

Generational Diversity in the Indian Workforce: An Exploratory Study

¹Dr. Saundarya Rajesh, Ph.D, ²Karthik Ekambaram

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Abstract: *A population may be segmented based on age or experience with the intent of identifying attitudes and preferences that cohort members have in common due to their shared life events. This process of segmentation presents a classification of the subjects into generations distinct from each other. Most organizations in India currently employ men and women belonging to the different generations, especially knowledge industry companies. Therefore it is important that in the event of co-existence of multiple generations at the workplace, the underlying differences between them are leveraged for greater business benefits. Also it is important that detrimental outcomes if any due to conflict of perceptions are strategically averted. Given a context where most diversity and inclusion studies in the Indian milieu have focused on gender and disability till date, this report presents the findings of an explorative study that attempts to unravel the generational diversity of the Indian workforce wherein each generation is characterized by values, attitudes, behavior and a culture of work unique to them.*

A process of continual brainstorming discussions that involved over 250 corporate representatives helped classify the Indian workforce into five distinct generations, members of some of which were born as early as 1920 and some as late as 1990. The generations identified were 1) Veterans 2) Free-Gens 3) Gen X's 4) E-Gen's and 5) Gen Y's. As birth years of a group of individuals would in turn determine the socio, cultural, political, economic and technological climates in which they grew up in, the year windows were appropriately identified. As the primary intent of the research was to understand the career choices and work ethics specific to a given generation in order to provide directions to manage the latent differences better, the discussions were centered on identifying behavioral patterns and beliefs of every distinct cohort.

It was found that while veterans are a rarity in workplaces of today, the Free-Gens were characterized by greater responsibility and the Gen X had a good share of its women making progress. Popular opinion was that the E-Gens were relatively more hardworking than the other generations and the Gen Ys who grew up as the liberalization, privatization and globalization phenomena were transforming the country's corporate machinery, possessed the most liberal attitudes.

The findings of this research will provide significant pointers to the latent stereotypes associated with each of these generations and will provide insights into strategies to overcome the resulting friction due to misconceptions. Bridging these differences and managing the varied interests of each of the distinct generations can lead to better collaboration, increased knowledge sharing, greater innovation, improved productivity and an increased competitive advantage. In nutshell, if the art of appreciating generational diversity is mastered by every worker on India Inc.'s network, a store house of tacit knowledge possessed by the older generations can be captured that can enable the younger generations' quest for greater leadership capabilities.

Keywords: *Generational diversity, Free-Gens, Gen X, E-Gens, Gen Y, workforce*

1. INTRODUCTION

Managing workforce diversity and developing an inclusive work culture is imperative for businesses for efficient talent management. Gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and disability are some of the commonly used criteria for employee segmentation and diversity definitions. Against this backdrop, it may be interesting to note that workplaces of today have yet another unexplored

diversity dimension, of that of the generations. With organisations employing personnel with varied, multidisciplinary skills (irrespective of their age) specific to their line of business, the average bandwidth of employee ages has been stretched far and wide. It is therefore important that organizational leaders do not ignore the need to manage this diversity and leverage the underlying generational differences in the best interests of the organization.

Studies examining generational diversity of the Indian workforce are still in their nascent stages while social scientists in the west have successfully uncovered the generational classifications of their workforces (Matthew Legas & Cynthia Sims, 2011). The intent of such research is to identify attitudes and preferences that define certain cohort members by exploring the life events they shared. Such a process will yield segments or generations of employees who are markedly different from each other and possess qualities that were molded into them through common events capable of creating influence. Social, political, cultural, economic and technological climates in which an individual grows up are responsible for certain beliefs and behavioral characteristics of him/her and hence birth year can prove discretionary enough in segmenting generations. Validating this proposition, the workforce of the United States have been known to be comprised of four distinct generations namely, the traditional generation (born before 1945), the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), the Gen X (born between 1968 and 1979) and Gen Ys (born between 1980 and 1999) (Tolbize, 2008).

