



COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

La esfera universitaria hoy: retos, proyectos de investigación y transferencia de conocimiento

Coords.

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THE ROLE OF THE MENTORING IN THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER OF GENERATIONAL HANDOVER IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the labor market has gone through many variations due to the given changes in the society and the fluctuation of the economy. The rapid advancement of technology, globalization and the search of incentives by organizations has made alterations on the market's interest (Basu, 2019). Thus, some of the consequences of this situation are the high employee turnover, workforce ageing and knowledge management (Lazzari et al., 2022). Knowledge has become one of the most important components of organisations (Xue, 2017). In the sector of education, and specially on higher education institutions, knowledge management is necessary to maintain the institutions prestige and competitiveness (Trivellas, et al., 2015). The knowledge that scholars and academics has been generating during their careers in their institutions needs to be transfer to other colleagues in order maintain the organizational value (Mendez et al., 2019).

In some organizations it is unsustainable to maintain the organizational knowledge in the institution because the key knowledge of experienced employees is not registered; in these cases, the high turnover of employees with key positions could generate instability on the organizations (Botti et al., 2021). This situation also affects knowledge retention, and

consequently, generational handover processes (Narayanan et al., 2019). The difficulty to obtain a long-term candidate to replace employees that are about to retire affects the knowledge retention in the organization (Serenko, 2023).

This problem is transferred to the final stage of the employee's life cycle. If a generational handover process is not carried out correctly, the organization loses knowledge, specific skills and competitiveness on the market (Škerháková, et al., 2022). Considering the shortage of candidates in the labor market, the difficulty stands finding the right candidate that would replace an experienced employee for a long-term (Zainee & Puteh, 2020). In this situation, generational replacement is a key resource to attract candidates and maintain the knowledge and competencies in the organization, bringing competitiveness to the company (Najafipour et al., 2022). Having a correct procedure is essential to identify key positions' competences, this would facilitate the research for specific candidates with the needed skills and carry out a successful replacement (Jackson & Allen, 2022). Being efficient on this last phase helps obtaining good results on the generational handover, and therefore, on the organizational knowledge retention (Ali et al., 2019).

The loss of competencies and knowledge on the organization can be mitigated by procedures such as mentoring because this strategy helps identifying which skills are critical for each position (Bidian & Evans, 2019). Mentoring is used to transfer the theoretical and practical knowledge from a senior employee to a non-experienced employee (Clarke, et al., 2019). This resource has been used in higher education institutions to transfer knowledge of academics that are about to retire. Research show that this practice helps retaining knowledge on the organizations and has a positive impact on the job satisfaction of the mentor and the mentee (Bano, 2020). Studies show that those higher education institutions that do not carry out successful generational handover or succession plans when employees get retired, they lose organizational knowledge (Al-Kurdi, et al., 2018). That is why more knowledge management strategies, such as mentoring, should be implemented in order to retain knowledge and have competitive organizations (Mendez, et al., 2019).

1.1. THE RETIREMENT OF BABY BOOMERS

In the last years, many European countries has been experiencing a demographic decline due to the birth-rate decrease (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021). The demographic pyramid of the EU-27 shows that the European population is aging drastically (Eurostat, 2020). This situation is alarming not just for the prosperity of society but also for the organizations (Helal et al., 2021). No country in the EU-27 reaches the fertility rate of 1.53 children per woman, which guarantees generational replacement and population stability (Eurostat, 2021). From 2023 onwards, there will be an increase of retirements of active workers belonging to the so-called "baby boom" generation (European Commission, 2020). All predictions announce that there will not be enough personnel or candidates on the market to fulfil the positions of those employees that are going to get retire (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021). The generation of baby boomers has already started getting retired and the expectations are that on the following years there is going to be a knowledge gap on organizations due to these retirements (Azeem, et al., 2021). One of the consequences of the retirement of baby boomers is the amount of replacements that would need to face the organisations at once. According to Al-Kurdi et al., (2018) most of the higher education institutions do not have any kind of management strategies to face this issue. If we focus on higher education institutions, the situation is alarming as the age of the workforce is increasing and there are no knowledge management strategies to face this problem (Veer Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017).

Baby boomers have been creating organizational knowledge during their professional career and that generational knowledge needs to be transferred in order to maintain the organizational competitiveness (Lombardi, 2019). Currently in the majority of the organizations five generations are working together (Lyons & Kuron, 2014), this means that an understanding of knowledge transmission and working styles is needed; otherwise, organizational challenges could occur (Rupčić, 2018).

