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RE-THINKING EFFECTS OF A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF AGE DIVERSITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

In The World Over, Innumerable Macro And Micro Facets Have Ushered In Unmatched Margins Of Multigenerational Cohorts In Organizations, Raising Degrees Of Age Diversity While Burgeoning The Short To Long-Term Effects Realized From Varying Demographic Dividends. The Phenomenon Of Age Diversity Has Further Ushered In Unprecedented Opportunities In Human History While Propelling Working Relationships Between Persons Of Varying Ages At A Level Never Seen Before In The World. Organizations Are Therefore Required To Adjust And Learn How To Deal Effectively With Older Workers As Well As Learn How To Deal With Younger Employees Whose Value Systems Sharply Differ. In The World Today, Highly Competent Staff Are Invaluable And Increasingly A Competitive Resource For Organizational Performance. Inability To Provide Adequate And Competent Human Resources Breeds Unsustainable Growth For Organizations. As Such, Organizations Have Become Greatly Reliant On Highly Performing Human Resources, A Void Hard To Fill With The Very Impending Retirement Of Baby Boomers Especially In Work Organizations Whose Career Paths Are Oblivious To The Changing Labor Demographics. Therefore, The Purpose Of This Paper Was To Unravel How Age Diversity Relates With Organizational Performance From A Multigenerational Perspective. A Total Of 50 Articles Were Reviewed And Analyzed. We Organized The Results In A Conceptual Model With Separate Categories Of Age Diversity And Its Influence on organizational Performance. For Each Category, We Identified Future Areas Of Research. We Conclude With A Discussion Of Limitations And Practical Implications.

Keywords: Multigenerational Effects, Age Diversity, Organizational Performance

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Introduction

The population growth rate in the developed economies is drastically declining while bulging the ageism of its working population. This has subsequently shrunk its working population leaving it with a huge residue of mainly older workers. Conversely, Africa is not ageing at the same rate as the most developed economies although the demographic challenges will be experienced in Africa much faster than in the developed economies because the latter recognized and planned for these challenges 50 years ago (Douglass, 2016). The African continent has the youngest population in the world with over 70% of its population under the age of 30 (UBOS, 2021.), however this significant number of young people could be an opportunity and a challenge for sustainable growth of firms in the Sub Saharan region. Nonetheless, non-manipulated differences across generational cohorts continue to inhibit optimum labor participation in work organizations which subsequently mitigates sustainable economic growth across the globe (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2020). Surprisingly a significant percentage of work organizations in Africa continue to remain silent on how the young generational cohorts (Generation X and Generation Y) can be empowered and mentored to fully reach their work potential (Heynes and Kerr, 2018) before the retirement of the older working category (baby boomers). Therefore, the call for an international response cannot be overemphasized as every country will be affected significantly by the wavering population structure and the only plausible solution is to cooperate and review sustainable and equitable strategies at both international and country levels. This will avert repeated and self destructive strategies in the guise of human capital development (Mahon & Millar, 2014). And as such, the phenomenon of age diversity has continued to usher in unprecedented opportunities in the human history propelling relationships between persons of varying ages at

a level never seen before in the world (Bloom et al., 2016).

Age diversity can be defined as the degree to which an institution is heterogeneous in relation to the age of its workers (Seong & Hong, 2018). Managing employees of different generational cohorts is becoming a contemporary human resource challenge that calls for an empirical revisit (Joniaková & Blštáková, 2015). Notably, the three key generational cohorts constitute of different employee work abilities and their alignment to the varying worldly perceptions (Indiatsy & K'Obonyo, 2017). Therefore, as times emerge, so have management practices and organizational forms evolved with new generations of employees with different expectations. In the world today, highly competent staff are invaluable and increasingly a needed resource for organizational performance (Bieling et al., 2015). And thus, inability to provide adequate and competent human resources breeds unsustainable growth for organizations (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2013). And as such, organizations have become greatly reliant on highly performing human resources. In view of these findings, emerges critical empirical questions of how work organizations especially in the developing economies can tap into the work competencies of differently aged employees and leverage from age diversity while subsequently enhancing performance of organizations (UN, 2016). From a global perspective, the major concern regarding age diversity revolves around knowledge and skills loss from the experienced baby boomers who will soon retire and the apparent lack of replacements to fill the void (Cole & McCullough, 2012). Therefore, in the context of a young and vulnerable working population, designing robust human resource policies on promotion, development and retention of employees of all ages remains of paramount significance if organizational performance in the contemporary times is to be enhanced (Kunze et al., 2009).

