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Training the Multi-Generational Workforce

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Training the Multi-Generational Workforce

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Abstract

The range in generations of employees is creating differences unseen in the workplace, until now. According to Keene et al. (2015), Baby Boomers were born between 1945 and 1964; Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980; and Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996. This broad range of ages means that employees can now be anywhere from 22 to 73 years of age. That fifty-plus-year gap is causing frustration, stress, and confusion among employees. Each generation has been influenced by certain social and economic transitions, technological advancements, and organizational developments that have led them to develop different views of both work and the work-life balance (Bartley et al., 2007). A lack of cultural training for employees has caused frustrating circumstances such as assumptions and generalizations regarding employees of certain generations. With the hospitality industry employing a diverse range of employees, these circumstances are more prevalent than other industries. In the interests of working to combat these frustrations, further research was conducted in order to determine what training is best to implement within the hospitality industry.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

There are now 75.4 million living Millennials, which is a half-million more than the 74.9 million living baby boomers (Andrews, 2016). The first Millennial college graduates entered the workforce in the summer of 2004, and will continue to do so in large numbers until around 2022 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). By the year 2015, Millennials had already made up the majority of the U.S. workforce; in fact, by 2015, 45% of the American workforce was comprised of Millennials, in comparison to the 21% of GenXers and the 31% of Boomers (Keene & Handrich, 2015). These numbers represent a demographic not seen since the Baby Boomer generation entered the workforce in the mid-1960s. In order to connect with a culturally diverse, multigenerational workforce, and one which represents a microcosm of religions and nationalities, effective leadership within every industry will need to develop new standards of human resources management (Maier, 2011). These same principles apply to the hospitality industry; perhaps even more so, as this industry is almost wholly customer-service based. In other words, those in the hospitality arena must work well with others. As Bartley, Ladd and Morris (2007) stated:

Human resource departments nationwide are beginning to recognize the need for workforce learning programs to educate employees about their intergenerational counterparts and to bridge those generational gaps while increasing cohesion through an understanding and awareness of the needs and desires of generationally diverse mixes of employees. (28)

Generally, diverse employees have different needs and desires. Their past experiences, including how they were raised, factor into these desires. With different generations working together it is necessary to train those employees on the different working dynamics to ensure a cohesive work environment.

Research Questions

The following research study proposes to examine the following questions.

1. In the workplace, what training is currently offered to employees to help better understand the generational differences among their peers?
2. What challenges do employees face when working with coworkers of a different generation than their own?
3. What training would be beneficial for employees in order to help them develop their understanding of diversity in the workplace?

Statement of the Problem and Importance of the Study

Statement

The current challenge for hospitality leaders and human resources professionals is how they might create supportive work environments for an increasingly diverse population of multigenerational employees and work groups (Maier, 2011). When it comes to employment challenges within the hospitality industry specifically, the majority of the prior research focuses on leadership relationships and job dissatisfaction; in other words, employees' intent to leave their organization. Research is lacking concerning training recommendations for generational diversity within the workplace. Hospitality leaders will benefit from a more thorough

understanding of what is lacking in order to encourage more productive collaboration among their diverse teams through proper training.

Importance of the Study

The challenge for hospitality industry leaders and human resources professionals of today is how to create supportive work environments for an increasingly diverse population of multigenerational employees and work groups (Maier, 2011). Indeed, the emerging trend of what has been called *generational diversity* in the workplace is a growing challenge for managers and learning officers (Bartley et al., 2007). The purpose of this study is to better understand what challenges employees continue to face when working with individuals of different generations. As such, it is necessary to analyze what type of employee training is currently being offered in the workplace. The following study aims to provide more detail in terms of what training would benefit employees the most while also making them happier in the workplace, and, thus, less likely to leave an organization. The results of this research will then be used to make recommendations for how a training program designed to alleviate the frustration, stress, and confusion experienced by employees of diverse generations may be achieved.

Definition of Terms and Abbreviations

For clarification purposes, the following definitions are for specific terms that appear frequently in the following research study.

Baby Boomers- Those individuals born between 1946 and 1964, during or shortly after World War II, and who were raised in an era of extreme optimism, opportunity and progress (Maier, 2011).

Diversity- An instance of being composed of differing elements or qualities (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Generation Xers- Those individuals born between 1965 and 1980, and who faced a rapidly changing social climate dominated by social and civil unrest, as well as advances in science and technology, that all served to move the average citizen into the computer age (Maier, 2011).

Millennials- Those individuals born between 1981 and 1999, who were children of the Baby Boomers or early Generation Xers, and who immediately entered the current high-tech, neo-optimistic times (Maier, 2011).

