LEADERSHIP PRACTICE INFLUENCES ON THE GENERATION X EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

The employment pool in today's workforce is being drawn from GenX, studying how leadership practices impact their commitment in the workplace becomes essential for leaders. If an organization wants to reduce absenteeism and turnover, or improve on-the-job behavior of its employees by fostering greater commitment, it is important that its personnel and management understand how commitment develops and what can be done to foster the appropriate kind of commitment. The study was designed to examine the relationship between perceived leadership practices using Kouzes and Posner (1988) Leadership Practices Inventory: Observer and GenX employee organizational commitment. Research has shown that commitment is positively associated with motivation and involvement, expressions of positive affect and loyalty, and some aspects of job performance and behavior. Respondents for this study were GenX employees and leaders of a health insurance company. The total GenX respondents were 129, out of 375 completed surveys, providing a response rate of 34.3%. The results indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between each of the 5 leadership practices (challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart) to the GenX employee's organizational commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, American corporate leaders, mentors, and educators in the United States are dealing with a multigenerational workforce as they have four distinct generations working simultaneously. The four generations currently in the U.S. workforce are known as the traditionalists or veterans, baby boomers, Generation X (GenX), and Generation Y (GenY) individuals. Members of each generation tend to share certain experiences, events, and history that help shape their generational personality during their socialization in the society. This research, however, addresses the relationship between the leadership practice and a specific generation of employee (GenX) commitment to an organization, which in this study, is the health insurance industry.

Recognizing the fact that the GenX will constitute the employment pool of the next 50 years, and that they will encounter some form of leadership, understanding their commitment

to the health insurance industry becomes critically important. According to research (Muchnick, 1996; Tulgan, 1996), employee commitment deals with psychological attachment; it manifests itself in the culture prevalent among those in specific professions, work groups, or generations.

The sets of organizational-based variables affecting commitment are expected to be different for all generations, and it has been shown in studies that organizational commitment is directly linked to turnover (DeConinck & Bachmann, 1994). There is a need to enhance organizational commitment among employees and, thus, examining leadership practices and determining what impacts it will have, if any, will be useful for health insurance organizations.

Furthermore, leaders who recognize their employees and include them in the change processes are most likely to experience little resistance. Employees will typically accept the implementation of changes (Appelbaum, Berke, Taylor, & Vazquez, 2008).

As the downsizing trend continues (Davis, Savage, Stewart, & Chapman, 2003), and in today's sophisticated phrase of workforce planning in corporate America, employees' loyalty and commitment attitudes are changing. Kouzes and Posner (1995) explained the phenomenon so well, stating the following:

> Loyalty and job security, we're told have gone the way of the dodo bird. Instead, we have a new society contract that promises interesting work and greater employability in exchange for commitment to excellence. But how do leaders create commitment in a virtual organization? (p. xix)

The question posed by Kouzes and Posner (1995) is foundational to this research. Various studies have been conducted to identify and understand the aspect of the individual and the work environment that influence organizational commitment. In fact, leader behavior is a situational variable that has received attention in the literature. Sommer, Bae, and Luthans (1996) stated,

> The impact of management style on employee attitudes dates back to the Hawthorne studies. In fact, the notion that open, participative managers who provide positive feedback (as well as criticism) will engender higher levels of commitment among their employees is a fundamental assumption of the human relations movement. Well-known theorists, such as Likert (1967), Locke and Latham (1990), and McGregor (1960) have all supported the notion that management influences organizational commitment. (p. 980)

It is probable that a leader's behavior is recognized as influential. This study will examine a specific leadership model which is Kouzes and Posner's (1988) Leadership Practices Model, that defines five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership and link it to GenX employee organizational commitment.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, the employment pool of the next 50 years is shrinking and majority of this pool of employees will be GenX and GenY (Tulgan, 2004). Therefore, getting to know what it takes to retain this group will be one competitive advantage organizations can benefit from. Second, the study links an established model of leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 1988), Leadership Practices Model, to an established Organizational Commitment Theory (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) for a specific industry, such as health insurance, and specific group of employees, GenX. The study also demonstrates that leadership behavior, as defined by this model, is related to organizational commitment.

Finally, it provides knowledge-based research for aspiring leaders and employees, which will enable organizations to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of their espoused leadership practices. This insight can further enhance the design of leadership development strategies around those principles emphasizing desired leadership behavior that ultimately produces employee commitment and sustained human capital for the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review, some insights were examined and provided on the background and historical perspective of organizational commitment in this study. These items included the definitions of organizational commitment, leadership overview, Kouzes and Posner's (1988) leadership practices inventory model and theory, and understanding the diverse workforce generations.

