**Reducing the Intergenerational Gap between Senior
and Younger Employees through OD Interventions on Communication,
Leadership, Work Values and Knowledge Management:
An Action Research at a Thai Workplace**

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Abstract

The perception of an intergenerational gap between the senior and younger employees spawns hurdles and difficulties in many workplaces, including an air cargo company based in Bangkok, Thailand. According to the initial assessment results, it was most apparent in the areas of communication, leadership, work values (WVs), and knowledge management (KM). This study reviewed literature on intergenerational gap and the identified issues, designed organization development interventions (ODIs), and implemented them to address the problems. The study was carried out among 40 full-time staff, representing several departments and two major generations at the company. The ODIs took the form of introduction to relevant OD workshops, activities, discussions using appreciative inquiry process. Participants' attitudes and opinions were measured in the five areas before and after the ODIs using quantitative and qualitative designs. Following the ODIs, paired samples t-tests and focus group results showed that the perceived intergenerational gap and the four key issues were significantly reduced. MLR post-ODI demonstrated that communication had a significant relationship with intergenerational gap. However, other variables showed no significant relationship. This may be due to the confounding factors in the quasi-experiment or limited sample size. The study suggested that companies who employed several generations at workplaces could use the ODI in this study as a starting point for generation gap bridging discussion and improvement in terms of communication, leadership styles, WVs, and KM. It also serves as a basis for revisiting intergenerational debate from the Thai cultural context, which differ from the context in which most generational theories originated. Future studies could focus on validating the models that emerged from that debate.

Keywords: Intergenerational Gap, Communication, Leadership, Work Values, Knowledge Management (KM)

Introduction

Background

An intergenerational gap, or generation gap, is characterized by differences in goals, expectations, work values, working styles, communication practices, and technological adaptability among the different generations (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; O'Bannon, 2001). While an intergenerational gap at the work place need not necessarily result in conflict, it can result in problems, such as low collaboration, potential resistance to change and poor performance, resulting in the need for adaptative and flexible leadership and management style (Hillman, 2014). In the light of demographic changes following reduced birth rates in many countries as well as in Thailand, ageing population and increased retirement age are common; many companies need to employ a workforce spanning up to four generations which are often referred to as Baby Boomers (born between 1946 - 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 - 1980), Generation Y/Millennials (born between 1981 - 1996), and Generation Z (born between 1997-2012), (Macovei & Martinescu-Bădălan, 2022).

The intergenerational gap at the work place, as well as the attempt to describe the distinct generational characteristics, has been the topic of considerable research since the 1990s (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). This interest coincided with the growing global influence and rapid changes brought on by information technological change (Pearce LeMay, 2022). These have increasingly shaped the workplace and the younger generations to such an extent that Generation Z who grew up with the advanced information technology is often referred to as the "first global generation", (Fratrièová & Kirchmayer, 2018).

As such, the author argued that the Thai Generation Z has more in common with their Western counterparts than with previous generations, at least with respects to social media and information technology. In spite of such assimilating effects, cultural context does have unique influence on the workplace as well as on the formation of distinct generations (Wetprasit, 2016). This needs to be considered when addressing the subject of generations gaps, and policies, especially when applying theories which have emerged from outside.

According to Prasartkarnkar (2018) Thai companies are distinctly shaped by cultural factors such as seniority, hierarchies, power distance, conformity, and collectivism, rather than just the individualistic approach at workplace. Such traditional cultural values pervade all ages and aspects of life, and are more strongly upheld by senior generations, while younger generations are now increasingly exposed to global influences and ideas. This leads to a stronger perception of an intergenerational gap, beyond the usual difference between age groups (Yunni, 2018). While the intergenerational gap perceived in many companies in East Asia is different in nature from that in Western countries, it is felt just as strongly by many:

> "...the situation at hand is one of two worlds within the same country. As much as the older East Asian generation held firmly to traditional values... the younger generation began to develop more individualistic characteristics resulting from economic restructuring and new technology" (Yunni, 2018).

The company in this research represented this intergenerational gap in workplace in its Thai variant. The initial assessment showed that the perception of an intergenerational gap was

the issue exhibited in the areas of communication, WVs, leadership and KM. As many research focuses Western theories and viewpoints and cultures leading to difficulties in assessing their overall effectiveness, therefore, the aim of this study was to address this gap by designing and applying relevant ODIs while keeping in mind the Thai cultural context to understanding the intergenerational relationships and uncover innovative approaches to narrow down the generational and possibly technological divides.

Focal Company and the Initial Assessment

The researcher was approached by a major shareholder of a middle-sized logistics company with decades of expertise in international operations based in Bangkok, Thailand for consultation on often observed conflicts between the two groups of staff older and the younger. The company specializes in air cargo transportations and has a workforce of around 300 staff. Preliminary meetings between the company shareholders and the researcher confined the presence of an intergenerational gap perceived by the employees. In order to identify current situations and related problems that could guide the design of a meaningful action research, an initial organizational assessment was set up with the following objectives:

- To explore attitudes and opinions among employees from different generations within the company

- To investigate the company's strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, threats (SWOT Analysis) and other related issues that hinder smooth collaboration between the two generations

-To qualitatively identify the current challenges related to intergenerational gap between the senior and younger staff

Data were gathered through a set of focus group interview questions using two groups of employees selected using purposive sampling according to criteria developed by the researcher, as followed: six employees were chosen to participate in the initial assessment - 3 employees aged 23 to 42 years with at least 3 years of experience, collaborating with and reporting to management or departmental managers, representing a younger workforce equivalent to Generation Y and Generation Z; 3 employees aged 43 to 73 years with at least 7 years of experience, also collaborating with and reporting to management or departmental managers, representing senior workforce, equivalent to Generation Baby Boomers and Generation X.

