

Preparing the Next Generation of Leaders

The Emerging Organizational Landscape with Generation Y at the Helm

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Abstract

The organizational landscape is on the tipping point of a fundamental shift as baby boomers en masse transfer the leadership torch to the next generation and retire from the workplace. However, the transition is fraught with challenges as there is a scarcity of fully prepared individuals to assume these leadership roles.

Thus the purpose of this paper is to present results from a study exploring how organizations are preparing for the next generation of leaders, Generation Y (GenY). This paper addresses three key issues: (1) the leadership role and competency profile required by GenY leaders; (2) the organizational initiatives in place to identify, develop, and retain GenY leadership talent; and (3) the anticipated changes as leadership roles are filled by GenY.

Introduction

Increasingly, there is an exodus of leaders from the work force and a lack of fully prepared individuals to take the leadership reins. On a global scale the leadership shortage is flagged as a critical issue [1]. This gap continues to swell with no end in sight.

All sectors of the economy share a concern about an escalating leadership deficit resulting primarily from Baby Boomers leaving the workforce. Organizations are troubled by the quantity and quality of leadership available to meet their future needs. Although there is growing concern, proactive measures to close the leadership gap have not been readily forthcoming as organizations cite more pressing operational and strategic priorities. If the gap persists there are widespread implications for employers, organizations, industries, government, society and the economy. These include potential threats to an organization's triple bottom line; further erosion to global positioning; and burgeoning expenses incurred from competition for leadership expertise, mainly in the international labour market.

The purpose of this paper is to present results from a two-year study exploring how organizations are preparing for the next generation of leaders, Generation Y (GenY) - those born between 1981 and 2000, who bring a distinct set of values, expectations, and behaviours to the workplace. Noted as the highest performing and ambitious of the generations, and most likely to ignite radical change, GenY is considered the solution to the leadership gap [2]. The study investigated three key issues: (1) the leadership role and competency profile required by GenY leaders; (2) the organizational initiatives in place to identify, develop, and retain GenY leadership talent; and (3) the anticipated changes as leadership roles are filled by GenY.

This study focuses on GenY and does not include Generation X (GenX), those born

between 1965 and 1980 who chronologically succeed Baby Boomers. GenX is the smallest of the generations representing 18% (6 million) of the population. As GenY is a larger cohort representing 23% (8.1 million) of the population [3], they have the bulk of accountability for closing the leadership gap [4]. As well, an increasing number of GenX leadership candidates, having scrutinized the demands of the economy, are concluding that entering the leadership quagmire is not their preferred career choice [5]. This paves the way for GenY, not as disturbed about the issue and seeking quick promotion. Although GenY is heralded as the solution to the leadership gap, they are considered the most exigent generation for organizations to attract, engage, and retain, as they prefer self-employment to working for organizations [6]. Hence, given the challenges ahead, organizations need to enhance recruitment and engagement strategies without delay, so GenY leadership is in place for the height of Baby Boomer retirement.

Context

Steadily Increasing Leadership Gap

On a global scale the scarcity of qualified leadership talent is earmarked as a critical issue [7]. Reports indicate that the number of executive positions worldwide is estimated to increase between 10% - 20% by 2012, yet as many as 52% of organizations will be unable to fill the roles [8]. The resultant quest for leadership expertise has been dubbed the “war for talent” [9].

Several demographics contribute to the crisis. The generation of workers available to replace Baby Boomers, who occupy most leadership positions, are 20% fewer in numbers than Baby Boomers [10]. The Conference Board of Canada [11] forecasts an accelerated rate of retirement beginning in 2012 when 30% of older Baby Boomers (6.6 million) reach age 65. By 2030, a quarter of Canada’s population will be 65 or older and ready to retire (assuming age 65 departure). By 2016, a shortage of one million workers is predicted [12], yet more disturbing is the forecast of ten million more jobs than people capable of filling them by 2010 [13]. Canada looks to the U.S. for solutions, yet it faces the same dilemma. Over 60 million U.S. Baby Boomers will retire in 10 years and 19% of Baby Boomers in management are forecast to retire in 5 years [14]. Under Canada’s immigration policy, entrance quotas will be deficient in closing the gap [15]. International recruitment offers little resolution as data reports 61 countries with below average birth rates to meet replacement needs [16].

