



Research Report:

Generations and Leadership

May 2011

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Generations and Leadership

Introduction

The multi-generational workplace is a reality of today. In recognising workforce diversity, social scientists have not only emphasised cultural diversity but also generational differences. The current workforce comprises several generations and at least four cohorts have been identified, each possessing different characteristics from the next (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 2000).

In the milestone courses that the Civil Service College runs, inter-generational issues are often a talking point in the Personal Leadership Modules. To design milestone programmes for middle-managers, pre-course focus-groups and supervisor interviews were conducted to verify the challenges faced by this level of leadership, and inter-generation dynamics was highlighted as an issue of interest. The following quotes from the interviews illustrate this:

- “When you ask them (Gen Y) to do something, they just ask you ‘why?’”
- “How do you keep them interested? They don’t want to do the grunt work. They have different values. They say ‘I’m bored!’”
- “People seem to be asking you: “What did you do to deserve that position?”
- “They are more questioning than we were!”
- “There is a high staff turnover in the more mundane jobs, done by younger people who move on more quickly because they have higher expectations.”

In the past decade, the idea of generational differences in the workplace has received much attention from the popular press - newspapers, consultant press releases, magazine articles, as well as peer review articles. Many purport that these generational differences are important for managers in the workplace to pay attention to. Some of these base their assertions on reasonably sound research, whilst others are overly dependent on anecdotal evidence from which they create generalised stereotypes at best.

This paper aims to describe generation cohort theory, and provide an overview of existing research into generational differences that potentially has significant bearing on leadership and leadership development. Prompted by the paucity of robust research, the Civil Service College has embarked on its own research into generations and leader. We conducted an exploratory focus group study with the Singapore Civil Service (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the methodology) and are able to share findings from this initial phase of the research.

Generations in Overview

Overview of Generations Theory

The concept of generations was first brought to light within the field of sociology in the early half of the 20th century by Karl Mannheim's essay "On the problem of generations" (Mannheim, 1952). Kupperschmidt (2000) defines a generation as "a group of people or cohort who share birth years and experiences as they move through time together". Generational theorists postulate that shared experiences and the environment affect the process of socialisation in a way that influences the development of various characteristics such as personality, values, beliefs and expectations (Macky, Gardner and Forsyth, 2008). These characteristics, once shaped, remain stable through adulthood, and impact the attitudes and even actions of the generational members. Conger (2001) states that historical events create powerful emotional memories that impact upon perceptions and feelings about authority, institutions, and family. In other words, each generation is imprinted by the collective experiences of its youth (Mannheim, 1928) and tend to share common views, values, and attitudes.

Generations are influenced by various socio-cultural shifts. These could include wars and their results, new technologies that significantly alter work and life-styles or political-socio-economic transitions (Macky, et al, 2008). Changes in family and social patterns, experiences of scarcity or insecurity, or shifts in work culture and practices, are especially potent in shaping a generation's personality traits, work values, attitudes, and motivations (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002).

Generations at Work

While there are some slight variations between publications on the exact time-frame of the different generations, it is generally agreed that there are four distinct generations in existence today. These include:

- Traditionals (Matures) – born between 1909 and 1945
- Boomers – born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation X (Xers) – born between 1965 and 1979
- Generation Y (Gen Y, Millennials or Nexters) – born after 1979

In Singapore, the Traditionals experienced the end of World War II and the Japanese Occupation, they witnessed the first legislative council elections, and saw the beginning of the Cold War. The Boomers of Singapore lived their developmental years through the height of the Vietnam War, watched the demise of colonialism and Singapore's move to self-government, witnessed industrial, racial and social unrest, and marvelled at a man walking on the moon. Young Singaporean Xers beheld the opening of the first McDonalds in Singapore, watched their parents fret over the 1980s stock market crashes and construction recession, witnessed the identification of AIDS and experienced the birth of the internet. More recently, the Gen Ys in Singapore rode the first MRT trains to school, celebrated the new millennium, listened to their parents gripe about ERP fees, grew up immersed in a fully wired world and saw the horrors of 9-11 and the Asian Tsunami (Kuijsters, 2010).

At present, there are approximately 3 million in the Singapore workforce (Ministry of Manpower, 2009). Current statistics show that approximately 3% of these employees are Traditionals, 38% Boomers, 39% Xers, and 20% Generation Ys. See Figure 1.

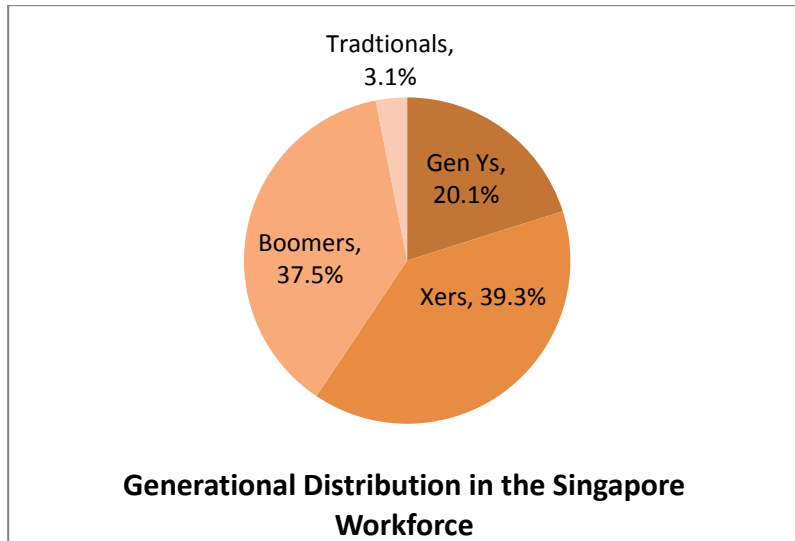


Figure 1: Generational Distribution in the Singapore Workforce

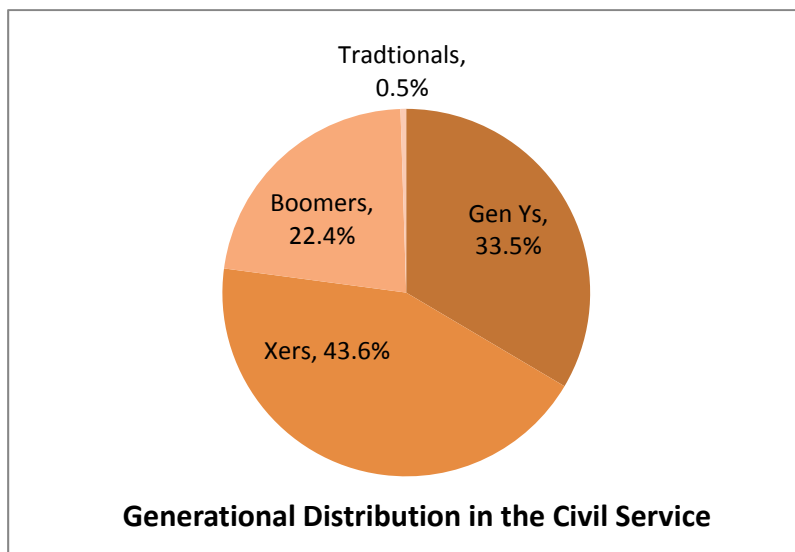


Figure 2: Generational Distribution in the Singapore Civil Service

In the Singapore Civil Service with a work force of 74,000, 0.5% of these employees are Traditionals, 22% Boomers, 44% Xers, and 33.5% Generation Ys.