Assessment Results

Two data analysis techniques were used to evaluate the transcribed interviews with the aim of identifying the main problems and sub-issues: Thematic and SWOT analysis. One key problem and four issues had, which subsequently were used to establish problem definition and related factors in this study:

Intergenerational Gap

Both senior and younger interviewees of the company perceived the main difficulty to be an intergenerational gap, which impacted negatively on task accomplishment, collaboration and teamworking among different generations. The 4 areas in which the negative impact of the

intergeneration gap most felt was:

Communication

Communication between senior and younger generations was ineffective, with the younger employees relying on information technology and seniors on face-to-face, leading to mismatches in communication, despite management's efforts to promote communication upskilling through on-the-job training.

Leadership Style

Leadership was challenged by the need to adapt and motivate four different generations in workplace, each with varying expectations, outlooks and strengths. There were tendencies to disregard managerial mandates, leadership was seen not embracing the challenges and changes brought on by the diverse workforce.

Work Values

The senior generation valued traditional Thai work ethics, dedication and seniority, while the younger generations tend to be more individualistic, respect equality, and work-life balance. This led to conflicts when younger generation employees changed the established ways of doing things, resulting in high turnover amongst the younger employees.

Knowledge Management (KM)

KM generally relies on the readiness for knowledge sharing across departments and employees at different levels and ages, which was not universally practiced. The KM system at the company was neither organized nor unified, the departments and branches tended to work in silo, hence fragmented information and loss occurred often.

The Need for Action Research

Management recognized the importance of addressing the intergenerational gap in the four areas by recognizing that effectively managing a multigenerational workforce and integrating them is a complex task, but there are many benefits to having a multigenerational work-force, e.g., better collaboration, experience sharing, understand different work values, all of which maximizes the workforce's potentials. Failing to address this could result in employee conflicts, job dissatisfaction, low engagement, high turnover, missed opportunities for innovation and future expansion envisaged by the owners.

Statement of Problem

The perceived intergenerational gap among the older and younger employees created misunderstanding in the areas of communication, leadership, WVs, and KM. This led to undesirable outcomes such as lack of communication, disrespect for each other, unsupportive leadership, intolerance of different work values; while the lack of a systematic KM further aggravated the gap. All of these needed to be addressed in order to improve collaboration, work efficiency, innovation, information sharing, supportive work environment, shared decision making, and respect for one another in the company.

Research Questions:

1. What is the level of intergenerational gap as perceived by the senior and the younger generations, and the four key issues: communication, leadership, WVs, and KM?

2. What ODIs could be designed to improve the situation?

3. What are the levels of the four key issues and the intergenerational gap after the ODIs?

4. Are there significant differences with regards to the intergenerational gap and the four key issues between pre- and post-ODI stages?

5. Are there qualitative differences in the perceived intergenerational gap and the four key issues among the senior and younger generations before and after the ODIs?

6. Are there relationships among the four independent variables: communication, leadership, WVs, and KM, and the perceived intergenerational gap before and after the ODIs?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The researcher was approach by the owner and a study was carried out at a well-established medium sized logistics company based in Bangkok, Thailand. A series of ODIs was designed and carried out over a period of two months in 2024 involving 40 purposely chosen participants from the population of 300 employees. Pre- and Post-ODI analyses were carried out using mixed methods.

Limited sample size and industry specifics could limit the generalizability as the findings and conclusions of this research are based on the evidence and interpretation by the researcher in collaboration with the employees. They may be context specific and generalization to other companies would need further examination. However, the insights gained are useful for logistics firms that manage a diverse and multi-generational workforce.

Significance of the Study

This study has potentials to make contributions in academic and practical applications on bridging the intergenerational gap. Its findings further understanding to intergenerational differences in modern workplace. The recommendations can be used to guide staff development, foster better understanding and collaboration among different generations, create better climate, improve teamworking, motivation, organizational learning, and growth.

Literature Review

The literature review covered relevant theories and research related to intergenerational gap, the four key areas, as well as the Thai context, which also served as a background to designing the ODIs.

Age, Generation Theories, and Generation Gap

An intergenerational gap represents the differences in values, opinions, behaviors of different generations. Understanding an intergenerational gap is about understanding the mechanism of change in individuals and groups, including ageing, why and how it occurs over

time; it is a complex multidisciplinary task (Appelbaum et al., 2022).

The theories of generations have emerged since the 1920s. Generations can be viewed as an

> "… externally defined and constructed groups of people born in a range of birth-years and assigned characteristics based on assumptions about shared experiences" (Costanza et al., 2023).