Challenges Associated with Advancement of GenY into Leadership

A major challenge which faces organizations is how to attract, engage, and retain GenY who are markedly different from Baby Boomers in their workplace expectations. Characterized as entrepreneurial and independent, digitally savvy, rejecting micromanagement, and valuing empowerment and excitement [17], GenY has an unorthodox approach to career management that does not parallel traditional paths. Cited in the literature are low levels of trust of and loyalty to corporate cultures, attributed to intense media scrutiny of corporations tainted with scandal and having witnessed several instances of organizational downsizing [18]. They also have “little tolerance for lines of authority and proper protocol” [19, p. 47]. Consequently, they have become sceptical, mistrustful and apathetic toward traditional hierarchies and authority, and will confidently challenge authority [20]. With GenY declared “the most entrepreneurial generation in history”, organizations are confronted with the added weight of convincing young workers that working for a corporation has greater appeal than self-employment [21].

GenY brings an impressive portfolio of academic credentials and requisite skills in

technology to the workplace along with lofty expectations for fast-track promotions, raises, perks, flexible work arrangements, a need for fun [22], and meaningful work that adds value to the organization's strategic direction [23]. They expect continuous recognition and daily feedback [24]. They also call for managerial support as well as clear and comprehensive instructions, yet seek autonomy to chart the path and pace for achieving goals [25]. Studies report that 64% of respondents said organizational leaders lack understanding of the communication preferences of GenY [26]. Given their pressing sense of immediacy, GenY is unlikely to be enticed by promises of distant pay raises and promotions [27].

Job jumping every two years in search of greater compensation or purposeful work is the norm due to a boundaryless view of career and an awareness of their sought-after technological expertise [28]. GenY's definition of long term commitment is one year, and only one in five anticipates tenure with the same company for six years or longer [29]. Security is valued, but is defined as career security whereby they build a portfolio of transferable skills permitting them to change jobs freely. They are attracted to careers that enable them to make contributions to the community, especially pertaining to environmental sustainability, and they value time away from work to pursue volunteer interests [30]. Even in the current job loss environment, GenY exercises the right to leave, usually when frustrated with lack of promotional opportunities [31].

Methodology

This research is framed within a grounded theory approach which focuses on developing theories that are informed by events, as well as interactions of people and their communications [32]. Strengths related to grounded theory include "strategies that guide the researcher step by step through an analytic process; the self-correcting nature of the data collection process; the methods' inherent bent toward theory and the simultaneous turning away from a contextual description; and the emphasis on comparative methods" [33, p. 522]. A qualitative approach allowed probing for details, clarifying frameworks, and redirecting questions [34].

In early 2008, a pilot study was conducted in Ontario, Canada on how companies prepare GenY for leadership. From this research, the need and momentum for a national study materialized with funding provided by Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C., Canada. Specifically, the preliminary research contributed to the development of the theoretical perspective framing this study; refinement of research questions; and validation of methods for data collection and analysis against the goals and objectives of the program of study.

A two-year national study was conducted consisting of one-on-one and focus group interviews with 204 senior leaders and leadership development practitioners across organizational sectors and industries, and 116 GenY employees. Participants were from small and large organizations; a variety of industries; and well established and new organizations.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, specifically the constant comparative method originally developed by Glaser [35] and further developed by Strauss and Corbin [36]. This allowed a comparison of similarities, differences, and general patterns in responses. Each line of transcripts was reviewed to determine concepts that the data reflected. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding [37] allowed for progressively more complex searches for larger and more illuminating connections. Continuous reflection and synthesis of data led to the emergence of themes and patterns which were clustered into categories. The goal was to keep categories mutually exclusive and to refine categories so they remained manageable and salient.