With the raising of the retirement age, many are remaining employed longer, and there is little doubt that the age range of employees in many organisations is widening. This is the first time that organisations have four generations working along-side each other. Thus it would be helpful to gain a better understanding of what differences exist between the generations, what might distinguish leaders from a certain generation and what implications these differences have on the effectiveness of their followers as well as the development of future leaders.

Generational Differences in Leadership

According to leadership theory and research (Dickson, Den Hartog and Mitchelsohn, 2003), culture shapes how people view and practise leadership. Generations, with their unique worldviews and even language, may be seen as cultural sub-groups (Zemke, et al, 2000). Thus, just as culture has been shown to affect leadership, it follows that generational differences in leadership can certainly be expected.

While there has been a reasonable number of credible studies done on inter-generational differences, only a handful of studies have researched the issue of generational differences in leadership. Therefore, in order to understand how leadership might differ across generations, we have drawn on these few key studies and made extrapolations from research on generational differences (see Appendix 2 for a summary of generational differences affecting the workplace). By then including our findings from the focus groups study we conducted, we have been able to propose five leadership styles that appear to be shifting with the generations. These are currently exploratory and indicative rather than conclusive, but provide a useful way of navigating and interpreting inter-generational working.

1. Individualistic versus Collective

The first leadership difference that we propose is that newer generations appear to have more of an individualistic focus compared to the more collective orientation of the older Boomer generation (Bass, 1990; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003; Leonard, 2003, Sessa, et al 2007). Looking at cross-sectional 360 degree feedback data for over 1,250 managers across various industries, Kabacoff and Stoffey (2001) found that newer generation leaders were more competitive and assertive, compared to older generation leaders who were described as more accommodating to others' needs and interest. It seemed that Xers, in particular, tend to adopt a more independent and less relational form of leadership, compared to Boomers who focused on forming close and supportive relationships.

Findings from this focus group study add support to the generational drift from collective to individualistic. Boomers were characterised as collective in focus, as custodians for the organisation's interests and reputation, loyal and community minded. This is illustrated below.

"Boomer leaders are very concerned about the heritage, the origin of the organisation, the core functions and things like that... they are concerned about so many generations coming together to work and think that we may lose focus and our direction..."

The collective values of the older generation are also borne out through their willingness to share knowledge and experience to help the development of the younger generations coming through the system. This generosity of spirit was widely recognised and was brought up across the majority of focus group discussions. An example is shown below.

"I've had three boomer leaders at the director level all from different backgrounds, but the consistent thread I found was their willingness to share, to develop more junior staff. In the different projects that I've done with them, they've always given advice and leadership. So, I think that's a consistent thread that I find."

Various other studies, including ones that control for age differences as a factor, have demonstrated changes in psychological traits associated with individualism as generations pass (Twenge and Campbell, 2008; Trzesniewski and Donnellan 2010 – see Appendix 2). To some extent this is also mirrored in Singapore: a recent Singapore study on values found that compared to Gen Y, their Boomer parents placed significantly higher ratings on values of collective orientation (Chang 2010). In a cross-sectional study investigating if Xers were more individualistic as compared to Boomers, results showed that Xers were significantly more self-reliant, competitive and more inclined to work alone (Siras, Karp and Brotherton 2007). While Xers do not stand out in this way in our research in the Singapore Civil Service, there is still some evidence to suggest a generational drift, from the more collectivist Boomer to the more individualistic Gen Y leader.

Supporting this, the focus groups revealed a much more individualistic mindset within the current Gen Y leaders. They were described by themselves and others as self-interested and ambitious. This is manifested by some reluctance to take their share of team tasks, weighing up the personal gain before accepting roles or responsibilities and impatience to see immediate returns for themselves. The following comments illustrate these points.

“So, the Gen Y will say, why do I have to do this? ... How will this add to my career development, I don’t see why I should do this.”

“I have that impression that my generation has low emphasis on values and (is directed) more towards reward... maybe 70% to 80% of them who want to be leaders is because of the rewards that lie behind being a leader.”

“I guess those who want to, do it mainly for rewards, or I perceive they do. I guess their main motivation is their personal gain... They are more impatient about things and try to gain the recognition personally more than to share the rewards with their team mates.”

The argument that newer generations have a more individualistic leadership style seems to contradict popular literature that refers to Gen Y as being more team orientated. They may engage in teamwork but are they good team players? Our focus group data seems to indicate that the newer generation of Singapore leaders are very accustomed to team working through their education, but that they may be more concerned about personal gain than contributing to the common good.

2. Conservative versus Risk Orientated

The second difference in leadership style can be found along the continuum from conservative to risk taking. In Kabacoff and Stoffey’s study (2001), Boomer leaders were found to take a more conservative approach compared to newer generation leaders who were more willing to take risks and try new approaches. Both superior and peer 360 ratings for middle and senior leaders indicated that newer generation leaders felt more comfortable in fast changing environments, were more willing to take risks and consider novel approaches as opposed to Boomer generation leaders who relied more on predictability and maintaining the status quo.

This research study found support for this proposition in the Singapore Civil Service as Boomers were on the whole described as cautious and slow to adopt new ideas and ways of working, Gen Ys were seen as risk-orientated and Xers lay somewhere in between. There were of course exceptions to this, but the following is typical of how the generations were described.

Referring to the Boomer generation: *"I think they are cautious of getting in on new initiatives... it's like making a suggestion to them, they might agree or they might say okay, yes, it sounds like the right thing, but inwardly you know that they are not that supportive of your idea, because there is no action being done. If you ever ask them, they will say we need to take it carefully or something along those lines. So I think that shows a level of cautiousness in making a decision."*

Xers were described as: *"We are encouraged to make changes, to look at things differently. At the same time, we know that we have to respect the structure. We know our clear ground, how big it is...It's like we can be experimental, but we're also cautious... and we're also cautious about this... about respecting history, experience. So we can be experimental to a certain extent."*

Describing Gen Y, *"I was really struck by the difference in her worldview and the willingness to question and challenge assumptions a lot more rather than just take things as a given. And I think it's just this whole openness to new ideas and less concern that the decisions taken now are going to impact my organisation or my country to such a degree. The older ones amongst us would be weighing [these] more heavily... I would describe it as being careful. But she was just willing to experiment a bit more and to even consider the negative aspects - willing to risk it, in a sense."*

This openness to change and innovation may stem from Gen X and Y leaders' early experiences as they grew up in a world of rapid change and one where revolutions in technology occurred more and more frequently. The Singapore education system has also made shifts in teaching philosophy, from more direct-instruction teaching to developing students' varied interests, talents, and creativity (Tzuo, 2010). Along with these, the evidence suggests that self-esteem has increased over the generations, while the need for social acceptance (social desirability) has significantly declined (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). With a lower concern for social norms and greater levels of self-esteem, newer generations may be more equipped to generate out-of-the-box suggestions that they are confident of promoting.

At a deeper level still, perhaps we are seeing a different value set developing. In a study on Singapore values, older generations were found to possess traditional achievement values including: determination to complete any job taken, ability to work in a down-to-earth manner, responsibility, ability to bear hardships in work and thrift. In contrast, Gen Y's espoused modern achievement values of daringness to take risks for enterprise, independence and autonomy, and creativity (Chang, 2010). Later in this paper, we consider how the different generations interact as their different value sets come into contact and what impact this might have on performance and organisational effectiveness.