Ultimately, they tried to explain, describe, and predict behavior of groups of individuals of different ages and their interactions, in order to be able to manage and react to their dynamics, including the conflicts that emerge from it. Historical and cultural contexts are assumed to impact and generate distinct generations with different characteristics, values and behaviors, as well (Taylor & Morin, 2009).

Several theories of generations have been established over the decades by researchers from various disciplines like sociologist Karl Mannheim's historical awareness and shared awareness (Mannheim, 1952), Norman Ryder's demographically based and cohort view of generations (Ryder, 1965), and more recently Strauss and Howe (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The Strauss-Howe theory of generations of the early 1990s, based on span of years and reoccurring generational personalities, emerged at a time when the growing impact of technology was felt increasingly both at the individual level and in the workplace in the West, as well as those countries with access to information technology in the East, like Thailand. This more recent theory of generations helped further popularize the generations now labelled "Generation X, Y, Z" etc. and their usually associated standardized break point years (The Whys and Hows of Generations Research, 2015).

The study of generations and the intergenerational gap at the workplace became a subject of great interest since the 1990s both in academic research, as well as amongst business practitioners. It resulted in a host of findings and managerial recommendations for the workplace practices based on the supposed unique characteristics in values, behavior and characteristics of each generation (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Rudolph et al., 2021). This popularity might be explained by the fact that "generations" and their deceptively simple concept helps to explain a world that seems to be continuously accelerating in pace and growing in complexity, particularly due to advances of technology.

However, since around 2010, a growing numbers or scholars have voiced criticism of generational theories and their usefulness in terms of providing insightful, actionable information. They argued a haphazard approach to methodology (Lyons et al., 2015), a lack of empirical evidence, oversimplification of the complex social dynamics, thus, weaknesses in the conceptual framework – too deterministic and unfalsifiable, and the arbitrary randomness of break point years defining generations and other problems, resulting in inconclusive or unreliable results (Costanza et al., 2012; Rudolph et al., 2021).

Some researchers suggested improvements in the operationalization of the theory other researchers (Campbell et al., 2017; Urick, 2017), while acknowledging these weaknesses, e.g., Western-centric, imprecise definitions and boundaries, support the concept of generations as a "fuzzy", but useful heuristic of social sensemaking.

Other researchers came to the conclusion that the oversimplified versions of theories of gener ations and their supposed findings can lead to

> "….the creation and perpetuation of generational stereotyping: the belief that every member of a particular generation has the characteristics specific to that generation (*Generationalism,* a forms of age discrimination)" (Costanza et al., 2012),

and thus, be potentially harmful for practices, which can run against non-discriminatory policies of organizations on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Costanza et al., 2023).

Several scholars have suggested alternative theories in order to explain change and the resulting differences between different ages, for example, the Life Span Development Theory, how humans develop and change across the life cycle, based on the works of Baltes (1987). It accepts that historical and sociocultural contexts impact individuals at an individual level, but not as a shared generational effect (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017), and allows for both age- and history-graded influences.

The Social Identity Theory, a psychological lens into which how individuals derive self-concept based on affiliation with particular groups represents another approach to explaining the intergenerational gap. It is based on the works of Tajfel and Turner (1979) and views generational differences

> "...as the extent to which people reject or identify themselves with one generation" (Boyle, 2021).

Following these controversial discussions, in recent years, however, researchers have started to recommend intergenerational policies to employers that underline the "commonalities", rather than the "differences" between generations at workplace, stressing equity and diversity in order to bridge the intergenerational gap. While differences across ages can be observed, they cannot solely be explained by the concept of generations, and individuals in turn cannot simply be categorized as the product of such generation (Costanza et al., 2023). Instead, it is better to differentiate based on "learner similarities" across employee ages (Berge & Berge, 2019). On-the-job learning, discussion groups, peer interaction and feedback, as well as mentorship (Appelbaum et al., 2022) are crucial to reconnect generations, build understanding of each other's differences to use the entire workforce's full potentials.

Generations and Intergenerational Gap Theories: Thai Context

Generations as postulated by the theory of generations are sociological and "context-dependent, varying across industries, organization cultures, and individual experiences" (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Although Thailand's four generations cohorts now present at the same workplace have taken shape in a very different social, political and cultural background parallel to their Western counterparts, this hasn't stopped many Thai researchers from adopting the assumed characteristics and differences of Western generations, which they then transplant into the context of the Thai workplace culture. Although younger generations worldwide seem to have assimilated, especially through the use of technology, even the younger generations in Thailand, Thai's youth is still being characterized by a different cultural context compared to their Western counterparts (Farrell & Phungsoonthorn, 2020).

While research to establish a framework of Thai-specific generations remains largely distant and is beyond the scope of this study, the Thai workplace culture itself has been studied

a lot, and findings have strong bearings on issues such as communication, leadership, WVs and KM. The cultural factors in the Thai workplace are high in measures of collectivism, power distance, harmony, and a strong hierarchy reflecting the principle of seniority (Prasartkarnkar, 2018; Wetprasit, 2016). Some of these factors are directly opposing Western style principles which younger Thai generations are exposed to, for example, individualism versus collectivism, meritocracy versus seniority and loyalty as principles of career advancement (Yunni, 2018). This is becoming a point of frustration for the modern Thai workplace, and partly explains high turnover for younger employees, which can be interpreted as a person-organization/WVs misfit, and is observed increasingly in employees of younger generations. Researchers like Prasartkarnkar (2018) therefore, urge senior managers to allow juniors to take on leading roles, to create different approaches of building better relationships between juniors and seniors, for example, through a mediation process, while younger generations need to understand how to work together in the existing, culturally shaped work place, and relate to colleagues of all ages, and older and senior generations need to re-connect and be ready to learn from one another.

