

Trust, Leadership Style and Generational Differences at Work – A Qualitative Study of a Three-Generation Workforce from Two Countries

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Abstract

Trust, leadership style and generational differences at work have received significant attention in recent years. Despite several studies on these topics, their relationships in two contrasting demographics have not yet been explored. To address this gap, this paper examines how trust relates to the leadership style at work for the workforce of three generations involving Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y/Millennials. The data has been gathered through qualitative interviews and narratives from employees of three-generation working in the multinational organisations based in India and Finland. The generational difference is more noteworthy in these two countries, with Finland experiencing an ageing workforce in comparison with India, which has a much younger workforce. The findings provide valuable insights into the organizational leaders efforts to align their leadership styles as perceived most optimally by the specific generation of employees and signify that, for three generations, trust development depends on the leadership style at work.

Keywords: *baby boomers, generation x, generation y, leadership style, millennial, trust, three generations, qualitative study, Finland, India.*

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1. Introduction

The current workforce in organisations comprises at least three generations, labelled as Baby-Boomers (Boomers), Generation X (Gen X), and Generation Y (Gen Y/millennials), and is considered to be a crucial resource for organisations, representing a vast pool of talent and skills (Glass, 2007). Considering this diversity in age groups and the ageing demographics (De Long, 2004), managing a multi-generational workforce with different perceptions and goals is extremely challenging in today's multinational organisations (Glass, 2007). However, if managed properly the differences can be converted into significant strengths and opportunities (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).

Generational categories have received an increased awareness within the organisations (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Konrad, 2006). Each generation possesses its own work values, ability and characteristics (Burke, 2004), meaning that organisational leaders face challenges and benefits (Gursoy et al., 2008). These generational categories develop trust within their leader-follower relationships and desire to nurture the similar relationships under the preferred leadership style (Weston, 2001; McNeese-Smith and Crook, 2003). According to the empirical work by Davenport and Prusak (1998), there is no preeminent leadership style; successful leaders are believed to be able to adapt their leadership according to the preferences of their subordinates.

Trust between the various actors in organisations is an important element of the leader-follower relationship. It can be a key determinant of efficiency in employees (Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Rousseau, et al., 1998; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). Trust between three-generation employees and leaders plays a key role in an organisation striving to achieve highly engaged and competitive workforce (McAllister, 1995). Leaders can increase employee productivity, morale, mo-

tivation (Wiley, 1997) and retention (Kogan, 2001) by developing trust; this is because trust has been shown to have an influence on processes such as satisfaction with and perceived effectiveness of the leader (Gillespie and Mann, 2004), increased discretionary behaviours (Burke et al., 2007), improved team performance (Dirks, 1999, 2000) and organisational stability (Rich, 1997; Shaw, 1997).

Armstrong-Stassen and Lee (2009) and Cogin (2012) highlight that it is important for organisations to be conscious of generational diversity and to initiate the necessary actions to enhance employees' sense of belonging to the organisation. To expand this research domain and incorporate new viewpoints of trust and leadership style, this paper investigates trust in the leadership style from the three-generation perspective in two countries (Finland and India) and discusses the implications for leaders. This qualitative empirical study aims to answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. How are trust, leadership style and a three-generation workforce related in working life?

RQ2. How can the leadership style facilitate trust development among a three-generation workforce in a working life context?

The paper begins with a literature review on trust and generational theories, and conceptually connects these with the leadership style at work. Subsequently, methodology and findings are presented under the empirical study. The paper concludes with a discussion of results and inferences for leaders. In closing, limitations of this study and future opportunities for research are presented.

2. Conceptualising trust

Trust has significant organisational and interpersonal consequences as studied in the past (Argyris, 1964; Podsakoff, et al., 1990;

Mayer, et al., 1995; Brower, et al., 2000; Davis, et al., 2000; Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002). It is characterised as multifaceted in organisations (Möllering, et al., 2004; Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012) and is the building block of the workforce (Ikonen and Savolainen, 2011).

