



Ingredients for Transforming from Wild to a Workable Multigenerational Team!!!An Appraisal Study

Ranjana Magdalene

ranjanamagdalene.r@gmail.com

Tata Consultancy Services, Coimbatore, Tamil
Nadu

Dr. K Chitra

profkchitra@gmail.com

Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts and Sciences for
Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to exhibit the study of the work variables influenced by multigenerational diversity and to understand how the cohorts would respond to them. An initial independent examination of the characteristics of the generation cohorts and work variables was done. A detailed listing of work variables followed by classifying them on the basis of their impact was done. The work variables are classified as Organizational, Group and Individual variables, which are highly influenced by multigenerational diversity. This paper intends to bring out the study done on the group category of work variables, which have affected the manner in which the team cohorts had reacted thereby inducing a sequel of events. The researcher collected data from secondary sources and through interviews among IT Project managers of large, medium and small projects and arrived at the identification of the work variables that are influenced by multigenerational diversity.

Keywords: Multigenerational Diversity, Group Variables, Generational Cohorts, Innovative Ideas, Constraints

INTRODUCTION

With the IT revolution being the giant unicorn sweeping the modern generation, the urge to achieve success faster and finer has become the order of the day. Good that such an order keeps today's workforce on its toes. The wave of technological advances has helped to catalyze such expansions and ease off the modern-day work pressures. The Information Technology Industry has created such a vibrant impact on almost all companies that, to visualize a world without IT is almost a bad dream.

IT projects of today rule every business domain to such extent that every industry feels itself challenged if the IT transformation does not occur from within. Heavy digitization and digital transformation projects across various domains, be it Hi Tech, Utilities, Retail, Energy or Manufacturing have found themselves swept by the digital transformation wave. Thanks to Business 4.0 that all organizations across business domains have embraced IT in a wholesome manner.

This has given rise to the inception of large IT projects where such projects and their organizations are almost finding it hard to digest the work in hand. With the intent to see more profits in their bags, IT organizations have extended their expertise beyond boundaries. Projects are being undertaken in whirls and thanks to human and technology enablers, most of them reach the finishing line in style.

However, there are some which do not. Leave alone reaching the finishing line, some of the IT projects even fail to understand and comprehend the initial objectives lined for the project. Such failures are hard to be justified and mitigated as they can lead to financial death of big organizations for whom the project is undertaken.

Problem Statement

As mentioned above, IT projects of today lack the foresight of where these projects should drive the organization that is leveraging their project. Limited foresight of the serviced organization's vision is further multiplied when such projects land on hands that are not properly skilled or equipped to deliver. To add on to this the project outcomes are highly at risk when such teams are impacted by inherent forces such generational and gender factors.

It is imperative that organizations have to consider the fundamental and basic human resource component more than technology and automation as the fluidity and unpredictability in this area affects a project performance to a large impact. With more than four generations working in a project and the heaviness of automation and technology pressing hard, managers need to study the diversity impacts in a project and devise techniques to handle effectively. The question in hand is how the new wave of digital transformation and disruption handle the events triggered by multigenerational diversity.

Diversity in Workplace is an issue that keeps rumbling like a dormant volcano and that organizations need to be alert enough and deploy strategies to effectively utilize the power of workplace diversity.

Understanding in the impacts of Diversity on organizational outcomes is very pivotal for sustainability. Some proponents have

maintained that diversity improves organizational effectiveness. However there are some who believe that if diversity is not managed properly can even lead to organizational fatality. Although greater heterogeneity may lead to lower consensus and higher conflicts, they could enhance problem solving at the same time.