Communication and KM Theories

For the purpose of discussion, the four areas identified under the intergenerational gap will be examined in the following order: communication and KM below, leadership and work values in the next section.

Changes in information technology are one of the most important factors that have increasingly affected individuals, the workforce, and the workplace globally in recent decades. It may not come as a surprise that the areas of the company being studied that was most affected by the intergenerational gap were communication and KM, two related areas which were strongly impacted by changes in information technology. Communication or the process of exchanging information together with information technology not only changes the nature of communication itself, but gave rise to and facilitated KM systems through the process of channeling information to achieve certain objectives. Interestingly, many researchers view the present intergenerational gap as primarily a "communication disconnect" (Downs, 2019; O'Bannon, 2001; Yunni, 2018;), bringing a shift from face-to-face communication and older communication mediums to technology-mediated mediums that significantly transformed communication between humans. Technology development and the "information-based societies" gave rise to and enabled KM or the knowledge that is held by a company being one of the most important industrial competitive advantages nowadays (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Technology can help unify and effectively channel communication in a company, for example, through a homogenous KM. However, information technology including social media can also establish barriers between generations at the workplace through changing and differing communication styles/channels that can result in misunderstanding and conflict. It equally has negative effects on communication when it is being used to avoid direct contact with each other (Venter, 2017), or is not equally used by all generations at the workplace. Realizing the need for, and implementing and enabling the use of communication and KM platforms across generations with the aim of inclusion and bridging intergenerational gap is one of the most important roles of leadership and OD practices, nowadays.

Communication is a discipline highly dependent on the cultural context of the workplace. Consequently, the communication models by Schramm (1971) Kincaid (1979, 1987) and Berlo (1960), all of which emerged in the US, help understand the important elements of effective communication and processes. But they have to be adapted to the cultural/work context (e.g., individualistic or collectivistic, laissez-faire, autonomous or paternalistic etc.), just as research findings based on them do not necessarily apply to Thai companies without adaptation; cultural factors might also hinder or be conducive in applying such models/findings. Adopting a western-style communication model with a feedback loop, for example, as suggested by Schramm, expecting the receiver to ask questions in order to clarify the information after receiving a message, especially to a senior colleague, can result in conflict and failure of communication in Thai society, unless embedded in the workplace or culture. Fear of face loss, and the desire for conflict avoidance and harmony would strongly impact the success of the unmodified implementation of such model (Rhein, 2013; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999).

The same is true for the KM processes and various models reviewed: the KM cycle (McIntyre et al., 2003) and SECI (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, Internalization) knowledge creation model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). As an example, knowledge sharing, the process at the heart of successful KM, requires the readiness to share information between all ages and levels among employees

> "a collaborative culture where employees are encouraged to share insights and expertise freely" (Zhou & Li, 2012).

However, in the face of highly hierarchical and paternalistic structures and seniority power system in Thailand, the exchange between colleagues of different ages automatically imposes a hierarchical power relationship that impacts open, unbiased exchanges (Yodwisitsak, 2004). On the other hand, research found that the Thai cultural trait of collectivism versus individualism has a positive impact on knowledge sharing; this finding should be used to help offset the issue.

Work Values and Leadership Theories

Work values and leadership are equally dependent on cultural context (Nicholson & Kongthaewtong, 2021) but are less directly influenced by outer changes such as information technology than communication and KM. Understanding employees' work values is essential to attract and retain the workforce; instruments like the Four dimensions of WVs, or Munster Work Value Measure (MWVM) (Krumm et al., 2013) help identify and measure such work values and motivators. While a lot of research is contradictory regarding the change of younger generations' work values over time, it does support increasing tendencies towards greater work-life balance (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), and hence expectations toward a more open and inclusive leadership (Nicholson & Kongthaewtong, 2021). In addition, the COVID pandemic demonstrated alternatives to office work supported by technological advancements such as remote offices, which can help enhance work life balance, further impacting expectations towards working environment and culture. The Person-Organization (PO) Fit model (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) is an important model to ensure and predict employee

satisfaction and thus employee retention. Thailand is experiencing an increasingly high turnover of young staff. Based on the Selection and Attrition model (Schneider, 1987) and the PO Fit model, this signifies a misfit between a company's evolved work culture and work values, and the employee's work values. Several possible strategies to improve PO Fit are possible. The company can try to adapt its work culture, place, or parts of it, according to expectations of younger generations in order to attract them. Such changing expectations in Thailand's younger generations with regards to remuneration packages, leadership culture, company culture, work-life balance, and work environment significantly benefit recruitment and retention.

