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The Influence of Multigenerational Workforce in Effective Informal Team Learning

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Abstract

The urgency of this research arises from the convergence of two dynamics that are transforming the workplace and impacting organization performance. The first is multigenerational workforce work side by side in the same organization even in the same team. The second is informal learning, a major mode of learning in an organization. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the influence of generational background of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y in relation to informal team learning in the Indonesian business environment. Both, qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted with 21 interviewees and 184 survey respondents representing a total of 191 multigenerational teams participating in this research. The findings suggest that generational background influence informal learner and effective informal team learning, but have no direct impact on team climate. Understanding generational differences will enable individuals to learn informally and create a conducive team climate that will lead to effective informal team learning.

Keywords: effective informal learning, informal team learning, informal learner, multigenerational workforce, team learning

Introduction

Multigenerational workforce learn together

Baby boomers, generation X and generation Y hold different values, desires, ambitions and working styles. Conflict between them influences low productivity, job dissatisfaction, absences, resignation, that may cause increased cost, high staff turnover and lower performance (Bennett et al, 2012). The largest potential conflict in multigenerational workforce is between boomers and generation Y (Yers). They are parents and children that have daily arguments at home. At work, for instance, using smartphone in a meeting might be multitasking for Yers, but seems disengaged or rude for boomers. Another conflict is generation X (Xers) who are fed up of being stuck in the middle between boomers who refuse to retire and Yers who are treated far better than they were (Economist, 2013)

Informal learning is part of business. Research shows that informal learning is about 70 to 80% of the total learning in an organization (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Cross, 2007). Informal learners will explore many things by themselves. In the future, formalized structured training may not be necessary, except for the most technical or legal aspects (Conlon, 2004).

However, if a company does not have formal training program and only relies on informal training, it can make employees feel helpless and directionless (Conlon, 2004). For that reason, informal learning will not replace formal learning, but complement it. Informal learning itself is defined as learning through interaction with others, through the learning value of the job and through networks (Van der Klink et al, 2014). Informal learning happens every day in non-educational settings, while formal learning includes learning activities organized by the organization such as workshop and sharing sessions.

Those two business challenges also occur in Indonesia. As multi generational workforces take place, they should be managed consciously in order to create synergy. Since learning influence organizational performance in which most of it is informal, informal learning should be done effectively.

Who are baby boomers, generation X and generation Y?

A concept of generation was introduced by Mannheim's 1923 essay "The Problem of Generations", which provided theoretical treatment over generation and became a sociological phenomenon (Pilcher, 1994). According Mannheim's essay, generation is a group of people typically by birth years that experienced the same major historical and sociological events.

That historical background shaped the work values of each generation's (O'Bannon, 2001), their attitudes, motivations and beliefs (Helyer and Lee, 2012). The changes of work values affected the dramatic changes in economic, social, technological and political conditions. (Hui-Chun et al, 2003). In the workplace, the work value differences influence interdependence level, consensus decision-making and collaboration (Sirias et al, 2007).

Currently there are three generations in the workplace. Most sources identify baby boomers as people born in 1946-1964, Generation X born in 1965-1980 and Generation Y born in 1981-2000. Although the authors defined the characteristics of each generation below, the generation in this study is limited to the group of age of workers.

Baby boomers. This generation is named as Baby Boomer because of the birth rate increased dramatically after World War II, where the living standard got better (O'Bannon, 2001; Helyer and Lee, 2012). Most of boomers have begun to retire, but almost half of them plan to work beyond the pension age (Helyer and Lee, 2012).

Growing up in an era of unprecedented economic growth and stability, boomers are loyal with one organization (Hui-Chun et al, 2003) and workaholics (Schultz and Schultz, 2009). In that era, there were not many companies existing thus they have no choice than to be loyal to a company. This makes boomers reluctant to teach younger generations, as they tend to be afraid of losing their jobs (Chan, 2010).

Boomers are optimistic about health and wellbeing, personal gratification, personal growth, team players, relationship focused, work involvement and service orientated, but they are technologically challenged, process ahead result, reluctant to disagree with peers, self-centred, and not budget minded (Bennett et al, 2012). Boomers are not raising children anymore, but are more focused on himself and partner in retirement.

Generation X. The name of "generation X" was first introduced in British society by Douglas Coupland in 1992 (Kuyken, 2012). Born

between 1965 up to 1980, Xers are now in age range of 30 to mid-40s. They are the majority of workforce now and many corporate leaders are Xers.