Workplaces are becoming increasingly age diverse, and the incidence of older employees reporting to younger managers is increasing. One of the biggest challenges for organizations in the coming years will be the retirement of older workers and their replacement with the younger workers. Hence organizations have to adopt effective strategies to recruit, mentor and retain the younger generation entering the work space. (Jean M. Twenge, 2010)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the work on generations has been based on observation rather than large-scale empirical findings, and very little academic research has been done on the characteristics and expectations of generations and their implications for the workplace. Although significant attention has been given to cultural and gender diversity, the literature has produced scant evidence regarding the impact of age diversity on HRM policy and practices.

Jeta, Fanta and Reidl, Rene have stated that human factors are very critical for project success especially for Information Systems and Information Technology Literature. (Riedl, 2012). They had scientifically investigated that the human factors in a typical IT Team are influenced by power, organizational politics etc.

Harvey, Micahel (Michael Harvey, 9 September 2005), have found that for organizations to scale up delivery, they need to virtualize their teams as well. They have circled down to four critical capitals which are motivation centric and focused around human, social, political and cross cultural.

(Abyad, 2017) has detailed on the effect of Globalization on Project Management which is based on Political, cultural and economic factors which are influenced by intercultural communications, sociability etc which are based on generational diversity issues.

Generation Analysis & Literature

As mentioned above, today's workforce is a combination of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z. Each generation comes to work place with a definite set of values and attitudes and carry a varied level of job satisfaction. Added to this, each generation has its own expectations, priorities and communication mechanisms which affect project performance right from planning to closure. Project Managers have to utilize the talents and skills of each generation to get optimal performance on the team. (Janice Celeste, 2015)

The term "generation" has been defined in many ways but the underlying premise is that every generation shares a common outlook and is heavily influenced by common life experiences. Each generation is also motivated by a varied mix of life values and work ethics (Waxer, 2009). Previous studies have found that Gen X'ers most often find themselves as leaders and thus accepting a refusal from fellow team members would be difficult. While Gen Y'ers most often are self and work oriented, hierarchy does not impact them at all. Similarly, Gen X prioritize Job security and Money while Gen Y and Gen Z want to make a difference for themselves and not for organizations as such. Studies also indicate that Gen X'ers tend to change their careers during their lifetime and pursue higher studies for a longer period of time. (Burmeister) while Xers contend for professional growth and acclaim. With such varied perceptions each cohort carries, it is imperative to assess and analyze how to manage each of them in a diversity work place.

According to data from United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, for the next 10 years, the current largest workforce group (baby Boomers) will gradually walk off the stage; generation X and generation Y will become the dominant workforce groups (US Department of Labor, 2008).

A generational gap will exist, the generations will be going through a learning curve stage on how to better collaborate with each other. Unlike previous generational integration of the somewhat obedient Silent Generation versus the workaholic Baby-Boomer generation versus much the independent Generation X, this round of changes will be an integration of the highly cynical and pessimistic Generation X versus the high self-esteemed and positive Generation Y and tech based Gen Z.

FINDING COMMON GROUND AND CHALLENGES

Recent findings indicate that a large number of IT projects fail and have peaking schedule and cost overruns. Although the project failures trigger off from any of the project process areas, the underlying reason for failure stems from the manner in which the project workforce responds to such failure causing project climatic conditions. As more than four generations occupy today's work place, the challenge of managing and sustaining the project team so as to achieve project success is getting complex. Managers have to respond in multiple ways for the same issue impacting the same project area because the manner in which each generation cohort responds is different. The technique adopted to manage one generation cohort cannot be used for another and hence project managers need to be coping with varied methods to ensure the success of a project.

Savvy organizations are using this multi-generational workforce as a competitive advantage in terms of offering flexibility, establishing a well-rounded group of associates with a variety of experience and skill sets, and providing new avenues for problem-solving. They're finding that interaction among the generations encourages innovative approaches and perspectives to improve productivity, safety and morale. However, some companies are being challenged by a multigenerational workforce. There's concern over tension among the generations because of their different experiences, values, expectations, work habits and communication styles.

