

# MANAGING GENERATION GAP DIFFERENCE FOR WORKING IN DIGITAL AGE

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**Received:** April 24, 2024; **Revised:** May 29, 2024; **Accepted:** June 14, 2024

## Abstract

The objectives of this research were to assess the problems and obstacles in managing generation gap difference for working in digital age, to analyze the managing generation gap difference for working in digital age, and to propose the suggestions of managing generation gap difference for working in digital age. This research was qualitative. Key informants in this study were executives of government organizations, executives of state enterprises, personnel working in government organizations and personnel working at state enterprise organizations, totaling 20 key informants by a purposive selection. The research instrument was a structured interview. Data were analyzed by a descriptive summary.

**Keywords:** Managing; Generation Gap; Difference; Digital Age

## Introduction

Currently, Thailand had fully entered into an aging society by 2023, according to information from the Department of Provincial Administration. The Ministry of Interior found that Thailand had an elderly population aged 60 years and over, accounting for 1 in 5 of the entire country's population, or approximately 13 million people, of the total Thai population of 66,057,967 people (Thai PBS, 2024). Stepping into society complete aging meant that organizations must manage personnel of different ages. From those who had just graduated from university at the bachelor's level until closed to retirement age or already retired but had been renewed. The organization must manage personnel

with diverse age groups. It could be both opportunities and obstacles in the organization. This was because the organization had personnel of various ages. Making the organization had more diverse ideas. This made it was possible to meet the needs of service recipients better and from a wider range of ages. But at the same time the fact that the organization had personnel of various ages might cause misunderstandings or inaccurate or conflict because personnel of each age group would have their own perspective on each matter. Each issue was different. Therefore, thoughts might be affected. As well as more guidelines for working if there was no systematic management or supporting measures. It might affect the readiness and continuity of public administration and the quality of public services (Nattawadee Na Ranong, 2022).

The generation gap was one of the problems in human resource management. This was because the organization consisted of various personnel who differed in terms of age. Each age had a natural personality that was shaped by the environment, news, politics, economy, and culture of that era. As a result, people in each age group mostly through experiences and feelings of community in a similar context. They had similar attitudes. People was born and of different ages often had different natures in expressing themselves or performing tasks. This often cause conflicts or obstacles while working from personnel of different ages. In terms of ages, it could be divided as follows: Baby Boomer (born 1946 - 1964), Generation X (born 1965 - 1979), Generation Y (born 1980 - 1997), Generation Z (born 1997 and up) (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2015) Diversity of human resources brought both positive and negative impacts by positive impact. That was, diversity could bring many benefits to an organization. But at the same time, diversity had a negative impact on organizations (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Every generation had different characteristics. The differences in people in each age group were not only caused by different ages, but also by generations between generations. And this might cause gaps in perspectives, thoughts, beliefs, and lifestyles (Yuwapat Foundation, 2023).

Generation Gap was considered a difference in thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, including different growth in each period of society. When society developed or changed accordingly Era: The ideas of people of different ages were different as well. Many people might thoughts that this problem arose from age differences alone, but actually there were many factors involved, which was

the Generation Gap problem in the workplace. It was considered inevitable. Because in each organization there must be a mix of employees of various ages together (JobsDB Recruitment Company (Thailand) Co., Ltd., 2023) by Teerakorn Ananthothai (2023), explained the “Generation Gap”. Or the age gap that currently, various organizations would find 4 generations of workers as follows: 1) Baby Boomer was a person aged 59 years and over (born between 1946 - 1964) was a group of people who grew up in the post-World War II era. So, there was dedication to work. They might not be able to cope with various changes as quickly as other generations. 2) Generation the economy was getting better flexible to adapt to the world whether it was culture, technology, or different lifestyles. 3) Generation Y was people aged 23 - 42 years (born between 1981 - 2000). They were a group of people who grew up in an era of economic prosperity. It was the era of Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. They often succeed at a young age. I liked the speed and had IT skills, and 4) Generation Z was people younger than 23 years old (born from 2001 onwards). They were a group of people who grew up in an era when the economy began to decline. Received news about terrorism COVID-19 outbreak problems with stomach problems since school age. Therefore, they were a group of people who had more open thinking, were much more digital native than Generation Y, and had high courage to express themselves. As in many studies, it had been said that in each organization, especially those that were more established, 10 years and especially the government organization in the workplace, there would be at least 3 generations of age differences (Kraburi District Community Development Office, 2020).

