a result, collaboration and effective communication are required to achieve all of these KPIs. The table of participant profiles is shown below.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Name	Age	Educational Background	Duration of work	Position
Sri	51	SMA	28 years	Technician
Shinta	48	SMA	24 years	Technician
Mufti	45	SMA	18 years	Technician
Narsih	49	SMA	22 years	Technician
Prana	24	S1 Industrial Engineering	3 years	Staff
Elisabeth	27	S1 Mechatronics Engineering	5.5 years	Staff
Rama	23	S1 Industrial Engineering	2 years	Staff
Ida	25	S1 Industrial Engineering	3 years	Staff
Grafita	35	S1 Industrial Engineering S2 Mechatronics Engineering	12 years	Management (Manager of Packout Area)
Sari	38	S1 Medical S2 Management	10 years	Management (Manager of HRD)

Results and Discussions

1) In contemporary discussions on generational differences in the workplace, it's commonly suggested that varying work values and attitudes among different age groups should result in distinct preferences for leaders and different leadership styles. However, this notion often lacks solid theoretical underpinning. While it's plausible that leader preferences may reflect generational values, leadership behavior is a complex interplay of leader attributes, follower attributes, and contextual factors. Effective supervisors are typically characterized by qualities such as kindness, understanding, and efficiency, fostering a positive work atmosphere and motivating team members. Moreover, there's a spectrum of supervisory styles, ranging from laid-back to deadline-oriented, each suited to different organizational contexts. The key lies in a supervisor's adaptability to the team's needs and project requirements, which facilitates collective success. Additionally, effective supervisors prioritize building supportive relationships with their teams, fostering an environment of appreciation and support that enhances collaboration and innovation, ultimately boosting productivity.

   Understanding and embodying these traits are crucial steps toward preparing for effective leadership in the future. By cultivating these qualities, individuals can contribute significantly to creating a positive and productive work environment for both their teams and their organizations.

2) The platforms and communication techniques of various generations vary. Baby Boomers prefer to communicate over the phone, in person, via fax, email, and in group or team meetings. They dislike social networking sites, blogging, texting, and being afraid of technology. However, Generation X prefers to communicate through the channels they frequently use, such as texting, blogging, instant messaging, e-mail, cell phones, blogs, and online forums. They have blocked formal letter writing, face-to-face communication, team discussions (which work better one-on-one or alone), communication barriers with social networks, and communication up and down the generation. However, Generation Y favors texting, instant messaging, emails, and online social networks for communication. Face-to-face interactions, phone discussions, formality, and informal letter writing are barriers for Generation Y (Dave, 2010). Effective communication with supervisors plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of the professional world. It is noteworthy that team members frequently encounter communication challenges from age differences with their supervisors. These challenges often stem from varying communication styles, expectations, and generational disparities. Such discrepancies occasionally lead to misunderstandings and hinder the seamless flow of information, potentially affecting the efficiency of projects and overall teamwork. However, it is reassuring to acknowledge that these challenges are not insurmountable. In practice, they are typically resolved through a two-fold approach. First and foremost, fostering open communication channels between team members and their supervisors is paramount. This open dialogue creates a space for openly sharing and understanding concerns and perspectives. Secondly, resolving these challenges involves constructive discussion and the mutual willingness to find a middle ground. This means that both parties must actively understand and adapt to each other's communication preferences and expectations. It is essential to recognize that bridging the gap in communication due to age differences is a valuable skill. It ensures a harmonious working relationship and underscores the importance of adaptability and flexibility in the ever-evolving workplace. Consequently, acknowledging and addressing these age-related communication challenges can lead to more effective collaboration, streamlined

workflows, and enhanced project outcomes.