Trust theorists have reported that trust develops incrementally over time, integrating it with compatible style and actions (Mishra, 1996; Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). However, engaging for long time only does not develop trust; continuous interaction is needed. The trust development process is a never-ending story, it is long and timeless (Martin, 1998). Trust is considered to be an ongoing process (Connell, et al., 2003), and as a central element of enabling collaborative actions in the dynamics of leader-follower relationships (Mayer, et al., 1995; Lewicki, et al., 2006). The temporal dimension of the ongoing trust process was encapsulated by Wright and Ehnert (2010).

According to the psychological and transformational approach, the nature of trust transforms over time due to the existence of several types of trust (Lewicki, et al., 2006). Trust is an extremely dynamic phenomenon, bouncing up or down based on interactions between the partners (Bijlsma-Frankema and Costa, 2005). Trust is reported as a state of relationship, which may alter across interactions and situations. Conceptualising trust as a state also refers to the dynamic nature of trust. In the context of relationships, Klausner (2012) also defined trust as an interactional state. In addition, trust is reciprocal in nature, implying mutual trust and dependence (Deutsch, 1958; Butler, 1983; Butler and Cantrell, 1984; Serva et al., 2005; Ferrin, et al., 2008; Möllering, 2001; Mayer, et al., 2011). Reciprocation is considered to be a continuous process of satisfying mutual expectations, carrying out emotional contracts, thereby enhancing a dyadic relationship (Levinson, 1963). The relational nature of trust has been put

forward by Wright and Ehnert (2010). Trust is observed as a dyadic phenomenon by nature (Yakoleva, et al., 2010) and relational models of dyadic trust in organisations were developed by Mayer et al., (1995). In the contextual nature of trust (McKnight and Chervany, 1996; Agote, et al., 2016), the superior's benevolence was highlighted as a basis of the subordinate's trust. Trust relationships are multifaceted, interactive and contextual by nature; the actors are involved in the formation of these relationships themselves. In the kaleidoscopic nature of trust, trust can rapidly and suddenly "fray at the edges" and the upward spiral may also occur rather suddenly (Ikonen, 2013). Typically, these changes in the trust development process seems appear to originate from habitual and insignificant actions, especially from the subordinate's perspective. Trust is also considered to be highly dynamic due to its process-like perspective (Burke et al., 2007). Trust dynamics include initiation, sustenance, breach and restoration of trust (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). The process perspective of trust emphasises the process-like nature of trust development (Möllering, 2013; Savolainen and Ikonen, 2016).

3. Generational categories in working life

The definition of generations as defined by Eyerman and Turner (1998, p. 93): "a cohort of persons passing through time that come to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time". The 'generational habitus' generates and structures individual practices, which will emerge and are defined by forces operating in a particular generational field (Gilleard 2004, p.114). Other observations about generational differences state that they arise due to the cohorts of individuals born and raised

in certain social and political periods, and individuals of one generation are defined as those born and living in the same era and sharing their unique values, personalities, trust perspectives and peer traits (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998; Gursoy, et al., 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Borges, et al., 2006; Jena, 2016). Thus, the generational category and the difference between them served as the preliminary point of studying trust between generations (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Meriac et al., 2010; E.Ng. et al., 2010; Cogin, 2012).

A series of criticisms have been made towards the rising number of multi-generational research studies. Few critics illustrate generational diversity by means of life stages (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Johnson and Lopes 2008; Lester et al., 2012). A life-stage viewpoint advocates a common growth order for the human lifecycle, starting from infancy to old age. As individuals mature they develop more socialism, conformism and self-transcendence, and become immune from changes and individualism (Erikson, 1997; Smith and Schwartz, 1997). Another criticism is founded on ignorance of the effect of culture on shaping an individual's life experience that is overlooked by a reliance on key past events and categorisation by birth rates (Murphy et al., 2004; Johnson and Lopes, 2008). For example, Baby Boomers growing up in India after it became independent in 1947, whose early years were regarded as difficult and uncertain, have dissimilar experiences from those who were raised in Finland during the same period and whose seminal years were marked by stability and development. Regrettably, only one major cross-cultural research study by Murhy et al. (2004) has been conducted that provides some insights into generational study. However, the research was unsuccessful in addressing the many questions pertaining to control of life stages and cultural differences.

In light of these criticisms, this paper utilises the findings of Cogin (2012) to segregate the values that are influenced by life cycle or cultural origin and places its focus on work values referring to generational cohorts. These work values that influence and shape the generational diversity would be important from the perspective of leadership style; as proposed by Rokeach (1973), work values displays an individual's decision making and actions.