At present, most government agencies and state enterprises would have executives or supervisors who belong to the baby boomer group and Generation which was a group of people with long experience in working. It was a group that didn't like change. Including operational level employees who were in this group, they had the same mindset. As a result, the way of working was not consistent with employees belonging to Generation Y, and Generation Z. They were a group of people in the new generation who grew up with various technologies, which increasingly applied technology to their work. But the supervisor or senior group did not support or changed the way of working. Adhere to the original work system, this caused the new generation of employees for lacking motivation to work, didn't dare to change, unable to independently propose new ideas of their own. This made employees unable to

work together (Nipa Wiriya Phiphat, 2016), which negatively affected work efficiency and affects the organization. Therefore, the organization must be committed to solving the problem. Work goals were set to increase work efficiency. By creating satisfaction for employees which was the motivation to work. It might be caused by personality traits, attitudes, and the nature of the assigned work. Knowledge and abilities appropriate to the work performed having good colleagues, receiving appropriate compensation and benefits (Natcha Jaitrong, 2016).

## **Research Objectives**

1. To assess the problems and obstacles in managing generation gap difference for working in digital age.
2. To analyze the managing generation gap difference for working in digital age.
3. To propose the recommendations of managing generation gap difference for working in digital age.

## **Literature Reviews**

**The Concept of Generation:** Hammill (2005) had defined generation as a group of people born at a similar age in a society who had experienced similar environmental conditions and molded it to create a unique identity together in terms of attitude and behavior. Glass (2007) gave the meaning that generation referred to people who had experienced an event or the environment was similar in a society, with such experiences giving rise to identity in common attitudes and behaviors among people of the same age group. Schoch (2012) meant that different generations had different experiences, living life values different work styles and motivations.

**Generation Theory:** Western researchers especially the country, the United States was among the first who initiated the concept of generations were grouped into groups based on age (SHRM, 2004), such groupings form the basis of analytical studies. Characteristic differenced thoughts and behaviors in life consumption and work of people of the same age in each era. Each era had a different lifestyle. This was a result of changes in lifestyle, social environment, as well as scientific and technological progress. It allowed us to better

understand the characteristics and behavioral trends of the population in each era when we could understand the differences in each population group well. We would be able to access or manage various tasks in accordance with characteristics, behavior and needs in various areas, whether it was in the form of products or services, communication process assignment work motivation process, etc. At present, the concepts and results of such studies were applied in many fields of management. Whether it was marketing enterprise development human resource management (Assael, 1995; Howe and Strauss, 2000), etc., based on information about 2022 world trends by Creative Thailand, providing information about the division of generations was as follows: 1. The Baby Boomer group was people born between 1946 - 1964 (1946-1964), which was the generation of grandparents, which was after the end of World War II. 2. Gen X was people born between 1965 - 1980 (1965-1980), which was the generation of their parents. They were also called "Yuppie", which was an abbreviation of Young Urban Professionals. 3. Millennials (Gen Y/Millennials) were people born between 1981 - 1996 (1980-1996) which was the generation of children who were born amid changes in technology. 4. Gen Z was people born between 1997 and 2009 (1997-2009), which was the younger generation. They were a group of people who grew up with technology that was developing at a rapid pace. 5. Alpha was people born between 2010 - present (2010-present). They were a group of children who had access to Virtual Reality with lifestyles and lifestyles such as watching movies, listening to music, shopping, playing games, living in a virtual world.

