

Chapter 8

Handling Variation in Work Ethics and Values Across Generations in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The chapter attempts to identify the generational cohorts operating in organizations in Nigeria and their unique work ethics through the use of empirical study to confirm the identified unique generational work ethics. This empirical study using samples from Nigeria established that there are generational differences in work ethics, but only in the means of carrying out work. The generational cohorts agree on the end of all work assignment. The chapter argued that differences in means to work, if effectively managed, will lead to innovations which would produce future wealth. After reviewing various leadership styles, the chapter concluded that servant leadership is superior to others based on empirical results which show its superiority. The chapter recommended that organizations must use servant leadership characteristics as the criteria for recruiting and promoting leaders in multi-generational workforce. The characteristics of servant leaders can be learned since they are not hereditary.

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity in organizations is recognized as a driver of organizational productivity when effectively managed. Diversity is described in various aspects covering, age, gender, culture, education, work experience and religion. An aspect of diversity that has taken center stage is generational diversity. This chapter defines generation as “an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages” (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 364). It is the significant life event that defines the peculiarities of each generation and the life events are contextually situated.

Generational diversity became very critical at the turn of the 21st century when Gen Y entered into the workforce. This period reflects the presence of multiple generations in the workplace at the same time. For example, in Nigeria there are three generations of workers in organizations, while in some nations four. The situation in Nigeria arose as a result of the mandatory retirement age of 60 years which made it mandatory for the oldest generation to be out of the workplace. Although there is no consensus in the naming and extent of each generation (Glass, 2007; Twenge, 2010), this chapter will utilize the following nomenclatures to address the various generations in the Nigerian context: (Solaja & Ogunola, 2016):

- Traditionalists (1928-1948)
- Baby Boomers (1949-1965)
- Gen X (1965-1979)
- Gen Y (1980-2000)
- Gen Z (2001-2020) - Few in the workforce

Evidence exists that there are differences in the work ethics and values across various generations (Salahuddin, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). These differences are manifested in the motivation and behavior of each generation. When different generations work in the same organization, they either collaborate or are in conflict. Collaboration enhances organizational productivity because it leverages on the best in each generation while conflict drains the energy in the organization and leads to low productivity. Consequently, effective management of these differences is required so as to enhance collaboration and minimize conflict. These generational differences also lead to differences in the preferred leadership styles and the leadership style enacted by leaders from each generation (Salahuddin, 2010; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007).

Leadership behavior is known to play a major role in the motivation and behavior of employees in an organization (Amah, 2018a,b; Salahuddin, 2010). Empirical study has established that not all leadership styles are equally effective (Amah,

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