3. Increasing Intensity and Pace

Given their openness to risk the newer generations seem to be more fast-paced and intense in their exercise of leadership. In Kanacoff and Stoffey's study (2001), Xers were found to be perceived as operating with more energy, intensity and passion, while Boomers were more likely to maintain a calmer, lower-key, understated interpersonal stance. While it is possible that the younger generation is not any more achievement oriented than the young adults of past generations in the workplace, they seem to be more demanding for immediacy of outcomes. A Singapore study that

polled 3,500 employees found that workers of other generations cited impatience or abruptness as a common reason why they found working with Gen Y difficult (Kuijsters 2010).

Data from our focus groups corroborate this trend, as illustrated below:

"I suppose that she's a lot faster, absorbs ideas a lot faster than maybe the boomer generation and some of the X generations, she moves a lot faster, able to whip up things very quickly, highly energetic"

"They are very impatient, or have a very short attention span. So they might start on one project and be very excited about it and then they realise oh, maybe we can't do this sort of thing and then they'll move onto the next thing and they'll be very excited about that."

"I think they also expect results very quickly"

"So, you know, it's like you put in ten hours, they want 20 hours of results"

This difference in 'leadership impatience' could be a manifestation of generational differences in work values, personality and other factors. There is an indication that the newer generations are more competitive, ambitious and results driven, more self-assured and more opportunistic. Status matters to them, they are risk takers and are eager to seize opportunities (Twenge et al, 2010, Kanacoff and Stoffey, 2001, Siras, Karp and Brotherton, 2007). Compared to the older generation's world of steady progression and paced achievement, the newer generations are accustomed to a world of immediate access, instant feedback and quick outcomes.

4. Big-Picture Capabilities but Short-Term Focus

Here we explore an apparent contradiction within new generation leaders. According to Kanacoff and Stoffey (2001), newer generation leaders appear to be stronger in strategic bigger picture thinking, having bolder visions. They found that younger generation leaders were rated higher on strategic thinking by their bosses on 360 measures than older generation managers of the same level. Although our research participants thought that the younger generations may come up with *"a broader spectrum of solutions which are a bit more out of the box"*, there was less overt mention of this strategic mindset. Nevertheless Gen Y participants clearly indicated that they wanted and expected to work for visionary leaders who could take the big picture view.

On the other hand, when they looked at the ratings by peer and direct reports, the newer generations were rated as more tactical (emphasising the production of immediate results by focusing on short-range strategies by their peers) than the older generations. Sessa et al (2007) also reported that the newer generations worked towards short-term goals and focused on delivering quick results. This may come as no surprise as we have just explored how newer generations want fast results and are less inclined to pursue harder or longer term goals.

It appears that whilst the younger generations are supposedly more inclined towards broader-level thinking, they seem to operate on shorter timescales. This apparent contradiction might be the function of a capability versus preference difference. This is conceivable, given that the newer generations grew up in a more globalised world of interacting systems and diverse views but also one that has a high rate of change, high product design turnover, and a strong emphasis on speed.

The new generations might be more quickly able to see and grasp a more complex interactive world and thus might be more capable of bigger-picture and even longer-term thinking. Yet, they have not seen things last for very long and are used to instant results.

The younger generation's short-term focus could also be linked to their view of organisational commitment. In general, studies indicate that the newer generations, compared to the older generations, have a more short-term view of their time with an organisation (D'Amato and Hersfeld, 2008, Cennamo; Garner, 2008, Twenge, et al, 2010). In Singapore, a study recently reported that other generations found it difficult to work with Gen Y because they perceived them as having lower commitment – 'job-hopping', 'detachment from work' or the 'lack of commitment' (Kuijsters, 2010). If newer generations do not see themselves tied longer term to an organisation they might well prefer quick wins and speedy results over the strategic goals they can see some way off.

5. Sources of Authority

Generations appear to vary in their sources of authority with some real consequences for how they lead. Kanaccoff and Stoffey (2001) found that Boomers were rated as having higher respect for those in authority as compared to new generations who were less concerned with authority and hierarchy. Through in-depth focus group interviews, Gursoya et al (2007) found that generations had strong differences in their attitudes towards authority, with older generations much more deferential towards authority and rank.

The younger generations have grown up in a time when it was culturally more acceptable to question authority. Their developmental context has been one where post-modern and pluralistic worldviews dominated education and life, and where no-one was seen to hold absolute or 'right' solutions. Many organisations are becoming flatter and from their position, it now might appear to them that the power to influence lies strongly with competence and knowledge.

Given these differing sources of authority, the older generation leaders can be seen to exercise leadership along lines of hierarchy, viewing leadership influence as generally positional. On the other hand, the newer generations are more likely to respect and also exercise leadership based on capability, competency and expertise rather than rank. This is also paralleled by shifts in personality and values across the generations. The need for social approval has declined sharply in new generations (Twenge and Im, 2007). Someone scoring highly on this trait is more likely to conform to social order, expect conformity and adopt a more formal manner - a style more often seen in the leadership of the older generation. In line with this, a study on Singapore values, found that the newer generation placed significantly less emphasis on conformity to authority, superiors and social order when compared to the older generation (Chang, 2010).

This trend was evident in the focus group discussions we conducted, and one of the most frequent leadership characteristics used to describe the older generation was to do with hierarchical authority and conformity as illustrated below.

"I think there is an unspoken expectation that you must respect me, because I'm your boss.... and I didn't get to this position for nothing... and I think it cuts across most of my boomer bosses."

“(With regard to) all the Boomers I’ve reported... it’s more formal, in terms of the relationship.... and it’s a bit more sort of directive rather than discursive.”

This is in sharp contrast to Gen Ys who were described by one of our research participants as, *“They don’t like bureaucracy or hierarchy”*. It was put as simply as that.

Leadership Styles by Generation

Informed by our own research study in the Singapore Civil Service and by anecdotal evidence and case studies summarised by Zemke et al (2000) we postulate that different generations exercise leadership differently, expressing distinct leadership styles. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Leadership styles by generation

Generation	Leadership style
Traditionals	Directive, simple, clear
Boomers	Hierarchical, collective mindset, sharing wisdom, conservative, measured
Xers	Fair, competent, straightforward, collaborative, experimental within boundaries, reluctant respect for authority
Gen Y	Challenging of authority, innovative, individualistic, pacey, short-term focus, ambitious

Bearing in mind that this is only a guideline, we will use this overview of leadership styles in this paper as a useful shorthand when considering the effectiveness of leadership played out across the generations found within today’s workforce.

Generational Effects On Followers

If this is the leadership offered by the different generations, what impact does this have on the people being led – the followers? It stands to reason that if leadership styles differ across the generations, there will also be differences in the expectations that various generations have of their leaders. In this section we explore the interplay between the generations, where mismatches might occur and how leaders can get the best out of each generation.

Expectations Of Leaders

There is research to suggest that individuals categorise others they meet into leaders and non-leaders in order to guide the ensuing social interaction (Lord, De Vader & Alliger 1986; Lord and Mayer 1990). Followers have certain expectations of their leaders and whether their leaders share this view of their role can make the difference between a more or less effective working relationship (Engle and Lord 1997). Further research has shown that agreement between subordinates and superiors on what constitutes or defines a leader is linked to greater organisational commitment, job satisfaction and well-being in subordinates (Epitropaki and Martin 2005).

Do Generations Differ in What They Look for in Leadership?

