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# A Study on Perception of Generation X and Generation Y towards Preferred Leadership Attributes

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**Abstract:** *Workplaces today are characterized by various generations at work. A generational group, often referred to as a cohort, includes those who share historical or social life experiences, the effects of which are relatively stable over the course of their lives. All these generations are raised in different times and changing cultures so they can have different ideas about leadership and performance. It is important to manage these generation s at work with care due to difference in preferences towards various work practices. They even vary in preference of various qualities a leader must have to be acceptable as leader. The present paper tries to study the preferences of Gen X and Gen Y( as these generations constitute the present major workforce in organizations) towards leadership traits and attributes. A random sample of 64 Gen X employees and 56 Gen Y employees have been across various sectors was selected and administered a questionnaire to identify their preference towards of leadership traits and attributes. There was no much difference in perception of Leadership traits but both generation differed in perception towards leadership attributes.*

**Keywords:** *Gen X, Gen Y, leadership attributes*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Generational diversity in the workplace refers to the extent to which the workforce population of an organization represents, or is influenced by, people of different age groups available in the general workforce. Each generation shares similar experiences growing up and views the world through their own generational experiences, influences and social values. Accordingly, each group has a different approach around work-life balance, employer loyalty, authority, and other important issues related to the organization, all of which have a significant impact in the workplace.

Today's workforce is more diverse than ever. 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). Each generation is distinct, to some extent, in terms of their core values and work values (Salahuddin, 2010). Generation Y is the newest generation of workers to enter the labour force. They are different from other generations in terms of work-related values and attitudes; managers need to tailor their approach to leading Generation Y and Generation X in order to engage and retain this generation (Salahuddin, 2010).

People of generation X were born between the years of 1965-1980. Generation X has a different generation's approach to workplace loyalty and contribution to their entrepreneurial spirit than the baby boomers. People of generation X will not stay at the same place of employment for more than five years and in most cases may move at the three-year mark (Chatzky, 2002). Where their parents lived to work, generation X works to live, and work/life balance is a hallmark of this generation (Conger, 2006). Generation X tends to be more independent, self-motivated and self sufficient. Further Kupperschmidt (2000) describes generation X as technologically informed and very comfortable with diversity, change and competition. This generation aims to get fast results and they are also focused on getting the job done by relying on technology and multi-tasking. They are motivated by flexible work schedules, the newest technology and opportunities to express creative and new ideas (Tyler, 2007). People of generation Y were born after 1980. Generation Y is the most frequent used term and addresses the generation that is just beginning to feature in the workplace. Members of this next generation are very different from previous generations and that they will challenge present work values in a number of ways (Tapscott, 1998). People from generation Y are the most demanding of all the generations and tend to leave an organization if they are dissatisfied. On the other hand they are also more optimistic than generation X, which leads to proactiveness and flexibility of mind (Woodward, 2000). The mentality of generation Y is also different. For example, the mentality of Generation X represents normal and modesty behaviour, while the mentality of generation Y prefers self will and personal

