

# Strategies for Retaining a Multigenerational Workforce

Jones LM\*

Walden University, College of Management and Technology, 100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

## Abstract

As organizations become more age diverse, some business leaders face challenges managing a multigenerational workforce. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies that leaders at a university in Northwest Florida implemented to retain their age-diverse workforce. The targeted population was higher education business managers who had success with retaining an age-diverse staff. The conceptual framework of the study was Herzberg's 2-factor theory of motivation. A significant tenet of this theory is employees explain satisfying and dissatisfying experiences based on intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to their job functions. The data collection process included face-to-face interviews with 4 participants and a review of company documents, including the university's strategic plan and diversity and inclusion initiatives. Through coding and thematic analysis, 7 themes emerged that could help leaders retain a multigenerational workforce: foster a diversity-friendly workplace culture, implement effective interpersonal communication strategies, employ a formal approach, encourage a healthy work-life balance, value employees and their differences, offer professional growth opportunities, and eliminate negative generational stereotyping. Developing and cultivating retention strategies may contribute to social change by helping managers and leaders enrich retention rates, thereby increasing employment stability, improving productivity, and enhancing organizational and community relations.

**Keywords:** Generational cohort; Traditionalists; Baby boomers; Generation X; Generation Y

## Introduction

### Background of the problem

The four generations that constitute today's workforce include traditionalists (born between 1925 and 1945), baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1981), and Generation Y (born between 1982 and 2000), also known as millennials [1]. According to Cloutier et al. [2], differences among the four generational cohorts can cause challenges for business leaders to develop successful strategies to retain a multigenerational staff. The generational differences that managers find challenging includes attitudes, beliefs, values, work ethics, workplace perceptions, and workplace expectations [3]. Additionally, intrinsic and extrinsic factors can affect the motivation levels of generational employees, which can strongly influence their workplace expectations [4].

Gaining a keen understanding of how to manage differences among multigenerational employees is vital to an organization's success [5]. Leaders of multigenerational staff tend to treat all workers the same, regardless of their cohort classification, instead of focusing on individual characteristics and traits of generational employees and treating them according to their needs [6]. Establishing a workplace environment that is diversity friendly can encourage innovation and teamwork between generational employees, which could have a positive effect on productivity and retention [7]. Al-Asfour and Lettau [8] asserted that it is essential for organizations to examine their leadership styles and level of understanding of the differences that exist among generational workers so that leaders can address workplace diversity, which can reduce generational conflict and improve employee retention.

### Problem statement

Diversity in the workplace increases as baby boomers delay retirement and join the other generations in the labor force [5]. Differences in age, intrinsic and extrinsic motivator preferences, and characteristics of generational workers can lead to challenges for business managers in retaining their multigenerational staff [9]. By 2023, the workforce will reach an estimated 163.5 million people with

the traditionalists representing 8% of the workforce, the baby boomers representing 22% of the workforce, Generation X representing 20% of the workforce, and Generation Y representing 50% of the workforce [10,11]. The general business problem is that some business managers do not recognize the differences among multigenerational workers, which can adversely affect employee retention. The specific business problem is that some business managers lack strategies to retain a multigenerational workforce.

### Purpose statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore retention strategies business managers use to retain their multigenerational workforce. The targeted population consisted of department managers from an education institution located in Northwest Florida who had success in retaining a multigenerational workforce. According to Hannay and Fretwell [12] and Matz-Costa and Pitt-Catsouphes [13], academic administrators can experience workplace conflict and retention dilemmas if managers do not identify and address the differences that exist among multigenerational workers. Therefore, an academic population was suitable for this study. The implications for positive social change include the opportunity to share strategies that could help organizations increase their retention rates of generational workers, as well as promote organizational unity across generations. Managers, administrators, and other individuals who hold authoritative positions could use the findings of this study to increase the retention rates of generational workers, thereby creating employment stability, improving productivity, and enhancing both organizational and community relations.

\*Corresponding author: Laurita M Jones, College of Management and Technology, Walden University, 100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55401, USA, Tel: +1866-492-5336; E-mail: [Laurita.Jones@Waldenu.edu](mailto:Laurita.Jones@Waldenu.edu)

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## Research question

The central research question was the following: What retention strategies do business managers use to retain their multigenerational workforce?

## Interview questions

1. What strategies do you use to retain your multigenerational workforce?
2. What specific procedures or business practices have you implemented to ensure the retention of your multigenerational workforce?
3. What strategies have you found to be most effective in retaining your multigenerational workforce?
4. What strategies have you found to be the least effective in retaining your multigenerational workforce?
5. What challenges did you encounter when you implemented the strategies, and how did you overcome the challenges?
6. What advice would you share with other business managers about developing and implementing strategies to help retain their multigenerational workforce?