They started to work in 1990s where there were many changes in economics, culture and work life (Chan, 2010). Therefore, Xers always look for an opportunity, are not as loyal as boomers, competitive and familiar with corporate downsizing. Xers will have on average six to seven positions in their lifetime (O'Bannon, 2001).

As most of Xers did not have enough attention from parents when they were children because their parents were so busy working, Xers used to handle many things by themselves (Hui-Chun et al, 2003). This situation made Xers want a balanced life between professional work and personal life (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008). Currently most of Xers have teenaged children and they want to give more attention to them, not repeating what their parents did. For that reason, Xers prefer a balanced life and job satisfaction than money, recognition and promotion (Hui-Chun et al, 2003). Xers are creative people and they need freedom to do their job. They want less control, need authority to make decision and include in managing change. Since they want a balanced life, Xers enjoy working from home. They will work well from home still accomplishing all tasks, thus organizations should support them with technology for mobile work (Chan, 2010).

Generation Y. Millennial of Yers were born after 1980. They were children of boomers. They grew up with various instant things; no wonder if they want anything fast and instant. They also grew up with more technology, internet and social media. Hence, Yers are portrayed as being technology savvy. Since they live in a globalization era, they have multicultural friends from both online and offline, so they can easily interact with people from different race and background.

When Yers started to work, there were many organizations available, so they can choose the most comfortable place to work. But they are not as loyal as earlier generation because they prioritize on their personal life and work only for make a living. Yers are very appreciative about life and they also greatly appreciate family and friends (Chan, 2010). For that reason, they want to always have connection to their family and friends. This made them so close with the social media.

A study did by Schultz and Schultz (2009) showed that Yers tend to self-oriented and need continuous feedback, appreciation and reward

from their leader. Growing up in instant world, Yers want to have success in a short time, but they also want a job is flexible, requires creativity, nice colleagues and give a big impact to the world.

How baby boomers, generation X and generation Y influence informal team learning?

Informal learning. Informal learning is defined as experiential, non-routine or may be incidental, mostly related with tacit knowledge and people are not always consciously aware of it (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). Having a discussion with a colleague next to our cubicle, meeting to discuss a strategy for approaching a new client in a café, and chat about a solution for a project in a messenger application are some of informal learning activities in workplace. Reading, visits, meeting, auditing and having conversation are some examples of informal learning methods (Gear et al, 1994 in Cheetham and Chivers, 2001).

Illeris (2003, on Bjork et al, 2013) states that learning in the workplace must be seen as, both individual and social process, comprising both regular daily learning and more complex personal development. Therefore there are two critical variables in creating effective informal team learning: informal learner and team climate. Informal learner includes indicators of an individual to learn informally, both by himself and in his team. Team climate needs indicators that enables team member to learn informally together. It includes certain behaviour and support system to create team climate.

Previous research about informal learning among hospital nurses done by Bjork et al (2013), among teachers by McNally et al (2009), and among social workers by Gola (2009), showed that informal learning is highly valued for newly qualified employees regardless of generational background. Informal learning helps new employees to understand their tasks, team and organization in a short time.

Informal learner. However Marsick and Watkins (1990) studied that there is no formula that guarantees learning, whether formalised or not. They can only suggest three personal characteristics to enhance team learning: Proactivity (to take an initiative or an action in a situation), critical reflection (to reflect based on underlying assumptions) and creativity (to think out of the box).

Chivers (2006) in his research about informal learning among professionals in the UK found important behaviours of individuals who

learn informally. First of all, an individual should not be shy; otherwise he will lose the opportunity to learn from others. Other desired behaviours are to collaborate with others in learning, share what has been learned, compare experiences for learning purpose, reflect regularly on recent experiences, codify and articulate lessons learned. More over, individuals can learn well in a team when eager to obtain knowledge from peers and experienced colleagues, make mental links between their informal learning experiences and any relevant theory or principles, formulate their own theories, discuss learning process and its improvement with relevant colleague, take stock of what they have learned and facilitate learning of other colleagues (not just new employees).

Prugsamatz (2010) found that employees are motivated to learn for various reasons. It can be from himself such as his urge to accomplish the tasks (intrinsic) or from outside (extrinsic) such as from leader or established system. He also stated that competence, trustworthiness, co-orientation and individual dynamism, which are important for an individual to learn in a team.