identity (Bontekoning, 2008). That is also a reason that people of Generation Y put emphasis on learning. They want to learn, because they want to deliver the best performance. This depends on if their competences are identified and matched with challenging work. According to INSEAD today's managers will also need to change their approach to inspire their followers. To do this, management might consider "distributed" leadership, which is based on the idea that leadership is not a rank or a role but is based on completing tasks that influence an organisation. The model helps organizations leverage the capabilities throughout the firm by distributing leadership to wherever the best information and capabilities reside. Someone who is a leader today may become a follower tomorrow and vice versa, which may go some way to placating ambitious younger workers in places like Mexico and India who overwhelmingly desire leadership roles, although not all of them will be able to attain that level. Open communication and feedback are most often cited as qualities preferred in leaders by members of Generation X, the post-baby boomer generation, and Generation Y, "the millennials". Generation Z, however, the generation born from 1994 onwards, has other ideas. The fear of stress and of failing in senior roles means current leaders may need to consider altering their definition of leadership to encourage nervous workers to join the management track. In this regard this study will provide some insights.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Generational groups have different characteristics and this is an important issue for their leaders. Earlier research had proven that employees with different work characteristics will be more effective and productive with different leadership styles (Tulgan, 1996). Leadership style is the approach as well as the behavior by which a leader directs his or her followers toward achieving a goal (Farag, Tullai-Mc Guinness & Anthony, 2008). In today's modern workplace traditional criteria no longer fits to define a successful leadership style. Nowadays leadership requires a mixture of skills, such as professional skills, experience, and education (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). That is why leaders must try to understand the mindsets of different generations, and how each group sees the world based on its experiences (Zemke, et al., 2000). The literature points to a conclusion that baby boomers, generation X and generation Y could require different leadership styles to maximise their productivity in modern workplaces (Yu & Miller, 2005). The way how each generation views leadership, rests on the influence about differences in attitudes, values and beliefs of each generation (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). For example, baby boomers prefer a collegial and consensus style of management which encourages communication and sharing responsibilities. Following Yu & Miller (2003) previous research indicated that baby boomers tend to be more loyal to employers and willing to accept a „chain of command“ leadership style. According to Zemke et al. (2000) this Baby boomers promoted equality in the workplace, redefined roles and rules, and that is the reason why this generation might have a preference for a more participative management style than for the command-and-control management style. This is also confirmed by Salahuddin (2010) which refers that boomers believe in a participative leadership style, but that they have problems to implement this in the workplace. This style of leadership requires skill in understanding, listening, communicating, delegating and motivating, but according to Saluhaddin (2010) this generation lack these skills. People of generation X are egalitarian and do not generally respect authority. They value honesty, fairness, competence and straightforwardness (Sessa et al. 2007). Generation X is increasingly well-educated, independent and eager to upgrade their skills compared to previous generations. Those characteristics require different leadership styles than people from other generations with less education and skills (Tulgan, 1996). Tulgan's .Yu & Miller (2003) generation X may prefer their employer to treat them more as partner rather than a worker. Generation Y is only just entering the workforce and will, mainly, be entering into emerging knowledge worker organizations and positions According to the study of Dulin (2008) this generation prefers leaders who are mentors. Overall, generational changes have occurred in the workforce which had a significant impact on leadership styles (Sessa et al. 2007). different leadership characteristics, elicit varied responses and are preferred by different generational cohorts (Bass & Bass, 2008; Hall, 2012; Khadar, 2012; Ruys, 2013). Other studies identify similar preferred leadership styles across multiple generations, albeit different studies use different leadership theories for comparison. Many of these same studies identify different generational cohort preferred leadership characteristics (Lisbon, 2010; Riescher, 2009; Sessa et al., 2007). However most explain the world as it is by identifying current exhibited leadership styles and predilections via self- or 360-degree analysis, or follower leader relationships. They do not explore the world as it should be by asking subjects their leadership style or characteristic preferences. Recent studies have indicated that it is important to understand generational leadership constructs (Sautner, 2102; Twenge, 2010). A review of the literature indicated there are no leadership studies specifically exploring organizations due to their STEM orientation. The situation is similar for generational studies. However, when STEM criteria are applied to organizations, a few studies exploring industries such as telecommunications and high-technology manufacturing may be identified (Rodriguez, Green, & Ree, 2003; Yu & Miller, 2005). Patrick J. Carley(2008) study on Generational perceptions of leadership behaviors and job satisfaction among healthcare professionals in Western New England in his study to determine the relationship between leadership

behaviors, transactional and transformational, with job satisfaction among healthcare professionals. The results of this study indicated that transformational leadership behaviors were positively associated with job satisfaction but not all transformational leadership behavioral components. Lee-Volker Cox (2016) in his study Understanding Millennial, Generation X, and Baby Boomer Preferred Leadership Characteristics: Informing Today’s Leaders and Followers . The study’s purpose was to describe and determine the degree of difference and importance of leadership characteristics as perceived by Baby Boom, Generation X, and Millennial generational cohort. A holistic analysis of the data and research indicated additional characteristics differences and potential multigenerational trends regarding ethics, innovation, work focus, and feedback. Mecca M. Salahuddin (2011)Generational Differences Impact On Leadership Style And Organizational Success. The paper examines whether there is a relationship between leadership style and generational cohort and its potential impact on organizational success. The author recommends researchers continue to examine, using an empirical method, generational differences and leadership styles to understand its affect on organizational success.

**III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- A. To understand the perceptions of Generation X and Generation Y towards leadership attributes.
- B. To analyze the difference in perceptions of Generation X and Generation Y with regard to leadership attributes

**IV. HYPOTHESIS**

There is no significant difference in perception Generation X and Generation Y with regard to select leadership traits and attributes.

