# Factors Affecting Multigenerational Diversity in IT Sectors: An Interview Based Framework

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## Abstract

*This Research paper aims to evaluate approaches towards multi-generational diversity management in Information Technology industry. In this research unstructured interview method is followed to acquire in-depth information about organizations' progress and approach in understanding multi-generational diversity management.*

*Diversity across generations become the standard in organizations throughout the world and this research concentrates on that in the landscape of the Information Technology sector. Generational disparities and priorities in the workplace are learnt here along with the factors which affect Multigenerational Diversity in the organizations associated with Information Technology industry.*

*This research is based upon primary data from Information Technology Industry only. Data from other Industries can vary from the conclusion in this research. Furthermore, the number of interviewees is not voluminous in nature, so the conclusions and impact can vary depending on the circumstances if the process is applied on a larger scale.*

*This research suggests the identifying factors in managing Multigenerational workforce in Information Technology industry. This research paper suggests updated criteria for Human Resource professionals in motivating Multigenerational workforce by understanding their changing priorities.*

**Keywords:** *Multigenerational Workforce, Information Technology, Diversity Management, Generational disparities, Human Resource.*

## Introduction

The term - 'Generation' naturally denotes a universal group of individuals. Generational cohorts are distinct groups of persons who were born at the same period of time and progressed almost at the same pace (Salahuddin, 2010). Cohorts are a notion that transcends national and cultural borders (Dwyer and Azevedo, 2016; Kowske *et al.,* 2016).

A multigenerational workforce consists of employees from several generations. At present, most of the organizations across the world consist of the Baby-Boomer (Year of birth: 1946 - 1964), Generation X/ Gen X (Year of birth: 1965 - 1979), Millennial/ Generation Y/ Gen Y (Year of birth: 1980 - 1995), and Generation Z/ Gen Z (Year of birth: 1996 onwards) (Gibson *et al.*, 2010; Kaifi *et al*., 2012). So, it is imminent for the organizations to plan teams of individuals from five to six

different generations at the same time in the coming years (Hartman and McCambridge, 2011; Benson and Brown, 2017). Based on how well the transition is handled, this shift in age demographics offers businesses with both obstacles and opportunity.

In the Information Technology industry, constantly pushing the frontiers of technology necessitates a continual give and take between learning from the past and going ahead into the arena of unknown. A multigenerational workforce provides the supply of the elements for constant disruptive innovation by creating productive environment between the the possible future and the bygone past, thus preventing the organization from being caught in only one paradigm. The parameters such as cultural aspects, attitudes towards tech-native mentality, work quantity, work quality, cultural framework, entrepreneurial nature, emotional intelligence, multitasking abilities, learning with purpose, work-life balance, initiatives, adaptability and flexibility are the main drivers of the difference in priorities among multigenerational workforce (Stevens, 2010; Mathieu and Zajac, 2015; Kidwell, 2003) ranging from shortly to be superannuated Baby Boomers to fresh entrants of Gen Z employees in Information Technology MNCs across the globe. Regardless of employee values, disparities or barriers, IT workplaces of the 21$^{st}$ century may be a happy and creative environment for employees of all the generations (Bott *et al*., 2020), if the business has proper employee awareness and enlightened managers make it happen (Dois *et al*., 2019; Gladwell *et al*., 2020). As solutions are growing increasingly complicated and linked in the Information Technology businesses, individuals of varied ages are able to develop a larger, and more diverse, pool of ideas leading in a more robust results that function for a broader set of clients (Zeeshan and Irma, 2012; McGuire *et al*., 2007). Their distinct generational views guarantee that their organization are able to satisfy wide demands and preferences in product features, user interfaces, and accessibility upgrades (Ghosh and Chaudhuri, 2009). So, the organizations that acknowledge and appreciate the distinctions between each generational cohort will have a better chance of effectively motivating and communicating with their employees (Singh, 2020; Meriac *et al.,* 2010).

