CHALLENGES OF GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS AT ACADEMIC WORKPLACE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic world, time runs very fast and has created many generations cohorts. There is no denying fact that vivid groups of generations have been developed which have different ways of thinking and working. There are various problems faced by employees at workplace due to generational contradictions. This includes problems due to differences in thinking, work ethics, usage of digital technology. Hence, this study has been chosen which is empirical in nature. Generational differences in thinking are experienced every day at the academic workplace. The knowledge of generational contradiction at academic workplace is important but less thought of area, therefore this study has been done highlighting challenges related to generational diversity and its implications at the academic workplace. The aim of the present study is to discover the differences in each generation in selected academic institution of University of Delhi. It is found that there is a need to acknowledge generational contradictions at the workplace and various measures have been suggested in this study to bridge the generational gap. This study will help not only to understand challenges due to generational diversity at academic workplace but also will contribute to the productivity of the institution by doing an in-depth analysis. The findings will also help to pave further way and add on to the empirical literature with respect to generational diversity at workplace.

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Keywords: Generational Cohort, Bridging Generational Gap, Generation X, Millennial, Generation Z.

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Introduction

हमारा कार्यस्थल कर्मभूमि है हमारी, हमसे ही तो पहचान है इसकी,
इसका सौहार्द है मेरी जिम्मेदारीं।
उम्र–भेद हो सकता है, कार्य प्रणाली में भेद हो सकता है,
मत–भेद हो सकता है, लेकिन मन–भेद न होने दें।
चलो एकता का परिचय दें, सकारात्मक रूख अपनाएँ,
सामुहिक प्रगति की राह पर आएं।

–आरती गुप्ता (2022)

India is a country of 'unity in diversity' since historical times as people of different cast, creed, religion, languages & other dissimilarities live together in India with unity and harmony. But same 'unity in diversity' is less seen amongst employees of different generations at the workplace and this makes generational diversity a worldwide problem. Top authorities do not know exactly about how employees of different age groups respond to an organizational change for example change in technology, policies, structural changes. Generational diversity has become a global problem due to the invasion of technology and ways of handling and using the technology are different for different generation employees. Recently Covid-19 pandemic has affected adversely lives and there is a widespread variation in thinking of people of different generation employees.

Rationale of the Study

The aim of this study is to discover the differences in each generation in academic institution of University of Delhi. Generational diversity cannot be neglected & should be given a considerable thought of while framing the future policies for the staff. It is very important to research in this area in the coming years as very few research works have been done on generational cohort contradictions of academic institutions' employees. Moreover, very few already done work are impulsive in nature and no conclusion can be drawn out of those.

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Organizations Profile

Sri Aurobindo College Evening (University of Delhi) is situated in South Delhi in the serene surroundings of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Malviya Nagar. The College has completed 35 years of its formation and has been accredited with 'B+' grading by NAAC. It aims at imparting holistic education for academic excellence inculcating human values through academic and co-curricular activities. Another objective of the College is to develop Human Resources (Teaching and Administration employees) of this institution as a work force of global standards.

Statement of the Problem

A study has been conducted on Teaching and Administration employees of the College to identify various challenges derived due to generational diversity at academic workplace.

Recent Literature and Research Gap

Generational diversity means having workforce of a wide range of different ages that represents human resources of a workplace. Generational diversity is described by Zemke, Raines and Filipczak as "a group of people who share birth years, history and collective personality as a result of their defining experiences".

Michele Debczak (2019) categorizes the employees age group wise in following manner:

- Silent (born between 1925 to 1945): 70 years aged people, may not know technology, quite diligent and loyal.
- Baby boomers (born between 1946 to 1964): Diligent, loyal and technologically exposed.
- Generation X (born between 1965 to 1980): Self-sufficient & convenient with technology.
- Generation Y / millennial (born between 1981 to 1996): Smart working, quite comfortable with technology
- Later on fifth Generation Z (born between 1997-2012): Post millennials, born in technology times, IT friendly & extremely self-dependent.

