Multigenerational workforce and organizational performance: A convergent analysis

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Abstract

The composition of today's workforce has experienced a notable increase in age diversity with four generations working together. The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of a multigenerational workforce on organizational performance, specifically examining the skillsets of different generational cohorts. The motivation for doing the study arose from the necessity to comprehend the skill sets of various generational cohorts and how this understanding could assist firms in fostering an inclusive work environment and effectively manage the human capital of diverse generational groups. A convergent mixed study methodology was utilized to quantitatively define demographic parameters and qualitatively investigate concepts and themes of the phenomenon, as well as provide a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences. Data was collected from a purposively sampled population of 60 employees across three distinct generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y and included 4 senior managers and 56 line employees from a selected school in Lusaka District in Zambia. The data was acquired through surveys, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated the presence of different generational skillsets within the workforce. The findings proposed strategies and best practices for managing a workforce consisting of multiple generations. Organizations can utilize the study's findings to enhance employee engagement within a multigenerational workplace. Furthermore, the data can be utilized to guide management methods to maintain harmonious working relationships.

Keywords: *multigeneration, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, organizational performance*

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1. Introduction

The modern workforce is now composed of five distinct age groups presenting their unique experiences, beliefs, objectives, attitudes, and drives. The four distinct generations coexisting in the workplace are Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Each generation brings its own set of values, communication styles, work preferences, and technological proficiencies contributing in a unique way to the organizational productivity and growth (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020).

In social sciences, the term "generation" denotes distinct social groups within a community and their differences. In contemporary discourse, the term denotes a range of variables and aspects, including age group, historical period, theory, and degree of kinship. Recent research indicates that the human life cycle is dynamic, evolving with social and historical factors (Lyons et al., 2015). Members of a generation are shaped by their shared experiences within a specific time frame of birth. The distinct life experiences introduced to individuals during their early years are bound to influence their values within each generational cohort (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). Since different cohorts present varying characteristics, addressing the diverse generational cohorts require leaders and managers who comprehend generational dynamics and can either modify themselves or the environment, or leverage the characteristics of each generational group to fulfill the requirements of their firm. A multigenerational workforce also presents both challenges and opportunities. Some workplace challenges involve managers lacking adequate knowledge regarding the uniqueness of each generational cohort (Calk & Patrick, 2017). Without an understanding of these unique characteristics, managers cannot create greater production in a multigenerational workplace. In contemporary work environments, the convergence of multiple generations within the workforce has become a distinctive characteristic. It is, therefore, imperative for managers to understand the differences they are working with. If managers lack sufficient understanding of the distinct characteristics of each generational group, it may result into underperformance or no performance at all (Lewis & Wescott, 2017).

Generational diversity in the workplace has garnered increased attention in management during the past decade. The attraction and retention of personnel across all age groups, together with the ongoing improvement of their skills, are critical issues in the context of talent acquisition and demographic aging. The emergence of the Millennial generation and Generation Z in the employment has prompted several inquiries regarding their assimilation in

the workplace, while the ongoing retirement of the Baby Boomer age necessitates intergenerational knowledge transfer (Venne & Hannay, 2018). This has prompted many organizations to invest in understanding how to manage a multigeneration workforce. Comprehending the intricacies of employees and their sources of motivation can assist experts in developing programs that improve the overall organizational performance. Generational dynamics can inform management techniques that boost collaboration, employee engagement, dispute resolution, and productivity across generations (Myers & Sadaghian, 2010).

In Zambia, most studies dealing with generational cohorts have concentrated on managing diverse workforce (i.e. Simumba & Qutieshat, 2023; Haynes, 2008). There are limited theoretical and empirical studies done to establish a shift in the workforce related to age demographics, generational cohort skillsets and its impact on organizational performance. As today's workforce spans multiple generations, each bringing unique experiences, values, and expertise, understanding these dynamics has become crucial for organizational success. In trying to fill this gap, this study explored different generational cohorts found in the present organizations in Zambia and how each generational cohort impacts organizational performance. This study was also motivated by the fact that most intergenerational studies are done in the west, although they affect emerging nations because western events spill over into other worlds.

The main objective of the study was to explore multigenerational workforce cohort characteristics and establish strategies and best practices for leaders to navigate multigenerational workforce of organizations in Lusaka Districtin Zambia. It particularly assessed and identified the unique generational characteristics present within the multigenerational workforce, examined the diverse skill sets exhibited by employees across different generations within the workforce and determined the specific generational dynamics that have an impact on key performance indicators (KPIs) within the organization.

The study aimed to look at Baby Boomers' experience and leadership to Generation Z's technological prowess and innovation. By taking a comprehensive approach, this study provided valuable insights into how leveraging the strengths of a multigenerational workforce could enhance productivity, foster a harmonious work environment, and improve competitive advantage. The findings provided a guide to managers and policymakers in creating strategies that effectively harness this generational diversity leading to the achievement of optimal organizational outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Multiple generations are working together for the first time in today's dynamic corporate environment. The multigenerational workforce presents different ideas, attitudes, and work methods. The most significant differences in generational preferences are anticipated to be in the areas of technology, face-to-face communication, e-mail communication, social media, formal authority, and enjoyment in the workplace. The rationale for choosing these six items is based on the generational cohort theory (Lester et al., 2012). Employers are not ready to deal with employees who lack relatability, resentful, communicate less across generations, and ultimately produce less. Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge that generational differences are a topic deserving of careful consideration, especially in the context of intergenerational interactions in the workplace. The dynamic nature of a shifting environment cannot be adequately encapsulated by the inclination to categorize individuals based on a twenty-year span. The concept also fails to consider the categorization of society into different generations (Alexander Agati, 2012).

This research examines how generational traits affect communication, productivity, innovation, and employee engagement in a multigenerational workforce. The analysis indicates gaps and difficulties in Zambian research that need further study. Few studies have examined intergenerational workforces and organizational effectiveness in Africa, particularly Zambia. A few studies have examined the implications of a multigenerational workforce, including managing it and its obstacles (Rajput et al., 2013; Kaifi et al., 2012; Tan et al., 2021).