**Literature Review**

Age is an essential category which is social in nature and within the interactions among human beings in general, and it is one of the key societal elements influencing the assignment of responsibilities such as those on an organizational hierarchy, as well as the giving of authority and prestige in conventional organizations with pyramid structures (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Dencker *et al.,* 2017). Age provides a rich perspective that represents society as a whole and is still an influence in the workplace. The social agreement between the workforce and the organization is shifting dramatically, and the talent functionalities grab it not as a hindrance but as a basket full of opportunities. Skills and knowledge, regardless of generation, are critical denominators for a successful transition into the Talent Market (Wong *et al*., 2008). To reflect the changing requirements of the twenty-first-century information technology world, the notion of diversity and inclusion in the workplace is shifting. Policies, employee training, and performance management procedures must be consistent enough in order to a diverse yet highly effective workforce (Rajani,

2012). Companies which want to maximize the advantages of a diverse workforce need to confirm that every procedure is consistent with Diversity and Inclusion policies (Sinha *et al*., 1994; Zetlin, 1992). It is important to note here that although not every person of a given generation shares everything, overwhelming majorities share many of their generation's qualities, characteristics, and beliefs. Members of all generations are likely to encounter major events throughout their developing adolescent years that have a lasting influence on their attitude on life and work (Busch *et al*., 2008). Consequently, these generational differences have a significant importance.

The core values for Baby Boomers are Discipline, Conformity, Diligence, Patience, Sociability, Loyalty, Compliance, Traditions and Long-term commitment (Coleman, 1998), which differs from the core values of Gen X which are Personal Growth, Self-Reliance, Pragmatic, Process Oriented, and Avoidance of micro management (Foot and Stoffman, 2008). Moving towards the Gen Y, it has been found that the core values for Gen Y are Work Involvement, Team Oriented, Informality, Self-Confidence, Street Smart Attitude, and Well adaptation to change (Harris, 2005), which varies from the core values of Gen Z which mostly comprises of Equal Opportunities, Personal Gratification, Transformational, Equal Rights, Entrepreneurial, Casual work environment, High expectations from the organization, Customization of career options (Tolbzie, 2008).

Work Ethics vary significantly from generations to generations across the workforce (Tulgan, 2014). Baby Boomers put importance on Dedication, Dependence and Conflict avoidance (Twenge *et al*., 2010) whereas Quality and Collaboration are important factors for Gen X employees (Smits *et al.,* 2011). Gen Y professionals put reliance on Self-Reliant attitude, Work-Life Balance, Job sharing, and Output focused mindset (Krahn and Galambos, 2014) whereas Gen Z employees prefer a workplace with the ambience of Ambition, Multi-Tasking, Community Involvement, Self-Development, and Flexi Timing (Lyons et al., 2012).

The information technology industry has grown to be one of the most sophisticated in the world. This industry has boosted productivity more than any other industry or economic element in this 21st century, regardless of nation, developing or developed, and thus proves itself a primary engine of global economic growth. Economies of scale and insatiable demand from both consumers and businesses as well as the economies of scale are part and parcel of this rapidly growing sector (Sethi and King, 1994; Croteau and Bergeron, 2001). An Information Technology organization's leadership style can put huge positive or negative impact on the employees working in the organization (Cennamo and Gardner, 2019) in this digital era. Baby Boomers are familiar with Conservative leadership style which is Hierarchical and top down in nature (Johnson, 2001). On the other hand, Gen X employees prefer Humane and Democratic style of leadership (Krahn and Galambos, 2014). Gen Y professionals like Collaborative style of Leadership which Fast Paced as well as Fact Based (Tolbzie, 2008) and Gen Z puts importance on Diversity and Inclusion to be implemented in Leadership Style (Smola and Sutton, 2014).

When it comes to priorities in the job and requirement from the Information Technology MNCs, then Baby Boomers put importance on Recognition and respect for their experience, they put huge importance on Job stability and have strong work ethics (Smits *et al.,* 2011). Gen X employees put importance on opportunity for their meaningful contribution, team approach, Clear Job

Descriptions, Cultural fitment, and Peer Loyalty (Johnson, 2001). Gen Y prefers Dynamism, Forward thinking, Employee Engagement, Big picture view of work with respect to mission and vision of the organization (Twenge *et al*., 2010) whereas Purpose for life, Challenging job, Friendly work environment, learning and development opportunity are the main priorities for the Gen Z employees (Lub *et al*., 2012).