Researchers have reported fundamental differences in the work values of multi-generational workforces (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Cogin, 2012). Tulgan (1996) suggested that owing to their unique work values, multigenerational workforces are more efficient and innovative under a unique leadership style. Work values have been defined as the results employee desire and believe they should attain through work (Cherrington, 1980; Nord et al., 1988; Brief, 1998; Frieze et al., 2006). Work values nurture employees' perceptions in the workplace that influences employee's attitude and behavior (Dose, 1997) and perceptions and problem solving (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Work values are categorised as extrinsic and intrinsic (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Twenge, 2010). Extrinsic emphasise to the outcome of work like job security, salary, rewards and recognition. Whereas, intrinsic focuses on the work process like learning, innovativeness, intellect (Elizur, 1984). Altruistic values lay emphasis on making contribution to society (Borg, 1990). Other values like status-related focuses on influence, recognition, development (Ros et al., 1999), freedom-related values focuses on work-life balance and social values focuses on leader-follower relationship (Lyons, 2004).

Table 1 summarises the birth year of the generational categories used in this study along with the generational birth years proposed by other scholars.

Table 1: Generational categories and alternate birth years
(Years referred in Bureau of Labour Statistics in AARP, 2007)

TABLE 1: GENERATIONAL CATEGORIES AND ALTERNATE BIRTH YEARS (YEARS REFERRED IN BUREAU OF LABOUR STATISTICS IN AARP, 2007)	
Generations and Birth Years	Alternate Birth Years and Authors
Baby Boomers 1946–1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1943–1960 (Strauss and Howe, 1991) • 1946–1964 (Benson and Brown, 2011; Cogin, 2012; Dries et al., 2008; Meriac et al., 2010) • 1946–1962 (Davis et al., 2006) • 1946–1961 (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008)
Gen. X 1965–1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1961–1981 (Strauss and Howe, 1991) • 1965–1976 (Benson and Brown, 2011) • 1965–1980 (Cogin, 2012; Dries et al., 2008; Meriac et al., 2010) • 1963–1981 (Davis et al., 2006) • 1965–1983 (Sullivan et al., 2009) • 1962–1979 (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008)
Gen. Y 1981–2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1981–1995 (Cogin, 2012) • 1981–1999 (Meriac et al., 2010) • 1984–2002 (Sullivan et al., 2009) • 1981–2001 (Dries et al., 2008) • 1980–2000 (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008) • 1980–1994 (Smola and Sutton, 2002)

3.1. Baby Boomers

This generation commonly occupies positions of leadership in workplaces through the years of career development and promotion in employer organisations. The Baby Boomers generation is facing tremendous changes in the adoption of technology, both personally and professionally. Boomers consider themselves to be optimistic and resourceful, and evaluate their self-worth and that of others on the basis of work quality (Hicks and Hicks, 1999). They appreciate promotions, monetary rewards (Patterson and Pegg, 2008) and are mostly goal oriented (Burke, 2004; Lamm and Meeks, 2009). Their long tenure of employment makes them more likely to trust their organization. They believe in commitments in the workplace and their work outlook is process-oriented. Some key characteristics of this generation are that they are authentic, experienced and

competitive, they believe in equal rights and opportunities, consider values, teamwork and discussions, are motivated to work and value commitment and loyalty, believe in long-term employment. (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Jorgensen, 2003; Burke, 2004; Hammill, 2005; Patterson and Pegg, 2008; Lamm and Meeks, 2009; Cates et al., 2013).

3.2. Generation X

GenXers are fun loving, autonomous and quick learners. They were born in the era of emerging technologies such as computers, video games etc. They take pleasure in having a good balance between their work and personal life, embrace diversity and are not workaholics. They are a kind of revolutionary generation, who rise fearlessly against the oppressive work ethic of the baby boomer parent generation (Lancaster and Stillman,

2002). They are considered to be unattached, free agents, seeking individual motivation and rewards. They are the individuals who change jobs most frequently in order to achieve their own personal aspirations. They are extremely independent, flexible and value equal opportunity (Miller, 2010). They view work as being action-oriented. They trust their leader's words and actions, but once that trust is broken, it is very difficult to restore. Some key characteristics of this generation are that they are adaptable, competent and competitive, highly educated, innovative and independent individuals, motivated by freedom of work and limited rules, they need competent leaders, and they respect knowledge, not position. (Adams, 1999; Reese, 1999; Joyner, 2000; Chatzky and Weisser, 2002; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Jorgensen, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2003; Hammill, 2005; Miller, 2010; Cates et al., 2013).

