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LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES AMONG GENERATION X AND
MILLENNIALS LEADERS

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Abstract

Managers are increasingly grappling with generational differences in their work forces. Problems can arise from differing mindsets and communication styles of workers born in different eras. The frictions may be aggravated by new technology and work patterns that mix workers of different ages in ever-changing teams. As the millennials continues to mature and enter the workforce, it is imperative that organizations and leaders develop an understanding of how to maximize their contribution to the workplace. It is important that employers have an understanding of what this generation expects from all aspects of their employment, and leadership preferences in order to prepare them to be the next millennials leaders. Therefore, the objective of the study is to list the leadership attributes among leaders of Generation X and Millennials. An extensive literature review is conducted on leadership attributes among Generation X and Millennials. Finding shows there are five similar attributes among these leaders which are contingency reward, passion, collaborate, innovativeness and willingness to change. An empirical study shall be conducted in a future research to confirm Generation X and Millennials leadership attributes in Malaysia based on previous literatures.

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1. Introduction

Today's workforce is more varied than ever before. Age diversity is of particular interest, as the workforce is now comprised of four generations (Kyles, 2005). Generational differences are a legitimate diversity issue that organizations need to recognize and understand (Arsenault, 2004). Research suggests that employees of the present three generations include, i.e., baby boomers, generation X, generation Y. To some extent, each generation is distinct from its key values and values of the job. According to Wey Smola and Sutton (2002) the Generation Y are also labelled as Millennials, Nexters, and the Nexus Generation (Burke & Ng, 2006; Chou, 2012; Zemke et al., 2000). Therefore, this paper will be using "Millennials" to describe Generation Y in order to be consistent with the literature. In recent years, social and political discourse has increasingly focused on millennials and the impact of this generation on the nation's workforce and economy (Fritsch et al., 2018). With Baby Boomers at or approaching retirement age, organizations are looking to the Millennial Generation (those born between 1979 and 1994) to fill the leadership pipeline (Ng et al., 2017). As now, millennials are growing older and are moving into leadership positions and are faced with managing older generations, which they were never trained to do.

A study conducted by Virtuali and WorkplaceTrends.com found that 91% of millennials are aspiring to lead positions and 43% are currently motivated to take control and empower others as leaders of the world. In contrast to what others believe, their drive for leadership is also underpinned by selflessness. Only 5% are looking for money and 1% for energy. The study also found that 55% of millennial students want their employers to offer better possibilities for leadership development, and 58% of thousands think that communication is a crucial leadership skill—51% believe that this is a trait. Other than that, the Malaysian government has also disclosed its Vision 2020 in the early 1990s to steer the country towards accomplishing the status of a developed country by the year 2020 (Sarah, 2017). In order to achieve this ultimate objective, (Mohamad, 1991). Thus, in order for Malaysia to be able to produce a knowledgeable, productive, proactive and multi-skilled generation by 2020, leadership would play an important role to prepare the millennial. Therefore, the objective of the study is to list the leadership attributes among leaders of Generation X and Millennials.

2. Research Questions

The research question for this study is what are the attributes of Generation X and Millennials leaders? In other word the research objective is to list the leadership attributes of Generation X and Millennials.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Generational Cohorts

Generational cohorts are groups of individuals born around the same time and share distinctive social or historical life events that create value systems that distinguish them from people who grew up at different times (Twenge et al., 2010). In today's workforce, there are three dominant generational cohorts: Boomers,

Generation X, and Millennials, which make up 29%, 34%, and 34% respectively (Fry, 2015). The three generational cohorts according to Rajan (2007) are as depicted in Table 01 below:

Table 01. The Three Generations

Generational Cohort	Year of Birth
Baby Boomer	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1979
Millennials	1980-1999

Source: Rajan (2007)

3.1.1 Baby Boomer

The baby boomers are those who were born between 1946 and 1964 (Chini et al., 2014). The largest generation grew up in a time of economic prosperity. Their core values include optimism, team orientation, personal gratification, health and wellness, personal growth, youth, work and involvement (Hofstetter & Cohen, 2014). Many are considered to be workaholics. Early boomers grew up in a manufacturing society, which was replaced by an economy relying on the service sector. Most had stay-at-home mothers. They are of a ‘buy now, pay later’ generation. Most are well educated and value lifelong learning. They have seen a president, a presidential candidate and a social leader assassinated; they watched the first man landing on the moon, and they have strong conflicting opinions about Vietnam and going to war (Lee Cooke & Xiao, 2014).