Related to generational differences, a study did in Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, about lecturers and students showed that lecturers and researchers who are baby boomers have high sensitivity to information. Xers who are used to technology can easily accessed the information using media, although they have no emotional attachment to technology. And Yers who mostly are university students can easily use technology, for learning but they are sometimes not patient to find the information. That study also showed that individuals that able to use technology would be more productive (Atmi, 2014).

Team Climate. Li et al in Marsick (2009) identified barriers of knowledge building besides the leader are learning culture or team climate, lack of appropriate systems, technology and human interaction. In this study, we define appropriate system as office layout and human capital system.

The study done by Bennett et al (2012) show that organization should prove spaces for sharing knowledge within the workplace. Joy and Haynes' (2011) research about office layout showed that a team-based area is the most popular choice for all generations to share knowledge and the second most popular place is the office lounge. However, some boomers still prefer to have discussions in a bookable meeting room. Steel case Inc. (2009) studied that boomers need private

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space separated with collaboration spaces. And they prefer a centralized knowledge centre, while Xers prefer personal flexible mobile workstations and open accessible team areas. Yers can work anywhere. Yers prefer fun, open and collaborative space, plug and play tech environment, no boundaries or hierarchy.

The other important support system is the human capital system. Human capital system and leadership were found to be significantly and positively related to team knowledge sharing especially for tacit knowledge sharing (Chuang et al, 2013). One human capital system is the reward and incentive system. The reluctance of boomers to share knowledge can be resolved by an incentive and reward system (Chan, 2010) and this system is also interesting to Xers and Yers (Fawazi, 2012).

A study that explored informal learning among hospital nurses done by Bjork et al (2013) showed that a young nurse will learn fast by increasing his responsibility and by being guided in complicated nursing situation by the more experienced nurses.

Related to generation differences, since most of the valuable knowledge of boomers is composed of tacit knowledge, it needs a recipient who is willing to acquire new knowledge (Kuyken, 2012). Therefore, mentoring is the common knowledge sharing process from boomers to Xers and Yers. On the other side, Xers and Yers should open their mind, respect older people and want to learn from them.

Having the multigenerational workforce working side by side raises challenges, but also brings opportunities that can be effectively utilized to address the changing and uncertain skills needs of the knowledge economy (Helyer and Lee, 2012). Some companies already anticipated this condition by mentoring scheme from older employees to younger staff at Coca-Cola and older generations can also learn from younger generations at Cisco.

Technology can become a link between individuals to generate informal learning (Marsick, 2009). It enables people to use, share, store, and create knowledge, both by himself and with others, through a collaboration system.

More than the supported system mentioned above, important preconditions for sharing of tacit knowledge is a culture with shared values, care, trust, autonomy, openness, innovation surplus of time and information, and variation of work (Bjork et al, 2013). Another researcher, Prugsamatz (2010) observed that trust, interpersonal

communication, team expertise and empowerment are dimensions to create team dynamics for learning.

Effective informal team learning. Team effectiveness is defined as performance and employee satisfaction (Gladstein, 1984). Performance and satisfaction are as a cycle, because if a team performs well then another team member will be satisfied and it will trigger them to perform better later on. A few years later, Hackman (1990) defined team effectiveness as performance, behaviour and attitude. Performance is measured through quality, quantity and delivery timeliness of a task or a project. Behaviour is the ability of team member to improve their capability continuously. Attitude is individual satisfaction in being in a team. Performance, behaviour and attitude are also as a cycle, because if a team can perform well, team member will feel satisfy in being in a team and they will want to improve their capability for more complex tasks. This will result in better performance.

Developing a model for multigenerational informal learning

Taking the above factors in to account as explained in the previous section, an informal learning model for multigenerational team was built. Figure no. 1 shows the conceptual framework that was used in our study. Based on previous research, we already know that informal learning influence team climate and team climate influence effective informal team learning. Therefore in this study, the author focused to study the influence generation differences on those three variables. The following hypotheses will be tested using mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative study.

H1: Generation background will have a direct and positive effect on informal learner.

H2: Generation background will have a direct and positive effect on team climate.

H3: Generation background will have a direct and positive effect on effective informal team learning.

Methods

Qualitative Study

This study used mixed method starting with a qualitative study, then a quantitative one. The qualitative study was to test the conceptual framework by interviewing people and observing people's behaviour directly. It was done at a medium-size consulting firm in Jakarta,

Indonesia that deliver training, consulting and assessment services. A consulting firm was chosen because they deal with knowledge in every activity. Their products itself are also knowledge. There are 138 employees in 12 work units or team. Seven of those teams are multigenerational teams. 21 people were selected from those seven teams, shown in table no. 1.