Considering the Communication style, Baby Boomers prefer Formal communication with High-power distance as per Hofstede Insights (Lyons et al., 2012). Gen X prefers Diplomatic communication style and prefers an avoidance of manipulative languages (Lub *et al*., 2012). Whereas Informal and Straightforward communication approach are preferred by Gen Y as well as Gen Z professionals (Parry and Urwin, 2011).

Generational differences have an impact on many aspects of work, especially recruitment, team cohesion, change management, employee motivation, and maintaining and growing productivity. Forward-thinking businesses modify their strategy to comprehend the employees' beliefs and attitudes in a better way, while also leveraging various technology enabled processes to evaluate and develop new, more significant insights about individuals' requirements and aspirations (Nichols *et al.,* 2015) in an organizational context. Personalization and customization are the keys here, and gone are the days of one-size-fits-all approach (Lancaster and Stillman, 2017). This customization helps workforce to optimize contribution at the workplace, find purpose for their jobs, and, ultimately, align themselves with the organization's goal in a much better way (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Gentry *et al*., 2011). The importance of meeting the divergent needs and priorities of multigenerational workforce is more than ever (Cennamo and Gardner, 2019) nowadays based on collaboration among the workforce, developmental opportunities, and growth opportunities.

Organizations realize the significance of agility in the face of constant disruption, which re-signifies the necessity of change management, which ultimately offers the organizations and its leadership to think one step ahead to inculcate collaboration among multigenerational workforce (Hatfield, 2002). Organizations have been transformed to a social system where the agenda is achieving the goals with the help of a collective effort and employee effectiveness (Korpiun, 2020) and there is a paradigm shift from ruling to governing. Human Resource professionals must have to implement creative solutions to enhance the workplace environment inside businesses in order to create increased employee loyalty and assist in the development of corporate cultures (Hill, 2002). There have been continuous yet substantial modifications in the role of the workforce in the business ecosystem over the past few years because of modified commitment and engagement of the employees and to effectively deal with this situation, it is of utmost importance for the HR practitioners to understand the difference in priorities from multigenerational workforce (De Meuse and Mlodzik, 2020). They must ensure that the work environment is managed in such a way that members of each generation of the company can be functional from a universal perspective.

**Objectives of the study**

Different organizations follow different set of approaches for managing employees spanning across different generations like Baby-Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z. This research's objective is the evaluation of multiple approaches identified by the organizations towards multi-generational diversity management in Information Technology industry.

**Methodology**

In this research unstructured informal interview method followed by transcription and analysis is followed to acquire in-depth information about organizations' progress and approach in understanding multi-generational diversity management. A total of 46 Human Resource practitioners are interviewed to get in depth information about multi-generational diversity management in their respective organizations.
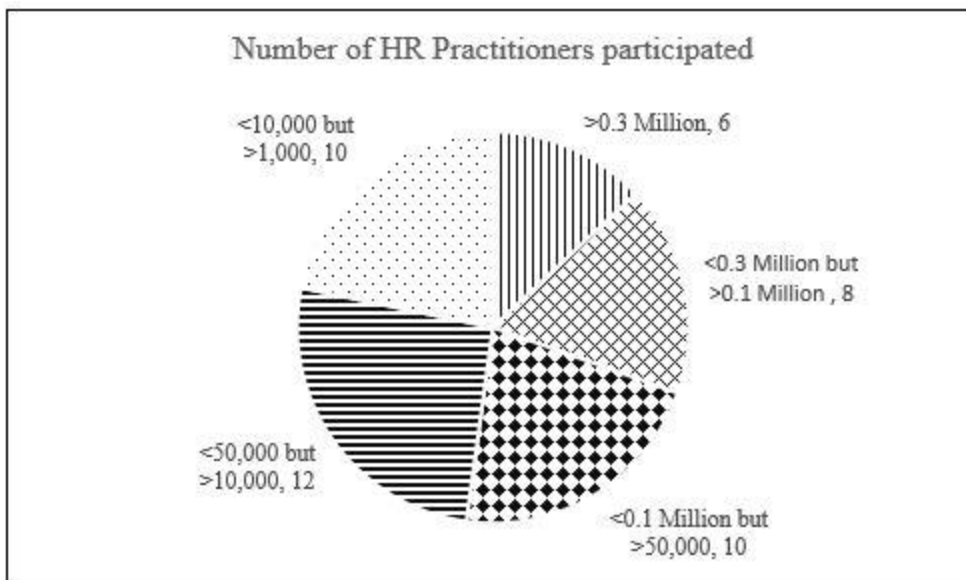


