

# Intergenerational Stylistic Preferences in Leadership Training of Public School Business Administrators

By Candis M. DeVito, Lucianna Basilice,  
Michael Shane Higuera, Ed.D., Elsa-Sofia Morote, Ed.D.,  
and Robert J. Manley, Ph.D.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference in perceived importance of training in specific aspects of transformational leadership and transactional leadership during certification preparation between Generation X and Baby Boomer New York State certified school business administrators. Eighty-seven school business administrators participated in the study. The results indicated that neither generation showed a notable preference to either leadership style. Baby Boomers agreed more than Generation X with the importance of training in leadership style items measured. This supported the literature that characterized Generation X as more independent, placing a higher value on accountability, and had less organizational commitment than Baby Boomers.

## Introduction

The definition of leadership is commonly accepted as one individual having influence over other members within an organization to take action for the purpose of attaining defined organizational goals. This definition inferred that leaders must have influence over others, facilitate the attainment of goals, and have followers (Lunenburg, 2012). How and why leaders had variable degrees of success with these three concepts had been attributed to numerous theories that have been researched extensively (Burns, 1978; Carlyle, 1888; Lunenburg, 2012; Weber 1947). Leadership theory evolved significantly since the great man theories that were founded on the idea that great leaders are predetermined. Modern leadership theory valued growth and development of great leaders over time. These modern theories were a response to changing societal views of leadership obligation. Predetermination was widely dismissed, and there was an increased interest in variances of leadership styles. If a leader had the ability to develop leadership skills, then what leadership skills should be developed to become an effective leader were worthy of examination. Researchers often categorized leadership practices and skills into styles to compare and contrast them. Two styles that have

been commonly identified as juxtapose in practice are transactional leadership style, which defines quality leadership by the implementation of clear exchange practices with followers and transformational leadership style, which defines quality leadership as effectively motivating followers (Higuera, 2009).

The role of the New York State certified school business administrator (SBA) has evolved dramatically. Prior to this evolution, the position's job scope required budget management, reporting, management of direct support staff, and facilities management. These tasks became increasingly difficult, and additional tasks of financial management and managerial necessities were added to the scope of these duties. This was reflected in the School District Accountability Act of 2005 (State of New York Office of the State Comptroller, 2005). This Act created a significant amount of new financial mandates for New York State public school districts. The job requirements of the SBA changed in both public perception and managerial duties. The SBA was pulled into the public eye and began working collaboratively with the superintendent much like the chief financial officer of a private company. This contrasted with the position's prior segregation. Since that shift SBAs were given a larger span of leadership responsibilities than the profession had historically seen. Understandably, this population perceived a wide array of needs in their certification training (Higuera, 2009).

The dramatic change in the job scope of the SBA reflected the need for substantially prepared and effective school business leaders. The changes that were implemented in the public school system have had significant fiscal consequences on school districts and require changes district wide to comply with the imposed requirements while continuing to sustain standard functions with fewer resources. This required organizational change. Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (2011), maintained that although change cannot occur without strong leadership, effective leaders are the scarcest resource available for revitalization (p. 195).

This study explored the generation gap among SBAs to identify the evolution of school business leadership in relation to generational belonging. Potential differential perceived training needs during certification preparation in transformational and transactional leadership styles among New York State certified school business administrators belonging to the Generation X and the Baby Boomer generational cohorts are explored to assist in identifying the level of adaptability required by certification programs.

## **A Review of the Literature**

### ***Leadership Styles***

Transactional leaders developed a clear system of rewards and sanction exchange for performance. Burns (1978) said that transactional leaders approach followers with a theory of exchange with the goal of compliance. In this exchange, both the superior and the subordinate received something of value.

Transformational leadership theory was first introduced by Burns (1978) and took into consideration the leaders' transformational abilities, adaptability, social contribution to the organization and ability to move followers. His theory addressed how leaders have a significant impact on individuals' whole being within an organization, not just their productivity. Transaction or exchange between leader and follower was a cornerstone of theory, but in contrast to transactional leadership, the exchange was motivated by high morale, social, and spiritual values. He asserted that transactional leadership and transformational leadership are mutually exclusive because transactional leadership is practiced to benefit the self, while transformational leadership is practiced to benefit the organization.

Goleman (2000) reported the findings of research that explored organizational performance results in relation to six different leadership styles. Each leadership style had appeared to have distinct impact on the working environment, and through various levels of the organizations. The research found that those leaders that were most positive had the ability to utilize and transition fluidly between multiple leadership styles.