Although each generation had somewhat different preferences and lifestyles according to the era. But all generations or people of different ages could live together with communication for understanding (Health Promotion Learning Institute, 2022). Registration Administration Office, Department of Provincial Administration (cited in Santad Phothisa, 2023) separated age groups into each generation. It could be divided as follows: 1. Generation Z: those born from 1997-2012 or aged 11-26 years. 2. Generation Y, those born in 1981-1996 or with an age range of 27-42 years. 3. Generation 4. Baby Boomer: Those born from 1946-1964 or aged 59-77 years. 5. Silent Gen: People born in 1925-1945 or aged 78-98 years.

**Concept of the Generation Gap:** Generation Gap came from the word 'gap', which was the distance that made it difficult to get along. It was caused by one factor and the word 'between ages' meant different ages. Therefore, when the two words were combined. Thus, summarizing the meaning of 'Age gap' could be defined as a problem between people of different ages who had different attitudes or principles that differed according to the social context which changed all the time and had been experienced in the past without the factor of 'communication' resulting in conflicts through words that affected the mental state and often ended up living separate lives (Health Promotion Foundation, 2022). Piyaporn Khunthongaek (2023), The generation gap was a difference in thinking, beliefs, attitudes, and different growth.

Differences of each age group naturally, it gave rise to different and diverse opinions as well. But if there were extreme opinions and failure to accept different aspects, it was caused a 'generation gap problem'. This conflict could happen at the agency/organization level, schools, or even among people who were ready to show love to each other like 'family' (Health Promotion Foundation, 2022).

The generation gap was one of the problems in human resource management. This was because the organization consisted of a variety of personnel who differed in terms of age. In each age there would be natural personalities that were shaped by the environment, news, politics, economics, and culture of that era, resulting in people of each age group. Mostly through experiences and feelings of community in a similar context. They had similar attitudes. People born and of different ages often had different natures in expressing themselves or performing tasks. This often cause conflicts or obstacles while working from personnel of different ages. (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2015).

Thairath Online (2023) with the time of growing up in different eras. Therefore, molding each generation to have different ideas. But what would make people of every generation and every age able to live happily together was "Communication" that was open to accepting and respecting the opinions of different people by using the 4E.

### **Concepts about Developing the Potential of Personnel with Different Generations:**

Senge (2006) gave the meaning of personnel development means training oneself with constant learning as an important foundation in order to expand one's abilities to become more proficient. It was a realistic state of seeing what was important to the individual and to the organization. Visualize possible futures created your own personal vision, maintain creative tension, and had the power of would to develop yourself thoroughly. Thanachart Military Bank Public Company Limited (2022) identified 10 skills for working in the digital age.

### **Concepts about Communication between People of Different Ages:**

The Health Promotion Foundation (2022) was not unusual. If different generations would understand the world, had different opinions and beliefs. The age gap could be filled by accepting and understanding each other, including communication to build friendly relationships among everyone. There was a creative connection. So, it could effectively reduce the generation gap. Dharmniti (2022) At present in the organization there were generations where the primary problem in living together was communication because each age group had different stances and reasons.

**Concepts about the Working Environment:** Waranthon Songkiattisak (2015), Working environment referred to things around us, both living and non-living things. It was around us and affected work efficiency. Gilmer (2007) divided the characteristics of the work environment into 10 elements that would facilitate work performance.

## **Research Methodology**

This research was qualitative. The study area was in Bangkok and surrounding areas by choosing to study government organizations and state enterprises. It was a purposive selection. 1) Government organizations, considering government organizations that received the State Excellence Award for the year 2023, namely (Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, 2023) 1.1 Revenue Department, 1.2 Department of Medical Sciences, 1.3 Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, 1.4 Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, 1.5 Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. 2) State

enterprises considering state enterprises that received the 2023 SOE Awards, Outstanding Organizational Management award category. Honor type and the award for development towards digital state enterprises (Prime Minister's Secretariat, 2024) consisted of: 2.1 PTT Public Company Limited, 2.2 Government Savings Bank, 2.3 Government Housing Bank, 2.4 Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, 2.5 Provincial Electricity Authority.

**Research Instrument:** Key informants in this research included (1) the executives of government organizations, totaling 5 people, (2) the executives of state enterprises, totaling 5 people, (3) personnel working at government organizations, totaling 5 people, and personnel who workers of state enterprise organizations, 5 people, totaling 20 key informants, using the selection by a purposive selection. The research tool was a semi-structured interview form. Data analysis was used in a descriptive summary.

