

EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES IN MULTI-GENERATIONAL TEAMS: A CASE STUDY OF THAI FAMILY BUSINESSES

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Abstract:

Background/ problem: In Thailand, family-owned businesses are vital for creating local economic and social value, with ownership typically being passed down through generations. However, descendant leaders face significant challenges in managing multi-generational teams.

Objective/ purpose: This study explored the conflicts encountered by third-generation leaders in managing multi-generational teams (MGT) in Thai family businesses.

Design and Methodology: A qualitative approach was employed involving in-depth online interviews with 20 successors of Thai family businesses. Participants were selected based on criteria including their leadership roles in family businesses with MGT structures. Using the qualitative interview method, the interviews were conducted in English and Thai.

Findings: The key findings revealed significant conflict arising from communication barriers, divergent management styles and resistance to change among generations. Generational differences in expectations and technology use resulted in inefficiencies and burdens for leaders. A key issue included misalignment between traditional practices from baby boomers and modern expectations from millennials, leading to difficulties in managing diverse teams.

Conclusion and Implications: The study highlights the importance of encouraging collaboration and suggests that mentorship and flexible communication methods can address generational gaps by enhancing habit formation theories with leadership practices. Future research should explore the application of social cognitive and goal-setting theories to better understand their potential for improving team performance and achieving company objectives.

Keyword: Family businesses, generational dynamics, intergenerational collaboration, multi-generational management, organizational performance

INTRODUCTION:

In Thailand, family-owned businesses are crucial for creating local economic and social value (Sribunrueng et al., 2022). These businesses typically operate under a Gong-Si system, in which leadership of the business is passed down through generations. Recent reports indicate a significant rise in family business growth, with an increase of 59% and a forecasted growth of 68% over the next two years (Pricewaterhouse Coopers International Limited, 2024). Despite their success, new descendants, particularly third-generation leaders, face challenges managing a workforce that spans multiple generations (Qiu & Freel, 2019). Current research on multi-generational teams (MGT) in family businesses indicates that conflicts often arise due to differences in work ethics, communication styles and technological adaptability (Lowe et al., 2020).

To ensure the family business grows and becomes more efficient, newer generations must appreciate and respect the work ethic and values of older generations and work together. Experience and expertise, royalty, strong work ethic, discipline and patience are the kind of work ethic and values that the younger generations can learn from the older ones. Leaders must adapt to the changing workplace and understand the values cherished by each generation to ensure growth and efficiency in a family business (Sribunrueng et al., 2022).

The transition between generations in business can present unique challenges (Sribunrueng et al., 2022). If any leader of a traditional family business does not have any succession planning putting in place or if their successors lack potential to take over, these variables will lead to a negative effect and bad attitudes towards the family business. This would create uncertainty, instability and a lack of confidence in conducting the business with a clear goal in mind and the direction of leadership would be vague. Initially, the second-generation entrepreneurs (baby boomers) have worked alongside the first-generation to build their businesses. As the baby boomers approach retirement, they focus laying

the path for their successors to take over. This signals a shift of their work functions, from fully and solely operating the business on their own to preparing the third-generation successors to undertake the work in the firm with a purpose of a future takeover of the business leadership. Currently, the generation successors that are referred in this study are primarily from generation X (Gen X) and millennials.

As these new leaders take over, they are expected to plan for the future of the company. Often, these third-generation entrepreneurs have grown up around the business, having been involved from a young age and familiar with the company's traditions, culture and employees (Ng et al., 2021; Sribunrueng et al., 2022). However, this familiarity can also lead to difficulties. The new generation might struggle with integrating their fresh management styles and work culture with existing employees from older generations, such as baby boomers or Gen X, who may resist changes and struggle with new approaches.

In the context of Thai society, which emphasizes hierarchy and respect for elders, these generational shifts can be particularly challenging. The strong cultural norms around deference may further complicate the smooth integration of new management styles and the transition of leadership within Thai companies (Sribunrueng et al., 2022). This study explored the conflicts encountered by third-generation successors in managing multi-generational teams (MGT) in Thai family businesses. The people who took part in this research work and own the business are either in the retail and distribution business sector or hotel and hospitality or construction business. The focus here was to seek factors that cause conflicts to arise in a team comprised of members from different generations. This study looked into how conflicts within MGT can be solved effectively and what kind of leadership techniques can successfully be employed to manage these multi-generational teams.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section clarifies the distinctions between different generations in the workplace. According to Mannheim (1952) explained the timeline of generations of the western world. This study concentrated on the generations in the current employee market which are baby boomers, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Baby boomers (born 1946-1964). This generation was born during the post-war baby boom and experienced a time of prosperity and economic growth. They are known for their work ethic, competitive nature and loyalty to their employers and resistance to change is more common in this generation. They may be less comfortable with new technology or changes in the workplace, which can slow down innovation and progress and also cause difficulty with communication (Edmunds & Turner, 2002).