## Conceptual Framework

Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, from an intrinsic motivator and extrinsic motivator perspective, was the conceptual framework for this study. The two-factor theory came about when Herzberg [14] collected data from interviews of 200 accountants and engineers from several industries in the Pittsburgh area. During the data collection process, Herzberg [14] asked his participants to explain periods of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on their jobs. The results of the study revealed that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction derives from two factors that he labeled motivation factors (intrinsic elements) and hygiene factors (extrinsic elements). According to Herzberg [15], the intrinsic factors of motivation that can lead to increased retention are job satisfaction and enhanced motivation. Herzberg [15] further stated that job satisfaction and motivation could encourage superior work performance and increased efforts from employees. Intrinsic motivators tend to represent more emotional but less tangible needs, such as project accomplishments, recognition for achievement, level of responsibility, growth and advancement opportunities, and the work itself [16]. Extrinsic factors of motivation correlate with job dissatisfaction and can lead to an increase in turnover, which will negatively affect retention rates [15,17]. Extrinsic factors are those that employees expect to be present and, if absent, can cause high levels of dissatisfaction. Examples of extrinsic factors include working conditions, authority or status, job security, company policies, leadership, and interpersonal relationships [16]. Herzberg [16] concluded that intrinsic motivators are the primary cause of job satisfaction, and extrinsic motivators are the main cause of unhappiness in the workplace. To improve job attitudes, increase productivity, and lengthen employee commitments, it is essential for managers to identify and apply intrinsic and extrinsic elements of Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation [18].

Due to four generations simultaneously constituting the workforce, such diversity requires an in-depth comprehension of what motivates workers of differing ages and characteristics so that organizations can successfully retain them [19]. Hyun and Oh [20] suggested that motivation factors affect the actual job tasks that workers do; therefore, the jobs should consist of intrinsic and extrinsic factors to cultivate

motivation within the workforce. Developing and implementing strategies that incorporate a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors based on the needs and characteristics of their staff could help managers mitigate turnover and enhance workplace retention [21].

## Operational definitions

**Generational cohort:** A generational cohort is a group of individuals who experience identical social, economic, political, and cultural events, and who share similar values and attitudes about life, work, and education [22].

**Traditionalists:** Traditionalists are individuals born between 1925 and 1945 who compose approximately 5% of today's workforce [1,23].

**Baby boomers:** Baby boomers are people born between 1946 and 1964 who compose approximately 30% of the population [1,23].

**Generation X:** Generation X constitutes nearly 34% of the population and includes individuals born between 1965 and 1981. The Generation X population is also known as the Xers, the 13<sup>th</sup> generation, and the latchkey generation [1,24].

**Generation Y:** Generation Y, also known as the millennials, consists of individuals born between 1982 and 2000. These individuals compose almost 12% of the population [1,25].

## Literature Review

### Background on generations

In the 1920s, Karl Mannheim introduced the concept of generation as a realistic addition to the examination of social stratification in modern sociology [26]. The sociology of generations can directly arrogate theories that surround the idea of social class, yielding a range of ideas such as generational conflict, generational mobility, and generational ideologies [26]. Eyerman and Turner [26] defined a generation in terms of years and origination. The meaning of generational cohorts improves generational sociological substance, which could place emphasis on the problem of the final dissolution of a generational cohort as its members evolve through retirement and physical decline. Time identifies multigenerational variances because periodization encapsulates the strategic opportunities and complications that relate to precise generations [26]. The researchers indicated that different generations survive by preserving collective memory of its origins, historic struggles, political and historical events, and ideologists and leading characters.

### Generational cohorts and age groups

Becton et al. [27] found that a generation, often referred to as a cohort, is a similar group of individuals that share birth years, age, and meaningful life events at critical stages of development. These people within the different cohorts acquire similar personalities and characteristics because of their shared experiences [28,29]. Society delegates these generational personalities and characteristics into stereotypes, which align with the environmental influences that affect their beliefs, values, personalities, and expectations. The generational cohort that individuals affiliate with can influence the views and attitudes related to leadership, management, work values, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and work ethic [30]. Colette and Stein [30] further highlighted how multigenerational workers view the workplace as well as the motivation influences that can promote retention and productivity. With the level of diversity in the business environment, it

is essential for managers to identify and comprehend the rudiments that keep employees motivated to promote loyalty and increase retention.

With the changing structure of the workplace, multiple generations are now working side by side instead of operating as separate units [31]. The difference in values, beliefs, historical experiences, and social experiences that generational cohorts working simultaneously bring to the workplace will affect their professional interactions. These interactions can have an undesirable effect on individual performance and retention rates [32]. Wang and Peng [33] revealed that generational classifications utilize a categorical approach, creating subjective instead of scientific timelines to identify the cohorts. The subjectivity of categorizing the generations will not be an issue for the current study because the minimal variation of the birth years has no bearing on the generational descriptions.

The current business environment primarily includes four generational cohorts: (a) traditionalists, born between 1925 and 1945, (b) baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, (c) Generation X, born between 1965 and 1981, and (d) Generation Y (millennials), born between 1982 and 1999 [34]. Individuals within these cohorts share external historical events or life experiences that took place during their formative years [35]. In sharing significant life events, the four generations are susceptible to certain values and expectations that will contribute to how they perceive their work environment [36]. Workplace diversity is now custom in most companies due to the four generational cohorts coexisting in the workforce. The members of the four cohorts establish and determine their workplace beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and expectations based on shared generational qualities [37].

Some organizations are modifying their processes and expectations due to baby boomers remaining in the workforce [38]. Younger generations joining the baby boomers in the workplace change the demographics of the business environment as the baby boomers become the subordinates of the younger generation of workers [39]. To remain in alignment with the presented literature about generations, I will apply descriptions discussed in the following sections to explain each cohort.