Indeed, knowledge management strategies should be applied in order to transfer knowledge from retirees to younger employees in order to bring organizational success (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2022). The knowledge loss that could bring the retirement of the baby boomers is going to affect all sector in the labour market, but specially on higher education (Clark & Ritter, 2020). These retirements will have a direct impact on the productivity and organizational efficiency of both private and public institutions (Bixby, 2020).

One of the characteristics of higher education institutions' is their organizational culture; as academic and professor generate knowledge and they use it as an element of differentiation (Fauzi, 2023). In universities experts from different disciplines work together, therefore, when it comes to manage key knowledge, different kind of limitations are found (Omerzel, et al., 2011). Also, the factors that academics consider necessary for their retirement usually differs (Altman et al., 2020).

Public and private institutions have already started concerning about this issue of retirement processes and academics' knowledge transfer (Alghail et al., 2023). That is why organizations will have to adapt their employees work cycle, facing the retirement of a large part of their workforce and the changes of the labor market that are result of demographic change (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2022). Thus, organizations need a road map to adapt to the new challenges that will bring the labor market which are knowledge management, knowledge transfer and knowledge retention.

1.2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge has become the most valuable asset and commodity in the labour market, thus, knowledge management is a key factor to ensure organizational success (Xue, 2017). Thus, we understand knowledge management as the process where key knowledge of the organization is created, acquired, shared and used or applied (Obeidat et al., 2016). Universities or higher education institutions have the advantage that their academic environment help them creating more knowledge spaces (Saeed, et al., 2022). According to the study carried out by Chang & Lin

(2015) the culture of the organisation influences on the knowledge management processes.

The application of new strategies of knowledge management in higher education has difficulties as there is already a functioning system that employees are comfortable with it (Muftahu & Jamil, 2021). Indeed, in the majority of universities the adopted strategies to carry out knowledge management are inconsistent or inadequate (Fullwood & Rowley, 2017). Moreover, in the study carried out by Veer Ramjeawon, & Rowley (2017) was shown that there is lack of infrastructures on knowledge management strategies when it comes to the knowledge transfer of retirees and employees.

Nevertheless, higher education institutions need to invest time on knowledge management process, identifying the type of knowledge that is necessary for the organization and formulating objectives to maintain it in the institution (Mahdi, et al., 2019). In order to carry out effective new knowledge management processes, it is needed that all employees have the same vision, mission and priorities as the institution in terms of the importance of knowledge sharing (Muftahu & Jamil, 2021).

When it comes to understand the difficulties to apply knowledge management strategies it is possible to highlight the following factors: (1) lack of policies and reward mechanisms (2) absence of specific resources, (3) shortage of funding and time for research, (4) frequent leadership position changes, (5) lack of a knowledge-sharing culture, and (6) weak industry–academia linkages to carry out knowledge transfer or sharing (Veer Ramjeawon, & Rowley, 2017).

In terms of the advantages of knowledge management process on higher education institutions are multiple, such as the improvement on the services on teaching, curriculum development and administration planning (Ahmad, et al., 2017). Indeed, there is a link between the knowledge management environment of an organization and the employees job satisfaction (Kianto, et al., 2016). Those employees that have knowledge sharing culture are going to be more prompt to facilitate communication between their colleagues, they will be better at decision making, problem solving and working on teams; therefore, the organisation is going

to be more effective and the employee's general competences are going to be more strengthened (Trivellas, et al., 2015).

1.3. THE ROLE OF MENTORING

Knowledge management strategies are necessary for the success of higher education institutions, and mentoring is an essential tool to transfer the know-how and the expertise of academics that are about to retire (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017). Mentoring consists on transferring the needed knowledge and skills for a specific job position from an experienced person (mentor) to a non-experienced person (mentee) (Clarke, et al., 2019). The latter is willing to learn for his/her own professional development (Clarke, et al., 2019). It is understood that mentoring should provide psychosocial support to the mentee, this includes providing role modelling from the mentor and giving career or instrumental support in order to complete and learn skills that requires the job position (Kram, 1985).