**Figure 1: No. of HR Practitioners Participated**

Among them, 6 are working in the organizations where employee strength is more than 0.3 million, 8 are working in the organizations where employee strength is more than 0.1 million but less than 0.3 million, 10 are working in the 10 different organizations where employee strength is more than 50,000 but less than 0.1 million, 12 are working in the 12 different organizations where employee strength is more than 10,000 but less than 50,000 and the rest 10 are working in the 10 different organizations where employee strength is more than 1,000 but less than 10,000. Startups or next-gen IT organizations are not considered in this research as the number of Baby Boomers or Gen X is not significant there, to reduce the chance of biasedness. To make the whole interview process unbiased, 23 male Human Resource practitioners are interviewed and 23 female Human Resource practitioners are interviewed, thus a balanced gender ratio is maintained.

**Findings/ Results:**

Based upon the primary research and data collected from 46 Human Resource professionals of various IT organizations, it has been found that the prime positive factors identified by the organizations considered in this research for multi-generational diversity management in IT organizations are –

- Providing value to all of the generations on Employee Value Proposition
- Proper feedback mechanism for improving employee experience
- Compliance in diverse working styles and needs

The negative factors identified by the organizations considered in this research for multi-generational diversity management among the IT professionals are –

- Stereotypes and Prejudice
- Un-clarification of the expectations to the workforce
- Non-inclusive hiring process

**Analysis and Discussion**

A series of life experiences, relationships, and events in the life of a human being define he/she is as human. In this respect, age is a determinant of variations in actions and behaviors. It is critical to invest in your employees regardless of their age group and the success here begins with accepting generational differences, from the elderly to the younger, and all in between. When each individual can put their best self forward without feeling the need to comply, a multigenerational workforce is genuinely strong. In reality, this involves accepting and embracing generational differences for the greater benefit. Engaging all the individuals of diverse ages at the office increases the dynamic character and enhances the company's growth trajectory more understanding to outside opinions. In the presence of the multi-generational workforce, organizations are able to reap the benefits of multiple perspectives while dealing with real time business problems. It leads to improved problem-solving abilities which in turn creates an excellent opportunities of peer learning. Thus, there is an option of smooth transfer of knowledge and thus the organization can build an effective relationship among the various generations who work for that organization. Respecting the diverse limits of each team member while keeping the organization's own set of values, boundaries, and ground rules is probably the most difficult accomplishment that Information Technology firms confront as a confluence of personnel of different generations as identified by the interviewees. A highly skilled workforce which is multi-generational in nature is naturally agile in nature. As a firm with various generations of employees are used to account for people with diverse viewpoints and experiences in the case of companies with multigenerational workforce, they are of course better positioned in a much better way to respond to business changes effectively. Due to lengthy working hours, improved educational system and financial constraints, four generations work alongside each other in the Information Technology workplace across the world. Considering the factor of EVP, according to the interviewed HR professionals, cultural advantages help to keep the staff of different generations and from different countries pleased with their jobs in IT MNCs. The idea here is to provide a highly prized working atmosphere supported by a great Employee Value Proposition

and a variety of incentives to appeal to a wide range of employees. EVPs with policies and programs for health, work/life balance, paid leave off, professional development, career progression, community outreach opportunities, various financial programs, and social activities may cater to a broader range of ages.

One of the most important components in managing the multigenerational workforce is to promote honest input from workers of all ages, which indicates the pulse of the multigenerational workforce as indicated by the dialogue with the questioned HR practitioners. HR personnel generally gather feedback through surveys, performance reviews, one-on-ones, or other innovative techniques in most of the IT businesses investigated for primary research here as they have well equipped digital media for collecting feedback. With the aid of these feedback systems, it is possible to determine how engaged the workforce is, how they are doing, and, lastly, what has to be addressed in order to effectively manage the multigenerational workforce. Considering the IT professionals, typically Gen Xers prefer to receive feedback once or twice a year, but Gen Z workers prefer rapid, bite-sized review on performance. A tailored approach not only makes the employees happy, but it also makes it simpler to provide effective yet meaningful feedback.