Fig. no. 1. Conceptual framework

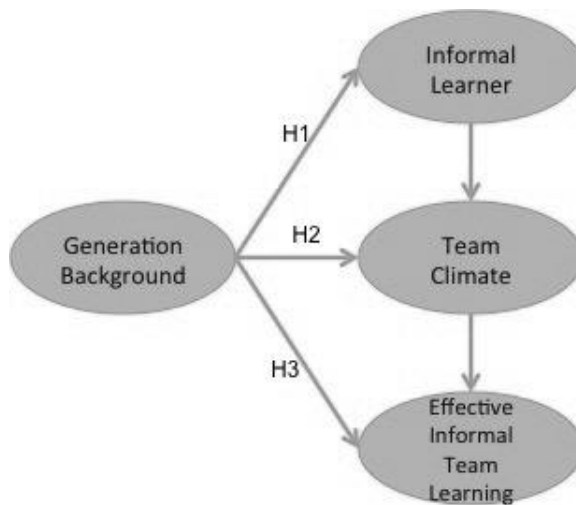


Table no. 1. Socio-demography characteristics of interviewees (N=21)

	Categories	N	%
Generation	Baby Boomers	6	29%
	Generation X	8	38%
	Generation Y	7	33%
Work experience	1-5 years	4	19%
	6-10 years	3	14%
	11-15 years	8	38%
	16-20 years	3	14%
	> 21 years	3	14%
Leader position	Team leader	5	24%
	Team member	16	76%

Quantitative Study

Quantitative study was done to test the research model developed in the qualitative study. Both online and offline questionnaires were administered to collect data from respondents. Beforehand the questionnaire was tested on ten persons, randomly selected, to check the clarity and relevance.

The respondents were the public training program participants during December 2014, held by the consulting firm where we did the qualitative study. From eight batches of training program, 184 respondents representing 184 multigenerational teams participated in this survey shows in table no. 2. They are employees in Jakarta from staff up to senior manager level. Based on industrial background, 52 percent of the respondents work in service industries like bank, financial institution, goods distributors, telecommunication provider, software developer, public services and non-profit organization and 48 percent work in manufacturing industries, fast moving consumer goods, pharmaceutical manufacture, automotive spare parts manufacture, oil and gas, property.

Table no. 2. Socio-demography characteristics of respondents (N=184)

	Categories	N	%
Generation	Baby Boomers	13	7
	Generation X	101	55
	Generation Y	68	37
Work experience	1-5 years	29	16
	6-10 years	50	27
	11-15 years	46	25
	16-20 years	40	22
	> 21 years	17	9
Leader position	Team leader	105	57
	Team member	79	43

Results

Qualitative Study

The interview results were analysed using NVIVO 10 software. The conceptual model was accepted in regards to generational influence, informal learner and team climate. Informal learner also influenced team climate, and both, informal learner and team climate

had a direct influence on effective informal team learning.

This qualitative study also resulted in indicators for each latent variable. The indicators mentioned in the literature study above were asked to the interviewees and their responses were clustered based on the frequency and importance. The indicators produced in qualitative study are shown in table no. 2 and a detailed explanation of each latent variable is as follows:

Generation background. Generation influenced the ability of individuals to learn informally such as respecting each other, communication and technology adaptability. Brilliant young generation should respect baby boomers like they respect their parents. On the other side, boomers should also respect to Yers though they might have different behaviours and preferences to boomers i.e. they are so closed to gadget and social media.

Communication is important for building a relationship. The way each individual will communicate affects the relationship itself. Although different generations have their own communication preferences, such as boomers preferring to communicate face-to-face while Yers can communicate well through social media, each generation should understand other preferences and tolerate them. Moreover, since technology is very powerful in sharing and storing knowledge, all generations especially baby boomers, should adapt to using it.

An interesting finding is that Xers actually looks like chameleons. Xers can easily adapt to both Yers and boomers. This fact is supported by Kuyken (2012) mentioned that Xers can adapt quickly to any new circumstances. One of the interviewee who is the product manager of leadership product also mentioned the flexibility of Xers.

Informal learner. The indicators that mentioned during the interview were quite a lot. There were six indicators as shown in figure no. 2: trustworthy, open minded, eager to learn and share knowledge, take initiative, adaptability and innovative. The authors noticed that these indicators seemed too ideal for a person. However, since this qualitative study aimed to explore and it will be tested further in quantitative study, we put them in as indicators of informal learner.

