

Generational Diversity: A Challenge For Leading Lights: An Analytical Study in the Education Sector

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Abstract

Workplaces today are highly diversified with the employees coming from different countries, belonging to differences races, age groups, religions and having gender differences which results into workforce diversity. Valuing such a diverse workforce means being fully aware of differences in behavior and strengths, acknowledging biases/prejudices and avoiding assumptions among the employees and focusing on job performance and conduct. The generation to which a person belongs is one of the very important determinant of workforce diversity. It is reasonable to expect that someone from your own era or a person sharing same birth years will have quite a bit in common due to the environmental factors which they were all exposed to and shaped by when they were young. At present, workforce representing four generations viz. Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y are working side by side in the organizations. It is evident from the previous researches that differences in the attitudes, values, and beliefs influences the expectations for leadership across generations. In this paper, a modest attempt was made to check whether significant differences exist among faculty members towards the expected leadership styles. A sample size of 690 faculty members from management colleges in Delhi and NCR region was selected. Using Factor Analysis and One Way Anova, it was observed that there are significant differences in preferences of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y members for their preferred leadership styles. The study calls the attention of HR Managers to this fact and suggest them to revise their leadership styles keeping in mind the changing needs and expectation of diverse workforce.

Keywords: workforce diversity, leadership styles, generations, baby boomers

1. Introduction

Workplaces today are facing acute difficulty not because there is downsizing, changes because of technology, severe competition or greed for authority or resources. It is a difficulty resulting from differences among individuals because of their diverse view points, perception, ambitions and work styles. Workplaces today are highly diversified with the employees belonging to different genders, religions, age groups, qualification and countries. This demarcation among the workforce is called workforce diversity. For reaping the benefits of workforce diversity, it is very important to understand the differences among diverse employees, their work styles, their preferences and then managing them in a way so that both organization and employees themselves get benefitted from the differences which they are bringing to the workplace. In other words, it emphasizes to remain conscious

about the needs and expectations, accepting biases/differences in opinions, controlling their strengths and motivating each and everyone towards job performance.

This paper will be focusing on Generational Diversity among workforce. Generational cohorts include individuals born around the same time who share distinctive social or historical life events during critical developmental periods. Each generation is influenced by broad forces for eg. their family background, colleagues, media, social and cultural events that create common value systems which distinguish each generation from the other growing up at different times. This makes it easy to predict and understand how the different generational groups or the people born during the same time prefer to be communicated with, motivated, recognized and rewarded.

The study seeks to explain the generational differences among the three generations i.e. Baby Boomers, Generation X and

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Generation Y on preferred leadership styles among University teachers. To achieve the objectives of the study, the paper has four sections, Section 1 gives the introduction of workforce diversity and a brief overview of generational differences, Section 2 gives extensive review of present literature across globe, defining the different generations, their characteristics and their influence on leadership expectations. Section 3 gives data and methodological issues. Section 4 gives summary of findings, implications for HR Managers and Recommendations. References form the part of last section.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Leadership

A leader is one who directs the efforts of his followers towards meaningful performance and motivates them to strive hard for achieving objectives effectively. In other words, it is a behavioural quality through which people guide and control other's activities to achieve common goals. He defines the objectives of his subordinates and guides them towards achieving those objectives. He also creates and sustains enthusiasm among them for achieving organisational objectives (Aswathappa, 2010; Robbins, 2003).

2.2. Generational Differences

Present workforce is divided among four groups each having their unique needs, expectations and requirements from the workplace. These four groups as suggested by Lancaster & Stillman (2002) and Hammill (2005) are as follows:

1. Veterans - Born between 1922 and 1945. This generation is also known as seniors or traditionalists. They grew up with a sense of duty. They see work as an obligation and believe that authority must be respected (Hammill et al. 2005). They have an individual work style and a preference for clear leadership through command and control (Hammill et al. 2005). Veterans tend to have a strong work ethic and prefer an element of discipline in the workplace (Murphy, 2010).
2. Baby Boomers - Born between 1946 and 1964. Just like Veterans, Baby Boomers too have a good work ethic. However, unlike Veterans, they prefer tasks which involve teamwork (Hammill et al. 2005). They wish to be involved with the decision-making process which means that a more consensual leadership style is most appropriate for Baby Boomers (Murphy et al. 2010). They value the personal attachment and direct contact. Therefore, direct interaction or face to face communication is highly appreciated by this generation (Hammill et al. 2005).