Alternatively, the company can define, communicate, and implement, a clear vision of the work culture including accessible goals that current and prospective employees at hiring time can aim for and identify with. Using tools like the DISC model (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness) behavioral styles model and its measure, while not being a work values measure, helps with understanding how behavioral patterns of individuals fit into such a work culture and alternatively accommodated into collaborative efforts (Geier, 1990).

Furthermore, the leadership theories that emerged in the West placed different emphasis on whether leadership can be learned and adapted to the task at hand, as in Situational leadership theory (Blanchard et al., 1985, 1993), is determined by the leaders' personality which has to fit the task suitable to the individual's leadership style, as in Contingency leadership theory (Fiedler, 1967), or relies on a unique personality with a vision that can motivate followers to go beyond a "transactional exchange", as in Transformational leadership theory. Existing leadership styles in Thailand for small and medium sized businesses are still highly influenced by Thai work culture characterized by hierarchy, authority, seniority, and are mostly a mixture of paternalistic and autocratic styles. (Nicholson & Kongthaewtong, 2021; Yukongdi, 2013). Younger Thai generations are increasingly expecting a more participative/inclusive leadership, offering more chances to them than traditionally seen in seniority culture (Nicholson & Kongthaewtong, 2021). This is a difficult transition, as a challenge to leadership can be seen as threatening the status quo (Rhein, 2013). Moreover, such changing expectations are still mainly limited to employees emerging from a small, urbanized elites in Thailand, while the existing leadership structure's advantages seen in the cultural context are still generally accepted and their beneficial side effects are still expected by most employees (Yukongdi, 2013).

For Thailand, leadership styles or how managers approach employees and the influencing factors reflect deeply engrained individual and cultural values. The most difficult challenge for modern day's companies is to find a leadership style that is embedded in the culture, yet able to integrate the best of existing practices and skills of the older workforce with the innovation and skills that younger generations might bring without alienating each other (Yunni, 2018).

Generations in Thailand are characterized by values, expectations, outlooks and lifestyles which are increasingly different, especially from those of traditional societies. The intergenerational gap currently experienced in Thailand, including the workplace, is probably greater than that of the same concurrent generations in Western countries. Distinct Thai generations, in the proper sense of the theories of generations, have not been defined in literature; and while generations globally seem to become more similar, the researcher refrained from applying generational stereotypes that have emerged in the context of western/US generational studies in order to describe the exact nature of the Thai intergenerational gap at the work place a priority; also, it's beyond this study. Instead, the researcher will simply differentiate it as the "senior" and "younger" generations. For this, the literature highlighted the need for integrated policies towards the multigenerational workforce with the aim of diversity, equity, and inclusion, instead of generational stereotypes, which can result in potentially harmful decisions endless. While differences between age groups need to be understood and managed by leadership in concept, all efforts must be made to use the best in each while bringing generations together in workplace, even if it means challenging each to come out of their "comfort zones", and encourage genuine mutual understanding and collaboration. Useful insights of western-style theories and models must be reviewed and applied against the cultural background and the context of the company.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 is the extension of the literature review and theoretical framework discussed aiming to promote understanding between the senior and younger generations. Improvements in communication, leadership style, WVs and KM will lead to inclusive decision-making processes, an environment in which employees and teams can freely express their values, concerns, as well as shared knowledge and ideas, ultimately leading to reduced generation gap in workplace.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
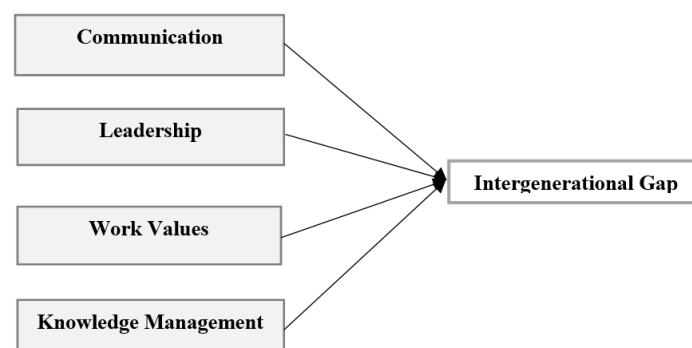
Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are based on the conceptual framework above and the action

research framework presented below.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in communication at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in leadership stye at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in work values at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in KM at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho5: There is no significant difference in intergenerational gap at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho6: There are no qualitative differences in communication, leadership, WVs, KM and the intergenerational gap at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Ho7: There are no significant relationships between communication, leadership, WVs, KM and intergenerational gap at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Action Research Framework

The action research framework (Figure 2) is used in this study. It includes three distinct stages: pre-ODI, ODI, and post-ODI where older and younger employee cohorts are paired together as groups in intergenerational workshops to reduce gap and enhance collaboration. The workshop also employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) through the 5-D Cycle: Define the area of focus, Discover ideal practices and strengths through sharing knowledge and experiences, Dream of an ideal work environment, Design strategies to achieve that vision, and Destiny, implementing and sustaining the changes. Such process fosters engagement, innovation, and shared purpose to improve the four workshops in communication, leadership, work values, team-building, mutual understanding, and knowledge management and sharing between generations.

