

The Role of Generational Diversity in Enhancing Employee Competency Development at Malaysia Public Universities: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Generational diversity within organisations, particularly in higher education, is increasingly recognised as a critical factor influencing the development of employee competencies. Public universities in Malaysia face a pressing challenge: effectively managing this diversity to foster an inclusive and productive working environment. This study investigates the role of generational diversity in enhancing employee competencies and workplace dynamics in academic settings. By examining the interactions among different generations and the impact of their varying values and approaches on team collaboration and effectiveness, the research provides insights into how generational diversity shapes teaching, learning, and organisational performance. A systematic literature review of high-impact journal publications was conducted to explore the relationship between generational diversity and competency development. The findings reveal that generational diversity enriches perspectives in teaching and learning processes, while also influencing workplace dynamics and employee collaboration. Distinct generational approaches and beliefs are shown to drive innovation and improve educational outcomes. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of generationally sensitive management practices in enhancing job satisfaction and productivity. The results suggest that educational institutions should implement strategies to integrate generational diversity effectively, leveraging its potential to enhance competency development. Understanding and valuing generational differences are essential for creating an inclusive and competitive work environment, particularly in the context of Malaysian technical universities.

Keywords: Generational Diversity, Competency Development, Malaysia Public Universities

Introduction

Generational diversity in the workplace is an increasingly significant issue, particularly in public institutions such as universities. The varying values, behaviors, and work styles of different generations can create tension, especially when there is a misalignment with the existing organizational culture. For instance, Generation Y (millennials), often described as highly innovative and technology-driven, may clash with Generation X, which tends to favor a more traditional, independent approach to work. Such differences can lead to conflicts that affect both social dynamics and professional interactions within teams. Torsello (2019) highlights the importance of recognizing these generational differences and tailoring motivational strategies to address the unique needs of Generation Y. These employees, who often seek greater job satisfaction and work-life balance, are at risk of leaving their roles if their motivations are not properly understood and supported. Research by Jayasekara and Weerasinghe (2018) further reinforces this idea, suggesting that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors play a crucial role in influencing employees' intentions to stay or leave their jobs. However, the relationship between motivation and turnover is not static; it varies across different age groups, requiring a nuanced approach to retention strategies.

Despite growing research on generational differences, there remains a limited understanding of how these differences impact employee performance and overall organizational effectiveness, especially in academic settings. The diverse generational perspectives particularly between millennials and older workers can lead to a range of challenges, from communication issues to contrasting expectations of leadership and work processes. Siregar, Santati and Meitisari (2023) suggest that failing to recognize and accommodate generational diversity may lead to workplace conflicts that diminish productivity and hinder collaboration. These generational gaps can affect not only the internal dynamics of teams but also the organizational culture and overall performance. In academic settings, where teamwork and collaboration are essential, such issues can undermine both the quality of work and the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. Therefore, there is an urgent need for organizations, particularly in the education sector, to adopt management practices that are sensitive to generational diversity in order to foster a harmonious and productive work environment.

This study aims to explore the role of generational diversity in enhancing employee competencies at public institutions in Malaysia, with a particular focus on the academic sector. The research seeks to understand how generational differences influence teamwork, collaboration, and the overall success of academic environments. By examining how the varying values, communication styles, and work approaches of different generations impact organizational performance, this research will provide valuable insights for higher education institutions. The key research questions include investigating how intergenerational interactions affect team success and how understanding these differences can improve workplace dynamics. The findings from this study will offer strategic guidance to institutions on how to leverage generational diversity as a strength, creating a more inclusive and effective work environment. Ultimately, the research aims to equip universities with the tools to enhance employee competency development, fostering a workplace that is not only productive but also better prepared to address the challenges of the modern workforce.

Methodology

To investigate the effect that generational diversity plays in the development of employee competencies at public institutions in Malaysia, this study utilised a systematic literature review methodology throughout its investigation. The first thing that needed to be done was to formulate the study questions, with the primary focus being on how different generations of employees influence the development of relevant competencies. Utilising academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, the research was carried out with the help of pertinent keywords such as "generational diversity" and "competency development."

Next, the selection of studies was carried out according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were established. The selection process consisted of selecting studies that focused on generational diversity in the workplace and competency development within the framework of education. Studies that were broad or irrelevant were not considered for inclusion. The data from the studies that were chosen were analyzed according to important topics such as the involvement of different generations in the process of competency development, the difficulties associated with intergenerational interaction, and the adequate management strategies.

