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Student Research Proposal

Millennials Leading the Workforce

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Abstract

Millennials currently represent the largest generation in the US workforce ranging from 22 to 38-year-olds. This segment will continue to rise as previous generations slowly carry on to retire. Millennials will start to dominate the workplace. They are projected to be some of the youngest company managers and currently sought to be the most promising team members. Older generations, such as the baby boomers, find millennials to be entitled, lazy, impatient, and easily distracted. In a more positive perspective, millennials are looking for feedback, purpose, opportunity, autonomy, and value personal life balance in their workplace. The motivation for this research proposal is to identify how millennials can be impactful leaders to both the younger and older generations they will be managing.

Keywords: Millennials, multi-generational workforce, leadership, training,

Problem and Purpose

We will also seek to understand the various professional motivations in different generations and find the best management style from a millennials perspective to manage multiple generations. The purpose of this research question is to better understand all generations in a workplace environment. Some questions we attempt to answer range from Baby Boomers to millennials. Questions like, how are they different, how are they similar, what do they value in a workplace, and what is each generation looking for in a leader? As more and more millennials step into a leadership role, it's important to understand effective ways to lead different generations at work. Through those findings, we hope to understand how millennials can be better suited to manage a multigenerational workplace.

Literature Review

Using the CSUEB Library Database, we focused on numerous peer reviewed articles to explore the various managerial styles and how they impact the multigenerational workforce. We

initially started searching in the Databases A-Z, on the homepage of the CSUEB library. We specifically focused on material located in Academic Search complete, and Google scholar to further analyze the impact millennials will create as current and future leaders. We then had to filter our results to multigenerational workforce, millennial leadership, diversity, values across generations, and other synonyms that helped us narrow our search.

Generational Diversity in a Workforce

Although it is beneficial for multiple generations to work together in an organization, this has also caused some workplace friction. According to Colquitt et al. (2011), characteristics differ between Baby Boomers born between (1946-1964), Generation X born between (1965-1980), and Generation Y born between (1981-1999). At times, it can also get complicated for many organizations to keep up with the differences in generations. Rajput et al. (2019) describes Baby Boomers as ones who give top priority to work and prefer personal communication. Gen X are considered to have lower levels of work ethics than Baby Boomers. They give more priority to individual goals rather than organizational goals. The Gen Y population, also called millennials are educated and participative in nature. This generation favors work life balance and are hardworking. According to Rajput et al. (2019), they expect high rewards for the work that they have completed.

The purpose of this study was to check if there were any significant correlations between different generations in a work setting and their work values. This study also focuses on preferred leadership styles among different generations, work motivators, and how this impacts the goals of an organization. For this study, secondary research was used from existing studies. The results indicate all generations possess various characteristics listed above. For instance, the results indicated that Baby Boomers lay more emphasis on job security and pensions more than the other generations. They stand very loyal to their organization and like to take part in decision making. Baby Boomers also very much respect the formal chain of command. The results for Gen X were opposite compared to the Baby Boomers. Gen X are fun loving, independent, motivated by status and recognition. The results for Gen Y differ in a way that millennials find a significant importance in bonuses, pay, and prefer having leaders that take care of them on the basis of individuality. They want immediate feedback and are open with rectifying their own mistakes.

Cognitive Moral Reasoning Across Generations

Multi generations, including millennials, may experience different types of cognitive moral reasoning. An interesting study seeks to understand how various individuals' reason when it comes to concepts such as moral problems in a business environment. This research study focuses on millennials using cross-generation analysis, preliminary investigation, data, and trends to understand the emerging generation's moral reasoning. Kohlberg's (1984) well-established framework on moral reasoning is used in this study, along with the Moral Recognition Interview process (Weber & Elm, 2018).

The results indicate that millennials do exhibit differences in moral reasoning based on intelligence, gender, academic major, and work experiences. For example, when it comes to gender, the results show no differences in moral reasoning between male and female business student millennials (Weber & Elm, 2018). The results also show that an increase in GPA

correlates to an increased level of moral reasoning. Also, there is a significant relationship between moral reasoning and an increase in work experience. In conclusion, there is a growing influence by millennials in the current and upcoming workforce and there is still a lack of instruments used to uncover moral cognitive reasoning in millennials.

Leadership Values Across Generations

Effective leadership and how each style of leadership across different generations may change over time based on modern context. An interesting study uses surveys, a value-based leadership lens, a thematic analysis approach and leadership themes like good judgement, fairness, integrity, trust, decision making, and a sense of urgency to explore alternative notion and leadership ideals. This study also questions if any leadership qualities are truly timeless. This study suggests that people from different generations value different traits of leadership. According to Anh et al., (2014), the findings suggest, "...younger generations seemed to have values that reflected self-interest, while the older generations had more altruistic values" (p. 978). The study also suggests that modern context did not change the nature of effective leadership over time. In conclusion, there were little differences between values through time and across generations.