Background and Historical Perspective of Organizational Commitment

Commitment is more than just a passive loyalty to an organization; it entails active involvement within the organization whereby one wants to achieve goals. One of the first researchers to put into operation the organizational commitment concept was Becker (1960). Becker's theory was based on the fact that consistent behavior forms the foundation of organization commitment. Becker stated, "Commitments come into being when a person, by making a side-bet, links extraneous, interests with a consistent line of activity" (p. 32). The term *side bet* described as something the follower would perceive as valuable or as an investment, such as money, time, work relationships, and pension plans. Commitment is viewed as a behavioral approach that subjects employees to engage in those behaviors consistently as a result of the accumulation of side bets that would be lost if behaviors were stopped.

Grusky (1966) suggested that the greater the rewards to the individual, the greater the commitment to the organization. Kanter (1968) introduced another perspective of commitment, stating that different types of commitment results from different behavioral requirements were imposed on employees by the organization. Sheldon (1971) suggested that organizational commitment is investment oriented and that it takes both social involvement and investment to develop commitment to the organization.

Organizational commitment over the last 40 years has experienced greater publicity both in the private and public sectors. According to Robbins (1989), within the topic of organizational commitment, job involvement and job satisfaction are among the most popular and widely studied attitudes of employees.

Frequently, it is very difficult to separate commitment from motivation and satisfaction. However, commitment goes well beyond these concepts. Previous research has linked organizational commitment to work behaviors, such as turnover, absenteeism, and job performance (Mowday *et al.*, 1982). Findings have suggested that the process through which individuals enter the organization through the recruitment process may shape their commitment to the organization. Socialization of the new employee, in which the organization takes steps to teach the new recruit about the organization's values and how work is done, also shapes commitment (Caldwell *et al.*, 1990).

Definitions of Organizational Commitment

Over the years, organizational commitment has been defined in various ways by different researchers. However, in analyzing all the various definitions (Becker, 1960; Brown, 1969; Buchanan, 1974; Grusky, 1966; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Kanter, 1968; Lee, Ashford, Walsh, & Mowday, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday *et al.,* 1979; Salancik, 1977; Sheldon, 1971; Weiner & Gechman, 1977), a common theme emerged and was reported to be a bond or linking of individuals to the organization.

Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) defined organizational commitment: The relative strength of an individual's identification with an involvement in a particular organization. Such commitment can generally be characterized by at least three factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership. (p. 604).

Singh and Vinnicombe (2000) defined organizational commitment by utilizing a group of Swedish and British managers attributes in the aerospace engineering industry. The terms cited were involvement, quality, hours put in, and putting yourself out. Managers emphasized the need for active, involved commitment to the organization and their personal career through initiative taking, creativity, and innovation.

Shepherd and Mathews (2000) noted that employers distinguish noncommitted employees from committed employees by their general behavior, attitude, demonstration of job satisfaction, and attendance. Andolsek and Stebe (2004) defined commitment as employees' orientation towards an organization that influences their involvement in its current and future operations.

Researchers have distinguished behavioral commitment from attitudinal commitment. Attitudinal commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday *et al.*, 1979) refers to the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Behavioral commitment refers to overt manifestations of commitment.

Meyer and Allen (1991) combined the behavioral and attitudinal approaches; the concept of the three-component model of organizational commitment was born. They were affective commitment, which reflects a desire to maintain membership in an organization. It refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in a particular organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with an organization because they want to do so. The other is continuance commitment, which reflects a need to remain with an organization and refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving an organization. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so. The third or final is normative commitment, which indicates an obligation to remain with an organization, reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment believe that they ought to remain with the organization.

One of the greatest needs a good leader can benefit from is having an employee who is committed; such commitment in terms of behavior and attitude can result in productivity and loyalty. These employees are individuals who forgo alternative courses of action and choose to

connect with the organization. In other words, they prefer to stay with the organization rather than seek employment elsewhere (Mowday *et al.*, 1979).

Leadership Overview

Leadership has been defined in so many ways and for the past 50 years (Fleishman *et al.*, 1991), there has been as many as 65 different classification systems introduced to explain the dimensions of leadership. Kotter (1996), a Harvard Business School professor and author, described leadership as a process whose function is change. Kotter went on to say that leadership involves creating a vision of the future and a strategy for achieving that vision.

During the 20th century in the days of Taylor's scientific theory (as cited in Wren, 1994) and Fayol's principles (as cited in Wren), approaches were mechanistic. Leaders prepared what needed to be done and gave orders and employees had to obey to be rewarded monetarily (Mele, 2003). They did not consider dialogue between individual and situations (Bass & Stodgill, 1990). In short, leadership is a process whereby individuals are influenced to perform to some level of expectation, while motivating and inspiring confidence and providing support in order to achieve or accomplish goals (Levinson, 2005).

According to Osland (2001), in order to set the stage for successful work teams, organizations require supportive top management and strong leadership, an organizational climate and policies that promote teamwork, teams with a common purpose and specific goals, and managers and team members who have the necessary skills to make teams function effectively. Apart from establishing direction for the group, leaders gain group members' commitment and motivate them to achieve goals to move in that direction.