Generation X (Gen X) (born 1965-1980). This generation grew up during a time of social and economic change, including the rise of technology and the decline of traditional career paths. They are known for their independence, adaptability and work-life balance (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016; Primastio et al., 2023). This generation can adapt and change, which makes them valuable in fast-paced or innovative workplaces. Their independence can lead to creative problem-solving and self-motivation and they can be more skeptical. They may focus more on short-term goals and immediate rewards than long-term planning, which can lead to a lack of teamwork and collaboration due to their independence. Millennials (born 1981-1996). This generation is often referred to as digital natives because they have grown up with technology and are comfortable with it. They are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, desire for flexibility and focus on work-life balance (Dimock, 2019; Twenge, 2017).

Generation Z (Gen Z) (born 1997-2012). This generation is just beginning to enter the workforce and is known for their comfort with technology, creativity and desire for diversity as well as inclusion in the workplace (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2018). They can adapt quickly to new technology and this innovative factor can help organizations stay current and competitive. As they like to work independently, this may lead to a lack of collaboration and teamwork in the workplace.

The MGT are key to a company because they enable the transfer of knowledge and values across generations, combining the experience of older generations with the innovation and adaptability of younger generations. This balance is essential for adapting to market changes, retaining talent and ensuring the long-term survival of the business across generations.

Generations conflicts

Generations conflict in the workplace often stems from differing dispositions among various age groups. Understanding the unique characteristics of each generation can help organizations foster collaboration and enhance productivity. Table 1 below presents the key traits and challenges associated with baby boomers, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z, as supported by various studies. Here is seen that these characteristics for Gen X, millennials and Gen Z, which are adaptability, tech-savvy and independent, can be suitably utilized in facing the current business environments where firms need to adapt to the ever-changing technology and new innovations in conducting their

daily business. On the other hand, an advantage of having stability in the leadership, which is the main positive point of baby boomers, can gain confidence from the workers, investors and customers as they ensure a continuity of direction where the business is heading in the economy.

Table 1 *Generational Characteristics*

Generations	Characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages
Baby boomers	Loyalty, Experience	Stability	Resistance to Change
Gen x	Independence, Adaptability	Work-Life Balance	Skepticism
Millennials	Tech-Savvy, Collaborative	Innovation	Impatience
Gen Z	Independent, Social Impact	Creativity	Lack of Collaboration

However, the resistance to change, which found in the baby boomers can be a hindrance to a firm. For instance, with the ever-changing economic environment and a frequent introduction of new technology and innovation, the resistance to change to adapt to new technologies can make the firm fall behind its competitors when attracting or retaining its customers. The impatience and lack of collaboration, negative character traits visible in the millennials and Gen Z, are not useful to any business. The impatience when conducting the business may cause the leader to make an ill-formed decision and it may result in reduction in profit and share in the market

Leadership styles

Leadership styles represent unique approaches when interacting with employees (Zheng et al., 2019; Madanchian et al., 2021). Two prominent styles are transactional and transformational leadership. Leaders who practice transactional leadership prioritize attaining specified objectives and maintaining the status quo while inspiring and motivating staff to do the same, fostering their innovation and creativity.

Transformational leadership is an innovative, inspiring and motivating leadership style. This leadership approach inspires team members to think creatively and inspires them to reach their goals. They establish high expectations for their team while also giving it the resources and support it needs to live up to those standards. Korejan and Shanbazi (2016) defined a leader's role as moving the organization toward the future, change, understanding and improvement of the work in an organization. In comparing transactional leaders and transformational leaders, innovative thinking, creativity and unconventional thinking are encouraged by transformational leaders. There are various types of leadership styles, as presented below:

An autocratic style of leadership is one in which a single person has ultimate authority over their group or organization and complete control over decision-making.

Laissez-faire leadership has been elucidated by previous research (Bass, 1985; Tosunoglu, 2016), which explained the concept of laissez-faire. Laissez-faire leadership is a style characterized by minimal direct supervision and a hands-off approach where leaders provide their team members with considerable autonomy.

Leaders should give their followers little instruction or direction and should instead allow them to choose for themselves. Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that the absence of leadership is because the leader does not meet the employee's justification expectations and confidence.

Additionally, democratic leadership involves requesting the opinions and input of followers when making decisions (Sharma & Singh, 2013). Democratic leadership (Gastil, 1994) is a leadership style that emphasizes collaboration and participation. Democratic leaders value their team members' viewpoints and encourage them to express them since they emphasize collaboration and value input from team members (Gastil, 1994; Tanwar & Priyanka, 2018; Woods, 2004).