2.1 The Concept of Multigeneration and their Characteristics

A generation is characterized as a distinct cohort sharing a common birth year and age, leading to significant life experiences during pivotal developmental phases. Life events encountered by different generations significantly influence the development of attitudes and ideas. For instance, the Zambian work environment has experienced four generations working together. A multigenerational workforce, comprising Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, reflects a diverse array of ages and experiences coexisting within an organizational structure. This diversity offers a dynamic work environment and understanding generational differences can significantly enhance workplace synergy and employee retention.

Every generation possesses distinct values, perspectives on authority, work attitudes, communication styles, and expectations regarding their leaders and the work environment (Stanley, 2010). For instance, the Baby Boomers generation born from 1946 to 1964 is characterized by ambition, ingenuity, and collaboration. They are frequently described as competitive, ambitious, and dedicated to attaining professional success. In a corporate environment, they contribute expertise, leadership, and a robust work ethic (Becton et al., 2014). Baby Boomers often valued for their experience and strong work ethic. They typically prefer face-to-face communication and are known for their loyalty and stability in their careers and value opportunities for personal growth and creative expression in the workplace (Lester et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2018). They contribute expertise, leadership, and a robust work ethic. They have elevated levels of self-sufficiency and diligence (Becton et al., 2014).

On the other hand, Generation X born between 1965 and 1980 is recognized for adaptability, self-sufficiency, and autonomy. Generation X consider change as standard; they are known for their global perspective, enjoyment of life, casual demeanor, self-sufficiency, and pragmatism, and they tend to disregard conventions to achieve their objectives in distinctive manners (Kian & Yusoff, 2014). They are frequently described as technologically proficient, adaptable, and dedicated to achieving work-life equilibrium. In an organizational context, they contribute ingenuity, problem-solving abilities, and a readiness to accept change. This generation can readily leave employment if dissatisfied with working conditions and pursues a work-life equilibrium (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). Generation X individuals anticipate prompt acknowledgment and awards, seek inclusion in all facets of the organization, and desire consistent opportunity for professional advancement. This group prioritizes personal objectives over professional ones, seeking opportunities that offer more challenges, enhanced earning potential, and superior benefits (Heyns & Kerr, 2018). Saileela and Thiruchanuru (2017) argue that Generation X consider employment security paramount and often prefers government positions for enhanced work stability. They bridge the gap between traditional and modern work practices, often advocating for work-life balance and efficiency. According to Wey Smola and Sutton (2002), they bring realistic and refined problem-solving approaches to the workplace, thriving in dynamic, diverse, and competitive environments that require multitasking. As the most diverse generational cohort in American history, Generation X emphasizes commonalities over differences, valuing secure employment and stability.

Meanwhile, Millennials (Generation Y) born between 1981 and 1996 are known for their desire for work-life balance, teamwork, and a sense of purpose (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). Millennials are often characterized as tech-savvy, collaborative, and value-driven. In an organizational setting, they bring new ideas, digital skills, and a strong sense of social responsibility. As they were born during the digital revolution, it's simple to assume that millennials are more tech-savvy and inclined to rely on technology. Millennials are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and independence, and prioritize job satisfaction, flexibility, and organizational dedication (Saileela & Thiruchanuru, 2017). They value collaboration, feedback, and career progression at a faster pace (Jonck et al., 2017).

Lastly, Generation Z, born from 1997 to 2012, is the youngest demographic in the current workforce, distinguished by its entrepreneurial mindset, resilience, and a pronounced emphasis on social and environmental concerns. According to Singh and Dangmei (2016), Generation Z is the most technologically sophisticated and ethnically varied generation, with technology occupying a pivotal position in their interconnected existence. Generation Z is regarded as the most open-minded and nonconformist demographic. Their openness is also seen in aspects such as gender fluidity. Generation Z was raised in a technology-driven environment. In an age of rapid technological communication, the need for constant and readily accessible information is standard for Generation Z (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Social networking profoundly impacts Gen Z's communication style, characterized by informality, independence, and directness, leading to their designation as the "do-it-yourself" generation (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Their strong connection to the internet has cultivated a significant digital affinity, as they traverse a landscape enriched with multimedia innovations such as tablets, smartphones, and social media (Turner, 2015). Gaidhani et al. (2019) emphasize that Generation Z is independent and self-motivated, possessing pragmatic job expectations and a positive outlook on the future. Notwithstanding these strengths, they are frequently regarded as demanding, acquisitive, materialistic, and entitled, exhibiting inclinations toward impatience and a dependence on technology, which results in diminished attention spans. Consequently, Generation Z offers distinct opportunities and challenges for enterprises seeking to leverage their potential successfully.

Multigeneration workforce impacts on organizational performance in that a diverse skillset brought by a multigenerational workforce enhances problem-solving and innovation due to varied perspectives and approaches. Organizations can benefit from increased

adaptability to change, as different generations can collaborate to merge traditional and modern practices. Effective management of such diversity can lead to higher employee engagement and retention by recognizing and leveraging the strengths of each generation.

2.2 Multigenerational Workforce and Organizational Performance

All organizations endeavor to achieve results through high performance whether the workforce is multigenerational or not. The descriptors of performance in this study will include:

Communication style. It is becoming common in the workplace to struggle to understand how the work habits and communication styles of individuals in different age groups. Conflict and miscommunication among coworkers have a detrimental effect on employee productivity (Tsipursky, 2023). Conflict makes Baby Boomers uncomfortable, and they may also be critical of others who have different opinions than they do (Salahuddin, 2010). The organization suffers when critical time, energy, and emotional resources are shifted from managing the job to resolving interpersonal or team conflicts.

Collaboration. The multigenerational workforce can foster better communication and collaboration by encouraging the exchange of ideas and perspectives. This can lead to improved problem-solving and increased productivity. People want coworkers who will support them and with whom they get along, regardless of their generation. Mencl and Lester (2014) posit that activities Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y greatly support are interactions with others at work.

Employee engagement. This is the extent of dedication and interest a worker demonstrates towards their company and its principles. Engaged employees actively collaborate with coworkers to enhance job performance for the overall benefit of the organization and possess a strong awareness of the business environment (Shamila, 2013). Satisfied employees pride in their organization with a desire to stay, excel, recommend it to others (Kazimoto, 2016).

