

Leadership in Multigenerational Organizations

This page intentionally left blank

Leadership in Multigenerational Organizations: Strategies to Successfully Manage an Age Diverse Workforce

BY

MICHAEL J. URICK

Saint Vincent College, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Copyright © 2022 Emerald Publishing Limited

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83982-735-8 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83982-734-1 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83982-736-5 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

I learned to read at an early age in large part due to my relationship with my grandfather, Michael “Ug” Cilli. Thank you, Ug, for always being there for me and for helping me to read – I think you would be proud knowing that I’m now not just reading books but also writing them. You have been influential to me in so many ways – from the music I listen to and perform, to the way I approach interactions with others, and to the way that I see the world. We are (obviously) from different generations but are kindred spirits and the interactions that we had are exemplars of how people from different age groups can learn from each other. I am lucky to have known you and I miss you.

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

About the Author	<i>xi</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>xiii</i>

Part One **Issues Related to Leading in Multigenerational Organizations**

Chapter 1 Introduction and Focus of the Book	3
Focus of the Book	4
My Generation Realization	5
Structure of the Book	8
Summary	10
Chapter 2 Overview of Generations in the Workplace	11
How Do We Know About Generations?	11
Generational Categories	14
Summary	17
Chapter 3 Leadership Theories	19
Leader–Member Exchange	21
Bases of Power	22
Transformational Leadership	23
Servant Leadership	25
Leader–Manager Behavior Profiles	25
Summary	27
Chapter 4 Intergenerational Issues in Leadership	29
Approach to Understanding Intergenerational Issues	29
Influencing Multiple Perspectives	32
Negative Perceptions of Age Groups	34
Relating to a Younger Age Group	36
Managing Older Followers	37
Challenging Interactions	38
Summary	39

Part Two
Strategies for Leading in Multigenerational Organizations

Chapter 5 Strategies for Leading Multiple Generations	43
Stress Individuality	43
Followership	44
The Role of Context	45
Finding Common Ground	45
Strategies for Improving Interactions from Prior Research	46
Summary	49
Chapter 6 Focusing on the Individual	51
Forgetting Generational Biases	51
Getting to Know Employees as Individuals	52
Determining What Motivates Followers	54
Understanding the Complexity of Each Person	56
Summary	57
Chapter 7 The Leader–Follower Dance	59
When to Lead, When to Follow	61
Mentorship Is a Two-way Street	62
Succession Planning	64
Looking for Learning Opportunities	65
Summary	66
Chapter 8 Understanding the Context	67
Examining the Readiness and Willingness of Followers	68
Figuring Out the Norms of Culture	70
Fitting in with Your Team	72
Summary	73
Chapter 9 Creating a Unified Identity	75
Making Sure All Generations Understand Context	76
Moving from “Me” to “We”	77
Creating a Positive Work Environment for Everyone	78
Moving from Self-interests to Group-interests	79
Summary	80
Chapter 10 Conclusion	81
Be Systematic in Understanding Generations	81
Review the Research on Generations	82
Internalize Positive Leadership Approaches	82

Consider Potential Challenges in Leading a Multigenerational Organization	83
Recognize that the Challenges Are Not Insurmountable	84
Focus on the Individual	85
Participate in the Leader–Follower Dance	86
Understand Your Context	86
Create a Common Unifying Identity	87
A Few Additional Matters	88
Summary	89
References	91
Index	95

This page intentionally left blank

About the Author

Dr. Michael J. Urick is a Graduate Director of the Master of Science in Management: Operational Excellence (MSMOE) program and Professor of Management and Operational Excellence at the Alex G. McKenna School of Business, Economics, and Government at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania (USA). He received his PhD in Management (Organizational Behavior focus) from the University of Cincinnati. His MBA (focused in Human Resource Management) and MS (in Leadership and Business Ethics) are both from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh and his Bachelor's degree is from Saint Vincent College. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses related to organizational behavior, human resources, communication and conflict, organizational culture, operations, and research methods.

The MSMOE program, which he directs, focuses on providing aspiring leaders with cutting-edge management techniques to effectively problem solve, minimize waste, and continuously improve their organizations. The program has been regularly ranked as a “Top 50 Best Value Master’s in Management” program by Value Colleges and as a “Top Online Non-MBA Business Graduate Degree” by US News and World Report.

