

## QuickView Leadership Series

Focus on the United Kingdom

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# What Makes a Leader Effective?

Generations in the U.K. Weigh In

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Common wisdom suggests that the generations in the U.K. are fundamentally different from one another. And certainly there are real differences – including the way they dress, the way they consume information, the music they listen to, and some of their ideas about appropriate personal behaviour. Based on these apparent differences, assumptions are made that the presence of more young people in the workplace will result in a substantial upheaval within organisations. And as the tide shifts, bringing more young people into the workplace as members of the older generations pursue retirement, will there need to be wholesale changes in how leaders need to behave to be effective? After all, if younger people are that different, perhaps leaders have to be different to lead effectively.

Who exactly are the generations currently in the workforce? And what do they really think makes a leader effective?

## The (Currently Working) Generations in the United Kingdom

Generations in the United Kingdom have their own unique characteristics that arise from the unique culture, economics, and history of the U.K.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) got their name from the rapid increase in birth rate after World War II. The U.K. is characterized by two distinct groups of Baby Boomers: those born during the post war rebuilding (1946-1952) and those born during the post war economic boom (1953-1964). Baby Boomers in the first half of the generation grew up with the reality of continued rationing after the war and rebuilding of London. In their conservatism and loyalty to their employer, this first group of Baby Boomers is considered to be similar to the Silent Generation (born 1925-1945) in the U.S. Baby Boomers born in the second half of the generation benefitted from the Marshal Plan, which pumped over \$13 billion of economic aid into European countries and increased economic expansion, and is perceived as being similar to Baby Boomers in the U.S. Both groups are described as generally organisation-focused and accepting of authority, and are believed to have a different orientation toward leadership than do younger generations<sup>1</sup>. This is the generation that helped keep Margaret Thatcher in office, and in the U.K. older Boomers in particular are perceived as being more pro-authority and accepting of directive behaviour on the part of bosses, and believe that as leaders they are more effective if they are more directive and authoritative.

## Generational Cohorts

Birth Years	1946	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Approximate Current Ages as of 2013	67	63	58	53	48	43	38	33	28	23	18	13
	Baby Boomers (1946-1960)				Generation Xers (1961-1979)			Millennial Generation (1980-2000)				

Gen Xers in the U.K. are described as the cohort born between the early 1960s and the end of the 1970s, and grew up during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, which included an energy crisis, an economic recession, and the Falklands War. As in the U.S., Gen Xers in the U.K. are perceived as being more independent and anti-authority than are Boomers, believing that leaders should be more inclusive and participative than leaders were in the past<sup>2</sup>.

Born in 1980 or after, Millennials in the U.K. grew up with greater access to technology than did either Gen Xers or Baby Boomers. They are similar to the same age cohort in the U.S. with regard to their familiarity with communications, media and digital technologies, and have also been described as being antagonistic toward organisational authority and having different expectations of leaders than do both older generations<sup>3</sup>. They are perceived as even more anti-authority than Gen Xers, and feel that leaders should be more inclusive and focused on social responsibility efforts than are older generations.



## What Do the Generations Think Makes a Leader Effective?

Overall, we find that all generations think leaders are effective when they are participative, team-oriented, charismatic, and humane-oriented, and are less sure that being hierarchical and autonomous makes a leader effective. Further, people of all generations expressed about the same lack of support for the importance of deference to organisational authority.

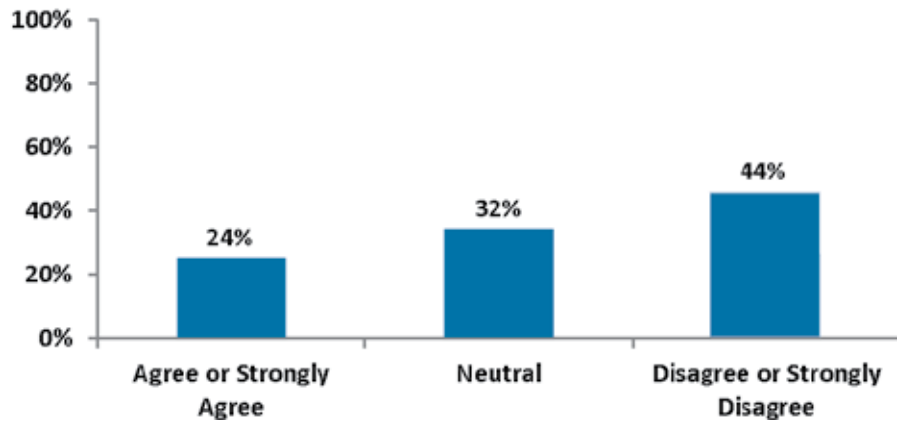


- **Hierarchical** leadership is characterized by placing importance on social rank, following tradition, and abiding by the rules.
- **Autonomous** leadership is characterized by self-reliance, and working and acting independently.
- **Humane-oriented** leadership is characterized by helping others, generosity, and compassion.
- **Participative** leadership is characterized by collaboration and inclusiveness.
- **Team-oriented** leadership is characterized by helping teams deal with conflict, working together, and developing cohesion.
- **Charismatic** leadership is characterized by strong enthusiasm, and by inspiring and motivating others.

