Metamorphosis of workforce management: The implication on employee retention towards sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

This paper tends to offer an insight into workforce management in its various forms and developmental stages. It also seeks to bring to light the Millennials or Generation Y who seem to be the most relevant workforce in today's organization. While highlighting the relevance of the Gen Y(s), this work also looks at the retention strategies that will keep this generation happy and stable in the workplace to ensure efficient productivity and profitability. The retention strategies come into strong focus because this will go a long way in ensuring the stability of organizations in the present economic circumstances and concluded that understanding the generation of one's employees will enhance employee retention in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

For effective and efficient repositioning of workforce management in consonant with today's business world where workforce stability is enshrined, there is a need to understand the generations' work values in terms of their similarities and differences to ensure their retention. In today's workforce, the generations of workforce comprise five different generations i.e. the traditionalist generation, baby boomer generation, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z with each exhibiting their unique work values as relates to their generation thus providing organisations with differing views as evident in opportunities and challenges confronting workforce management towards retention (Locmele-Lunova & Cirjevskis, 2017). Therefore, a significant aspect of human resource management is the management of the workforce which constitutes the major direction an organization takes seriously to ensure maximum productivity or profitability.

In a work-oriented context, Workforce Management (WFM) addresses how one matches workloads to staffing levels and involves always assigning the right people to the right jobs at the right time to forecast workloads, plan staffing levels, and generate corresponding work/shift rosters (Rick van Echtelt, 2021). Furthermore, Ramu (2020) states that WFM encompasses all the activities needed to maintain a productive workforce solely because human capital has emerged as the make-or-break factor of any organization's survival and growth. One obvious relation or unifying factor among discussions of WFM is the utilization of the workforce to maximize productivity. It also involves effectively forecasting workforce requirements and creating and managing staff schedules to accomplish a particular task on a day-to-day and hour-to-hour basis (Shraddha, 2019). The relationship between workforce and management again comes into focus with Kumar and Singh (2013) further asserting that workforce management is, basically,

the aspect of running an organization where management is controlling the results by organizing and harmonizing the workforce using various concurrent tools, means, and concepts.

The management of people at work has witnessed a series of evolvements from the agrarian period to the present day where the focus is now on human resources as an asset. Therefore, this paper tends to look at the transformation processes of workforce management as a whole which had been modeled by knowledge and competency gaps with emphasis on the characteristics of each generation and its implication on employee retention geared towards sustainable development with an emphasis on the millennials, Generation Y who are the most viable in any organization at the moment.

EVOLUTION/TRANSFORMATION OF WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT (WFM)

Lancaster (2015) in describing the evolution of WFM, alludes to a caterpillar that must morph from a leaf-bound platform that's being rapidly changed from one developmental stage to another because businesses and organizations must equally depend on radical change if they want to survive. Also, social media has placed present workplaces in the 'throes of a metamorphosis' that presents an interesting management challenge which is to create a work environment that accommodates the new participative urge that has now been spawned in most workers' DNA by the recognition and audience they enjoy on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Englemeier, 2016).
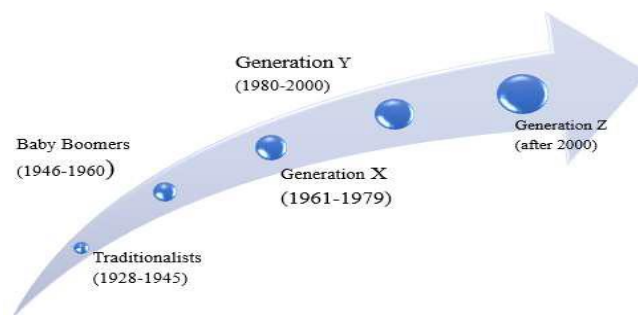

Figure 1. Saileela and Thiruchanaru (2018) Transformation processes of workforce management.

The evolvement of workforce management in the workplace as identified by Saileela and Thiruchanaru (2018) involves the classification of working generations into five major categories i.e. Generation Z (after 2000), Generation Y (1980-2000), Generation X (1961-1979), Baby Boomers (1946-1960) and traditionalists (1928-1945) with each generation having its unique traits and personality factors. Pyoria, Ojala, Saari, and Jarvinen (2017) emphasized that Generation Z that is also known as the millennials because they were born in the 80s with entry into the workforce in the 2000s. Pyoria et al also strongly believed that this particular set of workforce generations is more highly educated than earlier generations and competent in the use of technology.