### ***Generations***

Strauss and Howe strongly supported the belief that there were commonalities of mindset and personality within a specific birth year cohort in Generations (1991). They reviewed how people born within a certain defined age group shared a distinct set of attitudes, ethics, and behaviors. This phenomena was referred to as a peer personality, and defined as, "... a generational persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location (2) common beliefs and behaviors; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation" (p. 64). To define the boundary of a generation that encompasses a specific peer personality, the history surrounding the birth and coming of age of individuals within the generation should be examined (p.65).

The two generations examined in this study were defined as the Thirteenth Generation (Generation X), born between 1961 and 1981, and the Boom Generation (Baby Boomers), born between 1943 and 1960 (p. 32). Thirteenth Generation (Generation X) was categorized as being born at the worst time in the generation's cyclical process, partially due to the conflict among the adults belonging to the previous generation. As children they had less nurturing and supervision than previous generations. This was due to their Baby Boomer parents' extreme work ethic and undergoing the largest divorce rate the nation was yet to see. In their youth, they were often criticized by their parents, and had developed stringent morale and achievement expectations. Because of their early life experiences, they developed keen survival instincts and extreme personal determinism (pp. 322-324). They are described as, "Lacking the ego strength to set agendas for others, their 13ers instead react to the world as they find it. They are proud of their ability to poke through the hype and the detail to understand older people far better (they sense) than older people understand them" (p. 323).

Strauss and Howe (1997) further elaborated on Generations (1991) by defining 25 distinct generations by historical events referred to as turnings. Turnings are defined as culturally historical time periods are defined by events, or people belonging to a decade. The 13th Generation is described as valuing their individual freedom in work over loyalty to an organization, having a hardened edge, and preferring not to have a political affiliation. It was stated that they were criticized as slackers or Xers. This led to their naming as Generation X. The Boom Generation is described as self-absorbed, mainstream, and perfectionists. Their persona, which is referred to as "yuppie," is attributed to a rebellion against the free-spirited, unstructured nature of the previous generation (p. 138).

Rodriguez, Green, and Ree (2003) conducted a study examining the specific preferences of followers in leadership behavior among members of Generation X and the Baby Boomers by identifying what they valued in their job. Five specific categories were examined: fulfillment; technology; flexibility; monetary benefits; and work environment. Several dominant themes were identified among each generation. Findings indicated that members of Generation X valued: a challenging task accomplished within a workday; surfing and buying using the internet; working alone with flexible hours; a portable 401K with lump sum distribution; and a challenging, fun, job that is not necessarily secure. They found that Baby Boomers valued: a challenging task accomplished in several days; utilizing a telephone to compare prices; working alone with a regular schedule; and a retirement plan with benefits. The findings suggested that the identification of differential preferences among the two generations indicated a need for examination of leadership styles that can better meet the needs of Generation X, which became an increasing percentage of the workforce.

In 2004, Neil Howe presented an overview of Generation X at which he addressed the checkered reputation he believed the generation had received largely through

media. He explained that Xers were highly criticized, mostly by Baby Boomers who perceived them to be unstable, rebellious, unmotivated, and lacking collaboration. Howe claimed that this perception is a reflection of the Baby Boomers misconception of the independent culture of Generation X. He described Generation X as distrustful of interdependence because of their experience of not being provided for in their youth, as well as the prospect of being denied being provided for by the social security system in their elder years as previous generations have. Because of this, he said they believe in individual accountability, both in their own practice and in others (Howe, 2004).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study asked if any differences existed among the perception of importance of training in the specific elements of leadership styles during certification preparation for New York State certified school business administrators among Generation X and the Baby Boomers within transactional and transformational leadership.

### **Participants**

The sample population of 87 New York State certified school business administrators was taken from a larger study conducted by Higuera (2008). The population consisted of 49 males and 38 females; 30 having received master's degree, 47 having received a professional diploma, and 10 having received a doctorate degree. The ethnicity composition was two Asian or Native Americans, four Black or African Americans, one Hispanic or Latino, and 79 Caucasians.

The data was recoded into two groups based on criteria for inclusion of Generation X, and the Baby Boomer Generation by birth year. One individual from the obtained data set was excluded for not meeting the birth year criteria for this study. Of the remaining 86 participants, 34 were members of Generation X and 49 were identified as Baby Boomers.

### **Measurement**

Data reported in 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) with the level of importance from Part Two of the survey developed from previous research by Higuera (2009) identified as measuring transactional and transformational leadership styles were utilized (to see survey Higuera, 2009, p. 257).

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### ***Transactional Leadership***

The instrumentation parameters of transactional leadership were generated in accordance with the definition established by Bass & Riggio (2006) and expanded on

by Mancini, 2007. Higuera, 2008 illuminates Bass & Riggio (2006) asserting "transactional leaders attempt to describe clearly the responsibilities of and their expectations for their followers, and to establish the benefits and rewards for compliance and the sanctions for failure to comply with these responsibilities and expectations." He further elaborated this definition, including the clearly defined exchange theory of Mancini (2007) by stating that in the practice of transactional leadership, "The relationship between the leaders and the followers is the exchange of services and rewards" (p. 41).

#### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership was measured in accordance with the criteria introduced by Burns, 1978. Higuera (2009) clarifies, "transformational leadership is the relationship between the leader and followers in which the leader motivates the followers to be creative and encourages the followers to extend their best effort. The transformational leader, in adhering to high ethical standards, raises the ethical behavior of the followers" (p.42). He went on to include the interpersonal component of transformational leadership in accordance with Mancini (2007). He explained "transformational leaders build a relationship with followers that rests upon a mutual commitment to the individual growth of the followers (p. 42)."

#### ***Generation Xers***

Generation Xers are American individuals that were members of a cohort born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 317). Because this group was partially categorized by their rejection of labeling and group membership due to their loathing of media target marketing, they were originally only referred to in reference to the chronological placement in American history as the Thirteenth Generation. They were eventually coined Generation X, which became popularized by Douglas Copland in his 1991 novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (Howe, 2004).

#### ***Baby Boomers***

Baby Boomers were American individuals that are members of the Boom Generation, which are a cohort born between 1943 and 1960 (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 299). Their name paid homage to the era in which they were born. This was referred to by Fortune Magazine as the "Great American Boom." Many perceive this as the time during American history that experienced the most substantial growth in fertility, economics, housing, and science (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 304).

### **Methodology**

First, a ttest analysis was performed. It showed no significant difference between the two groups in the importance of training in transactional leadership ( $p = .096$ ); or transformational leadership ( $p = .224$ ).

The percentage of respondents who were in agreement with the importance of training in transactional leadership was approaching significance ( $p = .091$ ,  $t = -1.712$ ). Baby Boomers ( $M = 35.40$ ,  $SD = 6.53$ ) reported a 72.41% greater value on training than Generation X ( $M = 33.0$ ,  $SD = 6.35$ ) in transactional leadership ( $M = 28.51$ ,  $SD = 4.69$ ).

The researchers performed an item analysis to learn any discrepancies of opinion between the groups. **Table 1** presents the item distribution analysis of transactional leadership. **Table 2** presents the item distribution analysis of transformational leadership.

### Results

The Baby Boomer group placed greater importance than Generation X on three specific areas of transactional leadership training during their certification. Item 2 "Training

in the ability to translate staff responsibilities into step-by-step tasks is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = .838$ ) more importance on than Generation X. Item 4 "Training in the ability to design effective rewards for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance with expectations for staff performance is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.016$ ) more importance on than Generation X. Item 5 "Training in the ability to design systems to monitor staff performance is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .979$ ) more importance on than Generation X.

The Baby Boomer group placed a greater importance than Generation X on three specific areas of transformational leadership training during their certification. Item 9 "Training in the ability to motivate staff members to apply their best efforts to the performance of their roles is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = .735$ ) more importance on than Generation X. Item 11 "Training in the importance of motivating staff members through providing

Item	Generation	% Disagree	% Agreed	M	SD
1 - Training in the ability to clearly communicate responsibilities to staff members is important.	X	0.00	94.10	4.38	0.604
	BB	0.00	89.80	4.51	0.681
2 - Training in the ability to translate staff responsibilities into step-by-step tasks is important.	X	8.80	52.90	3.68	0.945
	BB	4.10	69.40	3.92	0.838
3 - Training in the ability to clarify expectations for staff performance is important.	X	2.90	76.50	4.03	0.797
	BB	2.00	87.70	4.27	0.730
4 - Training in the ability to design effective rewards for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance with expectations for staff performance is important.	X	20.50	44.10	3.41	1.104
	BB	12.20	63.30	3.73	1.016
5 - Training in the ability to design systems to monitor staff performance is important.	X	11.80	44.10	3.35	0.950
	BB	12.20	65.30	3.80	0.979
6 - Training in the ability to coach staff members that fall short of expectations is important.	X	8.80	76.50	3.94	0.886
	BB	4.10	85.70	4.18	0.782
7 - Training in the ability to document staff performance in relation to expectations is important.	X	2.90	76.50	4.03	0.797
	BB	2.00	77.60	4.10	0.797

challenges and meaningful work is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = .786$ ) more importance on than Generation X. Item 12 "Training in the importance of motivating staff through provision of the intellectual stimulation of problem solving is important." Baby Boomers placed ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.119$ ) more importance on than Generation X.

It should be noted that the Baby Boomers placed higher importance on training in all measured items of transformational leadership and transactional leadership except Item 1 "Training in the ability to clearly communicate responsibilities to staff members is important." However, Generation X was only in ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = .604$ ) higher agreement of this items importance than the Baby Boomers.

