

Younger Workers, Older
Leaders: A Qualitative Study
Exploring Generational
Perceptions of Leadership in the
Nursing Workforce

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Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the views of nursing leadership as perceived through the eyes of the generations in the nursing workforce.



Objectives

Learning Objective 1: The learner will be able to identify generational differences in the nursing workforce.

Learning Objective 2: The learner will be able to describe the perceived leadership needs as identified by each generation.



Theoretical Framework

Transformative theory of Jack Mezirow

- Learning and change are processes of how people make sense of their experiences
- Based on Critical reflection which is influenced by the generation and experiences each individual has



Participants Involved

- The nursing staff from a Metabolic/Stroke Unit
- Generations Participating:
 - Veteran: Born between 1925-1942
 - Baby Boom: Born between 1943-1960
 - Generation X: Born between 1961-1981
 - Millennial: Born between 1982-



Participants Involved

Generational Profiles

Veterans--1925-1942

Disciplined, patriotic, fiscally conservative—loyal to their employers and are stable in the workplace. (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczyk, 2000). Depression, WWII, sense of teamwork, civic minded will work to get the job done. Heroes: FDR, Patton, Montgomery, Churchill

Baby Boomers--1943-1960

Largest generation in the workforce, raised during economic expansion, women were encouraged to continue their education, 1967, man of the year to the baby boom generation, heroes: Kennedy, Ghandi, MLK, wanted to change the world and were graded on “working with others,” are workaholics and will work after retirement (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczyk, 2000)



Participants Involved

Generational Profiles

Generation X --1961-1981

Latch key generation, became self sufficient at an early age and their friends became surrogate parents, resented their parents for working so much and now work to live rather than live to work. Believe in work life balance. According to Altimer (2006) they expect their voices to be heard.

Millennial Generation—1982-

Comfortable with change in their lives. Good at multitasking. Raised through reports of terrorism, global warming and societal decline, lives were changed through 9/11. As predicted by Strauss and Howe (1991), they have begun to adopt characteristics of the veterans.



Background

Current and future nursing shortage

- In the next 20 yrs there will be a deficit of over 1 million RN's which is a 20% vacancy rate (Perrine, 2009)

Relationship of the shortage to the aging workforce

- The # of nurses leaving will outpace the # entering the profession Buerhouse, Stager & Auerbach (2009)
- 2 will leave for 1 entering (Martin & Tulgen, 2007)
- 40-60% over the age of 40 will retire by 2021 (Duvall & Andrews, 2010)



Background

Impact of shortage to society

Fewer experienced nurses to care for the acutely ill

Leadership

The primary reason nurses leave the acute care setting is retirement, conflict in the workplace due to dissatisfaction with workflow, mentoring, career development and leadership (Boychuck-Duchscher & Cowen, 2004)

Rationale for the Study

Issues impacting nursing staff satisfaction and retention

- The fact that there is an aging workforce, a decrease in the # of nurses entering and an increase in the # leaving creates a constant state of change
- Study by Sellgren, Ekvall, & Tomson (2006) showed that leadership behaviors are directly related to nurse satisfaction and retention

Differences in perception of leadership behavior between staff and management

- Study by Kleinman (2004) found that nurse managers perceive their behavior as being transformational and transparent/nurses saw them as transactional
- Study by Salahuddin (2010) found that leadership may not understand the generations and may have bias toward certain generations



Rationale for the Study

To the Nursing Profession

- 30% < 30 plan to leave the profession (Oulton, 2010)
- More than double the turnover rate than other professions with an equivalent education (Blythe, 2008)
- \$65,000 to replace 1 nurse (Dols, Landrum, & Weick, 2010)

To patients and society

- The aging population
- More complex disease processes
- Decrease in primary care physicians therefore will need more advanced practice nurses
- In the hospital a decrease in the # of experienced nurses leads to an increase in infections, falls, pressure ulcers and medication errors



Methodology

Qualitative: Case Study

Observations

- Took place during staff meetings, purpose is to view interactions between the nurse leader and the generations, 1 with nights and 1 with days.

Focus groups

- Allowed for discussion between the generations without the anxiety private interviews may cause. Each group was comprised of nurses from the same generation to provide an in depth viewpoint from each generation.
- Semi structured format

Consents

- Obtained prior to data collection
- Confidentiality
- Staff was not be identified and audiotapes and transcripts kept in a locked file



Data Analysis

- **Data was analyzed by reviewing the transcripts, recordings and personal notes.**

- **First cycle coding - Values coding**

Reflects a persons values, attitudes or beliefs, representing their personal values or worldviews (Saldana, 2009)

Literature says the generation a person belongs to influences their values (Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy, 2009)

Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008) worldviews and attitudes vary between the generations

- **Second cycle coding - Pattern coding**

Describes an emergent theme – used when examining social networks or patterns of human relationships

Results

Themes

Generational views of Leadership

Generational feelings of Autonomy and Empowerment

Generational feelings of Respect

Generational feelings of Support



Discussion

Leadership Style

Veterans: Can explain style but unable to name it

Baby Boomers: See leaders as more rule oriented

Generation X: leaders vary style based on the situation

Millennials: Leaders are Authoritarian

Autonomy and Empowerment

Veterans: Are Autonomous

Baby Boomers: Want to feel autonomous, want to be a part of change

Generation X: Feel empowered through the patients

Millennials: Unsure of themselves



Discussion

Respect

- **Veterans:** Want to be respected for their knowledge and experience
- **Baby Boomers:** Want respect from other generations as well as the leader
- **Generation X:** Want their voice to be heard
- **Millennials:** Want to be respected as being “part of the team.”

Support

- **Veterans:** Feel supported
- **Baby Boomers:** Need support to be able to practice to the highest level
- **Generation X:** Support is shown by leadership “being our voice.”
- **Millennials:** Support is demonstrated through educational experiences



Limitations

- **The size of the study**
 - One nursing unit in one hospital
- **Gender variations**
 - One male in the subject population
- **Cultural Variations**
- **Specific geographic location**
 - Would the findings be different in another area of the country



Conclusions

- **Leadership needs to be aware of generational differences**
 - **Staff satisfaction and retention is improved with either a transformational or transactional style (O'Shea, Foti, Hauenstein & Bycio, 2009).**
- **Decision making ability is important for all generations**
 - **External factors and pressures may impact feelings of workplace empowerment**
 - **Time needs to be provided to staff to attend meetings and participate in change**
 - **Generation X will soon be the prominent generation, autonomy and empowerment are influenced by their peers, peer review will be important**

Conclusions

Feedback is important

Evaluations need to be prompt and based on performance

Staff meetings need to be scheduled

Personal time is important

Self Scheduling

Millennials do not want to work weekends/nights/holidays

Veterans/Baby Boomers beginning to show the effects of 12 hour shifts

Policies that outline how “time off” is handled need to be in place



The Future

When we enter society at birth, we receive an inheritance from the people who lived before us. It is our responsibility to augment that inheritance for those who succeed us. I feel that all of us owe the world more than we received when we were born

An Wang
1920-1990

The Generations ARE our future
Let us understand



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