For this study, it is imperative to discuss the uniqueness of each generation to fully understand the rationale behind the workforce management transformation processes heralded by the gaps in knowledge and competence as dictated by the prevailing circumstances in the business world and how to increase retention and motivate top talent since it is obvious now that the traditionalist and the baby boomer generations are nearing their retirement age or are retiring, leaving behind more of the Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in the workforce.

a. Generation Y-1980 to 2000

This is the generation of persons born between 1980 and 2001, this group possesses positive traits such as the ability to multi-task, a desire for team orientation, a connection to community duties, and optimism. Darby and Morell (2019) believed that research also labeled the group as talented, well-

educated, and achievement-oriented while on the other hand, many studies categorized Millennials as an entitled generation that lacks experience and the desire to sustain a lengthy career at any company (Oginni & Faseyiku, 2012). Additionally, Millennials are perceived as inexperienced individuals with high expectations of receiving immediate rewards of titles and privileges that were not earned. It is important for human resources in an organization to recognize that Millennials are also extremely skilled with technology unlike Generation Z, Millennials can adequately relate to life and happenings before the existence of technology. It is also believed that Generation Z bears the residual effects of some key historical events in the workplace, it was the Millennial Generation who witnessed and experienced those same events in real-time, thereby changing their view of work ethic and workplace assumptions.

b.   Generation X- 1965-1979

Furthermore, Generation X members carry similar traits they assumingly label on their children of the Millennial generation. Members in this era were often left alone at home while their parents of the Baby Boomer era worked long hours at their jobs. Subsequently, members within this generation are known to possess traits of authority, and self-reliance, and have even been referred to as pessimistic and demanding in the workplace. Although, a highly independent generation, the family and family values played an important role. This generation show cased that a majority of these individuals in this generation always place family first. Known for entering their jobs with a tenacious work ethics, Generation Xers are not afraid to work for their employers, although they do not fully trust them. Their drive allows them to be successful and quickly adapt to changes in the work environment (Oginni & Faseyiku, 2012).

c.   Baby Boomers- 1946-1964

Measured by world events most especially from an American perspective such as the War on Vietnam and NASA's landing on the moon. Darby and Morell (2019) argued that Baby Boomers represent those persons born in an era when domestic and international affairs were budding. Baby Boomers grew up in a world filled with protests and major inventions. This particular workforce was very competitive, valuing the work titles and corner offices. Additionally, this workforce was very hard-working. Baby Boomers challenged workplace authority, re-evaluated organizational hierarchies, and were highly competitive amongst their constituents. They desired more communication than Traditionalists and often willing to offer but respected their mentorship opportunities and knowledge rendered. Thus, appreciating growth and development. However, this era still represents a sizable force within the workplace although there seems to be a consensus that the Baby Boomers are nearing retirement or already in the retirement phase.

d.   Traditionalists- 1925-1945

The beginning of the workplace eras started with the Traditionalists. Supportive literary work is overwhelming regarding the reputation of this generation. Impacted by significant historical happenings including World War II, The Cold War, the genesis of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Great Depression, this generation is often depicted as extremely conservative. In the workplace, traditionalists are referred to as dependable, loyal, and solid workers. Troubled by change, many are retiring alongside their status quo opinions.

With the discussion of these five workforce generation, it is pertinent to examine the various stages of development that have also led to the emergence of WFM. This will further help in understanding the transformation processes of the management of the workforce. In a Harvard Business Review article, McGrath (2014) asserts that there have been three "ages" of management since the Industrial Revolution, with each emphasizing a different theme such as execution, expertise, and empathy with the belief before the Industrial Revolution, that there was not much management at all which

literally meant anyone other than the owner of an enterprise handling tasks such as coordination, planning, controlling, rewarding, and resource allocation (Oginni, Afolabi & Erigbe, 2014). Schwab (2016) in a World Economic Forum article also argues that the First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production while the Second Industrial Revolution used electric power to create mass production and the Third used electronics and information technology to automate production with a Fourth Industrial Revolution building on the Third, the digital revolution that has been occurring since the middle of the last century.

Furthermore, with different perspectives on the evolution or metamorphosis of WFM, it is becoming obvious that scholars on this particular form of management do not seem to have a unified agreement on the various stages that have developed WFM. Kumar and Singh (2013) seem to believe there is no universally accepted model to break up history into stages even though WFM has been transforming from time to time to fit in with the flow of the dominant stretches of the eras. With this, Toro, Labrador-Fenandez, and Nicolas (2019) seem to have a dissenting opinion on the evolution of WFM with the argument that generational differences in the workplace are an ambiguous concept while also acknowledging and admitting that the generational differences in recent times have continued to attract research as regards the workplace in recent times. This argument is based on the assumption that the era or events surrounding these generations are contents that are fixed in the consciences of people as the natural way through which the world exists.

