

## Managing academic library as a multigenerational workplace: a field study of generational diversity management at Alexandria University faculty libraries

Research – Summary

Received: 12.06.2024

Accepted: 25.07.2024

Published: 27.08.2024

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### Abstract

The work environment in its various variables plays a vital role in stabilizing work and raising productivity; researchers in management sciences and work behaviours have noted the role of individual variables of workers (age, educational level, years of experience) in influencing the personal characteristics and behaviours of the workers, which has drawn attention to the multigenerational work environment, where it includes a number of generational groups. Each group is characterized by different characteristics, which make it imperative for tensions in relationships and conflicts to occur unless the management of institutions pays attention to the rapid adoption of appropriate foundations and strategies for the management of those generational groups.

This gave rise to the idea of the current study, which focused on the fact that the Multigenerational workplace Management is one of the most important factors affecting the functioning and productivity of the library.

The aim of the study is to introduce the concept of Multigenerational workplace Management into Academic libraries in order to properly manage the various generations of their staff. The management of staff from different generations of librarians is imperative and requires a clear strategy and a vision of its application, so

that libraries can make the most of their available generational diversity and build good relationships among them, thereby increasing morale and thus improving the career satisfaction of the staff, moreover increasing their performance efficiency, as well as achieving the aims of the library and the satisfaction of their users.

## Keywords

Academic libraries, work environments, librarians, Egypt

## Introduction

In today's work environment, it is increasingly common to find individuals from different generations working together. Depending on the classification system, workplaces today can include anywhere from three to four generations. These generational compositions vary based on each country's labor laws and retirement age stipulations. For instance, by 2024, Egyptian institutions are expected to see the departure of the older generation still active in the workforce, leaving only three generational groups sharing the work environment.

While generational diversity offers significant benefits, such as enriching the workplace and contributing to the achievement of organizational goals, it also presents administrative and organizational challenges. These challenges arise from differences in values, goals, communication preferences, and work expectations among the generations (Mahmoud, Fuxman, Mohr, Reisel & Grigoriou, 2021). The diversity in today's work environment has led researchers and human resources professionals to focus on understanding generational differences and developing effective management strategies. This is particularly important in workplaces with a multigenerational workforce, as it allows organizations to leverage the diverse talents, experiences, and skills of their employees.

Like many other institutions, libraries and information centers, including academic libraries, are multigenerational work environments. Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting the educational process in universities, providing various services to students, faculty, and staff. This critical role places a responsibility on library management to enhance employee performance and satisfaction, which in turn improves the library's contribution to education and research. Therefore, it is important to study the academic library as a multigenerational work environment to develop effective management practices that address generational diversity and foster healthy working relationships.

Researchers have explored various topics related to generational diversity, including management strategies for multigenerational teams, work ethics across generations, generational similarities and differences, communication in multigenerational environments, leadership of multigenerational teams, and intergenerational relationships. These studies highlight the importance of understanding and effectively managing generational diversity in academic libraries to improve employee morale, productivity, and job satisfaction.

## **1. Methodological Framework:**

**1.1 The Study Phenomenon:** The workforce is the most valuable asset of any organization, with management responsible for organizing, coordinating, and planning to achieve organizational goals. Numerous studies have indicated that one of the key factors contributing to low productivity is the absence of effective diversity management strategies, particularly in managing generational diversity and bridging the generational gap.

The phenomenon under study was identified during an exploratory visit to several faculty libraries at Alexandria University, where it was observed that employee morale was negatively impacted by the generational gap. This observation led to the decision to conduct this study, with the aim of analyzing the situation and proposing solutions to maximize the potential of a diverse workforce and improve job satisfaction, cooperation, and relationships within the libraries.

## **1.2 Objectives:**

1. Identify the age groups working in the libraries under study.
2. Determine the years of experience across these age groups.
3. Assess the awareness of management and employees regarding the characteristics of a multigenerational work environment.
4. Evaluate managers' knowledge of global strategies for managing multigenerational teams.
5. Investigate the extent to which multigenerational management strategies are implemented in the libraries under study.

**1.3 Importance:** This study is important as it examines libraries as multigenerational work environments, focusing on the management of different generations within university libraries. It reviews the generational groups working in these libraries, the opportunities and challenges they face, and the

relationships between them. Additionally, the study offers insights into modern management methods, serving as a guide for library employees and a reference for decision-makers in these institutions. Effective management of generational diversity can improve job satisfaction and morale, ultimately enhancing productivity and enabling libraries to achieve their goals.