Various literatures in leadership identified several characteristics of effective leaders. In the 21st century, some of the competencies required for effective leadership includes natural and learned abilities, personality traits, knowledge, networking skills, values, and other characteristics coming together to produce superior performance (Mujtaba, 2006). The leadership function is shared in many effective teams, and leaders should not only articulate a clear vision that appeals to subordinates but also express confidence in their followers' capacity to achieve the vision, consistently serve as a good example, treat employees fairly, avoid favoritism, and celebrate successes and accomplishments (Osland, 2001).

Leaders strive to motivate employees to perform at a high level. Motivation is the set of forces that leads people to behave in particular ways (Griffin, 2005). This means getting employees to work hard, come to work regularly, and make positive contributions towards the organization's goals. Performance depends on ability, environment, and motivation. Thus, to reach high levels of performance, an employee must want to do the job well (motivation); be able to do the job effectively (ability); and have the resources, information, materials, and equipment (environment) to do the job. Motivation is a skill that can and must be learned. It is essential for a business to survive and succeed. It is the key to performance improvement.

Another perspective on leadership shared by Hersey (1997), the cofounder of the situational leadership model, suggested that anyone anywhere who recognizes that influencing behavior is not an event, but a process is the situational leader. Hersey further indicated that the process entails assessing the follower's performance in relation to what the leader wants to accomplish

and providing support and guidance. In Hersey's view, the situational leader is concerned about people and results, and behaves in a manner where all parties win. Therefore, it can be concluded that with the situational leadership model, it is useful to keep in mind that there is no one best way to influence others. Rather any leader behavior may be more or less effective depending on the readiness of the person one is attempting to influence (Mujtaba, 2006).

Transformational leadership, however, the term which was introduced and, hence, developed by Downton (as cited in Jones & George, 2005) suggested that leaders have dramatic effects on their subordinates and the organization as a whole and inspire, energize, and motivate subordinates to solve problems and improve performance (Jones & George). Jones and George suggested that these effects include making employees aware of the importance of their jobs and high performance; making subordinates aware of their needs for personal growth, development, and accomplishment; and motivating employees to work for the good of the organization and not just their own personal gain.

Jones (2005) maintained that managers could be involved in transformational leadership by being charismatic leaders, intellectually stimulating subordinates, and engaging in developmental consideration. Transformational managers may also engage in transactional leadership by using their reward and coercive powers to encourage high performance (Jones & George). Burns (1978) distinguished between transformational and transactional leadership, describing transactional leadership as a series of exchanges and bargains between followers and leaders. Rada (1999) asserted that transformational leadership is the transformation of the organization and its personnel in the leadership process. In the long run, transformational leadership has leverage over directive only or coercive leadership, as employees realize that they are being included in the changes being made, which ultimately produces support of the change (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2008).

Path Goal

Another well-known leadership theory was developed to enhance employee performance and satisfaction by investigating their motivation. From early research conducted by Evans (1970), House (1971), and House and Dessler (1974), the path-goal leadership theory has developed. The path-goal theory takes into account employee characteristics and how they relate to leadership styles in the workplace (Northouse, 2003).

The path-goal theory of leadership sets two propositions:

1. House (1971) wrote, "One of the strategic functions of the leader is to enhance the psychological states of subordinates that result in motivation to perform or in satisfaction with the job" (p. 3).

2. The particular forms of leader behavior that will accomplish this motivational function of the leader are situationally determined.

According to Northhouse (2003), the path-goal theory supports the notion that supportive leadership, which consists of being concerned and friendly, will compliment employees who have a strong need for affiliation. On the other hand, directive leadership would compliment those employees who are dogmatic and have to work in uncertain situations. Given the varying

approaches, one message remains clear: leaders should rally support from their employees if any form of changes will succeed or fail (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2008).

Team Leadership

In the research on the effectiveness of organizational teams, it has been concluded that teams, when used effectively, have created higher productivity, better problem solving and decision making, more effective use of resources, and increased innovation and creativity (Parker, 1990). It has been argued that effective team leadership is one of the primary ingredients of team success. Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) wrote, "Indeed, we would argue that effective leadership process represents perhaps the most critical factor in the success of organizational teams" (p. 452). The theory behind this type of leadership involves functions of leadership that are needed for group effectiveness, such as monitoring in relation to taking action. Task function and maintenance function are two critical functions that have been identified to ensure that team leadership is effective (Gentry, 2005).

The development of positive interpersonal relationships is key to being a successful leader; learning what is important to individuals in teams, showing interest in their development and guiding them in the process enhances teamwork and results in attaining organizational objectives (Hader, 2007). One of the leadership practices in Kouzes and Posner's (1988) leadership practices model, "Enabling others to act" has a characteristic that encompasses fostering trusting relationships. This characteristic is consistent with what Hader reported, suggesting that when employees have trust and confidence in a leader, they obtain a comfort level and, hence, the sharing of information develops which enhances camaraderie and teamwork in workplace.

Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory Model

Kouzes and Posner's (1988) research started in 1983, when they began examining how extraordinary accomplishments are achieved by ordinary people, and what these types of people did when leading rather than managing people. After conducting personal-best surveys and various in-depth interviews, Kouzes and Posner (1997) concluded that leadership is a set of behaviors that can be learned and applied by managers and supervisors at all levels of leadership regardless of education, experience, or tenure.

The results gathered from the personal best study led to the generation of the leadership model identifying five practices: (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). The quantitative instrument, leadership practices inventory, was then created which is widely used to measure leadership behaviors pertaining to their model.

Researchers, such as Van Fleet and Yukl (1989), indicated that the Leadership Practices Model could be considered as transformational leadership. Kouzes and Posner (1988) stated, "The leadership field is in transition about the essential behaviors of leaders" (p. 483) which supports the consideration given by other researchers.

In 1995, Kouzes and Posner wrote,

> For what we've discovered, and rediscovered, is that leadership isn't the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It's a process ordinary people use when they're bringing forth the best

from themselves and others. Liberate the leader in everyone, and extraordinary things happen. (p. xx)

Imagine the commitment and excitement levels of employees getting to know that they are leaders within their own right and, if that energy is tapped, extraordinary things can be achieved.

Understanding the Diverse Workforce Generations

A multigenerational workforce is being dealt with in today's environment and leaders have to work with them in order to utilize the available human resources. As can be seen from Table 1 the four generations currently in the U.S. workforce are known as the traditionalists or veterans, baby boomers, GenX, and GenY individuals (Mujtaba, 2006). Members of each generation tend to share certain experiences, events, and history that help shape their generational personality during their socialization in the society.

Table 1
Various Generations in the United States

Generation	Birth years	Population in United States	Common characteristics
Traditionalists	1900s-1945	75 million	Stability and security
Baby boomers	1946-1964	80 million	Teamwork and human rights
X	1965-1976	46 million	Empowerment and social responsibility
Y	1977-1994	70 million	Technology and personal growth
Cyberspace	1995-present	20 million	Globalization and Internet

Note: Total population in the United States = 300 million, according to latest U.S. Census figures. Source for information in this table is B. Mujtaba, 2006, *The art of mentoring diverse professionals.* Fort Lauderdale, FL: Aglob.

The characteristics discussed are generalities, and they do not necessarily all apply to each person and some of the characteristics described for one generation may very well apply to individuals of other generations as well (Mujtaba, 2007). However, the characteristics described are likely to apply more often to individuals of the specified generation. As such, managers must be cautious and not stereotype-specific individuals when it comes to hiring and evaluating solely based on these categories because each person is unique and may not necessarily fit the mold for the specified generation based on that individual's place or time of birth (Mujtaba). Nonetheless, understanding the various generational personalities can help managers and leaders build bridges in the work environment to create collaborative teams in today's learning organizations. Furthermore, this understanding may assist them to effectively recruit and retain diverse individuals by meeting the majority of their intrinsic needs in order to keep them loyal and committed to the organization.

As one reads about the different generations, it is best to look for potential implications on one's own organizational systems and environments. As learning and wisdom increase, one can then appropriately use human systems on an individual and organizational basis to gain a true competitive advantage in the 21st century work environment. Current leaders, like past leaders, can reap bottom-line benefits from using big picture systems thinking to create user-friendly cultures that accommodate the needs of a diverse generation of workers (Lancaster,

Stillman, & Mackay, 2002). According to Lancaster *et al.*, with the existence of four diverse generations of employees in the work system, misunderstandings might become a common everyday occurrence if teamwork and team learning is not encouraged.

When generational collisions occur in the workplace, the results can reduce profitability, present hiring challenges, increase turnover rates, and decrease morale among all generations of employees in the department. Understanding the various generational personalities is essential in building bridges and creating new learning and development opportunities in the work environment. The four generations are identified below and, because each generation is somewhat different, one should note the various suggested rewards and retention methods.

Traditionalists or veterans were born between the turn of the last century and the end of World War II (1900 through 1945) and they make up about 75 million individuals in the United States. Because of their experience, traditionalists have learned to do without much participation and the management style they learned came from the military (Lancaster *et al.*, 2002). They were cautious, did not take much risk, spoke only when spoken to, and have been obedient to societal rules. They expect career security of lifelong employment and do not appreciate job hopping or downsizing jobs. Currently, there are many traditionalists working in large numbers at fast food locations and retail outlets, such as various department stores, including McDonalds, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and many top Fortune 500 organizations. This generation prefers a learning environment that offers predictability, stability, and security.

The *baby boomers,* born between 1946 and 1964, number about 80 million individuals in the United States (Lancaster *et al.*, 2002). They grew up in suburbs, had educational opportunities above their parents, saw lots of consumer products hit the marketplace, including calculators and appliances. The television had a significant impact on their views of the world regarding equal opportunity and other human rights. Many members of this generation served in the military throughout the United States and around the globe. They enjoy perks that allow them to have more free time like errand-running service, car washes, and food service. The preferred learning environment of the baby boomers includes interactive and team activities.