3) According to Johnson and Johnson (2010), there is a prevalent belief in non-academic literature that younger generations value teamwork less than older generations does. This might lead to conflict in multigenerational teams. Other than the individual differences hypothesis, there isn't much theoretical support for such a claim. Two cross-sectional studies of American municipal workers provide very little evidence to support or dispute this claim. Jurkiewicz (2000) discovered no distinctions between Baby Boomers and Generation Xers on the value of teamwork. In cross-sectional research of American workers, Sirias et al. (2007) investigated the collaboration elements of teamwork dualism collectivism. They discovered that Xers were more independent and competitive than Boomers, and they enjoyed working alone more than the latter after adjusting for rank, gender, and money. There were no discernible variations in the belief that self-interest boosts collective productivity or in giving up personal goals for the good of the group. Similarly, Boomers preferred cooperation than X teamwork and were more at ease working with others, according to Hartman & Payne's 2005 cross-sectional survey of American workers. Other, younger or older generations' inclinations for collaboration have not been studied. Based on the available data, it appears that various generations may value collaboration equally yet approach it in different ways. Collaboration within cross-age teams is a fascinating and essential aspect of the professional realm. Team members often have enriching experiences working alongside colleagues from diverse age groups, spanning younger and older generations. The amalgamation of varying perspectives and experiences from these age differences offers a well-rounded approach to problem-solving and project execution. This facilitates innovation and fosters a broader understanding of the task at hand. The collaborative efforts within cross-age teams bring about a dual benefit, notably an upswing in team members' overall well-being and the triumphant realization of project objectives. The diverse pool of ideas, skills, and experiences contributes to a more comprehensive and creative problem-solving process, ultimately leading to the successful completion of projects. Furthermore, it is worth noting that some team members highly value the support and contributions made by their younger colleagues and interns. Mentoring, knowledge exchange, and teamwork among team members of varying age groups are mutually beneficial. Younger colleagues often infuse a sense of vitality, enthusiasm, and a fresh perspective, while their older counterparts bring invaluable wisdom and experience. This reciprocal relationship within cross-age teams enriches the learning environment and augments the collaborative spirit. Recognizing the significance of effective cross-generational collaboration highlights that diversity in age and perspectives is a valuable asset in the workplace.

4) Management plays a critical role in ensuring a safe work environment and adherence to regulations within the production plant. This involves implementing and maintaining safety measures while also ensuring compliance with relevant legislation. Additionally, management should invest in training and development programs to equip staff with the necessary skills to adapt to technological advancements in the industrial setting. Transparent communication is emphasized, with management expected to effectively convey corporate goals, changes, and expectations to ensure alignment across all levels of the organization.

On the other hand, employees are tasked with enhancing efficiency and productivity within the manufacturing operation. This includes optimizing operations, minimizing waste, and actively contributing innovative ideas to drive success. Proactive problem-solving is encouraged, with employees empowered to take initiative and

assist in the organization's growth. While there's overall satisfaction with existing communication and collaboration, there's a recognized need for deeper discussions within divisions to enhance awareness of new policies and rules. There's also a desire for improved communication standards within teams and across divisions, along with a push for more efficient workflows, leveraging the technological proficiency and innovative insights of younger staff members. However, challenges with online systems, particularly related to technical expertise, highlight the importance of continuous learning and upskilling to navigate the evolving digital landscape effectively.

5) Different backgrounds bring with them a variety of viewpoints and experiences. This variety can lead to more creative problem-solving, new ideas, and a larger spectrum of solutions. Team members from various backgrounds frequently have diverse skill sets. This provides for a more diverse range of talents within the team, ensuring that varied jobs and obstacles are efficiently addressed. Cultural differences can be a part of background diversity (Azam, 2003). Understanding and accepting other cultural viewpoints may improve communication, minimize misunderstandings, and promote a more inclusive and productive workplace. Teams may encounter a wide range of events and changes. Individuals with varied backgrounds frequently contribute a variety of adaptive abilities, helping the team to more efficiently navigate through problems. Diverse thinking fosters innovation (Mohammadi, 2017). A diverse workforce is more likely to create innovative ideas and solutions, stretching the boundaries of traditional thinking. Teams with people from varied backgrounds are better suited to comprehend and manage global marketplaces in an increasingly linked world. This is especially critical for businesses with a global presence.

