

Bridging the Gap in Leadership Development within
Generation X and Y

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Bridging the Gap in Leadership within Generation X and Y

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Abstract

As the baby boomers come closer to retirement, many fear that the next generation will lack the necessary leadership skills needed to take on organizational leadership roles. These concerns appear to be centered on the differences within modern day leadership development programs in comparison to traditional leadership development programs. With these two generations sharing very few similarities many wonder how these two different generations will bridge the gap. Within the evolution of leadership many theories have been studied with attempts to determine the best way to train an individual to lead. This study concluded that both traditional and modern day theories and methodologies must be merged to yield an effective leader.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The baby boom began in 1946 and continued through 1964. During those 19 years, 76 million people were born. According to the Arlene Dohm, an economist in the Office of Employment Projections, in 1978, when baby-boomers were aged 15 to 32 they made up approximately 45 percent of the labor force (Dohm, 2000). As the age of the labor force increases, a greater number of people will leave the labor force due to death, disability, or retirement. Of the 25 million people projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to leave the labor force between 1998 and 2008, 22 million will be aged 45 years or older and thus will be leaving mostly to retire (Dohm, 2000). Over the 1998 -2008 period the oldest baby-bombers will be aged 52-62. After 2008, as more and more baby-boomers reach retirement age, the implications of their retirements are generating great concerns regarding whether or not Generation X and Y will have the necessary leadership skills needed to lead within the near future. This concern grows greater within the business, politics, and education industries.

Statement of the Problem

As the generation of the past prepares for the upcoming transition, a question is posed whether or not the leadership development taught in modern days yields an effective leader in comparison to learning methodologies of the past. Do the born/trained characteristics of this new age impact their ability to be effective leaders? As researchers continue to debate the issue of whether leaders are born or can be trained, the time to pass the torch draws near. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Labor Statistics steadily shows executives are reaching retirement age, and leaving many to be concerned about the readiness of the next generation for leadership.

The Purpose of the Study

This study explores the differences and similarities between the upcoming generation (X & Y) and that of the past generation (the baby boomers) regarding work ethic and leadership. More specifically, this study examined whether or not the traditional development programs were more effective in leadership development in comparison to modern day programs.

Significance of the Study

According to a recent study by the Conference Board, by 2010 about 64 million workers--40 percent of the nation's workforce--will be poised for retirement, though not all will choose to leave. The number of people ages 35 to 44 in the nation's workforce actually will decline by 10 percent, while the number of workers 45 to 54 will grow by 21 percent, and the number of 55- to 64-year-olds will grow by 52 percent (Kiger, 2005). Kiger (2005) also suggests that the retiring workforce will cause many organizations to struggle to sustain, grow and improve companies due to the influx of inexperienced workers.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted through the Gateway Technical College (Racine, Wisconsin) & Karmann libraries (University of Wisconsin Platteville) over a period of 33 days. Primary research was conducted via internet through EBSCO Host, with ERIC & Academic Search Elite. Key search topics included leadership development programs, modern day, past, generation, X and Y.

Method of Approach

A review of literature related to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of the evolution of leadership development, as it compares to modern day leadership development theories, and the changing of the generation as it applies to taking the lead was conducted. The findings are summarized and recommendations made.

Definition of Terms

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Leadership-</i> | A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. |
| <i>Generation X-</i> | The generation following the post World War II baby boom, especially people born in the United States and Canada from the early 1960's to the late 1970's. |
| <i>Generation Y-</i> | The generation following generation X, especially people born in the United States and Canada from the early 1980's to the late 1990's. |
| <i>Baby Boomers</i> | This generation was born between 1946 and 1964. |

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Many researchers believe that several organizations will face major leadership crisis as the new generation enters into the workforce. These concerns are centered on generational differences amongst employees and specifically those within leadership positions (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007).

Based on the research performed on this topic, these issues were surrounded by basic stereotypes of each generation. Deal (cited in Rossi, 2007) author of *Retiring the Generation Gap*, argues that all generations want the same thing at work, and share similar values. All generations want to be respected within the work place. Although their values are similar they tend to express them differently. Due to all three generations having different ways of defining what they value, it is often a mistaken indicator of the generations wanting something different. Her argument is based upon surveying over 3,000 corporate executives within seven years.

According to Rossi (2007) Deal's research concluded that the arguments tended to focus more around power. Who has the power, and who wants the power is an on going battle amongst the

generations. This power struggle brings on defense mechanisms causing all generations to use stereotypes against each competing age group (Rossi, 2007).

Characteristics of Generation X & Y

Generation X (born 1961-1981): Stereotypes & Assumptions

Research has suggested that many disgruntled managers complain that this generation is selfish, and unmotivated, and are slackers. Due to, the perceived lack of motivation this generation offers very little insight to the organization, in manager's eyes. Although, many consider this generation as slackers many admire their communication skills and technological savvy. Most companies have found that Generation X employees thrive in an environment where they learn new skills and apply new problem-solving techniques. In fact, this generation is more accepting of constant change than its boomer counterpart (Smith, 2000).

Generation Y (persons born between 1979-1994):

Stereotypes & Assumptions

According to research this generation may be viewed negatively, but is different from the boomers and generation X.

The difference is based on their childhood experiences in comparison to generation X, and baby boomers (Goldsmith, 2008). The parents of this generation have not taught their children the same work ethic that was passed down to their generation. While this generation is accustomed to the nice things that their parents work hard for, they have no clue of the hard work it took to achieve those nice things (Goldsmith, 2008).

Additionally, research shows generation Y prefers communication that is direct and constructive. They are loyal to their manager and exhibit integrity. This generation is full of energy, and is up for any challenge. In comparison to the generations before them multi-tasking and the utilization of technology comes naturally. This generation seeks happiness within their careers, and if they are unhappy retaining them will be difficult (Sujansky, 2002).

As assumptions continue to be made, Generation X and Y assume that not only do baby boomers resist change, but they are unwilling to understand the new age. All leaders in each generation must learn to dismiss stereotypes and gain an understanding of all generations within areas of learning styles, thought processes, how different generation handles issues under stress, backgrounds, and interest.

According to researcher Marshall Goldsmith it is important for managers to learn all they can about the emerging generation Y. Companies must embrace the generation and begin by understanding the culture, and most importantly how other companies are transitioning them into the organization as employees (Goldsmith, 2008).

According to Smith (2000) it is important that members of the organization take time to understand how their differences can play a major role in the operations ability to be successful.

Traditional Leadership Theories

Within the evolution of leadership many theories have been studied with attempts to determine the best way to train an individual to lead. These theories continue to serve as a basis of training and development for the upcoming generation.

There have been several debates on whether leaders and non-leaders can be differentiated. Various studies have taken place to identify whether or not leadership can be learned. Research has

found that there are several characteristics that define leaders. Those traits tend to show a consistency on areas of intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) argue that it is not clear whether or not leaders are like other people. They argue that leaders differ from non-leaders on six different traits: drive, the desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. According to Kirkpatrick and Locke individuals can be born with these traits, learn these traits, or both.

Skills Approach

As researchers continued to examine personal traits, studies began to suggest that leadership is a process that varies based on the situation at hand, and how leaders and followers handle it. Where the trait approach focuses on leaders being identified only through specific traits, the skills approach focuses on human, conceptual and technical skills.

The skills approach has roots dating back to 1955, with the classic works of Katz (1955). Traditionally learning methods have included lectures, case studies, and discussion. As organizations begin to rapidly change they are constantly creating new demands for leaders. Companies are taking a streamlined approach with integrated processes, more employee involvement, and increased

emphasis on teams and shared leadership. As this transition begins to swiftly take place, it is only necessary to tap into the learning methodologies. This includes facilitating more activities and materials focusing on more physical challenges that teach teamwork, improve interpersonal relations, and build self-awareness. Although personality does play a major role, the skills approach suggests that skills and abilities play a major role in being an effective leader. Katz claims effective leadership depends on three basic personal skills.

Technical Skills- includes being knowledgeable within a specialized area. A more modern day example that demonstrates Katz technical skills would include, being highly skilled with computers if one is heading an IT Department. (Katz, 1955).

Human Skills- includes working with people versus working with things. These skills help a leader work effectively with peers, subordinates and others. Human skills will allow the leader to help people remain in harmony through working together. The human skills also foster a sense of trust in knowing that this leader holds skills with which followers will feel comfortable and secure in coming to the leader with issues that may be of concern to them (Katz, 1955).

Conceptual Skills- includes the ability to develop ideas and concepts. Conceptual skills, allow the leader to put everything into a perspective in which can be understood. An example would be: examining a company policy, vision, mission and interpreting what it stands for and where it is going (Katz, 1955).

Katz describes all of these skills to be of importance in order to be an effective leader (1955). Based on the management level that a leader holds, some skills may be of greater or less importance.

Although this theory is outdated and appears to have no definite impact within the workforce of either of the three generations, it still remains a valuable instrument within leadership development amongst all generations. The streamlined approach that companies are now taking into great consideration cannot be successfully implemented without the proper utilization of human, conceptual and technical skills.

Trait Theory

The trait approach focuses on the theory of individuals being born to lead. The trait approach is different from other approaches to the extent that it focuses on the individual as the

leader and not on the follower or the situation. The trait approach depicts those people who stand out in front leading our society and communities. These leaders are considered to be gifted and perform in a special way. Stogdill, who began his research on leadership in 1948, initially found that leadership would vary based on different situations. During this period Stogdill's findings indicated that a person is not a leader because they have certain traits. Rather, the traits that the person has must correlate with the situation in which the leader is directing. Basically, a person may be able to act out as a leader in one situation but may not have the ability to act out as a leader in a different situation. In 1974 Stogdill concluded that leadership involved how a person handled a situation and he determined that there were specified traits that identified leadership. Since then, evidence soon became clear that it was impossible to predict a potential for leadership based on personal traits.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) found that there were several characteristics that defined a leader. Their studies determined that leaders are not like other people, and the differences should be recognized as an important factor in the leadership process.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) determined leaders are different based on the following six traits: drive, desire to lead, honesty and

integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability and knowledge of the business.

According to Kirkpatrick and Locke individuals can be born with these traits, learn these traits or both.

Contingency Theory

The contingency theory consists of matching the leader to situations based on their leadership styles. The theory intends to reach a goal by first understanding the effectiveness of the leader, then the situation. In order for the theory to work the leader must be given a situation based on their leadership ability and style. (Fidler 1964 & Garcia, 1967) examined the contingency theory by studying several leaders who worked within the military. After reviewing the styles of these leaders Fidler (1964) was able to determine which styles were most effective and ineffective in given situations.

Path–Goal Theory

The path goal theory explains how leaders motivate their staff to accomplish goals. According to Northouse (2007), this theory was introduced by Evans in 1970. The focal point of this theory is to satisfy the employee through motivational tools that will help them work effectively in achieving the goals. This theory was developed to explain how leaders could help subordinates

achieve goals through the selection of specific behaviors that are best suited for the subordinates. The path goal theory also focuses on how each type of leader behavior has a different kind of impact on subordinate's motivation. Unlike the trait theory the path goal theory does not classify the leader into a particular category. According to Northouse (2007), the path goal theory allows leaders to adapt to their styles based on needs or situations of the subordinates. This theory works in a way where the leader can help subordinates to accomplish their work successfully. The leader oversees this through assisting in establishing their goals and paths they want to take in order to reach the goal (Northouse, 2007).

Situational Theory

According to Northouse (2007), the situational theory was developed by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969. The situational theory focuses on what leadership styles should be applied based on the situation at hand. The leadership style that needs to be applied is determined by the leader first assessing his/her followers and then determining which style will be more effective based on their skills and motivation to complete the task. Listed below are a few samples of types of styles that can be applied:

- Directive Style- This style consists of the leader giving instructions in reference to how and what goals need to be achieved.
- Coaching Style- This style allows the leader to work with the subordinate in achieving the desired goal. The coaching style helps to build confidence and trust within the subordinate's ability to successfully perform the task.
- Supporting Style- The leader does not pay close attention to goals, but shows the subordinate support through listening, praising, and communicating.

Modern Day Leadership Theories

Research suggests that leadership development programs have traditionally operated on the hope that if they could develop leadership skills and increase the knowledge of executives that in return would yield more efficient job results (Zenger, Ulrich & Smallwood, 2000). Research has not confirmed that this goal has been reached. In many cases within the workplace the disciplinary procedure is utilized as a method to reach desired results.

According to Colvin, Geoff, Demos & Telis (2007), the command and control model of leadership is not effective in today's information-based economy. Most employees aren't turning wrenches but instead are using knowledge and relationships with

results that may not be easily observed day-to-day. According to Colvin, et al., in order to reach desired results managers would have to learn to limit dictatorship styles and in turn build working relationships with employees that foster positive learning and working environments that will in turn yield positive results. (Colvin, et al., 2007).

Traditionally programs have included the following: lectures, case studies, discussion groups, reading assignments, and simulations. In addition, Zenger, et al., (2000) report most leadership programs tend to focus more on theory. Zenger et al., (2000) found that traditional leadership programs involve asking students to analyze and diagnose various concepts spending very little to no time at all on implementation. Because leadership requires all action, without skillful implementation, no amount of analysis or planning is of any value. (Zenger, et al., 2000). While some researchers suggest looking back into the past to traditional leadership programs, others suggest changing the learning methodologies in leadership development courses. Among them are Zenger, et al., (2000) who suggest that modern day leadership programs should focus on teamwork, improve interpersonal relationships, and build self-awareness.

Additionally, according to Zenger et al., (2000), it is far more powerful to start at the other end. Begin with results: What does this leader need to accomplish in the next six months, as seen by those above, alongside, and below? What outcomes balanced among the interest of employees, customers, the organizations, and investors should be produced? Therefore they propose that Leadership Development programs should include the following:

Spend time planning: Participants should be given a hands-on experience that will allow them to plan what needs to be done differently once they return to work.

Create measurements: Participants performance should be measured once they return to work. These measurements will help to determine areas that have improved as well as areas that are in need of additional training.

Provide engaging and realistic simulations: Participants should be provided with hands on experiences that will allow the participants to assess the consequences of the decisions that they have selected.

Provide examples: Examples from previous seasoned and respected leaders will provide participants an overall view of how things are accomplished. These stories will also detail situations that have not gone so well, and ways to avoid reoccurrence.

Create action-learning projects: Participants should be provided real issues that may consist of participant's role-playing scenarios. These scenarios will allow them to reenact how they would handle challenges that the organization may face. Participants will be able to discuss these issues as a group, as well as assess different methods that may be effective in solving the challenges.

Use practical, concrete content, not academic or theoretical:

Providing practical content provides a more realistic approach to learning. Zenger, et al., (2000) also suggest executive group work and peer-group work. According to Zenger, et al.(2000), modern leadership development techniques consist of developing the leader, who in turns recruits and develops a successor. The leader's ability to develop followers will yield a more knowledgeable workplace, in comparison to a workplace with a selected amount of emerging leaders. Overall, leadership should leave behind a stronger more efficient organization than what was passed to them (Zenger, et al., (2000)).

As even more theories of leadership are considered, many question whether or not these theories will prepare Generation X & Y.

Team Leadership

According to Northouse (2007) leadership in organizational groups or work teams has become one of the most popular and rapidly growing areas of leadership theory and research. Team Leadership consists of organizational groups of people working together equally to reach a common goal. In order for the goal to be achieved the team must work together to accomplish the goal. Examples of team leadership include project management teams, task forces, work units, standing committees, quality teams and improvement teams. The focus of teams began to really boom within the 1960's & 1970's era (Northouse 2007). Within the era organizational development focused on how to build effective teams as well as leadership leading teams. According to Northouse (2007) as competition grew in Japan as well as within other countries teams really became focused on quality teams, benchmarking and how to improve.

Team Leadership Model

The leadership team model places the leader in the hot seat of ensuring that the team is effective. Effective team performance begins with leader's mental model of the situation at hand. The leader assesses the team and then creates solutions given the

situation. In order to respond appropriately, the leader must be highly skilled in diversified areas to ensure the team's needs are met.

The theories of the past, which focused specifically on the changing of the leader, must continue to serve as a basis to modern day leadership development. The new learning methodologies which focus on developing both the leader and the follower, will assist in fostering stronger leaders. According to Turner (2007), effective leadership skills and development includes implementing both technical and conceptual skills. He further indicates the right assistance for this transfer of leadership knowledge would incorporate four modes of learning, which include exposure to senior leaders, action learning, cross-training assignments and after-action reports and case studies" (Turner, 2007).

The Leadership Gap

Many researchers believe that several organizations will face major leadership crisis as the new generation enters into the workforce. These concerns are centered on generational differences amongst employees and specifically those within leadership positions (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown 2007).

According to a recent study by the Conference Board, by 2010 about 64 million workers--40 percent of the nation's workforce--will be poised for retirement, though not all will choose to leave. The number of people ages 35 to 44 in the nation's workforce actually will decline by 10 percent, while the number of workers 45 to 54 will grow by 21 percent, and the number of 55- to 64-year-olds will grow by 52 percent (Kiger, Patrick 2005). Kiger also suggest that the retiring workforce will cause many organizations to struggle to sustain, grow and improve companies due to a new generation entering into the workforce.

The generation gap between the boomers and X'ers has drawn great attention due to their disagreement in reference to the proper way to behave in corporate settings. These gaps will continue to exists as long as mangers suggest that intelligence and ambition are not being applied effectively within the work environment (Smith, 2000)

Bridging the Gap

According to John C. Maxwell (Maxwell, 1993), there are three areas in which successful people developers are different

from those who are not successful in developing others.

Successful people developers:

1. Make the right assumptions about people;
2. Ask the right questions about people; and
3. Give the right assistance to people

After reviewing this information, these three principles were applied to this area of study (Bridging the Gap between Generation X & Y), and concluded all that follows:

Asking the Right Questions

The second phase in being successful in developing people; recommended by Maxwell included asking the right question. This principle included first identifying the following within this research:

1. Are there specific skills which should be strengthened within generation X & Y?
2. Are there specific gap that needs to be filled?
3. Is there a plan developed to determined what it is going to take to help each generation succeed?

Giving The Right Assistance

Once roadblocks of assumptions have been minimized, and the right questions have been asked, the transference of knowledge can then take place. According to Turner (2007), effective leadership skill development, include implementing both technical and conceptual skills. He further indicates the right assistance for this transfer of knowledge would incorporate four modes of learning, which include exposure to senior leaders, action learning, cross-training assignments and after-action reports and case studies (Turner, 2007).

The transference of knowledge will not take place overnight. Research suggests that well-designed development opportunities will assist in rapidly developing generation X & Y. These well-designed programs will give the upcoming generation a competitive advantage over their competitors.

In order to develop future leaders they must be recruited and groomed early. Most companies have continued to develop and groom individuals who have long been on a fast track to success. Many organizations are moving past that and are focusing on developing young talent that can give them a competitive advantage. Colvin et al., (2007).

The development of youth leaders consists of providing a learning environment that will foster and demonstrate leadership. This task consists of all adults working together to empower their children, which in turn will assist in developing their leadership capabilities. (Foster, 1998)

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Research has found that more and more the workplace is becoming diversified in utilizing people within various generations. In order to come closer to closing the leadership gap, these generations will have to work together in understanding each other and most definitely respecting each other's ideas and opinions (Rossi, 2007)

Within the evolution of leadership many theories have been studied with attempts to determine the best way to train an individual to lead. While some researchers suggest looking to the past others suggest changing the learning methodologies. This study concludes that traditional and modern day theories and methodologies must be merged to yield an effective leader. In order to build an efficient theory of leadership development all generational experiences should be taken into great consideration. Once all generations are closely examined and understood, and the right questions have been asked in reference to generational gaps, leadership development can then be improved by fusing traditional and modern day concepts.

According to Avolio (2007) researchers must work to identify all areas that constitute leadership. This includes examining and integrating the ideas of what each generation constitutes as leadership as well. Once all of these concepts are brought together and well examined, researchers can then begin to better address leadership questions as it applies to theories and approaches that have been studied throughout the years.

Recommendations

Researchers should continue to research generational differences, to come to a complete understanding of each generation. As researchers continue to research generation X & Y, research should begin to focus on the Millennial generation to determine how they will be affected by leadership development. The information gathered will assist in developing the leaders of the Millennial generation.

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