The study of the multigenerational workforce is a global topic due to global workforce trends. Across the world, people are living and working longer, resulting in a broader age range within workplaces. This shift means businesses everywhere need to understand and accommodate the needs of diverse age groups. Different regions and countries may have unique generational characteristics influenced by local historical, cultural, and economic

factors. By studying multigenerational workforces, businesses and policymakers can better understand and navigate these global trends, ultimately fostering more inclusive, dynamic, and effective work environments worldwide.

Research on the workforce across different generations has been conducted in the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia. Each generation possesses unique behaviors and societal standards that are reflective of their particular perspectives. Managers should refrain from making judgments based on generational disparities, even if individuals possess comparable characteristics (Hayes, 2013). For example, the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire has demonstrated that throughout three generations, the influence of generation on work values is more substantial than that of age. However, these changes do not reach statistical significance (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). There are very slight generational differences in work-related outcomes, which suggest that organizational performance is not significantly affected by these disparities. This contradicts the idea that there are consistent and significant variations between generations (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015).

2.3. Multigenerational Workforce in Africa

Africa, with its diverse demographics and rapidly changing economic landscape, presents a unique context for generational studies. Most generational studies in Africa focus on understanding the dynamics and interactions among different age groups within the workforce considering the challenges, management and understanding different generations (Millar & Lockett, 2014; Nnambooze & Parumasur, 2016; Makola & Mulaudzi, 2018; Rutto, 2018; Kyalo & Gachunga, 2015). A study by Padayachee (2017) showed that the South African viewpoint on generations is different from that of other places because of the distinct historical and social setting. The history of South Africa, marked by incidents like the Soweto Uprising, the Sharpeville Massacre, and apartheid, has had a profound effect on the nation's various generations (Duh & Struwig, 2015). The findings of Jonck et al. (2017) also revealed a range of parallels and variances about work ideals among the generational cohorts in South Africa. The implication is that South Africa's generational dynamics like other African countries, might not fit the conventional, Westernized notions of generational cohorts. The cultural differences between the western world and Africa are the driving force to explore generational characteristics as presented and experienced in the African context.

In the local context, the demographics of Zambia like any other country, have also changed to include multigeneration. Despite the situation changing, there are very few studies conducted on the influence of multigenerational workforce on organizational performance delving into generational skillsets. The few studies have concentrated on management of diverse workforce. For example, a study by Simumba and Qutieshat (2023) looked at the influence of worker diversity on organizational performance in Zambian businesses.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

Several theories and frameworks help in comprehending the dynamics and characteristics of different generations.

Generational Cohort Theory. Generational traits vary in many research studies (Twenge, 2010; Wong et al., 2008; Costanza et al., 2012; Bargavi et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2021). According to Karl Mannheim's Generational Cohort Theory, generations have different values and attitudes based on shared experiences and historical events. Thus, historical events and social changes shape people's values, attitudes, beliefs, inclinations, and perceptions (Singh et al., 2021). War, genocides, holocausts, economic downturns, resource distribution changes, civil unrests, and terrorist attacks are examples of these events. The generational cohort theory emphasizes that social factors rather than biological processes dictate values, attitudes, and beliefs. Hence, the current study applies this theory to assess unique characteristics, values and experiences of different workforce generations in the Zambian context.

Generational cohort theory framework is used to categorize people based on the time period in which they were born and the significant events and societal conditions during that time. In this study, the key variables considered include generations such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z. Each generation has unique characteristics, values, and work preferences, technological adaptation, communication styles, leadership styles and preferences, motivational drivers, and learning and development, and feedback and recognition. The generations in the current corporate realm each exhibit distinct qualities that influence their work ethic and interpersonal interactions, their views on organizational hierarchy, and their approaches to change management (de Waal et al., 2017).

Understanding these variables can help organizations manage a diverse workforce effectively, ensuring that the needs and expectations of each generational cohort are met, leading to improved job satisfaction and productivity across the company.

The theoretical viewpoint establishes a basis for comprehending generational differences by offering contextual components that elucidate generational influence in the workplace. The amalgamation of individual and collective dynamics, along with the comprehension of pivotal times that impact individuals and groups, provides justification for activities that may otherwise be scrutinized by employers. Lewis and Wescott (2017) posit that according to generational cohort theory, workplace conflict misunderstandings, diminished employee well-being, reduced productivity, and increased turnover can arise when significant disparities in work values and beliefs among employees from different generations are ignored. Although many theories and the prejudices about different generations originate in the West, the generational cohort theory consist factors that can address generational cohorts in Zambia. As Jones et al. (2018) argue that generational studies are not universally transferable, it has prompted further research in Africa.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual framework
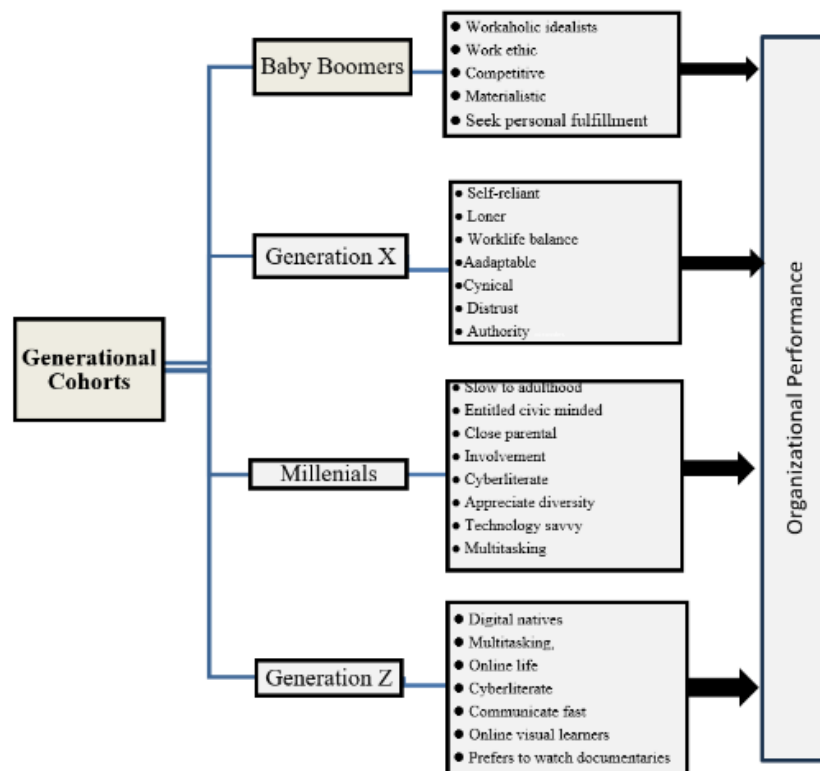
The conceptual framework on a multigenerational workforce typically addresses how different generational cohorts such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z interact and contribute to organizational dynamics and performance employing different skillsets. The key elements depicted in the framework include generational characteristics. Each generation possesses distinct characteristics, values, work styles, and communication preferences.