The team's composition provides a rich tapestry of skills, experiences, and backgrounds that collectively contribute to our effectiveness. Described as efficient and dependable, each team member brings experience. This diversity extends beyond professional backgrounds, encompassing a variety of skills that collectively enhance problem-solving capabilities and creativity. One noteworthy aspect of our team dynamics is the intergenerational mix within some teams. Including younger and older members creates a dynamic blend of experiences and perspectives. This amalgamation fosters a unique collaborative environment where the energy and fresh insights of younger members complement their older counterparts' seasoned wisdom and experience. Such diversity enriches our team discussions and reflects the evolving nature of the professional landscape, where cross-generational collaboration is increasingly recognized as a valuable asset. The team is a microcosm of the broader professional world, embodying the connection that arises from diverse backgrounds and age groups. This dynamic interplay of skills and perspectives positions us well to navigate the complexities of our work, fostering innovation and resilience in the face of diverse challenges.

6) In organized brainstorming sessions focused on education, Simoneaux (2013) emphasizes that such sessions can reveal varying training needs among employees, some of which are influenced by generational differences. Being open-minded is crucial for successful intergenerational communication. It is inappropriate to assume that all Millennials are tech-savvy while Baby Boomers are not. Rather than viewing a new generation as a threat, Baby Boomers could see it as an opportunity to gain fresh ideas from younger colleagues (Bowen, 2011). In the workplace, individuals of all generations should acknowledge and appreciate each other as unique individuals (Murphy & Raines, 2007). Nelson (2009) argues that understanding each other's personalities is essential for effective communication, reducing miscommunication

and leveraging each other's skills. Wood & Stephanie (2005) propose using the Generation United approach to bridge generational gaps, involving four phases: recognizing one's mistakes, older generations mentoring younger ones, younger generations acknowledging their roles, and each generation valuing their differences for personal development opportunities.

According to this perspective, staying focused in the present, building a better future, and learning from the past require embracing the distinctiveness between generations. Despite efforts, the differences between generations are inherent, so adapting management styles to incorporate diverse motivational approaches and respecting each generation's values is essential (Houlihan & Anne, 2007). Communication challenges are a prominent concern in the complex dynamics of organizational landscapes. These challenges, stemming from age gaps, divergent work styles, and varying communication methods, manifest in misunderstandings and heightened sensitivity among team members. The intricate interplay of these factors creates a nuanced environment where effective communication becomes challenging, impacting task efficiency and team collaboration. Recognizing the implications of these challenges, beyond task efficiency, is crucial. They can affect overall team dynamics, hindering collaboration and preventing the realization of the full potential of diverse perspectives. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic, multifaceted approach that acknowledges the complexity of communication dynamics in the workplace, dissecting root causes and implementing interventions to foster a communication-rich environment for organizational success.

7) Management plays a pivotal role in leading the manufacturing team by providing clear direction, setting goals, and ensuring everyone is aligned towards a common objective. Effective management contributes to increased staff productivity by improving workflows, optimizing resource utilization, and adhering to best practices in manufacturing operations. Creating a motivating work culture, acknowledging achievements, and addressing concerns are also crucial aspects of effective management, fostering a more engaged and satisfied workforce. Additionally, management is responsible for establishing efficient communication channels within the production team to prevent misunderstandings, align team members, and keep everyone informed about organizational updates and changes. Moreover, management plays a key role in identifying the skills needed by the manufacturing team and providing opportunities for skill development and training to ensure the workforce is equipped to excel in their roles.

In the current management landscape, there's a noticeable gap in fostering collaboration between staff and technicians within the organization. Specific strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing synergy between these two essential components of the workforce are lacking, impacting the efficiency and cohesion of collaborative efforts. Similarly, formal strategies addressing communication issues arising from generational differences have been insufficient. Acknowledging these issues is essential, but there's untapped potential in developing structured strategies that recognize workforce diversity and leverage it to enhance communication and collaboration. Strategic interventions, such as establishing formal strategies to promote understanding and facilitate dialogue between generations, can unlock the full potential of the workforce, fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and efficiency.