3.3. Generation Y/ Millennials

Gen Y or Millennials are highly evolved and technology oriented, they appreciate feedback and empowerment, with directional reinforcement. They do not need people to lead them through dominance; rather, they need intellectual leaders who work efficiently, actively and at ease with modern technology (Taylor and Keeter, 2010). However, some studies have suggested that this generation needs constant supervision and guidance, as they are partly engaged workforce. The members of Generation Y face more stress, a high level of competition and the threat of unemployment (Lieber, 2010). Some key characteristics of this generation are that they view work as a source of revenue; they value a creative environment and recognition; workplace and time flexibility; participative work style (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Hammill, 2005; Taylor and Keeter, 2010; Lieber, 2010; Cates et al., 2013; Kultalahti, 2015).

4. Relation of trust and leadership style in working life context

Leaders have been a vital part of organisational studies for decades (Yukl, 1989; Holle- ran, 2006; Kanter, 1993), and they are the key determinants for organisational effectiveness across multiple levels: individual, team, and organisational (Luthans, 1988; Yukl, 1989; Burke, et al., 2007). Leader- Member exchange theory (LMX) defines leadership as a practice of a mutual relationship and interaction between leader and follower (Northouse, 2004, p.147). Yukl and Lepsinger (2004) established a flexible leadership framework that discusses the recognition of leadership complexity, balance during challenging situations and the need for the corresponding actions of leaders across multiple levels and situations.

Leadership style is the approach as well as the behaviour by which a leader directs followers toward achieving a goal (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). The style of the leader depends on the nature of work, employees and individuality of the leader. The traditional leadership style is generally not motivational for all three multigenerational workforces. The new-generation leadership requires new skills, experience, education and compatibility with current technology (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Rodriguez, et al., 2003).

Trust is the essence of leadership, acting as a foundation for functioning relationships and cooperation (Badaracco and Ellsworth, 1993; Ikonen, 2013). When operating in an innovative environment, trust in leadership is essential for organisational success. Developing trust among the employees of organisations is considered to be an important leadership responsibility (Savolainen, 2011), that influences the employees within the organisation and the organisational performance. Leaders need to be trusted by the workforce as trust is an intangible asset, emotion-based 'uniting glue' (Savolainen and Lopez-Fresno, 2013); it is nevertheless an essential element

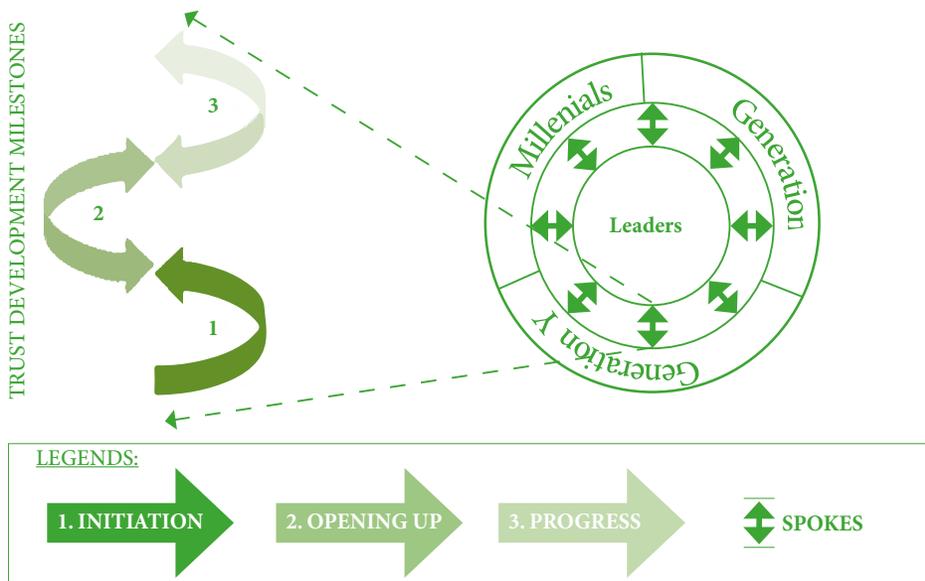


Figure 1: Trust Development Process between Leaders and a Three-Generation Workforce (Partially adopted from Savolainen and Ikonen 2016).

in every association (leader-follower relationship).