3. Generation X - Born between 1965 and 1980 and they are also called as Gen Xers. This generation sees work differently as compared to their seniors. They like independent tasks and want to do things in their own way (Murphy et al. 2010). For them everybody is equal and resist following rules and regulations strictly. They are more entrepreneurial in their approach towards work, and appreciate direct and instant feedback on their performance (Hammill et al. 2005; Zemke, Raines, & Flipczak, 1999).
4. Generation Y Born between 1981 and 2000 and also known as Gen Y, Millennial Generation or Echo Boomers, this generation is the most up-to-date generation at workplace. As compared to Generation X, they have a more participative approach to work and like to work in teams. They are strong promoters of work to live and believe in maintaining balance between work and family life (Hammill et al. 2005). They set high standards for setting their goals and get satisfaction by achieving them. (Murphy et al. 2010). They also emphasise creativity and get motivated by using different ways and methods for doing same task. (Murphy et al. 2010). They are connected with technology 24/7 and are multi-tasking (Hammill et al. 2005; Murphy et al. 2010).

2.3 Leadership and Generational Differences

The work characteristics of different generational groups are an important issue for their leaders. It is proved that employees having different work characteristics and different work expectations will prefer different leadership styles (Tulgan, 1996) and their performance and quality of outcome will vary according to their compatibility with the given leadership style. Abramson (1997) has concluded that all the developed countries are now moving from 'industry economy' to 'service economy' and then to 'knowledge economy'. With more and more work transforming into 'knowledge work', traditional leadership styles are becoming obsolete. Further, it is also suggested that to be effective, organisation's need to move away from hierarchical position-based structure to knowledge-based influence. Arsenault (2004), in a study conducted in USA found that significant differences were found among four generations for their preferred leadership styles. While Veterans prefer leaders who are loyal and honest, Baby Boomers prefer leaders who are caring, competent and honest. Preferred leadership style for Gen Xers and Gen Yers were determination and ambitious. They want leaders who can challenge the system and are confident for themselves. Yu & Miller (2005) in their study to validate generational differences in preferred leadership styles among the Taiwanese Workforce working in Manufacturing Sector indicated that Baby Boomers tend to be more loyal to employers and willing to accept a 'chain of command' leadership style and hence task-oriented leadership style is more acceptable to Baby Boomers. Generation X wish to

be treated as partner rather than a worker and also want to use their power and authority in daily activities. Therefore they prefer a relationship-oriented leadership style.

Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown (2007) in their study observed that boomer generation prefers leaders who are persuasive and diplomatic and trustworthy, Gen-Xers value leaders who are optimistic, persuasive, have experience and who recognize their talents and can give them feedback. Millennials valued leaders who were dedicated and creative and cared about them personally.

Of all the literature survey done, it was found that lot of research has been done in various organizations among blue collar and white collar employees. However there is paucity in education sector and this study is a modest attempt to bridge the gap in this sector.

3. Data and Methodology

The study therefore seeks to address the generational issues among faculty members working in Delhi and NCR region and tries to infer whether significant differences exist among different generations towards leadership style preferences.

3.1. Research Objective

To what extent preferences for leadership qualities vary across generations

- H₁: There are significant differences on preferences for leadership styles across generations
- H₀: There are no significant differences on preferences for leadership styles across generations

The research design for the present study was basically descriptive and exploratory in nature.

3.2. Survey Instrument

For studying the leadership expectations, a version of Kouzes and Posner's (Pierce & Newstrom, 2000) Checklist of Admired Leaders is taken for reference wherein interviewers are required to rate the characteristics they most admire in leaders. A Likert Scale of five was used from 1 being Significantly Important to 5 being Significantly Unimportant.

A convenience sample of faculty members working in Delhi and NCR area was used for the study. Questionnaires were distributed to around 1100 respondents. The survey resulted in a 62.7% return rate with 690 usable responses. The response population was 38% female and 62% male, with 46% participants identifying themselves as Assistant Professors, 25% identifying themselves as Associate Professors and 29% identifying as Professors. It was ensured that all generations under study are represented in equal number in participant population (refer tables 3–5).

Factor Analysis and ANOVA were used to find out the differences among generations on their leadership expectations.

4. Empirical Results

This section contains the analysis and interpretations of results. To begin the analysis sample adequacy test was conducted the results of which are shown in table 1. The results are satisfactory with the value of KMO and Bartlett's Test as. 834 (refer table 6). This is in the acceptable range (Jolliffe, 2002; Nargundkar, 2005). Three factors have been extracted which cumulatively explained 60.937% of the total variance (refer table 7).

After the number of extracted factors is decided, the next task of researcher is to give appropriate names to the identified factors.

Factor 1: Fairness and Competency

This factor has been named as Fairness and Competency as it includes being careful, ambitious, competency in job and honest to subordinates. It can be therefore concluded that being fair and competent is one of the most important leadership quality appreciated by the employees at work place.