**V. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present research is descriptive and analytical in nature. A sample of 64 Gen X employees and 56 Gen Y employees have been across various sectors was selected and administered a questionnaire to identify their preference towards of leadership traits and attributes. a total of 7 questions to determine their age, past work experience, and their preferred leadership traits and attributes.

To determine if the participants fit our definition of Generation X &Y, we asked them which year they were born in. We made this an open-ended question, and then filtered through the results for those born between 1965 to 1980 &1980-1994 respectively.

To evaluate what attributes generation X &Y felt was important for a leader to have we designed our own questions to ensure they were concise and avoided any unnecessary jargon. The attributes that were considered for the study are:

- Work ethic: A work ethic is a set of moral principals an employee uses in his job.
- Accountability: Responsible for carrying out a defined set of duties or tasks, and for conforming with rules and standards applicable to their posts
- Honesty It refers to a facet of moral character and connotes positive and virtuous attributes
- Planning defining goals for company's future direction and determining on the missions and resources to achieve those targets
- Consistency ability to adhere to standards and continuing to behave similarly in similar situations
- Competence the ability to do something successfully or efficiently

ranged from 1=not important to 5=very important. We then looked at both the standard deviation and the means to help demonstrate what traits generation X &Y values in their leaders’.An Independent t test was conducted to study the mean scores of the two groups.

**VI. DATA ANALYSIS**

Descriptive analysis Data has been collected based on a structured questionnaire, addressed to 64 Gen X employees and 56 Gen Y employees randomly. The no of responses are 120 on the basis of which data was analyzed.

AGE GROUP	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
25-35 years	64	53.33
35 years and above	56	46.67
Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	102	85.00
Female	18	15
Experience	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Up to 8 years	64	53.33
Above 8 years	56	46.67

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Full Time	120	100.00
Part Time	0	0.00
Job Position	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Intermediate	88	73.33
Manager	32	26.67

Table no 1 Descriptive statistics

Table no: 2 the reveals SPSS output of means and variation between the two groups Generation X and Generation Y regarding preferred leadership attributes. To further draw conclusion in difference in their opinion about leadership attributes an independent t test was run using SPSS. The Independent Samples t Test compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

Group Statistics

	Generation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work ethics	X	56	4.3571	.67227	.08984
	Y	64	4.3281	.66797	.08350
Accountability	X	56	3.8929	.75507	.10090
	Y	64	4.0156	.76619	.09577
Honesty	X	56	4.3750	.70227	.09384
	Y	64	3.0312	.71200	.08900
Planning	X	56	4.1607	.37059	.04952
	Y	64	3.7969	.87613	.10952
Consistency	X	56	4.3036	.60059	.08026
	Y	64	3.6094	.78916	.09864
Competence	X	56	3.8571	.84053	.11232
	Y	64	3.7031	.88515	.11064
Adaptability	X	56	4.1071	.86715	.11588
	Y	64	4.3125	.46718	.05840
Emotional Regulation	X	56	3.8214	.76532	.10227
	Y	64	4.0781	.36967	.04621

Table 2: SPSS output of means and variation between the two Generation X and Generation Y

Table no :3 the reveals SPSS output of Independent t test which has been used for comparing means and variation between the two groups Generation X and Generation Y regarding preferred leadership attributes.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Work ethic	Equal variances assumed	.026	.871	.237	118	.813
	Equal variances not assumed			.237	115.694	.813
Accountability	Equal variances assumed	.144	.705	-.882	118	.380
	Equal variances not assumed			-.882	116.320	.379
Honesty	Equal variances assumed	4.213	.042	10.380	118	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			10.390	116.296	.000
Planning	Equal variances assumed	23.799	.000	2.889	118	.005
	Equal variances not assumed			3.027	87.221	.003
Consistency	Equal variances assumed	5.857	.017	5.362	118	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			5.459	115.860	.000
Competence	Equal variances assumed	.655	.420	.973	118	.332
	Equal variances not assumed			.977	117.192	.331
Adaptability	Equal variances assumed	16.556	.000	-1.642	118	.103
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.583	81.874	.117
Emotional Regulation	Equal variances assumed	46.594	.000	-2.385	118	.019
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.287	76.949	.025

Table no:3 Independent t test –Difference in Means of Gen X and Gen Y –Leadership attributes