So to what extent do the different generations vary in their expectations of leaders and how might any differences here be impacting on performance at work? To date, the set of attributes that people most admire in leaders has remained relatively stable from generation to generation (Kouzes and Posner, 2002; Arsenault, 2003). There are 20 characteristics listed by Kouzes and Posner that hold good for all it seems including honest, forward-looking, inspiring, intelligent, supportive, ambitious, courageous, loyal, self-controlled, and so on.

While the set has not changed much, there have been some shifts in the strength of ranking of certain attributes and the findings from this research further inform how gaps between the generations may be widening.

Data from our study has enabled us to create an initial impression of how the expectations or prototypes for leadership might compare across the generations in Singapore (see Figure 4). However as the sample size was small, particularly for Boomers, no firm conclusions can be reached at this stage of the research. However, even this small investigation shows a fair degree of agreement between the generations to support the previous findings but with a few exceptions.

Figure 4: Top 10 expectations of leaders by generation (ranked based on frequency)

Boomers' leadership expectations	Xers' leadership expectations	Gen Y's leadership expectations
1. Empathy / caring	1. Empathy / caring	1. Empathy / caring
2. Motivating	2. Visionary	2. Visionary
3. Develops others	3. Influential communicator	3. Driven
4. Sets direction	4. Authoritative	4. Honesty and integrity
5. Visionary	5. Flexibility / adaptability	5. Charisma / inspiring
6. Honesty and integrity	6. Driven	6. Influential communicator
7. Fair and objective	7. Honesty and integrity	7. Confidence
8. Open minded	8. Fair and objective	8. Develops others
9. Driven	9. Charisma / inspiring	9. Motivating
10. Authoritative	10. Intelligent / insightful	10. Decisive

Potential Leadership Issues

1. Drive, Focus And Optimism

There has been the suggestion that newer generations require increasing drive and dynamism from their leaders.

In a cross-sectional study by Sessa et al (2007), Gen Ys differed from older generations in placing greater value on attributes of *dedication* (determination to succeed), *focus* (setting of clear goals and priorities), and *optimism*. An earlier study had also found that determination and ambition were admired significantly more by Xers and Ys than the older generations (Arsenault 2003). As you can see in Figure 4, Gen Y participants in our research defined leaders as *driven* more often than other generations (at position 3 in their top 10 compared with positions 6 and 9 for Xers and Boomers respectively). Gen Y participants also had greater expectations that leaders would be *confident* and *decisive*, characteristics that did not make it into the top 10 for older generations.

The newer generations seem to expect more action-orientated leaders – both Xers and Gen Ys. Perhaps this generation is looking to be led by people who share their own personal confidence to take risks and act quickly, and may be disappointed or demotivated by the caution of some of their leaders. The following is a typical comment from our research participants on their Xer and Boomer leaders.

"I think Gen X leaders will be pretty decisive, they make a decision quite fast. Maybe negative, positive, whatever, but they're decisive, yes. Baby Boomers may take a longer time to make decisions, because they may have a lot of things to consider and they are not so daring."

Leaders are aware of this and many are adapting to the needs of other generations. One Boomer commented:

“Leading a group of Gen X, it’s very dynamic. It’s very fast moving. It’s quite fun. It’s a lot of team, a lot of conversations, and from the conversation things get moving.”

2. Different Learning Styles

D’Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) found that newer generations, Xers and Gen Y, showed a higher learning orientation than older ones (Boomers). This increased orientation towards learning was also found in Singapore Gen Ys in a study by Chang (2010). Compared to their parents from an older generation, Gen Ys rated ‘creating and seeking opportunities for development’ and ‘continuous study and improvement’ as significantly more important. Here we consider how leaders from different generations support this learning and development.

Our findings suggest that Boomers view *developing others* as central to their definition of leadership so there should be a good fit here across the generations. This is seen in their own practice as leaders through their willingness to impart wisdom and share experience. Perhaps they are at a stage in their lives where they view learning and development as more for others than themselves although our research showed that this was not the case for all Boomers. Overall, this sharing of experience and organisational know-how was appreciated across the different generations.

The only potential issue identified is in the differing learning styles, as our study revealed some push back from younger generations when Boomers’ more didactic style was seen to get in the way of experimenting and learning from their own mistakes. There may be a growing need for older generations to find new ways of developing their younger colleagues to realise their potential.

3. Differing Needs For Authority

As we have already discussed, older generation leaders are more likely to draw on hierarchical and positional power and tend to demonstrate a more authoritative style of leadership. From our focus group data, Boomers and Xers expect their leaders to be authoritative, suggesting they will be operating with some shared assumptions when they interact as superior and subordinate, whichever way round this may fall. There were examples of Xers accepting authority from above as illustrated below.

“I find that the Boomer leader is more detailed, it’s just that it’s passed on to us, we relate to it. Based on my experience, my bosses are more detail conscious, that’s why we try to be more detailed.”

Gen Y appear to be looking for a less directive style from above than older generations as they made very little mention of ‘authoritative’ when describing the attributes of a leader. The nearest they came was to list *assertiveness* as a positive attribute and *domineering* as a negative attribute. Nonetheless this was not positioned in their top 10 characteristics, so perhaps it is no wonder that there is sometimes friction between Gen Y and their older colleagues. Here you can see how

confusing and frustrating this mis-match in leadership expectations can be from an older generation's perspective.

"Someone actually said to me, you have to convince me why you want me to do this and he wants me to convince him why he has to do it for me."

Interviewer: *"And what does he look for in that convincing?"*

"I really don't know. It's like he is asking 'why do you want me to do it?' And I think it is just an assignment for you, as part of your job. Can you just do it?"

We do not hear the other side of the story from this example, but the younger generation also expressed frustration as illustrated below.

"For me, it's sometimes very frustrating when the person seems to be talking down to you and giving you directions but not hearing you out. I've had that experience where you have something that you would like to propose, but you find that the other person is actually not listening to your proposal, because his mind is already shut, he's already decided what he wants to do."

These differences may go as deep as the work-based values held by the different generations. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) found that Boomers and Xers valued work freedom less than Gen Y. The researchers concluded that Gen Y has a greater need for freedom in the selection of tasks and the way in which they are completed, allowing them greater work-life balance. In addition Gen Ys were found to score significantly higher than Boomers in their desire for freedom from supervision (Twenge 2010).

Taken together there is now a growing body of evidence to suggest a potential issue between the generations when it comes to sources of authority.

4. Vision And Inspiration

In the Kouzes and Posner paper, referred to earlier in this section, *forward looking* and *inspiring* were two of the established leadership characteristics that all generations expected from their leaders. Moreover if we were to look at other studies into leadership, *visionary*, *inspiring*, *charisma* and other similar traits are typically listed (Offermann et al 1994, Epitropaki and Martin 2004). So perhaps it is no wonder that *visionary* is in the top 5 for all generations in our research study and *charisma* and *inspiring* features in the top 10 for Xers and Gen Ys.

Despite this general call for visionary leadership, there may be a gap in the delivery of visionary leadership across the board as this characteristic was pretty much not mentioned when focus group participants described their managers in the Singaporean Civil Service. Is it that the vision is lacking or is there a tendency for current leaders to be more reserved and emotionally controlled which may stifle expression of their vision and their passion for their work, their department, their organisation? As a result disappointment can occur here for younger generations:

"I [experienced] some feelings of disappointment. I think you come in, you meet a leader, you are very inspired, and you have all these ideals, and then the expectations are too high. It affects the relationship, because you become disappointed in your manager, perhaps unfairly, but it can affect the work relationship."