## Results

**Problems and obstacles in managing generation gap** difference for working in digital age had been found that the different skills of personnel are an important problem in managing the generation gap in working in the digital age. This was because personnel in the old generation had fewer skills and expertise in technology than personnel in the new generation. In addition, they had different values, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on working. This made the organization unable to meet the needs of personnel of all ages. Conflict problems of the generation gap that occurred within organization, resulting in personnel deciding to leave the organization. This caused the organization to lose personnel in performing its duties. And Thailand's entry into the current aging society had resulted in an even greater age gap between personnel in organizations. Motivating or creating motivation to work in the same way, such as promotion, salary increase, could not be used to motivate personnel, especially the new generation of personnel. Communication problems caused by language use interpretation and forms of communication of people of different ages and senior systems within the organization. That the younger ones must obey and follow the elders was not conducive to the work of the new generation of personnel.

**Managing generation gap difference for working in digital age:**

Creating motivation for work: It was found that the organization had managed career development to employees, encouraged personnel to always had the opportunity to develop their own skills and abilities. So that personnel could achieve their desired goals. There was support, praised and rewards for personnel. Welfare design must be more able to meet the needs of personnel at different ages, such as overtime pay, skill development, holidays, leave, and psychological counseling, organizing tourism happy hours, relaxation massage, etc., and the working style must be improved, provided more flexibility, such as working in a Hybrid Workplace model.

**Reducing the gap between communication:** found that organizations must create a culture of communication between personnel of different ages in the organization. This communication culture would result in a good atmosphere for working together. By adjusting the attitude of personnel of all ages to sympathize with each other, accept each other's differences both in terms of ideas, backgrounds, and environments of people of each age, developed personnel within the organization to have better and more efficient communication. From the training organized by the organization including creating opportunities for every generation group to have the opportunity to work together in order to learn from each other and communicate more with each other.

**Integrating generational differences:** It was found that reducing the generation gap required personnel to interact more with each other. By always doing activities together, such as eating together, buddy pairing organizing sports events, etc., in order to encourage personnel to respect and honor each other. Accepted individual differences and were good friends with each other which unites personnel of all ages to have the same ideas, beliefs, and ways of working. Common values must be created for everyone to adhere to, promote teamwork and it was important to use the strengths of personnel of each age group to create benefits for the organization, such as exchanging knowledge, techniques, and experiences with each other, etc., which would help develop the organization's work even further.

**Appropriate competency development:** It was found that the development of both Upskill and Reskill competencies of personnel of all ages to have knowledge and abilities consistent with working in the digital age, such as technology skills. Media skills and awareness of digital media used critical thinking and problem-solving skills communication skills, data analysis skills, teamwork skills, skills in empathy for others, etc. In addition, personnel competencies were developed according to age differences, to prevent personnel in each generation from having to face problems with digital disruption.

**Creating an appropriate environment:** found that organizations must create a culture teamwork, created a learning organization atmosphere where personnel could always learn and developed new skills. There was a space to showcase talent for the new generation of personnel. There were a variety of activities within the organization, such as talking and exchanging activities every morning, organizing sports games, etc., for a fun working atmosphere. Whoever loves was connected to each other. The approach to working had freedom and flexibility. Including the work location and tools and equipment, it must be conducive to smooth work for personnel of all ages.

**Suggestions for managing the age gap in work in digital age**, it had been found that the working model of an organization should be flexible. Able to work from anywhere at any time including increasing use of technology in the work process, to be consistent with the behavior of the new generation of personnel, promote teamwork or project-style work, created a culture and shared values that accepted each other's differences, integrated the age gap into the organization's human resource management plan or process, promoting intergenerational, learning through activities, developed the organization into a transformational organization to attract a new generation with knowledge and abilities to work in the organization and welfare arrangements took into account the needs of each age group more.

