

## MULTI-GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

In today's business environment, leadership is critical to the success of the organization. This is true no matter what industry one is in. But what organizations have now are additional challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most significant challenges is that managers have four generations working altogether in the company. The baby boomers, the X generation, the millennials, and the Z generation are all part of the team. Each one of these generations has different ideas, skills, and needs when it comes to leadership. One size fits all leadership style no longer works in our business society. Leaders need to find ways to get each employee, regardless of age, engaged in the mission, vision, and objectives of the day-to-day activities. This narrative will explore what needs to be done to create a multi-generational team that is engaged, productive, and feels empowered.

### Understanding the Different Generations

Generational differences are just a part of the business world these days. Different generational teams working together can be very challenging in the day-to-day work environment. As employees are products of the time in which they grew up, they will have different values, motivations, beliefs, and attitudes. These differences can lead to many challenges, such as conflicts, miscommunications, and misunderstandings in the organization. This can hinder the company's mission, vision, and objectives and even cause its eventual failure. How leaders see the world is a significant factor in how we value, treat, and work with our staff. Generational mix can be an ongoing problem, but it can be dealt with through an increased understanding of the issues involved, education, and tolerance (Warner & Sandberg, 2010).

The workplace has changed quite a bit in recent years. The generation to which the employee belongs is a driving factor that aids managers in understanding the individual or a whole group. Generation is an influential factor that human beings instinctively recognize when we speak or listen to different generations that are not our own. Personnel who grew up in the same era tend to relate to the same stimuli, such as news, music, media, how to do tasks, and many other cultural factors. Someone in your generation may have quite a bit in common with each other due to many environmental factors exposed to during that time. However, it may cause a divide between other generations in the organization. This is key for leaders to understand and know how to deal with these situations. When individuals from different generations come together in a business, they bring their own worldviews, which can turn negative and result in problems. This can slow down the objectives that need to be accomplished daily as well as hurt profits (Warner & Sandberg, 2010).

One of the goals of any leader is to build relationships across generations. The increased range of generations working side-by-side daily calls attention to vast differences. The eventual potential for conflict between staff is exceptionally high. According to some researchers, 70% of respondents stated that the company they work for has no programs addressing generational differences. According to HR.com, in 2010, only one out of three organizations believed that generational differences are important. With our population having to work for a more extended period of time, this perception is slowly fading away. When addressing diversity issues, the key is building bridges between employees with different views of how the world works. Managers must foster an environment that shares perspectives, spending time

**Impact Factor (JCC): 5.8347 - This Article can be downloaded from [www.bestjournals.in](http://www.bestjournals.in)**

together, honesty, mutual respect, listening, communicating in fruitful ways, and valuing the input of one another. Building relationships is a challenge within itself, and it takes time; it will not happen overnight. Strong leadership skills must be exhibited here and cannot be forced upon the workers (Warner & Sandberg, 2010).

### **What Can Leaders Do?**

Many problems can result from the disconnection of generations within the organization. If not addressed, these differences can significantly impact the bottom line as well as employee engagement and empowerment. Problems include misalignment of goals, poor sales and service, lack of communication, change resistance, poor teamwork, turnover, and conflict. These issues can damage an organization's culture and lead to eventual disaster. So how can leaders handle these problems? The focus must change on a daily basis, and the following mindset can be developed among the leaders. The first goal is to have a more focused hiring and internal selection regarding positions in the company. Second, stress better engagement and retention, fostering a more positive environment. Third, encourage a more creative team-based reasoning model. Train all staff in a more optimized goal/target-setting method. For a leader to be successful with many generations, they must develop an environment of respect and appreciation for all. To do this, managers must adopt the leadership style of the Authentic leader (AL). This will be key to the organization's success with employees and the market (Warner & Sandberg, 2010).