Roberta Katz, S Ogilvie (2022) in their book 'Generation Z Explained, The Art of Living in a Digital Age' explained that Gen. Z knows the internet world since birth and has lots of diversity in this cohort itself. Gen. Z is exceptionally good, attentive, and bright. This young workforce is quite promising, giving a complex to the prior generations, know to solve the problems fast.

Cathrine and B. Metcalf (2017) in their article "I-Generation and their acceptance of technology" state that there may be significant diversity in generations that contribute to the acceptance of technology. The characteristics of various generations differ.

Generation Y or Millennial is the group of individuals who follows Generation X. They prefer to communicate by sms, social media and they use tablets / smart phones. They prefer online communications while messaging and face – to – face when making financial decisions.

Generation Z which is born after the Millennial, has come up very fast. Generation Z has been growing up truly with Information Technology (IT) and are quite comfortable to make use of IT.

Generation X is the group of individuals born after the Baby Boomers (BB) generation who are also known as digital immigrants & use their signature product i.e. personal computer. Baby Boomers generation people are born after WWII until about the mid-1960s. Their signature product is television & they prefer to communicate by telephone (Robertson Associates, 2013; Wikipedia; 2017b).

Augustin Prince et al (2014) in his article 'Moving beyond Age' said that there is a strong need to establish long term relations with people and it is our duty to prepare future managers in such a way that they should have crossed generational diversity barriers.

Ganesh Uma (2014) in his paper: "Gen X & Gen Y: Is co- existence possible" describes that while Generation X employees are rich in experience of long years. Generation Y employees are better equipped with technology and networking. But, apart from traditional management, Generation X need to be aligned with Generation Y to contribute to the growth & development of the organization. Generation X has to play the role of a Coach instead of a manager. Generation X and Y need to work together in harmony for the success of an organization.

Kilber Jennifer et al (2014) explained that a new generation of like-minded employees consisting of similar age group arrives every twenty years into the workforce and managers struggle to understand the new group. The organization need to be aware of the generational diversities and customize the management techniques cross generations to become successful in achieving organizational goals. The organization should understand that Generation Y sees the world differently, so the Managers need to handle generational differences.

Baldonaldo Arthur M (2013) in his article "Motivating Generation Y and Virtual Team" elaborated that Generation Y is very much a major part of the workplace. An adaptive flexible behavior needs to be developed by the seniors & subordinates to effectively motivate and manage.

Angeline Tay (2011) in his article 'Managing generational diversity at the workplace' stated that work ethics, behaviors and attitudes of three generations differ and effected by historical, cultural and social perspectives. Management in the organizations should play the role to ensure that individual from different generations perceive each other positively & amicably to avoid disharmony.

Objectives

- To examine the major problem faced by employees of different age group.
- To identify the best way to manage the employees of different age group.
- To suggest various measures that can be adopted to bridge the generational gap.

Research Methodology

The present study has been conducted using descriptive method. An e- questionnaire was designed keeping in view objectives of the study and distributed amongst the working staff of Sri Aurobindo College Evening. An MS-Excel based analysis as well as graphical analysis has been done based on responses received corresponding to each question of the questionnaire. Responses of 70 employees have been received out of the 100 population. Chi Square is used to test the hypothesis of the study.

Sample Size

The population to be surveyed in this study will be the employees of different age group on selected colleges of University of Delhi. The sample size of the research will be 100 employees of academic institutions. It will be based on the fact that the sample size is equally distributed among different generations of employees.

Data Collection

The study is an empirical work comprising of data collected from two sources:

- Primary Data is collected through a questionnaire. There would be Convenience Sampling of the academic institutions' employees from each generation.
- Secondary Data is collected through literature published in this area.

Statistical Instruments

The research instruments require a structured survey questionnaire. An MS-Excel based analysis has been done in the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