Factor 2: Team Orientation

This has been revealed to be next most important factor with explained variance of 20.237%. Being able to give best to the team members, self-confidence and encouraging team performance rather than individual performance were loaded high on this factor and thus the factor has been named as leader's Team Orientation.

Factor 3: Creativity and Foresightedness

This is the next important factor with 18.962% of the variance. Three leadership qualities loaded high on this factor included forward looking, completing assignments on time and good imagination and creative skills. The factor has been named as Creativity and Foresightedness.

4.1. Effect of Generations on Various Reason Factors

For ascertaining whether significant difference exists between various generations, One way ANOVA is applied.

Decision Rule: When the significance value of F-test/Welch test is less than 0.05, Null hypothesis is rejected. When the Null Hypothesis is rejected, Post Hoc analysis will be used for further ascertaining which groups differ among their mean score.

Summary of Findings

1. The results of the analysis of the ten leadership expectations measured in the study indicated that there were significant differences among the generations on two out of three factors extracted through principal component analysis. (refer table 9)

Table 1. Showing loadings of preferences for leadership factors

Factor No.	Name of Dimension	Item No.	Variables	KMO ¹	Variance Explained ²	Factor loading	Reliability ³
1	Fairness and Competency	54	A leader must be caring towards his subordinates.	.834	21.738	.837	0.715
		53	A leader must be very ambitious.			.738	
		55	A leader should be competent enough in his job to lead others.			.643	
		58	A leader should be very honest to his job and organization.			.453	
2	Team Orientation	61	A leader should be able to motivate his team members to give their best.		20.237	.785	0.662
		62	A leader must be self - confident.			.744	
		60	A leader should encourage team performance rather than individual performance.			.646	
3	Creativity and Foresightedness	57	A leader should always be forward looking.		18.962	.805	0.718
		58	A leader should have the strong determination to complete all the assignments very successfully.			.759	
		59	A leader should have good imagination and creative skills.			.640	

¹Refer Table 6

²Refer Table 7

³Refer Table 8

- Three factors extracted included, (1) Fairness and Competency, (2) Team Orientation and (3) Creativity and Foresightedness.
- One way Anova was then applied to these factors to check effect of generations on factors and significant differences were found to exist on two factors, namely Team Orientation and Creativity and Foresightedness.
- For the factor, Fairness and Competency, there were no significant differences observed among generation. Hence this factor carries equal importance for all the generations.
- Post hoc analysis (Turkey/Tamhane Method) was employed to find out which generation is different from the other generations based on their mean scores for factors Team Orientation and Creativity and Foresightedness.
- The questionnaire was developed using Like Scale of 5 wherein '1' referred to Strongly Important and '5' indicated Strongly Unimportant; hence lower the mean score of the factors higher is the importance given by the respondents for that factor.
- For the factor, Team Orientation, it was found that this factor, Team Orientation, is very important for Baby Boomer Generation (1945–1964) as compared to other two generations i.e. Generation X and Generation Y. (refer table 10).
- Baby Boomer generation prefer team performance because it always gives them the opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts and satisfy their needs for exchanging feelings and emotions. They are emotional people who don't mind

sharing their rewards with each other as they have been brought up in an era where sharing of resources with each other was emphasized whereas other two generations prefer bosses who evaluate performance on individual basis.

- Similarly, factor Creativity and Foresightedness has also been rated high by Baby Boomer Generation as compared to other two generations. (refer table 11).
- Baby boomer generation has struggled a lot during their early years. They have learnt to fight with all hardships whatever coming their way. They want their leader also to be forward looking and with strong determination who can look for opportunities outside and then achieve them using their experience and skills. Further, since they experienced scarcity of resources in their early childhood, they have learned how to make big out of small. Similarly, they expect their leader also to have creativity and imagination power so that they can do wonders out of limited resources and prove their point.
- Descriptive analysis was used to compare preferences of Leadership Expectations across generations based on the mean values (refer table 2).