### **Traditionalists (1925-1945)**

The traditionalist cohort includes individuals born between 1925 and 1945. Although the majority of the traditionalists have retired since reaching retirement eligibility, a small percentage remains in the workforce [40]. The Great Depression, World War II, and Pearl Harbor are the events that help shape and influence the lives of the traditionalist generation in the United States [7]. Reinbeck and Fitzsimons [41] informed that traditionalists currently hold three-quarters of the nation's wealth and helped shape the United State's military and economic power. They are or have been executive leaders of some of the most prosperous United States companies, and are not quick to speak up or share their ideas. Traditionalists are hardworking and tend to favor military-like management that follows a top-down or chain of command style [41]. This generation sacrifices and follows authoritative commands without question [42]. Individuals of this generation are loyal to their employer and will often work for the same organization for much of their career [43]. Additionally, traditionalists have respect for tradition and do not waiver from established rules. Their Great Depression experience caused the traditionalist generation to plan for financial security, and they are monetarily conservative, making them the wealthiest of the four generations [7].

### **Baby boomer generation (1946-1964)**

The baby boomers are the largest and most popular generation in

United States history, with a surge of their births taking place during and after The Great Depression and World War II [44,45]. Loroz and Helgeson [46] reported that approximately 76 million boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. Also known as the forgotten generation or the Woodstock generation, the boomers experienced postwar stress and radical social changes such as the Civil Rights movement and the Women's movement [47]. Kaifi et al. explained that parents of baby boomers raised them up in two-family households during a time of prosperity [48]. Kaifi et al. [48] also posited that the main events that significantly influenced this generation are the assassinations of John F Kennedy, Robert F Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Srinivasan [47] stated that baby boomers are self-absorbed, less loyal, lack respect for authority, and that money and self-realization are their primary motivators. The geographical dynamics of the workforce is changing due to baby boomers choosing to remain in the workforce beyond retirement age and eligibility [49]. Understanding desired career paths of the baby boomer generation is important because this segment of the generational population will continue to impact the economy [50]. Rice advised that the baby boomer generation has the desire for promotions in the workplace but experience restrictions because they lack technology skills. Nevertheless, some managers prefer to retain older workers, such as baby boomers, because organizations can benefit from their wealth of knowledge and professional expertise [51].

### **Generation X (1965-1981)**

Generation X, also acknowledged as the X'ers and the 13<sup>th</sup> generation, are currently between the ages of 35 and 51 as of 2016. Organizational downsizing, industrial restructuring, and increasing rates of temporary and part-time employment are events that fostered members of the Generation X cohort [52]. They also endured the country's political problems as well as the rejuvenation of the economy [53]. DeVaney [34] mentioned that Gen X members lived in single parent households or households with dual income earners that alternated childcare responsibilities. Generation X'ers are known as *latchkey* people because they would normally let themselves into the house after school, did their homework by themselves, and watched television unsupervised until a caregiver returned home [34]. The lifestyle preferences and attitudes of Generation X'ers shows that they tend to favor the ability to balance work with their family and life interests. Al-Asfour and Lettau [8] articulated that individuals of this generation have a more progressive outlook on life, and are tech-savvy because of their experiences with technology advancements such as the rise of the Internet. With the Generation X population having a strong focus on maintaining a work-life balance, being familiar and comfortable with technology can help empower them to realize and enhance the balance between work, family, and lifestyle [8].

Researchers often depict Generation X characteristics from a negative viewpoint; however, the elements that make them distinctive emphasize a more positive perspective. The Generation X cohort is skeptical about politics, and are independent, self-reliant, teamwork oriented, and values workplace flexibility. Additionally, authority does not intimidate them, they are outspoken, results and goal oriented, prefers multiple work assignments to keep them motivated and engaged, and desires consistent training and development opportunities to enhance their skills [54].

### **Generation Y (1982-2000)**

Bolton et al. [55] stated that both managers and academics are curious and fascinated about the Generation Y cohort. Society perceives Generation Y or the *Millennials* as digital natives because



they are the first generation to spend their entire lives in the digital era [55]. In 1982, 3.7 million members of Generation Y were born making them the second largest generational cohort in American history [25]. Of the four generations, members of Generation Y will most likely suffer the most from the housing market collapse and higher college tuition costs, which are aftereffects of the September 11 terror attacks [25]. Kamau et al. [56] posited that in addition to Millennials having an entitlement mentality, they are also the most ethnically diverse, creative, and multitasking generation ever to exist. Although they are the most educated cohort to exist and are selfish and narcissistic, they are also very optimistic and technology savvy [57]. Generation Yer's experienced very structured type lifestyles and experienced helicopter-style parenting (terms used to describe parents that are overly involved and hover over their children) as parents became as actively involved as possible in their children's lives [58]. Holt et al. [59] advised that the 75 million members of the millennial generation will most likely lead the global labor force through the complexities and chaos of cyber-socialization.

The Millennials acquire their knowledge and capabilities by using networks and technology, and are more challenging in the workplace than the older generations [60,61]. Over 90% of this generation is involved in online networks and social outlets due to their high comfort levels with technology, and they welcome new and challenging opportunities and finding ways to develop their skill sets [62]. Murray [63] suggested that millennials' can-do attitudes are like a breath of fresh air to the workforce. This generation is goal-driven and innovative, and prefers to work jobs that are meaningful with companies that value them [63]. Members of Generation Y are not fond of companies that have a culture based on a need-to-know basis and prefer to work for transparent business entities that share the organization's values, mission, expectations, goals and objectives, and workplace conflicts with all employees [64]. Work values are essential to learning and understanding how best to manage Generation Y because their work values are what make them unique and different from the older generational cohorts [65]. The Generation Y cohort is known as the trophy generation or the trophy kids because of the emerging trend in competitive sports and other events that give rewards for participating rather than for winning [48]. Many of the Generation Yers watched their parents suffer stress caused by the dot.com downfall and increased rates of layoffs and divorces, which shaped the generations views on long-term commitments and flexible careers [48].