"Younger generations are less experienced and they are definitely more idealistic, more passionate, but they don't know how to do things. But maybe other generations, baby boomers, they know how to get things done and they know quite a few of things that they can't do as well, or they think they can't do, and so there is less vision. You know, it's not as visionary."

5. Empathy And Caring

From our research and the existing body of research referred to above, everyone agrees that leadership is about people and that leaders need to be empathic and caring with their staff. All generations want to feel cared about and supported by their leaders, the question is how well equipped the different generations are to provide what appears to be a basic human requirement.

From our research, Boomers may offer this through mentoring, patient teaching and even a parenting approach and Xers are more likely to show their support through getting to know their staff on a more personal and social level. However Xers were described as *"hard driving with some heart, whereas the baby boomer can be hard driving but with more heart"*, suggesting that the warmth required for empathic and caring leadership may be waning. What about Gen Y? They certainly like to feel nurtured and it seems they can show warmth together as illustrated below:

"It's like when there's a crisis, let us do a group hug and everything will be all right, which is not a bad thing. It's really around the expectations, and I think that the warm and fuzzy feeling is very, very much appreciated by the younger generation."

Leaders are aware of these needs, it seems, as one research participant demonstrated:

"They [Gen Y] do appreciate you walking over and, you know, just offering help. They don't necessarily need the help, but they do appreciate the attention."

The question is whether Gen Y will prove to be caring and empathic leaders themselves given our findings that they may be more self interested and impatient than older generations. Does this herald a pending gap in leadership where followers will continue to need caring and supportive leaders, but where the leaders may not be inclined to fulfil this requirement? This possibility is expanded upon later in the paper.

Living Up To The Expectations Of The Next Generation

Why does this matter? Surely over the years, newer generations have always entered organisations and have had to alter or suppress their own preferences and expectations to fit into the pre-existing order created by the preceding generations. We would argue that there are several reasons why ignoring generational differences may have adverse effects for the Civil Service. Organisations may not in fact have a choice as the new generation is becoming bolder, more confident and more outspoken, and we can expect more open expression of their needs.

Firstly, we refer to the old adage: a leader is only as effective as the team that sits behind him or her. Through better understanding of their team members' expectations and requirements of them as a leader, leaders can get the best from their entire teams. As we have already established, when leader's and subordinate's expectations of leadership mismatch this presents suboptimal working conditions for the team. We have already touched upon some of the more noticeable differences between the expectations of Gen Y and the leadership characteristics of older generations.

Secondly, talented new colleagues will gravitate towards leaders who are more in tune with them and their needs, either within the civil service or in private industry if this offers more inspiring leadership. Increasingly the quality of leadership is become a weapon in the ongoing war for talent. As demonstrated by this research, Gen Y are impatient and self-focused as a generation and fully prepared to jump ship if a more attractive opportunity came their way.

Finally, the hierarchical leadership model, with a single leader reported into by a number of subordinates, has increasingly come into question when leadership in organisations is often more collaborative (Day, 2000). It is argued that more and more, different members of a team could take on leadership of that team at various times, that individuals will start to assume leadership when their experience affords them a unique perspective, and so the team will experience a range of different leaders (Friedrich et al 2009). Younger generations, finding themselves in leading roles at times, will start to live out their own leadership styles in front of their older counterparts. Given this growing trend, especially in knowledge-based organisations where depth of expertise and knowledge can break down traditional hierarchies, the need to understand generational difference in leadership is becoming ever more pressing.

Immediate Implications For Leadership Development

If the Singapore Civil Service is to feel well equipped to bring out the best in the different generations working within its many organisations, there are a few priorities suggested both by our research and other well-founded papers.

1. Visionary And Engaging Leadership

There are a number of ways to develop more visionary and engaging leadership – something universally called for from across the generations. It may be that the current leadership development programmes offered across the Civil Service support such development and it is a matter of taking sufficient numbers through these programmes for more visionary leadership to be seen and appreciated. As with any programme, application of learning needs to be supported by the wider system within which individuals operate. As a consequence, leaders may benefit from OD

(organisation development) support within their organisations to work with their staff to create a shared vision and to engage staff around the delivery of this. Increasing leaders' capability to co-create the future vision and strategy of their organisations with their colleagues will play to the preferences and possibly strengths of the younger generation (Bunker and Alban 2006).

2. Coaching Skills

Given that leaders are keen to develop their staff and younger generations are enthusiastic to learn, the challenge when this occurs across generations is to adopt a style that suits the learner rather than the teacher. Importantly for younger generations who like to experiment, are impatient to put learning into practice and who have the self confidence to come with some of the answers themselves, teaching may not be the right model to think of here especially given their more learner-centred experiences of their school and college education. Coaching offers individuals a facilitated way of finding their own solutions to work-based challenges and through this process they develop their own capabilities to work independently and effectively. Developing coaching skills across the senior and middle manager populations would equip leaders to work more in this way when developing their staff.

3. Skills Of Followership And Managing Upwards

Given that it takes two to tango, there may be some merit in developing the followership capabilities of individuals in the Singaporean Civil Service. Most leaders are also followers so this could help managers across the hierarchy – although it may need to be positioned as managing stakeholders for the more senior audience. This research has prompted us to look at followers with greater scrutiny given their role in supporting leaders to achieve organisational goals. Development can be designed to equip individuals in a range of followership skills, including understanding the bigger picture, maximising learning on assignments, introducing ideas and suggestions, knowing when to agree and when and how to challenge and so on.

These are a few ideas for developing today's leaders; the next sections consider what we can expect from the leaders of tomorrow and what development will they need.

Next Generation Leaders – The Potential Growth of Narcissism in Leadership?

While most literature has focused on how to manage Gen Ys, in 2007, in a Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge web forum, Jim Heskett posed the question: "How Will Millennials Manage?" To some extent, our attempts to answer this question are reflected in the previous sections, however, here we would like to address a specific issue – the potential growth of narcissism in leadership.

Over the past decade, growing attention is being placed on this issue of the narcissistic leader. Maccoby (2004) in the Harvard Business Review, writes about the pros and cons of the narcissistic leader, stating that "many leaders dominating business today have... a narcissistic personality. That's good news for companies that need passion and daring to break new ground... but can be dangerous for organisations".

Growth in Narcissism

People with higher narcissistic characteristics tend to view themselves as special, unique, and highly intelligent. They have high levels of confidence and optimism, are often bold and enjoy having authority over others (Galvin, 2010). Twenge and Campbell (2008) found that newer generations were more likely to agree to items such as "I think I am a special person", and "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place" – with 25% of Americans in their 20s responding to the majority of questions in the narcissistic direction. Aligned to this, is an increase in several other factors related to narcissism such as self-esteem, confidence, social non-conformity, assertiveness, competitiveness, and self-reliance (Twenge, et al, 2000, 2008, Sirias, Karp & Brotherton, 2007 and Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). The newer generations have also been found to be more motivated by prestige, status, money and advancement (Twenge, et al, 2010, Cennamo and Gardner, 2008).

These studies reflect an American population, and the question of how applicable these are to a Singaporean context is a valid one. Findings from several Singapore studies indicate that Singaporean generations increasingly reflect these patterns. In the Kuijsters (2009) study, descriptions such as 'self-centred', 'only wanting promotions', 'doing it their own way' and 'overconfident' were cited as reasons why working with Gen Ys are difficult. 'Selfishness' was applied to both Gen Ys and Xers. Chang's (2010) study on Singaporean values, showed significant generational differences on several values that parallel the abovementioned American studies. Gen Y's rated values such as self-realisation, pleasure seeking and competitiveness higher than their Boomer Parents. On the other hand, compared to Gen Y, Boomer parents placed significantly higher ratings on values such as moral, collective orientation and hard work.