Therefore, servant leadership considers the needs of followers and tries to empower and support them while emphasizing the importance of the leader's service to the team. It prioritizes the needs of the team and creates a positive work environment by fostering relationships (Greenleaf, 1977; Kohntopp & McCann, 2018; Liden et al., 2008).

Understanding these styles is crucial as each presents unique advantages and disadvantages. Exceptional leaders adapt their approach to suit diverse situations and contexts.

Table 2 *Leadership Style characteristics*

Leadership Style	Characteristic	Advantages	Disadvantages
Autocratic	Complete authority and control, making decisions without input from team members. Quick decisions, limit creativity, reduce employee satisfaction.	Quick decision-making, clear direction.	Limits creativity and reduces employee engagement and satisfaction.

Laissez-faire	Provide minimal supervision, allowing team members significant autonomy. Enhancing independence, a lack of guidance and direction.	Fosters autonomy, encourages innovation.	Lack of guidance, potential for low productivity and directionless effort.
Democratic	Involve team members in decision-making, valuing their input and encouraging collaboration. Increases engagement but can slow down the process.	Increases team engagement, fosters collaboration and promotes innovation.	Slower decision-making, possible indecision due to too much input.
Servant Leadership	Prioritize the needs of their team, focusing on support, empowerment and fostering positive relationships. Enhances trust and collaboration but may require more time and effort to implement.	Builds strong trust, enhance collaboration, improves team morale and job satisfaction.	Time-intensive, requires high emotional commitment from the leader.

There are various types of leadership styles, as presented below:

Table 3 *Summary of Leadership Styles*

Leadership Styles	Characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages
Great Man Theory	Inherent heroic traits, born leaders	Emphasizes the influence of personal charisma	Overlooks the role of skills development
Trait Theory	Specific traits like intelligence, charisma	Identifies key traits for effective leadership	May ignore context and situational factors
Contingency Theory	Leader's effectiveness based on the situation	Adapts to different contexts and needs	Can be complex to implement consistently
Behavioral Theory	Focus on leadership behaviors (Directive, Supportive, Participative, Achievement-Oriented)	Provides actionable behaviors for leaders	May overlook individual differences in leaders
Transactional Theory	Reward-based exchanges for performance	A clear and structured approach to motivation	Can be too rigid and transactional
Transformational Theory	Inspires and motivates through vision and inspiration	Enhances follower engagement and innovation	Requires strong vision and personal charisma

Table 3 summarizes various leadership styles, highlighting their key characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. This table helps to clarify the styles and their influences, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Leadership Styles

Leadership is about guiding and directing the people in the team. The characteristics of leadership can be summarised using keywords such as interpersonal, influence and goal-oriented.

To provide a clearer understanding of ideal leadership, various leadership theories have been developed over time. For example, The *Great Man Theory*, introduced by Thomas Carlyle in the early 19th century, posits that leaders possess inherent heroic qualities (Spector, 2016). However, it is important to recognize that leadership is not solely a product of innate traits; many leaders emerge based on their instincts and abilities (Fairholm, 2015; Madanchian et al., 2021). Furthermore, *Trait Theory* suggests that certain personality traits, such as intelligence and charisma, are commonly found in influential leaders (Madanchian et al., 2021; Yukl, 1989; Zaccaro et al., 2017). Physical traits and personality characteristics often distinguish leaders from non-leaders (Madanchian et al., 2021; Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020; Northouse, 2018). These traits can be classified into emergent and effective traits (Başar, 2020).

The *Contingency Theory*, introduced in 1969, focuses on the leader-subordinate relationship, emphasizing goal setting and the role of leader effectiveness in motivating followers (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020). Situational leaders exhibit characteristics such as delegating, consulting, convincing and instructing. In contrast, *Behavioral Theory* identifies and assesses leadership effectiveness in four categories: directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented leadership (Mirzal & Ninglasari, 2021).

Additionally, *Transactional Theory* conceptualizes leadership as a system of contingent rewards, where leaders engage in positive exchanges with followers based on shared goals. Conversely, *Transformational Theory*, emphasizes enhancing the motivation and moral commitment of both leaders and followers (Downton, 1973). Transformational leaders are capable of motivating followers to shift their perspectives and work toward shared goals through their vision and personality.