GenX, making up about 50 million individuals in the United States, born from 1965 through 1976, transitioned into the work environment during the 1990s. They had plenty of choices in choosing their professions and jobs (Lancaster *et al.*, 2002). The technological advancements exacerbated their successors, as they are techno savvy unlike some of their baby boomer competitors. Rather than paying their dues for a number of years as previous generations did, they were able to demand that organizations adapt to their way of doing things, creating disbelief from the previous generations.

This generation was raised in the fast lane, having been commonly referred to as latchkey kids as parents were either working or divorced, and they will come home from school to an empty house. They are the job-hopping generation, believing that job security does not exist, instead security comes from the ability to transfer and market ones' skills (Davis, Pawlowski, & Houston, 2006). For this group, freedom and autonomy are considered the ultimate rewards as this generation grew up being independent. This generation believes that as long as the job gets done, it is not important where or when it occurs. They have been raised in fun environments and, thus, like for their training to be fun and interactive with immediate feedback (Mujtaba, 2007).

Generation Y individuals, born between 1977 and 1994, make up about 70 million individuals; are technosavvy and multitasking; and have had access to cell phones, personal pagers, computers, and concern for personal safety most of their lives. It is predicted that this generation will be more loyal than the GenXers provided they are stimulated and have learning opportunities. They are likely to challenge why systems function the way they do and how things operate, and futurists feel this generation will make the greatest contributions (Lancaster *et al.*, 2002). According to Eisner (2004) and Spence-Laschinger, Finegan, and Shamian (2001), GenY individuals will be more likely to deal with finding facts quickly and to find more of such data, as they will have a short shelf life. So, today's college-age students must learn to think on their feet, make decisions based on new knowledge, create new knowledge through inductive and deductive reasoning, experience different methods and cultures, learn faster than their previous generations because information is changing faster than ever, and continuous learning is becoming the norm.

The global world of training and education will spend about $2 trillion annually and around $740 billion just in the United States (Eisner, 2004) to make sure their employees are well-educated, flexible, and able to think at a fast pace while adjusting to the changing needs of their clients. So, in terms of learning style, GenY students expect education to be about the application and the doing of things that relate to their current interests. Also, they learn best when the learning process and facilitation involves them in a fun and humorous manner. This generation strongly resists the traditional style of lecturing by academicians and know-it-all experts because they prefer to be involved in the process. Spence-Laschinger *et al.* (2001) mentioned that GenY students are likely to treat traditional assignments like the throwaway instructions you get with a new computer. Perhaps, this mindset is why the formats of case analysis, debates, teamwork, presentations, and working jointly on real world exercises seem to be most suitable and more enjoyable in many of today's educational settings.

GenX Characteristics

Kupperschmidt (2000) noted that typical characteristics of GenX employees are as follows: They are self-reliant, want a balance, do not like to commit to anything, are full of skepticism, and embrace diversity. Zill and Robinson (1995) noted that approximately 40% are products of divorce that grew up with little guidance from their parents.

In most of the literature reviewed, the GenX employee has been labeled as a slacker who lacks strong work ethics and they are just focused on their wants and needs (Harken, 2000). GenX workers have been described as job hoppers who are rebellious, changing one job every 3.5 years (Cordeniz, 2002). Sibson and Company (as cited in Rodriguez, Green, & Ree, 2003) survey found that 55% of their employees already planned or had the thought of leaving before hitting the 3-year mark. GenX have also been characterized as having a diminished expectation about their economic prospects (Yrle, Hartman, & Payne, 2005).

Another interesting characteristic commented on was that the GenX employee works to live, whereas the baby boomer lives to work (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2003). This may justify earlier comments of GenX being slackers. In some investigative work done by Kupperschmidt (as cited by Cordeniz, 2002), Kupperschmidt identified the most common characteristics of GenX

employees. These are important for a leader because it creates a diagnostic parameter, by which leaders can exert their influences, given what they know. The list includes that GenX are self-absorbed, independent, industrious, and resourceful. The characteristics also include that GenX value fun and balance in life, they take their time to commit to those long-term relationships, and they are creative and decisive problem solvers. They are also materialistic-practical, seasoned consumers. Loomis (2000) stated that this generation has individualistic and freedom-minded attitude, which could make great consultants. When GenX individuals are questioned by these characteristics, their view is that they are actually revealing individuality and entrepreneurship (Yrle *et al.*, 2005). To this end, if leaders can understand and appreciate some of these characteristics, then their job of influencing to increase productivity or commitment may be enhanced.

GenX Preferences

The ability to recognize what a GenX employee prefers in leadership style is an important factor needed to guide and inspire the GenX workforce (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2003). It is clear that the baby boomers are on their way to retirement and that demographic changes and market competition in the labor force are two major opportunities casting shadows on organizations, making them push for effective leadership training. The ability to comprehend traits and behaviors on the perception of the GenX employee to effective leadership needs to be identified as the boomer generation transitions to the GenX.