**Conclusion**

The study revealed a differential perception of leadership among Generation X and the Baby Boomers. However, identification of significant adherence to either transformational or transactional leadership style by either group

could not be made. This indicated an evolution of effective leadership by adaptation as suggested by Goleman (2000). Generations X's comparatively lower agreement level with all but one item measuring the importance of leadership training supports the characterization of this group by Strauss and Howe (1992) as more independent and less organizationally committed than Baby Boomers. Howe (2000) asserts that Generation X values individual accountability and may be more committed to individual contributions than cohort work group results.

Based on the variations of importance placed on leadership style training by New York State certified school business administrators between Generation X and the Baby Boomers during their certification process, an exploration of potential variations in training needs of the newly emerging *Millennials* should be conducted. Higher education institutions could more efficiently meet the training needs of aspiring SBAs by acknowledging the evolution of students' generational belonging over time, and revising the curriculum to coincide with their social structure.

<b>Table 2</b>					
<b><i>Distribution Analysis – Transformational Leadership</i></b>					
<b>Item</b>	<b>Generation</b>	<b>% Disagree</b>	<b>% Agree</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>8 - Training in the ability to motivate staff members to be creative and imaginative in the performance of their roles is important.</b>	X	5.90	67.70	3.94	0.919
	BB	8.20	73.50	4.04	0.957
<b>9 - Training in the ability to motivate staff members to apply their best efforts to the performance of their roles is important.</b>	X	5.90	70.60	3.97	0.904
	BB	2.00	85.70	4.20	0.735
<b>10 - Training in the importance of motivating staff members through the ethical belief system of the leader(s) is important.</b>	X	2.90	64.70	3.94	0.983
	BB	6.40	78.80	4.04	0.999
<b>11 - Training in the importance of motivating staff members through providing challenges and meaningful work is important.</b>	X	8.80	52.90	3.71	1.060
	BB	0.00	73.50	4.08	0.786
<b>12 - Training in the importance of motivating staff through provision of the intellectual stimulation of problem solving is important.</b>	X	20.50	41.20	3.32	1.036
	BB	22.40	57.10	3.55	1.119
<b>13 - Training in the importance of developing a vision for the transformation of the organization is important.</b>	X	5.90	67.70	3.97	0.937
	BB	6.10	77.60	4.20	0.935



## **References**

Bass, B. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. May 1, 1985 | ISBN-10: 0029018102 | ISBN-13: 978-0029018101

Bass, B. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, 8(1), 9-32

Bass, B. & Stogdill, R. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership : theory, research, and managerial applications*. New York, London: Free Press Collier Macmillan.

Beer, M., Eisenstat, R. A. & Spector, B. (2011). Why change programs don't produce change. *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management*, 177-197.

Burns, J. M. (2010). *Leadership*. (1 ed.). New York: Harper Collins. (Original work published 1978).

Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Fredrick A. Stokes & Brother, New York, 1888.

Goleman, D. (2000, March). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(2), 78-90.

Higuera, M. S. (2009). *New York State certified school business administrator preparedness, perceived importance of that preparedness, and job satisfaction*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest, May 2013 (Order No. 3360836, Dowling College)

Howe, N. (Performer) (2004). *Broad overview of Generation X to the national council of teacher retirement*. [podcast]. Life Course Associates. Retrieved from [SBA.youtube.com/user/Lifecourse/about.com](http://SBA.youtube.com/user/Lifecourse/about.com), May 2013.

Rodriguez, R. O., Green, M. T., & Ree, M. J. (2003). Leading Generation X: Do the old rules still apply?. *The Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(4), 67-75.

Seaton, J. L., & Boyd, M. (2007). The organizational leadership of the post baby boom generation: An upper echelon theory approach. *Academy of entrepreneurship journal*, 13(2), 69-77.

State of New York Office of the State Comptroller (2005). *Laws of New York*, 2005 Chapter 263.

Strauss, SBA., & Howe, N. (1997). *The fourth turning: An American prophecy*. New York: Broadway books.

Strauss, SBA., & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations, the History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Weber, M. (1947) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Oxford University Press, New York.

## **Authors**

Candis M. DeVito is currently a doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology at Saybrook University, located in San Francisco, California.

Lucianna J. Basilice is currently an administrator of the Dowling College Academic Access Program and is currently a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration, Leadership, and Technology at Dowling College, Oakdale, New York.

Shane Higuera, Ed.D. is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Technology at Dowling College, Oakdale, New York.

Elsa Sofia Morote, Ed.D., is currently a Full Professor of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Technology at Dowling College, Oakdale, New York, and a Senior Postdoctoral Researcher MIT 2001-2003.

Robert J. Manley, Ph.D., is Dean of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Technology at Dowling College, Oakdale, New York.



**NSDC**

**National School Development Council**