Habit theories

The behavior of different generations in the workplace can be associated with various leadership styles. When individuals consistently exhibit certain types of behavior, such behavior becomes automatic and can be triggered within stable contexts (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). The ability to generate new ideas aimed at addressing workplace challenges can be enhanced by integrating habit formation theories with flexible leadership approaches, ultimately improving organizational performance. Behavioral theories can be understood as follows:

Operant conditioning theory explains how behaviors are shaped and learned through reinforcement and punishment (Skinner, 2019). By introducing consequences, individuals can modify their behaviors to either gain rewards or avoid penalties, thus influencing their actions.

Social cognitive theory, proposed by Bandura (1986), highlights the role of social influence and learning from others. It posits that behavior is shaped by environmental factors and social circumstances, with a strong emphasis on observational learning. This theory identifies three core components: cognitive factors, behavioral factors and environmental influences.

The theory of planned behavior helps explain and predict human behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Dumitrescu et al., 2011). It argues that three key factors—attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control—significantly influence an individual's intention to engage in specific behaviors.

Automatic behavior can be explained through *Dual Process Theory*, which describes how thoughts can arise from two separate processes: conscious and unconscious (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). This distinction underscores the complexity of human cognition and behavior. Additionally, the *Habit Loop Model*, outlined in *The Power of Habit* (Duhigg, 2012), simplifies the understanding of habits into three steps: cue, routine and reward. It illustrates how habits operate automatically and unconsciously, even when individuals are aware of their actions.

To achieve better outcomes and meet targets, *Goal-Setting Theory* emphasizes the importance of establishing clear objectives to motivate consistent behavior. Frameworks such as Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) serve as practical examples. The effectiveness of goal setting lies in its ability to inspire repetitive behaviors.

Finally, *Fogg's Behavior Model* (Fogg, 2002; 2009) identifies three critical components—trigger, ability and motivation—that influence behavior changes. These elements must align for a behavior to occur.

Research concepts

By gaining the understanding on types of generations present in workplace, leadership styles' characteristics and traits together with habit theories, this helps identifying factors that make impacts on the development and compression of MGT conflicts. The study aimed to use the knowledge on these above mentioned and the research findings to explore a new leadership technique for managing multi-generational teams that involves combining habit formation with leadership theories. This is to aim to find a new approach that can bridge the gap in this area of research.

Research Objectives

This paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What key conflicts can arise in a team comprised of members from different generations?
2. How can conflicts within MGT be resolved effectively?
3. What leadership techniques can be employed to manage these teams successfully?

METHODS

Design

This qualitative study involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 family business executives. In this research, qualitative interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the conflicts encountered by third-generation leaders in managing MGT.

Setting

There were 20 individuals who voluntarily agreed to take part in this research; they run the family business in Thailand. They are successors to their family run business. These types of businesses that they have been operating are in retail and distribution sector, hotel and hospitality sector and construction sector. The research scope confines to people who are successors to the companies by inherited the family business either from immediate family members or relatives. Within these 20 participants, 16 participants received the family business as a direct inheritance from their parents. 4 people received the family business from their relative.

Participants

In this study, the recommended sample size for reaching data saturation is between 5 and 24 interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Purposive sampling was employed to gather a wide range of data on leadership experiences. The selection criteria included participants who (1) were involved in the management of a company, (2) were successors of a family business, (3) were involved in a company that was 100 percent family-owned and (4) were currently holding a leadership position within the company. These criteria were used to identify suitable candidates for the study.

Interview Questions

The questionnaire survey was administered in both English and Thai. Initially, the questionnaire was sent to 20 candidates for preview before conducting interviews. In this way, the qualitative interviews were useful because the candidates were able to speak freely and present their perspectives during the interviews (Harrison, 2001). The survey comprised 12 questions divided into two sections. The first section focused on the candidates' backgrounds. The purpose of the questionnaire of the first section was to collect demographic information, while the second section included more detailed, in-depth questions, focused on exploring leadership styles and management behaviors related to multi-generational teams (MGT). The following questions: 1) What are the main challenges in managing MGT in a family business? 2) What conflicts arise when working with multiple generations? 3) What are the company's expectations? 4) Are MGT essential for the business? 5) How can issues with multi-generational teams be resolved?

Procedures

A meeting was arranged for senior and executive-level candidates, many of whom had limited availability. An online interview was chosen as the best solution because it allowed for scheduling the date and time as well as recording the interview. Microsoft Teams software was selected as the preferred solution because most candidates could receive the invitation and block off the interview time in their calendars. Candidates were required to use a meeting room or any quiet place during office hours for the interview.

Data Rigor

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed to identify themes related to leadership, conflict resolution and generational issues. Interviews are a valuable methodology for exploring personal and ethical issues. Successful interviews can be assessed based on four criteria, comprising accessibility to candidates, maintaining objectivity and clarity of purpose, ensuring candidates understand the requirements and valuing and motivating candidate responses. The interviews were recorded for content analysis and were conducted online in Thai, with each session lasting no longer than one hour. Before the interviews, the questionnaire was sent to volunteers to provide them with an understanding of the study. The in-depth online interviews were continued until all questions were answered.