The interviewed HR practitioners identified that a One-size-fits-all approach is not applicable in addressing how workers of any age may perform best, and so permitting varied methods can better adapt to the needs of IT firms, irrespective of its size. Information Technology organizations must adapt to their workers' demands not only for recruitment but also for retention of the best personnel in the Information Technology landscape. Previously, there may have been a generational component in the inclination for virtual work, according to the questioned Human Resource practitioners, but the COVID-19 outbreak has altered that. The physical workplace has evolved a lot since then. Now in the digital world, the workplace is considered as a place where the employees collaborate with each other in lieu of a place where the work is performed. A wide spectrum of workers had welcomed the flexibility of remote work, and because the majority of IT businesses had the infrastructure to transition to a virtual work environment quickly, employers have embraced this reality in order to accommodate varied working styles and demands.

One of the widespread misconceptions is that older people are not comfortable with technology, and because technology is an integral aspect of every IT firm, this bias multiplies in this scenario, thus negatively affecting the multigenerational management process. Here comes the negativity of stereotypes, which is probably the worst component when dealing with the issues of managing a multigenerational workforce. Whether they are true or incorrect, they are not doing anybody any favors, as all 46 HR experts contacted for the study unanimously agreed. To fully benefit from the multigenerational workforce, any preconceptions or age - based stereotyping should be avoided at all costs.

Employee responsibility and opportunity for skill enhancement are hampered when leaders' expectations are unclear. Because improving one's abilities in the IT business is a constant process be it a Baby Boomer or Gen X or Gen Y or Gen Z, this form of unclear direction results in impeding the intergenerational management process, as stated by majority of the Human Resource experts who are interviewed for this research.

As highlighted by the questioned Human Resource practitioners, not hiring employees from all generations leads to generational stagnancy instead of generational diversity and impedes intergenerational diversity management. There are probable variances in preferred communication styles and tone interpretation among generations, and most companies exploit this by picking a specific one rather than all. As a result, the demands of one generation are met while the needs of the others are not, causing a stumbling block in intergenerational diversity management.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

A generation is more of a systematic approach toward a meaningful objective than just a mental perspective. The diverse makeup of Information Technology firms varies as they expand, and then this transformation results in a shift in the culture of the company. The IT workforce of today is truly intergenerational. This creates problems up to a certain extent because of differences in communication styles, work habits, and employer expectations, but it also presents substantial possibilities since various generations bring diverse experiences and talents and the potential of these possibilities has the capability to outperform the hindrances created by multigenerational workforce. These possibilities have a long-term positive impact if the associated difficulties can be handled effectively with due diligence. Understanding what employees actually desire, enabling flexibility, and creating chances for continual development are all critical components of harnessing the power of a Multigenerational Information Technology Workforce. As a result, Information Technology businesses must explore new HR tools and regulations, should use reverse mentorship, and must rethink growth and development as this particular industry is a very fast changing industry. In this context, the employers' main task is to constantly detect and adapt to such developments. Information Technology organizations must understand which essential skills and activities positively impact work effectiveness of Multigenerational workforce, and then communicate them effectively to their people, and subsequently assess and reward performance accordingly.

Because of increasingly varied workforce with generational cohorts and in most of the time demographical cohorts too, revisiting the leadership capabilities is the need of the hour as mentioned by most of the HR professionals participated in the interview and organizations should consider giving training to its leadership position holders to improve their communication style and constructive feedback mechanism deemed fit the demands of each generational cohort. Organizational training and coaching can provide managers with the additional skills needed to effectively address the varied problems of a multigenerational workforce. Organizational Flexibility became vibrant because of continuous shift of consumers' demand in the landscape of the competitive Information technology market. So, empowerment of the employees, cross cultural training can bring significant positive changes with increased organizational learning for developing a culture of promise and faith. Multigenerational workforce can help in decentralization and multiplicity of the opinion which helps the organization to be away from group thinking. Professionals from every generation can attain their greatest potential when they feel supported, respected, and valued. It fosters a working climate in which members of the team

communicate, propose new ideas, and remain dedicated to the business's objective, resulting in increased contribution and improved economic value. So, nurturing an inclusive work environment, creating continuous learning opportunities, clarity of expectations, and working on EVP are the keys in managing a multigenerational IT workforce successfully.

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