He is Six Sigma Green Belt certified and is also certified through the Society for Human Resource Management, through the True Lean Program at the University of Kentucky, as a Certified Conflict Manager, as MBTI Certified, and as Diversity Management Certified. He is the recipient of an “Excellence in Teaching” award from the Lindner College of Business at the University of Cincinnati, the “Quentin Schaut Faculty Award” from Saint Vincent College, and a “Teaching Excellence” award from the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs among other pedagogical honors. Internationally, he was also recognized by the Institute for Supply Management as a “Person of the Year” in the learning and education category.

Urick is the North American Associate Editor of *Measuring Business Excellence Journal* and an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Leadership and Management*. He is also the Editor for the *Exploring Effective Leadership Practices through Popular Culture* book series from Emerald Publishing.

His research interests include leadership, conflict, and diversity in the workplace. Much of his work focuses on issues related to intergenerational phenomena within organizations. He also often examines how popular culture can be used to advance organizational behavior theory. In addition to authoring

or co-authoring over 50 publications including multiple books and peer-reviewed articles, he regularly presents at academic and practitioner international meetings such as the Academy of Management, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and Institute for Supply Management conferences. He is a regular speaker on age-related issues in the workplace throughout the United States and internationally (having presented on four continents) and is an Active Consultant on issues related to workplace interactions, organizational culture, and ethics. Michael has served as a reviewer for a variety of academic publications including the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, and *Journal of Family Issues* as well as the Organizational Behavior and Human Resources divisions of the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in addition to other conferences. For six years, he wrote a monthly blog where he blended his research and teaching interests to suggest practical and actionable items for readers to use in their current or future work situations.

Professionally, he has served on the boards of ISM-Pittsburgh in various roles including President and the Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival. He has also served on the Westmoreland Human Resources Association board in various positions including Vice President. Prior to academia, he worked in a variety of roles related to auditing, utilities, environmental issues, and training and development. Through these experiences, he became fascinated with interactions in the workplace and how they might be improved which has influenced his academic career.

For fun, Urick enjoys music and, for 24 years, led and performed with a horn rock/jazz band that toured through over a dozen US states and released 11 albums.

Acknowledgments

With any book, even though one author's name is on the cover, it truly takes a team to get it from an idea into its published form. That is certainly the case with this book and I am blessed that I have the best team on my side.

First, I want to thank my family, especially Janet and Lucy and my parents Rick and Mickie. Without your constant love and enduring support, none of my writing would ever happen. Thank you so much for everything that you do for me. I also want to thank my grandfather "Ug" for whom this book is dedicated. Thank you for your mentorship, friendship, and for teaching me how to read.

Second, I want to thank John Ludvik who worked as a student assistant in the McKenna School at Saint Vincent College while I was in the early stages of working on this book. Thank you for your assistance in helping me set up the interviews necessary to collect data for this book and for all of your behind-the-scenes work.

The current student assistants in the McKenna School, especially Alek Kraft and Kelsey Myers, have also been helpful in offering feedback on my writing. Additionally, they have been generous with their time in running errands and engaging in office work so that I could focus more on my writing. Thank you for all that you do.

I also need to thank everyone who has collaborated with me on research related to generational phenomena in the workplace. Without your partnership and insights, this book could not have happened. I especially want to thank Elaine Hollensbe, Sean Lyons, Suzanne Masterson, Gail Fairhurst, Jim Weber, Therese Sprinkle, Alperen Arslantas, Jim Baehr, Linda Schweitzer, and Lisa Kuron for our work together. Thank you also to Kelly Weeks, Stacy Campbell, and Emma Parry for your ongoing support of my research.

I would like to thank my Dean, Gary Quinlivan, Fr. Paul Taylor, President of Saint Vincent College, and Jeff Mallory, Executive Vice President and COO of Saint Vincent College. I truly appreciate your support of my research and your flexibility in allowing me to pursue my interests.

All of the individuals that agreed to be interviewed for my research were incredibly helpful. Thank you to all of you for sharing your insights and knowledge with me to help make this book specifically, and my other research projects more generally, so much richer. I wish that I could thank each of you individually here but, as you know, the interviews were done with the promise of confidentiality. I hope that each of you know how appreciative I am.

xiv Acknowledgments

I want to thank my faculty colleagues as well as my support group of friends who listened to and offered feedback on my ideas. I also thank those friends and colleagues who provided additional stories related to generations in the workplace that helped to inform my writing. I especially want to thank Jim Buscaglio, Dave Braum, and Jeff Godwin for sharing their insights and perspectives with me.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Lydia Cutmore and the entire Emerald team. I would especially like to thank Fiona Allison (the BEST Commissioning Editor ever) from Emerald. Thank you for talking me into doing this project and for your support and enthusiasm for all of my recent book projects. It is truly great to work with you.