RESULTS

The results from the in-depth online interviews and content analysis are presented in the following subsections.

Demographic Characteristics

The study involved 20 successors of family businesses, with interviews conducted online. The participants included 14 males (70%) and 6 females (30%). Their age distribution was as follows: 5% were aged 51-60 (baby boomers), 55% were aged 41-50 (Gen X) and 40% were aged 31-40 (millennials). In terms of education, 45% held a Bachelor's degree, while 55% had a Master's degree. Of the 20 successors, 80% inherited their executive positions, while 20% attained their roles through family connections. Their management experience ranged from 0-3 years for 25%, 3-5 years for 30% and 5-10 years for 45%. Regarding business ownership, 50% were sole proprietors, 30% were in partnerships and 20% had distributed ownership. The business varied in size: 10% had 1-5 employees, 40% had 6-50 employees and 50% had 51-200 employees. The age distribution of employees was 10% baby boomers, 30% Gen X, 35% millennials and 25% Gen Z.

Main Findings

The study focused on understanding conflicts within MGT regarding management styles, organizational cultures, communication preferences and adaptability to change. The findings effectively addressed this objective, revealing key issues and strategies for improvement. The research findings from the in-depth interviews regarding the conflict in MGT can be summarized into three categories. The content analysis results are described further.

General Conflict in Managing Multi-Generational Teams

According to the findings from this research, the study looked into what the main challenges in managing MGT in a family business are together with what conflicts arise when working with multiple generations. The research covered on the topic of what the company's expectations are and whether MGT are essential for the business. The study also looked into how issues with MGT can be resolved.

In this interview result, participants (P) in the study identified key conflicts, comprising, generation gap, leadership style, organizational culture shock, obedience and loyalty, resistance to change, communications and learning a new technology. The generation problem can be identified as these below:

Generations gap. This is a significant difference between the traditional management style of baby boomers and the more data-driven, results-orientated approach favored by Gen X and millennials. The study identified three primary sources of conflict. In Thai culture, respecting baby boomers is crucial, even when the leader is younger. Direct and assertive communication and willingness to learn from their experience can help build trust and cooperation across generational lines. These generational differences can lead to misunderstandings and friction within the leadership team, especially as younger generations prioritize faster processes and innovation, while baby boomers tend to resist rapid change.

With each unique generation's behavior, baby boomers often fail to listen to others and may not be open-minded despite their valuable experience. Gen Z has a unique persona, is straightforward and does not show much respect for their elders, very independent and confident in their expertise. A lack of respect for others, for example, younger generations are accustomed to instant feedback and direct communication, which may unintentionally disrespect baby boomers, who value a more formal approach. As one of the participants noted,

"Older generations (baby boomers) expect to be treated with regard and respect by younger generations such as millennials and Gen Z, but they often fail to listen to or accept any new ideals from the younger generation. How to make other gens respect them when they do not respect others." (P3)

Leadership Style. The management styles of new successors tend to be more results-oriented, data-driven and fast-paced compared to the traditional approaches favored by baby boomers. As a result, there is a noticeable gap between the leadership styles of the founding generation and the newer management team, leading to friction in the decision-making process. The following are some of comments that made by the participants over this point:

"Just hire for 3 months, then evaluate the results. If the goals are not achieved, inform them that they have not passed the probation period." (P4, P9 and P16)

"Less company activities and less benefit for the employee but better benefit to the company." (P5, P and P11)

"The company aims to set the working standard to be more cooperative rather than a family business type." (P1, P3 and P16)

"The founder offers better benefits and rewards, while the successor wants to reduce costs to increase profits." (P17 and P6)

Organizational Culture Shock. Rapid changes in organizational culture can be challenging for baby boomers, who may struggle to adapt to new methods and technologies. A sudden change in management strategy, culture and tradition can cause a culture shock to the older generation, such as baby boomers. The new successor has less care for people and is more result-oriented. This creates less royalty and impacts the employee's feelings. The participant does not care and is ready to hire new employees for the company. This resistance to change can lead to high turnover and dissatisfaction among younger employees, as highlighted by other participants. Two of participants pointed out on this area:

"If they cannot follow the leader, then they will leave the company." (P5)

"The successors will easily replace older generations with younger ones to transform the company since the new generations understand data, thus saving time on training." (P1 and P17)