#### **1.4 Study Questions:**

1. What are the age groups working in the libraries under study?
2. How many years of experience do these age groups have?
3. How aware are management and employees of the characteristics of a multigenerational work environment?
4. How knowledgeable are library directors about global strategies for managing different generations?
5. How effectively are library directors applying these strategies?

#### **1.5 Study Limits:**

##### **1.5.1 Objective Limits:**

This study is focused on analyzing the strategies employed by the administration of Alexandria University's college libraries to manage generational diversity among their employees.

##### **1.5.2 Geographical Limits:**

The study is geographically confined to the libraries of Alexandria University's colleges located in Alexandria Governorate, as well as the library of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Beheira Governorate (Edfina), Egypt.

##### **1.5.3 Qualitative Limits:**

The study specifically addresses the management of generational diversity among three distinct generational groups of workers in Alexandria University's college libraries. The focus is on employees born between 1963 and 2003, with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years.

##### **1.5.4 Time Limits:**

The study covers the period from mid-2022 to mid-2023, examining the management of generational diversity among workers in Alexandria University's college libraries during this timeframe.

## **1.6 Study Methodology and Data Collection Tools:**

This study employs a descriptive approach to gather facts, data, and information related to the management of generational diversity among employees in the libraries under review. The goal is to identify, analyze, and interpret the current situation, with the aim of deriving general conclusions that can help align practice with ideal management standards. To achieve the study's objectives, the following data collection tools were utilized:

### **1.6.1 Structured Interviews:**

Structured interviews were conducted with the directors of all Alexandria University college libraries. Pre-determined questions were asked, and comprehensive answers were obtained, along with additional insights from the directors. Field visits were made to all 20 faculty libraries, which include:

1. Faculty of Arts Library
2. Faculty of Law Library
3. Faculty of Commerce Library
4. Faculty of Science Library (located in Moharram Bek)
5. Faculty of Medicine Library
6. Faculty of Pharmacy Library
7. Faculty of Engineering Library
8. Faculty of Agriculture Library (located in Shatby)
9. Faculty of Education Library
10. Faculty of Dentistry Library
11. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Library
12. Faculty of Tourism and Hotels Library
13. Faculty of Fine Arts Library
14. Faculty of Physical Education Library for Boys
15. Faculty of Physical Education Library for Girls
16. Faculty of Agriculture Library (located in Saba Pasha)
17. Faculty of Nursing Library

18. Faculty of Specific Education Library
19. Faculty of Early Childhood Education Library
20. Faculty of Economic Studies and Political Science Library

These visits provided valuable information and additional insights through standardized interviews with the library managers.

### **1.6.2 Direct Observation:**

Additional information was gathered through personal observations made during the field visits to the libraries under study.

### **1.6.3 Questionnaire:**

A questionnaire was administered to collect data from library workers, aiming to assess the current state of generational diversity management in Alexandria University's college libraries.

## **4. Results and Recommendations of the Study:**

### **4.1 Study Results:**

#### **1. Absence of the Younger Generation:**

The study reveals a notable absence of the youngest generational cohort (those under 27 years old) in the entire sample. A small minority of this group are employed on temporary contracts or through the comprehensive reward system. This gap is primarily due to a decade-long hiring freeze at Alexandria University, resulting in a significant generational void within the work environment. Consequently, the workforce is predominantly composed of the middle generation (ages 27 to 44), which is present in all the libraries studied. The older generation (over 44 years old) is found in 17 of the libraries, while newly established libraries are exclusively staffed by the middle generation. Additionally, the majority of library managers belong to the older generation.

#### **2. Lack of a Unified Organizational Structure:**

The study highlights the absence of a clear, unified organizational structure across Alexandria University's college libraries. This has led to confusion in the delineation of responsibilities, particularly between department heads and their older colleagues holding the title of "Senior Specialist." This

ambiguity hampers department heads in fulfilling their roles effectively and creates tension between different generational groups within some libraries.

### 3. **Mismatch Between Job Titles and Responsibilities:**

There is a disconnect between employees' job titles, their experience, and the tasks they perform. Employees, regardless of their titles or years of experience, are often assigned the same tasks, leading to an underutilization of the expertise of older employees. This can result in frustration among senior staff, which may in turn affect the morale of younger employees, leading to a decline in overall employee morale across generational groups.