Millennials Need Training to Manage

Slowly, millennials are starting to manage more senior generations, but Baby Boomers and Generation Xers aren't too confident in their ability to lead. Although some believe that millennials are highly capable to lead as a generation, others think that they were never trained to manage the older population. This study used surveys conducted by consulting firm, Future Workplace. Gaul (2016), points out there are low levels of confidence in millennials in their leadership skills due to the lack of training. The Generation X and Baby Boomers responded that, "...lack of pertinent experience on behalf of the millennials could have a negative impact on a company's culture" (Gaul, 2016, p. 20). Surprisingly enough, older generations also haven't received sufficient training in this type of area. The studies' positive responses point out that a millennial's greatest strength is their ability to build relationships and work well with others in a team environment. The highest percentage of respondents believed that millennials could be good leaders to multiple generations if they have executive mentorship, attend leadership summits, shadow different types of jobs, and attend other various events. They should also listen to feedback, be able to adjust their communication styles, and learn more about their team members. With that said, millennials could be great leaders to all generations with the right type of training and experience.

Millennials View and Expectations

Various researches have begun to debunk the idea and stereotypes of millennials. This particular study focuses on millennials and their expectations on the typical behavior of a leader and leader member relationships. This study also looks to answer the millennial's views on relational and communicative expectations. Based on surveys, millennials want to be encouraged to think critically and realistically by managers. Omilion-Hodges and Sugg (2019) state that millennials want the following, "...to navigate tension within leader-manager relationships and how to communicate effectively to foster a strong, trusting relationship with their future managers" (p. 99). With that said, not all stereotypes are true about millennials.

Values, Skills, and Preferences

This study examines the values, skills, and preferences of three generations. According to research, millennials value personal development and work-life balance over money and status. They appreciate their jobs, and hope to climb up the ladder, however they also know how important self-care is. Millennials are usually thrilled to grow and learn new skills. Receiving feedback from their supervisors is what helps them achieve their goals. Gen X values independence and the possibility of advancement. They value stability both at work and at home. Lastly, we have the Baby Boomer's generation. This generation believes in doing everything by the books. They want to be respected and praised for their job. This study provides expected leadership styles to which these generations will respond positively according to their values. Millennials will respond to leaders that are supportive. They want to make sure they are offered flexible work schedules, clear directions, feedback, career development opportunities, and knowledge of company goals. Gen X will respond to a leadership that offers supervision. They also seek flexibility, career development, and autonomy, while the Boomer generation will respond to a leadership style that will allow individuality and self-expression. There are differences between generations, this study does a great job of highlighting them. This also helps us understand that in the future, leadership styles are projected to change as millennials take over the workforce.

Multigenerational Workforce and Learning Styles

Now more than ever, organizations are managing a multigenerational workforce. This study explains how learning styles change throughout generations. According to Cekada (2012), "Each generation has unique characteristics, influences, work ethics, core values, and respect and tolerance for others that affect how its members interact, communicate and learn in the workplace" (p. 40). The author focuses on three generations which are millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. Based on research, millennials fall under the category of being the most educated and technologically literate. This generation was showered with attention and driven by high expectations, leading to self-confidence. Millennials learned from a young age to juggle multiple tasks and interests, making them great at multitasking. Baby Boomers grew up in an era where economic prosperity was starting and stay at home moms were common. They learned strong work ethic, and self-sacrificing behavior from their parents. Baby Boomers today, hold positions that mirror these behaviors, creating conflicts with younger employees that may not meet the expectations. Lastly, Gen Xers grew up in a different environment. This group is by far the most independent, and adaptable. All three generations grew up in different environments, therefore, they also have different learning styles. Learning styles will also affect the way these generations lead and train their teams. The Boomer generation is likely to lead through activities, discussions, simulation or problem-solving exercises. Gen X will be successful at leading by providing feedback to their team and offering a comfortable environment where everyone will have fun. Ultimately, millennials will lead by providing visual methods like pictures and videos to start conversations. This study demonstrates the different effects each learning styles have on managing styles.