The researchers were responsible for carrying out the validation process to guarantee the quality of the studies that were chosen. This technique resulted in the production of a complete data synthesis, which offered applicable practical management advice and provided in-depth insights into how generational diversity increases staff competency at public institutions in Malaysia. The approach of systematic literature review made it possible to conduct an in-depth and open-minded investigation into the role that generational diversity plays in the process of competency development. This investigation laid a strong foundation for the formulation of practical suggestions in the field of human resource management.

Literature Review

Human resource management faces a considerable challenge when it comes to the topic of generational diversity in the workplace. The fact that employees from different generations, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, are working together is contributing to the growing prevalence of this problem. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact that generational diversity plays in boosting employee competency development. Specifically, the study focuses on the distinct characteristics, values, and expectations of different generations of employees, as well as the consequences these differences have for human resource management and employee development. In Malaysia's public universities, the presence of a diverse generational makeup plays a significant part in the enhancement of employee competency development through the use of individualised human resource strategies (Eddyka Firdaus et al., 2024; Norliah Kudus et al. 2024; Eddyka Firdaus et al., 2023). Organisations can establish a collaborative atmosphere that minimises vulnerabilities and maximises strengths when they have a thorough understanding of the distinctive features and beliefs of each generation, such as Baby Boomers and Millennials. The awareness of different generations leads to increased productivity and better succession planning, while the diversity of ideas leads to the development of innovative solutions. Additionally, psychological empowerment varies from generation to generation, which affects both performance and engagement. Organisations can effectively promote employee competency development by acknowledging and capitalising on the strengths of each

generation (Toro et al., 2019; K Norliah et al., 2017; Baran & Kłos, 2014; Walt & Plessis, 201, Mahadi Abu Hassan et al., 2024).

Definition of Generational Diversity

The existence of individuals belonging to different age groups inside an organisation, each of whom has a unique set of life experiences, values, and expectations for their work, is referred to as generational diversity. According to Ghasempour et al. (2021), a generation is comprised of individuals who were born within a comparable time frame and who share major life experiences that impact their views and behaviours in the workplace. In addition, Cismaru and Iunius (2019) assert that the life experiences that each generation goes through contribute to the formation of their features. Some obstacles arise while trying to meet the expectations and requirements of each generation of workers due to the diversity of generations.

The Importance of Competency Development among Multi-Generational Workers

The term "competency development" refers to the efforts that are made to improve the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of employees to fulfil the requirements of their jobs. Teaching and learning, research, and management are all included in the scope of employee competency development in the setting of technical institutions in Malaysia. It is necessary to modify competency development programs to accommodate the fact that various generations have distinct work styles and expectations. Baby Boomers, for example, tend to favour more traditional ways of education, whilst Generation Y tends to favour more technology-oriented approaches toward education. It is also necessary for employers to emphasize career advancement and employee engagement inside the organisation, particularly through the implementation of an appropriate High-Performance Work System (HPWS) implementation strategy. By taking into account the aspects that are relevant to each generation's motivation, future managers need to have an understanding of the most effective ways to manage employees who come from diverse generations. The effective management of generational diversity can help organisations enhance their productivity, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and ensure that they can keep brilliant individuals who come from a variety of generational backgrounds (Ismail & Bahron, 2020).

Challenges in Managing Generational Diversity

When it comes to managing generational diversity, one of the most significant issues is the friction and conflict that exists between different generations. It has been suggested by Sobrino-De Toro et al. (2019) that this conflict can be avoided if management is responsive to the requirements and approaches to work that are associated with each generation. In the context of technical universities in Malaysia, the generational gap may result in misconceptions in management and the execution of tasks, which would ultimately impair the development of employee competency. Therefore, to alleviate this tension, a strategy that is more inclusive is required. In addition, organisations have a responsibility to improve their efficiency in managing generational diversity, which includes the modification of human resource strategies to take into account disparities across generations. According to Savanevičienė and Jakimukb (2016), this procedure entails the creation of efficient communication tools, the development of progressive methods for human resource management, and the implementation of management practices that aim to improve productivity and decrease intergenerational conflict.

