

Leadership Models across Generations

Saturday 28 January

This session was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

What leadership traits inspire and engage both younger and experienced generations?

Dimensions to be addressed:

- Intergenerational exchange
- The power of role models
- A shared vision and responsibilities

Key Points

- The fundamentals of leadership have not changed; yet technology and new generations have transformed the context and style of leadership.
- Modern leaders will succeed if they can harness the power of younger generations, while managing the generational divide.
- One innovative idea is to establish a “ shadow board ” , drawing on leaders under 30 with genuine responsibilities and influence.

Synopsis

The fundamentals of leadership have not changed. Aspects like setting a vision, determining objectives and measuring outcomes are timeless. However, technology and social media have changed the context and younger generation ' s demand a new style of leadership. The Millennial Generation (or Generation Y), people born in the 1980s and 1990s, has been shaped by the Internet, instant communication technologies and new media. As they join the workforce, it creates both opportunities and challenges.

One of the challenges of modern leadership is to manage across the generational divide and keep the entire workforce motivated. For example, technology is not just a tool for young people – it is fully integrated into their lives. This can be a challenge when internal legacy systems are clunky compared to consumer devices such as smart phones and gaming consoles.

The younger generations can also appear quite impatient and do not believe in organizational hierarchies or 9-to-5 working arrangements. They reject “ job-for-life ” ideals and tend to have less loyalty to their employers, preferring a “ portfolio ” approach to their career – having two or three careers during their lifetime.

Millennials also prefer to be coached rather than directed. As such, feedback needs to be based on questions of “ why ” , rather than providing solutions and prescribing “ how ” . Another difference with older generations is compensation. Younger employees tend to value flexible work arrangements, diverse experiences and broad opportunities rather than focusing on the paycheque alone.

One innovative idea for leaders to engage younger generations is to establish a “ shadow board ” , drawing on leaders under 30 with genuine responsibilities and as much influence as the actual board. The new leadership model is not based on authority, but on social networks and the ability to mobilize action. Modern leaders will succeed if they can harness the power of the new generations while avoiding the pitfalls as they are integrated into the workforce.

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<http://www.weforum.org/sessions/summary/leadership-models-across-generations>

Disclosures

This summary was written by Gareth Shepherd. The views expressed are those of certain participants in the discussion and do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants or of the World Economic Forum.

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