Since informal learning is a learning process done by an individual and between people, there are some required indicators: first, he should be a trustworthy person. If people trust him, they want to share knowledge to him, and they trust the information given by him. Trustworthiness is developed when a person commits to what he said

and is accountable for what he did.

As a learner, he should be eager to learn many things, both, by self-learning and from others. Related to generation, a younger learner should respect the senior worker and want to learn from them. On the other side, the senior that has a lot of expertise and experience should share their knowledge to the younger through mentoring program. A good learner knows where and how to find knowledge, know if the knowledge is valid, know how to link one knowledge to others and is able to summarize knowledge to make it more understandable. A learner also needs to open his mind, accept others' opinions and unusual ideas. There might seem an extreme idea, but a learner must understand it first before rejects an idea. He also needs to be open with many resources out there. More, he should able to take initiatives. For instance, if he has a problem, he should proactively solve it first before asking help from others. He also needs to take the initiative to learn by himself instead of depending on others. This closely relates to innovation and each an informal learner should able to see the things that can be improved in his team. It can be a better business process or developing a new product.

Last, a learner should be able to adapt to his team situation and to change. If he knew the majority of his team was Yers, he should understand Yers' behaviours and preferences and adapt to them in order to be able to communicate to them.

Team climate. Factors that influence the climate of a team are trust, openness, willing to learn/share knowledge, supported system and facilities. Trust is the basis of the relationship. Team members should trust each other to create a comfort atmosphere in which to learn.

People feel comfortable to share his knowledge when there is openness in a team. It commonly started by open and transparent behaviour from the leader. In an open situation, people will not be afraid to speak, to share opinions and to learn.

To create learning atmosphere, people in a team also need to learn and share knowledge each other. People like to learn especially that related to the job and from many sources i.e. seniors, other colleagues, and from media. They do not keep the valuable information by themselves, but share it to their colleagues. And they share it voluntarily and spontaneously, not as ordered or being forced.

The habitat also needs to be supported by system and facilities. Availability of technology for sharing, storing and using knowledge is

necessary. Facilities should also support informal learning process using an open-space work layout, personal development plan and mentoring program. A reward system such as recognition for a person that innovate a new product will also support informal learning. More, mentoring program is one of the powerful tools to create learning flow from the senior to the junior.

However those supported facilities, open and trust situation will not be useful if team members do not used it in learning and sharing. Therefore, team leaders and all the team members should have habits of learning and sharing knowledge.

Effective informal team learning. The majority of the interviewees do not relate the informal team learning to team performance because most of the team did not achieve the target and had a low performance at that time. Though they feel the impact of informal learning when they accomplishing their tasks. They could finish it faster than just relied on formal training or planned sharing sessions.

Interviewees also said that their capability was enhanced if they learned informally continuously. Self-learning and informal mentoring are the most powerful informal learning sessions for them. More over, they also have more connections, both form internal and external organization, that are very useful to accomplish the tasks.

Quantitative Study

The author used Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to process the data. PLS is chosen because the research objective is theory development and prediction and the research goal is to identify the key driver construct or indicators (Hair et al, 2011). Sample size was also relatively low compared to the indicators tested. According to Hair et al (2011), PLS minimum sample size should be equal to the larger of the following: ten time's largest number of latent variables or ten times largest number of structural paths or hypotheses. Since there are four latent variables and six hypotheses in this study, 184 samples are enough.

Table No. 3. Latent variables measurement result

Latent Variables	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha
Generational Background	0.899	0.947	-	0.870
Informal Learner	0.629	0.836	0.383	0.891
Team Climate	0.566	0.838	0.315	0.705
Effective Informal Team Learning	0.795	0.921	0.251	0.744

Afterwards we ran the responses through Smart PLS 2 software. The result in table no. 3 showed that all of the Cronbach's alphas are between 0.7 and 0.9. It means this study is reliable. All of composite reliability values are higher than 0.70 and all of the average variance extracted (AVE) are higher than 0.50. It means that this result is valid because composite reliability values should higher than 0.70 and AVE values should higher than 0.50. However R square values of 0.25 for endogenous latent variables in the structural model that result in this study is described as weak (Hair et al, 2011).

Generation differences influence the informal learner. Individuals' background affected their quality of learning. It is showed by the t-value 6.328 that means Hypothesis 1 was accepted. However generations' differences did not have direct influence to team climate that indicated by t-value was only 1.166. Since it is lower than 1.96, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. Critical t-statistics for a two-tailed test are 1.96 for significant level of 5 percent.