Research Findings

Research participants shared experiences and insights about the challenges and opportunities of preparing GenY for leadership. Emerging from content analysis of data were the following categories: the role and competency profile of GenY leaders; how organizations identify and develop GenY leadership potential; and, organizational changes anticipated as GenY moves into leadership roles.

Role and Competency Profile of GenY Leaders

Findings from this study indicate that GenY will require a distinct and complex portfolio of competencies to lead in a multi-national marketplace and in a flattened and shrinking global context. GenY will be expected to shift organizational priorities and reframe workplace realities.

Refocus Organizations as Global Forces

GenY leaders will be expected to reset the organizational compass to align with organizational values, refocus where the organization is heading as a global force, reaffirm what needs to be improved in the organization, rejuvenate workforce engagement, and reengage workplace teams. GenY leaders will be expected to ground their decisions in personal and organizational values, and they likely will struggle with the polarities that surface when personal and institutional values conflict. They will also need to exercise their bench strength in harmonizing disparity between core organizational values and organizational initiatives, and to work with staff that challenge and resist values-based leadership.

In the case where values are challenged, GenY leaders will need to engage in widespread consultation and collaboration with staff about current and desired values, and how these values should be lived in the organization. Specifically, this invites inquiry into a number of areas: the nature and extent of the disconnect to current organizational values, specifically focusing on how these values are perceived and experienced by staff; the desired organizational values and how they should be manifest in the organization; and the momentum and commitment that exist for reframing values and for venturing down a new pathway. Having candid conversations about values will position the organization to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness in their culture, which is the starting point for co-creating a culture of engagement that attracts and retains staff, and inspires them to do their best work.

Develop Cultural Intelligence

In tandem with honing emotional intelligence, which is a key competency in most leadership development architectures, GenY leaders are encouraged to develop cultural intelligence. According to organizational leaders, cultural intelligence will surpass emotional intelligence as a sought-after leadership competency, since the next generation of leaders will spend upwards of 70% of their time in the global community.

At the core of cultural intelligence is an acute and deeply engrained sensitivity and capacity to embrace differences and function effectively in national, organizational, and ethnic cultural arenas. It is considerably more profound and complex than awareness of the ethnicity, social customs, cultural norms, rules and taboos, legalities, and business etiquette that is often the starting place of most cultural awareness training programs. The signature qualities of cultural intelligence transcend cerebral knowledge of a culture and are rooted in one's genuine interest and capacity to nurture deep and meaningful connections with others. It manifests itself in one's authenticity, in one's inexhaustible curiosity about the world, and in one's nimbleness in acting

and reacting to situations and people; usually tested in times of intense anxiety and stress. From this orientation, one is willing and able to take a leap of faith into the unknown and engage in the uninhibited risk taking and experimentation that are the trademarks of effective leadership in the twenty-first century.

Developing cultural intelligence positions GenY leaders to transfer their cultural sensitivity and adaptability into identifying and managing other differences in such areas as gender, religious beliefs, social class, sexual orientations, age, education, and physical abilities. It equips GenY with the skills to view the work world through another lens; assess the impact of workplace diversities; and be proactive in implementing policies and programs to manage workplace differences.

Develop High Performing Team

In a global economy where multi-national teams have become a pervasive phenomenon in organizations, achieving high performance in a team setting is one of the most illusive and underdeveloped areas of organizational work life. Even though organizations promote and encourage teamwork, and credit teams as key players in their business operations, little is known about what drives their success and even less time is spent uncovering how to develop high performing teams.

Organizational leaders confessed the chilling reality that team development is exhaustive and intrusive on an already fast-paced and overburdened work schedule. Given a business landscape of unprecedented and unpredictable change and a work culture characterized by chronic hours, fatiguing workloads, and shrinking deadlines, team development typically takes a backseat. Hence, intentions to develop teams are trumped by other priorities that are deemed more pressing to organizational success. Consequently, many teams report difficulty fostering trust, and experience unfulfilled individual, team and organizational goals.