8) While diversity may offer several benefits to a firm, it is also necessary to be aware of the dangers and obstacles that may occur as a result of varied origins. Communication techniques, linguistic competence, and nonverbal signs may differ

depending on one's cultural background. Misunderstandings might emerge, impairing good group communication (Spak, 2013). Cultural variations can cause misunderstandings of purpose or meaning. There is a possibility of subgroups emerging in heterogeneous groupings based on shared backgrounds. This might lead to cliques, diminishing overall team cohesiveness and collaboration. Individuals from various backgrounds may be more or less comfortable with change (Yu, 2005). If new methods or ideas are not adequately communicated and executed, they may meet opposition, hurting overall team relations. Unconscious biases based on cultural, gender, or other disparities may exist in individuals (Kannan, 2017). These biases can have an impact on collective decision-making, cooperation, and performance assessments. Developing a sense of camaraderie and collaboration in different groups can be difficult, especially if there are substantial cultural or language hurdles that prevent the formation of strong interpersonal ties. Conflict resolution may be more difficult in a diverse group owing to cultural variations in conflict resolution approaches. Some cultures favor direct confrontation, whilst others prefer indirect or non-confrontational methods.

The experiential landscape of collaborating with team members spanning different age groups unfolds as a nuanced journey marked by positivity and inherent challenges. The positive aspects are evident in the diverse perspectives and insights contributed by team members of varying ages. However, this diversity also introduces the potential for miscommunications, requiring a thoughtful approach to navigating the intricacies of intergenerational collaboration. The challenges inherent in working with different age groups manifest in variations in work styles and communication approaches among team members. While enriching the collaborative environment, these differences can also pose hurdles that necessitate active management. The need for ongoing discussion and compromise becomes paramount in mitigating these challenges, fostering an environment where each team member feels heard and understood. Recognizing the delicate balance required to harness the benefits of diversity while addressing potential challenges, regular meetings are organized to foster collaboration within diverse teams deliberately. These meetings serve as a platform for open dialogue, allowing team members to share their perspectives, align on common goals, and collectively address emerging issues. This proactive approach to communication and collaboration acknowledges the inherent complexities of working with diverse age groups. It underscores the importance of continuous efforts to ensure a harmonious and productive team dynamic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

With the passage of time, many young people are beginning to learn numerous vital jobs in industries, particularly at the staff level. Meanwhile, key technical roles in the sector are dominated by professionals with decades of expertise. The big age gap between technicians and staff makes it more difficult since understanding each other demands particular tactics and communication. The distinct qualities of each generation add to the complexities of relationships.

This study sheds light on the generation gap problem that exists at firm XYZ. The researcher used a qualitative technique to study the viewpoints of each stakeholder, beginning with technicians and ending with management. According to the findings of the interviews, the wider the age gap between staff and technicians, the more difficult the communication techniques are. Not only that, but a person's level of maturity and experience impact how they interact and collaborate in a team. The management team is aware that this issue is widespread at firm XYZ. Because there are fewer of them, the management team wants to begin giving

seminar counseling at the staff level.

As the management team sets out on this project, they understand that a sophisticated strategy is required, one that takes into account the distinctive qualities of every generation. The seminars are intended to serve as a forum for staff members to openly express their experiences and thoughts in addition to serving as a means of disseminating technical information. The objective of this interactive forum is to promote a collaborative attitude that cuts across generational barriers and to break down prejudices in order to develop a culture of mutual understanding. Firm XYZ aims to provide a work environment that recognizes the contributions of all generations and capitalizes on the combined assets of a varied workforce by providing investments in the professional development of its employees and fostering meaningful connections.

The choice to use seminar counselling as a means of addressing the generation gap is, all things considered, an advanced tactic that is in line with the changing demands of the contemporary workplace. It shows a dedication to flexibility, ongoing education, and fostering a collaborative culture—all critical for business XYZ's long-term success in a constantly changing sector. The process of closing the gap between generations is not only a difficulty but also a chance for development, creativity, and the creation of an environment at work where all employees, regardless of age, can succeed and contribute to the overall success of the company.

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