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Generational Differences:
Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

There are currently more generations working in the workforce of today than at any other time in the history of the United States. Each of these generations has its own unique set of values and influences. The problem is that there is not enough understanding of generational differences, and the resulting generational conflict is affecting the achievement of organizational goals within law enforcement organizations. The research conducted was to support and defend a belief that leaders within law enforcement organizations should become familiar with the uniqueness of each generation and provide training to all employees on the topic of generational differences. Research by the Society for Human Resource Management has shown that nearly 60% of human resource managers at large companies have observed conflicts that are caused by generational differences (as cited in Kadlec, 2007).

The information presented here was gathered through a review of articles, internet sites, journals, and books. The information researched supports the belief that generational differences are the cause for significant challenges, such as maintaining operational effectiveness, employee morale, communication, employee turnover, recruiting new employees, team building, and dealing with change within the law enforcement organization. Law enforcement leaders who have a better understanding of generational differences and subsequently make the necessary adjustments to their philosophies will ensure the current and future success of their organization.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the more significant challenges to the workforce and the manner in which business is conducted for the 21st century is the leadership of each generation of employees. In the workplace today, there are four generations who each have their own characteristics, expectations, and tendencies. These four generations are commonly referred to as the following: Veterans/Matures, born between 1922 and 1945; Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980; and Generation Y, born between 1981 and 2000 (Hammill, 2005). Generational differences and the issues that are relative to each generation are universal to all organizations, and law enforcement is not exempt. The question is about the challenges generational conflict presents to the leadership of law enforcement organizations. Some of these challenges are maintaining operational effectiveness, employee morale, communication, employee turnover, recruiting new employees, team building, and dealing with change (Hammill, 2005). Leadership within law enforcement organizations should become familiar with the uniqueness of each generation and provide training to all employees on the topic of generational differences.

In the United States today, all organizations are dealing with the same challenges and phenomena of generational change and conflict. The issues relative to generational differences are universal, affecting all industries in the employment market (Bess, 2008). The Veterans are almost all retired, the older Baby Boomers are beginning to retire, and the younger Baby Boomers will be following soon. A larger and larger number of younger Baby Boomers and Generation X are finding themselves in leadership positions and having significant problems leading and motivating other Baby

Boomers, and both Generation X and Y. This is a task that they are not properly prepared for due to the organizations lack of understanding of generational conflict and the differences in the values of each generation.

Most researchers identify four specific generations that are present today, and this is the first time in history that four generations are represented in today's workforce (Hammill, 2005; Marston, 2009; Tolbize, 2008). Each generation garners its uniqueness from the influence of different experiences, life, and world events. Leaders must have a clear understanding of the experiences of each generation to understand the motivations associated with each generation.

The Veteran/Mature generation is described as the traditional, silent, and post depression World War II generation who were born prior to 1945 (Marston, 2009). Though their presence is dwindling, some of the younger members of this generation may still be found in the workforce today. Veterans are greatly influenced by the sacrifices they witnessed, which were made by society during the Great Depression and World War II. They experienced a great deal of economic turmoil and military action, and as a result, they are very happy to have a job that they can make a living at and support their families. These events distinguish the Veterans as a loyal and self-sacrificing generation that is always thinking of the good of the organization. Their loyalty was directed at their occupation and the employer who hired them. The work they did was not just a job; it was a lifelong commitment. They are also the generation that believes an employee must pay their dues in hopes of receiving a promotion opportunity and a stable retirement. This generation values hierarchical structure within the organization and strict chain of command. This is attributed to the fact that more

than 50% of the men in this generation served in the military (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Following the Veteran generation is the Baby Boomer generation. The Baby Boomer generation was born between 1946 and 1964 (Marston, 2009), and they were shaped and influenced by national and world events like the Veterans. The Baby Boomers were influenced by the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the sexual revolution, and the widespread use of contraception and family planning. Many of the members of the Baby Boomer generation who are now in leadership positions spent their formative years protesting against the establishment and those that were in power. Baby Boomers were raised to believe that they were the culture of change. They equate work with self worth. Baby Boomers also believe that if a person wants success, then hard work and sacrifice are the hard price to pay. Baby Boomers are workaholics, and they firmly believe in step-by-step promotion and in paying dues (Tolbize, 2008).