## Organisational Authority

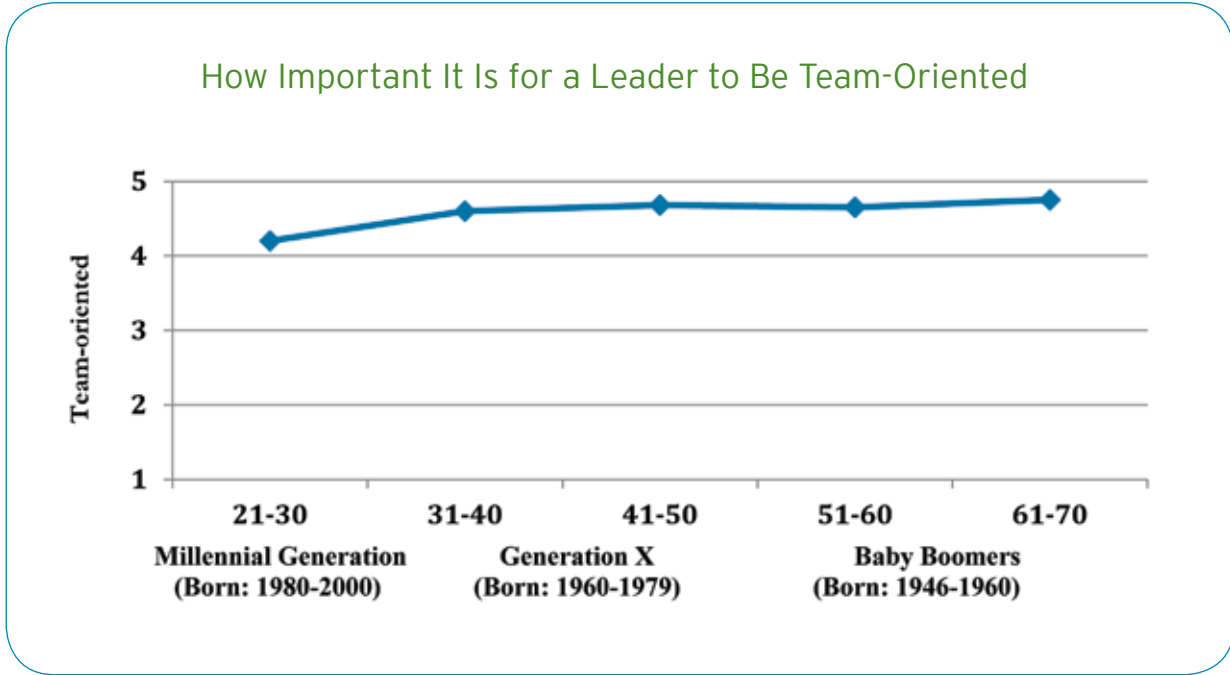
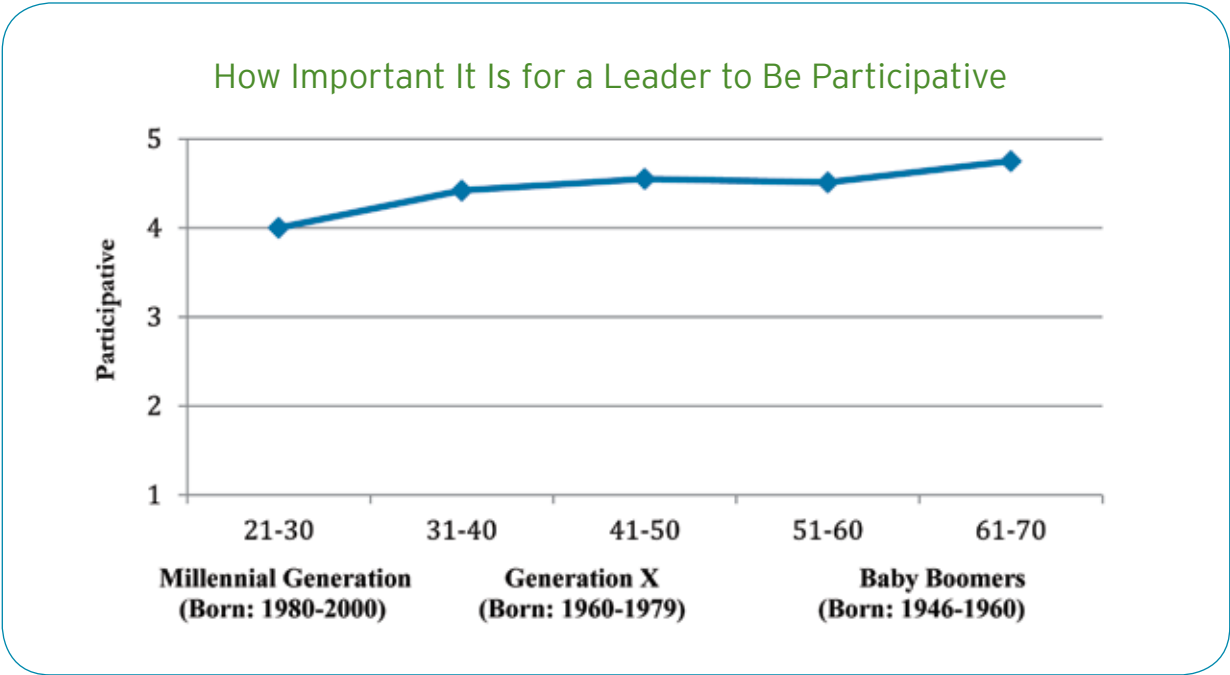
People of all generations expressed about the same lack of support for the importance of deference to organisational authority. Understanding how employees view organisational authority has important implications for organisations because it can impact how much they choose to comply with directives from their managers and other superiors. To some degree, compliance with authority is important for ensuring rules are followed and order is maintained. However, in some cases, questioning authority can be a healthy practice for organisations. For instance, having employees who are willing to question authority may prevent mistakes from happening or poor decisions from being made. The managers in the U.K. sample did not generally endorse complying with authority, but there was a wide range of perspectives and the pattern was similar across all generations.