### Generational diversity

Some employees have made a habit of recruiting and hiring young people. Still, retaining experienced and knowledge-rich employees is of increasing importance in a globalized economy [66]. Retaining employees with knowledge and experience could be of mutual benefit to hiring older workers along with younger workers, and doing so could help develop a positive business stance that is not politically driven. A specific benefit of age diversity is the massive amount of skill sets acquired by employees. Swan [66] revealed that companies that employed primarily young workers found it to be detrimental to the business. Organizational leaders felt that hiring older workers could provide better emotional intelligence in handling business-client relationships.

The demographical changes of the workforce, along with high ethical standards and the pressure of maintaining a competitive advantage in a global marketplace are inducing more businesses to address employee diversity [67]. Heyler and Lee [68] stated that education, training, and employment providers would need to respond

to generational differences by investigating the attributes of all parties, their development and life needs, the requirements of potential employers, and what the employers can offer to workers. Some business leaders are embracing the multigenerational workforce and are taking advantage of the benefits that the cross-generational workforce brings. DeMeulenaere et al. [69] suggested that age diversity could have both positive and negative effects on labor productivity. The positive aspect of age diversity is the large amount of knowledge that exists between the different generation of employees, and the negative aspect is the lack of unity and collaboration that age-related differences can cause, which can hinder performance. Organizations are establishing ways to harness the skills of their older workers to develop the skills of their younger generation of employees [68]. Comprehending that a multigenerational workforce can increase a company's competitive edge is the key to persuading businesses to take it seriously.

### Generational stereotypes

Riggio and Saggi [70] affirmed that the belief in generational differences has been around since the twenty-fifth century, BC. Even during the twenty-fifth century, BC, the perception was that variances among generations could cause threats to production, so the older generations worked to mold the young generation to mirror their image [70]. Although a person is aware of the similarities and differences that exist within the generational cohort that he or she identifies with, such diversity may not be as obvious to individuals from other generations which can lead to age-related stereotyping and assumptions [71]. However, Constanza and Finkelstein [72] asserted that limited empirical evidence exists to support generational-based differences. Riggio and Saggi [70] suggested that the dominant belief in generation based variances is due to systematic predispositions in social perception. The social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner [73], strengthens the significance of inter-cohort awareness of values between generations. The social identity theory purports that a person's view changes based on identified social categorizations across several constructs (e.g., beliefs, values, occupational types), which defines essential aspects of the individual [74]. For the social identity theory to apply to research regarding values and generational cohorts, it is essential for individuals to comprehend the way that generational cohorts perceive the value preferences of other generational cohorts [74]. In-group and out-group (social categorizations) biases can cause each generational cohort that has power and control in the workforce (today would be the baby boomers) to look at succeeding generations from a primarily negative perspective [70]. Consequently, the younger generations perceive work-related behaviors from a problematic viewpoint and are seen as distracted, unmotivated, lacking work ethic, and disloyal. Riggio and Saggi mentioned that members of the dominant generation pursue and decipher evidence that is consistent with stereotypes due to confirmation biases [70]. Stereotypes are difficult to disregard because it is simple to see substantiation of what is accurate, but this could be the result of how generational cohorts process inherent biases and social information [70]. Actual and perceived generational differences are present among older and younger generational cohorts. Zacher stated that because there is a lack of generational theory and methods available, it could be useful to organizational managers to further invest in the investigation of generational differences in the workplace [75].

Stereotypes regarding boomers, Generation X and Generation Y are highly common [76]. Numerous stereotypes, such as the credence that baby boomers are worriers and avaricious and that members of Generation Y are disparaging but tech-savvy, do exist. These traits

emerged from experiences that generational cohorts have within their historical context, which creates steady individual differences that characterize generational cohort members [76].

### Generational differences in work-related values and attitudes

Work values are the primary source of significant differences among generations, as well as the reason for conflict in the workplace. However, research indicates that if properly managed, those differences can help determine strengths and opportunities [39]. Gursoy et al. [39] argued that it is essential for managers to comprehend the foundation of each generation and their value differences if management wants to establish and maintain a work environment that promotes leadership, motivation, communication, and generational synergy. Additionally, the results of studies suggest that understanding the work values of a multigenerational workforce can help managers identify motivators to combine with the strategies they implement to retain employees [39].

The array of differences that exist among generations in the workplace has gained interest with organizations, researchers, and practitioners [77]. As the generational workforce continues to shift, organizations will experience predictable and evolving issues related to the differences that exist among generational cohorts [78]. The characteristics and experiences that generational cohorts share are what interest researchers and professionals because comprehending such information can help administrators manage generational workers more effectively [77]. Many organizations have executed programs and interventions to help capitalize on generational differences. Constanza et al. posited that such programs and interventions could cause detrimental outcomes instead of positive results if prematurely implemented [77]. Constanza and Finkelstein affirmed that a more useful approach might be to conduct needs assessments that will address generational differences among individuals, and to establish interventions based on characteristics identified through the assessment process [72]. Reis and Braga added that the motivation and preferences regarding work could differ for each generation, and might require modifications to recruitment and retention management practices [79].