During the 1940s and 1950s, Veterans and Baby Boomers worked hand in hand to achieve the strongest economical and industrial accomplishments of the 20th century. The Veterans had the return from a great war and a unified sense of patriotism, but this solidifying sense of purpose was missing from the Boomers. There was no sense of personal cause and eventually idealism took hold. Their sense of idealism and thoughts that they could change the world led to many of the activist movements during the 1960s and 1970s. By thinking they could do better than their Veteran parents, they began to rebel against the establishment and marked dramatic changes in the last half of their generation. Often classified as a revolution, the music changed, civil rights were on everyone's minds, and instead of embracing war like their Veteran parents, they

rejected the Vietnam War. Political leaders were assassinated for being outspoken, the drug culture peaked, which led to the death of influential entertainment personalities, the sexual revolution had begun, and all of this was documented on a grand scale and projected for everyone on the television (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Generation X follows the Baby Boomers and encompasses those born between 1965 and 1979 (Marston, 2009). As with the previous generations, Generation X is also influenced by the events of its time. These events involve changes in the corporate world and seeing firsthand how downsizing at the corporate level affected the careers of their parents. They are the generation with the highest level of divorced parents, which resulted in "latchkey" kids coming home to empty houses. Women were going through a revolution and had decided that being a homemaker is not what they wanted to be, so, for the first time in history, most women were working outside the home. This had negative implications on what had been the traditional family unit. All of this led to Generation X being probably the most misunderstood generation and the most marked by skepticism (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Generation X is the generation that has the least respect for institutions like churches, schools, and political parties. This is the reason why those in Generation X expect more communication within the organization, are more likely to question established authority, and are less loyal to their employers. Though classified as hard working, those in Generation X also seek to balance time at work with personal time. They are very independent and self motivated to succeed.

The most recent generation to enter the workforce is known as Generation Y and is commonly referred to as the Millennials. This generation was born after 1980 (Marston, 2009). Millennials can be described as full of self-esteem, educated, tolerant

to diversity, and very socially minded. The Millennials' parents have protected them because they did not want their children to make the same mistakes that they did. The advent of technology, or the technological age, has been the greatest influence on Generation Y. Thanks to the information age and growing up with computers and the internet at their fingertips, members of Generation Y are focused on short-term immediate results due to their exposure to the almost daily advances in computer technology. They are fast-paced, possess a high sense of self esteem, and are a diverse group that expects their workplace to be just as diverse (Tolbize, 2008). It is easy to see why leadership within law enforcement organizations should become familiar with the uniqueness of each generation and provide training to all employees on the topic of generational differences.

POSITION

The purpose of this thesis is to create a better understanding of generational conflict and provide adjustments that should be made to ensure the success of the law enforcement organization. There is a problem that exists within organizations today that is causing conflict between personnel, and failure to understand generational conflict by personnel at all levels is having very negative effects on organizational effectiveness. That problem is the failure to understand generational conflict by personnel at all organizational levels. Lack of understanding, with regards to generational conflict, creates miscommunication, lack of trust, and frequent conflicts. This, in turn, interferes with daily operations, new procedures and programs, and proper delivery of messages and directives throughout the organization. Generational differences are a factor of today's and tomorrow's workforce and will exist in all workplaces. Current and future

generations will always have specific differences that makes each unique, but with the proper amount of research and familiarization, the differences in each will assist all employees in making changes to ensure success.

When there are multiple generations of people that work closely together, there must be a sense of understanding between each group. During the introduction of the new group or person, there is apprehension. The existing organization members feel that the norms that exist are the only way of accomplishing objectives. New personnel, however, are more often from a different generation and have a different set of values and influences that drive their behavior. For example, as a sign of gratitude and loyalty to the organization, a veteran will come in early and stay late of their own free will. The Generations Y employee will see this as unnecessary and focus on whether or not what is required of them is accomplished. Each generation has completely different views of what it means to be productive.