This study contributes to a discussion about trust and leadership in working life over three generations by suggesting a model (Figure 1) that describes the trust development process between a leadership style and a three-generation workforce. Process studies in the organisations and management areas place emphasis on why and how things build up, appear and mature over time (Langley et al., 2013). Zand (1972) proposed a spiral model of reinforcing trust that illustrates that trust is reinforced by communication in a process based on the participant’s actions and expectations. Van de Ven (1992) and Pettigrew (1990) contributed to the process perspective particularly with regard to the organisational changes. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) proposed a stage-based trust development model. Savolainen and Ikonen (2016), proposed a trust development process illustrating it as growing plant metaphor.

Figure 1: Metaphorically represents an organisation as a wheel, composed of leaders

and their styles in its hub, a multigenerational workforce in the outer layer, and trust as the spokes (connecting elements). As spokes in a wheel ensure a positive connection between the wheel hub and the outer layer, and facilitate steady move, symbolically, the trust in working life ensures the development of a positive relationship between the leader and the three-generation workforce. The length of the spokes represents the trust-development process, elucidated through the metaphor of the growing plant that shows multiple developments of trust (Savolainen and Ikonen 2016). The first step involves the dynamics of initial development, in which the leader and the workforce of three generations become acquainted and try to perceive each other’s work values and style. The actors in the organisation observe each other in working life and try to deepen their understanding when they find similarities in their work values and a favourable leadership style; they conversely remain in shell when they feel that their work values differ (Langley et al., 2013). The second stage emerges as the “opening up” in

progressing the trust building. Here, the individuals deepen their relationship through interactions and by becoming less formal. The third stage is described as a “seed and breaking the shell” also likely associated with the paradox of protection/defence (Savolainen and Ikonen 2016). In the second and the third stage there is the possibility of the reverse movements that could be due to challenges such as differing work values and non-preferred leadership style. These challenges result in broken trust that further deteriorates the trust-building process.

As a wheel with broken or uneven spokes causes a rough ride, similarly deterioration and violation of trust leads to a breach of trust in the leader-workforce relationship (Andersson, 1996; Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; Robinson, 1996; McAllister, 1997; Kramer, 1999; Keyton and Smith, 2009; Kim et al., 2009). If the use of a damaged wheel continues, it will lead to a collapse of the system in the same way as trust issues that are not addressed in an organisation, will impede its functioning (Mayer et al., 1995; Kramer, 1996; Shockley-Zalabak and Winograd, 2000; Kramer and Cook, 2004).

5. Empirical Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between trust and leadership style in a workplace context. The focus of the empirical study is on two contrasting demographics (Finland and India) studied from the perspective of a three-generation workforce. The reason for selecting this data from a two-country combination is that the generational difference is more noteworthy in these two countries. Finland is experiencing a steep rise in its ageing workforce as compared to India, which comprises a younger workforce.

This research utilises a qualitative approach using interviews and narratives to capture a deeper understanding of the underlying phenomenon. Qualitative research helps in understanding the insight, impli-

cations and perspectives of the participants (Saunders et al., 2009). Qualitative interviews have been categorised in various ways, such as unstructured, semi-structured and structured. This study focuses on unstructured and semi-structured formats because structured interviews often produce quantitative data (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The data gathered from the interviews are considered to be valid and reliable to address research questions and objectives. Interviewing is a flexible method, which enables the participants to discuss openly and freely (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). The interviews were generally audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, to attain data using the actual words. The participants were encouraged to discuss the topic during the open interviews (Ticehurst and Veal, 2000). Written notes were used with interviewees who were not comfortable with recording. The notes also supported and guided the analysis of the interview data.

