LEADING AND TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATIONS: GEN Y AND Z

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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to consider educational teachers as leaders and the challenges they face teaching digital generations. Therefore, I compare the teachers educating Generations Y (Millennials) and Z (Zen) to leaders of all organizations leading multiple generations. I suggest it is critical for teachers to possess a portfolio of competencies. This requires that teachers be trained in multiple disciplines, such as, intelligences, technologies and diversities (age and cultures most importantly). As we prepare for the next world leaders it is essential for teachers to be competent with not only relational skills (referred to as competencies from hereon), but also the rapid changes in technology and all its tools. In addition, there must first be an understanding of the characteristics, ideas, beliefs and values of each generation. Also, the learning styles of each generation must be considered.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Competencies, Education Industry, Generations, Learning styles

INTRODUCTION

This paper compliments previous studies conducted by Marie Legault and Grace Miranda that examined the challenges of leaders leading multiple generations/groups. The suggested areas for future research of those two studies included a potential shift in leadership styles and the enhancement of relational skills. Both studies also indicated that leaders would face challenges if these areas remained unaddressed. Based on the lived experiences of the participants in two focus groups of the study conducted by Grace Miranda, the findings substantiated that leaders were facing multiple challenges and a shift of leadership methods would be helpful.

This paper finds that teachers face the same and additional challenges. The themes and findings of the Miranda study holds true for all teachers especially those teaching Generations Y and Z. The findings of this paper indicate a need for vital changes to meet the needs of today’s next generation of leaders. It also indicates that the development and consistent practice of certain competency skills are fundamental to successfully lead/teach multiple generations. It is equally important for teachers to develop, practice, and utilize, consistently, digital products to engage these two generations. This paper recommends a few solution-focused strategies to address the challenges of leading and teaching Generations Y and Z. In addition, this paper adds to the limited empirical studies on effectively leading and teaching multi-generational students.

Literature continues to indicate that there is a crucial gap in research regarding strategies for leading multigenerational workforce/groups. Over a decade ago Marie Legault studied four generations working alongside of one another. Legault’s study recommended areas for future research and indicated there would be a potential need for leaders of multigenerational organizations to shift
leadership styles and enhanced their competency skills. Legault also suggested that leaders faced challenges if the recommendations remained unaddressed (Legault, 2002; Miranda, 2015). Following Legault’s suggestions I reviewed the same generational group and discovered a fifth generation (introduced as Generation Z). Gen Z was not included in my original study due to a lack of empirical research. Instead, I focused on Legault’s recommendations. I discovered there were little to no changes in the four generational groups within a span of a decade. However, as foreseen by Legault, I exposed a need for leadership to shift their perspective, increase their skills and embrace change (Miranda, 2015).

This paper presents a combination of ideas and knowledge from both previously mentioned studies that leaders of the education industry could find useful to overcome the challenges they face with the ongoing clash distinguishing the difference between the generations they are charged with leading and educating.

The education industry is big business for the United States (U.S.). It is thriving globally and yields enormous revenues and employment. Higher education revenue in the U.S. is reported to be worth over $400 billion (Economywatch, 2010). As with every business, there are leaders and followers. When followers adhere to leadership direction without question, leadership can focus on revenue and productivity. However, when unmonitored change occurs leadership challenges arise and the focus is forced to shift.

**Significance of the Study**

Magnuson and Alexander (2008) claimed that the four generations currently working in the United States side by side possess unique characteristics. Current literature indicated that there is a crucial gap in research regarding strategies for leading a multigenerational workforce. This study presented new ideas and knowledge that leaders could find useful to overcome the challenges they face with the ongoing clash between the generational differences, thereby prompting improved performance, group behavior, and viewpoints (Conger, Pearce, 2003). Multigenerational organizational leaders could profit from the information presented in this study by amending their leadership styles and enhancing their relational/skill sets. Legault also suggested that leaders charged with leading and educating.