Overall, the framework emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing generational diversity to harness the full potential of the workforce for improved organizational outcomes. By integrating this theory and concepts, the framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the multigenerational skillsets and how this impact organizational performance a multigenerational workforce, offering practical insights for leaders to navigate this complex landscape.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used convergent mixed method where the qualitative and quantitative data were simultaneously collected but separately analyzed. The data gathering strategies helped evaluate participant experiences through in-person discussion such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews and survey to quantify and identify the generational characteristics.

3.2 Sampling, Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study was carried out at a secondary school in the Lusaka District in Zambia because of its; a) geographical location - the chosen organization possessed regional elements, operations, and culture that would yield a more comprehension of the phenomena under investigation; b) substantial size - the presence of a sizable workforce spanning all generations facilitated the identification of the target population; and c) governmental institution - the organization enjoyed a favorable reputation and prominence. The participants were purposively sampled because they are directly connected to the topic under study. The sampled people were able to provide information based on personal experience regarding the generational cohort characteristics and their impact on organizational performance.

Four senior managers were provided with a semi-structured individual interview guide. These interviews included both closed and open-ended questions allowing the interviewer the

flexibility to explore themes or responses in greater depth. On the other hand, a focus group discussion was also conducted with 20 participants distributed as 12 Generation X, 7 Generation Y (Millennials) and 1 Baby Boomer. The selected site recorded no Gen Z. The researcher reached data saturation point. Data saturation is a concept often used in qualitative research to describe the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data being collected. It is the absence of new codes established during both data collection and processing. Other researchers appear to ascertain data saturation based on their perceptions of the data during or subsequent to data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this research, the researcher could not obtain any newer information as the same patterns were being repeated. This was an indication that enough data had been collected to understand the phenomenon being studied thoroughly. In practice, reaching data saturation involves a combination of the researcher's judgment, the complexity of the research question, and the richness of the data. Achieving data saturation ensures that the findings are complete and credible, which enhances the reliability and validity of the research. This concept is crucial in studies using methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, where exploring the depth and nuances of participants' experiences or perceptions is key.

On the other hand, an email blast with a questionnaire was also utilized for the 56 employees of other ranks. The online survey questionnaire was constructed with questions derived from the various elements associated with each primary inquiry within a specific area. The questionnaire covered demographic details, including age range, department, and years of service. An online questionnaire was distributed to the sampled participants through the established WhatsApp group via a generated link. Each participant filled out an online questionnaire and submitted it electronically upon completion. This was conducted at each participant's convenience during the data collection period.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study used the Braun and Clarke (2021) six-step framework for thematic analysis to examine focus group data from twenty key participants. The methodology extracts themes and patterns from qualitative data, which includes data familiarization, code creation, topic production, theme review, theme name and definition, and report generation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Naeem et al., 2023).

Figure 2

Braun & Clarke (2021) six step framework

The researcher transcribed the interview and checked transcript accuracy by listening to recorded interviews. To understand participants' responses to research questions, the researcher read all the transcripts several times. After reviewing the interview transcripts, the researcher developed initial codes. NVivo 14, a popular CAQDAS, was used to analyze interview transcripts.

3.4. Research Ethics

The study ensured that participants were aware of their rights to an explanation of the goals, processes, and outcomes of the study, as well as the opportunity to be published and the option to decline participation or withdraw at any time. The participants had the confidence to act freely and base their choices on the most complete facts available. The researcher upheld the integrity of the study and its ethical standards while also safeguarding participants from injury and invasion of privacy. In addition, participants were made aware that they were under no obligation to continue after they decided not to participate.

The subject of multigenerational workforce might not have posed so much discomfort to the participants but not all participants might have been comfortable to reveal age related issues. As a result, the study adhered to research ethics and confidentiality, which state that participants will not be identified or presented in an identifiable manner and that anonymity will be maintained, meaning that not even the researcher will be able to determine which comments originated from which respondents (Bell & Waters, 2014). Meanwhile, the questionnaire was subjected to an ethical review process at UNZABREC. The study did not involve any vulnerable participants, or participants who were unable to consent for themselves.

In the initial phase, before data collection, formal written permission was obtained from the Assistant Dean of Post Graduate Studies, directed to the research information providers in

each chosen organization. Prior to individual interviews and group discussions, an introductory letter was delivered.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 presents the organizational demographic data based on three factors: age, job experience, generational cohort, and departmental affiliation. The researcher collected and presented participants' demographics to understand their views on multigenerational workforces' effects on organizational performance. This allowed the researcher to understand and analyze how participants regarded the multigenerational workforce given the identified parameters. Demographics possibly influence respondents' opinions, ideas, and approaches to multigenerational workforce. The varying perspectives of different cohorts enriched the data.
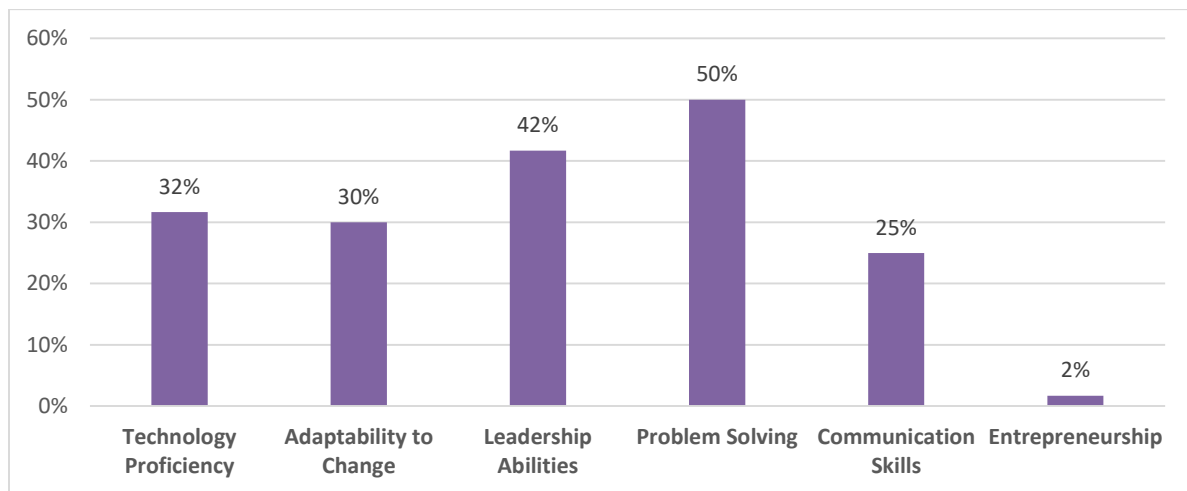
Table 1