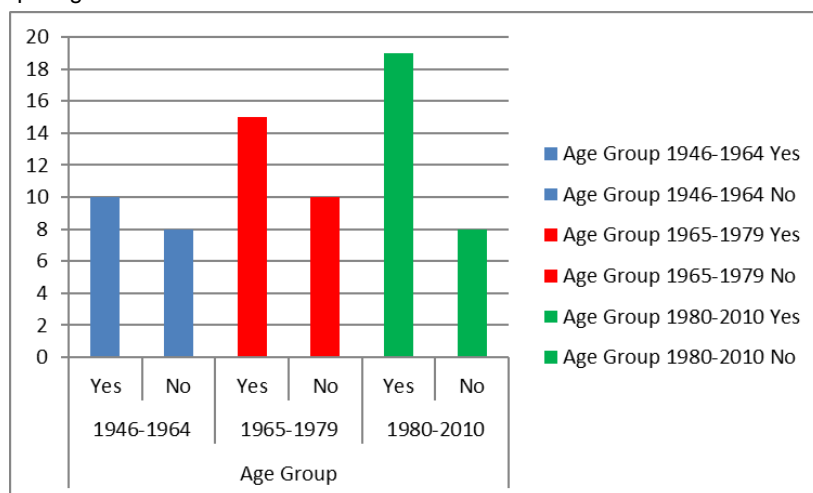- Would you like to participate in a workshop in which mostly employees senior in age are participating?

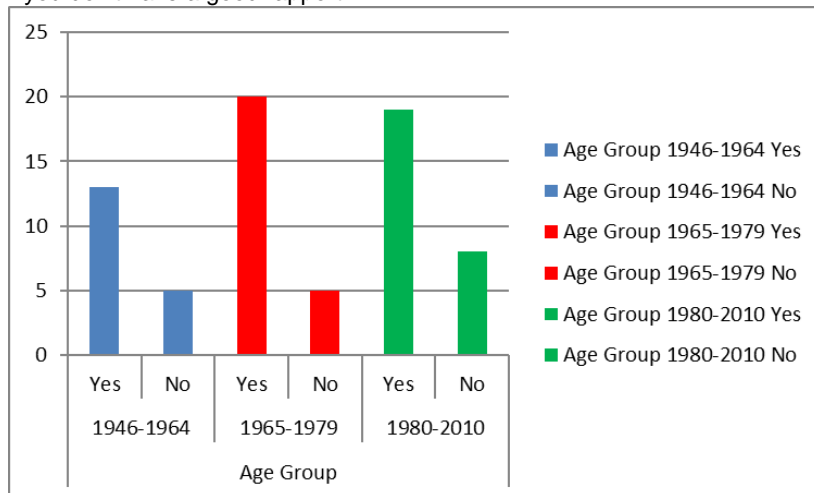**Figure 1: Bar Graph**

Interpretation

- 14% of employees (10) are interested to participate in a workshop having age diversified employees in the age group 1946-1964 whereas 11% of employees (8) did not.
- 21% of employees (15) are interested to participate in a workshop having age diversified employees in the age group 1965-1979 whereas 14% of employees (10) did not.
- 27% of employees (19) are interested to participate in a workshop having age diversified employees in the age group 1980-2010 whereas 11% of employees (8) did not.