However as every country has its unique set of social, political or economic events defining its years of evolution and so does India, it is important to customize generational definitions specific to the Indian workforce taking into consideration the popular life events that characterized each era. This study was initiated with this intent at hand. Identifying generational cohorts also involved understanding the values, beliefs, work ethics and attitudes shared commonly by members of a cohort and hence this research also aimed at exploring the commonalities and differences between generations studied.

Focus group discussions involving 250 corporate representatives helped identify the demographics distinguishing five unique generational cohorts in corporate India, which are: 1) Veterans 2) Free-Gens 3) Gen X's 4) E-Gen's and 5) Gen Y's (or Millenials). The birth year windows used were 1) 1920-45 2) 1945 – 1960 3) 1961 – 1970 4) 1971 – 80 5) 1981 – 90, respectively. The six different discussions revolved around arriving at a comprehensive set of life events specific to every birth year window. The events listed would then become indicators to common behavioral patterns that members of a cohort share. To cite a finding, the veterans who were born in the pre-independence era and are currently a rarity in the Indian workplace were found to be wary of the current culture of work. The Free-Gens who came next in order grew up in an atmosphere of new found national freedom and had many highly successful cohort members in the country's bureaucracy; the flip side being their negative corporate experience. The next cohort of Gen X was witness to greater women's empowerment and spent certain formative years as nationalization of banks were happening in the country, which influenced their employment patterns. The E-Gen's who followed grew up in a time of limited opportunities; consequently they grew up to believe that success is a function of their hard work and speed. The members of the Gen Y generation found themselves growing up in a relatively liberal atmosphere with many multinational companies making a beeline to the country as a result of increased liberalization, privatization and globalization.

The findings of the study are extremely relevant to organizations keen on averting mismanagement or unstructured management of generational dissimilarities. The insights that emerged will help organizations design D&I initiatives, customized to their workforce, to leverage generational diversity.

2. BUSINESS CASE UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

Knowledge of attitudinal differences between employees belonging to different generations required to be engaged in a collaborative manner, lays the foundation to the process of appreciating generational diversity. While a researched and strong human resource strategy to manage such teams of individuals can be a win-win for both the organization and the employees concerned, ignorance of this diversity dimension can result in ineffective teams. Furthermore, the productivity of the organization suffers as a result of ill-managed generational tensions. The

wealth of tacit knowledge acquired through years of experience by cohort members of the elder generations goes un-captured. A 2005 study by Accenture found that at least 45% of respondent organizations were failing to transmit critical workforce knowledge to newer employees (Heffes, 2005).

Another study reported that generations respond differently to talent management strategies (Sonnenberg, 2011). So if the strategies are to achieve the desired outcomes, it is important that underlying differences are bridged. However it is not enough that the differences are understood; “Managing “generational diversity” is only partly about knowledge, and it is mostly about communication”, says another similar study (Notter).

Understanding and managing generational diversity can bring an array of benefits and perspectives to the workplace, such as improved talent attraction, retention and engagement, enhanced workplace productivity, increased competitive advantage that keeps customers loyal and an expanded view of succession planning and building leadership bench strength, reports another research of relevance (Kelly, 2009). This study goes on to note that Asia Pacific region has the world’s most positive view about generational diversity with 44% confident that it contributes to workplace productivity.

Just as target marketing paves the way for effective product management, employee segmentation is key to talent management. To be more specific, generational segmentation can provide pointers to the right talent strategies to be deployed on a set of employees belonging to a generation. It may thus be noted that the business case for understanding and exploiting generational diversity is strong and sound. It needs to be addressed with urgency by organizations keen on developing an inclusive work culture through means of smart talent management. When every professional – a manager, an employee or an entrepreneur understands this vital form of diversity affecting today's high-performance workplace, organisational success follows (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

3. ABOUT THE STUDY

The large format discussions were carried out in the Indian cities of Chennai, Coimbatore and Bangalore involving corporate workers, both women and men who belonged to diverse age groups. The year of study was 2010. While three of the six discussions were held in Chennai, two were held in Bangalore – two Indian cities adequately representative of corporate diversity. The last of the focus group discussions was held in Coimbatore. As pioneers in numerous diversity and Inclusion initiatives, experts from FLEXI Careers India moderated the various discussions.