3.1.2 Generation X

Gen X refers to those who were born between 1965 and 1980 (Hofstetter & Cohen, 2014). This generation has also been called ‘slackers’ and ‘baby busters’ (Tolbize, 2008). This is a smaller generation, i.e. the year that witnessed the lowest birth rate in the history of the US was 1975 (Anderson & Morgan, 2018). According to Favero and Heath (2012) the values of this generation differ from the baby boomers. Gen X are reportedly self-oriented, cynical and materialistic. As a group, they are waiting longer to marry; they want quality leisure time and do not easily submit to authorities. This generation wants to make an impact on societies; they also need to see that their accomplishments are valued and that they are part of their employers’ success (Ehrhart et al., 2012).

3.1.3 Millennials

Millennials, often referred to as Generation Y, Nexters, or the Net-Generation is the youngest generation in the current workforce (Sessa et al., 2007). This generation has also been called ‘the Internet Generation’, ‘Nexters’ and ‘Echo boomers’ (Huang & Petrick, 2010). They may exceed the baby boomer generation in size. Although this generation is still being defined, Davies (2016) list their core values as optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, sociability, morality, street smarts and diversity. In the era of a new millennium, leaders may need to be more creative about how to understand or value the strengths that Millennials bring to the workplace. Instead of working with Millennials to capitalise on their unique strengths, they are often in conflict with them; therefore, they are creating an unhappy and unproductive

workforce with continual turn-over (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2010). The life events that may have shaped this generation include 9/11, Columbine, global warming, globalisation and the digital revolution (Tapia, 2008). They tend to be socially and environmentally conscious. With the new form of technologies and communications being made available, global experience is common. They are the digital generation who grew up with technology, constant connectedness and social networking (Gibson et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2008).

3.2. Leadership

For over a half-century, the word leadership has mainly focused on management and organizational development and became an interesting subject for discussion and research studies (Adlam, 2003). Leadership is one of the ten vibrant capabilities to be created to achieve viable competitive advantages by properly formulating and delivering a strategy. The desire to provide quality management all over the organisation provides organization with long-term performance and allows it to implement fresh environmentally friendly strategies (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). Every leader in every organization performs certain roles for the smooth running of the organization and improvement of organisational performance. The manner in which the leader performs these roles and directs the affairs of the organisation is referred to as his or her leadership style. Leadership style therefore is the way a leader lead.

According to Chen and Lee (2008), previous studies on leadership have identified different types of leadership styles which leaders adopt in managing organizations (Davis & Bryant, 2003; Hirtz et al., 2007; House et al., 2004). Leadership style is an approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people (Northouse, 2015). For the past few decades, leadership styles continue to be one of the most exciting issues for organizations (Lo et al., 2010) because it plays a significant role in affecting the motivation, commitment and predisposition of the workforce in which it provides focus, meaning and inspiration to those who work for an organization (Ahmad, 2001). In reviews of leadership styles, the three leadership styles most frequently identified are as discuss below:

- **Transformational:** Transformational leaders are those leaders who create ownership on the part of group members, by involving group members into the decision process rather than exchanging reward for performance, and the leaders communicate a clear vision and goals, where employees can identify.
- **Transactional:** Transactional leadership is a leader's ability to identify their follower's needs and clearly shows the ways to fulfil these needs in exchange for the performance of followers.
- **Blue ocean leadership:** Is a leadership is a leadership style where its focus is on achieving an organizational increase in leadership strength quickly and at low cost, which translates into high performance for the business.

3.3. Leadership Attribute

In the last fifty years, many leadership theories have been proposed, which were claimed to influence the overall effectiveness of the organizations (Ali et al., 2013). According to Pascale et al. (2010, p. 4), "much of what we know about leadership is today redundant because it is literally designed for a different

operating model, a different context, a different time”, where now, in the era of technological change and competitive world, an organization needs to employ leadership styles that could help it to survive. According to Alkahtani (2015), the suitability of leadership styles to be used in an organization is based on the sector of business in which it is operating. Thus table 02 below summarizes leader’s attributes for transformational, transactional and blue ocean leadership style.