Demographic characteristics

Description	Category	N	%
Age	21-30	2	3.33
	31-40	13	22
	41-50	35	58.3
	51 and above	10	16.9
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	3	5
	1-5	8	15
	6-10	7	11.7
	Above 10 years	42	70.0
Generational Cohort	Baby Boomer	1	1.7
	Generation X	40	66.7
	Generation Y (millennials)	19	31.7
	Generation Z	0	0
Departmental Affiliation	Operations	8	13.3
	Programming and Training	12	20.0
	Education and Related Teaching Subjects	38	63.3
	Human Resources	1	1.7
	Information Technology (IT)	1	1.7

The workforce under study consists of only three generations, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Generation Z was not present in the selected site, indicating

that the youngest generation is Generation Y, with an age range of 27 to 33. The wide spectrum of age groups, departmental affiliations, and years of work experience helped the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the age composition of the workforce impacts organizational performance due to the extensive and detailed findings resulting from the diversity of the sample. As Baby Boomers approach retirement, it will become increasingly vital for firms to attract and retain high-caliber staff. Organizations must establish new human resource management standards to effectively engage a multi-generational workforce. A top-down and bureaucratic management style may prove ineffective with younger generations of employees. Employers ought to promote versatile leadership styles that are flexible and inclusive, accommodating the requirements of a varied workforce.

Figure 3

Generational cohort traits and characteristics

Source: Field Data, 2024

The results shown in figure 3 demonstrate the presence of multiple traits in the general demographics with 32% (n=19) indicating that they were tech-savvy, 30% (n=18) saying they were adaptable to change. Of the participants, 42% (n=25) reported having leadership qualities, 50% (n=30), the largest percentage said they possessed problem-solving ability, 25% (n=15) reported having communication skills, and 2% (n=1) reported having entrepreneurial traits. The results clearly suggest that generational cohorts in the present work environment often exhibit unique traits and characteristics shaped by their shared experiences and upbringing.

Table 2 shows thematic analysis of the unique generational characteristics. The findings reveal details of the distinctive qualities of the workforce based on the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The data demonstrated a presence of technical knowledge, adaptability, leadership, problem-solving, communication, and entrepreneurship characteristics. Results indicate multigenerational workers communicate and participate differently. Baby Boomers favor in-person contact, whereas Generation X opts for what they perceive as the most efficient method. Generation Y utilizes instant messaging, social media, or emails and is seen as ineffective communicators. This is justified by Lester et al. (2012) that Generation Y wants workplaces with clear expectations, fast information, and regular feedback. Similar to Millennials, Generation Z favors text messaging and instant messaging as their principal communication platforms. A survey by Appelbaum et al. (2022) indicated that almost two-thirds of Gen Z members either dislike or just moderately enjoy conversing by telephone; they frequently prefer using FaceTime or Snapchat over traditional phone calls and these disparities in communication styles result in insufficient communication and collaboration, as well as disputes among the generations.

Table 2

Unique characteristics

Sub-theme	Indicators
Younger generation	Informal communication with all people
	Good communicators face-to-face, email, instant messaging
	Good entrepreneurial skills and tech-savvies
Older generation	Good leadership skills and communicate formally
	Good management skills
	Good pupil relations
	Great counsellors

It was also observed that Millennials are more familiar with fast changing technologies and can transfer skills to the older generations. Collaborations between junior and senior faculty members can enhance knowledge exchange and reciprocal learning. Reverse

mentorship has been suggested as a method to close the technological divide between generations.

The younger generation are also very entrepreneurial and business-minded while the older generations exhibit leadership and management skills and prefer formal communication using traditional methods. These disparities may, at times, cause conflicting expectations which can only be mitigated through multigenerational workforce management. In terms of leadership which is essential for managing a multigenerational team, Millennials prefer participative or transformational leadership styles that emphasize teamwork, whereas Baby Boomers prefer hierarchical leadership. These insights demonstrate the complexity and skill required to manage multigenerational workforces.

Gaining insights into these interconnections enables companies to bridge generational gaps, resulting in a more efficient and harmonious work environment. Generational cohort theory suggests that if considerable variations in work values and attitudes between generations are not addressed, it can result in workplace conflict, misunderstandings, negative impact on employee well-being, decreased productivity, and increased turnover (Lewis & Wescott, 2017). The findings also underscored the need to recognize each age group's professional skills. Understanding a company's skills is crucial for several reasons. Organizations can leverage worker skills and intelligence by analyzing various aptitudes. This allows information sharing, mentoring, and staff competency transfer. Through careful study, organizations may use a multigenerational workforce's talents and abilities to innovate and gain a competitive edge. Understanding team dynamics is crucial for developing high-performing teams that successfully complement each other's skill sets. An inclusive and hospitable work environment enhances employee dedication, contentment, and retention.

The results shown in figure 4 demonstrate the presence of generational specific skillsets and characteristics, with Baby Boomers, the smallest representation in the sample population indicating a 2% (n=1) for all the factors i.e. collaboration skills, communication skills, entrepreneurial skills, and managerial skills. For collaboration skills, Generation X indicated the highest at 77% (n=46), and Generation Y at 22% (n=13), communication skills, Generation X indicated 53% (n=32), and Generation Y (Millennials) was 45% (n=27), entrepreneurial skills, Generation X was at 18% (n=11), and Generation Y(Millennials) recorded 80% (n=48) and managerial, Generation X scored 35% (n=21), and Generation Y (Millennials) recorded

63% (n=38). The results clearly suggest that generational cohorts exhibit different characteristics in varying degrees in the present work environment.