4. GENERATIONAL SEGMENTATION: POPULAR CLASSIFICATION

Listed below are a few popular classifications of generations in the workforce, in other parts of the world.

- **Western:** *Veterans, Baby Boomers, GenX, GenY* (Tolbize, 2008)
- **Hewitt’s :** *Passionate Advocates, Enthusiastic Followers, Under-rewarded Supporters, The Disenchanted, Unrealized Potentials, The Detractors* (Marusarz, 2009)
- **NASSCOM’s:** *Free-birds, Seekers, Stabilizers, Loyalists* (NASSCOM)
- **American theorists:** *the Depression Era, World War II Era, Post War, Leading-Edge Boomer, Trailing-Edge Boomer, Gen-Xer and N-Gen* (Morgan & Kunkel, 2011)

4.1. Generations in the Indian Workforce

The five distinct generations into which the Indian workforce can be classified are:

1. Veterans (Born between 1920-45)
2. Free-Gens (Born between 1945 – 1960)
3. Gen X’s (Born between 1961 – 1970)
4. E-Gen’s (Born between 1971 – 80)
5. Gen Y’s (Born between 1981 – 90)

The following chart shows the distribution of generations in corporate India's workforce. It may be noted that veterans are not indicated in the chart as they are a rarity in the modern Indian workplace. The E-Gen's are the majority constituting around 29% of active workers; the Free-Gens are the interim seniors and are rapidly leaving the workplace, so they constitute only around 20%.

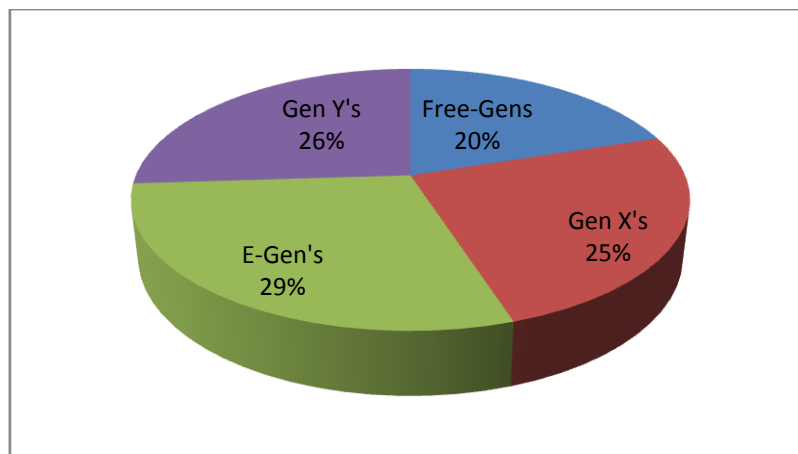


Fig1. Generations in the Indian workforce

In figure 2 is presented a snapshot of the listed generations.