- In case you don't know a new feature of MS-Office but a junior employee knows, will you agree to learn the same from him?
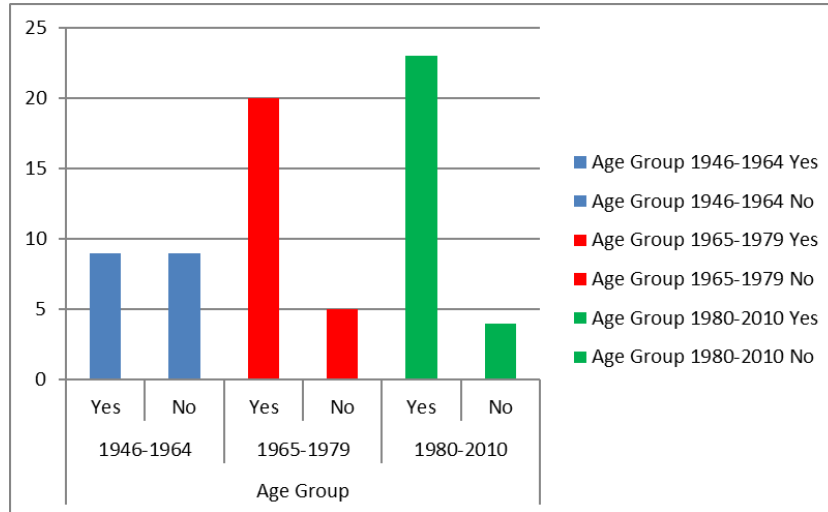
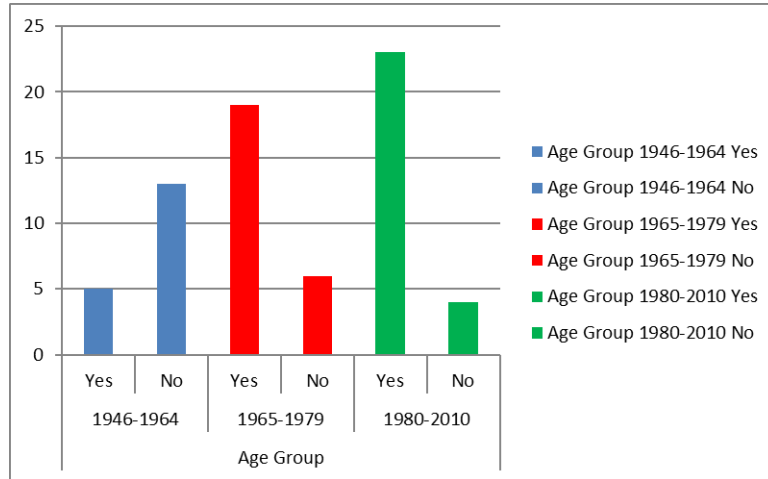**Figure 2: Bar Graph**

Interpretation

- 13% of employees (9) think to learn a new feature of MS-Office from a junior employee in the age group 1946-1964 whereas 13% of employees (9) did not.
- 29% of employees (20) think to learn a new feature of MS-Office from a junior employee in the age group 1965-1979 whereas 7% of employees (5) did not.
- 33% of employees (23) think to learn a new feature of MS-Office from a junior employee in the age group 1980-2010 whereas 6% of employees (4) did not.

- Given an opportunity, will you give positive feedback in appraisal of a junior employee with whom you don't have a good rapport?
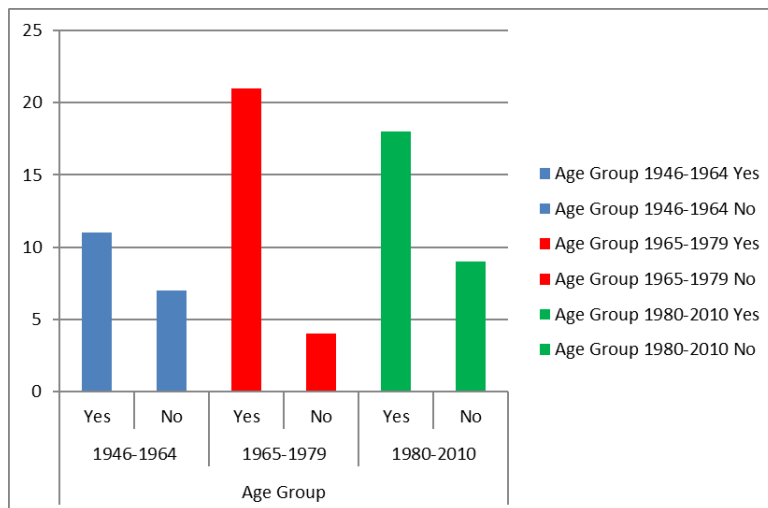

Figure 3: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- ▪ 19% of employees (13) agreed to give positive feedback in appraisal of a junior employee in the age group 1946-1964 whereas 7% of employees (5) did not agree on that.
- ▪ 29% of employees (20)   in the age group 1965-1979 felt to give positive feedback in appraisal of a junior employee whereas 7% of employees (5) did not feel so.
- ▪ 27% of employees (19) in the age group 1980-2010 felt to give positive feedback in appraisal of a junior employee whereas 11% of employees (8) did not feel so.