Figure 4

Generational cohort specific skills
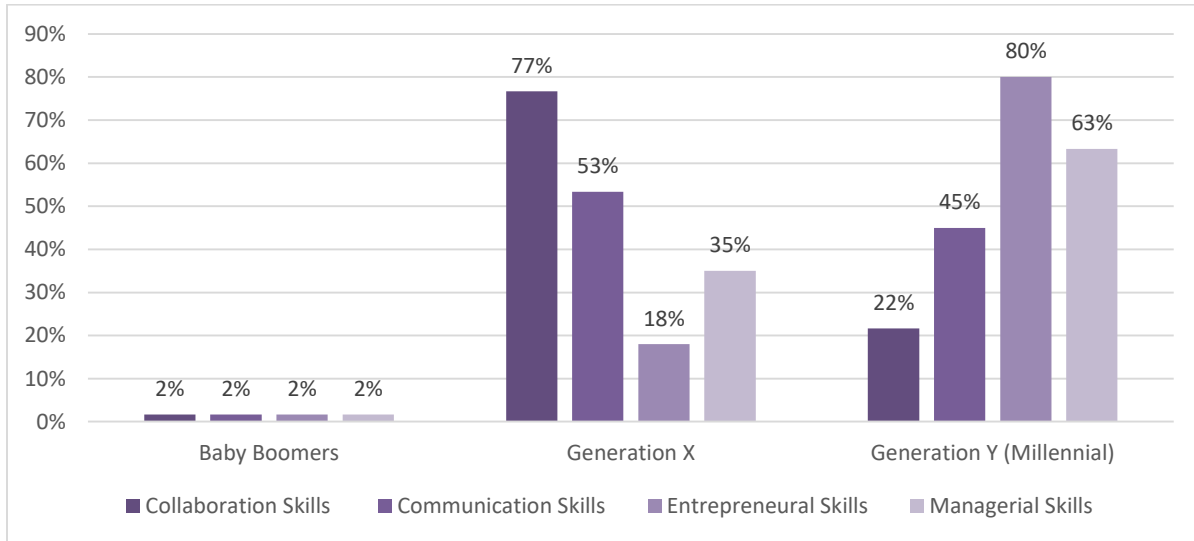
Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 3

Diverse generational skillsets

Sub-theme	Indicators
Older generation	The older generation are better with academics and leadership
	The older generation are firm in their actions, work ethics and manage people well
	The older generation does things in the old ways and are rigid to change
	The older generation have diverse experiences to share and communicate easily
Younger generation	The younger generation are good in co-curricular activities
	The younger generation are good with and help with the modern skills like technology
	The younger generation are straight forward communicators
	The younger generation does things in a modern way and do side hustles for a living

The analyzed themes show that different generations bring unique life experiences, values, and perspectives to the workplace. From the focus group discussions and the one-on-one interviews, results show numerous skillsets and qualities found in a multigenerational

workforce of a selected school in Lusaka District in Zambia. The results indicated that employees collaborate to accomplish the established goals and objectives by leveraging the abilities existent within their workforce to enhance and complement each other's skillsets. This aligns with the findings of Mencl and Lester (2014), who suggested that Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y all highly value social contacts in the workplace. de Waal et al. (2017) also added that employers should recognize the unique traits of each generation in the workplace and provide a productive work environment for everybody.

The results showed a younger generation that is entrepreneurial through activities like the tuck shop to make money. They also possess technological skills which they utilize in their preference for quicker communication. The older generation exhibited management and leadership skills necessary to smooth running of the organization. They also want to maintain the status quo in performing their duties and tend to be rigid about change. The younger generation are being relied upon to conduct reverse mentorship to assist the older generation with technology. This collaboration is supported by Lewis and Wescott (2017), generational mixing can augment creativity and productivity, as age diverse work teams can tackle problems and difficulties from several perspectives and leverage a wider range of experiences, according to interviewers from the education department.

The findings also underscored the need to recognize each age group's professional skills. Understanding a company's skills is crucial for several reasons. Organizations can leverage worker skills and intelligence by analyzing various aptitudes. This allows information sharing, mentoring, and staff competency transfer. Through careful study, organizations may use a multigenerational workforce's talents and abilities to innovate and gain a competitive edge. Understanding team dynamics is crucial for developing high-performing teams that successfully complement each other's skill sets. An inclusive and hospitable work environment enhances employee dedication, contentment, and retention.

The results in figure 5 demonstrate the indicators influencing organizational performance with 80% (n=48) the largest percentage indicating that technology influence organizational performance, and 40% (n=24) identifying innovation had a significant impact on organizational performance. Of the participants, 28% (n=17) reported adaptability to change to have an impact on organizational performance, and 18% (n=11) reported entrepreneurship having an impact on organizational performance.

Figure 5

Generational dynamics influencing key organizational performance indicators
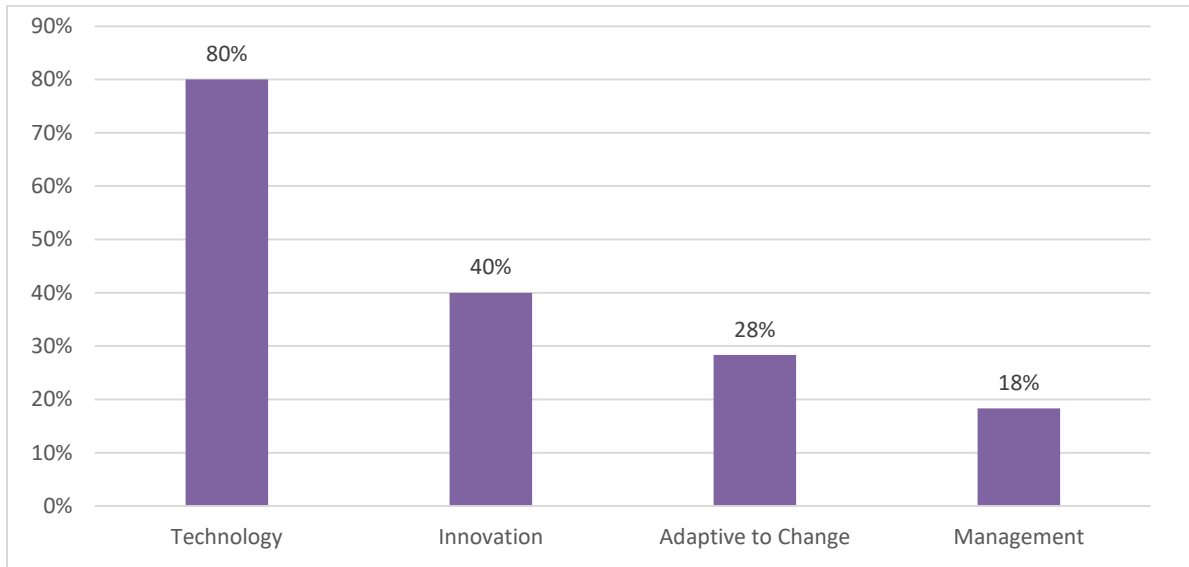
Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 4