Multigenerational- Relating to several generations, whether family or societal (Dictionary.com, 2018).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Prior research on employee training has focused on employee perceptions and intent to leave an organization. According to Maier (2011), researchers have indicated that an employee's intentions to leave a position are expected to have a negative impact on his or her perceptions of a leader's process or style. Employees who believe their personal needs are being met through a leader's individualized attention and consideration will be less likely to leave the organization that is meeting these needs, and thus remain as a member of the organization (Maier, 2011). Further, Keene & Handrich (2015) argue that much of the research indicates that the higher one is in a managerial position, regardless of age, the more intrinsically motivated he or she is to work, and to encourage others to do the same. How, then, does this research impact generational diversity, specifically in the hospitality industry? According to Maier (2011), researchers

indicate that it is crucial for hospitality leaders and managers to understand multigenerational similarities and differences in worldview, attitudes, work philosophy, and ways of interacting with others, as this will enable them to make informed decisions while creating positive working conditions that attract and retain highly productive workers (as cited in Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). Indeed, the results of Maier's study indicate that there exists both generational and job category differences in the perceptions employees hold about the workplace, especially as these perceptions relate to their dissatisfaction and intention to leave an organization (Maier, 2011).

Potential challenges among generations

The diversity among generations can lead to potential challenges for managers who do not understand the levels of importance and satisfaction that each generation places on organizational benefits (Gladwell, Dorwart, Stone & Hammond, 2010). Each generation has experienced different factors that have contributed to developing their mindset about the workplace. The negative effects of multigenerational differences are often experienced because individuals are remaining in the workforce for longer periods of time, thereby creating environments where they often experience confusion, frustration, and stress when working with individuals outside of their own generational group (Maier, 2011).

Summary

Prior research has often focused on employee intent to leave an organization and the overall dissatisfaction level leading up to his or her exit. There is little evidence demonstrating that training programs, and more specifically, generational training programs, factor into an employee's final decision. Furthermore, research indicates that generational differences

influence how employees imagine their preferred working environment to be. This mindset factors into their overall satisfaction within the workplace.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Mixed Method

The method best suited to test the theory that generational diversity training would be beneficial in the workplace is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research. The use of a mixed-method study allows both quantitative and qualitative data to be analyzed more thoroughly. As such, the investigator is using a mixed-method study to understand the challenges facing multigenerational employees and to gather data that addresses the following research questions:

1. In the workplace, what training is currently offered to employees to help them better understand the generational differences among their peers?
2. What challenges do employees face when working with individuals of different generations?
3. What training would be beneficial for employees in developing their understanding of diversity in the workplace?

Quantitative Research

Through quantitative research methods, the investigator will determine the level of frustration employees have with one another. Additionally, data will be uncovered that determines whether employees in the hospitality industry have received generational training from their employers, and if they feel it has helped them to better understand the differences in worldviews, ways of interacting, and work philosophy among their coworkers.

Qualitative Research

Through qualitative research methods, the investigator will determine the challenges that are faced among the different generations, and more specifically, which generation experiences the greatest difficulties in the modern workplace. Employee feedback will uncover what training is recommended in order to overcome current challenges, as well as what training employees have received in the past. Their feedback will also provide insight into whether they have left a position because of the stress caused by working with individuals of different generations.

Research Design

A paper survey consisting of open-ended questions and a Likert Scale was distributed in person to nine employees of an independent hotel located within a community college in the suburbs of Chicago. Those nine employees represent all three generations and included both male and female employees. It was important to the study that the sample was comprised of employees within the hospitality industry, and more specifically an independent property. Independent properties tend to offer unique training programs for their employees, as compared to brands within the industry. The survey itself consisted of five Likert Scale questions ranging from Completely Agree to Completely Disagree, and four open-ended questions which followed those responses. Additionally, demographics were compiled in order to differentiate among generations and gender.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Findings

Overall, eight surveys were returned, for an 88% response rate. The responses were received from three male and five female employees who represent the following generations:

one Generation Z, three Millennials, three Generation Xers, and one Baby Boomer. The following statements were incorporated into the Likert Scale, and average scores were calculated.