Obedience and loyalty. Baby boomers are often seen as the most loyal employees of a company, as they help establish the traditions and culture of the organization and empathy from the founder. However, some participants believe that baby boomers are not necessarily loyal, but rather they prefer to avoid conflict and stick to what they know. As a result, they tend to stay with the company for a long time and are loyal to the founder but not necessarily to the successor. However, the new generations, such as Gen Z, are very impatient to work with traditional types of business. Even though their technology skills and acknowledgment are very up-to-date for the market, this generation tends to have a short working life in the family business. As one participant said,

"Baby boomers believe in company legacy but are not as open to new challenges." (P9 and P15)

Resistance to change. A lack of ability to change can be identified with most generations that stay in the company for too long, such as baby boomers. This generation doesn't believe in having a successor's strategy because it is a new way of working for them. It takes a lot of time to see results and achievements, so they stick to the same process they know will yield the expected outcome. Another issue was trust within the successor family, changing the company strategy; the candidates found this caused many conflicts with the founder of the family as they did not

believe in the idea of initiative and only accepted it after witnessing achievement. This resistance to change can lead to high turnover and dissatisfaction among younger employees, as highlighted by other participants:

“If they cannot follow the leader, then they will leave the company.” (P5)

“Thus, find someone else to do it if you cannot adjust it.” (P18)

“Baby boomers are resistant to adapting to current market changes and prefer to stay in their comfort zone.” (P9)

“Their working behavior remains consistent and cannot be changed.” (P1, P3, P8 and P20)

However, Gen X and millennials are willing to adapt their working style in order to survive conflicts. These generations adapt well to the strategy and make up the majority of management in the current employee market.

Communications. Communications within such misalignment in expectations can hinder decision-making and disrupt intergenerational communication within Thai family-owned businesses. Gen Z is very sensitive regarding the direction and purpose of work, as well as any conflicts or differences in working ideas. This generation is very good at accepting new challenges. Gen X and millennials are willing to adapt the working style in order to survive the conflicts. Because these generations adapt well in the strategy, they are the majority of MGT at this current employee market. However, there can be communication conflicts within a team, such as when team members try to share their ideas with senior management and are consistently rejected. In such cases, they are likely to look for another company that values their input. Whereas baby boomers tend to resist new ideas and struggle to find solutions. One participant commented that,

“Baby boomers are not loyal to the company. If they were loyal, they would have to change their working style, but they just keep continuing the same behavior again and again with no change at all.” (P15)

Learning a new technology. As the older generation, such as baby boomers and Gen X, are more careful and detailed at work, these cause a time-consuming to the business. In order to keep up with market trends, the successor will need to enhance the management skills of the team and motivate them. The participants must be willing to implement the new strategy and lead by example to see the results. These new skills can be developed through personal development, improved work skills and adopting new technologies. When comparing the outcomes of learning new skills, it takes baby boomers a long time to understand the system, whereas Gen X and millennials generally adapt well. Gen Z, on the other hand, are experts and require less time to learn. Some participants commented over this area: “Difficulties arise when teaching older generations to use a new system. They agree but struggle to step out of their comfort zone and follow through with the task.” (P15)

“I tried to lead them by set the working standard to become more cooperate type than family business type.” (P10)

Generational Differences and Their Importance

Each generation brings unique strengths to the table. Baby boomers are valued for their loyalty, experience and ability to solve problems quickly. They offer a strong work ethic and deep industry knowledge, which are difficult to replace. Conversely, millennials and Gen Z are more adept at leveraging technology and adapting to new work practices.

Difference in expectations. Gen Z seeks innovative environments and flexible working conditions, which can lead them to pursue opportunities outside the family business once they have gained sufficient experience. Each generation's differing needs and expectations - from management style and communication to technology usage and adaptability - require careful consideration. Understand the challenges in retaining younger employees who may view the company as a steppingstone rather than a long-term career. Participants did mention over this point:

“Gen Z employees tend to resign quickly if they feel the company does not meet their standards or provide sufficient benefits.” (P12)

“Gen Z just uses my company as a jumping stone as their salary and work position growth very fast from jumping from one company to another within a short period of time.” (P10)

Current Leadership Approach

From the research, most participants are managing MGT, forcefully implementing the new business and trying to get better outcomes for the company. This type of leadership is very successful in gaining more business for the company; therefore, the employees find it hard to follow because of the high turnover rate in family business companies.

Better company benefit. To improve the turnover rate, leaders should set a positive example, demonstrating successful outcomes and encouraging older generations to adopt new technologies and methodologies. As the older generation will see the result and trust the leader's strategy, this increases leadership strength for the younger generations. Some participants mentioned that,

“Implementing the new online system to track stock in real-time enhances workflow and saves employee time.” (P9 and P12).