Literature Review

Quite often contemporary organizations are decried for the use of rudimentary human resource practices which continue to hamper organizational innovations and service quality. Therefore, this paper borrows from the resource based theory to establish the fact that age diversity alone cannot sufficiently determine organizational performance in the absence of other factors like innovation, service quality and inter-organizational systems, which are key constructs for organizational performance (Mafini,2015). The resource based theory propounded by Barney (1991) postulates that resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable create a firm's vantage position which leads to outstanding performance over time (Pintado & Bianchi, 2020). The Resource based theorist further maintains that organizations have various resources including human, financial, and physical resources although the most critical of all these are the human resources (Qader et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, it is important to clarify that by human resources, we imply employee skills, knowledge, attitudes, and other characteristics (SKAOs) that are relevant for creating competitive advantage. This theory predicts that organizations that optimally utilize the rare, valuable, non-substitutable and non-imitable human resources attain superior performance in all its operations over their competing firms.

Multigenerational workforce can be defined as people with different age groups working in the same organization (Walt & Plessis, 2010). According to Martin and Ottemann (2016), the notable generational cohorts that constitute today's workforce include the baby boomers (born between 1946-1964), generation X (born between 1966-1976) and Generation Y (born between 1977-1994).Accordingly, managers in contemporary organizations are challenged with harmonizing the multigenerational workforce influence in the work place because different

generational cohorts portray different perspectives and characteristics towards achieving organizational short and long term objectives (Alferjany & Alias, 2020). D'Amato and Herzfeld (2008) observe that older workers (baby boomers) exhibit more commitment to their employers, unlike their younger counterparts (generation X and Y). And as such, contrary to the baby boomers, the generation X employees place less importance on job security and rather seek better opportunities for personal development. In addition, the younger generation is more independent and likely to take charge of their career paths than their old counterparts (Poisat et al., 2018). Conversely, the baby boomers have respect for authority and hierarchy at the workplace while generation X employees are more self-reliant and independent with no consideration for authority, additionally, the millennials prefer flexibility and comfortably seek clarity concerning administrative decisions whenever they perceive them as unreasonable, sharply different from the two aforementioned groups (Al-Asfour & Al-Asfour,2014). It is therefore important for future studies to empirically interrogate the influence of these multigenerational employees on an organization's performance.

Having an age diverse workforce does not necessarily imply having a multigenerational workforce because an organization could be having employees of varying ages but when in actual sense they fall within one or two generational cohorts and therefore, appreciating the concept of age diversity from a multigenerational perspective resonates well at its conceptualization stage. The trends in the developed countries as regards the age concept differ significantly from the developing countries (Tarique & Schuler, 2010).While the population growth in the developed economies is expected to reduce, the burgeoning population in the developing world is drastically increasing the working population category to a residue of only the young people (Schuler et al., 2011).

Therefore, the major challenge for management lies in how to attract, select, promote, develop and retain workers of three generational cohorts namely; baby boomers, Generation X and the Generation Y. The problem of retiring baby boomers has become a real demographic time bomb in the world today because minimal strides have been made to capture their knowledge and skills for use when they exit (Layzell et al., 2009). It has been projected that there will be an acute shortage of crucial work skills (knowledge, skills and abilities) from the retired baby boomers by the year 2030 unless respective organizations utilize these skills sets from the impending retirees before they exit (Bloom et al., 2016). Ultimately, organizations that uphold age diversity usher in an inclusive age diversity climate often expressed in form of an age diverse workforce with well-developed age diversity management practices (Rabl et al., 2014). However, weak age diversity practices do mirror an incompetent organization's mission in complying with age discrimination legislations. More often than not, do organizations uphold age diversity but rather, comply with employment laws in order to avoid lawsuits (Mahon & Millar, 2014). Visible age diversity management practices mirror an organization's respect for diversity since its sole purpose is to create a climate wherein employees of all ages are respected accordingly so as to reach their full potential regardless of their differences like the age factor (Vranakova, 2021). Consistent with the diversity climate literature, an organization that is age diverse in its workforce will become more attractive to talented applicants during routine recruitment exercises because of the perceived non-discriminatory tendencies in the organization (Urbancova, 2020). This subsequently has a bearing on the organizational performance because talented employees usher in the organization high employee productivity. And as such, in order, to attract and retain employees of all ages, appraisal, compensation policies and practices should equally be aligned to the

phenomenon of age diversity management (Bieling et al., 2015).

Odhiambo et al, (2018) reiterate that findings from both developed and developing economies suggest the emphatic need for older and younger generational cohorts coming together to form coherent and viable corporate cultures. These values inherent in the different age groups do complement individual employees while sequentially drawing better firm performance. And as such, an age diverse environment yields and creates better working relationships and harnesses social cohesion for all (Chung et al., 2020). This is consistent with many studies like (Silva et al., 2014; Sousa et al., 2019) who argue that a heterogeneous age workforce propels innovations, service quality and developed inter-organizational systems which transits into better goods and services as well as increased growth of the firm. Conversely organizations that lack sensitivity to age diversity dynamics usually generate social identity conflicts which fracture work groups into undesirable cliques that consequently compromise service quality standards in work organizations (Walt & Plessis, 2010) and as such, organizations have a responsibility of developing and implementing diversity management policies that not only promote age diversity practices, but also do design visible organizational identity (Einwiller et al., 2021). More so, if the age diversity strategy is competently implemented in organizations, superior performance will be registered (Pettersson, 2017). Ultimately, if organizations can adopt appropriate age diversity policies for employees, well informed management decisions that enhance organizational performance will be made (Chukuigwe et al., 2021).