Part One

Issues Related to Leading in Multigenerational Organizations

This book is organized into two parts. This first part provides some background on research related to generational phenomena and leadership. It also details some of the challenges that leaders might find in influencing and making decisions that impact an age diverse workforce.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Introduction and Focus of the Book

Michael J. Urick

We have all heard stereotypes about different generational groups whether they are about baby boomers, millennials, generation x, or even generation z (the newest generation to enter the workplace). We may have worked with people of other ages that we have had a difficult time dealing with. And we may have engaged in leadership activities such as influencing or making decisions that impact someone of another age. It is possible that we may have had a hard time motivating, reaching, or connecting with these individuals. Challenges in leading other generations are not uncommon in modern organizations and anyone in a leadership role, whether formal or informal, has likely experienced some age-related difficulties.

In fact, generational issues present major challenges that are of increasing importance to organizations all around the world. Many organizations are experiencing the most age diversity among employees in their histories and getting these individuals, each potentially with their own mindsets and expectations, to collaboratively work together can prove to be overwhelming. This challenge is not going away. In a 2020 report, Deloitte estimates that 70% of organizational leaders believe that individuals from other generations need to work well together to ensure a better future. However, only 6% of this same surveyed group believes that organizational leaders are ready to facilitate effective intergenerational collaboration (Deloitte, 2020).

I would also speculate that some of the issues that occurred during Covid-19 and which we are dealing with in our organizations are a direct impact of generational issues. Of course, moving work online can exacerbate intergenerational communication issues when it is easier to ignore or “ghost” fellow employees if co-workers don’t see each other in a physical facility every day (Urick, 2020). But, beyond that, having fewer employees is crippling supply chains, product quality, and institutional knowledge in our workplaces. But, why are there fewer employees in crucial roles? Rather than adapt to changing workplaces, some older workers may be deciding to retire. And, on top of this, some younger workers have not been prepared to take on leadership roles, yet they are forced to assume them.

4 *Leadership in Multigenerational Organizations*

Problems associated with generational issues have plagued organizations in real time during the pandemic.

Yet, despite the potential challenges, embracing an inclusive attitude concerning various age groups can have many positive effects. It can push organizations to create more age-inclusive HR practices, it can help to provide stability as workers of various ages learn from each other, and it can often lead to highly innovative and productive work processes (Tinsley-Fix, 2020).

All of these positive outcomes will help improve both individual and organizational performances. But these will only occur if leaders strive for the development of a positive organizational culture where people of all ages feel welcomed and believe that they can make an impactful contribution to their workplace. But, such a positive culture can only occur if organizations work to facilitate open communication among generational groups. Unfortunately, I have found over the course of more than a decade spent studying intergenerational phenomena in organizations that positive communications between individuals of various ages and generations do not always occur (Urlick, Hollensbe, Masterson, & Lyons, 2017). That statement likely does not surprise you and is something that you already know (after all, you picked up this book).

But, negative interactions do not have to bog down our organizations if we work to improve them and engage in proper leadership that promotes intergenerational cooperation. And, indeed, there are many instances of positive interactions influenced by model leadership in multigenerational organizations. But, in order for such positive outcomes to occur, organizations and their leaders must help to foster good workplace dynamics.

Of course, individuals must take responsibility for respecting their coworkers of all generations and so each employee essentially has the responsibility to treat others with respect and dignity. But, sometimes individual employees need help. Even if they have good intentions, they need an organization that supports intergenerational cooperation. Thus, organizations must help to facilitate positive interactions and positive age-inclusive cultures as well ensure their survival into the future. As such, leaders must engage in solid leadership techniques that encourage individuals of various ages to work well together and mentor each other. Without this, organizations will not be sustainable, reliable, or perform as well as they might otherwise.

Focus of the Book

This book, therefore, is about providing organizational leaders with some perspectives that they might find useful in order to unite and motivate an age-diverse workforce toward accomplishing shared goals. This book will explore some common issues that organizational leaders may face as they work toward these actions.

In exploring common generational issues (including many that you likely face on a daily basis), I draw upon over a decade of my research on the related topics of intergenerational phenomena in the workplace and on leadership. Some of the statements that I make are based on research that I've published after analyzing nearly 100 conversations that I've had with leaders spanning various generations.

