

Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify generational differences and similarities among hospitality employees and managers in order to develop leadership strategies and management styles that can be utilized to increase employee morale and productivity while enhancing recruitment and retention rates of highly qualified workers. Data for this study were collected through a series of in-depth focus group discussions. Findings indicated significant generational differences in world views, attitudes toward authority and perspectives on work. Findings suggested the Baby Boomers respect authority and hierarchy, while the Generation X-ers (Gen X-ers) rebel against authority. Findings also suggested while Baby Boomers live to work, Gen X-ers work to live. The Baby Boomers are willing to wait their turn for promotions and rewards, and are very loyal. On the other hand, Gen X-ers expect immediate recognition through title, praise, promotion, and pay. They also want a life outside of work—they are not likely to sacrifice theirs for the company. The Millennial Generation believes in collective action, with optimism of the future, and trust in centralized authority. They like teamwork, showing a strong will to get things done with a great spirit.

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1. Introduction

For the first time in the history of the modern workforce, employees from so many different generations are working side by side and closely both with people who are as young as their children and as old as their parents (Zemke et al., 2000). Managers are realizing that age has just as much to do with employees' hopes, learning styles and expectations as do culture, gender and other characteristics. By understanding each generation and by giving employees what they need to thrive, leaders can do more to increase productivity, morale and employee retention (Kogan, 2007). Merit is overcoming longevity in the deciding factors that contribute to promotion. People from very

distinct generations are competing for leadership positions in the workplace (Raines, 1997). Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennial Generation employees compete for the same jobs and often younger generations get them. Sometimes, because of the post-industrial info-centered work world, the person in charge may be younger than those he or she manages. As Generation X and Millennial Generation workers bring skills that some Baby Boomers may not possess, they end up finding themselves supervising older employees (Kogan, 2007).

In the past, multiple generations had worked in the same organization, but they were usually separated from each other by virtue of their job descriptions and system hierarchy. Middle-aged employees tended to be in middle management, and younger workers were everywhere else. Their contacts were mostly with their peers or one level up, with their supervisor (Kogan, 2007). Generational mixing was rare, or significantly structured by formality and protocol. When veteran employees made decisions, they

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were handed down and communicated to the younger workers through the line supervisor. There was no sharing of how decisions were made, the strategy behind the order, or for that matter, any requests for input or feedback (Martin and Tulgan, 2002).

The management style was based on a top-down bureaucratic approach (Hogan et al., 1994). The top-down management and leadership practices were largely influenced by the feudalism paradigm (Barker, 1997), which describes leaders at the top of the hierarchy where they direct and control all activities of the people working below for them. Studies suggest that this type of leadership mainly originated from a bureaucratic framework, which is more appropriate for the Industrial Age (Gronn, 2002). The most important element of the bureaucratic framework is the traditional assumption that control must be rationalized. As a result, the bureaucratic management and leadership style were developed around the idea that goals are rationally conceived and, therefore, managerial practices should be structured to achieve those goals (Barnard, 1938; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this approach, organizational success or failure can be explained by actual managers' attributes (Ogaard et al., 2007). This model centers on issues such as motivating workers toward task objectives (House and Mitchell, 1974), leading them to produce efficiently and effectively (Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001) and inspiring them to align with and commit to organizational goals (Bass, 1985; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

In the past, many hospitality companies utilized the principles of top-down bureaucratic management and leadership framework which resulted in cost-driven human resource policies where employees are treated as another resource to be deployed to achieve organizational goals (Lucas and Deery, 2004). It is true that, like other resources, human resources should be utilized as effectively and as efficiently as possible to reach organizational goals; but management has to remember that employees should be treated as human with feelings, aspirations, personal goals and priorities in life, the need for self-fulfillment and satisfaction, and the potential for development (Lucas and Deery, 2004; Ross, 1994; Ogaard et al., 2007). Studies suggest that large parts of the hospitality industry use traditional management and leadership styles (Mok et al., 1998; Pittaway et al., 1998; Tracey and Hinkin, 1994, 1996). While managers in some of the hotels located in the US appreciate the value of participative leadership, they are inclined to utilize a more authoritative style due to difficulties associated with the participative leadership style (Worsfold, 1989).

However, in recent years, significant changes have taken place in the workplace. Major hospitality companies such as Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, Ritz Carlton, etc. are slowly recognizing that human capital and resources are significantly different than other resources a company has. They are realizing that resource-based and value-added policies are essential to achieve the delivery of high service quality

and customer care. That is why they are developing programs and policies to create a work environment that enables employees to have a satisfactory experience at work, good relationships with their superiors and peers, and a fair reward for the effort they have contributed (Ogaard et al., 2007).

While hospitality companies are slowly changing their management practices, labor force demographics are also changing. These changes and employees from several different generations working together are having both positive and negative impacts on employee retention, morale and company profitability (Gordon and Steele, 2005). One of the most important and unique benefits of generational blending is creativity. People who come together from different perspectives always have the potential to bring different thoughts and ideas to problem solving. The potential for positive creative synergy is immense. However, the generational blending and integration is also creating intergenerational problems in the workplace due to generational differences in values, worldviews, ways of working, ways of talking, thinking, even dressing in the workplace (Raines, 2003).

These generational differences are likely to create further conflicts in the workplace by dividing the workforce into an "us vs. them" mentality (Leadership Advantage, n.d.; Yang and Guy, 2006). In a workplace that requires collaboration and cooperation among workers from different generations to deliver the best possible service to customers, generational conflict among workers, combined with a top-down bureaucratic management approach, is likely to adversely influence service delivery. Thus, the interdependent nature of the hospitality industry cannot succeed with the underlying tension of intergenerational conflict in the workplace. The need for understanding differences and overcoming them is crucial in creating positive and fruitful working conditions that are likely to enable hospitality industry leaders to attract and retain workers that will ensure and improve the quality of service delivery and productivity (Ross and Boles, 1994).

Most studies suggest that even though the hospitality industry is slowly changing its management practices, they could do better (Lucas, 2002, 2004; Lucas and Deery, 2004; McGunnigle and Jameson, 2000; Price, 1994; Worsfold, 1999). Studies also suggest that there is significant difference between managers' and employees' perceptions of their work environment. Ogaard et al. (2007) suggest that managers are more likely to perceive the work environment as participative compared to employees. This difference in perceptions is just one of the many that affect organizational effectiveness.

Development of effective and efficient workplace strategies and management practices requires a thorough understanding of workforce needs and wants. To manage a very diverse workforce, hospitality 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). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to

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