The data has been categorised into two case studies for each country. Case studies are defined as “research situations where the number of variables of interest far outstrips the number of datapoints” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Data in the case study method are collected by various methods using qualitative research techniques such as interviews, document analysis, narratives, and observation, including ethnographical and anthropological strategies (Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010). Case studies enable a researcher to study contemporary phenomena in a real-life situation, where limitations between context and phenomenon tend to be unclear (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

Case study 1 comprises data from Indian demography collected by interviewing participants at work. Case study 2 comprises data from Finnish demography that encompasses five narratives. The findings of each case study are presented under each case study, and followed by a summary of both the findings.

5.1. Case Study 1:

Indian demography

The data was gathered from 55 employees (Baby Boomers – 10; Gen. X – 22; Gen. Y – 23) of the three-generation workforce at multinational organisations. The interviews were conducted outside office hours to avoid the fear of being in the office and holding back the information. The interviews lasted for 70–90 minutes. The participant and the interviewer exchanged thoughts and ideas about trust, generational differences between employees and leadership styles.

The data analysis began with reading, listening, examining data and then analysing the data. Topics identified during data collection were bifurcated from each other. Finally, the topics were analysed one by one. During the analysis, the topics had to be reconstructed and some were incorporated and combined into one renamed topic.

5.1.1. Findings of case study 1

The findings from the Indian demography are summarised based on the themes emerged from the comments of the participants; some of those comments are presented later. Participants based on their generational background, discussed several themes and issues concerning leadership style and trust.

Responses of Baby Boomers about leadership style and Trust:

Response 1: “Leaders are necessary, they should have morale and values like the renowned leaders do. Good leaders have their own style of leadership which motivates the followers”.

Response 2: “Leaders need to build trust with the employees formally and informally, and it can only be done with personal interactions. It’s not one day job”

Response 3: “Leaders are important in an organization, my team has various age employees and different perspective of any issues, I

think it’s the leader’s responsibility to find the best way out to manage and keep everyone motivated”.

Response 4: “Leaders are good when they pay attention for the preferences, values and wellbeing of his employees”.

Response 5: “Trust is a core concept, of believing and relying on each other in team. Everyone should have trust then only we can achieve success in any work. Trust of leaders in employees and vice-versa is very important”

These selected comments reflect the broad outlook of Baby Boomers. In summary, they need authority, and however they also need leaders to lead them with values, morale and potential. For Baby Boomers, relationship is built through ongoing personal interactions and trust is built through long-term relationships and demonstrating confidence in their work.

Responses of Gen X about leadership style and Trust:

Response 1: “Leaders duty is to indicate what is expected from me in work, so that I can give my best for that work and my performance is measured on the outcome of what is expected of me. Also a leader should be approachable. That is my first point of building trust”.

Response 2: “I want freedom at work, leader’s guidance is needed, but still I want to have my own space and freedom to decide how to work and approach to issues. It’s important for me that my leader trust me and my work values”.

Response 3: “If my work was outstanding and my decisions were proved to be excellent, my leaders should empower me. And based on my work quality he needs to give space and freedom to decide. These actions will increase my trust on my leaders as I will have a feeling that my leader also trusts me. It’s simple you trust me and I trust you”.

Gen. X considers them to be adaptable. They are the layer of meritocracy between the

Baby Boomers and Gen. Y. They feel trusted when rewarded with empowerment and recognised for their work values. They build relationships through interactions in the workplace and outside office hours and believe that their leader's actions need to be aligned with what leaders preach.

Responses of Gen Y about leadership style and Trust:

Response 1: "I don't want information of every second through meetings or face-to-face. Emails, messages will also do. It disturbs me in my work. We can make groups in social media accounts and can deliver important information's there too"

Response 2: "I want a competent leader, from whom I can learn new things, he should obviously be knowledgeable. I don't need a dictator"

Response 3: "Leaders need to make environment really friendly and cool that we can approach anyone, anytime at work. Also, rewards need not be monetary or in award functions, leaders can just come to my place pat on my back for my efforts and that all. It makes me feel rewarded. E-mails circulation for best work is also a good idea"

Response 4: "Leader's openness and honesty is very important to trust him"

Trust building in Gen. Y starts with personal interaction and is then strengthened using social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp). They are uncertain, ambiguous, and maintain fluidity. Generation Y demands freedom of work, empowerment and leaders who can lead in challenging situations.

