RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKPLACE IN SUDANESE PRIVATE SECTOR: *AN OLDER WORKFORCE AS WELL AS A DIGITAL GENERATION*

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on understanding generational differences in the workplace in Sudanese private sector. Specifically, the study attempts evaluation of the generational differences in the workforce and how manger can manage these differences. This is in addition to evaluation of the distinct characteristics of the employees from older workforce and digital generation in the private sector in Sudan. The study adopts qualitative approach for the data collection and analysis, primary data was collected by interviews. The main findings reveal that, there are some differences between the two generations regarding their attitudes, values, perceptions and expectations, digital workforce tend to show higher expectations regarding career and life advancement rather than old generation. The older generation appeared to be slightly more satisfied with their jobs rather than the digital generation. Accordingly leader and manager should attempt to manage and reduces the gap/conflict between the two generations, they must try to enhance communication channel between the two in order to enhance their ability to understand each other and correct the misperception toward each other.

Citation: Yasir Abbas Saeed Abbas (Ph.D) and Minas Abdel moutalib Elamin, 2016. "Understanding generational differences in the workplace in Sudanese private sector: *An older workforce as well as a digital generation*", *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (04), 29992-29996.

INTRODUCTION

Change in the demographic characteristic of the Sudanese workforce deserves more attention from academics, employers, employees and policy makers. Today, several organization in Sudan have at least two generations of employees consisting on older workforce and digital generation. According to Kupperschmidt (2000), a generation is an identifiable group that share birth, years, age, location, and significant life events at critical development stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Other believes that when individuals from the same generation share historical, economic, social experiences, and behavior. The behaviors, attitudes, and work value of different generation of employees may be influenced by their historical, economical, social, and cultural experiences. Work tensions and conflicts are inevitable if different generations fail to understand and accept the unique and different characteristic of each group, and to embrace their similarities. So as a leader for workplace with this different generation differences you need to avoid employee tensions and conflicts by being sensitive to the needs of the different groups, this matter represents an important challenge to management with these characteristic.

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The Problem of the Study

A generation differences can create many problems and difficulties that can affect organization performance. Successful manager needs specific characteristics to face these challenges, so the problem of this study focusing on examining generational diversity issues and the role of generational leadership in managing different generational differences in work place generally and in private sector in Sudan specifically.

Study Questions

1- What are the generational differences in the workplace generally?
2- What are the generational differences in the Sudanese private sector workforce specifically?
3- What are the characteristics of the older workforce?
4- What are the characteristics of the digital generational?
5- How manager can manage differences in the workforce in Sudanese private sector?

The Objectives of the Study

1- To identify the generational differences in the workforce and how manger can manage these differences theoretically.

2- To explain the distinct characteristics of the employees from older workforce and digital generation in the private sector in Sudan.

3- To examine how generational leadership can manage the differences in older work force and digital generational in private sector in Sudan.

Research Methodology

A descriptive research methodology will be adopted for this study. A survey will be used to obtain data from managers in specific private institutions in Sudan during the period Jan-March 2016. The term survey is commonly applied to research methodology desired to collect data from specific population, or a sample from that population, and typically utilizes questionnaire or an interview as a survey instrument (Robson, 1993). There many advantages and disadvantages of using questionnaire and interview, but based on the scope of the study, the time allowed to conduct the study, the access and having information from institution in Sudan and the budget available to conduct the study, for the above reasons the researchers prefers to use a designed interview survey instrument to assess the role of leadership in managing an older workforce as well as a digital generation in Sudanese private sector.

Case study

Case study approach provides a mode of inquiry for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon (Stake. 1994). The researcher will select Haggar Holding Company as a case study that represented the private sector in Sudan. The researcher conducted the interviews with the 10 experts in the field of management in different companies under Haggar Holding Company.

The purpose of interview is to

- Preliminary background on general issues and concern related to generational differences in workforce in these companies.
- Investigate how manager can manage generational differences in workforce.

Case study background

Haggar Holding Company (HHC) is Haggar family's vehicle, with interests with a range of businesses in Northern and Southern of Sudan. HHC has embarked of a program of expansion and diversification in keeping with its guiding principles, as outlined in the mission statement. The Haggar Group is made up of a number of companies with diversified activities, supported by liaison offices in Europe, the far and middle East.HHC was incorporated in 1996 to become a shareholder for all Haggar family's interests. The family started trading in the late 1880's and the first company was incorporated in 1904, in Juba, where the main base of operations was, until the mid of 1960's when it have to move due to Civil War. The family then relocated to Khartoum where it has settled, surviving through two round of nationalization. The Group's guiding principle is to continue to expand and diversify, gearing itself to the constant changes that are taking place locally, regionally and globally.

Haggar Holding Company consist of five companies

1-Coldair engineering company
2-Samsung
3-Daynamic international oil –well services
4-Pasgianos food and beverages company limited
5-Sudasat (tawali connected)

Each company includes different departments such as: finance, human resource management, marketing, information technology, corporate social responsibility and supply chain.