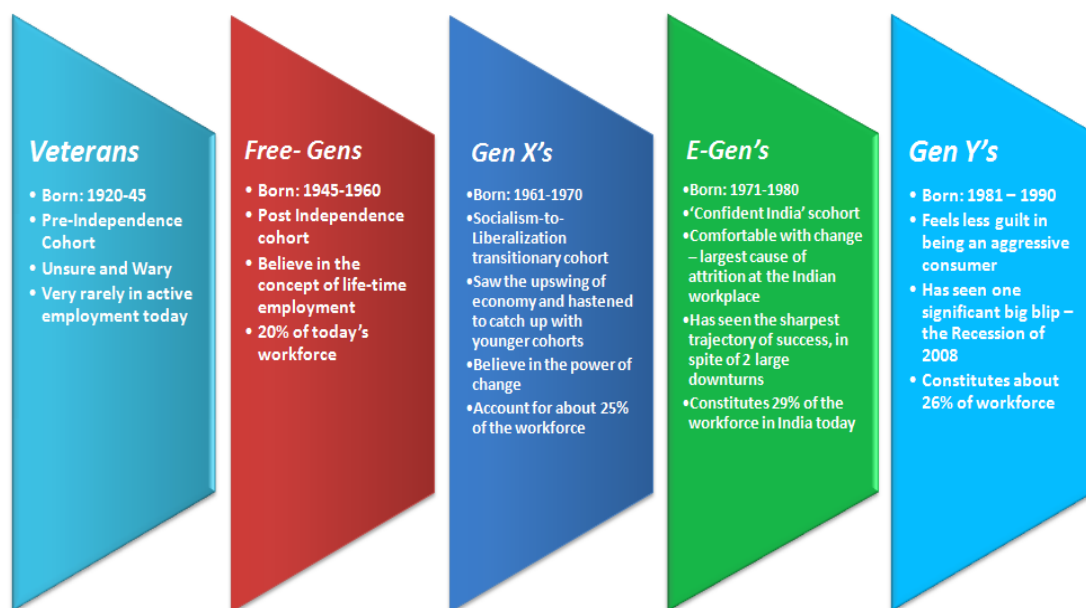


Fig2. Generational snapshot

5. THE GENERATIONS: WHY THEY ARE WHO THEY ARE?

It has been arrived at that the individuals across generations differ in their value sets and beliefs which consequently impact their approaches towards work (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010) (Columbia) (Zemke, Raines, & Filipcza, 2000). The social, cultural, economic and political contexts defining their formative years have a long lasting impact on individuals and their approach to work, in terms of work-life balance, work ethics, work rigor are all impacted by these. In order to address this diversity and reap maximum benefit out of it, it will help the Indian employer to know of the defining life events of each of the generations and shared characteristics created as a result. We move on to present the generational characteristics of the Indian workforce in the following few sections. As veterans are a rarity in the workforce today, the discussion does not detail their characteristics.

5.1. The Free Gens

The Free Gens born between 1945 and 1960 constitute about 20% of India's active workforce. Their entry into the workforce happened during the the 60s and the 70s, some of them enrolling

for work in the early 80s as well. This cohort essentially grew up in an atmosphere of new found national freedom, post 1947. Probably because of a greater extent of national consciousness, this generation grew up to be responsible and many cohort members developed an affinity for planning. Majority of them are hardworking and loyal though they have certain conservative outlooks in their approaches towards work. 'Work' is inevitable to this cohort.

Many successful professionals belonging to this generation work(ed) in the Indian bureaucracy. However, it has been observed that their corporate experience has seen a negative edge. This could be because the corporate hierarchy essentially adopts meritocratic approaches to promotion and in today's era of digital revolution, many members of this cohort find themselves behind workers (much younger to them) in terms of technology adaptability and consequently sidelined for promotions. But with a huge number of Free Gens retiring from active work, India Inc. needs to attempt to retain and capture the wealth of tacit knowledge they possess as also their wisdom in business strategies that could benefit the younger generations. Looking further into some of the important political and economic events that characterised this generation's formative years, this cohort was witness to many initiatives of the early governments of free and independent India. These included introduction of five year plans and a greater focus on agriculture and community development. Indian women acquired the right to vote, paving the way for women's emancipation and ushering in more egalitarian views in the society. The 1950s also saw the government introducing family planning for population control programs. Providing quality education to young Indians shifted the gear towards many programmes focussed in bringing world class education to India; the Indian Institutes of technology were started with this noble intent.