In examining or considering the most recent transformation in the workplace, the recent worldwide pandemic comes into focus. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a lot of uncertainties within WFM. The pandemic also changed the way organizations operate with a lot of organizations having to improvise and innovate to ensure the viability of their workforce and profit-making. Dhar (2020) considering these changes, examines some innovations in the United States that have helped shape the workforce management strategies of organizations in 2020: -

1. **Contingent hiring**– The US workforce is currently contingent, with more than 80% of large firms intending to substantially increase their use in the coming years. Contingent workers bring on board the specialized skill set coupled with being readily available in the market which leads to reducing hiring costs and improving the company revenue.

2. Workplace Automation – Automation was synonymous with the word robotics but simply put, it has come to drastically alter how in-house processes are hired and operated. From streamlining recruitment with an ATS (Applicant Tracking System), a software that applies machine learning in auto-screening candidates to reducing bias in hiring processes through Artificial intelligence (AI), firms have been solely dependent on solutions and technology to sail them through. The potential of AI for enhancing hiring quality is huge as it utilizes data to homogenize common traits between candidates' experience, skills, and job requirements. Technological solutions are ideal for carrying out data-centric tasks, but companies need to be mindful of utilizing it without hampering user privacy and their ability to overcome unique challenges that would otherwise take up a lot of time.

3. Skill to upskill – Technology has altered the way we do business, adding to the need to constantly update employee technical and soft skills. According to research by PwC, Dhar explains that 79% of the respondents feel that a shortage of skilled talent was one of their top 3 worries, and 46% said upskilling was their preferred solution. Upskilling isn't just any run-of-the-mill training session that equips employees short-term, it is a well-thought-out strategy that requires identifying skills gaps, planning long and short-term goals, and executing it by way of methods that do not seem daunting or too difficult to comprehend for your staff. It is one of the most vital approaches that firms can use to equip their people with the skills and competencies they need. This is apparent because the Human Resource platform is

undergoing a cycle of change that it has never seen before Covid-19 thrust a very hasty spate of transformation on companies and one of the major components of this transformation was shifting completely to remote work. This remote nature of work has heightened the potential to unlock a workforce that is not only global but highly skilled and specialized. From automating internal HR processes to learning new ways to hire, maybe, this pandemic shone a light that brightened up the staffing industry.

IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Having established the importance to WFM in any organization or establishment, the need to focus on the implications of employee retention comes into focus with Mathimaran and Kumar (2017) and Oginni and Ogunyomi (2012) stating that an effective employee retention strategy is a systematic effort by management to create an enabling environment that encourages current employees to remain employed by having realistic policies and practices that addresses their diverse needs. On the other hand, Khalid and Nawab (2018) argue that employee retention is considered the heart of the organization because employees are encouraged to stick with the organization for a maximum period of time or until completion of certain work objectives in the organization. Kossivi, Xu, and Kalgora (2016) opined that for organizations to remain competitive, organizations are expected to not only attract the best talents but also motivate and retain them because employees are termed the 'lifeblood' of an organization whose departure can drain or terminate the life of an organization which supported the earlier work of Oginni and Ogunyomi (2012).

The metamorphosis of workforce management has seen a continuous shift from one particular period to another period. However, the most relevant workforce that will help in fully understanding the contextual implication of employee retention is Generation Y also known as the Millennials. This is because Naim and Lenka (2018) state that precisely in the last few years, there has been a paradigm shift in workforce demographics because of the influx of Generation Y employees and their ever-increasing representation in the workforce and the imminent retirement of Baby Boomers. Hassan, Jambuligan, Alam & Islam (2019) also believe that Generation Y is going to represent the largest segment of the world's workforce but argues that Gen Y(s) are always ready to seek better job opportunities. From all indications, Munir, Fairuz, Noranee, Pandiyan, Sundram and Aziz (2018) also seem to believe that the effectiveness and productivity of an organization lies on the ability to retain talented Generation Y employees because this particular generation brings a dynamic special collection of abilities, expectations, and talent to the organization and workforce. With these assertions, it is obvious that scholars and research agree to the fact that the Gen Y(s) are the best if not most educated with adequate professional training compared to other generations.

EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

Having identified Generation Y as the most viable generation in the workplace or work environment, it is pertinent to identify strategies to engage and retain them in a prospective organization. Also, for the Human Resources function in an organization, it becomes evident of the need to now rethink strategy to retain Millennials or Generation Y in the workplace to create a productive and profitable organization. Seah (2021) also has the same position on this with the opinion that employers need to re-strategize and look inward and ensure that Millennials are provided with compelling reasons to stay or risk losing them to the next available competition. The strategies though not exhaustive that can be

employed to ensure that the generation in focus stays or is retained in the workplace include mentoring, strategic leadership, and knowledge sharing (Naim & Lenka (2018),

1. **Mentoring**

Mentoring is a developmental relationship between a more experienced employee called a mentor and a less experienced employee called a mentee or protégée whereby both benefit from the relationship. Mentoring is a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, to facilitate that person's career and personal development. Also, a mentor offers protection to shield the mentee in situations of high risks of failure which might limit their career progress. Challenging assignments support the career development of mentees as they learn new roles and responsibilities. Psychosocial support helps mentees to develop a sense of belongingness, professional identity, and effectiveness. A mentor serves as a source of social support and offers friendship, acceptance, confirmation, counseling, and role modeling.

2. **Strategic Leadership**

With the fact that Millennials work in contemporary times, contemporary firms are operating in a complex business environment characterized by rapid globalization, high use of technologies, growing uncertainty, and dynamism. This particular set of workforce calls for a strong leadership style to cope with this ever-changing landscape and competition among organizations. In addition, with the notion that organizations want to stay productive and always beat the competition, the case of strategic leadership becomes more compelling.

3. **Knowledge Sharing**

Knowledge management can be seen as one of the most influential concepts in an organizational context. One of the reasons is the growing acknowledgment that knowledge is a crucial strategic resource for competitive advantage. While making a case for forms of knowledge, explicit knowledge is an objective, verbal, or written knowledge that is transmittable, codified, and articulated, whereas implicit knowledge is subjective knowledge rooted in routine, cultures, and contexts within the organization. As such, the success of knowledge management initiatives largely depends on knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is an integral component of a broad knowledge management discipline.

However, Seah (2021) while also offering retention strategies argues that Gen Z(s) are equally important and should be identified as one of the generations in today's workforce with the assertion that employers need to look inward and determine how they can provide both Millennial and Gen Z employees with compelling reasons to stay or risk losing them to the competition. This is because Seah further believes that business leaders around the world are currently faced with two sets of challenges such that they must identify how to attract Millennial and Gen Z talents who are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities, and they must also determine how to retain their existing employees who are of this generation.

METHODOLOGY

The study was primarily based on a secondary source of data collection which explains the rationale behind a mini-review of 20 articles that were previous research studies on the evolution of workforce management vis-à-vis employee retention. The review clearly shows the different transformation processes of workforce management, outcomes, and implications on employees in the workplace and the contents of the selected articles served as the basis for the level of analysis to clarify the classification of the workforce management metamorphosis. Thus, serving as a theoretical foundation for workforce management metamorphosis and employee retention.

CONCLUSION

Having established the importance of the generation that is most important and relevant in the workforce, it is pertinent to note that organizations are operating in changing and sometimes dynamic business environments, and therefore, workforce management can never be static but rather evolve from time to time as evident in the evolution and buttressed by the recent global effect of COVID-19 Pandemic. With the recent COVID-19 Pandemic, whereby, the entire management of the workforce is adapting to the new ways of life such as remote working which is now referred to as the new order in the workplace and the likes, the need to focus more on the needs of the Gen Y(s) and Gen Z(s) who are known to want more work flexibility and better-paying jobs to ensure sustainability in the workplace comes into focus. The generation in focus is not wired or profiled to be a loyal employee as they tend to move or change jobs rapidly. With countries and organizations still battling with the effects of the pandemic, organizations should be looking at serious and contemporary ways to retain such employees.

One of such way is to ensure that the workplace culture adequately suits the needs and flexibility of this workforce. Flexibility in this sense, simply means the perfect understanding and speed in which organizations respond to meet the needs of this workforce in order to keep them satisfied for a win-win situation on both sides all the time. Also, to ensure sustainability in the workplace, organizations need to create an avenue where this generation can actively thrive with their ideas and innovations. Above all, creating a workplace culture that suits the overall needs of this generation will help not only to retain them in the workplace but also ensure that the capacity, sustainability, and profitability of the organization are ensured.

It is therefore evident, that workforce management cannot be done in isolation without recourse to the development within the environment as a whole, gender sensitivity, and employee generation. This understanding would afford organizations the ability to forecast the direction of employee generational needs and anticipate change in the environment on account of any development which would invariably enhance employee retention.

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