Figure 2

Action Research Framework
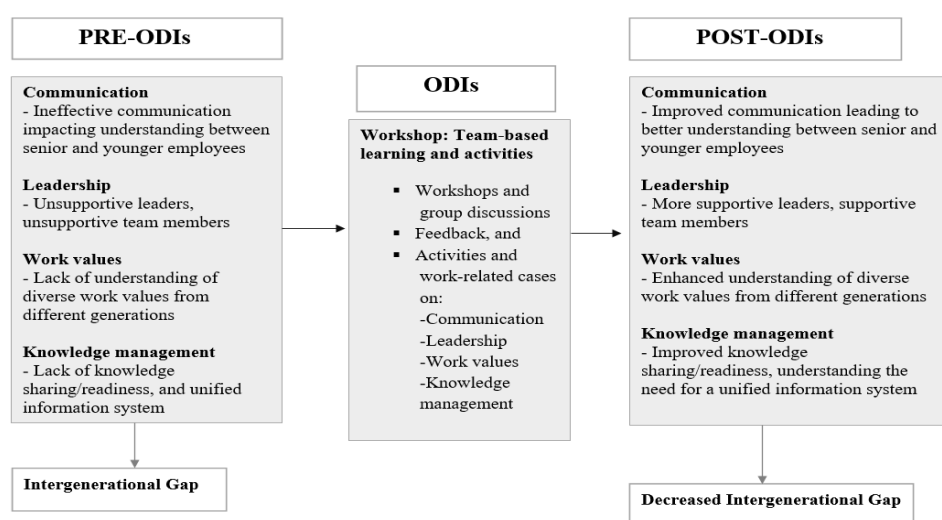
Research Methodology

This section described the research methodology which is comprised of mixed methods – quantitative/qualitative, and the action research methods. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected before and after ODIs via surveys, focus group interviews, and observations.

Population and Sampling

The population came from a logistics company with 300 employees. Non-probability using purposive and quota samplings were used to select the participants. A group of employees were identified based on age, job role, and experiences by the top manager ensuring diverse and representative of the two generations. Subsequently, 40 participants divided into two groups age between 43-72 and 22-42 representing senior and younger generations were assigned, and who were also willing to participate in the action research and the focus group interviews.

Research Instruments

Data were collected through 2 instruments: questionnaires and interview questions.

Questionnaire design, content validation and reliability test

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

- Demographics (six questions)

- Opinion and attitudes: 36 questions ("items") related to the topics of this study, namely communication (9 items), leadership (8 items), work values (10 items), KM (6 items) and intergenerational gap (3 items), using a five-point Likert scale. The items were identified from the literature reviewed for each variable, and then derived by the researcher in relation to the objectives of the study.

- An open-ended question asking for any additional comments.

For content validation, the items were distributed to a group of six experts in the field of OD, as part of the content validation process known as IOC (Index of Item-objective Congruence). According to Rovinelli and Hambleton (1976), an item is considered suitable for inclusion in the measurement if the IOC index value is at least 0.66, which was achieved after unclear items were revised according to the 6 experts' opinions

Following the IOC, thirty respondents took part to assess the instrument's internal consistency and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) were calculated using SPSS (Trial version), all five variables obtained values above 0.7, which was considered acceptable.

Focus group's interview questions

Four open-ended questions were formulated based on the objectives of the study, covering opinions on the four main issues using opened-end type of question to encourage discussion and feedback, and suggestions, e.g., "What are your opinions on communication, leadership, WVs, or KM in your company?" Focus group interview protocol were followed before, during and after to ensure respect, confidentiality and neutrality while exploring each topic.

Data Collection and Analysis

Forty questionnaire responses were collected to assess the differences between the pre- and post-ODIs. Paired samples t-tests followed by Multiple Linear Regressions (MLR) to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, were used.

Qualitative data was collected during the pre- and post-ODIs using focus group interviews. Conversations were transcribed together with the nonverbal cues, and analyzed via thematic analysis. Additional data were gathered using field notes, observations, photographs, recordings and memos; ethical guidelines were observed throughout.

Action Research and ODIs

The action research shown in Figure 2 was carried out through a series of ODIs based on the four workshops, namely Lego Building (communications), Cup Factory challenge (leadership), DISC Personality discovery (work values), and Magazine writing (KM), to reduce and bridge intergenerational gap as perceived in the initial assessment.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the key findings of the pre-ODI and post-ODI stages based on the survey and focus group interviews.

Demographic Data

There were 24 females (60%) and 16 males (40%) participating in the study, with 17 employees having more than 21 years of experience in the company (42.50%). Bachelor's degree is the most common educational level, accounting for 36 (90.00%), followed by diploma and master's degree, which are equal at 2 (5.00%). The majority of the participants (35%) worked in the Sales department, followed by Business development (15.00%). For position, sales executive has the highest frequency of 8 (20.00%), followed by sales support at 4 (10.00%). Finally, the senior generation accounts for 47.5% of the sample, whereas the younger generations formed the remaining 52.5% (19 and 21 participants, respectively).