GenY leaders will be expected to resurrect teams and champion their sustainability in a global context. They will be called to venture beyond extolling the virtues of teams and to ask tough questions – what internal organizational changes must be made to accommodate teams; and are we prepared to expend the resources? The expectation will be to transform how teams are established, trained, and rewarded so that their work is more fully aligned with organizational values and vision; they contribute more fully to the achievement of the organization's long term objectives and strategic mandate; and they foster widespread internal and external networks for partnerships. To achieve this, GenY leaders need to develop a coaching philosophy and skill set that enables them to support high performance cultures in organizations. Specifically, there needs to be commitment to developing a deep understanding of the nature, purpose and process of coaching and a commitment to guiding staff toward developing their full potential.

Develop Strategic Thinking and Decision Making Intelligence

Given the complexity of the global economy, future leaders require staggering strategic thinking and decision making intelligence. According to organizational leaders, future leaders must challenge the status quo, cultivate extraordinary innovations, and develop high performing teams to move forward aggressively with revitalized strategic priorities. Leadership requires unparalleled strategic thinking, judgment, and decision making intelligence to function in complex and uncertain times. Exemplary leadership that launches progressive strategic initiatives to propel organizations into uncharted and revolutionary terrain is the bedrock upon which organizational success and sustainability are built, and positions organizations for competitive

advantage in the fluid national and global economy.

Fundamental to leadership effectiveness is honing the craft of evolving into a leader that is strategically intelligent and models integrity while fulfilling the mandate of an organizational consultant and strategic change agent. GenY leaders will be challenged on two levels: 1) to take extreme risks and to pioneer novel approaches in building, managing, and sustaining an integrated strategy; and 2) to develop the right policies, practices, and programs to ensure successful implementation of the strategy which is ultimately linked to a global vision and strategy of the organization. They will also be expected to develop competencies in how to determine metrics that can be used to measure performance and to benchmark and evaluate the effectiveness of organizational functionalities as they support organizational strategies – a commitment to metrification that is fragile and poorly executed in many organizations.

Nurture Long-Term Collaborative Engagement

GenY leaders are expected to hone their cultural intelligence to navigate the complexities of establishing and sustaining partnerships in the transnational marketplace. Specifically, they are expected to dedicate their efforts to collaborative engagement whereby they transition from transactional business arrangements to nurturing meaningful, long-term connections with clients, suppliers, and the community in general. The era of transactions is obsolete, and now the compass is pointed on reinventing how organizations do business if they intend to secure a more permanent corner of the market.

The transactional model was fraught with problems because, in one's zeal to close business deals, initiatives were hastily launched without concern for building relationships; and hence, they quickly met their untimely demise. Failed initiatives were criticized for their inherent business flaws when in fact the microscope should have been focused on human relationships.

GenY leaders will be expected to redefine long-term collaborative engagement, consider the business advantages of establishing and sustaining meaningful partnerships; and chart the pathway for transitioning from transactions to long-term partnerships that are founded on consultation, collaboration, and transparency. According to organizational leaders, GenY leaders will be expected to investigate the root cause culprits that deter organizations from collaborative engagement with business partners.

Organizational Initiatives to Develop GenY Leadership Potential

Organizational leaders reported that they are aware of the pending leadership deficit and its organizational impact, yet they have not prepared accordingly and they admit their uncertainty about how to develop GenY. Leaders have been consumed with organizational survival and recovery from the economic meltdown, hence developing leadership capacity and dedicating resources to such initiatives have not been on their radar screen. Eighty-one percent of the organizational leaders and GenY practitioners rated succession planning and management systems currently in place in their own organizations as inadequate to prepare future leaders. Lacking are succession plans that require commitment and long term planning at all levels and pervasive understanding of how succession planning links to organizational objectives. Thirty percent of leaders reported succession planning as a top priority, yet 72% of these leaders admitted they would transfer funds from the pockets of succession management to other organizational areas not related to talent management, if required. Thirty-two percent said they include mid-level managers in succession planning, and only 11% included first-line supervisors.