Campbell et al. posited that there is a dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship between generations and culture [80]. Categorizing a person as a member of a generation is simple because all you need is the person's birth year; however, the challenge is defining the generational boundaries. Campbell et al. stated that there are a couple of ways to measure generational differences: (a) compare generations cross-sectionally on any variable in a survey, and (b) compare generations cross-temporally using samples of people at the same age and at different times [80]. Research tends to emphasize dissecting the different variances that underlie the generational differences found by using generational cohorts and generational factors [80]. The period and the cohort variance are meaningful for comprehending generational change, therefore, considering generational change as a combination of time plus cohort effects.

Campbell et al. [80] suggested that time and generational effects likely drive the majority of cultural change. Three popular models of generational change are the Strauss and Howe's cyclic model, the modernization model, and the rising extrinsic individualism model [80]. To understand generational change is to understand cultural change, because as culture changes so do the generations of people that are born into that culture. Campbell et al. further implied that the three things that alter culture are technology, cultural contracts, and economic changes.

The diversity of today's workforce has enhanced greatly due to the simultaneous presence of four different generations of workers. Some organizational leaders managing an age diverse workforce tend to treat their employee population the same regardless of their generational membership [6]. Managers will need first to identify and comprehend generational differences and then implement strategies and policies to improve communication and inclusion among generational staff [81]. These efforts can also significantly improve retention and productivity. Corporate leaders should review their leadership styles and understanding of generational differences to ensure that they are adequately ready to address the generational diversity of their staff to mitigate miscommunication and conflict [8]. Conflicts among the generational cohorts are a result of generational diversity. Leaders must comprehend the different generational characteristics, so the workplace environment can be one that exhibits high job satisfaction, work performance, productivity, attendance, and retention [6].

### Retaining and motivating a multigenerational workforce

The role of management in retaining employees is to encourage the talent to stay. Understanding why people leave organizations is imperative, but it is more critical to determine the organizational characteristics that make people stay with business entities [82]. It is essential for corporations to retain the best professional talent as it eliminates the recruiting, selection, and hiring costs replacing key employees [82]. James and Mathew [83] defined workplace retention as a deliberate move by an agency to establish an environment that promotes long-term employee engagement. George shared that a favorable work environment, as well as management and leadership styles, social support, development opportunities, autonomy, compensation, and work-life balance, are critical factors in employee retention [82].

Implementing a flexible workplace for employees is necessary for managing talent across all four generations. Eversole et al. explained that for a flexible workplace program to work favorably for the employees and the organization, managers must be competent in the mechanics of work and family programs to operate the programs efficiently and to enforce the rules and guidelines [84]. Organizations that can recruit and retain top performing employees will enhance workplace motivation and reduce turnover.

The main responsibility of a manager is to have a business that function effectively by the subordinates working efficiently, and producing results that are beneficial to the organization [85]. Pandta et al. stated that motivation is one of the primary factors that determine the employees work performance and intentions to stay with the organization [85]. One of the most influential theories of motivation, which can help improve employee retention and productivity, relates to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs where Maslow articulated that only an unsatisfied need can motivate the behavior with the dominant need being the primary factor for behavior motivation [86]. Factors that convey the importance of employee retention includes costs associated with turnover, company information loss, interruption in customer service, and a company's good will [87]. By maintaining higher employee retention rates, organizations can motivate talented employees to join the company by establishing a secured environment. Sandhya and Kumar mentioned that employee motivation is important factors that can help organizations enhance employee retention and organizational performance [87].

According to Kuyken [88], there is a specific economic impact with an organization when critical employees leave an organization;

especially taking into consideration the knowledge lost when employees depart. The concept of knowledge management is that people have critical skills, experience, and knowledge, and therefore, hold a significant amount of organizational value. Herzberg [15] discovered that employees tend to describe satisfying experiences regarding intrinsic factors about the job itself. Herzberg identifies these factors as motivators [20]. There is more to motivating employees other than compensation and proper working conditions. Hyun and Oh suggested that for an employee to be retainable and truly motivated, the employee's job must contain some fulfillment by providing the worker with opportunities for achievement, recognition, advancement, and responsibility [20].

High employee turnover results in increased costs of resources, recruiting, and time when replacing vacant positions. Employee retention strategies are a crucial element of an organization's vision, mission, values, and their policies, and should be a part of an organization's principles and operations [2]. Many organizational leaders fail to comprehend the reason for their high turnover rates, and only contribute turnover to poor relationships with subordinates and leadership [2]. However, studies show that the main reasons for low retention rates are the lack of opportunities for professional growth, unfair treatment, poor work and life balance, and low wages. Leaders are failing to recognize diversity in the workplace, thereby, adversely affecting production and retention rates among multigenerational workers. Cloutier et al. posited that training and development opportunities motivate employees and influence them to remain loyal to the organization [2]. Rahman and Nas advised that necessary training and development practices are significant to the success of business entities and that employees serve as the essential sources of consistent competitive advantage [89]. When organizations provide employees with development opportunities, the workers will usually reciprocate in positive ways by exhibiting job attitudes that commensurate with the amount of obligation that the companies offer in return [89]. Employee development programs can provide immediate benefit to organizations by increasing motivation and reducing employee turnover.