- Have you assisted a co-worker senior in age in operating a computer system who is less IT friendly?
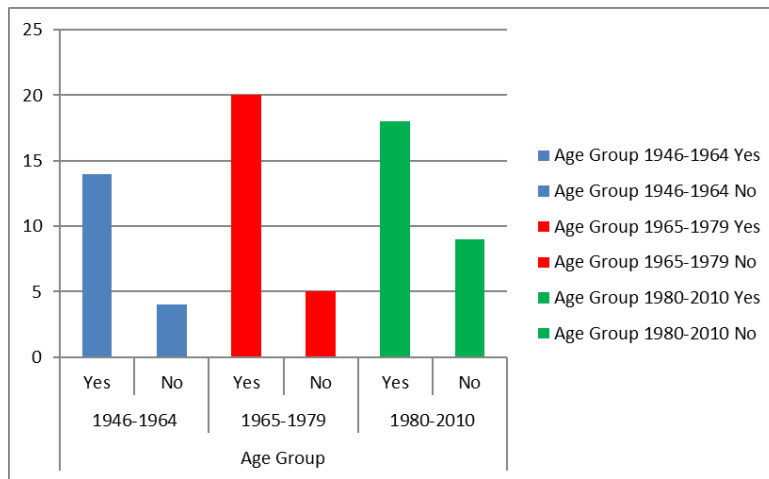

Figure 4: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- ▪ 7% of employees (5) in the age group 1946-1964 helped an age-wise senior colleague to become IT friendly whereas 19% of employees (13) did not.
- ▪ 28% of employees (19) in the age group 1965-1979 an age-wise senior colleague to become IT friendly whereas 9% of employees (6) did not.
- ▪ 33% of employees (23) in the age group 1980-2010 an age-wise senior colleague to become IT friendly whereas 6% of employees (4) did not.

- Would you prefer to do a non-routine but important task at your own initiation or when asked by your senior?

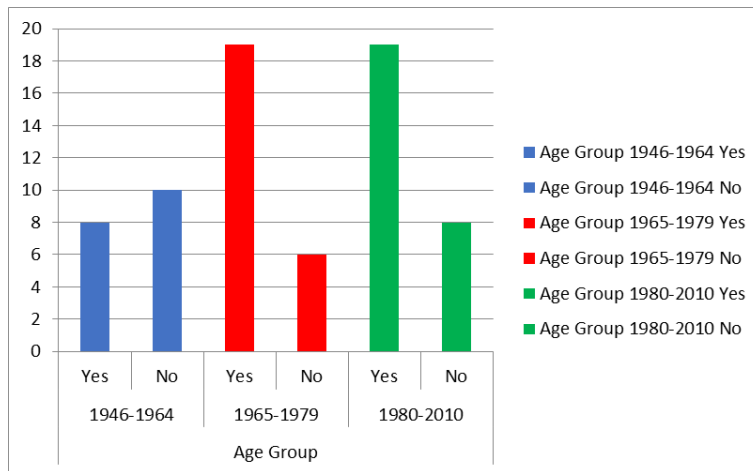**Figure 5: Bar Graph**

Interpretation

- The figures indicate that 16% of employees (11) in the age group 1946-1964 preferred to work at their own initiation whereas 10% of employees (7) did not.
- 30% of employees (21) in the age group 1965-1979 preferred to work at their own initiation whereas 6% of employees (4) did not.
- 26% of employees (18) in the age group 1980-2010 preferred to work at their own initiation whereas 13% of employees (9) did not.

- Would you like to resolve a conflict by agreeing with a senior employee even when you have a different opinion?