Literature Review

Understanding generational diversity in the workplace is an important challenge to management. studies have shown that not only do different generational groups possess unique value sets (Bogdonowtez and Bailey, 2002). But heterogeneity in age can affect performance ratings (Judge and Ferris, 1993), team turnover and social integration (McGuire *et al*., 2007). Because of differing attitudes performance and values, generational differences can create incongruence in the supervisors – subordinate dyad (Collins *et al*., 2009). While in the past multiple generational worked in some organization, they were usually separate from each other by virtue of their job description and system hierarchy. Employees from the same generational are likely to share the same work value, and these values vary from generation to generation (Qursoy *et al*., 2008). Each generation of individuals expects (what they want) other to know their needs and to respect them for who they are. They would be disappoint and setup when they perceive (what they get) their expectations are not met (TayAngeline, 2011). Inter-generational employee tension and conflict could be avoided if management is sensitive to needs of different groups and empathies with the way they think and work (Hill and Stephens, 2003). they should stops one generational group of employees from complaining and blaming individuals from another group wherever they fail to achieve their goals and aspirations .senior employees (in age) should not persist in asking ,what is wrong with the younger generation and the younger employees should not endless, criticize about the seemingly rigid and archaic management and leaderships style of their older colleagues. Idecilly, to create trust and harmony between employees from different generation, they should avoid from making the "us" versa us "them" type of comments and in situations (yang and Guy, 2006). Al though it may seem like a monument task for management to ensure that employees understand and accept the idiosyncrasies of each multi- generational group, it is not impossible mission. Management must be the first to knowledge and accept the unique characteristics and expectations of employees from different generational group. They should also identity the strength and weakness of each group and adopt judicious measures to accommodate their mixed expectation and perceptions (Tay Angeline, 2011). Like other authors (e.g., Dries *et al*., 2008; Zemke *et al*., 2000), Gursoy *et al*. (2008) provide a general description of the characteristics of each generation of employees. They describe the traditional Baby

Boomers as workaholics who rarely job hop. They are dedicated, diligent, self-motivated employees who expect to be promoted based on their seniority and loyalty. Boomers perceive the Generation X (Gen X) employees as more laid-back and the Generation Y (Gen Y) employees as technologically more adept than them. Gen X employees, according to Gursoy *et al*. (2008), tend to work smart and they prefer to balance their lives between work and family activities (work-life balance). They are efficient problem solvers but where possible, they prefer not to take on additional work. Comparatively, Gen X employees are more materialistic and sceptical than the Boomers as they worry more about the uncertain future. They resent being repeatedly told and reminded about what to do and how the Boomer employees are much better than them.

The individualistic Gen X cohort expects to be appreciated and rewarded as soon as they have achieved their organizational goals. When they have problems, they prefer to talk directly to their bosses for quick solutions. Unlike the Boomers, Gen X employees are not afraid to job hop because they are confident that each leap would land them in a higher position that pays more (Altimier, 2006). However, they would stay longer in organizations that offer interesting jobs, flexible work schedules, and opportunities for internal promotion.

Possible generational differences

Employees from the same generation are likely to share the same work values,and these values vary from generation to generation (Gursoy *et al*., 2008). Possible generational differences are:

1-Attitudes toward work

One of the major contributors of generational in the workplace is that generation X is uncommitted to their jobs and work only require hours, while the older generation is seems to be hard working generation.

2-loyalty toward the employer

Another point of contention among generations regards loyalty toward employers. The older generation characterized as being extremely loyal toward their employers, and generation X have lack if loyalty toward employer .The loyalty toward employers has been found to decrease, the younger generation the least loyal generation appeared to be.

3-Attitude toward supervision

Workers appear to differ in the extent to which they appreciated supervision and require feedback. For instant the younger worker presumably dislike micromanagement. Some studies that compared the younger and older generations indicated that the older valued freedom from supervision significantly more than the younger. Other sources of differences between the two generations such as; desire for a better work/life balance, their perception of what contributes to success in the workplace, attitude regarding authority and respect…etc. The majority of workers believe that fairness is

the most important aspect of workplace culture, and that feeling valued, recognized, and appreciated and being in a supportive environment that encourages happiness in the workplace (Randstad Work Solution, 2007). Since the needs and expectations of each generation differ quite a lot from each other, it is impossible for the manager to have only one way to respond. Therefore, in author's opinion, it is important the manager to remain as flexible as possible, to be able to provide right kind of support for each individual and focus more on decreasing possible negative attitudes, which employees might have towards each other. According to Annastiina Romo (2012), employees will feel more appreciated and valued in the company, if the work tasks are based on their strengths and know-how, and forgetting about presumptions given by the age. However, managers should bear in mind, that this type of evaluation of a person has to be enough diversified. Young people usually have the education required, but not necessarily the experience.

One major part of successful age management is trying to bring individuals together, making them work side by side, enabling them to appreciate the knowledge and skills they might be lacking, and thus learn from each other. By increasing contact between the members of different generations, the tension between them might release and people might start to perceive each other more pleasant and work towards the mutual goal. There have been identified few different management techniques, which might reduce age gaps by connecting and bonding people with different backgrounds.