According to Harken (2000), the GenX prefers naked management, the essence of which is to create a positive, trusting, and genuine connection with GenX employees. The components of the naked model are (a) necessary freedom, (b) active involvement, (c) key recognition, (d) empathy strengthening the working relationship between managers and GenX workers, and (e) direct communication. GenX individuals prefer to watch a video, read about new policies and procedures, access information online, and prefer shortness or being concise (Cordeniz, 2002).

Most of the articles conceded that trait studies excluded GenX; as a result, not much is known about trait combinations that GenX wants in their leaders (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2003). However, several literature resources exist on the general differences between baby boomers and GenX. This is important as one can rely on those attributes in order to predict the relationship that may exist between the leader and GenX employee. Preferences of the GenX when compared to the baby boomers include GenX workers are pro relationship building in the workplace whereas baby boomers are result-oriented leaders.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, Kouzes and Posner's (1988) five components of leadership, including challenging, inspiring, enabling, modeling, and encouraging, were used. Organizational commitment was measured using the OCQ developed by Mowday et al. (1979). There are three related characteristics of organizational commitment:

1. A strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values.
2. A willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.

3. A strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. The objective of this research is to understand what impacts, if any, leadership practices play on the GenX employees' commitment in the health insurance industry.

The research question in this study was what is the influence of perceived leadership practices on GenX employee's organizational commitment in the health insurance industry?

The hypothesis tested in the study was:

H_{1N}. There is no significant positive relationship between GenX employees' perception of the leaders' leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, encouraging the heart and GenX employees' organizational commitment to the health insurance industry.

H_{1A}. There is a significant positive relationship between GenX employees' perception of the leaders' leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, encouraging the heart and GenX employees' organizational commitment to the health insurance industry.

The primary independent variable used in this study was the perceived leadership practices described by Kouzes and Posner (1988). It was measured using their Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer (LPIO), which assesses the five dimension of leadership: (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart.

The dependent variable for this study was organizational commitment measured using the OCQ developed by Mowday *et al.* (1979). The OCQ is a public domain instrument with high reliability and validity rating, simple design, and ease of administration that was extensively used and proven in research.

DATA COLLECTION

This study's focus centered on examining the relationship between leadership practices and GenX employee organizational commitment. The participants in this study were employees of a customer service department in a health insurance company a letter explaining the nature, significance, and purpose of the research study, along with the survey were e-mailed to all participants using SurveyMonkey. All participants were requested to complete three sections in the survey: personal characteristics or demographics questions, LPIO, and OCQ. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was assured.

Before the commencement of the survey, various approvals were obtained from the vice presidents of the service and human resources organizations. Employees were encouraged to participate and were given a deadline to complete and return all surveys electronically. The response rates of those surveyed were calculated during the actual research.

Data Analysis

The completed data were screened to ensure that the right classification of responses belonged to the segment being studied, which in this case were members of GenX.

The LPIO Questionnaire, which consisted of 30 statements, encouraging respondents to rate their supervisors' or leaders' use of the five leadership practices areas; each area containing six statements. Furthermore, the five scales were independent and measured each of the five leadership practices, including challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart separately (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). The OCQ survey, which contains 15 questions of which six questions, were phrased negatively and reverse scored to reduce response bias. The results were totaled and divided by 15 to achieve a summary of GenX employee commitment. Mowday *et al.* (1979) recommended that responses be classified into three levels of organizational commitment based on their mean score. Low level of organizational commitment was achieved when a respondent's mean score is 0.000 to 0.499, midlevel organizational commitment score is achieved between 0.500 to 0.699, and high levels of organizational commitment score is achieved when a respondent's mean score is between 0.700 and 1.000.

An analysis of the compiled data examined the relationship between two variables: first, organizational commitment, measured using the OCQ, and the five leadership practices as measured by the LPIO. Descriptive univariate analysis was performed to validate the frequency distribution, means, and standard deviation. Pearson product moment correlation with a two-tailed *t* test was used to test the hypotheses of the relationship between the organizational commitment and the five dimensions of perceived leadership practices. Each null hypothesis had a $p < 0.05$ rejection criterion.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study was limited to employees in the health insurance customer service department and the assumption was that the GenX demographic characteristics were representative of similar departments across the company. The limitation surrounding this assumption, suggests that the sample of GenX were selected as a convenience sample and recruited from one department, in one health insurance company. This sample may not represent the entire population of GenX; therefore, caution should be used in interpreting and generalizing the results (Yuen *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, several limitations are associated with Web-based electronic surveys, which was the method utilized in this study. The limitations may include the possibility that another employee with access to the intended employee's e-mail may have completed the survey (Mitra, Jain-Shukla, Robbins, Champion, & Durant, 2008). Other limitations (Carbonaro, Bainbridge, & Wolodko, 2002; Wellman, McMillen, & DiFranza, 2008) are systemic issues, such as lack of computer literacy, sufficiently technologically skilled to access the Internet, and resistance to spamming and other possible technological problems.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The specifics examined were the relationship between GenX employee's organizational commitment and Kouzes and Posner's five dimensions of leadership practices which include challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the OCQ developed by

Mowday *et al.*, the LPIO developed by Kouzes and Posner, and selected demographic characteristics questionnaire.