Law enforcement leaders must be cognizant of their leadership style and adapt accordingly when leading each generation. Law enforcement is not immune to any of the effects of today's intermingled workforce, and law enforcement leaders must be cognizant that their leadership style adapts to the new generation of employees. The challenges that the new generations bring to the workforce must be met in order to ensure success for the organization. In today's law enforcement organization, the new employees are most often from a different generation than those that are supervising them. This, therefore, reinforces the need for employees at all levels to understand generational differences and receive training in effective ways to build effective teams so that the individual values of each generation are understood. A requirement for all

employees to attend sensitivity training and conflict management training should be implemented.

Leadership must be flexible to adapt to the differences amongst each generational group. When designing specific approaches to each generational group, consideration must be given toward each group's attitude about leadership, organizational structure and chain of command, loyalty, and motivation toward organizational commitment. When these differences have been identified, programs can be designed toward each segment of the workforce. An example would be explaining to Baby Boomers the expected outcomes and impacts of a program while explaining to the Generation X employees the individual gain each could achieve by participating in the program. The same program presented to Millennials would highlight how the program will lead them toward their individual goals, and it would be a chance for them to show off what they can do by being creative.

There are management approaches that can be taken to overcome generational conflict. Marston (2007) suggested a process that mainly involves managing Generations X and Y. The process is to negotiate, not order to action, anticipate the expectations of the younger generation, plan to ensure personal growth and development for each employee, seek employee input often, and reward those managers that do a good job. Today's generation of employees must be persuaded into action and not ordered to do the job (Conger, 1998). Marston (2007) advocated a negotiation with employees when and where negotiation is possible. Generation X and Y, unlike Veterans and Baby Boomers, do not follow rules just because management tells them. Generation X and Y have a different outlook on work and hope to have a

balanced work life and personal life. Veterans view work as an obligation, and even if they do not enjoy their job, they will work tirelessly at it. Generation X and Y employees want to connect with their employers and not have orders barked at them. Generation X and Y also have particular expectations with regard to personal development. Marston in 2007 stated that these generations "believe their true value to the work place consists of what they know and what they can do. This is in direct contrast with the Baby Boomer idea that their value to the workplace derives from their work ethic" (p. 148). The newer generations come to work with a self-image that says they have all the skills they need, and if they do not, then they are expecting to be taught.

An understanding of generational differences will enhance hiring and retaining high quality employees. Though there are currently four generations in the workplace, it is unrealistic to think that police departments would be actively trying to recruit members of the Veteran generation because the remaining members of this generation are approaching retirement age. Therefore, the information provided here will focus on recruiting and retaining Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y employees. In considering the impact of generational conflict on fire department recruiting, it was found by Rayon (2000) that understanding generational differences and applying that to the recruitment process could enhance hiring and retention. This better understanding and application to the recruitment process is a great advantage in the private sector, and there is no reason why similar techniques could not be employed for law enforcement in recruiting with significant success. Generational theory provides a legitimate foundation of knowledge to improve recruiters' ability to identify with and attract employees. It is

important for recruiters to recognize the different generations in order to adjust their efforts to attract potential employees (Orrick, 2008).

In order to maximize retention, it is important for leaders to modify their management techniques. Many Baby Boomers, especially those that are employed by larger law enforcement agencies with early retirement programs, are starting to leave public safety. The experience of these retiring Baby Boomers cannot be discounted and should be capitalized on by medium and smaller-sized agencies. When trying to attract a Baby Boomer to an agency, it is important to understand that recruitment efforts should emphasize how important the individual's experience is to the department, that the department provides stability for those that are hard working and want to excel, and offers a part-time program that would allow Baby Boomers to bring their experience while working part time or as a reserve officer. Finally, they should focus on specific programs that Baby Boomers can identify with, such as youth mentoring programs or fighting youth crime (Orrick, 2008).