Increase in narcissism could have been brought about and fuelled by various phenomena especially relevant to today's generation. They grew up experiencing wealth and unprecedented buying power. Smaller families of today mean that parents tend to devote their attention and resources to the one or two children that they have (MCYS & NFC, 2009). Has this bred a generation with a high sense of entitlement? With the last two decades seeing 15,000 publications promoting self and the importance of a child's self-esteem in learning and life success, there is the strong possibility that both parenting and education has focused too much on children's positive self-feelings and specialness (Mason and Brackman, 2009). Today's social media's (Twitter, facebook, MySpace,

YouTube) message is “broadcast yourself”, encouraging self-promotion far beyond what is enabled by traditional media.

Narcissism in Leadership

With regard to organizational leadership, narcissism has been defined as a “nonpathological (i.e., normal) personality dimension that involves a self-centered perspective, feelings of superiority, and a drive for personal power and glory” (Galvin, et al, 2010).

With studies showing a 30% increase over two decades in the narcissistic personality trait (Twenge, et al, 2008), there is a strong possibility that the prevalence of narcissistic leadership is also on the rise. This is especially so since, according to Blair, et al (2008), narcissistic traits drive individuals to seek positions of influence and power, and therefore, narcissistic individuals are often found in positions of leadership.

In our focus group conversations, ‘self interested’ and ‘ambitious’ were the most common terms used to describe Gen Ys – used even by the Gen Ys themselves. The following responses illustrate how the focus on self, over-confidence, a sense of being special and an ambitious drive for power is more overtly evident in newer generation leaders:

“... for myself, if I do take up leadership positions, I consider (if) I am going to gain from it, how is it going to look on my CV?”

“(they have) this expectation to climb... like they’re power hungry ... there’s this expectation that once I am here, (I have a) created path for me... I want to move on. I want to move up.”

On observing her peers take leadership in a big event, a Gen Y makes these comments:

“It was a big, big event, across departments, all the heads used their power and they are very arrogant about it because they had the power... It’s individualistic because they wanted to show that they are capable... they wanted people to point them out as the leaders ... they were very showy, in that sense... there’s showiness and then there’s arrogance, there’s power.”

Together these suggest that narcissistic leadership could certainly become more evident in newer generations. Naturally, not all newer generation leaders are going to be narcissistic, but the question is if, with the changing personality of the newer generation, there will be more narcissism in leadership than before.

Leadership Implications

The face of narcissistic leadership may well be different here in Singapore when compared to America where the hero CEO is exalted and personified in the likes of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Jack Welch. However, even in an Asian society where superstar leadership is not really witnessed, the potential impact of narcissistic leadership is still very relevant and though manifestations of narcissistic leadership may vary, the core effects (both positive and negative) may still be evident.

Impact on the Organisations

With the tendency for narcissistic leaders to embody characteristics of boldness, vision, confidence and to some extent charisma, organisations stand to be positively impacted in various ways. Maccoby (2000) suggests that “proactive” narcissistic leaders, due to their courage to question the status quo, innovate, and boldly pursue possibilities, are able to positively impact organisations. Depending on their sphere of influence, in big ways and in small ways, productive narcissistic leaders are able to provide vision, inspire others and drive organisations in new directions. The following comments about Gen Ys give us some idea of this in working life:

“They are more charismatic, usually, risk taking, because they are willing to take risks, certain businesses risks that others are not willing to take”.

“They were running a small business ... he said it mainly was to get a million Dollars or be a millionaire. So the whole business runs mainly on this motivation... he started a software company.”

However, while leadership theorists assert a strong link between narcissistic and charismatic leadership (Maccoby, 2000, Galvin, 2010), they also caution on the potential negative effects on organisations. Higgs (2009) highlighted four narcissistic characteristics that might shape a leader’s behaviour in a way that brings negative impact to an organisation:

- Exploitativeness/Entitlement: ‘I demand the respect due to me’
- Leadership/Authority: ‘I like to be the centre of attention’
- Superiority/Arrogance: ‘I am better than others’.
- Self-absorption/Self-admiration: ‘I am pre-occupied with how extraordinary I am’

If not careful, leaders carrying such a worldview, will “leave damaged systems and relationships in their wake’ (Maccoby, 2004). In their pursuit of achievement, they might not sufficiently consider the impact on individuals, organisational climate, commitment, and future capability. Yet these aspects are crucial to sustained health and performance (Higgs, 2003).

Impact on Others

Because of their confidence, boldness and vision, narcissistic leaders are often able to attract followers to themselves. As stated above, they are able to inspire and stir up enthusiasm. Speaking of a Gen Y leader, a focus group member shares, *“I believe that he must have a certain kind of charisma, and he could have something special in him, like special traits or special ideas or something, and people willing to follow him, you know, despite his young age and all those things”.*

However, in relating to others, narcissistic leaders have several weaknesses. From a list of various elements of narcissism (Higgs 2009), several impact on interpersonal relations and people leadership directly: arrogance, dominance, unwillingness to compromise, lack of empathy, hypersensitivity and poor listening. The following quotes from the focus groups illustrate some possible effects on others:

“They tend to, I don’t call it micro manage, I call them control freaks, because they come up with a plan of how your work needs to be done, and they expect you to stick to it. Then

barring all excuses they want you to just stick to the plan ... They just want to be in control. They want you to be exactly where they want you to be. They want to be control in that way."

"They do not care very much for the emotive part of things in running a team; it's always on an IQ basis in terms of it."

"Yes, he wants everything to be as fast paced as he is, and to see the connection."

"Highly competitive, looking at oneself rather than outside... Whereas we are used to collaborative, harmonious, let's get together and do things together; and then you thought about the next person."

Impact on Self-Leadership

Self-leadership is a process through which individuals control their own behaviour, influencing and leading themselves. The process includes a variety of interwoven strategies that address individuals' self-awareness, motivation, thought processes, and behaviour associated with levels of personal effectiveness (Neck and Houghten, 2006).

Narcissistic leaders tend to be self-motivated, have bold visions, high self-esteem and a strong level of belief in their own abilities, and tenaciously progress towards goal achievement. Where they may trip up is in the area of self-awareness. Self-awareness is a necessary first step for individuals to change or eliminate ineffective and unproductive behaviours, and leaders with greater self-awareness are better able to reflect on how to adjust their self-concept to be a more effective leader (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Narcissists tend to have an inflated picture of themselves, judging themselves more favourably on abilities and performance (Judge et al, 2006). Campbell and Campbell (2009) propose that narcissists unconsciously operate a "self-sustaining system that includes self-knowledge, intrapersonal self-regulatory processes, interpersonal strategies, and social relationships" to enhance and defend the concept they have of themselves. Maccoby (2000) writes that they are extremely sensitive to criticism and are poor listeners – they listen for the kind of information they seek and don't learn easily from others. One of the members of the focus groups put it like this:

"You also have to let them know that they are doing great things... they think that they can do greater things, but we think that they are not there yet, so we have to manage this gap, like how to make them feel that they are still doing great things, and better ones are coming."