## Discussions

Problems and obstacles in managing generation gap difference for working in digital age, it had been found that the different skills of personnel are an important problem. This was because personnel in the old generation had fewer skills and expertise in technology than personnel in the new generation. In

addition, they had values and beliefs, different attitudes and perspectives on working. This made the organization unable to meet the needs of personnel of all ages. The generation gap conflict that occurred within the organization results in personnel deciding to leave the organization. This caused the organization to lose personnel in performing its duties. And Thailand's entry into the current aging society had resulted in an even greater age gap between personnel in organizations, motivating or creating motivation to work in the same way, such as promotion, salary increase could not be used to motivate personnel, especially the new generation of personnel. Communication problems caused by language use interpretation and the communication styles of people in each age group were different and senior systems within the organization that the younger must obey and follow the elders. It was not conducive to the work of the new generation of personnel. Consistent with the research of Mustafa Ozkana and Betul Solmaz (2023) studied the topic the Changing Face of The Employees Generation Z. Their Perceptions of Work found that the social environment was very important to Generation Z because this generation would focus on comfort in working as a location. The impact of the social environment was an important factor in shaping organizational culture, creating, the spirit of the organization. The job employers should do when they had Gen Z employees in their organization were to aim to create relationships that were friendly, fun, and relaxed.

Managing generation gap difference for working in digital age: Creating motivation for work: It was found that the organization had managed career development to employees, encouraged personnel to always had the opportunity to develop their own skills and abilities. So that personnel could achieve their desired goals. There was support, praised and rewards for personnel. Welfare design must be more able to meet the needs of personnel at different ages, such as overtime pay, skill development, holidays, leave, and psychological counseling, organizing tourism, happy hours, relaxation massage, etc., and the working style must be improved, to have more flexibility, such as working in a Hybrid Workplace model, consistent with the research of Deloitte (2022) studied The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: Striving of Balance, Advocating for Change. The study found that 40 percent of Gen Z of the world average population and 39 percent of Thai people plan to quit working within 2 years, which compared to Gen Y, the averages were 25 and 13 percent of the world's population and Thai people, respectively, reflecting dissatisfaction

with the work they did. Two-thirds of the new generation of Thais answered the same question which was clearly higher than the world average. However, the business sector was also learning and adapting to attract talented personnel. It was found that compensation was the most effective thing that attracted people to stay with the organization over the past 2 years. However, the main reason for the new generation of Thais choosing to work was a good balance between work and life and opportunities for learning and personal development.

Reducing the gap between communication: found that organizations must create a culture of communication between personnel of different ages in the organization. This communication culture would result in a good atmosphere for working together. By adjusting the attitude of personnel of all ages to sympathize with each other. Accepted each other's differences both in terms of ideas, backgrounds, and environments of people of each age, developed personnel within the organization to have better and more efficient communication. From the training organized by the organization including creating opportunities for every generation group to have the opportunity to work together in order to learn from each other and communicate more with each other. Consistent with the research of Juthamas Mafaiwan (2019), a study was conducted on the attitude and communication behavior of employees of each age group in the organization. A case study of an information and communication technology company in Thailand. From the study results it was found that communication in organizations was very important. You must communicate to have understanding, be clear and choose the appropriate communication format for use. It would result in being able to work in the same direction. Made it work and achieve the goal prevent mistook and misunderstandings with each other. Communication styles chosen for each age group, talking face to face was the first method that every age group chose to use. Because questions could be explained and exchanged in detail. Problems or obstacles in communicating with a wide range of ages mainly involved the use of jargon, which sometimes caused misunderstandings.

Integrating generational differences: It was found that reducing the generation gap required personnel to interact more with each other. By always doing activities together, such as eating together, buddy pairing, organizing sports events, etc., in order to encourage personnel to respect and honor each other. Accepted individual differences and were good friends with each other

which unites personnel of all ages to have the same ideas, beliefs, and ways of working. Common values must be created for everyone to adhere to, promoted teamwork and it was important to use the strengths of personnel of each age group to create benefits for the organization, such as exchanging knowledge, techniques, and experiences with each other, etc., which will help develop the organization's work even further. In line with the research of McKinsey (2020) studied diversity showed that companies with high ethnic diversity perform 36% better than companies with less diversity. Moreover, companies with high gender diversity perform 25% better than companies with less diversity. The survey also showed that even diverse organizations had trouble creating inclusion. The survey found that overall feelings about diversity were 52% positive, but overall feelings about openness were much less positive at 29%, a considerable gap.