In occasions, there are mentors with extensive subject matter expertise but they lack from having the skills to transfer the knowledge to the mentee (Stelter, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are some characteristics of the mentor and mentee that help achieving positive outcomes (Eby & Robertson, 2020). Characteristics of the mentee such as strong interpersonal skills (Sambunjak, et al., 2010), goal orientation (St-Jean, et al., 2018) and positive self-regard are more positively valued from the mentors (Dubois et al., 2014). Considering the characteristic of the mentor, proactivity (Wanberg, et al., 2006), openness to experiences (Menges, 2016) and transformational leadership are more appreciated from the mentees (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

There is a relation between the relationship that is established through mentoring between the mentor and the mentee and the workgroup's performance as well as the organizational climate (Janssen, et al., 2018). In this way, positive team climate enhances the mentoring experience and relationship. (Robotham, et al., 2022). If the relationship that the mentor and the mentee establish is positive, it gives access to the mentee to valuable information and career sponsorship (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007).

Although mentoring is crucial in knowledge management (Mendez et al., 2019), most institutions of higher education do not take it into account on their knowledge management processes (Al-Kurdi, et al., 2018). Mentoring can facilitate knowledge sharing attitudes within colleagues and, therefore, is a practice that more organisations should consider (Huang, & Pham, 2022). Mentoring practices could help on generational handover processes on the knowledge transfer processes, improving the organizational competitiveness (Tavasieva et al., 2019).

1.4. GENERATIONAL HANDOVER

We understand as generational handover the process to transfer organizational competencies whether they are, (I) theoretical and/or practical knowledge, (II) soft, social and/or technical skills, and, (III) the know-how of an employee (Cox & Overbey, 2022). The purpose of generational handover is to retain organization's key knowledge and competencies through methodical strategies or procedures (Tavasieva et al., 2019). These processes focus on more experienced employees who are close to retirement (Garcia, 2020). The main objective is transferring key organizational competencies to avoid knowledge loss and maintain business competitiveness (Pandiyani & Jayalashmi, 2016). The knowledge and skill transfer give value to the worker as well as to the organization (Mohajan, 2017).

Generational handover is a useful tool for knowledge management processes in organizations (Ge & Campopiano, 2021). Indeed, generational handover is necessary for knowledge retention and knowledge transfer in organizations, and therefore, for their competitiveness (Gannon et al., 2021). In this way, mentoring it can be used as a tool to enhance the knowledge sharing between expert and novel employees and, consequently, improve organizational success (Manson, 2016).

Research show that higher education institutions struggle implementing generational handover processes (Jackson & Allen, 2022). Indeed, most higher education institutions do not identify the aging workforce as a primary concern (Kaskie, et al., 2017). The factors that affect universities not carrying out successful succession plans or generational handover processes are (1) the leadership style of the department manager, (2)

the career development of the employee during his stay at the organisation, and (3) the knowledge management practices that are not accessible in the institution (Ku Ishak & Mustafa Kamil, 2016). Suwaidi, et al., (2020) added that the (4) culture of the organization also has a direct effect on carrying out successful succession plans.

Even if difficulties can be identified to carry out generational handover processes, according to Mazorodze & Buckley (2020) the most effective way to transfer knowledge in organizations from employees that are about to retire are doing community practices with the departments, using mentoring, and doing storytelling. These strategies would help scholars sharing their knowledge to their mentees and would give space to share their thoughts around their retirement transition (Silver & Easty, 2017).

In the research carried out by Yakoboski (2015) results show that the majority of academics would like to work until they are 70 years old, the main reason for this was that they enjoy their work and they do not find any reason to leave their institution. Hence, universities should consider the needs of the academics and their perspective in terms of the retirement transition in order to prepare their retirement planning and to have a better offboarding experiences on their institutions (Cahill, et al., 2019).

Another reason why higher education institution should consider implementing generational handover processes is that knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer bring job satisfaction to the employees, leadership stability, knowledge retention and it ensures that no theoretical or practical knowledge is lost (Bano, 2020). In this way, succession plans and generational handover strategies are needed for the success of the organization and the wellbeing of the employees that are currently working or for those that are willing to get retired in the following years (Weisblat, 2018).