Therefore, organizations need to develop specific reward strategies to promote, attract, and motivate staff [90]. Establishing a one-size-fits-all approach to reward strategy can be detrimental to organizations because this can lead to direct or indirect financial implications for businesses. Bussin and van Rooy articulated that most managers feel that the most effective way to attract and retain staff is to offer rewards with greater benefits. Rewards can be financial and non-financial and the values of generational workers will determine what motivates them from a reward perspective [90]. The generational mix that plagues most businesses today requires managers to adapt and reinvent their retention and compensation strategies to take into consideration the different values, needs, and work ethics of the generational workforce. It is imperative for managers to consider the preferences and motivations of generational workers to attract and retain good quality employees and to enhance productivity [90]. It is beneficial for organizations to find a way to segment the workforce based on reward preference in a way that will provide a balance between the worker's needs and organizational efficiency.

One of the most vital and emerging issues that inundate the field of human resource development is how to assist organizations with changing workforce demographics successfully and effectively [84]. It will be difficult for businesses to retain a competitive advantage if they are unable to recruit and retain talented workers. Comprehending the needs of employees and creating or modifying organizational

cultures are essential tools in talent management. Dwyer and Azevedo asserted that to encourage an organizational culture that embraces a multicultural approach, adopting programs that emphasize diversity as well as including diversity in an organization's mission statement are necessary [91]. The newer generation of workers entering the workplace is different from the older generations that are leaving the workforce due to retirement; therefore, leadership needs to focus on retaining workers of all generations for organizations to remain successful in the future [91].

## Participants

This study included a purposeful sample of four managers of a higher education institution. The selection of participants took place irrespective of race and gender. Purposeful sampling is a widely-used technique in qualitative research and involves identifying and selecting research participants who are knowledgeable of and experienced with particular occurrences and interests [92]. The participants for this study included four managers of academic and nonacademic units or departments from an educational institution located in Northwest, Florida. The traditionalist generation constitutes a small percentage of the workforce due to aging and retirement [23]. To account for this, participants could take part in the study if they had experience with managing and retaining employees of the baby boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y cohorts. Participants included managers who had a minimum of 2 years of experience in a management position, and who managed a staff including three or four of the generational cohorts (traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) for at least 2 years. Cleary et al. posited that researchers use purposeful sampling to pursue information by conducting an in-depth examination of the data [93]. I used purposeful sampling to select managers who had experience retaining several generations in the workplace so I could answer the research question.

I used information provided by the Department of Institutional Research to determine potential participants who met the requirements for the study. I adhered to the organization's process for receiving permission and consent for participants to take part in the study. Participants who met the requirements to take part in the study received the consent document and an explanation of confidentiality before the interview. I provided the consent form to each participant via an invitation email to ensure that the participants comprehended the process before they confirmed and signed the agreement. In addition to being knowledgeable and experienced, participants must be available and willing to take part in the study [92]. Participants responded to the email using the words *I consent* to confirm their willingness to take part in the study, and I made sure that each participant understood the purpose of the study and the interview protocol that I would follow. Additionally, I had frequent dialogue with participants to determine a convenient time for the interview. I interviewed the participants at their personal office space to ensure confidentiality, convenience, accessibility, and limited disruptions. Bristowe et al. articulated that keeping the information shared by participants confidential is vital to the integrity of a study [94].

## Research Method and Design

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are three common types of research used to develop a thesis or dissertation [95]. I chose a qualitative method and a case study design based on the conceptual theory of constructivism. Boblin et al. asserted that case studies allow the researcher to investigate a phenomenon while focusing on the dynamics of the case within its real-life context [96]. Bailey suggested



that researchers use a qualitative methodology when looking to explore and explicate human behavior [97]. The method and design chosen were appropriate to help me achieve the goal of this study, which was to explore strategies that managers use to retain a multigenerational workforce.

**Data collection instruments**

Neuman asserted that the individual using a qualitative method of research is the primary person that collects data [98]. I was the primary data collection instrument for the current qualitative case study, and I used semistructured face-to-face interview questions to gain knowledge of strategies higher education managers use to retain their multigenerational staff. The four participants for this study had experience managing three or four of the dominant generations in the workforce, which included traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Yin advised that interviews are beneficial in research because they help the investigator comprehend participants’ experiences and perceptions about certain actions or events [99]. Drew articulated that conducting semistructured interviews is the most efficient approach to explore experiences because interviewees are then able to explain their experiences and perspectives honestly [100].

**Data analysis**

Data analysis is the most significant phase in qualitative research [101]. Qualitative data analysis provides the investigator with the opportunity to gain information and gather insights that otherwise could overlook traditional data analysis techniques. Lawrence and Tar posited that data analysis in qualitative research entails working with data, organizing it, synthesizing it, and searching for themes and patterns [102]. Thematic analysis, as defined by Percy et al. is the most known form of qualitative analysis and the process involves identifying patterns and themes of data [103]. Mabuza et al. [104] shared five stages of qualitative case study data analysis: (a) familiarization of qualitative data, (b) coding the data, (c) grouping the data into themes and categories, (d) interpreting the themes and categories, and (e) present research findings. I used a thematic analysis method based on Mabuza et al.’s (2014) data analysis process to analyze and organize the research data into categories and themes concerning retention strategies [104]. I first collected the data using face-to-face semistructured interviews. I then transcribed the data, transferred the data into NVivo software to help me group and regroup the data into themes and patterns, assessed the information, and developed conclusions to establish research results. I employed methodological triangulation by retrieving and reviewing electronic documents from the participants’ employer’s HR website about diversity and inclusion initiatives, strategies, and policies that managers could integrate into their managerial practices to help them retain multigenerational workers.