4.2 Comparison of Findings with Studies across Globe

These results differ somewhat from the results of the prior study (Arsenault, 2004). Arsenault in his study of leadership

Table 2. Top 5 factors influencing leadership expectations across generations

Sr. No.	Leadership expectations	Overall Mean ⁴	Ranking		
			Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y
1	A leader must be self - confident.	1.28	1	1	1*
2	A leader should be able to motivate his team members to give their best.	1.33	2	2	1*
3	A leader should always be forward looking.	1.4	3		4
4	A leader should have the strong determination to complete all the assignments very successfully.	1.41*	5	4	3
4	A leader should have good imagination and creative skills.	1.41*	4	3	
5	A leader should be very honest to his job and organization.	1.44		5	2

*. items having same mean scores
⁴Refer Table 12

Table 3. Showing Frequency of Questionnaires filled by each Generation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
				Percent	Percent
Valid	1945-1964	230	33.3	33.3	33.3
	1965-1980	230	33.3	33.3	66.7
	1981-2000	230	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	690	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Showing number of questionnaire filled by Gender count

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Year of Birth	1945-1964	172	58	230
	1965-1980	143	87	230
	1981-2000	115	115	230
Total		430	260	690

Table 5. Showing No. of respondents according to Year of Birth and Occupation

		Occupation			Total
		Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Professor	
Year of Birth	1945-1964	15	59	156	230
	1965-1980	106	78	46	230
	1981-2000	197	33	0	230
Total		318	170	202	690

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.834	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1847.009
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

Table 7. Total variance explained

Phase=Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings			
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.174	21.738	21.738
2	2.024	20.237	41.975
3	1.896	18.962	60.937

Table 8. Reliability statistics

N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (Factor 1)	Cronbach's Alpha (Factor 2)	Cronbach's Alpha (Factor 3)
4	.715	.662	.718

Table 9. Effect of generations on leader factors

Factors	Levene Statistic	Sig.	F	Sig.	Welch Statistics	Sig.
Fairness and Competency	5.728	.003	2.110	.122	1.967	.141
Team Orientation	5.994	.003	3.327	.036	3.395	.034
Creativity and Foresightedness	.592	.554	5.193	.006	5.205	.006

Multiple Comparisons

Table 10. Test = Tamhane, Dependent Variable= Team Orientation

	(I) Year of Birth	(J) Year of Birth		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Fairness and Competency Team Orientation	1945-1964	dimension3	1965-1980	-.20641204	.09486421	.088
			1981-2000	-.20879092	.09016133	.062
Creativity and Foresightedness	1965-1980	dimension3	1945-1964	.20641204	.09486421	.088
			1981-2000	-.00237888	.09372116	1.000
	1981-2000	dimension3	1945-1964	.20879092	.09016133	.062
			1965-1980	.00237888	.09372116	1.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Multiple Comparisons

Table 11. Test = Tukey HSD, Dependent Variable= Creativity and Foresightedness

(I) Year of Birth	(J) Year of Birth		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	
dimension2	1945-1964	dimension3	1965-1980	-.20430999	.09268817	.071
			1981-2000	-.29085790*	.09268817	.005
	1965-1980	dimension3	1945-1964	.20430999	.09268817	.071
			1981-2000	-.08654791	.09268817	.619
	1981-2000	dimension3	1945-1964	.29085790*	.09268817	.005
			1965-1980	.08654791	.09268817	.619

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 12. Mean and standard deviation – leadership expectations

	Year of Birth							
	1945-1964		1965-1980		1981-2000		Total	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
53.A leader must be very ambitious.	1.72	.621	1.64	.644	1.61	.743	1.66	.672
54.A leader must be caring towards his subordinates.	1.56	.593	1.59	.653	1.51	.632	1.55	.627
55.A leader should be competent enough in his job to lead others.	1.41	.590	1.44	.556	1.49	.639	1.45	.596
56.A leader should have the strong determination to complete all the assignments very successfully.	1.35	.477	1.43	.600	1.45	.609	1.41	.566
57.A leader should always be forward looking.	1.30	.485	1.45	.579	1.46	.617	1.40	.567
58.A leader should be very honest to his job and organization.	1.50	.527	1.44	.556	1.38	.562	1.44	.550
59.A leader should have good imagination and creative skills.	1.32	.546	1.41	.543	1.50	.574	1.41	.559
60.A leader should encourage team performance rather than individual performance.	1.39	.564	1.49	.639	1.49	.672	1.46	.627
61.A leader should be able to motivate his team members to give their best.	1.28	.506	1.38	.554	1.33	.490	1.33	.518
62.A leader must be self - confident.	1.20	.429	1.30	.530	1.33	.498	1.28	.490

expectations among generational differences reported top five leadership expectations for Baby Boomer Generation as Honesty, Competence, Loyalty, Caring and Determination. Similarly, in the previous study Generation X preferred leadership style included Honesty, Competence, Loyalty, Determination and Ambitious and generation Y's preferred styles included Honesty, determination, loyalty, competence and ambitious.

The differences noted between this study and previous research may be due to differing age groupings for the generations used in the Arsenault study as compared to this research. Additionally, difference of education and type of work performed by the participants in the respective studies can also be the reason behind the differences in opinions and rankings. Arsenault's study was conducted on under-graduate students while for the present study, the population consisted of teaching faculty members from universities and colleges.

4.3 Implications for Human Resource Managers and Organizations

1. From the study, it was observed that top scored mean items highlighting the preferences for leadership expectations across generations were same for all the generations. This makes the task of organisation and human resource managers even more easy i.e. by concentrating on few factors, they can satisfy the needs and expectation of all the generations.
2. Factors like Self-confidence and Team Orientation of leader were the top rankers in each generation. Managers are therefore required to see that while appointing or recruiting the managerial posts, they should see that candidates have got confidence in themselves and they are good in motivating their team.
3. Forward looking approach, good imagination and creative skills are other important factors which are appreciated by all the generations in their leaders.
4. It was observed that Baby Boomers prefer leaders who evaluate on the basis of team performance rather than individual performance.
5. Generation Y employees prefer leaders who are honest to the organisation. Through literature survey also, it was observed that Generation Y employees are more socially responsible and are ethical in their services towards society. To attract these employees, it is necessary for the organization to enrich their value systems.
6. Generation X employees prefer leaders who are competent enough to lead. The organizations should not just appoint managers based on their knowledge or qualifications. Managers who are really competent enough and have got expertise in their areas should be selected to take the lead roles so that they can motivate the team members under them to contribute their best.
7. Further, it was also observed that though Generation Y employees appreciate leaders who motivate team performance but they want individual feedback and rewards based on their performance. They do not believe in sharing the resources and rewards with team members. While baby boomers don't mind sharing their resources and rewards with their team members.

4.4 Suggestions and Recommendations

1. It was observed that all the faculty members from all generations expect their leaders to be self-confident, forward looking and optimistic. Organising regular Faculty Development Programmes or Staff Development Programmes on positive personality or optimism can help leaders to win the heart of their team members.
2. Leaders should recognize the different work characteristics between generational groups and apply leadership styles that will contribute positively to employee motivation. For example while Boomers prefer annual performance feedback and wants to be directed as to what is expected out of them, Generation X is individual performer and expects feedback on regular basis. Generation Y on the other hand prefers to work in group where they can share each other's ideas and opinion, but they want their feedback individually and frequently.
3. Changes in job design, system of rewards and organisation structure might also help the organisation to have a sound leader subordinate structure. Baby Boomers and Generation X employees, since experienced, prefer the leadership style where complete freedom is there to take their decisions and the way they want to work. Hence, they can be given an assignment to complete with little supervision and support as and when needed.
4. Generation Y employees can be put under mentors who can guide them and support them and clear their doubts and difficulties. This will give them confidence and also knowledge on how to take decisions under stressful situations.
5. The organization should appoint leaders based on their knowledge, skills and merit rather than their qualification or seniority. Because only talented leaders who are experienced and are experts in their field can lead a team with confidence. This will also develop respect among team members for their leader.
6. The management of Colleges and institute should know how to motivate their team towards giving their best performance. The management therefore is required to have their leader competent enough to meet these expectations. In this way,

they will be able to generate respect towards their immediate bosses which will in turn help in building smooth and effective relationship between management and employees.

5. Conclusion

The above research calls attention to the fact that differences are existing among generations and if serious efforts are not undertaken to develop compatibility, there is every possibility for conflict and problems arising between members of different generational groups. According to a recent survey - nearly 70% of respondents said that their organizations do not have specific programs in place to address generational differences, while one out of three companies reported that generational issues are not important or only somewhat important in their organizations. However, in reality this perception is proving wrong as organizations are frequently turning to consultancies to help them sort out generational problems encountered in the form of communication, leadership, relationships, and their ability to attract and retain key talent. Managers and leaders lead the way which comes naturally to them because of their membership to particular generation without giving a thought to what other generations prefer. This is the root cause of problem and conflicts starts arising. They are required to treat each generation differently. For eg. while Boomers prefer annual performance feedback and wants to be directed as to what is expected out of them, Generation X is individual performer and expects feedback on regular basis. Generation Y on the other hand prefers to work in group where they can share each others ideas and opinion, but they want their feedback individually and frequently.

5.1 Future Research:

The scope of the study was very limited as it is confined to faculty members working in Universities and colleges and Institutes approved by AICTE in Delhi and NCR. Similar research work can be conducted on all India basis to have a wider view of Generational Diversity among different cohorts. Understanding the generations and their expectations can provide useful insights for framing out strategies to attract, develop and retain young

university graduates to work in the education industry and stopping the switching over of Generational X faculty members to corporate world who are needed to fill the gap created when Baby Boomers will retire.

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