Managing Multi-Generational Workforce by Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The challenges in 21st century has expanded as leaders need to adjust their leadership approach to suit with the diverse workforce coordination. With such a pressing demand on skilled worker. They were expected to deliver their task effectively neglecting that some may have difficulties. With so many issues in turnover and early retirement, Malaysia seems to face with major withdrawal of their talented, and experience employees in labour force. Prior to this, job satisfaction was said as the antecedent in early retirement and turnover. In today's workforce orientation, the workforce was composed by these four generational cohorts from Baby Boomers to generation Y. They coloured the environment in their own way. Each generational cohort have different characteristic that represent them. It is best to understand that their distinctive characteristic was shape by demographics trends, cultural phenomena, and many more. Technical competency is far more common place for a gen Y and Z. This is certainly a reality of technical deficit to gen X. With knowing about the challenges, issues and their characteristic, it is best to help us understand how they work and lead to promote job satisfaction.

Key words: Challenges, leadership, Generational cohort.

I. INTRODUCTION

Review of most writings mentioned trending pattern in highlighting the challenges of leadership in 21st century orientation such as globalization, technological advancement, and generational gap. The challenges become more

complex as leaders have to adjust their leadership approach to suit with the diverse workforce coordination. In relations with this matter, demographic profiles in Malaysian workforce change with many from the era of 1945 to 1964 will reach their retirement age and the movement of new generation that massively enliven the workforce composition with most of them come from the generation x and y (Yin-Fah, Paim, Masud, & Hamid, 2010). According to Broadridge and Hearn (2008) the shift in the generation gap prompting leaders to revisit the philosophy, mission and their values for the relevance of 21st century perspectives. In today's working scenery, the reality chart a worrying fact that many leaving the organization. Issues such as turnover and early retirement has been widely discussed over the years (Nazim, 2009; Long, Thean, Ismail, & Jusoh, 2012; Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth, 1978). Factors such as job satisfaction, and workplace well-being are said as antecedent towards turnover (Mcbey & Karakowsky, 2001; Yukl, 2005). Given factor such as leadership behaviours that will drive the organization change, Yukl and Lipsinger (2004) illustrated on few researches on the exploration of leaders' effect on employee's job satisfaction, where later literatures on the study is getting immediate attention. Inagami (1998) warned that one of the utmost challenges for leaderships at the entire level of organisations is how to build the type of environments that promote, facilitate, and sustain a positive level of employee's productivity and job satisfaction.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers and scholars who study the effects of population on society, use the term "generation" to refer to individuals who were born and raised in the same general time span (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Researches argue that values, attitudes and perspectives of a generation tend to be influenced by key historical and social life

experiences they share during the era-time period they were born and raised (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002).

While they exhibit differences, many of whom grew up in the same time period have a strong identification with their own time in his- tory and may feel, think and act in similar ways. Those similarities among members of a generation tend to be evident in the ways they live their lives, including their participation in the workforce (Patterson, 2008). A generation tends to develop a personality that influences a person's feeling toward authority and organizations, what they expect from work, and how they plan to claim those expectations (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

However, classifying or conceptualizing workers by age group- ing and cohort can be a complex subject in itself. Researchers have indicated theoretical and empirical discussions surrounding generations is less clear in terms of measuring and defining gen- erational cohorts and their subsequent views of work and work values (Parry and Urwin, 2011). Parry and Urwin (2011) argue the effects of age, career development stages, cohort composition and variable periods or environmental influences contribute to a convoluted approach toward understanding generational views in terms of generalized work values. These studies have identified five possible dimensions of generational workplace cohorts: (1) chronological, (2) functional or performance, (3) psychosocial or subjective, (4) organizational, and (5) the life-span concept (Kooij et al., 2008).

However, Kooij et al. (2011, p. 199) argued that "although other important indicators of age may be useful, most organizational studies of age-related influences on work behav- ior have used chronological age. The use of chronological age also facilitates translation of findings to the organizational environ- ment, where chronological age is the principal indicator of aging in the workplace." Based on the suggestions of Kooij et al. (2011), this study used chronological age to operationalize generational.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the characteristics of multi -generational cohort.
- To study the issues arising from multi -generational workforce.
- To study role of leaders in managing multigenerational workforce.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary data. Various papers were reviewed to study the real picture of the organizations having multigenerational workforce.

Generational Cohort

The terms 'birth cohort' was first used by French sociologist Emile Littre in 1863 (Howe & Strauss, 1991). The studies later expanded by Manheim in 1928 and the terms' generational cohort' was used since then to summarize individual in different historical periods of time (Cutler, 1977). Three generational cohort mentioned in this paper is baby boomers, gen X and gen Y. Baby boomers are those who born from 1945 to 1964, generation X were born from 1965 to 1980 and gen Y were born after 1980 (Eisner & Harvey, 2009).

- *Objective 1: -*

Characteristic of generational cohort

In today's workforce orientation, the workforce was composed by these four generational cohorts from baby boomers to generation z. They coloured the environment in their own way. In workforce makeup, leaders are comprised from all generation. Each generational cohort have different characteristic that represent them. It is best to understand that their distinctive characteristic was shape by demographics trends, cultural phenomena, and a moment they born that have turning points. It is said that Baby Boomers are much focused in their task and have strong work ethics (Notter, 2007). Besides, they are competitive, and have high loyalty

towards organization [30]. The generation X preferred to work alone and prioritize work-life balance, and cynical and Generation Y does not concern much on their task as long as it is done and complete, socially sensitive and technology savvy (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Crampton & Hodge, 2006). Generation Y are said to be technology savvy and have deficiencies in interpersonal skills in communication because they were raised and born in the era of digital orientation.