Risks of Narcissistic Leadership

To conclude this section, we present a number of correlational studies that highlight some dangers of narcissistic leadership (Ouimet 2010). These studies establish a positive link between narcissistic leadership and the certain workplace variables (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Potential workplace effects of Narcissistic leadership

Workplace factors	Potential effects of narcissistic leadership
Organisational Impact	- Volatile and risky decision-making and organizational performance (Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007); - Absence of a climate necessary to achieve sustainable performance (Higgs, 2009);
Impact on Others	- Inflicting damage on others (bullying, coercion and damage to the psychological well-being of subordinates) (Aasland et al., 2008); - Destruction of subordinates' trust and degradation of organizational effectiveness (Benson and Hogan, 2008); - A toxic work atmosphere (lack of empathy and coldness toward colleagues and staff) (Goldman, 2006); - Poor supervisor ratings of interpersonal performance (Blair et al., 2008)
Self-Leadership	- Poor supervisor ratings of personal integrity (Blair et al., 2008) - Dysfunctional management (difficulty learning from feedback) (Campbell and Campbell, 2009) - Tendency to white-collar crime (Blickle et al., 2006; Ouimet, 2009)

Implications for the Development of Future Leaders

While the previous section has reinforced the dangers of narcissism in leadership, studies have indicated that it is only the excesses of the trait that lead to potentially negative consequences (Benson and Hogan, 2008). Thus, a clear intervention is to ensure that leaders are developed in ways that prevent excessive narcissistic attributes from shadowing their leadership effectiveness. Moccoby (2000) proposes that leaders that have narcissistic inclinations can, through development, learn to manage the darker side of leadership and capitalise on their strengths without having their weaknesses overtake them.

To combat the pulls of narcissism and help future leaders develop, what is needed are leadership programs that emphasise a deeper understanding and embracing of the moral responsibility of leadership, a greater awareness and tackling of 'self', a enlarged appreciation of and focus on others. The following elements of leadership development should be considered:

- **Developing the moral dimension of leadership** – Burns (1978) in his seminal book, *Leadership*, speaks of the responsibility of leadership to elevate others to a higher sense of performance, fulfilment, autonomy, and purpose. Leadership development has the capacity to expand a leader's concept of leadership to include the moral dimension. Leadership

development that draws upon theories of transformational and authentic leadership (George 2003) can help future leaders to move beyond a focus on self to a focus on contributing to others and a wider purpose. In effect, leadership development needs to help leaders embrace the essence of 'good' leadership in order to combat the potential downsides of narcissism and so recapture the essential humanity of leadership.

- **Increasing self-awareness in leaders** – A central issue of narcissism is the individual's inability or unwillingness to gain a realistic picture of oneself. However, in order for leaders to be effective, it is necessary for them to gain an appreciation of their true capabilities and weaknesses, and realise their impact on the organisation and the people they are leading (Maccoby, 2000). Studies have shown that narcissists view themselves as superior out of honest belief (Judge, et al, 2006), so self-appraisals might be less useful than multisource ones such as 360 degree measures. Thus, in leadership development, the well facilitated use of an objective appraisal would form the basis for leaders to detach from themselves, gain perspective, and develop the humility needed for continuous learning.
- **Confronting and adjusting leadership behaviours** – Linked to the above point, leaders need to come to a place where they are willing to confront and adjust their own behaviours. Effective coaching or mentoring can facilitate a process where leaders are helped to confront the negative effects their behaviours have on others, and to work out strategies to better manage these behaviours (Babiak and Hare, 2006). Coaches or mentors that are able to challenge the leader while helping them positively reshape their self-concept in the face of negative feedback, will allow the leader to relook at their brand of leadership. Because perceived competence and self-efficacy are important to the leader, the coach can use these as levers when helping narcissistic leaders. Once they see how addressing their own behaviours will ultimately improve their standing as a leader, there will be a greater chance that they will self manage more actively.
- **Communicating respect, value and inclusion** – Communication that inspires usually contains two elements, one relating to boldness of vision and the other relating to how much the listener is included and involved in that vision. In a way, the boldness and visionary characteristics of the narcissistic leader are not unlike the charismatic qualities of transformational leaders. However, the narcissistic leader communicates in terms that project self-reliance, self-focus, personal greatness and non-inclusiveness. On the other hand, inspirational communication is often characterised by such elements as social responsibility, the inclusion and support of empowered others and a focus on serving the interests of the greater collective (Galvin, et al, 2010). Learning to frame goals and messages in a way that communicates respect and value for others enables leaders to better inspire and engage. Leadership development should help leaders be more aware of the framing of their communication, helping them adopt a communication approach that includes the goals, needs and empowerment others.
- **Building leaders that enable leadership** – The ultimate challenge for narcissism is the transference of focus and power to others, yet leadership that enables others to lead is needed in a complex world where no one can know the full picture. With regard to uplifting leadership, Follett (1924) wrote: "Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders." Leadership development needs to help leaders embrace a model of leadership that de-emphasises the 'heroic' model of leadership where vision is monopolised, to one that focuses on the harnessing the diverse perspectives, experiences and strengths of others. Leaders who can learn to feel comfortable not being in the centre

but are open to let others take the lead, will be more successful at creating yet more generations capable and equipped to lead.

Facing the greater possibility of future leaders with stronger narcissistic tendencies, the purposeful development of leaders at an early phase in their career is vital. A narcissistic personality can be turned into a potential strength if young leaders can accept feedback and begin to develop a perspective that goes beyond the self (Maccoby, 2004). In this way, leaders inclined towards narcissism may be able to overcome self-focused behaviour and capitalise on their own confidence and propensity to influence others, to offer truly visionary and inspirational leadership.

Conclusion

Through both an appreciation of the current literature on generations in the workplace and through our focus group research study, we have started to gain a better appreciation of generations and leadership today. We have taken a particular interest in how the different generations lead, what their needs are as followers and in how these leaders and followers might interact for better or worse. In identifying some potential issues we have started to conjecture as to the developmental needs of leaders from different generations both now and into the future.

Propositions

The propositions explored within this paper are informed by the evidence currently available and are shared tentatively to stimulate debate and prompt further research. Our propositions on leadership are as follows:

- Older generations have a more collective mindset, newer generations are becoming increasingly individualistic
- Older generations are more conservative and cautious, newer generations are keen to experiment and take risks
- Newer generations are increasingly impatient and work at pace to achieve short-term results
- Newer generations can think strategically but may still opt for short term goals
- Each generation varies in leadership depending on their source of authority
- Together this picture suggests that newer generation leaders may show narcissistic tendencies

Our propositions on inter-generational effects are as follows:

- Newer generations are becoming frustrated by the measured, slower pace of older generations
- Older generations offer a more didactic style of development that does not match the learning style of younger generations
- Conflict will increase as newer generations question the authority of older generations
- Older generations are not providing the vision and passion to bring out the best in the current generation
- Newer generations may be too selfish and impatient to show caring and empathy towards others in their charge

Limitations Of The Research

We are mindful of the limitations of this research paper. Firstly, as we highlighted in the introduction, there is only a small number of research-based or peer referenced articles exploring generations and leadership. As a consequence some of the conclusions we have drawn or propositions we have made rely upon only a handful of studies, most of which have been conducted outside of Singapore. More research is required for us to be confident that these are generalisable findings. Secondly, the research study that we have conducted to investigate generations within the Singapore context was only designed as an initial investigation to inform a more wide scale research project. We have shared some of these preliminary findings from this research with you here in order to keep the dialogue going in this interesting area. However, as the sample was relatively small and the focus group design was not balanced to achieve equal representation from each generation, further research is required to substantiate the themes we identified from this qualitative research. Thirdly, most of the literature, including this study, is based upon cross-sectional research where one cannot be certain that differences detected between generations are not simply a reflection of age, life stage or organisational position.