### **Authentic Leaders**

When one adopts this leadership style, they own their personal experiences by knowing themselves and acting in a way that is consistent with the individual's true essence. As the leader grows and develops, the level of authenticity increases along a continuum, and inauthenticity fades away within the person. Once the leader embraces their personal values and beliefs, it is easier to manage different generations. Authenticity, of course, is the core of AL and comes from an infrastructure of positive psychology and organizational behavior. When this happens, positive behaviors of resilience, hope, optimism, confidence, and innovation develop, and motivation and engagement increase. Authentic leaders tend to influence staff through these psychological processes, and positive gains are realized throughout the organization. Employees then take managers' cues, exhibit transparent decision-making, and are more committed to work every day. Workers learn how to behave and remain emotionally and physically entrenched in the mission and vision. They will also remain more cognitively aware during work hours, increasing productivity. At this point, meaningfulness in work activities increases, desired behaviors are displayed, and job performance increases (Sims et al., 2019).

Turnover, tardiness, and absenteeism will decrease because AL provides a system of sustaining and enhancing organizational performance and engagement. Team performance will improve, which will aid in increasing profits. In the infrastructure of AL, there is a relationship

between the style of leadership, multiple generations, and positive job outcomes. Social identification within the AL style allows the employee to view personally that they are part of the team. It also assists staff in deriving pride from the team membership and provides a perception that belonging to the team is an essential aspect of their identity. Since perception is reality, this is important to the team member when it comes to buying into the organization's objectives, mission, and vision. This is critical if the company wishes to be successful in the market. Authentic leaders increase social identification by increasing their values when interacting with associates by encouraging the staff to be concerned with benefiting the collective. This, in turn, makes the work team more successful, motivated, and engaged (Sims et al., 2019).

**Job Involvement**

Job involvement is a crucial ingredient in leading different generations. It is defined as the degree to which the staff member identifies with the work that they do and how vital the role is to their work life. When dealing with many generations, this is key in leading those different individuals from varied age groups. AL is an excellent way to ensure this happens, and it helps the staff members to identify more with the work role involved in the day-to-day tasks. This in turn will achieve a more collective behavior within the multi-generational team fostering stronger collaboration. Work involvement is heavily related to supervisor support and motivation regardless of age group, culture, or gender. Work role identity is affected by work involvement and is created by a positive work environment and job satisfaction. It is a sense that the team is one working together and accomplishing objectives every day. It is clear that AL is an excellent tool to use when leading employees of different ages. It provides an atmosphere of cooperation, understanding, tolerance, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas. This can be a critical factor in company success and increased profits(Sims et al., 2019).

**The Mindset of the Generations**

Four distinct generations are working today: The baby boomers, the X generation, the Y generation, and the Z generation. This can be a significant challenge to leaders in all age groups. At times it can be difficult to get all four generations working together and going in the same direction. If collaboration does not happen, then the organization's mission, vision, and objectives will not be accomplished. This can be disastrous for the organization regarding profits, market share, and brand awareness. Management has to be aware of each generation's mindset to lead them successfully (Kaifi et al., 2012).

**The Baby Boomers**

This generation mostly grew up in strong economic times, and the culture, norms, and ideals were changing rapidly. Primarily this group are optimists, believe in progress, expect wars to end, and view racism as an issue only in the past. Individuals born in this period did not grow up dependent on technology. Because of this, babyboomers view technology as an artifact of the organization. In understanding this collective they share traits with the other generations, prefer autonomy, and often have hobbies. It is common for this generation to volunteer for environmental causes and have political affiliations. They are outspoken and have concrete views on many societal issues as well as work issues. Servant leadership is the best style to lead this group (Kaifi et al., 2012).

**The X Generation**

This group has some specific traits. They are individualistic, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, risk-tolerant, value work-life balance, and understand the value of cultural diversity. Many authors state that this generation is less formal and more adaptable than baby boomers. This group is more focused on outcomes rather than the task process. Many have claimed that they lack people skills and sometimes ignore the organization's culture. For Gen X, the independence factor comes with some negatives, such as being impatient, as stated, poor people skills, possessing much cynicism, being straightforward, and can give the perception of hastily or roughly constructed responses. The authentic leadership style works best for this generation (Kaifi et al., 2012).