They were also marred by the India China war in 1962 and suffered its side effects. On the brighter side, they also saw the emergence of some of the most powerful women in Indian history including the first Indian woman Prime Minister, Ms. Indira Gandhi (who started her first stint in 1966) and the first Indian woman Chief Minister, Ms. Sucheta Kriplani of Uttar Pradesh (from 1963-67). Bringing the beauty crown to India in 1966, Ms. Reita Faria became the first Indian and Asian woman to do so. Agriculture received a major boost with food production acquiring newer benchmarks as a result of the Green Revolution post 1967. It may also be of interest to note the technological milestones during this period as such advancements could be indicative of the quality of life an average Indian belonging to this cohort experienced. The primary modes of long distance communication were the Indian postal system and telegraphic messages. Channels of entertainment were confined to the Akashvani – the government's official radio broadcasting channel, a few cinema theatres and the gramophone. The Indian Railway network that interconnected major Indian cities provided reliable and safe modes of long distance transport people for the people. Another significant development representative of this era was the electrification of many Indian cities and towns, an invention that significantly impacted the lifestyles of the then urban Indians.

The following are some of the major attributes common to this generational cohort, as per popular opinion that emerged after the various rounds of discussions.

- Service oriented
- Naturally relationship driven
- Want to please
- Very good team players
- Uncomfortable with conflict
- Social 'shyness'
- Gives more importance to process rather than results
- Very sensitive to feedback

While good team playing capabilities, service oriented-ness and feedback sensitivity make Free Gen's assets to organisations employing them, their social shyness and poor conflict management skills need to be adequately addressed to truly benefit from their services.

5.2. The Gen X's

The Gen Xs account for about a quarter of the Indian workforce. This cohort consists of individuals born between 1961 and 1970. It was during the 1980s or the early 90s that this Indian generation became part of the workforce. They grew up in an age where the Indian democratic system was undergoing teething troubles. However, this generation saw Indian women making remarkable progress. It was also found that members belonging to this cohort had doubts regarding sustainability of growth, a probable consequence of the turbulent social context they grew up in.

The Gen X's have a greater sense of duty, according to this study. A vast majority is conscious of job satisfactions and prefer to work in areas that assure them contentment. A significant number of them are past the mid-career phase and are the bread winners of families with children in the college going age group. Hence they are keen on work flexibility that would help them achieve greater work life balance. They treat work as a challenge and are ready to run the extra mile to meet this challenge.

The emergency of 1975 was a distinct political development of the formative years of this generation. When the Janata party (a coalition of political parties) came to power in 1977 overthrowing the Congress party, it was the first time that a non-Congress government was coming to power in independent. However multinational players such as the IBM and the Coca Cola exited the country post the induction of the new government.

In 1971, India won a war against Pakistan while Ms. Indira Gandhi was the Prime minister. This also stirred the nationalist sentiments in a good number of cohort members. India emerging a nuclear power post the first successful nuclear test in 1974 is another landmark event of the defining years of this generation. Agricultural progress continued to be made with many innovative practices being launched to boost food production under the 'Green Revolution' campaign. The nationalisation of all major banks was another significant economic milestone in the country, during this period.

As for technology, this generation witnessed the advent of some path breaking inventions into the Indian entertainment market such as the television, the tape recorders and the walkmans. The telephones made their way to Indian homes and communication became easier and swifter. Scooters and motorcycles began to occupy Indian roads in a good number and this generation saw such private modes of transport also becoming popular alongside mass transportation services. Fax machines became characteristic of many Indian offices and smart professionals started using calculators. Photocopiers also became immensely popular during this time.

The Gen X's according to popular opinion share the following characteristics.

- Adaptable
- Techno-literate
- Creative
- Multi-tasking
- Aggressive in driving growth
- Leads with ease
- Values self-reliance
- Pragmatic

Most of these qualities can be leveraged for organisational success. However their aggressive demeanour in driving growth needs to be appreciated by members of all other generations to enable smooth collaboration.

5.3. The E-Gen's

The E-Gen's born in the decade 1971-80 account for the majority in modern India's workforce today – 29%. Some of them started their professional stints in the 1990s and others after the new millennium was ushered in 2000. An average E-Gen's formative years saw the government

adopting a 'protectionism' approach to encourage indigenous industrial growth. The members of this cohort value hard work and believe that efforts in the right direction will bring results. The competitive mentality is stronger amongst members of this generation with many adhering to the mantra that 'progress is a function of one's own speed'.