Apart from highlighting the limitations of the research, it is important that one clarification be made: the propositions of this paper do speak broadly about generations as populations, and it is impossible to make predictions about individual behaviour based on generational trends. Indeed, there is probably more variation among members within a generation than there is between generations.

Further Research

We now call for further research to test out the propositions outlined above both in Singapore and in a wider international context. We particularly encourage longitudinal research into leadership and further exploration of generational leadership within flatter structures where this might be a more shared and fluid phenomenon.

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Appendix 1: Research Methodology

Sample And Demographics

The sample for this research was taken from past participants of The Singapore Civil Service College's suite of milestone programmes, largely consisting of public officers who work in various Ministries and Statutory Boards, typically in managerial positions from Assistant Managers/ Assistant Directors to Directors. In addition, students from three tertiary institutions (Singapore Management University, Nanyang Technological University and Republic Polytechnic) were also contacted in order to tap into the views and experiences of Gen Y before starting work full time.

All participants volunteered to take part following receipt of an email from The Singapore Civil Service College inviting them to participate in a study to explore how different generations of the workforce perceive leadership.

There was a total of 55 participants in the study (25 men and 30 women), divided into the following generational groupings:

- 7 – Boomers (Baby Boomers)
- 20 – Xers (Generation X)
- 9 – Gen Y in work
- 19 – Gen Y Students (pre work)

Methodology

Focus Group Design

The focus group discussions (FGD) were designed to bring different generations together to allow for some debate of any differences that might be uncovered across generations. As this was a small pilot study a balanced research design was not pursued and the following pairings were achieved in seven focus groups: Xers and Gen Y Students (pre work) on three occasions, Xers and Gen Y (in work) on one occasion, Boomers and Xers on one occasion, Boomers and Gen Y (in work) on one occasion and one occasion of Gen Y Students (pre work) on their own. Further research is recommended to rectify this imbalance and to include quantitative methodologies to test out the propositions generated by this study.

Data Collection

All participants took part in a two-hour focus group discussion that was digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The focus group structure was as follows:

- In silence at the start of the FGD, each participant completed a paper-based form on which they were asked to list 25 traits that typified or described leaders in the workplace
- General discussion of generations at work
- Generations split into sub groups to share leadership traits from their forms and agree the top 10
- Whole group discussion of top 10 traits of leadership from generational sub groups
- Whole group discussion of characteristics (stereotypes) of leaders from the different generations

- Generations split into sub groups to share stories of being led by different generations
- Whole group discussion on leading different generations

Analysis

Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify key themes from the qualitative data with verbatim quotations collected as illustrations of each theme. Where leadership traits or characteristics were collected, these were grouped, counted and rank ordered.

Appendix 2: Research on Workplace Generational Differences – A Summary

Previous research addressing generational differences in workplace values, attitudes and personality indicate that generations differ along several dimensions. Studies have shown that generations vary in terms of:

- **Centrality of Work, Work-Life Balance and Work Flexibility** – It seems that the centrality of work to the individual has declined over the generations, with Xers and Gen Ys viewing work more as a means of livelihood, rather than a key part of life. Smola and Sutton (2002, Twenge et al (2010) Cennamo and Gardner (2008). The Gen Y's greater emphasis on work-life balance was also seen in the Kuijsters (2010) study which showed Singaporean Gen Ys placing a much higher premium on extra annual leave than that of the other generations.
- **Work Ethic** - Research suggests that with each new generation, the willingness to work hard, put in overtime, and the pride in one's work has decreased (Twenge, 2010, Bush, et al, 2008, Smola and Sutton 2002). In a Singapore study by Temasek Polytechnic and GMP (2009), older Generations (Boomers and Xers) were found to have a less favourable perception of Gen Y's work ethic than vice versa. In the Kuijsters (2010) study, the survey results indicated that older generations found it difficult to work with Gen Y because they perceived them as having 'attitude problems', 'unexposed to hardship' and being 'easily bored'. It is important to note however, that the decreasing willingness to work does not mean that the absolute hours worked by the newer generations have decreased. The Singapore Department of Statistics (2006) showed that average working hours per working day has in fact risen over the years.
- **Organisational Commitment** – There is some indication that there is a decrease in organisational commitment in new generations as compared to older ones (D'Amato and Hersfeld, 2008, Cennamo and Garner (2008). In Singapore, the TAFEP (2010) study, found that older generations found it difficult to work with Gen Y because they perceived them as having lower commitment – for example, 'job-hopping', 'detachment from work' or 'lack of commitment' (TAFEP, 2010).
- **Learning Orientation** - D'Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) found that newer generations (Xers and Gen Y) showed a higher learning orientation than older ones (Boomers). This increased orientation towards learning was also found in Singapore Gen Ys in a study by Chang (2010). Compared to their parents from an older generation, Gen Ys rated 'creating and seeking opportunities for development' and 'continuous study and improvement' as significantly more important.
- **Extrinsic Work Motivators** - In terms of various motivators at work, Xers and Gen Y were found to place greater value on extrinsic rewards as compared to the Boomer generation. This means that they place a greater emphasis on factors such as prestige, status, money and advancement when choosing a job (Twenge, et al, 2010, Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). In the TAFEP (2010) Singapore survey, there is a slight indication of this trend where more recent generations ranked 'good pay and benefits' and 'performance bonus' as higher in priority as compared to the older Boomer generation, although it was only one rank apart.
- **Personality Traits** - Various studies have demonstrated changes in the psychological traits as generations pass (Twenge, et al, 2000, 2008, Sirias, Karp & Brotherton, 2007 and Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). Most convincing work in this field has been done by Twenge. In a meta-analysis study he compared samples of same-aged respondents on a psychological

questionnaires separated by time (e.g. 19 year olds tested in 1970 vs 19 year olds tested in 1980). These studies indicate that, compared to the older generations, the newer generations differ in the following ways:

- **Report higher self-esteem** - More recent generations are more likely to agree to statements such as “I take a positive attitude towards myself” and “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”.
- **Are more assertive, dominant and independent** - researchers found a marked increased in these traits between 1970 – 1990. Xers were found to be more individualistic as compared to Boomers, being significantly more self-reliant, competitive and inclined to work alone.
- **Score higher on Narcissism traits** - Compared to other generations, Gen Ys tend to agree more with statement such as “I think I am a special person”, “If I ruled the world it would be a better place” and “I can live my life any way I want to”.
- **Have a lower need for social approval** - Today’s generation also seem to display more independence in that they are less concerned with what society regards as the norm.
- **Have less of an internal locus of control** – Newer generations tend to attribute causality, control or outcomes less to themselves (internally) and more to their environment (externally).

In contrast research studies have not supported some of the differences claimed by popular writers in this arena:

- **Intrinsic Work Motivators** - With regard to intrinsic rewards (interesting work, work that allow learning, work that allow the full utilisation of skills, etc), it is generally postulated that the Gen Ys are motivated more by the intrinsic meaning of work than other generations. However, both cross-sectional research and time-lag research show that there was generally little difference between generations (Jurkiewicz, 2000).
- **Altruistic Motivations** – Contrary to popular assertions, more data driven approaches have revealed that there was little difference between the generations in their civic consciousness (Twenge, 2010 and Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). There were no significant differences between generations when asked questions such as if they would like a job that is worthwhile to society. In the TAFEP (2009) survey, all Singaporean generations ranked the importance of the statement ‘organisation openly supports corporate social responsibility’ equally.