The focus reflects purpose, development, coaching, continuous conversations, and life. Organizational leaders that can grasp the importance of meeting the needs of their age-diverse staff or students could garner tremendous performance benefits leading to a successful and healthy work/educational environment (Paris, 2008). To help people and organizations become accustomed to the differences between generations, leaders must first comprehend the phenomenon of the differences between multiple generations (Stanley, 2003). The data collected from the study conducted by Miranda (2015) coupled with data on Generation Z in this paper, might prove helpful and provide leaders with strategies to adjust their leadership styles to be successful in leading multigenerational organizations.

**Generations Defined**

Generations consist of a group of persons born within a shared life span (birth years) who experienced the same world events, which moves them together and bonds them through time (Kupperschmidt, 2000). That definition provided indications that these groups of people, or cohorts, possess common views, values, and attitudes. In addition, they also share a universal knowledge of life (Edmund, Turner, 2005).

**Generations Y and Z Demographics: Characteristics**


Those in Generation Y expect autonomy and are less inclined to pursue formal leadership positions. They are motivated by individual and public praise and opportunities for broadening their skills. They believe in social commitment, enjoy networking, are realistic, and they value blending personal life into work, being well informed, and learning new perspectives and ideas (Aker, 2009; Brinckerhoff, 2007).

**Generation Z - born (1996 - 2010)**

Generation Z. They like learning autonomously and prefer to figure things out on their own. The love technology because they do not know life without it. Generation Y chooses human rights over environmental issues. They have had to live through some frightening and uncertain times such as, student loan debt, a declining workforce, high unemployment rates, home and job losses along with communities’ struggles these issues create frightening times for them (Personal communication, 2016). The demographics used here is per American Management Association (2015).
**Generational Learning Styles**

Gen Y - Learning Style is both audio and visual. They agree online learning is less stressful but, also like the classroom for physical interaction. In addition, they require participation in and hands-on activities that are centered around learning. Gen Z prefers to learn visually. They enjoy online platforms and readily embrace technology, i.e. smartwatches, smartphones and laptops. Gen Z also requires pictures of tangible items that can be used to teach a concept to retain information and increase understanding.

**Leadership Theories and Leadership Styles**

Numerous leadership styles exist today. Tangential to leadership styles, many leadership theories suggest ways in which leaders should lead employees. I suggest the following four leadership styles will work the same for the U.S. education system as recommended in my previous work (Miranda, 2015).

**Authentic Leadership**

Authentic Leadership displays evidence of a pattern of openness, freely shares needed information for decision making, accepts the opinion of others, is transparent professionally and personally in a manner that enables employees/students to gauge the competency and morality of their actions (Walumba et al., 2010).

**Ethical Leadership**

Ethical Leadership is the expression of naturally proper conduct through individual actions and interpersonal associations, and the encouragement of such conduct to staff through collaborative communication, corroboration, and decision-making (Brown, Trevino, Harrison, 2005). Ethical leaders are directly involved with employees and value building their trust. Simply put, ethical behavior is important to ethical leaders. Their focus is on making fair decisions and listening.

**Servant Leadership**

Servant Leadership aspires to encourage and steer employees, provide optimism and a sensitive experience by creating relationships built on trust (Schneider, George, 2011). Servant leaders serve first, putting employees before themselves. Servant leaders are more concerned with the employees/students than with the organization. A servant leader’s goal is to create opportunities for employees/students to grow. This is accomplished through leading with integrity and with respect for their employees (Schneider, George, 2011). Washington, Sutton, and Field (2006) reported that servant leaders possess the uniqueness of empathy, integrity, and competency, which are principles of efficient leaders.

**Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leaders have been described as teachers who are dedicated to their careers and bear comparable qualities to leaders in other professions. Teachers thought processes encompass how their labor will generate successes based on their interaction with others, including students, before they think of themselves.

Asserted by Danielson “The term teacher leadership refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere” (Danielson, 2006).

**Competency Skills Defined**

Per Daft (2008), Emotional Intelligence is “a person’s ability to perceive, identify, understand, and successfully manage emotions in self and others”. Cultural Intelligence focuses on one’s capacity to understand, make sense of, and perform effectively in circumstances branded by a variety of cultures (Ang et al., 2007).