Response Rate

The surveys were distributed electronically using SurveyMonkey to 930 employees at the company's customer service unit. The respondents consisted of all demographics at various levels of the department. Employees were asked to voluntarily complete the survey within 2 weeks. Of 930 surveys, 402 employees completed the survey; however, only 375 were valid responses as 27 had missing data. The overall response rate was 40.3% for the total population. However, because this study was specific to GenX employees, these are employees in the sample who were born from 1965 through 1976 and transitioned into the work environment during the 1990s. The response rate to the overall valid sample was calculated at 34.4%, as 129 GenX employees completed the survey from a valid sample of 375 employees.

OCQ Analysis

The organizational commitment of the GenX employees was determined by the respondents completing the survey, which consisted of 15 questions based on the OCQ developed by Mowday *et al.* (1979). A slight modification was made to the survey used in this study, adding service to organization, making the instrument more applicable to the service organization, which was the area being surveyed in the company. There is no impact to the questionnaire's validity or reliability because of this added word. The respondents in this category were divided into six groups.

The 15-response items used a 7-point Likert-type scale with a range of 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (moderately disagree), 3 (slightly disagree), 4 (neither agree nor disagree), 5 (slightly agree), 6 (moderately agree), and 7 (strongly agree). The following six statements, Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15, were negatively phrased, so the response values were reversed. In order to equalize the 7-point scale for one-on-one comparison with the 10-point scale used by the LPIO, the sum of the recoded responses were converted to an index based on the maximum possible score of 105 or 15 responses times 7 points. The responses to the 15 organizational commitment questions were summed for each respondent and divided by the maximum commitment score of 105. The resulting index of commitment was then normalized into a range from 0.00 to 1.00. The summary of descriptive statistics of respondent's aggregate organizational commitment is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Organizational Commitment Summary

Category	Statistic
N	129.00
Max	0.99
Min	0.20
Mode	0.89
Median	0.76
Mean	0.73
Standard deviation	0.18
Coefficient variation	24.60

LPIO Questionnaire Analysis

The perceived leadership practices section consisting of 30 descriptive statements was completed in Part II of the survey. Kouzes and Posner (1988) developed the LPIO for measuring perceived leaders' use of the practices of the Leadership Practice Model. Kouzes and Posner cited five leadership practices consisting of two basic strategies, which ordinary people accomplished in an extraordinary manner. The five leadership practices containing the two basic strategies follow:

1. Challenging the process by (a) searching out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve and (b) experimenting, taking risks, and learning from the accompanying mistakes.

2. Inspiring a shared vision by (a) envisioning an uplifting and enabling future, and (b) enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams.

3. Enabling others to act by (a) fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust and (b) strengthening people by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support.

4. Modeling the way by (a) setting the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values and (b) achieving small wins that promote consistent progress and building commitment.

5. Encouraging the heart by (a) recognizing individual contributions to the success of every project and (b) celebrating team accomplishments regularly.

The GenX employees were asked to rate their leaders' usage of these five leadership practices in 30 descriptive statements. The 30 descriptive statements in the LPIO are combined as five groups of six items and they were found to be independent measuring the five different practices with no overlaps (Kouzes & Posner, 1997).

The employees were asked to rate their leaders' behavior using a 10-point Likert-type scale to indicate the leader engages in the leadership practice 10 (almost always), 9 (very frequently), 8 (usually), 7 (fairly often), 6 (sometimes), 5 (occasionally), 4 (once in a while), 3 (seldom), 2 (rarely), and 1 (almost never). The responses of the six corresponding questions were totaled and divided by 60 to generate the five leadership practice criteria. The resulting indexes of the five leadership practice criteria were then normalized to a range from 0.00 to 1.00.

The LPIO results showed a cumulative mean score ranging from 0.686 to 0.753 for the five dimensions of leadership. The leadership practice of modeling the way scored the highest with a mean of 0.753, a standard deviation of 0.219, and a coefficient variation of 29.1%. The leadership practice of challenging the process scored the lowest with a mean of 0.686, a standard deviation of 0.233, and a coefficient variation of 34%. The aggregate summary statistics of the GenX employees' perception of their leaders' five leadership practices is displayed in Table 3. below.