Members of Generation X encompass most of the officers and nearly all of the supervisors that are currently moving into management positions within law enforcement agencies. When trying to recruit members of Generation X, recruitment efforts should describe how police work allows an individual to work on tasks with little direct supervision and a lot of work is self-initiated. This will appeal to Generation X's preference to work on tasks as individuals or as individual members of a team. Members of this generation also value personal time away from work. Emphasis on flexible work schedules with days, evenings, or nights as an option and a discussion of the department's leave policies are important. Members of Generation X also expect to

be provided with training that will allow them to be in control of their own careers. Training opportunities that are available within the department should be highlighted and is important for not only recruitment, but also retention. A discussion about available career paths within the department and education incentive or reimbursement programs is also important.

The diversity that law enforcement offers on a daily basis with regards to job tasks is vital because members of Generation X are known to become bored easily and are seeking an exciting variety of activities. A discussion of the ever-changing and developing world of law enforcement is also important, so potential employees in this generation know that the work environment is progressing and dynamic. Generation X members are also highly oriented toward technology and expect to be able to work with technology on a daily basis. The availability of technology within the department should be highlighted. This generation is also known for being impatient, so the application process should be fast-tracked as much as possible, and recruiters must maintain good communication throughout (Orrick, 2008).

Generation Y encompasses the new wave of employees entering the workforce. They are the generation that has been told that they can accomplish or be anything they want. To effectively recruit members of Generation Y, recruiters must highlight the department's career development programs and education incentive programs. Generation Y has also grown up in a world that is full of brand names. Agencies should develop a brand that is easily recognized and signifies them as a quality employer. Generation Y is highly connected socially and have close relationships with friends. An agency with an employee referral program will entice new employees to bring their

friends with them due to their desire to work together. The parents of recruited

employees can become involved in the child's application process. Agencies should

welcome this and capitalize by developing brochures or other communications for

candidates to provide to family members that include expectations, dangers, benefits,

compensation, and other specifics of the job. Agencies must be respectful toward

family members and extend appreciation for their support of their child and the agency

(Orrick, 2008).

COUNTER POSITION

Incorporating recognition and awareness of generational differences into the law

enforcement workplace has been difficult and is often hindered by arguments from

opponents. One such argument is holds that the basic paramilitary structure of the law

enforcement organization must remain the same. The theory that employees in each

generation must be supervised differently with less discipline is unacceptable when

mistakes could be detrimental to the lives of others (Goodwin, 2010). Instituting a more

empowering leadership style does not mean that the basic paramilitary structure has to

be disposed of. The paramilitary rank structure in law enforcement has its roots in the

rank structure of the military. Difficulties with generational differences in law

enforcement parallel problems in the Unites States Army. An Army study concluded

that captains are leaving the service in large numbers (as cited in McCafferty, 2003).

This is mainly due to a generation gap that exists between general officers that are

Baby Boomers and junior officers that are from Generation X. The study conducted by

the Army contained recommendations worth noting since military service and law

enforcement have many things in common. Of importance in these recommendation is

to reduce, if possible, dependence on rank and position and include junior officers in decision making (McCafferty, 2003). This does not mean that there is no need for some sense of paramilitary rank structure.

According to McCafferty (2003), leaders should reject the coercive leadership style and stress listening to others, coaching, and fostering the development of employees. However, police officers must have respect for rank and chain of command, the ability to follow orders, and a commitment to the department and their fellow officer because anything less endangers the safety of themselves and fellow officers. Agencies must do more work during the hiring process to ensure that prospective police officers have a history of respecting authority and getting along with colleagues. The best predictor of an individual's future behavior is past behavior, and in a world where police officers rely on one another, there must be an understanding of rank and the flow of the chain of command. McCafferty (2003) further stated that the ideal standard for a prospective police officer is the absence of a history of deviant behavior and absence of alcohol and drug abuse. Also extremely important are a prospective employee's relationship to authority, respect for the law, job history, and financial records. Agencies should work toward achieving higher levels of job satisfaction and professionalism and become a learning organization