These deficiencies lead to limited social interaction amongst leaders and co-workers (Cascio, 2006). Interestingly, each of the generation attributes and beliefs about work was tabled in which revealed that Baby Boomers believe that hard work is equal to long hours spend in work and they have long term commitment in organization, while generation X demand for work life balance in their work and more flexible work schedule. However, for the generation Y, they expect to have multiple employers and multiple careers and while at the same time they are the best when integrating technology into workplace (Ethics Resource Center, 2010). Based on the unique characteristic presented, each generational leader is predicted to have different leadership approach to geared the organization. With the multigenerational makeup on today's workforce, it presents the challenges for leaders to understand and utilized appropriate leadership approach that later could be a tool to retain employees in organization. With respect to this issue, challenge in gaining greater understanding of this generation require leaders to literate the values and behavior on each distinct generation so people can act in a way that allow everyone to contribute effectively and efficiently (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

- *Objective 2: -*

Issues of job satisfaction and generational cohort

Business is no longer competing to get a vast number of customers, but instead they are competing to pool knowledge worker that can run and make their organization sustains through a year or forever. With so many issues in turnover and early retirement, Malaysia seems to face with major withdrawal of their talented, and experience employees in labour force. In Malaysia, turnover has started to increase in early 1991 (Hewitt Associates, 2010). To be precise, the numbers raise from 9.3% in

year 2009 to 10.1% in year 2010 (Grieffieth, Hom & Gaertner (2000).

It has been confirmed through many studies in organizational behaviour and management that job satisfaction is the primary predictor of employee's commitment and their intention to switching for another job Knight, Durham & Locke, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, 2006). Ingersoll (2006) and Igbaria and greenhaus (1992) mentioned that job satisfaction is the main contributor towards such scenario. As founded by Tan (1998), factors such as job satisfaction have significant relationship with employee's intention-to leave the organization. On one hand, leaders' support is seemed to be an essential factor in promoting job satisfaction in an organisation. Ulrich, Jick & Glinow (1993) supported that leader' behaviours will reflect upon organisational system and teamwork, also as a decision maker.

Challenges in managing generational cohort

One of the most pressing issues in organizational change is demographic shift and its influence on leadership. With today's workforce transition, it presents challenges to leaders to influence employee commitment (Jernigan, Beggs & Kohut, 2002). The generation differences deal with employees' motivation, organization productivity, team work, and organizational changes (zemke, Raines & Flipczak, 2000). If leaders could better understand their characteristic, it could provide managers with tools to retain the best employees. The diversity of employee's background and characteristic require leaders to adjust their style in leading. Such adjustment will in turns provide value to the organization (Sugansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

The workforce transition encompassed different people from different groups which designated as baby boomers, gen X and gen Y. Each of this groups differ because of their life experiences, life and career stages and work experiences (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Moreover, with differences in their characteristic, today's leaders cannot expect loyalty exist in employees. Leaders need to be alerted that have to implement different approach rather than stick to the old tricks like offer employees with good pay and benefit, promotes them but burden them with task and another meticulous project (Yeaton, 2008). Another challenge that needs to be ponder is the way leaders can understand the generational cohort. It may be complicated by life or

developmental stage of the employees.

Apart from understanding the behavior and values, leaders need to be sensible on how each generation perceived technology. Baby boomers who were born between 1945 and 1964 have slow appreciation for technology while gen X who grew up during the eruption season of MTV and video games were said as well verse with technology. On the other hand, gen Y are technologically well informed and highly dependent on technology (Yeaton, 2008). The challenges in technological aspect influence the achievement of individual responsibilities at work. Understanding the generational cohort and their characteristic could close the knowledge gap of employees and it can strengthen leaders capabilities to motivate employees.

- *Objective 3: -*

Bridging the gap between generational cohort

Technical deficit has suffered some generation to try catch up with others. It was said that technical competency is far more common place among our younger workforce but many have a decided deficiency in the Low-Tech ability to communicate – either verbally or in written form (Cascio, 2006).

Most of us work in what is now coined a "multi-generational environment". The transformational changes in technology over the past two decades created a knowledge and skill gap between the generations. Therefore, as a leader, recognizing, accepting and managing this reality accordingly is the trick. There has been much written and said about how Baby Boomers and Gen X should manage the Generation Y workforce – and also how to navigate being managed by a Generation Y era manager. Nuance and subtlety aside – it all begin with gracefully teaching Y communication skills and learning how to communicate in a manner in which they will respond positively (Yukl & Lipsinger, 2004).

V. CONCLUSION

Different generations have had different experiences, educational settings, and most importantly shaped by demographic and cultural phenomena. Although every member of a generational cohort is unique, these characteristic in general create cohort

preferences about how a generation wants to be motivated by those who lead them. Accommodating generational preferences in areas such communicating their values and beliefs will help to promote an environment of job satisfaction and retention. Facilitating the growth and development of employees is an important in leadership roles. Yet in the presence of a generationally diverse workforce, this is not an easy task.

VI RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are summary recommendations for leaders who are leading a multigenerational workforce and enabling that workforce to thrive and to meet tomorrow's challenges:

- Seek to understand each generational cohort and accommodate generational differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors.

- Cultivate generationally sensitive styles to motivate all members in organization.

- Develop the ability to be more sensible on the strength and weakness of each generational difference especially in technology advancement.

- Employ high tolerance to avoid generational conflict so as to build effective work teams among each other's.

- Capitalize on generational differences, using these differences to enhance the work of the entire team.

The changes in today's workforce should not be a reason for leaders to actively engage the employees to achieved job satisfaction. In the changing landscape of competitive recruitment, sustainability of organization could be achieved by retaining the best talents. Leadership strategies that work well with diverse workforce is through

understand their distinctive characteristic and work on to motivate them.

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