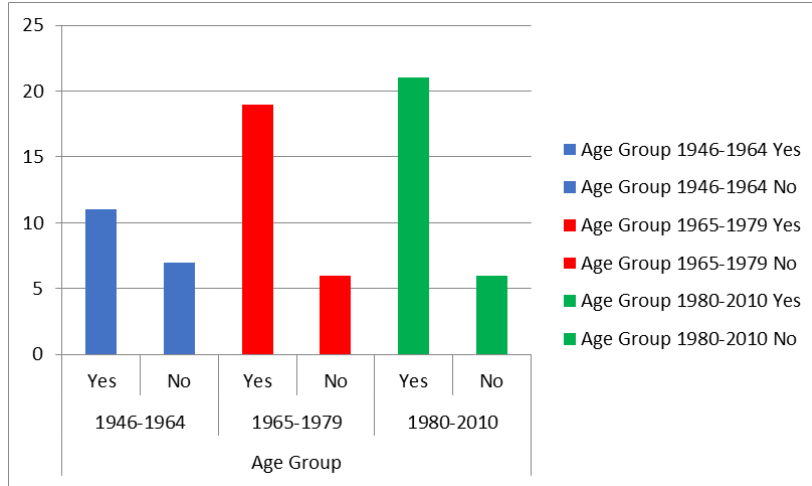**Figure 6: Bar Graph**

Interpretation

- 20% of employees (14) in the age group 1946-1964 preferred to resolve a conflict with age-wise senior colleague whereas 6% of employees (4) did not.
- 29% of employees (20)   in the age group 1965-1979 preferred to resolve a conflict with age-wise senior colleague whereas 7% of employees (5) did not.
- 26% of employees (18) in the age group 1980-2010 preferred to resolve a conflict with age-wise senior colleague whereas 13% of employees (9) did not.

- Would you like to attend team building activities like workshop or recreational activities arranged by a co-worker younger in age?
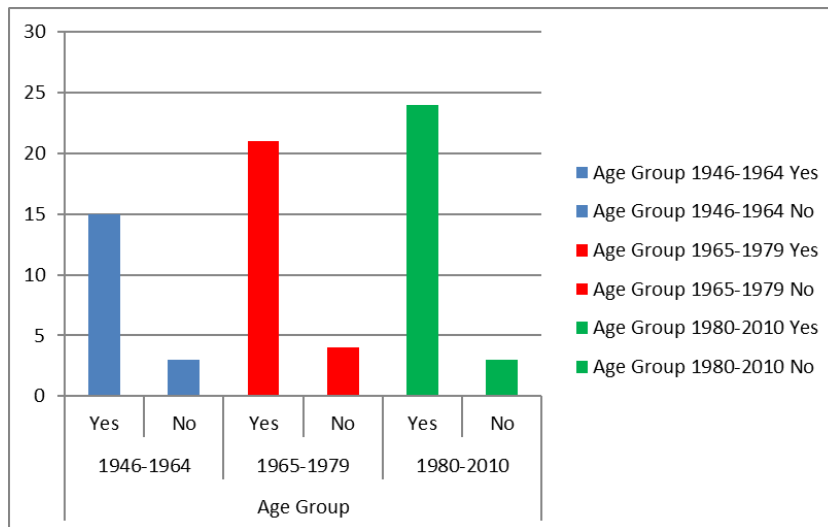

Figure 7: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- ▪ 11% of employees (8) in the age group 1946-1964 intended to attend team building activities arranged by a junior co-worker whereas 14% of employees (10) did not.
- ▪ 27% of employees (19) in the age group 1965-1979 intended to attend team building activities arranged by a junior co-worker whereas 9% of employees (6) did not.
- ▪ 27% of employees (19) in the age group 1980-2010 intended to attend team building activities arranged by a junior co-worker whereas 11% of employees (8) did not.

- • Have you given your extra time to help a co-worker to prepare a presentation?
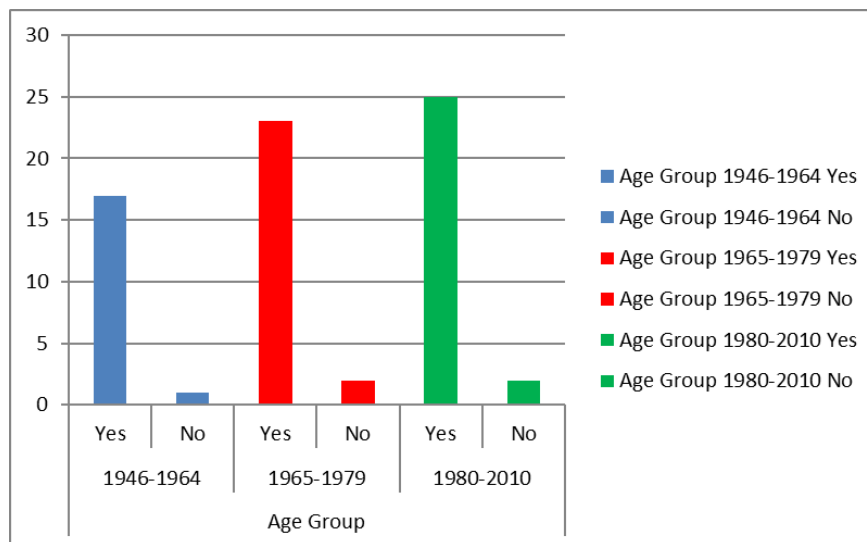
Figure 8: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- ▪ 16% of employees (11) in the age group 1946-1964 gave their extra time to help a co-worker to prepare a presentation whereas 11% of employees (7) did not.
- ▪ 27% of employees (19)   in the age group 1965-1979 gave their extra time to help a co-worker to prepare a presentation whereas 9% of employees (6) did not.
- ▪ 32% of employees (21) in the age group 1980-2010 gave their extra time to help a co-worker to prepare a presentation whereas 9% of employees (6) did not.