**Presentation of the findings**

The central research question for this qualitative single case study was the following: What retention strategies do business managers use to retain their multigenerational workforce? To help me answer the research question, I conducted semistructured interviews with four business leaders purposefully selected based on their success with developing and implementing strategies to retain a multigenerational workforce. In preparation for the interviews, I had the participants decide on a convenient date, time, and location to share information with me about their retention strategies without interruptions. I used my interview protocol to guide the interview process. Participant interviews consisted of six open-ended interview questions, and each

interview took place within the allotted 60 minutes. Each participant provided informed consent agreeing to take part in the study prior to participating in the interview process. For the coding process, I used NVivo to aid in the development of themes and categories. I followed Mabuza et al.’s five-step process for reviewing and analyzing qualitative case study data [104]. I used a Sony digital voice recorder to record the interviews. I incorporated member checking into the interview process to allow each participant to validate their responses to ensure that I understood their responses and that I accurately represented each participant’s views and perceptions. Harvey explained that using the member checking process improves the credibility and validity of research data [105].

After analyzing and coding data from the participant interview responses and electronic university documents, I identified seven themes (assembled into three thematic categories) that could help leaders retain a multigenerational workforce. I provided an analysis of the correlation between the developed themes and the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for the current doctoral study was Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation. Figure 1 shows the first thematic category and three themes (themes 1 through 3) for strategies to retain a multigenerational workforce, Figure 2 depicts the second thematic category and the three themes (themes 4 through 6) for procedures or business practices that can improve retention of a multigenerational workforce, and Figure 3 contains the third thematic category and the theme (theme 7) of a primary challenge that leaders experience when employing strategies for retaining a multigenerational workforce.

Themes 1 through 5 and Theme 7, along with the respective research findings for strategies that managers use to retain a multigenerational workforce, relate to the hygiene tenets (extrinsic)

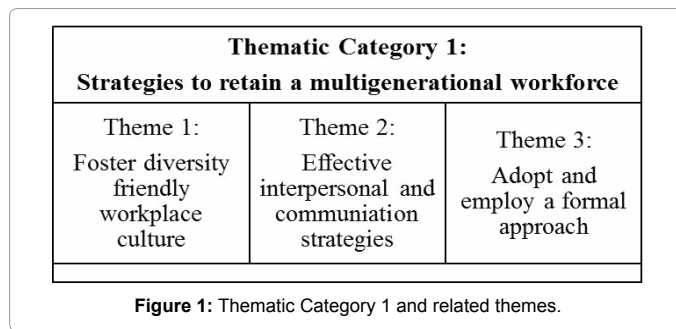


Figure 1: Thematic Category 1 and related themes.

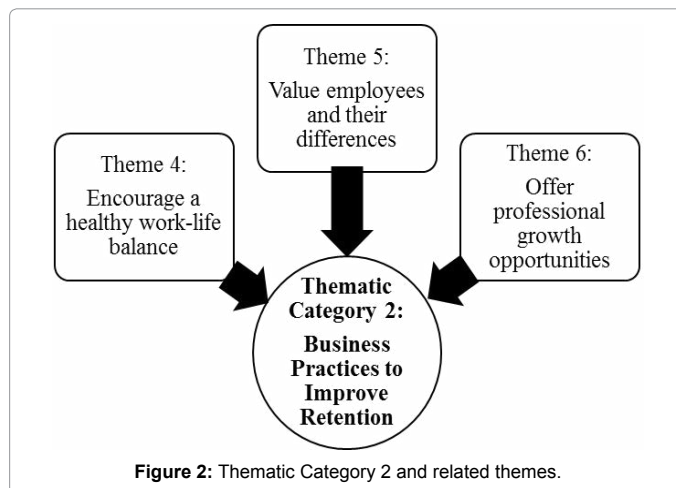
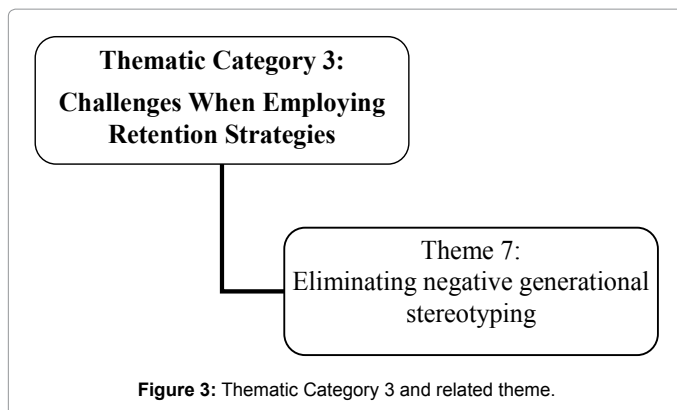


Figure 2: Thematic Category 2 and related themes.



of Herzberg’s two-factor theory. Theme 6 and the corresponding findings on strategies that managers use to retain a multigenerational workforce relate to the motivation (intrinsic elements) factors of Herzberg’s two-factor theory. Theme 1, fostering a diversity friendly workplace culture, correlates with the work cultures and environments hygiene factor; Theme 2, effective interpersonal and communication strategies, links to the communication and interpersonal techniques hygiene factor; Theme 3, adopting and employing a formal approach to managing and retaining a multigenerational workforce has a parallel relationship to the company and administrative policies hygiene factor; Theme 4, encouraging a healthy work-life balance, correlates with the work cultures and environments hygiene factor; Theme 5, valuing employees and their differences, have a direct relationship to the value from leadership hygiene factor; Theme 6, offer professional growth opportunities, relates to the professional growth and learning opportunities motivation factor; and Theme 7, eliminate negative generational stereotyping, relates to the work cultures and environments hygiene factor.