Seventy-eight percent of HR leaders reported difficulties securing skilled leaders and

60% predicted the degree of difficulty will escalate within the next five years. Fifty percent of HR leaders engage in at least three rounds of recruitment for jobs with supervisory responsibilities and 28% initiate a fourth recruitment round before the right candidate is found. Eighty-six percent of HR leaders reported their organizations were not coaching younger staff to progress into management. According to HR practitioners, organizations struggle with defining “leadership”, including whether the focus of effective leadership should rest on personality or behaviours. This uncertainty results in organizations working with insufficient or imprecise information in the hiring process, causing much leadership expertise to go undetected.

Of the organizations with succession planning and management systems in place, 89% use traditional, classroom-based approaches to leadership development and 32% have formal mentorship programs. According to 83% of GenYs, both of these initiatives require significant reform in order to better prepare younger staff for leadership, with the resounding recommendation to abolish classroom-based instruction and replace it with formal mentoring programs. Mentoring was identified by 81% of GenYs as the cornerstone of successful workplace transitioning - an unrivalled approach for transferring organizational wisdom, skills, and abilities from seasoned practitioners to protégés. However, only 38% were satisfied with mentoring received; 41% preferred better support systems; and 66% needed more training on how leadership contributes to the organization’s strategic mandate.

According to GenY, mentoring is fundamental to their development as it enables them to hone leadership competencies; to understand the links between professional and organizational accountabilities; and to be included in a circle of prominent organizational leaders. Specifically, GenY learns how strategic relevance is woven into leadership initiatives; and how to fulfill the strategic mandate in an unpredictable and shaky business landscape.

Given the importance GenY place on mentoring, they are likely to scrutinize carefully an organization’s succession management program prior to applying for employment. Companies that promise to groom GenY for leadership will likely be earmarked as employers of choice. A distinction of this magnitude would be a landmark victory for an organization, especially in a decade characterized by daunting recruitment challenges – the grim reality of a shrinking labour force, and GenY’s attraction to entrepreneurialism instead of working for others.

Organizational Changes Anticipated from GenY Leaders

GenY has a compelling vision of their leadership, the changes they will orchestrate in the workplace and the global community, and the legacy they want to leave behind. Interviews with GenY uncovered their confidence and zeal to move into the executive suite and their belief that there will be more change on the horizon that requires them to exercise refined change management expertise. GenY envisions radical change in alternative work arrangements, global industry-academic-community partnerships, and more flexible workplace policies and practices.

Rotating Senior Management

GenY’s mistrust of corporate cultures and skepticism and apathy toward traditional hierarchies and authority have shaped radically their approach to leadership. They cited corporate scandals and mismanagement of human and financial resources as the compelling reasons for wanting change in the approach to leadership. To curb these spiraling downward trends, GenY proposes two fundamental changes in leadership: 1) replacing the Chief Executive Officer with an executive team of six senior managers, each with a diverse business profile; and 2) rotating each managers into the Chief Officer’s role for a term no longer than six months.

Other members of the team serve in an advisory capacity to the officer. The rationale for the change is three-fold: 1) to minimize the probability that any one individual can exercise autonomous decision making in an organization that could result in organizational corruption; 2) to increase transparency in the decision making process; and, 3) to model collaboration and consultation that GenY will expect staff throughout the workplace to exercise.

Boundaryless Work Environment

GenY challenge Baby Boomers to discard the common phrase “think outside the box” and replace it with a fresh, sustainability-oriented phrase, “burn the box...and recycle the ashes!” This is GenY’s metaphor for the workplace transformation of the twenty-first century which they describe as a boundaryless work environment. It includes decentralization of large corporate structures to pave the way for autonomous, self-sufficient business units, and a flattened and flexible infrastructure that goes beyond current workplace designs. Self-directed teams functioning in the virtual workplace will be the norm, rather than the exception, in a climate that is goal-centric. A goal-centric work environment will make job descriptions redundant and replace them with “target statements” that convey departmental goals to be achieved in six and twelve month intervals. The onus rests on departmental teams to exercise their own leadership in strategizing action plans for achieving targets, self-monitoring progress, networking globally to access resources, and managing obstacles that threaten goal achievement.