2. OBJETIVES

To carry out this study, two research questions were established in order to analyse the role of mentoring in the knowledge transfer of generational handover in higher education:

- Research question I: Identify if retiring workforce of universities consider necessary the role of a mentee in their retiring processes.
- Research question II: Identify the approximate time extent to transfer the knowledge and necessary skills to the mentee.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. PROCEDURE

To carry out this study, qualitative data was obtained through the responses given by participants in open questions related to the role of mentoring in the processes of knowledge transfer on their institutions. This questionnaire was passed once to the participants to obtain the descriptive information.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The sample is constituted by 45 employees of a university that are currently retired or that are going to be retired in the following years. 63.38% of the participants were male and the mean age of the sample was 64.7 years old.

3.3. INSTRUMENT

An ad-hoc questionnaire was created via Qualtrics. This questionnaire has different sections that cover different topics such as the retirement process in the organisation, knowledge transfer, emotions during the retirement, mentoring processes, and talent retention. To carry out this study, we have just focused on the mentoring processes.

3.4. DESIGN

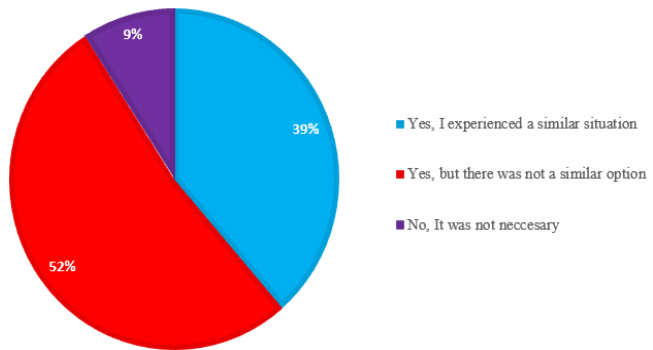
In order carry out this research we decided to choose a non-experimental design because there is no analysis of a control independent variable and we did not carry out any kind of intervention.

4. RESULTS

The results obtained related to the first research question are that the 39% of the participants stated that they had a similar figure in their generational handover process, the 52% of the participants stated that they would like to have had a mentee but they did not have it, and just the 9% of the sample did not consider necessary the role of a mentee in their retirement process (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Interest on having a mentee to transfer the knowledge on their job positions before getting retired

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE A MENTEE TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE BEFORE YOU GOT RETIRED?

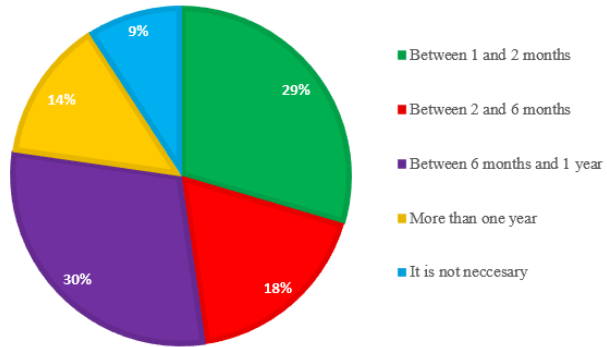


In this way, and answering the first research question, it is possible to state that the 91% of the participants had interest on having a mentee to transfer their knowledge related to their job position before getting retired.

In terms of the second research question, the results showed that 29% of the participants consider between 1-2 months are enough to transfer the knowledge and needed skills to the mentee, 18% confirmed that between 2 and 6 months is enough, whereas 30% stated that between 6 months and 1 years should be required, the 14% of the participants consider that appropriate time estimation with mentees to transfer knowledge would be more than 1 year, just the 9% mentioned that no mentee is needed to carry or generational handover.

FIGURE 2. Time estimation for the interaction with the mentee for the knowledge transfer

TIME ESTIMATION FOR THE INTERACTION WITH THE MENTEE FOR THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER



Thus, 75% of the participants consider that the time needed for interaction with mentees for knowledge transfer has to be less than one year.

5. DISCUSSION

This research shows that even if it seems necessary for employees the role of mentoring in their last month's previous to retirement, just the 39% have had a similar figure to transfer their knowledge, know-how and necessary skills to maintain the talent in their institutions. According to Cottle (2021) through mentoring general pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge can be transferred, and this impacts directly on the competitiveness of the organization. In this way, those institutions that apply this kind of procedures on their employees' retirement processes, are more prompt to retain talent and therefore, they are more competent (Perpétuo & Pestana, 2022). The study conducted by Wilson, et al., (2014) showed that mentoring provides mentees access to social and cultural capital that are needed for the progression of higher education institutions. Moreover, mentoring processes have a direct impact on the abilities of mentees, such as self-efficacy (Gimmon, 2014) and job contribution (Thurston, et al., 2012).