Table 02. Leadership Attribute

Attribute	Transformational	Transactional	Blue Ocean Leadership
Visionary	Leader sets vision	Vision is not clear	The vision is to always challenge the ordinary
Contingent Reward	Intrinsic satisfaction	Extrinsic satisfaction	Team gratification
Courage	Empowerment	Initiation by leader	Let’s go (togetherness)
Idealized Influence	Use of charisma	Use of power	Promotes new ideas & thinking
Inspiration	High inspiration	Leads the way	Walks with the team
Intellectual Stimulation	High intellectual stimulation	Low intellectual stimulation	Engagement in creativity & innovation
Passion	Beyond organizational goals & objectives	Organizational goals & objectives	Always connected to reality
Strategic Thinking / Planners	Long term planners	Short term planners	Game changer
Focus	Vision and goals of organization	Values, qualities and behavioural style	Acts and activities leaders need to undertake
Collaborate	Executive & senior level	With subordinates	All levels in organization
Innovate	Encouragement	Slow or no innovation	Innovates to survive
Willingness to change	Moderate to fast	Only when problem exists	Do or die
Communication	Two-way	Top-down	360 Degree

4 Research Methods

An extensive literature review was done to list leadership attributes among different generations. Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is used to support this study, where it is a cognitive model of human behaviour that focuses on prediction and understanding of clearly defined behaviours. The theory states that people act in accordance with their intentions and perceptions of control over their behaviour, while intentions are influenced by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceptions of behaviour control (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behaviour is used in a wide range of different social behavioural domains and meta-analysis has shown that this theory is useful for predicting intentions and behaviour in different domains (Hardeman et al., 2005; Knowles et al., 2012; Smith & McSweeney, 2007; Yoon, 2011).

5 Findings

Applying the transformational-transactional leader construct, generational leadership researchers determined transformational leadership was preferred across all generations, and transactional second most preferred (Hall, 2012). Using the GLOBE study instrument, Lisbon (2010) determined Generation X members believed the charismatic/value-based leadership dimension contributed more to good leadership than the Millennials. Lisbon (2010) also discusses the need to identify the leadership styles and preferences of Millennials and McCrindle (2006) discusses further specific leadership attributes that need to be examined. Millennials feels the need to have a work environment that forms relationships and research suggests that this cohort desires a work environment where humour and constant challenges are present (Eisner, 2005). When comparing Generation X and Millennials, Generation X considered vision and participative leadership characteristics were more important for leadership effectiveness. Generation X also called out malevolent, face-saving, and bureaucratic, procedure-focused leadership characteristics as hampering leadership (Lisbon, 2010). Millennials also tends to favour an inclusive style of management, dislike slowness, and expects immediate feedback about performance (Rajput et al., 2012). This was supported by a similar finding by Cox (2016) which highlighted that Millennials has high preference for an approachable leader with vision who walks the walk and does not just talk. Table 3 bellow summarize the findings from previous study on the leadership preferences among generation X and Millennials.

Table 03. Leadership Attributes Among Generation X and Millennials

Attributes/Authors	Ren, Xie, Zhu, and Warner (2018)		Shrivastava, Ikonen, and Savolainen (2017)		Kraus (2017)		Sharizan, Syed Jamal, and Rosmimah (2016)		de Waal, Peters, and Broekhuizen (2017)		Yigit and Aksay (2015)		Salahuddin (2014)		Cates, Cojanu, and Pettine (2013)		Shen and Wan Fauziah (2012)	
	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M	X	M
Visionary		√				√		√										
Contingent rewards		√	√	√	√				√	√							√	√
Courage																		√
Idealized influences								√					√					
Inspiration		√		√				√					√					
Intellectual stimulation								√					√					
Passion															√	√		
Strategic thinking													√					
Focus		√																
Collaborate		√						√							√			
Innovativeness								√	√	√	√	√						√
Willingness to change									√	√								
Communication								√								√		

Note: X= Generation X and M=Millennials

6 Conclusion

In today's rapidly changing, interconnected, information-driven, technology enabled world, leadership still comes down to relationships and understanding how to bring people together to reach a goal. Many leadership theories have been proposed in the last fifty years, which are claimed to have influenced the overall effectiveness of the organisations where they have been employed (Ali et al., 2013). As for this study, from the findings above, it could be concluded that the attribute of the millennial leaders

is visionary, strategic thinking, focus, contingent reward, idealized influence, inspiration, collaborate, courage, intellectual stimulation, passion, willingness to change, and communication, could help leader in implementing new thinking and different actions on how they could lead, manage, and think differently. Besides, the ability to recognize and understand difference leadership style preferences provides organizations and managers with an advantage in leading their diverse workforce effectively. They can also achieve more productivity and generate a competitive advantage, which benefits both the organization and the employees. Other than that, findings of this study also add value to the theory of planned behaviour literature. It also enriches the body of knowledge in understanding the attributes of millennials leaders. Thus, empirical study shall be conducted to confirm leadership attributes of millennials leaders based on previous literatures.

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