Social Intelligence skills consist of the ability to self-express in social interactions, to read and understand different social situations, to have the knowledge of social roles, norms, and scripts, interpersonal problem-solving skills, and to understand social role-playing skills (Cantar, Kihlstrom, 1987). Practical Intelligence is “knowledge that helps you read situations correctly and get what you want. And, critically, it is a kind of intelligence separate from the sort of analytical ability measured by IQ” (Cultural Front, 2013).

**Emotional Intelligence Components**

The emotional intelligence profile consists of five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness is the most critical component of emotional intelligence; it is the capacity to understand ones’ own emotions and their effects on others. Self-regulation is the second component, which is described as the ability to control one’s own disturbing urges and to think things through before acting or reacting. Motivation is the desire to perform one’s duties for reasons other than money and to do so with enthusiasm. Empathy refers to the talent of comprehending the emotional makeup of others and displaying concern relating to their emotions. Lastly, Social skills are building rapport and finding common ground in managing relationships (Goleman, 2004).

**Social Intelligence Groupings**

Albrecht (2004) designed the S.P.A.C.E formula which is a range of manners divided into five basic skill groupings: situational awareness, presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy.
The first basic skill is situational awareness, which is one’s capacity to examine and comprehend the framework of circumstances someone is in and become aware of the way the situation controls or forms the behavior of the people involved. Presence is the message others perceive you present, or the impression you give them. Authenticity is the level of true and right motives presented to others and it is like that individual’s personal value, which means that they are straightforward. Clarity is one’s ability to communicate ideas openly and successfully with force. Empathy is connecting with another person intellectually and experiencing their feelings or thoughts.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Four Factors

The first factor is Strategy which describes how a person makes sense of inter-cultural experiences. It exposes the methods people use to gain and comprehend cultural information. Knowledge is the second factor it is what a person understands about cultural differences and similarities. This includes having a general understanding about economic and legal systems, norms for social interaction, religious beliefs, aesthetic values, and language in different cultures. The third factor is Motivation is the stimulus that makes a person curious in applying what they have learning after experiencing and interacting with people from different cultures. The fourth factor is Behavior, which is a person’s ability to be mindful of both verbal and nonverbal behavior to avoid offending by possessing flexible and appropriate responses in various situations when interacting with another someone from a distinct culture (Van Dyne, 2016).

Digital technologies are “electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or process data. These include social media, online games and applications, multimedia, productivity applications, cloud computing, interoperable systems and mobile devices” (The State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training, 2015).

Social Media Communication

Generation Y’s preferred social media communication methods are:

• YouTube
• Facebook
• Twitter
• Instagram
• Pinterest
• LinkedIn

This paper concludes with the findings from the study conducted by (Miranda, 2015) which was the results of two focus groups representing four generations in the U.S. workforce. The focus group was comprised of sixteen individuals representing all four generations. The findings for Generation Zen are the email responses from sixteen individuals representing Gen Y and Gen Z describing their preferred learning style, use of technology and social media. The responses from both groups are vital for leaders of both business and education to grasp and adapt to.

Findings

The findings are the same as those of the study conducted by Miranda (2015) to address the research question of what are some of the challenges facing leaders of multiple generations?

1. Emotional and social intelligence
2. Motivation
3. Communication
4. Work/life balance
5. Time
6. Hierarchical
7. Respect and hard work
8. Support of generational differences

The above referenced themes represent some of the challenges leaders face in leading and working with multiple generations, per the focus group comprised of leaders. The following themes identified challenges that leaders must address and detailed competencies to assist leadership in being more efficient in leading multiple generations/groups, which were as follows.

Recommendations

1. The challenges that leaders face in leading multiple generations/groups are solvable
2. A Leader’s need to embrace soft skills is essential to the success of the organization/group
3. The motivation of each generational cohort is a requirement for leaders to know
4. The establishment of social constructs is crucial for the social interactions with leadership and learners, as well as, learners and their peers
5. Generations Y and Z are digital learners and will require teacher/instructors to be digital savvy
6. Learners need to feel valued, respected and treated fairly. It is a requirement that teachers must meet
7. The lack of customized communication and time taken to understand the different perspectives of Generations Y and Z is challenging
8. A lack of self-awareness of self and others leading multi-generations and groups


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