Millennials the Future of Leadership

Millennials makeup the largest generation today. They have started to take over the workforce rapidly. They have demonstrated different values, beliefs, and aspirations compared to other generations. This study strives to explore millennial leadership and fellowship styles in the workplace. The authors suggest two propositions: the first one is, millennials will demonstrate high levels of participative leadership in the workplace. The second proposition is, millennials will demonstrate high levels of exemplary fellowship style in the workplace (Chou, 2012). The first proposition examines communication styles used by millennials. According to research, this specific generation expects to communicate frequently with their supervisor and maintain a strong relationship. Creating strong relationships with their supervisor gives them the confidence to question those who are superior. As they learn from their peers, they are more likely to take over higher positions. Overall, millennial leadership is greatly influenced by the work environment. Millennials will look up to those who are currently leading, and gain inspiration. They are expected to take over the workforce in the next couple of years and add their own touch to leadership.

Millennials and Organizational Success

An organization will thrive depending on the team and their efforts. This study explores the workplace profile of millennials and the impact they have on organizational success. Most organizations today are facing changes. This is something that millennials are known for. They thrive in environments that are constantly changing. They are also able to adapt quickly. Therefore, this proves that millennials are beneficial to companies that are undergoing change and will set them up for success in the future. The second point that is made throughout this study is that millennials were exposed throughout their lives to technology often. Consequently, they have been able to multitask between devices, social media, or browsing the internet. They have been able to access information that other generations have not. Overall, an organization will be successful if the leader is able to adapt to change, has a vision, is motivational, and inspires others. According to the study millennials are able to do this and better the organization.

Leadership Theory

When looking for a leader, organizations look for candidates who are honest, have a vision, are able to inspire others, and are competent. Becoming a great leader can be a difficult task to accomplish. Those who do become leaders will learn from their past supervisors or managers. Leaders usually implement different leadership styles to approach different situations. Regardless of the leadership style that is implemented, one of the jobs of a leader is to inspire others to follow a similar path. According to Fore (2012), "Millennials look for leaders to provide guidance, exhibit competence, develop strong interpersonal relationships, foster a positive work environment, be able to self-manage, and possess excellent communication skills" (p. 7). This study explores the reasons why millennials will become leaders in the future. Consequently, millennials will become great leaders depending on their past experiences. If they had the opportunity to have a great leader in the past, they will be inspired to hopefully become one in the future. In conclusion, they theorize that depending on past experience millennials will become leaders.

Methodology

In this study, our group will be using a mixed method research approach to attempt to answer our main research question which is: Are millennials fit to lead multiple generations? Our survey will be sent out to four different universities including CSU East Bay, San Jose State, UC Santa Cruz, and USF. Our goal is for the surveys to reach graduate and undergraduate students in business, administrative and management majors. However, there may be some limitations to surveying students as they may vary in work experience. Through quantitative and qualitative research, we will collect data through surveys that will help us acquire more understanding of the topic. The limitations of this study also include not being able to confirm the actual age of each participant. Those who are taking the survey have the opportunity to provide false information.

We will start by reaching out to each universities' program managers to see if they can send out an email to all students in the particular program to do a voluntary survey. We will need 1,000 participants, ideally 250 from each university. We require a larger sample size because we will be accounting for things like reporting bias and misjudgment. Surveys will include close-ended questions and multiple-choice questions. Some of the questions we would highlight include:

1. Which generation do you think would be best fit to manage a multigenerational workforce?

A. Baby Boomers born between (1946-1964)

B. Generation X born between (1965-1980)

C. Generation Y born after 1980.

D. All of the above

2. What do you value most in a leader?

A. High Competency

B. Good Communication

C. Approachability

D. Honesty

3. What do you value most in an organization?

A. Feedback

B. Experience

C. Compensation

D. Enjoyment

4. Do you see yourself in a managerial position in the future? (Y/N)

5. If yes, what generation do you belong to?

A. Baby Boomers born between (1946-1964)

B. Generation X born between (1965-1980)

C. Generation Y born after 1980

6. Do you think millennials can be good managers to a multigenerational workplace? (Y/N)

7. Describe a time when encountered a great leader in your career, and what generation did they belong to?

8. Why do you think it is important to have a great leader in a multigenerational workforce?

9. What does leadership mean to you?

10. How do you think millennials will affect the workforce in the future?

These questions will help identify the different perspectives people have on leadership, in regard to different generations. It's crucial that we collect data that includes observational details that we can departmentalize into groups. We want to determine which generation wants to be a leader and what they value in a leader.

Data Collection

For this study, we intend to provide a survey that will be distributed to four different universities. An email will be sent out to each department manager with a link made by survey monkey. We are hoping that the department managers will send the survey to each professor for students to conduct as a voluntary survey or class assignment. It will include close-ended multiple choice and yes and no answers. These answers will provide information to better understand students' perspective of what they value in good leaders, and if millennials are fit to lead multiple generations.

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