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the five key variables from the pre-ODI and post-ODI including means, standard deviations, and percentage changes.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of the Pre-Post ODI and Percentage Change

Variable	Pre - ODI			Post - ODI			
	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	% Change Pre-Post
Communication	3.294	0.485	Neutral	3.738	0.367	Neutral	13.49
Leadership	3.684	0.536	Neutral	3.981	0.410	Neutral	8.06
Work Values	3.845	0.540	Neutral	4.120	0.411	Agree	7.15
KM	2.291	0.398	Disagree	2.630	0.236	Neutral	14.91
Generation Gap	3.891	0.824	Neutral	3.483	1.056	Neutral	10.49

Source: Author

Results show that the highest percentage changed is KM, or 14.91%, suggesting significant improvement in this area after ODI. The next highest percentage changed is communication, which is 13.49%. The lowest percentage changed is work values, at 7.15%. The significant improvement in KM suggests that the intervention was effective in helping employees share more information and data pertaining to the tasks that they had carried out which leads to perceived better decisions, process efficiency, and error reduction. Another significant improvement is in communication, which suggests the ODI had positive impact on communication skills, using alternative communication and feedback channels. There are positive improvements in the leadership and work values but to a lesser degree. This may not be surprising. Communication and KM are closely related areas, which have been dramatically impacted by external change in the shape of information technology. They are also possibly more easily impacted by the ODIs than work values and leadership, which are more strongly related to the psychology of individuals, and are much slower to change. Moreover, defining "successful improvement" in the areas of communication and KM might be more easily defined and measured than, for example, a successful PO Fit which is highly individual and therefore requires more individually tailored ODIs.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were evaluated by using paired samples *t*-tests (Ho1-Ho5) for the pre-ODI and post-ODI in all key issues, by thematic analysis for Ho6, and by MLR for relationship testing of the four independent and dependent variables (Ho7).

Hypothesis Testing (Ho1-Ho5)

There are no significant differences in communication, leadership, WVs, KM and intergenerational gap between the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Comparison of the pre-and post-ODIs. Table 2 shows the pre-post ODI comparisons of the five key issues.

Table 2

Paired Samples Statistics

Variables	Pre-ODI		Post-ODI				
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	T	df	p-value (sig.)
Communication	3.294	0.485	3.738	0.367	−15.492	39	0.000
Leadership	3.684	0.536	3.981	0.410	−9.410	39	0.000
Work Values	3.845	0.540	4.120	0.410	−9.545	39	0.000
KM	2.291	0.398	2.633	0.236	−6.846	39	0.000
Generation Gap	3.89	0.824	3.483	1.056	3.330	39	0.002

Note: Significant at 0.05 level.
Source: Author

Paired samples t-test statistics indicates a significant difference in all five variables between the pre and post ODI at $p < 0.05$. The pair that has the highest positive change in mean is communication (0.44), followed by KM (0.34) and intergenerational gap (0.41). Leadership and WVs improved moderately at 0.30 and 0.28, respectively.

Hypothesis Testing (Ho6)

There are no qualitative differences in communication, leadership, WVs, KM and the intergenerational gap between the pre- and post-ODI stages. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving coding (labelling), grouping of labels, identification and reviewing of themes against the data.

Pre-ODI Findings. Thematic analysis results of both senior and younger interviewees perceived an intergenerational gap characterized by communication gap and leadership styles, preferring what each generation is used to, as well as by having different work expectations such as flexible working hours career progression, diverse learning methods and technological proficiency. The themes in each of four areas which negatively impact the generations gap were:

Communication

Mismatched communication. Employees reported difficulties in communication due to differing communication styles and mediums. Senior staff preferred face-to-face meetings, while younger employees favored digital communications. This led to misunderstandings and discomfort. Furthermore, younger staff often hesitate to express their opinions in public due to perceived barriers from seniority.

Tasks Assignment. Many employees felt that task assignments were unclear, especially the new type of assignments (e.g., cargos, destinations, regulations). This lack of clarity contributed to stress, feelings of neglect, overworking and increased responsibilities.

Feedback Mechanisms. The culture prior to the ODI neither provided ways and means of feedback nor encouraged. Many employees felt unmotivated and believed that leaders did not value their contribution nor equip them with sufficient guidance and motivation.

Leadership

Perception of Leadership. Employees felt that leaders were not attentive to their concerns, leading to a perception of leadership ineffectiveness. Many staff members believed their voices were not valued in work and decision-making processes, which hindered motivation and engagement.

Work Values

Diverse Work Values. There was significant diversity in work values among employees between seniors and juniors. This may partly be due to different personalities which created misunderstandings and hindered collaboration, as employees struggled to align their differing values and expectations with the shared goals.

KM

Lack of Centralized KM. The organization lacked a centralized platform for knowledge sharing, making effective communication across departments difficult. This absence led to misunderstandings and conflicts, staff relied on fragmented and informal communications and channels without a common platform for information exchange.

Post-ODI Findings. The findings in the four areas were as follows:

Communication

Improved Communication Dynamics. There was a noticeable improvement in perceptions of communication. Staff began to feel that leaders could be more attentive and open to listening to their concerns. The intervention fostered an environment where employees felt freer to share ideas without fear of negative judgment, which encourages feedback.

Follow-up on Tasks. Supervisors were more closely monitoring work progress through various communication channels, fostering a sense of community, accountability and support between generations.