**Appropriate competency development:** It was found that the development of both Upskill and Reskill competencies of personnel of all ages to had knowledge and abilities consistent with working in the digital age, such as technology skills. Media skills and be aware of the use of digital media, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, communication skills, data analysis skills, teamwork skills, skills in empathy for others, etc. In addition, personnel competencies were developed according to age differences, to prevent personnel in each generation from having to face problems with digital disruption. Consistent with the research of the World Economic Forum (2023) reported on the Future of Jobs Report 2023. The study found that an important skill that most companies plan to trend in 2023-2027 were analytical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, including skills in using AI and Big Data, while personal qualities mentioned included leadership skills and social influence, flexibility, adaptability, agile and knowledge skills, and lifelong learning. The survey found that 48% of companies agreed that improvements personnel development plan and promotion process would be the key to increasing talented workers within the organization including wage increases and Upskills & Reskills.

**Creating an appropriate environment:** found that organizations must create a culture teamwork, created a learning organization atmosphere where personnel could always learn and develop new skills. There was a space to showcase talent for the new generation of personnel. There were a variety of activities within the organization, such as talking and exchanging activities

every morning, organizing sports games, etc., for a fun working atmosphere. Whoever loves were connected to each other. The approach to working had freedom and flexibility. Including the work location and tools and equipment, it must be conducive to smooth work for personnel of all ages. Consistent with the research of Noppadol Detprasert (2018), he studied the management of organizational diversity. According to different age groups, it was found that the organizational diversity management style of employees of companies in Amata City Industrial Estate. The organization had various media within the organization, such as email notifications, announcements on the board to show that the organization was accepting of differences in the workplace in terms of gender, age, religion, race, etc. Secondly, the organization had a wide network to attract a variety of job applicants and had a variety of ways of thinking and communicating. And everyone was encouraged to express their opinions. Diversity was evident at every level of the organization. The work environment was friendly and welcoming to everyone including new employees. There was an exchange of ideas and the use of resources between employees from different cultures.

Suggestions for managing generation gap difference for working in digital age, it had been found that the working model of an organization should be flexible, able to work from anywhere at any time including increasing use of technology in the work process, to be consistent with the behavior of the new generation of personnel, promoted teamwork or project-style work, created a culture and shared values that accepted each other's differences, integrated the age gap into the organization's human resource management plan or process, promoting intergenerational learning through activities, developed the organization into a transformational organization to attract a new generation of people with knowledge and abilities to work in the organization and welfare arrangements, took into account the needs of each age group more. Consistent with the research of Chichanok Klomchit (2021), he studied the impact of personnel diversity management, team performance with job satisfaction performance and resignation intentions of public organization personnel. The research results found that if management gave importance to personnel diversity management, it would affect the job satisfaction and performance of personnel. But if management brought in personnel diversity management, it might cause personnel who worked as a team to be ineffective. And if

executives applied more diversity management to effective teamwork, it would result in a decrease in personnel's intention to resign.

## New Knowledges

According to the study, it is clearly seen that transformational leadership of school administrators has significant influence on school management in digital era as shown in the chart below.

Regarding the chart, transformational leadership of school administrators on creating and maintaining shared decision-making structures and processes, building a shared vision, creating high performance expectations, providing individualized support, and developing consensus about goals affected school management in digital era.

## Conclusions

Government organizations and state enterprises should develop the potential of personnel in the Baby Boomer and Generation X groups in more modern technology skills. So that the personnel in this group could adapt to working in the digital age. This was because seniority made the organization's environment uncomfortable and inhospitable for new personnel. If not seriously resolved, this would result in the resignation of the new generation of personnel because they would not be able to fully use their abilities.

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