“Holding a 5-minute morning meeting or call can help track the current status of the company and find faster solutions.” (P11 and P20)

Resolving Issues and Enhancing Team Performance

Using transformational leadership to motivate new strategies in management is essential. It is important to understand the behavior of different generations, reduce generational conflicts and improve team performance. By recognizing the core characteristics of each generation and applying new strategies and empathy to employees, we can change

management's behavior for the better. This can enhance the company's values and make job positions more appealing to employees. For instance, creating a shared goal and offering rewards for achieving it can help bridge generational gaps.

Motivation. Additionally, as one participant noted, quarterly staff incentive trips and other team-building activities can foster a sense of unity and purpose. Eventually, navigating the complexities of multi-generational teams requires leaders to adapt their approach, be sensitive to generational differences and motivate their teams through respect, empathy, understanding, recognition and strategic goal setting. By understanding and leveraging the unique strengths of each generation, organizations can achieve better alignment and drive success. There are some suggestions by several participants here:

“Give a team initiative to get one goal and the result is that they will provide the reward.” (P2)

“Start team initiative project for a year-end bonus, this will help in smoothing the MGT.” (P9 and P10)

“Outing and team building activity creates a strong empathy of MGT.” (P3)

“Set self KPIs for self-audit for personal improvement and Group KPIs for the company goals.” (P3, P5, P6, P12, P16 and P20)

Time. The key to change is time. Time is the key to seeing the result of any strategy and changes. More than 5 years ago, most participants began to see the result in changing company tradition and working style. They patiently wait and see the result as the whole company culture has already changed to the direction they want. Therefore, the participants are to have to upskill as a sample to the organization. The disadvantage is that some want to change instantly, but the employee cannot follow their order and leave the company, especially Gen Z. Some participants mentioned over this point:

“In the first year, our employees were baby boomers who only used Excel to check the hotel booking system and communicated solely via landline. However, after 5 years, our hotel has gained global recognition online and now has a more advanced system for forecasting room sales for any season. This allows us to plan events during the low season to attract more customer bookings.” (P8)

“I attended a seminar to expand my network and took a short course in hotel management to connect with potential partners and promote my company.” (P12)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion of Main Results

This study aimed to explore the challenges of managing multi-generational teams within family businesses, focusing on leadership styles, communication and generational conflicts. It also looked into conflicts encountered by third-generation successors in managing multi-generation teams in Thai family businesses. The research gathered insights from interviews with 20 family business leaders, highlighting the difficulties and strategies employed in managing leadership dynamics across generations of baby boomers, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z. Participants in this study work in the retail and distributor business, the hotel and hospitality sector and the construction business. Additionally, the research focus was to seek factors that cause conflicts to arise in a team comprised of members from different generations. It looked into how conflicts within MGT can be solved effectively, what leadership techniques can successfully be employed to manage these multi-generation teams and identified key highlights in the research themes, such as (1) differences in management and communication preferences across generations, (2) miscommunication as a primary cause of conflict and (3) the effectiveness of transformational leadership in addressing these challenges and promoting collaboration.

The study emphasizes that generational differences can lead to workplace conflicts (Lowe et al., 2020). However, it extends these findings by demonstrating how specific leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, can effectively address these issues within the unique context of family businesses (Northouse, 2018). This suggests that, while generational conflicts are well-documented, transformational leadership provides a practical approach to mitigating these challenges and enhancing a more harmonious work environment (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The key findings of this study on the conflicts within MGT can be identified as generation gap, leadership style, organization culture shock, obedience, loyalty, resistance to change, communications and learning new technology. Each generation has unique characteristics, with Gen Z having a straightforward persona and not showing much respect for their elders, being very independent and confident in their expertise (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Baby boomers do not want to feel completely left out and do not respect their senior positions. With these behaviors, undoubtedly, both generations have a lack of respect for others.

A lack of resistance to change is a significant barrier to developing a family business into a cooperative type of business. Implementing a new strategy requires adapting to the system to improve the business and ensure the survival of the family business in the current market situation. When new successors attempt to change the company's strategy, baby boomers often revert to the familiar system they used to follow. This stubborn working style from the baby boomers results in a lack of compliance with the new successors (Lewin et al., 1939). With this the participants

suffered from baby boomers' resistance to change and challenges to successors, where improvement to the company is necessary and may need individuals from different generations to implement the new system smoothly. However, Gen X and millennials adapt well to the company and just want to survive in the workplace, so they adapt to change and are willing to change their working style according to the successor strategy and any new implementation from the successor (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016; Primastio et al., 2023)

The differences between individuals are crucial in resolving conflicts within MGT. The findings indicate that the participants suggested changing the company culture and adapting the leadership style to align with MGT. To enhance company goals and outcomes, they proposed integrating team and personal goals into MGT in order to monitor results more effectively. They also recommended implementing a new work system and allocating time to assess the outcomes, although this may require a longer time frame to observe improvements and measure achievements. Encourage management to work together as a team using team building and initiatives to create a sense of belonging for each generation.