There is an increasing demand in the workforce today to add multigenerational diversity to their workplace policies. HR, talent management & Project Management professionals must include the effects multiple generations have in the workplace to their diversity and inclusion initiatives. Multigenerational workplaces create unique challenges and opportunities for employers who leverage each generation's talents and strengths to benefit their organization's bottom lines.

EXPLORING & CLASSIFYING VARIABLES

Based on the literature review, the variables were identified which were having a direct impact on the Generation Cohorts and a direct influence on their response behavior. At a broad level, the variables can be thought of having individual and group dimensions.

Further down the variables grouped under Individual dimensions will have an impact on the manner in which the individual would respond. On similar lines the variables under group dimensions would have an impact on the way the team would respond due to influences from the variables under the Individual dimensions.

Further the dimensional variables can be further classified based on the influence it has both on the individual and the team. A combination of variables from both individual and group dimensions can influence the overall team response which is very important for project managers to detect and decide on further course of actions.

The variables governing the individual dimension will be vertically directed towards the style in which the individual responds to leadership, motivation, innovation and focus on results and recognition.

The variables governed by the group dimension will be horizontally directed across the team which would cohesively enable the team to respond to organizational commitment, loyalty, group decision making and conflict resolution.

The relationship between variables will be analyzed based on which of them are highly preferred by the cohort and the degree to which they value and respond. The variables will be a top down trigger from Organizational, project and individual level of operations. Variables such as Organizational Commitment bound by loyalty and intention to quit is one such example which can play a major role in the response mechanism.

ANALYZING RESPONSE TO COHORT BEHAVIOR

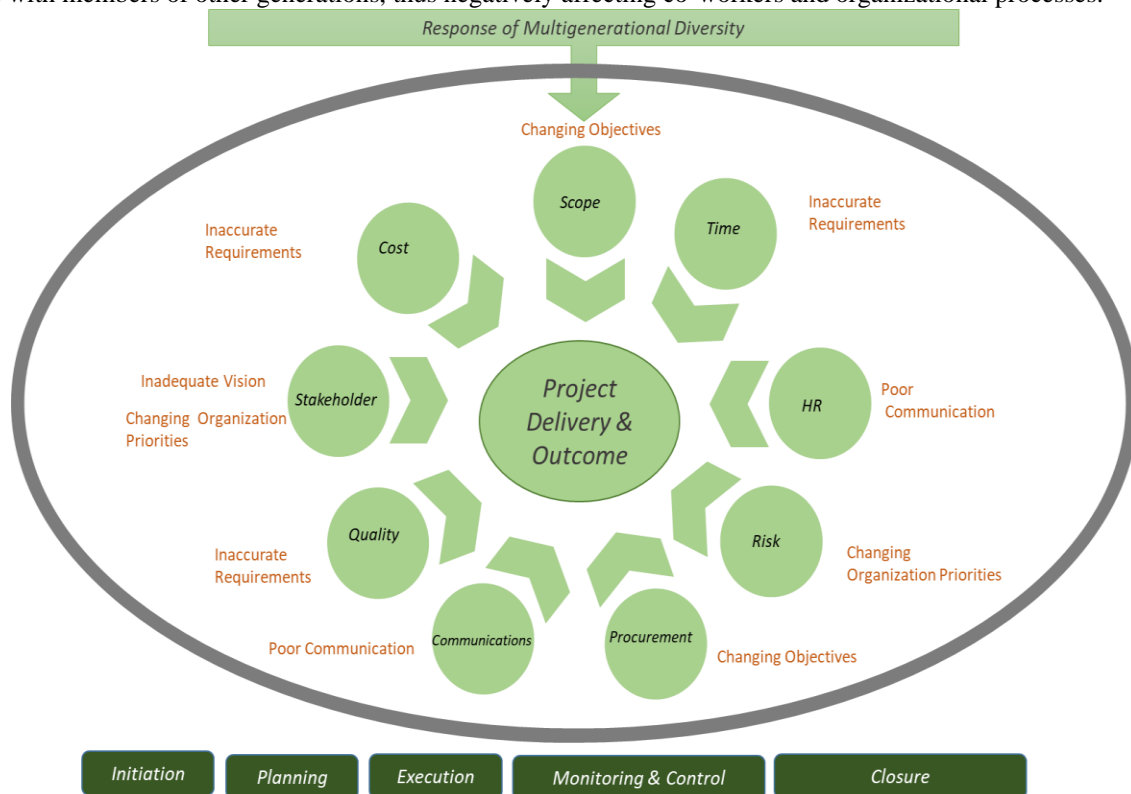
In general, each generation responds to different management styles, work environments, and motivational techniques which directly affect an employee’s overall performance. Managers are developing strategies that from a human perspective are important to identify as the strengths and abilities of the new working generation. These strategies are essential in order to attract and recruit talented individuals whose workplace behavior and social interaction is far different from any previous generation. (Jerome, 2014)