### **Millennials**

This generation is digitally orientated and technically savvy. Most only know a world with cell phones, the internet, and social media. This fact makes them an asset when it comes to dealing with new technologies. Millennials prefer job flexibility and varied experiences. Furthermore, they prefer collective action and working in teams and favor careers that matter to them. Jobs must have meaning to get them to engage and feel empowered to the fullest extent. They are civic-minded, eco-aware, socially conscious, and optimistic. Also, millennials are opinionated and wish to be heard regarding their views and ideas of the things around them. This generation values health, freedom, family security, friendship, and self-respect. Communication is a critical trait that an organization must have for the employee to get engaged in the organization's mission and objectives. Nevertheless, some may need assistance with one-on-one communication and oral and written skills. They thrive with team effectiveness and enjoy special projects. They have often been referred to as the *trophy generation* or *trophy kids* because as they grew up, most received trophies for participation rather than winning. Because of this factor, they do not care for in-house competition and organizational politics. Many fear long-term commitments because of some of the events that transpired concerning their parents as they grew up, such as divorce, the dot.com bubble, and the junk bond crisis. Transformational leadership is the best leadership style for millennials (Kaifi et al., 2012).

### **The Z Generation**

The Z generation has been shaped by social change and global events. This generation has also been influenced by the emerging child-focused society and is the first generation to be raised with the internet. The age group expects to be treated as peers, appreciate a work environment that is casual in nature, prosper in a culturally diverse organization, and work best in team-driven company culture. This group is achievement-orientated, confident, and technology orientated. They also believe a career is a means to an end, not a destination. Z's prefer real-time communication, such as texting, instant messaging, and the use of cell phones. Because they have never lived without it, technology is a natural part of their professional and personal life. This demographic prefers rewards like autonomy, flexibility, and opportunity. Bridgers, as sometimes they are called, need to contribute, have a work ethic of integration, and prefer a communication style that is immediate and casual. For example, the attitude they portray is one of "I will, I can, and just let me". The leadership style to use with this generation is a combination of servant leader and authentic leader (Ballone, 2007).

### **Generational Awareness**

How can we be more aware of the different generations working in the organization? First of all, leaders need to tap into the preferred work style of the employee. This will increase engagement, empowerment, retention, and performance. Next, be aware that generational differences will change the organizational culture and how staff relates to it. When leaders realize the events and experiences that have shaped the different generations, they can adjust and adapt their leadership style to fit the age group. This requires strategic commitment and taking advantage of generational strengths. This will create a company culture that is stronger, more adaptive, innovative, and one that can move forward at any time. As this happens, the organization will become more profitable and promote collaborative relationships among teams. Brand awareness will then create a more engaged staff and involvement in the mission and vision of the daily activities that need to be achieved. Also, it is crucial to understand that each generation views "face time" differently and that leaders must adjust to those perspectives. Furthermore, leaders must be aware of age group differences among vendors and customers. For example, if you are dealing with boomers, is the message clearly laid out and phrased professionally? Concerning X's,

does the product or service provide a benefit, and do you listen to suggestions? With millennials, are you direct, honest, and willing to provide additional resources? The Z generation will appreciate an informal and collaborative relationship in all interactions. Z's will also need a connection to social and environmental issues(Ballone, 2007).

### **The Keys to Being Successful with a Blended Workforce**

Leaders must be aware of the different generations and how to lead them. Understand what gets each age group motivated, engaged, and empowered daily. Having a core leadership style is always a sound management tool. However, one must be able to adjust the style to fit the generation. Using the transactional style rarely works because it disregards the human element of the leadership equation. Each age group has specific commonalities and stark differences. Leadership must know, understand, and be able to take advantage of each of these characteristics. If this is done, it will increase the organization's effectiveness and foster an

environment of trust, respect, appreciation, and teamwork. It will create a path to success and

increased profits.

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