1) Firstly, the manager should avoid myths and stereotypes; there is a difference between respecting differences of individuals and labelling them. Moreover, these age neutral attitudes of superiors will shape the atmosphere of the whole working environment.
2) Increasing communication, as well as encouraging interaction and collaboration among the employees are big factors, which ultimately will also help to anticipate and surface the possible generational conflicts, before they grow too big.
3) By creating diverse work teams, the manager is able to avoid age pools and transfer ideas and knowledge across the whole organization. Mentoring and reverse-mentoring are excellent ways to share knowledge cross-generational. Not only will it help to transfer the valuable tacit knowledge from Boomers, but it will also bring people together.
4) Remaining flexible. Understanding the needs of different generations and offering the right programs and benefits to retaining them. (Whitacre 2007; Kyles 2005; Greencard 2011; Zemke *et al*. 2000.Quated in Annastiina Romo, (2012))

Analysis and discussions

Analysis of Interviews

The researcher conducted the interviews with 10 experts in the field of management in the different companies under Haggar Holding Company, two experts from each company.

1-Background information:

The majority of the respondents are of ages between 40-60 years old, most of them have postgraduate studies. Their experiences range between 5-20 years old.

2-Is your company has awareness and perception of generational differences in workplace?
All of the interviewees stated that the company is aware by the differences between the generations.

3-What are the characteristics of older and digital workforce in your company?
Most of the interviewees agreed that older workforce have the capability to respect the company and company's objectives to be achieved. As well as they are more committed and loyal to the workplace, they accept the company's rules, policies and do their job as it is required. Some other interviewees add that older generation often lack for being flexible to changing and to cope with. On the other hand interviewees mentioned that digital workforce has the ability to learn quickly and are flexible enough to deal with changing, in spite of that they are much complaining toward rules and rigid activities and restrict environment. Both generations have their own expectations toward company each in different way.

4-Are there any conflicts between the two generations?
All the interviewees mentioned that, once the company hired different generation that mean conflict will occur due to the differences in their values, attitude, perceptions…etc. each generation have their way to look at the company, its rules, activities and expectations. These differences may arise communications problems.

5-What are the various techniques used by managers to decrease the gap/conflict/differences between the generation in the company? Some interviewees stated that one the techniques to solve this problem that to correct the misperception that employees of each generation have of other, and by offer appropriate environment that suit both generation and allow them to work together properly. The other interviewees mentioned that they preferred to assign task related to the characteristics of each generation in order to avoid the conflict between them. Other techniques that interviewees mentioned that to manage this conflict is that they make the older workforces to train and coach the younger one to be able to enhancing their communication and they can work together.

DISCUSSION

The main characteristics of older workforce in private sector in Sudan are: older workforce have the capability to respect the company and company's objectives to be achieved. As well as they are more committed and loyal to the workplace, they accept the company's rules, policies and do their job as it is required. Also older generation often lack for being flexible to changing and to cope with changes. On the other hand digital workforce has the following characteristics: they have ability to learn quickly and are flexible enough to deal with changing, in spite of that they are much complaining toward rules and

rigid activities and restrict environment. Both generations have their own expectations toward company each in different way. These results confirmed what is mentioned in the literature such as: Randstad Work Solution, 2007. Altimier, 2006, Gursoy *et al*. (2008). The leadership can manage the differences between the older work force and digital generational in private sector in Sudan by the following techniques:

- Correct the misperception that employees of each generation have of other.
- Offer appropriate environment that suit both generation and allow them to work together properly.
- To assign task related to the characteristics of each generation in order to avoid the conflict between them.
- Make the older workforces to train and coach the younger one to be able to enhancing their communication and they can work together.
- These techniques are confirmed what annastiinaromo, (2012) mentioned.

RESULTS

There are some differences between the two generations regarding their attitudes, values, perceptions and expectations, digital workforce tend to show higher expectations regarding career and life advancement rather than old generation. The older generation appeared to be slightly more satisfied with their jobs rather than the digital generation. The analysis arise that the level of commitment to their employer. Lastly, older generation have been found to be less likely than the digital generation to leave their work. Accordingly leader and manager should attempt to manage and reduces the gap/conflict between the two generations as it was mentioned in the analysis that they try to enhance communication channel between the two in order to enhance their ability to understand each other and correct the misperception toward each other.

Conclusion

Every generation of the workforce is unique, valuable and special in reality, each tend to view the other differently based on their own experiences and expectations. The role of management and leader is to ensure that individual from each generation should perceive each other more positively to avoid any intergenerational disharmony.

Recommendations

- For any company that aim to manage and control the differences between the different generations is that, the company should be aware about the different characteristics of each generations and try to educate their workforces about these unique characteristics.
- Managers/leaders need to understand the background of their workers in order to manage them effectively.
- Company should organizes training that will enhance the level the generation relations.
- Further researches with adequate sample are necessary to study this area more comprehensively.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

- Background Information:
- Position
- Age
- Level of Education
- How long have you been in this company
- Is your company has awareness and perception of generational differences in workplace
- What are the characteristics of older workforce in your company
- What are the characteristics of digital generation in your company
- Are there any conflicts and tensions between the older workforce and the digital generations?
- What are the various techniques used by the manager to decrease the gap between the older and digital generations.

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