Today’s workforce is a combination of multiple generational cohorts who reflect varied behaviors and attitude towards work. With the retirement of many Baby Boomers (1946-1964), the modern workplace is changing and there is a larger influx of workers from the Gen Y and Gen Z cohort joining the already extended Gen X generation cohort. This trend is totally changing the overall workplace landscape and project climate as well. Hence there is a need for modern day project managers to very carefully understand the individual and group behavioral dimensions of the team and derive innovative approaches to deal with multigenerational diversity and related issues.

Organizations have approached diversity issues from a strategic view point but generational diversity which is of a different form, has to be tackled from bottom-up approach rather than from a top down approach.

MANAGING INFLUENCES& COHORT RESPONSE

This generational shift is reshaping organizational profiles to adapt to the different demographics entering the business world. There are research findings which predict that cohort’s characteristics and responses may complicate, and potentially disrupt, workplace interactions with members of other generations, thus negatively affecting co-workers and organizational processes.



This results in conflicts which in turn stimulates uncertainty, aggression and friction in a common work place which in turn result in reduced productivity, innovation.

As the above schematic depicts, each of the project areas are impacted by factors or agents that cause failures which live through the project life cycle starting from Initiation to closure.

CONCLUSION

The road ahead is very clear that companies will have to take a serious look into their human resource landscape which is currently rolled in by people from multi generations. Leaders who effectively manage their age-diverse teams enjoy numerous advantages and give their organizations a competitive edge.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abyad, A. (2017). Globalization Challenges in Project Management. *Middle East Journal of Business*, 12(4):10-19.
- [2] Burmeister, M. .. (n.d.). "It's all about me" becomes a crossgenerational conversation . 63(5), 92-93.
- [3] Janice Celeste. (2015, September 16). How to Manage a Multigenerational Workforce and Not Go Totally Insane. *Successful Black Parenting* , pp. 1-7.
- [4] Jean M. Twenge, S. M. (2010). Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing. *Journal of Management*, 35(5), 1117-1142.
- [5] Jerome, S. W. (2014). Millennials in the Workforce: Gen Y Workplace Strategies for the Next Century. *e-Journal of Social & Behavioural Research in Business*, 1-12.
- [6] Michael Harvey, M. M. (9 September 2005). Global virtual teams: a human resource capital architecture. *Int. J. of Human Resource Management* 16, 1583–1599.
- [7] Riedl, F. T. (2012, June 1). Determinants of Information Systems and Information Technology Project Team. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, pp. 455-482.
- [8] Sungjoo Choi, H. G. (Feb 2010). Managing Diversity in U.S. Federal Agencies: Effects of Diversity and Diversity Management on Employee Perceptions of Organizational Performance. *Public Administration Review* , 110-112.
- [9] Waxer, C. (2009). Clash of the generations. *Computer World* , 43(7), 16-20.
- [10] Wen, Z. (n.d.). SELECTING COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKPLACE.