Exploring Cross-Generational Traits and Management Across Generations in the Workforce: A Theoretical Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: Understanding and identifying the traits of different generations and their effects on management is essential for creating a strategic business operational management structure. This literature review aims to identify traits associated with each generation and determine if any cross-generational traits exist to capitalize on each group's characteristics and find solutions in managing multiple generations. This research will examine the literature on each generation consisting of the Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z; and attempt to identify traits that affect each generation's ability to be managed in the workforce and work with other employees of different generations. The goal is to test the assumption that some, if not all of these traits, are unique to or are shared across generations. This review will explore each generation's set of traits and management characteristics to develop the groundwork to form successful teams and further explore the best way to collaborate across different generations by exploiting and acknowledging work values displayed by each generation. This review will also provide a platform for further studies and can be used as a standard to build stronger, more cohesive, and productive teams made of multi-generations.

KEYWORDS: Generations, Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, Management, Generational Traits, Cross-Generational Traits

Introduction

Members of each generation share and display unique traits where critical experiences have developed and become part of their lives. These experiences have given way to how each generation thinks, acts, and makes choices. Glass (2007) states that each generation possesses a generational persona recognized and determined by common age, location, shared beliefs, behavior, and perceived membership in a generation. There are currently five different generations alive in the United States, and all five of them are participating in the workforce. The Traditionalist Generation and Baby Boomers are the oldest of the active generations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of all workers in these two generations, 42% are in management, professional, or related fields (Toossi and Torpey 2017).

Furthermore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), almost 90% of all Traditionalist generational workers are in some director, executive, or advisory role but only hold 5% of all positions at that level of an organization. The remaining workforce is composed of Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. The combination of the five generations makes up the current workforce that is either working side by side, as coworkers, as a person who manages or is being managed. This phenomenon has been perpetuated by increased life expectancy and a delay in retirement (DelCamp, Knippel and Haney 2010). With longer life spans, long years in the workforce, and differences in generational thinking, it has created a workplace consisting of both different and similar management styles. This paper aims to examine how generational traits influence management to accomplish operations through better collaboration amongst teams and utilize specific generations' traits to identify the similarities and differences amongst different ages.

This study addresses the theory that there are problems associated with cross-generational management and that different generations respond differently to different management styles. Additionally, shared traits can be utilized across the different generations to create more efficient, effective, and collaborative teams. The purpose of this literature review is multi-fold. First, we aim to identify traits that are specific to each generation. Then we will identify issues in management from the literature that is related to generational trait differences. Lastly, we will aim to identify any cross-displayed traits that can be determined and, in the future, used to create effective cross-generational management. The literature review approach will help identify characteristics associated with each generation, if any existing models or theories already exist, explore and evaluate these characteristics, and potentially help develop the groundwork for the field.

Generations

Each generation comprises a group of people who have experienced different events, typically before entering the workforce. These events have influenced them into whom they are as a collective group today. Glass (2007) states that each generation possesses a generational persona recognized and determined by common age, location, shared beliefs, behavior, and perceived membership in a typical generation. Members of a generation are shaped by the same "defining events," which they collectively experience during their crucial developmental years from age five to eighteen. The experiences they share bind the generation together and give them a sense of common ground (Glass 2007). These experiences have been narrowed down to six causes. From these causes, values and beliefs are created that stick with them over time and influence their personalities. (1) A traumatic or formative event such as an assassination of a political leader or wartime. (2) A dramatic shift in demography, which influences the distribution of resources in a society. (3) A privileged interval that connects a generation into a cycle of success and, or failure. (4) Creating a sacred space wherein sacred places sustain a collective memory. (5) Mentors give impetus and voice by their work. (6) Generations are formed through the work of people who know and support each other (Wyatt 1993). As we have displayed through the six causes, each group will be different and affected differently with different outcomes. However, some groups may experience not the same but similar events that may result in similar trait development. Further, the general agreement among many experts is that the U.S. workplace is changing and becoming divided into cohorts (Crampton and Hodge 2007). How leaders view generational differences and how each generation views their leaders can also cause workplace problems (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000).

Traditionalist Generation
The Traditionalist Generation also referred to as the Veteran Generation, and G.I. Generation were born between 1922 and 1943. Even though retirement is viewed as an earned privilege for years of hard work, many members of this generation work beyond retirement age (Underwood 2007). This generation has been through a cumulation of wars, survived the great depression, and had many socioeconomic influences on what formed their characteristics associated with their generation. Macon and Artley (2009) identified that the Traditionalist Generation had an intense loyalty to their employers. Their performance has been consistent over the years. They value a strong work ethic and strive to better their organizations before worrying about their successes or failures. The focus on their organization's success before their own can be attributed to the characteristic that the Traditionalist Generations values safety and job security. This trait was a direct cause of surviving the great depression. Tollbize (2008) determined that the high percentage of this generation who served in the military ended up adopting "top-down" decision-making. The top-down decision-making is a consistent trait throughout literature as a critical trait to this group and an influencer in management styles. It is associated with authoritative leadership and management styles.

Additionally, from military service, teamwork was found to be a trait that many members of the Traditionalist Generation valued (Kooij, Lange, Jansen and Dikkers. 2014). Patota, Schwartz, and Schwartz (2007) also found this accurate and stated that the Traditionalist

Generation displayed strength in working collaboratively with others. Authority was highly respected as an avenue to seek a short-term increase in selected social relationships triggered by the Socio-Emotional Selectivity theory towards a simple and clear directive style (Kooij, Lange, Jansen and Dikkers 2014). The rationale for this style is that the Veterans were men who were loyal to the organization. Through a comprehensive literature review, Lancaster and Stillman (2002) stated that this generation found themselves merely happy to be employed.

Traditionalists are known for their accountability, clear communication, management of resources, organization, service orientation, and ability to work collaboratively with others. In terms of weaknesses, Traditionalists tend to struggle with adaptability, initiative, technology, valuing diversity, delaying rewards, and valuing training (Patota, Schwartz and Schwartz 2007).

Baby Boomer
The Baby Boomer Generation was born between 1946 and 1964 and is the byproduct of the Traditionalist Generation. They are defined as loyal, possess an attachment to authority, traditions, and culture (Arslan and Staub 2015). This generation of employees are defined as workaholics, self-motivated, and resistant to change. Baby Boomers are hardworking and motivated by their position, income, and reputation in the workplace (Harber 2011). They are currently holding upper and senior-level management positions (CTE Statistics Table Archive 2019). They have been defined as being idealistic, willing to sacrifice personally and professionally to achieve success (Glass 2007). According to Crumpacker and Crumpacker (2007) Baby Boomers are competitive and against perceived laziness. Research by Kramer and Solomon (2011) found that Baby Boomers live to work and tend to respect authority and hierarchy in the workplace, perhaps because they were brought up in a work environment where authority and hierarchies were respected. However, contradicting research by Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000) states that Baby Boomers despise the traditional hierarchy and make every effort to turn the hierarchy upside-down. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak's (2000) research found that Boomers prefer a collegial and consensual style. They are passionate and concerned about participation and spirit in the workplace. They espouse communication, sharing of responsibility, and respect for each other's autonomy.

Generation X
Generation X, born between 1965-1980, is a generation raised with more technology than their predecessors. They have been defined as being more diverse, self-defined cynical, and having a lack of loyalty to employers than previous generations (Tolbize 2008). They are happy to conform to societal norms and uphold traditional values, such as respecting authority figures and hierarchical order (Cox, Hannif and Chris 2014). This segment of the population is beginning to make up a large portion of the workforce, reaching about 35% (Pew Research Center 2017). Generation X is motivated by opportunities to collaborate, diversify, and make a successful change. This generation is sometimes called the Echo Boomer generation as the behaviors and attitudes of the generation are very similar to the Baby Boomer generation, except for competitiveness, which has been replaced by an expectation of collaboration (Lancaster and Stillman 2002). Literature by Delcampo (2010) finds that they tend to be fair, competent, and straightforward. Generation X does not respect authority as did past generations, as they prefer egalitarian relationships; they like to be challenged and thrive on change. Brutal honesty is a trademark of this generation.

Millennials
Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y born between 1981 and 2000, prefer a polite relationship with authority, prefer leaders who pull people together. This generation believes in collective action and a will to get things changed (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak 2000). The Millennial generation consists of close to 90 million individuals in the United States. Approximately 1 million millennials enter the workforce each year, and by 2020, they will form almost 40 percent of employed Americans (Lykins and Pace 2013). Research on millennial employees indicates that this generation is significantly different from previous generations,

particularly in higher self-esteem, assertiveness, and narcissism than earlier generations at the same age (Deal, Altman and Rogelburg 2010). Millennials are also more accepting of diversity, team-oriented, capable with advanced technology, and adept multitaskers (Farrell and Hurt 2014). Martin and Otterman (2016) also found some firmly held values of this generation, including being more ambitious to make a difference and secure a comfortable life. They displayed a greater interest in learning new skills and desired security over stability, were creative, adaptable, and multitaskers. Among the firmly held values found by Martin and Otterman (2016), having unrealistic entitlement expectations, expecting prompt recognition and reward, and expecting instant gratification can influence management styles' effectiveness.

Gen Z
Generation Z, born between 2000-2020, the youngest of the workforce with the eldest of the group just starting to enter the workforce, has their own set of distinctive traits. They have been identified as being and having reliance, freedom, individualism, addiction to technology, and speed (Burkup 2014). Characteristics consist of multitasking, efficient technology utilization, individualism, lack of desire to work with or be part of teams in the work environment, creativity, global point of view, and preference for non-standard and personalized work (Burkup 2014). They have also been characterized as being achievement-oriented, have greater economic well-being, are more highly educated, and are more ethnically and racially diverse than any other generation. However, they are also the least likely to have worked when they were young (Schroth 2019). According to Burg and Burg (2019), Gen Z denies diversity more broadly; they are expected to stay at a company less time than millennials and have higher expectations for employers' ethical behavior.

Management

We have defined management as working with and through other people to accomplish organizational goals and manage its human capital (Montana and Charnov 2000). In the case of management styles, they are defined as a recurring set of styles associated with organizations' decision-making process (Albaum, Yu, Wiese and Herche 2010). Characteristics of these styles have been identified in a 4-system management style by Likert (1967) to be (1) Exploitative Authoritative - managers of this style tend to motivate individuals by threats and punishment, and decisions are imposed on employees. (2) Benevolent Authoritative - lower-level employees make decisions within the given limited framework; however, significant decisions originate from the top. Top managers feel more responsibility. (3) Consultative System - this type of management style is related to the Human Relations Theory. Managers of this style tend to motivate subordinates through rewards; moreover, lower-level employees are free to make decisions related to their work. Top managers still have control over decisions; however, they count their subordinates in action plans before setting goals. (4) Participative System - this is the most effective management style; it is related to Human Resources Theory. The participative system includes a high level of participation, responsibility, motivation, communication, and satisfaction (Likert 1967). In attempting to identify organizational management decision-making and how different styles execute decision-making, managers begin to recognize that through the use of different management styles, a firm will find and use specific characteristics of those styles to address the presence of other generational characteristics. As has been shown above, each generation has its own set of attributes and values that drive and influence their actions, which will result in the ability to effectively manage teams, departments, and individuals in the process of reaching the firm's goals.

Effects on Management

Prior literature has indicated two key points: (1) There are traits that are recognized as what makes up an effective manager. (2) Identification of generations shows that each generation has different traits that are unique to them. With the above-identified points, organizations must recognize that

there will be issues management issues among teams and employees if the problem is not addressed. Conflict will arise, resulting in the consequences of greater organizational issues.

The Society for Human Resource Management (Burke 2005) identified that work values are the most significant difference among generations and a significant source of conflict in the workplace. Conflict is defined in different ways, then broken into subtypes, then followed up with different theories. The research identified by Shonk (2020) included three conflict types: (1) Task conflict, (2) Relationship conflict, (3) Value conflict. Task conflict often involves concrete issues related to employees' work assignments. It can include disputes about dividing up resources, differences of opinion on procedures and policies, managing expectations at work, and judgments and interpretation of facts. Relationship conflict arises from differences in personality, style, matters of taste, and even conflict styles. In organizations, people who would not ordinarily meet in real life are often thrown together and must try to get along. Value conflict can arise from fundamental differences in identities and values, including differences in politics, religion, ethics, norms, and other deeply held beliefs. Andre (2018) addressed that generational conflict must be discussed, understood, and resolved effectively so that a culture of openness and appreciation prospers in the workplace environment. They suggested that conditions, such as incompatible goals and differences in values and beliefs, can drive a situation toward conflict. Furthermore, Andre's (2018) review suggested that the successful resolution of conflict requires mutual respect among all team members, active listening, good communication skills, adherence to the issue, recognition of differences, and acknowledgment of the conflict's emotional aspects. Collaboration, a "win-win" strategy, focuses on consensus between the parties on achieving their goals for a positive resolution.

By identifying generational differences in the workplace that create conflict and correlating it with a specified list of conflict types, these types of conflict can influence differences and create management problems. Analysis by Knight (2014) has been able to identify common questions that organizations have seen managers and leaders wrestling with: (1) How should I relate to employees of different age groups? (2) How do I motivate someone much older or much younger than I am? (3) What can you do to encourage employees of different generations to share their knowledge? Additionally, Knight (2014) suggested the use of Reverse Mentorship and was able to offer positive effects, especially in the older generations.

Beutell and Wittig-Berman (2008) reported that managers and human resource professionals need to consider generational differences and monitor program usage patterns for each group. Additionally, when it comes to management and management traits across multiple generations, an empirical study by Murphy, Greenwood, Ruiz-Gutierrez, Manyak, Mujtaba, and Uy (2006) found significant instrumental and terminal value differences across generational groups. It emphasized the importance of adopting appropriate management practices. Thompson and Gregory (2012) noted the differences between generations in preferred leadership styles. Murphy (2004) stated that 'if managers do not understand these value similarities and differences, they could be setting themselves up for failure or loss of valuable employees by not knowing how to motivate employees'. A study addressing generational differences in work values concluded that significant generational differences existed in terms of work values when considering generations (Cogin, 2012). Sullivan and Decker (2009) report that the conflict between generational cohorts can cause instability within the group functioning. An example of this can be shown in Weingarted (2009) research, where older generations expect to be respected and looked up to by the younger generation while the younger generations expect to be treated as equals.