Policies and procedures will also be significantly reduced with some, such as collective agreements, absenteeism and sick leave, and dispute resolution to be eliminated. According to GenY, the mounting preoccupation with workplace policies and procedures signals mistrust of the workforce; conveys an unhealthy predisposition toward power and control; restricts autonomy and decision-making capabilities; and likely were designed to safeguard the organization from a minority of employees who abused organizational privileges. GenY predicts that collapsing policies and procedures, decentralizing large corporate structures, and shifting to goal-centric work environments will restore faith in organizations as places of trust and integrity.

Work-Learning-Personal Balance

GenY practitioners have witnessed first-hand the casualties from the pressures that employees face as they leverage job responsibilities, personal commitments, and professional development to stay current and to upskill for career advancement. Stress is indisputably the silent killer, remaining a taboo topic in most professional circles. Hyper-busyness is often espoused as a measure of success, and individuals often paint a picture of effortless self-management when tackling crises. References to personal struggle, the need for assistance, and anxieties associated with meeting expectations are buried as they suggest weakness and raise concerns about competency.

GenY is cognizant of the need to lower barriers that stigmatize attitudes and behaviours toward wellness and they intend to play an integral role in championing the case for work-learning-personal harmony. Specifically, GenY will advocate for organizational norms around wellness, a redefinition of professional success contingent upon managing health, establishing wellness as a core value in the workplace, developing support systems, and continually re-examining priorities and approaches to work-learning-personal balance. GenY is aware of the personal accountability they have for their employees, and realize that peak performance is rooted in personal wellness. GenY intends to offer shortened work weeks, sabbaticals, and extended leaves of absence for academic pursuits to be taken at the discretion of employees.

GenY is confident that employees will exercise the same due diligence in scheduling general leave as they do in achieving organizational goals.

When asked if they are concerned about over-skilling their workforce beyond the career laddering opportunities within the organization, GenY was not concerned. GenY intends to work with employees who have a new set of competencies to help them establish their own businesses and to explore how both companies can partner and support each other in their business ventures.

Values-Driven Workplace

Values-based leadership shapes GenY's approach to leadership, and is the compass for navigating changes in organizational policies, procedures, and initiatives. GenY perceives a values-based orientation as their North Star for decision making, especially when faced with struggles between their personal values and organizational commitments, and resolving conflicts with employees and clients which might stem from cultural differences.

A values-based orientation will pervade the organization so that policies, procedures, and practices are grounded in values and signal to the workforce how the organization is living its values. Values will be evident in human resources functionalities; including recruitment, selection, orientation, training, performance management and evaluation, and compensation. According to GenY, there are inconsistencies in many organizations between espoused values and values in practice which create a culture that often loses its way as being thoughtful and strategic in its decisions. Weaving values into human resources' practices communicates how all facets of an employee's work life are connected to values – how they are acclimatized to the organization, trained for the work they do, assessed, promoted, and rewarded. Hence, values serve as the bedrock upon which individual success and organizational prosperity all built.

Global Industry-Academic-Community Partnerships

GenY intends to aggressively forge partnerships with multi-national conglomerates and with small grass-roots organizations. They will seek partnerships with organizations that value making a difference and leaving a legacy; specifically, in the areas of corporate social responsibility, workforce engagement, virtual team experiences, and honouring cultural diversity and fairness. Their goal is to serve as catalysts that bring divergent businesses together to create a unique synergy and capture a greater slice of the product and service markets. The intent is to strengthen their own position and have a more dominant presence in the global marketplace by merging with organizations that have a business portfolio that is radically different than their own. Not only do they tap into new markets, but they earn a reputation as serious contenders in the global arena.