*Generational dynamics influencing key organizational performance indicators*

Generational cohort	Indicators
Younger generation	Technological proficiency
	Good results from a mix of traditional and modern ways leading to new ways of doing things
	More advantageous from exchanging knowledge and new ideas
Older generation	Good management to eliminate preference and proper communication needs to be embraced to solve conflicts
	The multigenerational impacts performance in a positive way through better and newer ways of doing things
	The younger generation is helping modify and mentor the older generations in using better correction methods on children

The numerous dynamics identified were technology, innovation, change, and management as major themes. These factors were discussed as crucial for the efficiency of multigenerational organization. The younger generation identified technology and collaboration as factors that impacted organizational performance, whereas older generation

stated good communication methods helped solve conflicts and enhance organizational efficiency. In this scenario, integrating the wisdom and expertise of older generations with the technological advancements of younger generations can create highly productive teams, boosting job satisfaction, engagement, and employee retention.

Figure 6

Strategies and best practices in managing a multigenerational workforce
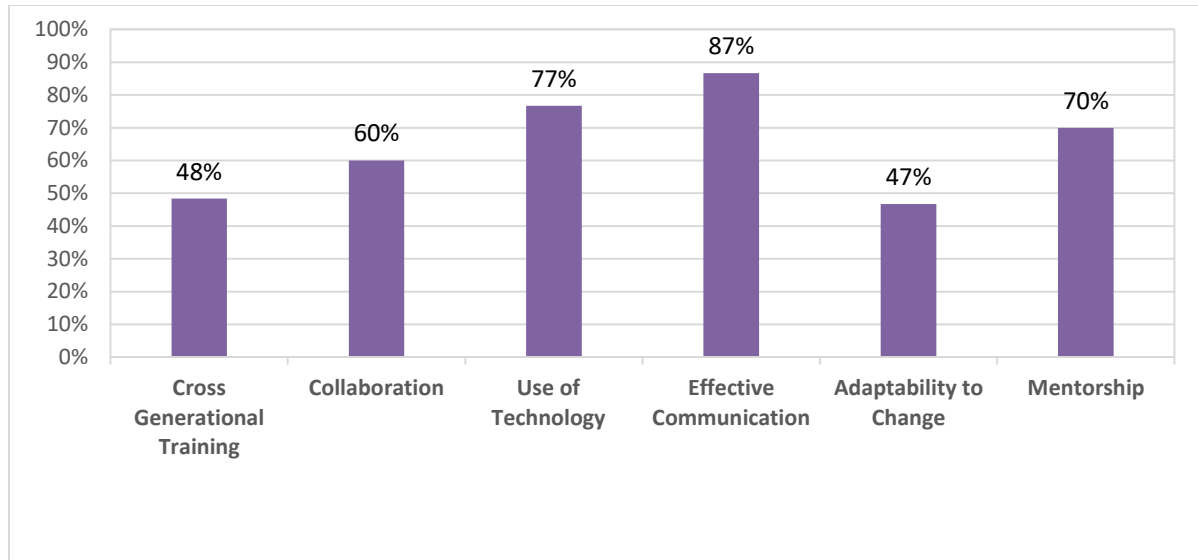
Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 5

Strategies and best practices in managing a multigenerational workforce

Theme	Strategies
Communication	Embracing good communication both formal and informal between the teachers
	Ensuring there is flow of information since majority of people can use phones
Collaboration	Encouraging collaboration between the young and the old
	Finding a way to cooperate between the teachers to come up with favourable working conditions in a world of technology
Training	Involving staff in training and continuous professional development where the young are assisted by the old
Leadership	Ensuring there is good leadership
Motivation	Giving awards to teachers on different occasions

Results in figure 6 shows 87% (n=52) indicate effective communication in an organization helps manage multigenerational workforce followed by 77% (n=46) citing use of technology as an effective factor. On the other hand, 70% (n=42) reported mentorship, 60% (n=36) indicated collaboration, 48% (n=29) showed training and 47% (n=28) reported adaptability to change. The results indicate that employees in the selected school in Lusaka District have varying strategies and best practices that they employ to best manage the different generations present in the organization.

The study showed fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research study results, primarily related to how the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. The qualitative research study results concentrated on descriptive data obtained from interviews, focus groups, observations, and content analysis. The data was predominantly qualitative, examining concepts, thoughts, or experiences. The objective was to acquire a comprehensive grasp of the multigenerational workforce phenomena and its viewpoints. It investigates the mechanisms and rationale underlying a topic or behavior. Patterns and themes within the data were uncovered through thematic analysis. This yields comprehensive descriptions and insights into the topic matter, resulting in more intricate and nuanced data. However, it may lack generalizability owing to smaller, more specific sample sizes. In addition, the results of the quantitative research involved numerical data gathered via an online survey questionnaire aimed at assessing the magnitude of the multigenerational workforce phenomenon. The analysis facilitated the examination of correlations between variables and addressed inquiries such as "how many?" Although different approaches were employed to collect quantitative and qualitative research results, the results had similarities due to rigor and attention to detail. The attention to detail ensured validity and reliability of the findings. This helped to enhance understanding of the multigenerational workforce phenomenon.