This study found that many E-Gen's exhibited an entrepreneurial streak and a large number of them emerged successful in businesses. Those who chose to stay employed had a distinct preference for customised careers wherein they held greater ownership and autonomy over their work. To many of them, own time is as significant as shared time. They generally find work exciting and show great rigor at work.

As for the socio political atmosphere that characterized their formative years, the election of young Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India in 1984 helped emphasize the power of youth. The nuclear tests carried out by India in the late 90s and the 2000s is seen as another major development of this era. Multinational companies started operations in India bringing with them a huge baggage of employment opportunities. With more liberal policies adopted by the government, the Information Technology and business process outsourcing industries grew in leaps and bounds creating a major demand for talent. The political participation of women attained greater importance with the introduction of a 33% reservation of parliament seats for women bill in 1996. Furthermore, 10 different women chief ministers came to power during the time span this generation was growing up, giving further inspiration to the women of this generation.

As the E-Gen's were growing up, a technological revolution of sorts was shaking the country. Motor cars became common and popular. Desktop computers and the internet (enabled by dial up connections in the later half of the 90s) changed the ways Indian offices worked. Satellite television gave entertainment a new meaning and this generation found itself pampered for choices of entertainment in the form of VCDs and computers. Pagers and mobile phones became gadgets for handy and swift communication and the advent of e-mails made long distance communication a breeze. The dotcom boom presented ample employment opportunities to members of this cohort.

The participants of the various discussions unanimously agreed upon the following attributes of the E-Gen's.

- Flexible
- Global thinking
- Techno-savvy
- Environmentally conscious
- Focus on Education
- Wants a 'life'
- Hates micromanagement
- Strongly polarized likes and dislikes

The list show that the E-Gen's are in possession of many qualities that can be utilised in the growth trajectory of socially conscious organisations. It should however be noted that as members of this generation tend to be highly opinionated, their strong likes and dislikes need to be aptly managed to avoid friction with other generations.

5.4. Gen Y's (Millennials)

The Gen Y's or the millennials are the youngest amongst the formally employed members of the workforce. Born between 1981 and 1990, their entry into the workforce was most recent – the 2000s onwards. It is estimated that they comprise of almost 26% of the total workforce. The economic liberalisation that happened in the 1990s ably aided by privatisation and globalisation earmarked the definitive years of this generation. The Gen Y woman is seen no less than her male counterpart in terms of educational attainment and professional capabilities; 42% of university graduates of this generation are women (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff, Wang, & Chen, Women Matter:

An Asian Perspective, 2011). The Gen Y cohorts are open about their sexual preferences as well probably because of their relatively liberal upbringing.

Many of them are in favour of flexibility in their careers and view work as a means to earn a living. Disposable jobs are what a majority of them live by as better perks and incentives lure them to newer jobs. Having lived and worked through either or both of two major recessions, the Gen Ys are sceptical about corporate lives. They are in general techno brilliant and carry global mindsets. They value diversity due to their multicultural upbringing wherein many of them had opportunities to interact with people from other cultures during the course of education or otherwise. This generational cohort has a good taste in experimentation and many of them pursue portfolio careers, where instead of working a traditional full-time job, job-seekers work multiple part-time jobs (including part-time employment, temporary jobs, freelancing, and self-employment) and explore different avenues in the process.

The Kargil war of 1999 was perhaps one of the most important political events this generation was witness to. The Pokhran nuclear tests of 1998 that pronounced the country's status as a nuclear power probably helped create greater hope amongst a large number of millennials in the future of the country. The opening up of markets as a result of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation continued to create a wealth of employment opportunities for this generation. However the global economic decline and the recession towards the end of the 2000's decade posed a serious threat to the career dreams of many Gen Y's.