Leadership

Enhanced Leadership Practices. Leaders adopted more adaptive styles in leading, collaborating and communicating post-ODI, actively listening to team members, encouraging feedback and open discussions. This shift fostered a culture of participation, ideas sharing, and questioning.

Adaptability of Leadership. Leaders recognized the importance of adapting their communication styles to meet team members' needs. Acknowledging and rewarding idea contributions furthered effective interactions across different generations and other identities (e.g., gender, departments), which in turn, improved motivation in the workplace.

Work Values

Alignment of Work Values. After the interventions, employees began to recognize the importance of aligning work values across different age groups and other forms of self-identifications. They felt a sense of unity after participating in team-building activities, social interactions, informal networking, which emphasized shared goals, thus, breaking down silo mindsets/thinking.

KM

Development of KM and Practices. The post-ODI stage witnessed discussions around establishing a centralized KM platform, such as digital platform for improved information sharing and storage. Staff acknowledged that having a common platform would facilitate quicker problem-solving by allowing them to access information , share insights and solutions.

Hypothesis Testing (Ho7)

There are no significant relationships between communication, leadership, WVs, KM and the intergenerational gap at the pre- and post-ODI stages.

Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) Analysis Pre-and Post-ODI

The MLR Pre-ODI results indicated F = 8.527, p < 0.00, means that the regression model is significant with R-square equals 0.494 indicating that the model can predict the variance in the dependent variable by 49.40%. The beta coefficients showed that communication has a value of 0.463, (Sig. = 0.029), while the remaining variables show no significant relationship. Collinearity Statistics show that the VIFs for all the variables are below 10, indicating that there are no multicollinearities.

The MLR post-ODI showed that ANOVA remained significant (p-value of < 0.05), with R square = 0.488, meaning, the independent variables can predict the dependent variable by 48.8%. The beta coefficients indicated that communication has a beta of 0.440, (Sig. = 0.028), but the other variables showed no significance, as in the pre-ODI stage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The quantitative data obtained from pre-ODI revealed the weakest areas lied in the areas of KM and communication (2.292 and 3.294). The findings are in line with the initial assessment that the intergenerational gap was related to inadequate communication, different styles of leadership preference, differing WVs, and lack of KM system.

Literature review was translated into a series of four intergenerational workshops through appreciative inquiry process, using group and mentoring activities, encouraging experiences sharing, collective knowledge and presentation skills building, and post-ODI follow-up sessions.

Descriptive statistics of the post-ODI and pre-ODI were juxtaposed and showed that overall, communication, leadership, WVs, KM, and intergenerational gap improved moderately. This is supported by the qualitative findings, post-ODIs.

Paired samples t-tests data showed that participants demonstrated significant improvement in communication, leadership, WVs, KM, and intergenerational gap compared to the pre-ODI stage. This indicated that the ODI programs that were designed to address the problems were effective. As Appelbaum et al. (2022) mentioned, these are crucial to reconnect generations, build understanding and increase the workforce's full potentials.

Thematic analysis comparing the pre-post ODIs showed improvement in communication across generations and departments, leadership styles, facilitating knowledge transfer and problem-solving. Leaders became attentive and supportive, recognizing the need for

adaptability in diverse work values and ideas sharing. Employees learned to value different perspectives while working towards shared goals, creating a more cohesive and cooperative workplace. Many previous studies including this study found that generational gap could result in misunderstanding and conflicts in the workplace but this can be resolved by using action research and ODI approaches.

Despite slight reduction in R^2 post-ODI, MLR results suggested that the interventions positively impacted the intergenerational gap, while other variables show varying levels of significance before and after ODIs, highlighting the importance of improving communication and KM in bridging generational gap, while indicating leadership and WVs aspects need further investigation.

As many previous studies posited, generation gap in the workplace through the ODI workshops can help improve workplace dynamics, digital adaptation, flatter social structures, knowledge transfer, and created stronger intergenerational bonding, which in turn lead to better teamworking, lower turnover, and more competitive advantage.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged as a result of juxtaposing the quantitative and qualitative results, after the ODIs, as well as the feedback from employees, supervisors and managers:

- Company-wide OD intervention for generational gap bridging workshops that encourage communication skills building, feedback, open discussions, and idea sharing should be implemented.

- Knowledge management loops involving pooling collective insights, critical thinking, formulate collaborative problem-solving, upgrading the existing work processes, and experimenting with new ideas should be integrated into employee mindsets.

- Introducing digital technology into workplace such as dynamic knowledge sharing folders that include incidents updating, delivery issues, delays, damages, errors etc.

Recommendations for Further Research

As we have seen in the literature review and findings that generational gap is complex and multi-facets issues which can involve subjects like generational boundaries (often based on age cohort effects), however, socioeconomic factors (which can be more influential than generational identity), or historical context and events are also important. Therefore, future studies could focus on theoretical and conceptual debates to understand the meaning as well as the classification within the Thai context, using both grounded theory approach and empirical evidence before intergenerational gap at today's workplace can be understood better. This is to avoid theoretical confusion regarding the meaning of generation, the boundaries, and the intergenerational gap itself. In addition, due to limited sample size, possible bias in sampling and data collection methods, and industry and context specific focus, further research could expand into other industries, with a larger sample size and random sampling procedure.

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