The Role of Generational Diversity in Enhancing Competency Development

Generational diversity has the potential to enhance competency development by facilitating the exchange of information across different generations. Older generations can impart their knowledge and wisdom to younger generations, while newer generations can provide older generations with information regarding emerging technology and techniques of labour. Consequently, this has the potential to hasten the development of competencies and enhance the efficiency of work at technical universities in Malaysia. Furthermore, multigenerational diversity has the potential to propel creativity. According to Torsello (2019), differences in how different generations approach their work can serve as a source of inspiration for new ideas and contribute to the creativity of organisations. In the context of Malaysian technical institutes, this indicates that the presence of a diverse generational student body can prove beneficial in facilitating the introduction of novel educational and administrative strategies. In general, the integration of different generations into the workforce at technical universities in Malaysia is a significant factor in the enhancement of employee competency growth. Inclusive methods and the utilization of personalised strategies have the potential to minimise conflict and boost productivity, even though there are obstacles associated with managing generational differences. Collaboration between generations is necessary for effective competency development. This collaboration should involve each age contributing to the accomplishment of organisational goals.

Theories of Generational Diversity

In the context of an organisation or community, the term "generational diversity" refers to the phenomenon that occurs when people of varied ages and origins, who have different experiences, values, and expectations, join together. Increasing life expectancy and rapid technical breakthroughs are two factors that are contributing to the escalation of this issue in the modern era. To gain a better knowledge of how different generations interact with one another, collaborate, and contribute to a variety of social, cultural, and economic situations, theories of generational diversity provide essential tools. Kessler and Pozen (2016) developed the Life Cycle Theory, which emphasises that individual differences are more influenced by life phases than by generations. According to this theory, younger persons are more daring and innovative, whereas older individuals are more conservative. Van Twist & Newcombe (2021) The Strauss-Howe Theory proposes that every generation goes through four cyclical phases, which are referred to as "High," "Awakening," "Unravelling," and "Crisis." These periods are responsible for shaping the collective experiences of the generation.

According to Al-Lawati (2019), the Generation Gap Theory sheds light on how rapid technical and social developments result in variations in the values and lifestyles of different generations. These differences not only present difficulties in communication but also present chances for creative expression. This viewpoint is supported by Mannheim's Theory, which establishes that generations are formed by significant historical events that contribute to the formation of their social identity. This, in turn, makes interactions between generations more dynamic and complicated (Popescu, 2019). A useful foundation for comprehending the social interactions that exist between people of varying ages is provided by ideas that focus on generational variety. Even though each theory takes a distinct approach, they all acknowledge that elements such as age, life experiences, and socio-historical context play important roles in the formation of interactions across different generations. In contemporary organisational and societal situations, having a grasp of these theories can assist in the reduction of

generational conflicts and the maximisation of the potential for collaboration and innovation that can be gained via the integration of cultural variety across generations.

Discussion of Research Findings

According to the results of the research, the presence of different generations in the workplace has a direct influence on the development of employee competencies at public institutions in Malaysia, particularly technical institutes. Different generations carry with them distinct historical backgrounds, experiences, and values, all of which have an impact on how they approach their work, as well as their capacity to learn new things and put them into practice. For instance, Baby Boomers are more attracted to conventional learning methods, which involve face-to-face contact, direct talks, and more formal arrangements. On the other hand, members of Generations Y and Z, who were born during the technological period, are more receptive to the utilisation of digital technology and distant learning methodologies as a means to expedite the development of their skills. On account of these disparities in learning styles, competency development strategies need to be more dynamic and flexible. These strategies should be adapted to the requirements of each generation to guarantee that the training that is offered is effective.

This individualised approach is essential because employees of different generations learn and take in knowledge in a variety of different directions. Since Baby Boomers were raised in a society that placed great importance on formal and traditional education, it is possible that they would choose to participate in workshops or seminars that are held in person (Ismail and Bahron, 2020). They value the presence of structure and authority in the workplace, and they are better at ease when they are provided with a consistent and well-organised work schedule. On the other hand, members of Generations Y and Z are more likely to favour learning methods that are flexible, rapid, and interactive. Some examples of these methods are project-based learning and online platforms. Technologies such as e-learning, webinars, and mobile learning apps are the ones that they like to use since they are more in line with their digital lifestyle (K Norlia et al., 2018; Shahrulanuar Mohamed et al., 2017; K Norlia et al., 2017). In light of this, technical universities in Malaysia need to offer a diverse range of educational and training opportunities to cater to the various requirements of the aforementioned generations.