- • Have you informed the Management about good performance of a colleague?

Figure 9: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- 22% of employees (15) in the age group 1946-1964 informed the Management about good performance of a colleague whereas 4% of employees (3) did not.
- 30% of employees (21) in the age group 1965-1979 informed the Management about good performance of a colleague whereas 6% of employees (4) did not.
- 35% of employees (24) in the age group 1980-2010 informed the Management about good performance of a colleague whereas 4% of employees (3) did not.

- Have you helped a junior colleague to acquire new skills & knowledge about work which you know?

Figure 10: Bar Graph

Interpretation

- 25% of employees (17) in the age group 1946-1964 helped a junior colleague to acquire new skills which they know whereas 1% of employees (1) did not.
- 33% of employees (23) in the age group 1965-1979 helped a junior colleague to acquire new skills which they know whereas 3% of employees (2) did not.
- 36% of employees (25) in the age group 1980-2010 helped a junior colleague to acquire new skills which they know whereas 3% of employees (2) did not.

Findings of the Study

- The study revealed that majority of employees in younger age group of 1980-2010 were interested to participate in a workshop having age diversified employees while 14% employees in the age group 1965-79 were not interested.
- It was found that majority of employees think to learn MS-Office from a junior employee in 1980-2010 age group whereas 50 % employees of 1946-1964 age do not think so.
- Most of the employees in the age group 1965-1979 felt to give positive feedback in appraisal of a junior employee whereas few employees did not feel so in other age groups.
- Most of the employees in the age group 1980-2010 had helped age-wise senior colleagues to become IT friendly whereas 19% of employees in the age group 1946-64 had not done so.
- The study also revealed that majority of employees in the age group 1965-1979 preferred to work for a non-routine but important task at their own initiation.
- Most of the employees in the age group 1965-1979 preferred to resolve a conflict with senior colleague whereas few of employees in the age group 1945-1964 did not prefer to do so.
- 27% employees in the age groups 1965-1979 and 1980-2010 wished to attend team building activities arranged by a junior co-worker whereas 9% employees of age 1965-1979 did not.

- Majority of employees (32%) in 1980-2010 age group gave their extra time to help co-workers to prepare a presentation whereas few employees have not done so in all of the age-groups.
- Most of the employees of 1980-2010 age informed the management about good performance of a colleague whereas 4% employees had not done so in age groups 1945-64 and1965-1979.
- Majority of employees (36%) in the age group 1980-2010 helped a junior colleague to acquire new skills whereas very few (1%) of employees had not done so in the age group 1945-64.

Conclusion of the Study

This study has highlighted the need to reckon generational differences and add on empirical evidences for research work at academic institutions' workplace. The study revealed that challenges of generational diversity at academic workplace can be resolved by streamlining and understanding the work morals of different age cohort employees and by customising the way of dealing with each employee based upon their individual work ethics. The study can be utilized to build up future decision making for the management & administrators in terms of customized future policies framing.

The study helps to understand that conflict resolving is important amongst age diversified employees for the efficient functioning of the institution. Efforts need to be taken to combat challenges & conflicts that arise due to generational diversity like IT enabled and team binding enabled environment. Team building & recreational activities should be organized in organizations to reduce this generational gap & to bring the common ideas on a single platform of the different age-group employees.

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