5.2.1. Case Study 2: Finnish demography

The data for case study 2 was collected through narratives. The data comprises five narratives (21 pages), originally in Finnish and translated into English during the course of the analysis. The stories were written by the rep-

resentatives of Gen Y, Gen X and Baby Boomers. All the narrators of the selected stories are employees or leaders in international companies in Finland. Human being expresses their experiences by narrating stories and listening the stories and tales have become exciting for research purposes (Czarniawska, 2004; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). Narrative in the current study is defined as "a spoken or written text that involves temporal sequences of events and actions" (Maitlis, 2012, p. 492).

In the analysis of the narratives, the generation theory is used as an analytical framework. The typical features and values have been collected and categorised. To summarise, we adopted a qualitative and interpretive approach to the empirical study of trust in leadership pursuing descriptions of the phenomenon. This approach aims at an understanding of the perceptions of the actors in their own real-life contexts.

5.3.1. Findings of case study 2

Narrative 1 (Story 1): An employee in a Finnish organisation portrays an incident in which Russian owner could not communicate in either Finnish or English. This communication issue generated disappointment and mistrust ("virtually broken trust") leading to unclear intentions among the generational workforce. The owner's attempts to repair the trust resulted in him inviting the employees informally to his home for dinner. Through this informal event, trust was strengthened among the workers as they comprehended leadership style and work values of their peers. Subsequently, the employees attempted to resolve the work issues through mutual goodwill.

Narrative 2 (Story 2): In an organisation with a three-generation workforce, one of the team members was promoted to lead a team of her former colleagues. The situation now was that her colleagues neither took her position seriously nor did they communicate in the required way. She (team leader) ex-

plained that she was answerable to the other executive leaders in their organisations. This action of the team leader was visualised as misconduct by the Baby Boomers, whereas the Gen X and Y considered it to be about personality and approach issues. In conclusion, it suggests that the leader needs to consider her leadership style of approach to each generation and build trustworthy relationship.

Narrative 3 (Story 3): The third story highlights the leadership style of a Gen. Y employee. As Gen. Y are considered sociable and contemporary, she used to welcome employees on the first day at the workplace by a handshake and a hug before stating "Don't worry and don't be nervous at all!". This could be perceived as being objectionable on a generational or gender basis. The Baby Boomers workforce might be unfamiliar with the custom of hugging in Finland but for Gen Y it appears to be natural. Again, it depicts the leadership style; what is acceptable in each circumstance.

Narrative 4 (Story 4): The fourth story illustrates how a leader built trust with employees of each generation based on the situation. This leader was leading the team of multigenerational employees. There was a situation in a team where a Baby Boomer needed to go home early for personal reasons, plus, a Gen. Y wanted to work from the afternoon to evening. The organisational policies did not support both types of working hours. The leader communicated with his executive leader and managed to find a solution where he divided both employees work between them and explained that the work of both the employees should not be delayed. In that case they both have to support each other by working for each other. This is a perfect example of a leadership style and building trustworthy relationships between leader and employees, and within a team.

Narrative 5 (Story 5): The fifth story is from a leader from the Baby Boomer generation who appointed a Gen Y. employee.

Being a leader of a different generational employee, he allowed the Gen. Y employee to inform him about what he considered to be a comfortable communication and leadership style. This idea from a leader made the Gen. Y employee feel empowered to decide his own working style and build a relationship professionally with his leader. The leader was able to gain the trust of his new employee.

5.3. Summary of findings

Trust development through building relationships: Generational differences in leader-follower relationships and among employees/peers affect the leadership style. Radical changes are required in the leadership style in order to successfully integrate a multigenerational workforce. The findings from both case studies highlight that trust building starts with relationship building in an organisation. To address the challenging task of leading a multigenerational workforce, leaders need to align and enhance their skills suitably in all their communication, behaviour and actions, whether interacting with individuals or with the whole multigenerational employee group.