As well, GenY leaders intend to devote time to coaching and mentoring the next generation of entrepreneurs. The objective is to partner with secondary and post-secondary institutions to introduce students to the realities, challenges, and opportunities that await them in the work world; to offer students feedback on their skills; to educate them about the competencies and performance expectations that will be required of them in the workforce; and to build their confidence and esteem as fully contributing members of society. GenY anticipates that these early contact will be beneficial to both parties: students get a better sense of the work world and how to prepare for their careers, and GenY leaders make early connections with the next generation of workers who will either work for them, become part of their network, or partner with them in business ventures.

Recommendations for Fostering Twenty-first Century Leadership

As GenY gains a foothold in leadership, organizations need to work with GenY to leverage generational and organizational expectations to achieve high levels of engagement and organizational productivity. This is an underdeveloped and critical area of inquiry given the pending leadership crisis and findings from this study that indicate a lack of succession planning even though the plight of leadership is being identified as an organizational concern. To achieve the mandate of preparing GenY for leadership, organizations are encouraged to focus their energy and resources on creating a generative culture of inclusion where GenY can orient to the work world and assert its leadership presence in championing organizational change.

Far too often but with good intentions, organizational leaders search for tools and recipes that can be infused expediently into their organizations as quick remedies for success. True, there are practices that have admirable track records for launching change, yet in the case of preparing GenY for leadership, there is a different starting point to consider. Leaders are invited to suspend temporarily the pursuit of tools and techniques, and reset the compass on creating a culture of inclusion; specifically, on fostering an environment that welcomes and supports differences by fully leveraging diverse gifts, talents, experiences, and viewpoints and by creating space for everyone to have a voice and make a difference. In a culture of inclusion, the stage is set for exploring both the root cause issue that underlies many of the tensions between younger and older workers and the hesitation that GenY has about committing to organizational work life as it exists currently. Senge [38] offers the promise that organizations will excel in an interconnected and complex global village by tapping into people's commitment and capacity to co-construct their workplace realities.

In a culture of inclusion, the generational cohorts can begin the heavy lifting around how to bridge differences. This involves understanding their differences at the values level and finding common ground; honouring differences; and proposing collaborative solutions for working together. It is through this process that individuals move away from the tendency to view the world dichotomously and leave behind an identity where they see themselves only as "GenY" or "Baby Boomers". From this emerges a new perception of themselves as valued members of a multi-generational team.

Bridging differences starts with attending to an organization's internal processes; that is creating more space for informal conversations and for intergenerational collaborations. The busyness of the work day characterized by mounting and competing pressures and deadlines leaves little time for engaging with people on a personal level. Yet it is through informal conversations that people share their values, needs, expectations, and visions and; hence, reveal their authentic selves - the bedrock upon which meaningful working relationships with others are built. Imbedded in these conversations is the courage to challenge assumptions and to have one's own mental models challenged by others. This is fundamental to bridging generational differences since each generation views the world through a different lens. Real conversation emerges when risks are taken to challenge assumptions and understand the values and perceptions beneath. If we can get past some of the explicit differences, we are likely to unpack the universal values that bind us. It is from this place that we begin to see ourselves traveling on the same pathway - diverging occasionally to express our uniqueness - but still heading in the same direction toward the same organizational goals.

Conclusion

It is anticipated that the research from this two-year national study will advance knowledge on: 1) the emerging leadership role and competency profile required by GenY; 2) the changing organizational landscape with GenY at the helm; and 3) the talent development required to support GenY as they progress into leadership roles. This research responds to the immediate need of organizations to formulate approaches to enhance GenY engagement and chart plans to have leadership expertise in place at the peak exodus of Baby Boomers. Further, it adds value to academic disciplines, including organizational studies, leadership, human resources, business, and management development; specifically contributing to succession planning and generational studies. Ultimately, we gain a better understanding of how to develop and support GenY as they prepare to navigate in a complex, global economy. It is under this future generation that global communities will thrive.

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