Literature and past research have been able to provide and support consequences to the problem. As identified, each generation is composed of different traits, and management is composed of different styles. More notable, when these differences are working together, issues arise if there are no workplace guidelines or policies.

Discussion

By addressing the differences among generational traits that are associated with management characteristics, we have been able to identify components to have cross-generational cohesiveness.

Additionally, literature reviews were able to identify the following solutional approaches that will incorporate the differences of the generations and the value that each generation brings: (1) Training (2) Communication (3) Involvement (4) Motivation.

The value of proper training should positively impact the performance of individuals and teams. Training activities can also be beneficial regarding other outcomes at both the individual and team level (Herman 2009). By incorporating this into management operations, a strong connection can be formed to capitalize on the different traits found among the various generations. When looking at generational gaps, an approach to training employees is to focus on all generations' shared values. Training refers to a systematic approach to learning and development to improve individual, team, and organizational effectiveness (Goldstien and Ford 2002). Using an identified systemic approach, such as focusing on shared values, will result in a more cohesive and effective team synergy while capitalizing on generational differences.

Open communication is key to success (Wallace and Mathews 2002). A key trait of management is maximizing each person's potential to meet a common goal. As we can see, each generation is composed of defining characteristics. One way to succeed is to have communication with each generation. Communication builds adherence to valued traits such as loyalty, giving direction to success, and collaboration. Communication will continue to be the catalyst for sharing information among teams and provides the foundation for more effective organizational performance.

Organizational structures must allow for teams to become more involved. There needs to be collaboration from each generation in tasks that will build unity and not separation. If the new generations are not involved and accepted as changemakers, they will become withdrawn (Brown 2003). A study about cross-generational communication determined that Boomers need someone to teach them how to use technology effectively. Younger generations are technology savvy and can reverse-mentor Boomers. In turn, Boomers can mentor younger generations on the value of teamwork and strategic decision-making (Glass 2007). This type of involvement gives value to each generation; it will satisfy a younger generation's perceived traits while allowing the older generation to have the time to express what they value.

Motivation brings all the generations together, sets standards, goals, and a sense of community. Lancaster (2002) noted that motivation is critical, and that each generation has different goals as a defining trait. Research by Brown (2003 identified ways to maximize different generations through motivation. (1) Recognize and utilize individuals who can connect to other generations. (2) Present information in ways to please all generations. (3) Be open to innovative ideas or exploit the skills that the generations bring to the table. (4) Respect the viewpoint of other generations. Remember that just because they are young does not mean that they do not have valid input or because they are older, they do not have validity to current situations. Using motivational techniques will help attract individuals of all generations to the team and the overall company goals.

Generations are unique to themselves; their traits make them who they are, dictate how they will act, and what they will value. Management is a process that continues to perform consistently; its tasks include decision-making and using assets and resources efficiently. Generational differences add an important variable to managerial decision-making in diverse organizations. To complete the process, those management characteristics must be able to incorporate actions such as training, communication, involvement, and motivation while providing direction. This is not an ending process as it will continue to happen as one generation leaves the workforce and their associated traits, a new generation enters the workforce with a new set of defining traits.

Conclusion

Literature has provided insight into various traits that past research has found to be present in each generation. All the given generations provide some overlapping defining characteristics. However, for the majority, each generation was unique to itself and thus upholding generational differences.

As we can see, events that a generation experiences help define them and create a set of traits or characteristics unique to that generation. Generational factors will affect management styles and strategic decision-making as well as organizational performance. The Traditionalist generation that consisted of a large amount of military and war experience was much more loyal and willing to accept top-down management (Tolbize 2008). But when looking at the latter generations that had not experienced military or wartime, they are much more independent and eager to be part of the decision-making processes.

The literature included in this study provided insight into management, management styles, and management traits. Literature indicated that each generation was different, and that management has a structure, but that the system can have differences based on who is executing it and who is receiving it. When looking at the generational differences, we can observe that some generations are more adaptable for cross-management training. However, as literature has shown, management itself is a constant. Thus, it will have a baseline of execution-style, and there will have to be some overlap in management styles across generations. By continuing to execute studies into generational traits and cross-generational management, theories and practices can be developed to increase productivity, performance, synergy, and overall organizational and cultural fit. These practices will give value to each generation's uniqueness.

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