### VII.FINDINGS

The p value (.871) >.001 of Levene's test for Work ethics, p value (.705) >.001 of Levene's test for Accountability, p value (0.042) >.001 for Honesty, p value (0.017) >.001 for Consistency, p value (0.420) >.001 for Competence, so we accept the null of Levene's test and conclude that is no variance in perception of Gen Y and Gen X regarding attributes of Leadership. This tells us that we should look at the "Equal variances assumed" row for the t-test (and corresponding confidence interval) results. p value (0.000) <.001 for Planning, p value (0.000) <.001 for Adaptability, p value (0.000) <.001 for Emotional Regulation, so we reject the null of Levene's test and conclude that is a variance in perception of Gen Y and Gen X regarding all the work practices understudy . This tells us that we should look at the "Equal variances not assumed" row for the t-test (and corresponding confidence interval) results. The corresponding p value for t-test(equal variance assumed) for Work ethics is .237 which is greater than assumed significance level .05 so we accept the null hypothesis “There is no differences in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute work ethics.” and both the groups perceive it in a similar way ie they have similar opinions about Work ethics as a leadership attribute The corresponding p value for t-test (equal variance assumed) for Accountability is -.882 which is less than assumed significance level .05 so we reject the null hypothesis “There is a difference in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute accountability.” and both the groups perceive in a different way ie they have different opinions about accountability as a leadership attribute. The corresponding p value for t-test(equal variance assumed) for Honesty is 10.380 which is greater than assumed significance level .05 so we accept the null hypothesis “There is no differences in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute Honesty.” and both the groups perceive it in a similar way ie they have similar opinions about Honesty as a leadership attribute The corresponding p value for t-test (equal variance not assumed) for Planning is 3.027 which is greater than assumed significance level .05 so we accept the null hypothesis “There is no differences in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute Planning.” and both the groups perceive it in a similar way ie they have similar opinions about Planning as a leadership attribute. The corresponding p value for t-

t-test(equal variance assumed) for Consistency is 5.362 which is greater than assumed significance level .05 so we accept the null hypothesis "There is no differences in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute work Consistency." and both the groups perceive it in a similar way ie they have similar opinions about Consistency as a leadership attribute.

The corresponding p value for t-test(equal variance assumed) for Competence is 0.973 which is greater than assumed significance level .05 so we accept the null hypothesis "There is no differences in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute work Competence." and both the groups perceive it in a similar way ie they have similar opinions about Competence as a leadership attribute. The corresponding p value for t-test (equal variance not assumed) for Adaptability is -1.583 which is less than assumed significance level .05 so we reject the null hypothesis "There is a difference in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute adaptability." and both the groups perceive in a different way ie they have different opinions about adaptability as a leadership attribute. The corresponding p value for t-test (equal variance not assumed) for Emotional regulation is -2.287 which is less than assumed significance level .05 so we reject the null hypothesis "There is a difference in the means of Generation X and Generation Y opinion towards leadership attribute Emotional Regulation." and both the groups perceive in a different way ie they have different opinions about Emotional regulation as a leadership attribute.

### VIII. SUGGESTIONS

This study on perception of gen x and gen y towards leadership attributes suggests that the preference of Gen x and Gen y are similar in case of Work ethics, Honesty, Consistency, Competence, Planning that means without these attributes any generation at work have concern about the leadership so these attributes cannot be compromised to manage people at work.. But they differ in opinions regarding Accountability, Adaptability and Emotional Regulation as Leadership attributes so these may be modified and tuned according to the mangle need.

### IX. CONCLUSION

The present study tried to evaluate perceptual differences among Generation X and Generation Y regarding Leadership attributes. The study reveals that both the generations ie Gen X and Gen Y have similar opinion about Work ethics, Honesty, Consistency, Competence, Planning as Leadership attributes. But both the generations differ in their opinion about Accountability, Adaptability and Emotional Regulation as Leadership attributes. The difference in these attributes suggest that when leading employees of Gen X and Gen Y the leader will be successful if he can adjust these attributes accordingly .

### X. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is done by taking a random sample just by randomly distributing the questionnaire to working people of both these generation only. So the work may be carried out in specific sectors as work environment, industry type etc may result in different perception about the attributes measured in this study. The attribute are also not comprehensive so study may be carried out for other relevant attributes as well.

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