Other statements are based on quantitative survey-based data collected with colleagues of mine. Analyses of some of this data have been previously published, but this book reexamines the research through a fresh lens which is to focus on effective ways to lead in an age-diverse context. This book also adds an updated perspective on the state of generational research from my previous book on the topic (Urick, 2019) and it supplements my earlier research with additional interview discussions that I conducted in 2021 (in which the analysis has of yet been unpublished).

The focus of this book is different than that of my previous work on generations and is different than much of the other discussions out there on generations in the workplace because it focuses on leadership. My prior publications related to age have been primarily about how to improve intergenerational interactions broadly and, though this is crucial for leaders of multigenerational organizations, this book takes a much more targeted focus on helping influencers and decision-makers navigate a multigenerational organization. This book is unique from much of the research on generations (with a few limited exceptions) in that much of the extant literature focuses on analyzing generational differences – this book does none of that, with the reasons why being noted in the next section. Learning more about both generational phenomena and leadership is passion of mine, so I am excited on blending these two areas of interest.

This book should be applicable to most current or aspiring leaders in almost any type of organization whether it is a business, non-profit, government agency, religious organization, or other group that intends to pursue common goals. Therefore, I hope that this book is not overly academic. Indeed, though it references some of the academic research on generations and leadership, this book is meant for a practitioner audience. My goal is to utilize academic research in tandem with examples from real business leaders to make practical suggestions for your leadership practices.

In doing so, this book will of course look at the academic research already published on generations and leadership, but it will also analyze the statements of individuals currently practicing leadership in modern organizations. And, furthermore, I will also share some of my personal experiences of intergenerational phenomena as they make sense in the context of the topics covered herein.

My Generation Realization

To start sharing my personal experiences, before I go on to address what I plan to cover in this book in more detail, I would first like to share why I believe generational phenomena at work are so important to understand (and so interesting to me as a researcher, leader, and organizational member). Earlier in my career, I was always one of the youngest individuals in the roles that I served in my organizations (I'm not the youngest anymore, by the way – that went away with time and turnover). And I felt like I was often stereotyped because of my young age (again, more recently because gray is starting to takeover more of what used to be my dark brown hair, this no longer happens). But in the past, for example, I was always assigned to work on technology-related tasks despite not liking

6 *Leadership in Multigenerational Organizations*

technology and also not being particularly good with it. Technology proficiency and adaptability are, after all, often closely associated with younger generations.

This didn't really bother me, though. But, what did bother me was the way that I heard generations formally and informally discussed in almost every job I've had. The initial time I encountered this was when I went to my first organizationally approved training on generations in the workplace at my first real job out of college. I remember it well. I was sitting in a large auditorium at my company's headquarters and it was filled with fellow employees from all over the organization. We were presented with a lot of stereotypes describing each generation by an instructor whose credentials bearing expertise on generational phenomena were unclear to me.

I was baffled. First, I did not understand why I was attending this training. How should I change my behavior based on the material that was presented? What was I to do with this information? Was I to use these stereotypes unquestioningly as I interacted with colleagues of various generations? That did not seem right to me.

But, second, this person was using stereotypes to describe individuals who might be the same ages of my colleagues, friends, and family members! Their descriptions seemed overwhelmingly negative in nature – there were very few positive adjectives being used. And these descriptions did not seem to fit my experiences. This individual labeled older generations as being curmudgeonly, unwilling to change, and overly conservative. But, my older family members were not like this, nor were my older coworkers. On the other hand, my own generation was described as lazy and entitled. These stereotypes weren't true either. As a younger employee at the time, I was putting myself through graduate school, one of my best friends of the same age was putting himself through medical school, and my other best friend of the same age volunteered for an undesirable assignment in Iraq for his job in a branch of the government during the Second Persian Gulf War. But, according to this training, they and I were lazy and entitled. As a note, many of these stereotypes and descriptors still persist and were brought up by interviewees in my research (despite many of them not being academically and statistically accurate).

But, these are not just descriptors that have no impact. Words matter. Words “do something” and these particular ones bothered me, as I believe they bother others. I left that training disenfranchised, bitter, and confused. And I couldn't wait to get out of that company. I didn't realize at the time that these negative stereotypes were nearly everywhere.

Naïve and not aware at the time that such generational discourses were common place in most organizations, I soon had an opportunity to leave that organization and I took it. Of course, I did not just leave because of the training, but because that organization had a negative culture overall. The training was just the tip of the iceberg and, as we will see explored in a later chapter, it is possible that this session was an artifact of the negative culture.