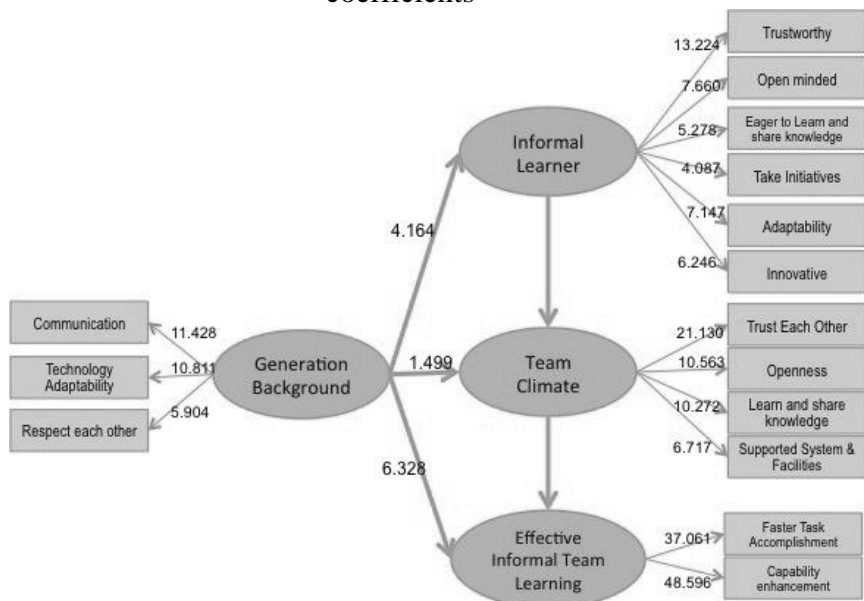
Generational background indeed directs influences effective informal team learning. The t-value was 3.097 so Hypothesis 3 was accepted. This finding was aligned with Haynes (2011) that mentioned that transferring knowledge from older to younger employees requires careful consideration including the interaction place.

Table no. 4. Hypotheses test of Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, T-values)

Hypotheses	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	Standard Error (STERR)	T Statistics (O/STERR)	Result
H1	0.619	0.627	0.097	0.097	6.328	Accepted
H2	0.206	0.213	0.142	0.142	1.166*	Rejected
H3	0.498	0.526	0.160	0.161	3.097	Accepted

The indicators that developed in qualitative study were tested in quantitative study. All of them were valid and accepted in the model. The outer study showed that indicators that influence generation background to informal learner were respecting each other, communication and technology adaptability. The indicators for informal learner are trustworthy, open minded, eager to learn and share, take initiatives, adaptability and innovative. For team climate, the indicators of trust each other, openness, learn and share knowledge and supported system and facilities are also accepted. Last, in effective informal team learning variable, the indicators of faster task accomplishment and capability enhancement are also accepted.

Fig. no. 2. Final research model with indicator loading and path coefficients



Discussion

Generational differences indeed influence informal team learning and it will not become a challenge if people respect each other, communication goes smoothly and people adapt to technology for learning purposes. Generation background also influences informal learner. Different generation will learn informally in a different way and it will not hamper the learning process if an individual as informal learner is trustworthy, open minded, eager to learn and share knowledge, take initiatives, adapt to changes and innovative.

However, generation differences are not significantly influence team climate. The more diverse generation in a team does not mean the team climate will become more or less conducive. Team climate that is suitable for informal learning will be created if team members trust each other, open each other, willing to learn and share knowledge and have supported system and facilities.

Generation differences also influence effective informal team learning. Their background did not preclude people to learn informally, but help the team to accomplish the task faster and enhance the capability. And effective informal learning regardless of the generation difference helps team in accomplishing the task faster and capability enhancement.

One possible limitation of this study is the fact that respondents are employees in Jakarta, Indonesia that may have different points of view and values from people in other areas. And the qualitative study was limited to a consulting firm that might have different viewpoints from employees in other industries.

Kuyken (2012) in his literature study shows the approach of “community of knowledge within the same generation” can help organization for practicing knowledge sharing. Nevertheless, we cannot retain boomers not to retire nor reject younger people not to enter the workplace. It is the cycle of employees. And this study showed that generation differences do not hinder informal learning process. Multigenerational team can do informal learning effectively if they have good informal learner and supported team climate.

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