### 4. **Proposed Generational Categories:**

The study suggests categorizing employees into three distinct generational groups: the beginner generation, the middle generation, and the senior generation. This classification aligns with the actual age distribution of employees in Alexandria University's college libraries.

### 5. **Lack of Management Awareness:**

The study found that library managers generally possess only superficial knowledge of managing a multi-generational workforce. They are not well-versed in the latest methods or best practices for managing different generations, indicating a significant gap in awareness regarding the importance of tailored management strategies for a multi-generational work environment. Managers tend to rely on traditional management techniques without referencing proven strategies for leading diverse generational teams. While most managers can recognize the diversity in characteristics, values, and capabilities among different generations, as well as the differences in needs, goals, aspirations, incentives, and work styles, this awareness has not translated into effective management practices.

### 6. **Challenges in Managing Multi-Generational Employees:**

Most library managers find it challenging to manage employees from different generations. They often observe conflicts arising from generational differences, particularly in libraries with a diverse workforce.

However, this issue is less prevalent in libraries where all employees belong to the same generational group, often due to the recent establishment of these libraries and the smaller number of staff.

**7. Promotion of Participation and Respect:**

Library directors at Alexandria University encourage a spirit of participation and respect among employees as part of their strategy for managing intergenerational relations. However, these initiatives are implemented in an inconsistent and uncoordinated manner. A significant portion of employees express dissatisfaction with the lack of social, cultural, and creative activities designed to relieve work pressure, rejuvenate energy, and foster positive relationships among staff.

**8. Lack of a Knowledge-Sharing Strategy:**

There is no clear strategy in place within the libraries to encourage knowledge sharing between different generations of employees, which hinders the effective transfer of expertise and experience.

**9. Limited Scope of Cooperative Activities:**

The majority of library managers limit cooperative activities to group work, neglecting other opportunities that could enhance the spirit of cooperation between different generational groups within their libraries.

**10. Commitment to Administrative Transparency:**

The management of the libraries demonstrates a commitment to administrative transparency, ensuring that work-related information is shared with all employees, regardless of their generational affiliation.

**11. Awareness of Coexistence and Acceptance:**

The libraries' management places significant emphasis on promoting coexistence and acceptance among employees from different generations. The study indicates that there is a general awareness among employees of the value of generational diversity and the benefits of mutual respect and learning. This awareness is closely linked to the level of understanding exhibited by library managers on the topic.

**12. Delegation Due to Technological Limitations:**



Some older-generation library managers delegate the responsibility of overseeing digital library operations to younger employees due to their own difficulties in managing these tasks or their limited familiarity with the required technology.

### 13. **Skill Disparities Across Generations:**

The study confirms that technological proficiency tends to increase with younger generational groups, a trend that is commonly observed both within and outside the workplace.

### 14. **Technological Gap and Resulting Conflicts:**

Both managers and employees agree that a significant technological gap exists between different generational groups, which often leads to conflicts.

### 15. **Efforts to Bridge the Technological Gap:**

While there is a managerial effort to bridge the technological gap through targeted training for each generational group, these efforts are hampered by the irregular availability of such courses from the relevant college administration, limiting the development of both technological and non-technological skills among employees and managers.

## **4.2 Recommendations:**

### 1. **Hiring Younger Employees:**

Recruit individuals from the younger generation to create a more balanced and diverse work environment in the libraries.

### 2. **Establish a Unified Organizational Structure:**

Implement a clear and consistent organizational structure across all Alexandria University college libraries, with the flexibility to adapt to each library's size and workload.

### 3. **Define Clear Job Descriptions:**

Develop precise job descriptions that reflect the specific responsibilities and specializations of each role, preventing role overlap, relationship complications, and potential conflicts.

### 4. **Align Job Duties with Generational Expertise:**

Identify and align job responsibilities with the generational group, leveraging the unique experiences and skills of each generation.

5. **Provide Training on Generational Management:**

Offer training and development courses on generational management for library managers, equipping them to effectively manage a multi-generational workforce.

6. **Document and Preserve Institutional Knowledge:**

Create a comprehensive guide documenting all library operations as a means of preserving knowledge and ensuring its transfer from one generation to the next.

7. **Develop Technological Skills Programs:**

Implement programs to enhance the technological skills of library managers and older employees, aiming to bridge the technological gap between generations and facilitate progress rather than impede it.