The results of this study showed that the 75% of academics pointed out that the time needed to interact with mentees in order to transfer knowledge of their position has to be less than one year. Even if it is clear that mentoring shows short-term benefits for mentees' career objectives, in the study carried out by Boeder, et al., (2021) was highlighted that mentoring processes are also beneficial for mentors in the long-term. Indeed, according to the study done by Chan & Nakamura (2016), those academics that spend more time doing mentoring practices obtain better generativity achievements. Moreover, spending time with the mentee provides academics a rewarding experience as mentors appreciate the opportunity to transfer their knowledge and remain engaged in the field that have been working their entire career (Mendez et al., 2019). Mentoring improves knowledge sharing on organisational culture and this has a direct impact on the institutions' knowledge retention (Azeem et al., 2021).

In terms of the limitations, it would be interesting having a bigger number of participants as this would give a broader perspective of the reality of higher education institutions in terms of the knowledge transfer strategies. Indeed, this research has just considered former and active employees of one higher education institution, therefore, it would be enriching having more institutions of different characteristics participating on the study. The participation of different types of higher education institutions would give the opportunity to analyse the similarities and differences of mentoring strategies and the time estimation spent carrying out these processes. Also, having a variety of institutions in the sample will enhance analysing the priorities of each organization in terms of knowledge transfer strategies. In this way, future lines of research are suggested in order to learn more of the effectiveness of knowledge retention strategies. More research should be done to highlight the role of mentoring on generational handover processes in higher education institutions. Further research on mentoring processes will improve knowledge transfer strategies and organizations' success.

6. CONCLUSIONES

This research plays a pioneering role on the contribution of the importance of the role of mentoring in the knowledge transfer of generational handover in higher education institutions. Hence, it gives a wider perspective of the socioeconomic situation as it describes the decrease of the natality rate of the population and the workforce ageing, pointing out the impact that generates this to the organizations. The demographic ageing also affects higher education institutions as in the recent years the workforce in this field has aged exponentially (Kaskiet, et al., 2017).

Considering that universities as well as higher education institutions are sectors that generate most knowledge through research and company collaboration, it is necessary for these institutions to have solid and effective knowledge management strategies (Thani & Mirkamali, 2018). Thus, the knowledge that is generated in this field is applied to companies and the society to improve the life quality standards of employees and citizens (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000).

In higher education institutions knowledge transfer is key to retain experienced academics knowledge (Ramayah et al., 2013). In order to do that, knowledge management strategies are necessary. Nevertheless, studies show that universities as higher education institutions do not apply successful knowledge management strategies, and therefore, knowledge is lost when scholar are retired (Veer Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017). One strategy to transfer knowledge is mentoring and has beneficial impact on the employees' job satisfaction and wellbeing and the organisations competitiveness (Bano, 2020).

This study shows that academics and scholars are willing to do mentoring practices with mentees, but in occasions they do not have enough resources to carry them out. In this way, mentoring is a useful tool and resource to retain knowledge on the organization as it gives the chance to the mentor to share his/her knowledge and feel fulfilled in a personal and academic way (Levallet & Chan, 2019). According to the results obtained in this study the time estimations that scholar consider that is needed to transfer knowledge to mentees is less than one year, therefore this information should be used to adjust better the knowledge

management strategies in the universities or higher education institution retirement transition plans. Considering employees opinion of the retirement processes not only will have a direct positive impact on the retirees offboarding process but also on their job satisfaction (Smedley, 2017).

Many organisations have started implementing generational handover processes to retain knowledge on their companies (Wikström, et al., 2018). This study supports the idea that when an employee is on her/his final phase of their career the company needs to be there on the process providing support, understanding and making the offboarding process as comfortable as possible (Kets de Vries, 2022). Stablishing a positive and reliable bond with the employee will help the organization retaining all the knowledge on the company as studies have shown that a good mentoring and succession plan entails more knowledge sharing with the mentees and other employees (Sammarra, et al., 2017).

In this way, future lines of research are suggested to have a better understanding of knowledge management processes where knowledge is transferred through generational handover process practices such as mentoring. Therefore, mentoring practices can be a strategic tool to retain knowledge on the organizations and guarantee the success and the competitiveness of higher educations institutions.

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