All participants recognize that each generation has different expectations. Only Gen Z requires a shortcut to success, as they want to succeed quickly. In order to establish a successful career path and attain better salaries, Gen Z prefers to change companies quickly and is very confident in their ability to do so. Therefore, baby boomers, Gen X and millennials tend to stay in the same company for a longer time. The participant clarified that the key leadership style technique used in management is the transactional style.

The research found that participants previously employed a new leadership style that aligned with their management techniques. They identified the behaviors of each generation and understood the weaknesses of these management techniques using benefits, time and motivation. The key factor in motivating is leading by example. This approach involves motivating the team by setting clear, results-driven goals and demonstrating successful outcomes. Baby boomers are able to see the process and the results, so this strategy can be effective if the successor achieves positive outcomes and can demonstrate actual results. However, it would not be beneficial if the results were unsuccessful. Therefore, Gen X, millennials and Gen Z will contribute their expertise and ideas to achieve the desired results (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2018) This teamwork can be successful if the leaders listen to their ideas, build trust and motivate these generations.

To successfully manage MGT, it is essential to understand the needs of each generation and their behavior. Employing a leadership strategy that relies on coercion, strict time limits, excessive control and creating uncomfortable situations may not yield positive results. In fact, it could lead to a higher turnover rate.

Limitations

This study faced various limitations. First, managing MGT presents significant challenges due to differences in communication (Men & Yue, 2019), management style, technology utilization and collaboration. Traditional working processes create less efficient work and burden the owner. The study focused on sensitive subjects related to candidates' behaviors, which may have influenced their responses. Second, some participants appeared disengaged or less invested in the questions. Specialized research terminology used during interviews occasionally led to misunderstandings among participants. Third as the participants were the leader of the company so they have a limited time and less available time for in-depth interviews.

Implications for Behavior Science

This research offers valuable insight into how leadership impacts Thai family-owned businesses managed by multi-generational teams. The study suggests that transformational leadership can help resolve intergenerational conflicts in family businesses. However, more research is required to understand how integrating habit formation theories with leadership styles can further diminish these differences. For instance, combining goal-setting with servant leadership could help align generational expectations and enhance collaboration. Future studies should focus on exploring how these combined approaches can provide practical solutions to improve generational harmony and efficiency in family-run enterprises.

The research likewise highlights how leadership behavior influences MGT in achieving company objectives and goals using behavioral science theories such as the social cognitive theory and the goal-setting theory. This study underscores the need to address generational behavior and communication style. Effective leadership in MGT requires traits such as charisma, adaptability and an understanding of social media influence.

The study suggests that organizations should develop strategies that emphasize intergeneration collaboration to manage MGT effectively, including mentorship and cross-generational communication programs. Implementing a combination of transformational leadership and the goal-setting theory is recommended for motivating employees. A strategy involving regular feedback and flexible communication methods could be initiated through transformational leadership, inclusive practices and a focus on results-orientated collaboration (Mirčetić & Vukotic, 2020).

Future research should explore the leadership style between transformational leadership, rewards, goal-setting and the social cognitive approach in management practices. Leaders should set specific goals to foster positive interactions and collaboration within the team.

CONCLUSION

This research 's findings identify some factors that cause conflicts to third generation leaders in managing MGT in Thai family business. They key finding of this study is that the resistance to change is a main hindrance to the management of MGT in Thai family business. Because of the ever-changing economic environment, especially with the online shopping marketing. It is importance that every employee should be flexible and have ability to adapt to new working style to suite their working environment. The resistance to change, especially to meet up with the needs and demands of customers, can drive clients away from business. As a result, participants need to change their managemental style to force MGT to work in according to changes in the business. The differences in generational values, some are clearly derived from the resistance to change, made an idea of hiring new generation workers as a replacement of the old generation employees feel uncomfortable in MGT; this creates a tension and problem in collaboration within the team. Lack of trust from the outsiders and the needs to keep the family business within the family members so no outsider can steal family's trade secret are apart of the resistance to change. Lastly time is a key element to succeed, particularly in managing the business. The estimate time for business to implement change and for change to take effect is 3-5 years or more. Moreover, the participants expressed that leadership training programs should enhance adaptability and open communication across generations. Furthermore, mentorship initiatives could help transfer leadership skills from older generations to younger leaders. Future research should examine the long-term impact of leadership adaptability on the continuity and performance of family businesses.

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