Statistical hypotheses were developed to examine the relationship between GenX employee organizational commitment and leadership practices, organizational commitment. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson product moment correlation. The rejection criterion rule

Table 3
Summary of Statistics for Leadership Practices Dimension

Index	Maximum	Minimum	Mode	Median	M	SD	% Coeff. Variation
Challenge	1.00	0.10	0.90	0.750	0.686	0.233	34.0
Inspire	1.00	0.10	1.00	0.733	0.691	0.239	34.5
Enable	1.00	0.10	1.00	0.800	0.748	0.216	28.8
Model	1.00	0.10	0.98	0.817	0.753	0.219	29.1
Heart	1.00	0.10	1.00	0.767	0.717	0.248	34.5

set for the null hypotheses was $p < 0.05$. The analysis and testing of the relationship between GenX employee organizational commitment and each of the five leadership practice dimensions of the LPIO, including challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) was completed. This analysis and testing showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between all five leadership practice dimensions and GenX employee organizational commitment. As a result, the null hypotheses of all five hypotheses were rejected. The results of correlation analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Pearson Correlations and Probabilities Index

Category	OrgCom	Challenge	Inspire	Enable	Model	Heart
OrgCom						
Pearson correl.	1.000	0.347**	0.276**	0.281**	0.294**	0.293**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000
Challenge						
Pearson correl.	0.347**	1.000	0.926**	0.890**	0.903**	0.892**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000
Inspire						
Pearson correl.	0.276**	0.926**	1.000	0.881**	0.880**	0.870**
Sig. (2-tailed)						
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000
Enable						
Pearson correl.	0.281**	0.890**	0.881**	1.000	0.934**	0.888**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000
Model						
Pearson correl.	0.294**	0.903**	0.880**	0.934**	1.000	0.900**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000
Heart						
Pearson correl.	0.293**	0.892**	0.870**	0.888**	0.900**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
N	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000	129.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSIONS

This study was primarily conducted to examine the relationship between perceived leadership practices and the GenX employee organizational commitment in the health insurance industry. The study was guided by a research question:

What is the influence of perceived leadership practices on GenX employee's self-reported organizational commitment in the health insurance industry?

The findings of this research indicated a statistically significant correlation between GenX employee organizational commitment and all five dimensions of leadership practices developed by Kouzes and Posner (1988) of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. The study also identified that out of the five, challenging the process had the strongest positive relationship to the GenX employees' self-reported levels of organizational commitment. The weakest positive relationship of the GenX employees' self-reported levels of organizational commitment was correlated to inspiring a shared vision.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One of this study's limitations is that the focus was only on a specific generation (GenX) in a specific functional area (customer service) within only one organization. Given that there are other functional areas in the company, it would have been interesting to find out whether the results are identical for GenX when work functions change. Other limitations include convenience sample, electronic surveys, only one company within the industry, and only one industry.

Another limitation of this study, which was not a longitudinal study, was its cross-sectional design. In today's economic uncertainty and multicultural mix in the workplace, the state of the economy heading for a recession, high gas prices, and a housing and mortgage crisis, a longitudinal study would have been helpful in predicting the impact of organizational commitment that results from economic cycles, business cycles, and cultural changes in the organization.

An additional limitation is that this study examined the relationship between perceived leadership practices and organizational commitment in a not-for-profit organization, where leaders are not under the same scrutiny as for-profit health insurance companies. As a result, further research is recommended using organizations where the stockholders are monitoring every aspect of the organization.

Further research regarding perceived leadership practices and organizational commitment in the health insurance industry could focus on cross-generational leadership between GenX and GenY and the organizational commitment or BabyBoomers and GenY and organizational commitment. Another area of future research could target the impact of leadership practices on all four generations' of employees commitment in the workplace as a whole, not specific to any industry, as it is now evident that this is the first time that all four generations will be working together in today's workforce and that each generation brings a unique work ethic to the workplace. The traditionalists relate to task orientated, Baby Boomers have a strong desire

to make their mark, Generation X wants positive reinforcement, and Generation Y wants advanced technology to be on the cutting edge.

SUMMARY

This research study attempted to broaden the existing theory and add to the body of knowledge concerning perceived leadership practices and organizational commitment in an industry that is very much challenged at the time of this study. The health insurance industry is undergoing transformation as it finds ways to serve people who can no longer have health insurance. Although this study did not address that, it provides recommendations for leaders to follow to enhance commitment to the workforce of the future that happen to be GenX employees. An interesting observation worth pointing out is the significant dominance of female employees in this industry with 80.6% of respondents being female. The implication that could be drawn here is that leaders must pay special attention to the needs of these employees in order to generate a win-win outcome in the long run.

The results of this study suggested that there is a positive and significant relationship between the five leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart in relation to GenX employee organizational commitment. Leaders should be knowledgeable regarding the causes and effects contributing to organizational commitment of not only GenX employees but all employees because organizational commitment impacts performance, turnover, and effectiveness. The continued sustainability and competitive advantage of an organization, rests on the human capital and leaders must ensure that they protect this important asset through leadership practices that enhance and impact employee commitment in the workplace.

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