Table 1: Average agreement with the statement “I often find it hard to relate to my coworkers who may be older or younger than I am” (1= completely disagree; 5= completely agree)

<i>Generation</i>		<i>Satisfaction</i>
Generation Z	(n=1)	3
Millennials	(n=3)	1.67
Generation X	(n=3)	3
Baby Boomers	(n=1)	2

Table 2: Average agreement with the statement “It can be frustrating to work on a team that has a wide range of employee ages” (1= completely disagree; 5= completely agree)

<i>Generation</i>		<i>Satisfaction</i>
Generation Z	(n=1)	4
Millennials	(n=3)	2.3
Generation X	(n=3)	3
Baby Boomers	(n=1)	4

Table 3: Average agreement with the statement “I would feel more comfortable in my job if my employer provided me with additional training to help me better understand my coworkers” (1= completely disagree; 5= completely agree)

<i>Generation</i>		<i>Satisfaction</i>
Generation Z	(n=1)	2
Millennials	(n=3)	3.3
Generation X	(n=3)	2.3
Baby Boomers	(n=1)	3

Table 4: Average agreement with the statement “I received generational diversity training from my employer” (1= completely disagree; 5= completely agree)

<i>Generation</i>		<i>Satisfaction</i>
Generation Z	(n=1)	2
Millennials	(n=3)	1.3
Generation X	(n=3)	2.3
Baby Boomers	(n=1)	1

Table 5: Average agreement with the statement “Generational diversity training would help me better understand where my coworkers are coming from” (1= completely disagree; 5= completely agree)

<i>Generation</i>		<i>Satisfaction</i>
Generation Z	(n=1)	2
Millennials	(n=3)	4.3
Generation X	(n=3)	3.67
Baby Boomers	(n=1)	4

The following open-ended questions were asked to further enrich the data gathered:

1. What challenges do you face when working with different generations?

Millennial participant: “Older generations have not been open to new ideas; younger generations feel more privileged.”

Millennial participant: “Adaption to new technology.”

Millennial participant: “Stereotypes, generalizations, assumptions, power struggles.”

Generation Z participant: “Having to learn either newer ways of things or doing them the old fashioned way.”

Baby Boomer participant: “Cell phone issues- lack of attention span.”

Generation X participant: “I am open to working with all generations. I see no challenges only opportunity.”

Generation X participant: “Employee motivations and the technology gap.”

Generation X participant: “Disagreements as to how issues should be addressed. Disagreements as to what constitutes proper work behavior.”

2. What generation have you had the most challenges with?

- a. Younger, Generation Z.
- b. Our current generation.
- c. Generation Z.
- d. Baby Boomer.
- e. Baby Boomer- as it relates to technological knowledge.
- f. Millennial or Baby Boomer.
- g. Baby Boomers.
- h. Those between 20 and 30 years of age.

3. What training would help you overcome these challenges?

Generation X participant: “Technology training.”

Millennial participant: “Training on why each generation does things or learns things a certain way.”

Millennial participant: "Social awareness or perspective training."

Generation Z participant: "Situational adaption training."

Generation X participant: "Generational diversity training."

Two participant's responses (One Millennial and One Baby Boomer) were "I don't know."

One participant's response was blank (Generation X).

4. Have you ever left a job due to the stress of working with different generations?

All responses were in the negative.

5. What specific training have you received which helps you work on a diverse team?

Millennial participant: "General diversity training- race and ethnicity."

Generation X participant: "General diversity online training."

Millennial participant: "College management courses."

Five responses were "no training."

Summary

The limited sample size did not provide as much data to be analyzed as the investigator would have preferred. As a result, not every research question received a response. Out of those questions answered, however, several themes emerged. Most employees had either received no training to help them work on a diverse team, or had only received general diversity training as it related to both race and ethnicity. One major theme that stood out concerned the challenges with technology, including adaptation to newer versions or models that Baby Boomers often face. On the other side, the one Baby Boomer who responded to the survey stated that the challenge with Generation Z is their overuse of cell phones. When compared to one another, these responses indicate that the younger generations utilize technology more than the older generation is willing to accept. Although prior research showed employee intent to leave an organization through dissatisfaction, each of the participants surveyed stated they had never left a job due to the stress of working with different generations.

Recommendations

The results of the survey administered just barely brush the surface of the need for generational training, but do clearly indicate the need for additional research. In order for optimal results to be gathered concerning generational diversity, additional research should be conducted within the hospitality industry specifically. One recommendation would be to survey the staff of a 1,000 room casino hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The sheer number of employees and their age range would provide sufficient data to analyze. Further, Las Vegas offers both independent and branded properties that when compared would also offer important data. Once additional data is uncovered, a plan should be developed for more specific generational diversity training. This training would be implemented within Human Resources departments and given to all employees. When implemented and administered, generational diversity training will alleviate the frustration, stress and confusion experienced by employees of diverse generations by enlightening generations on their differences and opening their minds up to different mindsets.

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