Preferred leadership style: The findings reflect that each generation has its own preferred working style that integrates with each leadership style. It is imperative for leaders to comprehend the similarities and differences of each generation in order to drive or motivate. For example, Baby boomers like to have a leadership style, which focuses on the individual needs, wellbeing and work values. Gen X prefers a leadership style in which they are provided mentoring and skills training. They want to be trusted and rewarded for their work. Gen Y presumably dislikes micromanagement, but need strong leadership (Joyner, 2000). Reverse mentoring (Marcinkus, 2012) can prove to be an innovative way of bridging the gap between multi-generations. Overcoming the stereotype culture in an organisation can build trust-worthy relationships.

6. Conclusion and discussions

This paper has presented the connection between trust, leadership style and generational differences. The qualitative empirical study focussed on a three-generation workforce comprising the data from two countries with contrasting demographics. It has been observed that leaders need to recognize generational differences in a working life context to develop trust. These generational differences can be interpreted as challenges or opportunities for leaders who want to benefit from the strengths of each generation and to encourage and promote workplace collegiality and support (Brennan, 2010).

As discussed theoretically in this paper, a debate still prevails about the existence of the generations. However, a fact that cannot be ignored is that organisations comprise various age groups employees, which are different in context of work. Moreover, stereotyping and generalising the work values and characteristics of the three-generation workforce can prove to be challenging as each group has its own key characteristics. There is a strong indication of differences because Boomers live to work, whereas Gen Y works to live, while Gen X emphasis a work-life balance. Boomers value empowerment and respect a hierarchy (Zemke et al., 2000), whereas Gen Y desire empowerment to believe that they are trusted and continuously challenges hierarchy and authorities (Gursoy et al., 2008). Gen X needs both empowerment and mentoring. Trust development occurs in building a relationship through leader-follower. In the case of Boomers, building a relationship is a longer process, necessitating continuous face-to-face interactions and keeping morale and values in view. In the case of Gen Y, for trust building interaction is necessary, whether face-to-face or through social media platforms. Gen X needs interaction, either face-to-face or via social media, trust builds in Gen X when promises that have

been made are fulfilled. The results of this study indicate that the different generations at work perceive the leadership style differently, and their trust-building processes and ways vary accordingly. It is important to build and sustain trust within a multigenerational workforce, as diverse values and perceptions become intertwined at the workplace.

6.1. Implications

The findings of this study have implications regarding the kind of leadership style to be adopted to lead the three-generation workforce; one leadership style is not appropriate for all the generations at work. Leaders who wish to succeed and who are keen to have a high-quality workforce need to integrate the work values of all generations in order to develop and sustain trust within the organisation. The issues of generational differences need to be handled judiciously, to avoid workplace stress, low productivity and job dissatisfaction (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Kopperschmidt, 2000). Through encouraging the work values of each generation, leaders can foster an environment of motivation, satisfaction and generational synergy (Gursoy et al., 2008; Smola and Sutton, 2002).

7. Limitations and Future Research

In this research paper, through the utilisation of a qualitative empirical study, the authors present the intersection of a number of broad areas such as generations, leadership style and trust. Each area equally deserves full attention and the authors have attempted to maintain a fine balance between the depth of study and scope of this research paper. Thus, this paper poses a few limitations that can be utilised in the future research.

This paper focused on a three-generation perspective of a workforce that is not universally acknowledged. The generational classification presented here was identified through scholarly articles and practitioners'

literature. In some developed economies, advances in healthcare and a high quality of life result in a late retirement age for individuals, and worldwide technological developments lead to start-ups from entrepreneurs as young as twelve years of age. These dynamics lead to the presence of 'Traditionalists' and 'Generation Z' in the workforce that can be included in future studies.

The authors collected data from the participants of various generations at work, keeping in mind the proportion of a particular generation in the workforce, e.g. the data count for baby boomers is comparably less than for other generations. This is for the reason that India is demography with younger

generations at work. The collected data has been analysed from a demographic perspective and the cultural impact has been kept out of the scope of this paper. However, it can be referred to future studies.

This study is confined to private sector organisations only based in India and Finland; it could also be extended to different sectors and multiple countries for a wider applicability. This article focuses only on trust in leadership style from the perspective of three generations. Other emotions and factors do not fall within the scope of this paper. The authors believe that the results will serve as a foundation for further studies and acknowledge that this paper is an initial step in this direction.

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