Organizational performance is defined as the ability of an organization to attain established objectives that warrant its survival and progress (Sweis & Sweis, 2020); the objectives may include but not limited to, increasing market share, retaining profits, ensuring labour stability

and retaining a competitive edge, however, organizational performance being a multifaceted concept is usually measured using various rubrics. It's worth noting that although conventional management has focused measuring organizational performance using financial parameters like; operational costs, budget performance, market shares, profit ratios and revenue collected among others, massive management flaws have been made due to the misleading knowledge about organizational transformations and continuous improvement (Chahal et al., 2016). However, this study examines organizational performance using respondents' perceptions measured mainly on three subscales; innovation, inter-organisational systems, and service quality (Chin et al., 2015; Mafini & Pooe, 2013). Accordingly, it is of critical importance that non-financial measures are rightly prioritized in the current and future empirical studies because of their overarching power in harnessing both the strategic and financial success in organizations (Taouab & Issor, 2019). It's against this backdrop that the study measures organizational performance as innovation, inter-organisational systems and service quality (Mohamed et al., 2019; Sunday, 2018).

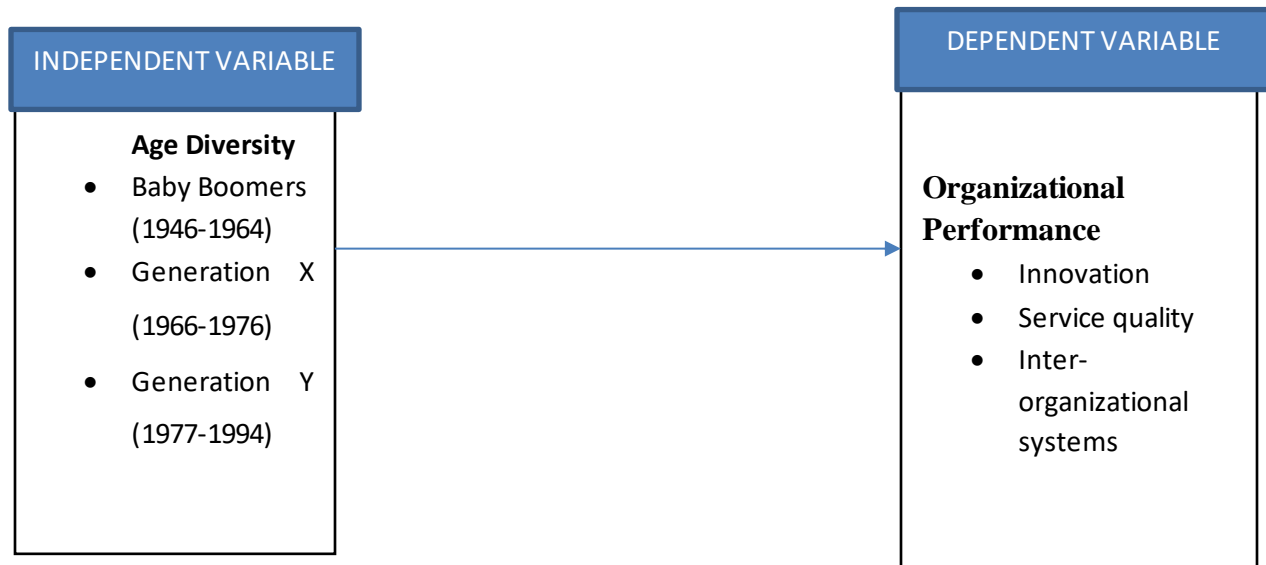
Over and above that, having an age diverse workforce is positively related to high performance in organizations where work teams are involved in complex decision making tasks (Sousa et al., 2019). Therefore, a workplace with millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers quite often offers a distinct opportunity for varied work perspectives and approaches to the highly fluid work environment of today (SHRM, 2020). And as such, studies conducted on organizational performance processes and outcomes provide a sound business case for age

diversity and thus support managers in seeking top management commitment (Gellner & Veen, 2013) as well as assist managers in macro-management of employee perceptions (Trawinski, 2018). To this end, there is still a void in empirical research as regards which diversity management perspective strengthens or weakens the impact of age diversity on organizational outcomes (Knippenberg & Schippers, 2014). The main conceptual problem focused on how the effects of having a multigenerational work force influence age diversity management practices and policies while sequentially impacting the organizational performance positively.