My next job was as a training manager. It was a great job for the most part. I enjoyed working closely with our instructors in an administrative role and I learned a lot about continuing education. One of our instructors, though, led

training on generations that was unfounded in any research. I remember seeing the materials for that session laying around the office one day and I asked her what research went into the stereotypes that were guiding her discussion. The instructor was unable to answer this. It was all anecdotally based on what others were saying, often in popular media.

Intrigued, I started poking around academic journals to see what was published on the topic and was shocked that (at the time) there was little research regarding generational issues at work. Said differently, there were very few actual pieces of research supporting the accuracy of generational stereotypes in the workplace. Yet, they were regularly reported in popular media and understood by members of many organizations. These stereotypes were often assumed to be correct.

I carried this newly discovered baggage – that the way organizations and, more broadly, society talks about generational phenomena is incorrect – with me for several years trying to process what to do about it. I was mesmerized that the claims of generational differences I heard discussed regularly in work and social settings, often under the guise as gospel truth, were in fact not based on anything except biases, stereotypes, and manufactured hype. So, I decided to research this. I enrolled in a doctoral program and decided to study generational differences in the workplace. I was so excited to tell my advisor of this potential research stream in one of our first meetings. But, the excitement soon turned to frustration when my advisor suggested that I focus on a different topic.

I had not at that time realized that there is often a strange disconnect between what organizational academics research and what actually goes on in the “real world.” While real organizations were grappling with generational issues and trying to make sense of assumed generational differences, academia did not yet shed much light to help. Generational phenomena, it seemed at the time, was not of much interest to organizational behavior academics despite it being of increasing interest to the world outside of academia. Reluctantly, I sat on this idea for several weeks until I received the latest issue of *Academy of Management Review* (one of my field’s top academic journals) in the mail. Aha! There among its pages was an article on generations in the workplace (Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010). I quickly marched into my advisor’s office, journal in hand, and laid it on her desk turned to the first page of the article. I convinced her! I was approved to begin work on research projects related to this area.

Around this same time, I was asked to work with a local chamber of commerce to help with a leadership development program they were offering that focused on supporting young leaders. I collected data from this group and this information happened to be crucial to my first few pieces of research on the topic of generations. In the initial survey that participants were sent, many remarked challenges that they experienced in communicating with individuals of other generations. In fact, the most reported comment was that younger leaders felt uneasiness and difficulty communicating with older colleagues. My research team and I followed-up their comments with extensive one-on-one interviews.

Over the months and even years that I collected and analyzed data, I came to the realization that generational stereotypes may not be academically supported

to be accurate as some new research that was just starting to emerge began to suggest. However, individuals in organizations believe that generational differences exist and act on these unsupported stereotypes in how they approach working with individuals from other age groups. This insight guided much of my early work on the topic and, as such, the results of this research are included within the pages herein. But, of course, subsequent work including this book adds on to these initial findings.

Structure of the Book

This book will draw on my previous research and include new freshly updated perspectives on intergenerational phenomena. It will be organized as follows. After this first introductory chapter, I will discuss generational phenomena generally in Chapter 2. I will consider the various generational categories that have become popular through discussions in the media and societal discourse. This chapter will question whether or not these categories are fundamentally different from each other. In doing so, I hope that you will find my evidence convincing that generational categories are not as relevant in explaining individuals' behaviors as are other traits.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on academically supported leadership theories and suggest ways in which they might manifest in workplace behaviors. I will provide a brief high-level synopsis of only a few theories out of the many that are discussed in leadership scholarship. Since this is a book on multigenerational leadership, I will emphasize those leadership concepts that have the most applicability to age-diverse organizations and teams. The theories that I will address will include some of the most popular such as leader–member exchange, bases of power, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and leader–manager behavioral profiles. I think that it's important to start at the theoretical level in order to truly understand the leadership phenomena that we see in our own organizations.

Chapter 4 will provide some example challenges that leaders may encounter in multigenerational organizations. Some issues related to leadership that will be explored include influencing individuals of multiple ages, stereotyping age groups, creating negative organizational cultures based on misperceptions of generations, and supervising someone of a different age (i.e., relating to someone of a younger age group or managing older employees). It is likely that you might find similar challenges that you have faced to be included in this chapter. This chapter concludes the first part of the book that considers leadership challenges in multigenerational contexts.

Chapter 5 will serve as the introduction to the second part of the book, which is focused on leveraging strategies to improve leadership effectiveness in multigenerational organizations. Part Two will consider the issues noted in Part One and identify specific behaviors that may help leaders grow their influence as well as their decision-making abilities among age-diverse groups of followers. Chapter 5