Business leaders who want to manage workplace challenges caused by the rapid increase in generational diversity in the workforce might benefit from the findings of this study. The results of the current study provided strategies that leaders of higher educational institutions and other business entities can develop and implement to retain a multigenerational workforce. The research findings based on interview responses and university documents about diversity and inclusion confirmed and added to the information and knowledge about managing and retaining a multigenerational workforce.

### Applications to professional practice

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore retention strategies business managers use to retain their multigenerational workforce. The targeted population consisted of department managers from an educational institution located in northwest Florida who had success in retaining a multigenerational workforce. The population chosen for this study substantiated strategies on how to sustain or improve retention of a multigenerational workforce.

An abundance of older research exists about organizational leaders acknowledging the increase in workplace diversity, and the coexistence of generations in the workforce that offer reasons for better management and retention of an age-diverse workforce. However, minimal research studies exist on effective strategies that leaders can develop and implement to aid in the maintenance and retention of a multigenerational workforce. The dynamics of employment is

changing due to an upsurge in diversity in the workforce [106]. Soto and Lugo posited that the increase in workplace diversity can cause leaders to experience challenges with managing diversity and retaining an age-diverse workforce [107]. Business managers and leaders at higher education institutions and other business entities can apply the findings, recommendations, and information about the generational cohorts included in this study to manage workplace diversity, enhance their knowledge base of generational differences, improve workplace cultures and environments, and to reduce negative generational stereotyping in the workplace. The themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process are applicable to higher education institutions and other business entities, and can be beneficial in helping managers develop and employ strategies to retain a multigenerational workforce. Additionally, business managers and leaders at higher education institutions and other organizations can utilize the knowledge and information included in this study to enhance retention, equality, and inclusion of a multigenerational workforce.

### Implications for social change

The information that participants shared may help managers and leaders in all business industries identify and comprehend the differences that exist among generational workers, as well as acknowledge the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that the generational cohorts value and prefer. Leaders and managers of higher education institutions and other business entities may find the results of the study helpful in developing and cultivating strategies to manage and retain a multigenerational workforce. The implications for social change includes the potential for business managers and leaders to (a) enrich or increase retention rates of a multigenerational workforce, (b) create employment stability, (c) improve motivation and productivity, (d) and enhance both organizational and community relations.

### Recommendations for further research

Recommendations for further research include retention strategies of a multigenerational workforce of other types of business entities other than higher education institutions. Conducting a study inclusive of several organizations in different business industries can offer leaders of non-education institutions effective strategies and business practices to retain an age-diverse workforce. Future research should consider a quantitative or mixed methods approach to examine or explore the retention strategies to determine which are most and least effective. Additionally, I recommend that researchers explore geographical locations outside of northwest Florida, and to use a sample size of more than four participants. Enlarging research efforts to cover a greater geographical area and increasing the number of research participants could generate more in-depth and efficient strategies that leaders in all industries can use to retain a multigenerational workforce.

Managers, administrators, and other individuals who hold authoritative positions could use the information, research findings, and recommendations in this study to mitigate turnover of multigenerational employees. Leaders at higher education institutions and other types of businesses can use the knowledge gained from the information in this study to (a) foster a diversity friendly workplace culture, (b) develop effective interpersonal communication strategies, (c) value generational employees and their differences, (d) develop professional learning and growth opportunities for generational workers, and (e) eliminate negative generational stereotyping in the workplace. By implementing these strategies and business practices, managers and leaders could improve retention, motivation, and productivity of a multigenerational workforce.



## Conclusions

A significant and emerging issue that some business entities have difficulties with is successfully and effectively managing workplace diversity because managing diversity requires a wealth of skills and knowledge [84]. Differences in the age, intrinsic and extrinsic motivator preferences, and the characteristics of generational workers can lead to challenges for business managers in retaining their multigenerational staff [9]. After analyzing and coding the data, seven themes emerged through thematic analysis. The key themes included: (a) fostering a diversity friendly workplace culture, (b) developing and employing effective interpersonal communication strategies, (c) valuing generational employees and their differences, and (d) adopting and employing a formal approach to retaining a multigenerational workforce. Business leaders may use the themes identified in this research study to guide their efforts in gaining additional insight on the challenges of managing and retaining an age-diverse workforce, and to establish effective strategies to improve retention, motivation, and productivity of a multigenerational workforce.

The findings of the current research study may contribute to an enriched comprehension of the varying and distinctive values, characteristics, preferences, attitudes, and beliefs of a multigenerational workforce. Successful strategies for retaining an age-diverse workforce in a continuous altering business environment are imperative to the success and survival of most companies. Thus, deploying the retention strategies and recommendations identified in this study may assist business leaders with retaining and managing a multigenerational workforce, improving employee motivation, and enhancing workplace productivity.

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