Methodology

This paper was based on critical review of literature focusing on key topical areas of; effects of a multigenerational work force, age diversity and organizational performance. A non-systematic review method was conducted using electronic articles on the subject of; effects of a multigenerational workforce, age diversity and organizational performance. Secondly, we conveniently and flexibly conducted databases searches mainly from Ebscohost, Emerald, University of Nairobi repository and Google Scholar because they were easily accessed by the researchers. A set of search terms such as effects of a multigenerational workforce, age diversity and organizational performance were interchangeably used in the databases. Thirdly, senior researchers namely; Prof Peter. K'Obonyo, Prof. Florence Muindi and Prof. Mercy Munjuri were contacted for some relevant articles. All together 50 readings were considered basing on their relevancy to the key thematic areas of the study.

Fig 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL



From the conceptual model above, the main proposition derived is that age diversity affects organizational performance positively. Therefore, an organization that recruits, develops and retains employees of the different age cohorts mainly; the baby boomers, generation X and generation Y is likely to experience high innovations, service quality and well developed inter-organizational systems in the organization's performance because these specific generational cohorts model an organization's productive age groups.

Findings And Analyses

Organizational managers are therefore charged with building expertise on how to handle the variations in employee attitudes in order to extract positive organizational outcomes from all the generational cohorts. Baby Boomers are seen as being willing to compromise their personal life styles for an increased professional growth in order to attain career success and financial security whereas Generation Xers focus on balancing their personal and professional lives, confirming the notion of a generation that works to live rather than one that lives to work. It is thus important to adopt a good institutional knowledge and skills management approach that allows the transition of crucial

skills from the baby boomers to the younger generational cohorts before baby boomers retire especially in work organizations whose career growth structures are rigid and limit permeations of different age groups to different seniority levels in career growth (Buelvas & Naranjo, 2019). From the preceding discussion, it's clear that recruiting, developing and retaining various generations of employees requires contemporary organizations employing robust and versatile recruitment and promotion strategies more than in the past. Therefore, in order to realize the fruition of these strategies, organizations need to relax the career growth structures or systems in order to allow multiple generational cohorts work harmoniously together in a bid to build sustainable employee synergies coupled with critical work skills and knowledge.

Conversely, having a multigenerational workforce increases miscommunications in organizations which may impede employee retention and innovation and ultimately this may affect the transition of tacit knowledge especially from the baby boomers to the younger generations (X and Y) workers (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014). And therefore, the process of appreciating generational differences among

employees and their impact on an organization's performance remains of paramount significance to human resource management research. Empirical studies conducted on multigenerational workforce posit fractured and incomplete data concerning its theoretical, conceptual and methodological background (Rossem, 2019). More still, extant studies conducted on multigenerational workforce (Dennissen et al., 2020; Heyns & Kerr, 2018) sustain that inappropriately accentuated age diversity practices in work situations have only exacerbated in group and out group prejudices with minimal attention paid to diversity management and perceived inclusivity among work groups. Further still, grouping multigenerations according to birth cohorts has also been found confounding and arbitrary in some studies because circumstances that demarcate generational cohorts differ with varying regions across the world (Singh et al., 2020). Accordingly, further empirical studies on multigenerational workforce pose a necessary avenue for further investigations to better understand the dynamics across generations and their influence on the performance of work organizations. It's critical to note that besides leveraging the purported benefits, multigenerational workforce may also pose certain challenges to organizations if they are improperly managed. Therefore, empirically testing this proposition in different work organizations will help in validating the different work values, their impact and rationale for inclusion of the multiple generational cohorts while leveraging from an improved organizational performance position (Walt & Plessis, 2010).

Conclusions

The intention of this article was to conceptualize the effects of a multigenerational workforce premising on the relationship between age diversity and organizational performance. Due to the evolving demographics in the world today, it is evident that work organizations will

inevitably operate with multi-generational workforces whose work values and impact on organizational outcomes sharply differ. While one generation will be phasing out of the labour market, a new generation will be joining with totally different work values, ethics and attitudes. And as such, only organizations that are responsive and adaptive to age diversity standards and needs will be able to enhance their service quality, innovations and inter-organizational systems and thus extract improved organizational performance. We hope that this paper will help organizational managers especially human resource managers make optimal use of the available human resources in a bid to improve their organizational performance. Our central argument is that a multigenerational workforce is a double edged sword that can enable age diversity while at the same time be used to advance superior performance especially in organizations whose career growth structures are rigid and non-permeable. However, we recommend an empirical study to test some of the assumptions contained herein. The study was anchored on only two variables namely, age diversity and organizational performance premised on a mixture of inconclusive and confounding findings, therefore future empirical findings need to enrich this study relationship with mediating and moderating variables.

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