Generational cohort characteristics. The survey results indicated that Baby Boomers and Generation X possess strong leadership qualities. As leaders, they prioritized integrity and underscored accountability in their decision-making processes. One manager pointed out that the school relied significantly on the older generation for leadership, as they fostered a strong ethical work atmosphere. The elder generation demonstrated effective management abilities by fostering positive pupil-teacher connections essential for a school environment. Many participants asserted that their extensive professional experience rendered them excellent counselors a characteristic which made them concentrate on cultivating the younger generation

through mentorship and the dissemination of knowledge. The younger generation showed strengths in technology and thereby bring fresh perspectives and technological skills. In the organization, they are relied upon to employ tech tools during examination which has made the processes easier and more efficient.

Diverse generational skillsets. The qualitative and quantitative study results both indicated that Generation X is distinguished by a robust work ethic respect for authority and conservative nature. This was demonstrated by what most Gen X participants stated during the interviews which showed their value for their work, commitment, professionalism, and dedication through their wok behaviour like reporting early for work doing their duties diligently without anyone forcing them. This was validated by one participant who expressed displeasure with the younger generation who seem to have become complacent with performing duties. Gen. X is marked by respect for authority and a preference for face-to-face engagement with supervisors. They are loyal employees that consider the younger generation to be disrespectful towards authority and hierarchy, particularly because the new generation favors direct communication with their managers. Because the older generation has been in the system for a long time, they tend to reliable. Their reliability is seen by the dependability in fulfilling responsibilities. The results also showed that the older generations possessed valuable institutional knowledge necessitating knowledge transfer and mentoring. As a result, the school management as shown by the results count on this generation to deliver quality work on time. The younger generation on the other hand, did not want to be dependent on formal employment but used the entrepreneurial skill to engage into side jobs they called "hustling''. At organizational level, they were very helpful at income generating activities like running the school tuck shop.

From the study results, it is clear that communication and collaboration are the major factors that can help multigeneration workforce to succeed at work. The results show that the older generation favored formal communication out of respect for authority and hierarchy. Millennials preferred informal communication because they believed hierarchy hampers communication and distorts feedback. They wanted immediate feedback hence the need to use instant messaging and face-to-face modes of communication. The result is evident that all generations engaged in communication across and within generational groupings with face-to-face being the commonest form of communication used by across generations. This is in line with Downs (2019) that face-to-face communication was overwhelmingly favored by all

generations. The study results also indicated that the multigeneration workforce was willing to exchange knowledge through mentorship and reversal mentorship. This is indicative of a collaborative team. Even though the results show generations are able to work together, they sometimes find themselves working as opposing parts. Whilst the millennials embraced technology in their work, the older generation showed a conservative approach, seeking to preserve traditional methods of working despite changing times.

Best practices. Although Generational cohort theory posits that each generational cohort is unique due to shared birth years, analogous life experiences, common values, and collective historical and social events, including wars, economic fluctuations, disasters, and technological advancements that shape social patterns in life and work (Gentry et al., 2011), the study results show a commonality among generations concerning best strategies they would want to see in the organization. The studied generations cited good communication both formal and informal among employees, collaboration between the young and the old, training involving staff and continuous professional development for all staff, promoting diverse leadership styles to address the needs of all generations, and embracing technology to meet the demands of the changing work world.

The results highlight the need for developing tailored strategies to manage a workforce spanning multiple generations, aiming to enhance organizational outcomes. Participants expressed a strong demand for best practices when addressing multigenerational workforce dynamics. The discussed strategies serve to bridge generational gaps and facilitate co-existence among employees. Insights from focus groups and one-on-one interviews revealed that the selected school in the Lusaka District in Zambia implements several best practices and strategies for collaborating with a multigenerational workforce. The proposed strategies included cross-generational training to allow all generations in the workforce to exchange skills and knowledge, technology integration, effective communication, flexibility, and mentorship. These factors were identified as contributors to enhanced organizational efficiency. Concerning communication, Chen (2021) observed that a significant issue in intergenerational communication is the absence of patience. The reliance of Generation Y on technology has resulted in inadequate communication skills and a lack of patience. Hence, managing a multigenerational workforce should consider that modern businesses need robust techniques to manage and leverage the diverse resources of a multigenerational workforce.

Meanwhile, a mix of generations demands that the organization enforces adaptation and learning. Structuring mentorship programs can facilitate effective knowledge transfer.

5. Conclusion

This study provided significant insights into generational disparities regarding cohort skillsets within the Zambian workforce. Generational disparities in work values are apparent. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that there are certain parallels among generational cohorts concerning labor ideals. Organizations should leverage solutions that effectively manage a multigenerational workforce, especially to enhance organizational performance. Effectively managing a multigenerational workforce can significantly enhance organizational performance by tapping into the unique skills and perspectives that each generation brings to the table. By fostering an inclusive work environment and addressing potential challenges proactively, organizations can optimize their workforce for sustained success.

This study has implication to employers. Understanding generational cohort differences and recognizing areas of collaboration and potential conflict can help employers to think through their particular workplace dynamics. Hence, they should build relationships through mentoring and reverse mentoring to promote a culture where younger employees share their expertise, particularly in technology, with older colleagues to foster mutual learning and growth. Fostering respect and communication among employees of diverse ages might enable organizations to harness individual abilities and enhance productivity. Mentoring programs have traditionally facilitated knowledge transfer by combining seasoned senior employees with junior counterparts, akin to the cultural transmission articulated in Mannheim's theory. In the management of younger generations, cooperation is seen as a crucial element in knowledge-sharing and knowledge transfer within multigenerational organizations. Moreover, trust is essential for fostering intergenerational cooperation, as the instinctive tendency to distrust others' knowledge while valuing one's own as more reliable is prevalent (Stiehr & Vandermause, 2017). There is great need to implement comprehensive training programs and offer targeted training and development programs that address the diverse needs and preferences of employees from all generational groups. Since generational studies hinge on policy matters, this research also stresses the importance of policy framework.

The study had limitations which included methodological difficulties, including the difficulty of defining generation, as well as the neglect of variations in country and ethnicity

that generations are intertwined with. Although the research offered significant insights, the sample size was geographically confined to a single organization. This may not adequately represent the wider population of generational skillsets across various organizations. As a result, the findings may lack generalizability to other regions or the broader community. Therefore, additional research with an expanded scope and larger sample size, together with comparison analyses of various organizations in Zambia, is strongly recommended.

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