Deal (2007), an opponent of generational conflict, argued that the generation gap does not exist, and, in fact, generations have more similarities than differences. According to Deal (2007), there are ten basic principles related to generational similarities, and some of the following are included in this ten. Deal (2007) stated that all generations have similar values including family, integrity, achievement, love, self

respect, and competence. Also, everyone wants respect; they just do not define it in the same way. Older people primarily think of respect as having their opinions given the weight deserved, while younger think of respect as having their ideas and talents respected. Deal (2007) also believes that people of all generations do not care about age; they simply want leaders to be credible, trustworthy, good listeners, farsighted and encouraging. As a final example of Deal's (2007) principles, she claims that all generations do not like change. She believes that resistance to change has nothing to do with age but rather is all about how much one stands to gain or lose from the change. Conflict in the workplace does not result from generational differences; it comes down to who has the power within the organization and who does not. Conflict between generations is actually a jockeying for position, social authority, and clout. Conflicts have less to do with age and more to do with who has clout and who wants it (Deal, 2007).

However, according to Kadlec (2007), nearly 60% of human resource managers have observed office conflicts that are a result of generational differences. Tensions typically result from the older generations thinking that the younger generations do not have any respect. How people want to be respected is different based on their age. A lack of understanding for a fellow employee because of a lack of understanding and respect for his or her generational uniqueness is directly related to age and results in a perceived lack of respect and therefore conflict (Kadlec, 2007).

RECOMMENDATION

Of the highest priority to law enforcement agencies is the ability to remain effective and maintain the respect of the citizens of the community the agency serves.

It is necessary to always provide the community with the most responsive and the absolute best law enforcement services possible. The effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in today's modern workforce hinges on the affirmation that there are four different generations that are present in the workforce (Hammill, 2005; Marston, 2009; Tolbize, 2008). Each of these generations has specific and unique traits, values, and characteristics that are of primary concern (Hammill, 2005). Leadership within law enforcement organizations should become familiar with the uniqueness of each generation and provide training to all employees on the topic of generational differences.

The days of the one-size fits all management style are over because of the uniqueness of each generation. Law enforcement leaders must have a solid understanding of what motivates each generation and develop a management style that is based on each generation. Failure to understand generational conflict by personnel at all levels is having a very negative effect on organizational effectiveness. The lack of understanding leads to miscommunication, lack of trust, and frequent conflicts that interrupt daily operations. Leaders must also be cognizant of their management style and adapt accordingly to each generation. Ignoring the challenges that each generation brings to the workforce and failing to address these challenges with an appropriate management style will lead to failure of the organization. With regards to hiring and retaining quality employees, it is necessary to understand what each generation hopes to get out of work in order to entice each generation to go to work. Each generation has specific needs that can be addressed in recruiting efforts and therefore maximizes the number and quality of employees that are being hired (Rayon, 2000; Orrick, 2008).

Opponents of adapting to generational differences believe that if law enforcement agencies treat everyone different, there will be a softening of the paramilitary structure that has been synonymous with law enforcement (Goodwin, 2010). This is simply not the case. Treating each employee special in order to capitalize and maximize their skills and abilities does not mean that there will no longer be a chain of command to follow. The paramilitary structure in law enforcement is necessary to save lives (McCafferty, 2003). Opponents also advocate that conflict in the workplace stems from a power struggle related to lack of respect for someone's position and has nothing to do with age (Deal, 2007). However, a lack of understanding for a fellow employee because of a lack of understanding and respect for his or her generational uniqueness is directly related to age and results in a perceived lack of respect and, therefore, conflict (Kadlec, 2007).

It is important that law enforcement agencies recognize generational differences because these differences affect everyone at all levels of the organization, no matter what position he or she holds. A continued lack of recognition and training will result in low morale, high turnover, failure of initiatives and programs, and failure to meet goals. By recognizing that each generation is unique, law enforcement leaders will be rewarded by having a highly effective and highly respected department.

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