The study also discovered that conflict between different generations can be a barrier to the development of competencies in an efficient manner. According to Sobrino-De Toro et al. (2019), disagreements frequently arise not only between elder generations such as Baby Boomers and younger employees, but also between different generations in terms of their values, expectations, and attitudes towards their work. Older generations may have the perception that younger employees lack discipline or are less appreciative of experience and formal structures, while younger employees may have the perception that older generations are less innovative or averse to change. If these tensions are not appropriately managed, they have the potential to impede the collaboration and communication that are necessary for the successful development of competencies. When dealing with disputes of this nature, it is important to employ management strategies that are more sensitive and inclusive, and that take into account the different values and expectations that exist between different generations.

Taking this into consideration, the management of human resources at technical universities in Malaysia needs to play a significant part in the management of generational diversity. A lack of sensitivity to these differences might result in a lack of collaboration between employees of different generations, which in turn decreases the effectiveness of competency development programs that have been established. One strategy is to include members of every generation in the process of planning and carrying out training to guarantee that every individual's opinion is taken into consideration and heard. The implementation of this strategy will facilitate the development of trust and mutual respect among employees of varying generations, which will ultimately lead to an increase in productivity and overall organisational performance.

Additionally, approaches to training that make use of collaboration and interaction might help bridge the age gap. Through the implementation of training sessions that include personnel from a variety of generations, technical universities in Malaysia can capitalise on the qualities that are possessed by each generation. Younger generations, namely Generations Y and Z, can introduce new technology tools and more inventive ways, while Baby Boomers, with their considerable experience, can provide both practical information and profound insights. During this exchange, members of both generations have the opportunity to learn and develop together, which will further enrich the process of competency development inside the organisation.

The research further demonstrates that generational diversity not only poses difficulties but also provides a significant opportunity for the development of new ideas and the acquisition of new skills inside an organisation. The synergy between different generations can be a source of inspiration for novel and inventive ideas, which are necessary for enhancing the competitiveness of an organisation. When employees of different generations work together to solve a problem, they bring a variety of perspectives to the table, which ultimately leads to solutions that are more thought-provoking and efficient. Technical universities in Malaysia can capitalise on the benefits of this diversity to improve workplace productivity and innovation (Torsello, 2019). This can be accomplished by fostering collaboration across different generations.

In summary, the research illustrates the fact that the presence of a diverse generational student body at technical universities in Malaysia has the potential to significantly enhance the development of staff competencies and facilitate innovation. The only way to accomplish this, however, is via management that is both efficient and inclusive, one that recognises the differences between generations and makes use of the specific capabilities that each generation possesses. Generational diversity has the potential to not only assist technical colleges in Malaysia in accomplishing their higher competency development goals but also to establish a more welcoming and pleasant working environment for all employees, provided that the appropriate techniques are used.

Conclusion

The generational diversity that exists within organisations, particularly in the setting of technical universities, is an essential component that has the potential to affect the development of staff competencies. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how several generations, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials),

and Generation Z, contribute to the enhancement of skills and knowledge in the workplace. The viewpoints, attitudes, and techniques that each generation brings to the workplace, learning, and social interaction are all distinct from one another. If they are managed well, these disparities have the potential to enhance the dynamism of the organisation; but they can also produce difficulties, particularly in terms of communication and collaboration amongst personnel of different generations. The presence of different generations in the workforce at Malaysia's public universities has an effect not only on the day-to-day operations of the workplace but also on the development of employees' competencies. When it comes to teaching and learning, older generations tend to place higher importance on conventional methods, whilst younger generations prefer to emphasise the use of technology and innovation in their work processes. To fulfil the requirements and expectations of each generation, educational institutions in Malaysia need to build competency development plans that are designed to satisfy those requirements. In addition, the research demonstrates that workers' levels of job satisfaction and productivity can be improved through the implementation of generational diversity management strategies. Organisational leaders have a responsibility to be aware of the distinctions between generations and to create an environment that is welcoming to all generations and allows for peaceful interaction between them. Diversity of generations has the potential to not only improve competency development but also to stimulate innovation and competitiveness at the university level, provided that the appropriate policies are implemented. Because of this, generational diversity is a strategic asset that may be utilised in the pursuit of organisational greatness.

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