Technological whirlwinds continued to happen – high speed internet connectivity via broadband being a path breaking development. Laptops, notebooks and tablets increasingly replaced the unwieldy desktop systems. Cars in different price spectrums, of different makes and models catered to the aggressive Gen Y consumers. The immense popularity of social networks – facebook, twitter and LinkedIn to name a few, emerged as platforms of effective communication as also platforms for voicing popular opinions. Smart phones were no longer items of luxury and phones capable of multiple modes of communication became extremely popular.

Enlisted are a few major shared attributes of the Gen Y generation as per popular opinion:

- Collective Action
- Optimism
- Tenacity
- Techno-brilliant
- Resilience
- Need for Supervision & structure
- Inexperienced
- Needs a paternal, inspiring leadership but constantly challenges the same

The Gen Y's are in possession of a good number of qualities that will let them carry on the batons of corporate leadership, tomorrow. But their lack of experience calls for the need for supervision and mentoring that cross generational communication platforms can dispense.

6. LEVERAGING GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

With every generation having its unique set of values, beliefs, attitudes and work ethics, it is important that every organisation keen on leveraging this diversity should make attempts to build a cohesive culture. The distinct cohorts must be able to co-exist and work together productively and effectively, with each cohort maintaining its unique identity. To this end, it is important that organisations should adopt structured talent management strategies, to avoid tensions between generations and maximise the benefits from the underlying differences.

The two key initiatives that can enable this vision are:

- a) Diversity training
- b) Mentorship

6.1. Diversity Training

It is important that every worker has the knowledge of the assets and competencies of his/her generation and that of the others. And this knowledge can be formally imparted by means of diversity training. Such programmes can increase an individual's awareness of his/her strengths and weaknesses as also of people in age brackets different from his and help the employee develop an appreciation for the underlying similarities and dissimilarities. For e.g., it is beneficial if the Gen Y's and E-Gen's in a team are convinced of the slightly more traditional work approaches of the seniors and adopt respectful means of mutual communication to drive home their viewpoints. The Free Gen's and most of the Gen X's should discard stereotypes that they may have about the younger generations (say, lousy and impractical approaches to work) and should be more expansive in their outlooks. An organisation's one culture should stream through every employee and a mutually respectful, collaborative work environment can consequently be developed.

6.2. Mentorship

Mentorship is another important organisation led initiative that can open effective channels of communication between the senior employees of a firm and the juniors. When mentoring is offered over an organised platform, the continual process of interaction wherein the junior employees get an opportunity to learn from the senior leaders' approaches to work and the latter gets a taste of the working styles and career aspirations of the former, proves to be an enriching and informative experience for both cohorts involved. Also, when mentoring is carried on a one-to-one basis, both parties are able to develop an appreciation for each other's personal traits (often common to members of that generation) and are able to align their goals for common good. Many organisations also have provisions for reverse mentoring, where a role-reversal of the mentors and mentees happen i.e., the younger employees offer help to the seniors in areas that they have a greater expertise in (technology adaptability, for example).

7. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this exploratory study has emerged a hitherto unexplored diversity classification of the Indian workforce – of that of generations. In an age where businesses are constantly seeking smarter talent management strategies, it is important that organisational leaders focus on leveraging this diversity and sensitize employees about the need to attain generational competence to work in a collaborative and cohesive manner. The four distinct cohorts identified were a) The Free Gens b) the Gen X's c) the E-Gen's and d) the Gen Y's. Significant life events characterising the formative years of each of these were enumerated to gain an understanding of their shared attributes. It was found that every generation had its unique set of competencies that could be of business advantage. However, there were certain conflicting priorities amongst generations which need to be readjusted to attain the same.

The Free Gens who were the oldest cohort in active work were found to be great team players. But one of their weaknesses was social shyness, which could be overcome through collaborative efforts. The Gen X's who are adequately techno literate were found to have aggressive approaches to growth – the colleagues of Gen X's need to be accommodative of these approaches to benefit from Gen X leadership.

The E-Gen's who are a majority in the modern Indian workplace value educational attainments; however they were found to have strongly polarised opinions and it is important for them to revisit such opinions with objectivity in times of conflict. The Gen Y's who are fast occupying the entry levels in the corporate Indian network are ambitious and have positive outlooks towards work. However, their lack of experience calls for them to be receptive of mentoring from seniors for better results.

With many Free Gens and a significant percentage of Gen X's retiring from active work, it is required of organisations to initiate means for fair succession planning and knowledge transfer. It is equally important to take proactive measures to prevent conflicts between different generations that could impede a company's productivity and tamper its very work culture. Conscious efforts to leverage the differences between generations can put an organisation on the path of success powered by innovation and commitment.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Saundarya Rajesh, Ph.D, the Founder-President of AVTAR Career Creators and FLEXI Careers India is one of the earliest voices to speak of Diversity & Inclusion in Indian workplaces. She was awarded her doctorate by SRM university, Chennai for her research on the '**Role Of Flexible Working Methods As A Career Enabler For Increasing Workforce Participation Of Women In India**'. She is an MBA from Central University Pondicherry and a gold medallist in English Literature from Madras University. AVTAR & FLEXI work in the space of creating flexi-careers, while also providing consulting services to companies in 'Flexidizing and Unbundling' jobs – concepts which are the brainchild of Saundarya. AVTAR I-WIN was showcased as an 'India innovation' in Outlook Business 2008 List of Ten Niche services, as also in the book 'Dream to Destiny' 2011 featuring successful entrepreneurs and visionaries. Saundarya was invited to speak at the World's largest HR conference, the SHRM Conference at San Diego, USA in July 2010 on how to create Flexible Careers for women.

She has been recognized by Industry, society and government, winning a slew of awards such as the Yuvashakthi Entrepreneur of the year award 2007, SCOPE Woman Exemplar award 2008, CavinKare's Innovation Award 2011, TiE Stree Shakthi Woman entrepreneur of the year award 2011, India Today's Business Wizards award 2011, the FICCI woman entrepreneur award 2012 and more recently the NEST Entrepreneur of the year award 2013..

Dr. Saundarya has authored several papers relating to the Indian Woman Professional, Women's Careers, Flexible working, Work-life Balance, Career Re-entry and Women's Workforce Participation. Her papers have been published in Journals such as The International Journal of Management (2012), Society for Human Resource Management (2012), The International Journal of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Research (2013), International Journal of Research in

Commerce and Management (2011), Asian Journal Of Management Research (AJMR) (2013), Indian Journal of Training & Development (IJTD) (2013), Journal of Business Management & Economics (JBME) (2013) and The Journal of NIPM (Kerala chapter) (2013). She is also frequently quoted in business papers and mainstream newspapers for her views on women's workforce participation as also for the research she has spearheaded in creating a sustainable workplace of the future. Saundarya attributes all her work to the inspiration she derives from Goddess Abhirami of Thirukadayur.



Mr. Karthik Ekambaram is an MBA with 18 years of experience in business analysis and consulting. Starting his career in IT business consulting, Karthik moved into HR consulting handling recruitment for a number of IT companies.

A deep and abiding interest in business consulting has prompted him to look at Diversity & Inclusion as a business driver for organizations by employing it as a talent, CSR and business strategy tool. He has carried out Job Analysis, Time and Motion studies at several client sites for the purpose of Flexidizing and Unbundling of jobs to create flexi-career tracks in organizations interested in implementing flexible working options for their employees.

Karthik has worked on many research studies on Diversity & Inclusion, Second career women, Generations in the workforce, Flexible working and Work-life balance. He has conducted Diversity & Inclusion audits for a number of organisations. Karthik has also co-authored several papers that have been published in Journals such as The International Journal of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Research (2013), Indian Journal of Training & Development (IJTD) (2013) and Journal of Business Management & Economics (JBME) (2013).