### “If Your Manager Tells You to Do Something, You Better Do It”

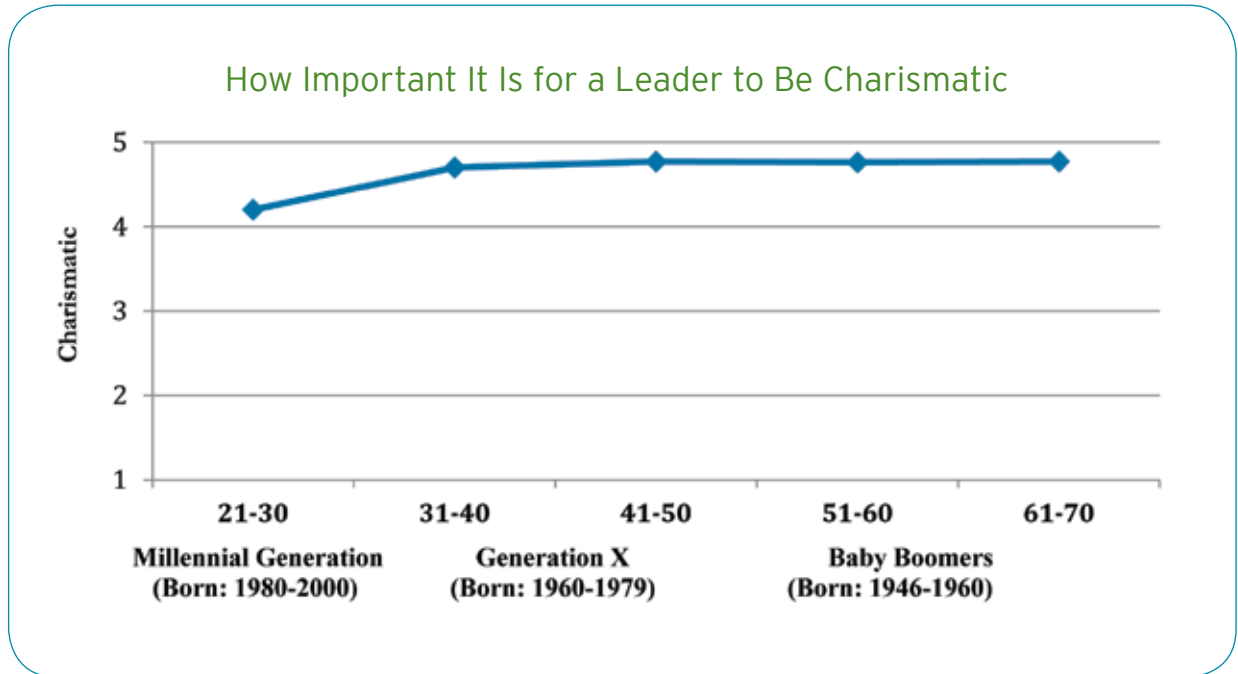


While the generations agreed that being participative, team-oriented, and charismatic are important for effective leadership, the generations differed somewhat in how important they thought each of these were.

In the U.K., older participants were more likely than younger respondents to say that being participative and team-oriented were important for effective leadership. This is directly contrary to the general perception that Gen Xers and Millennials are more focused on participative leadership than are Baby Boomers.



Interestingly, the belief that being charismatic contributes to effective leadership is slightly lower for younger participants than it is for older participants. Specifically, the perception of charisma as being important for effective leadership increases up to respondents who are 60 years old, and then levels off.



## So to Be Effective, Leaders Should Be . . .

. . . participative, team-oriented, charismatic, and humane-oriented. They should not focus on being hierarchical and autonomous, and shouldn't make enforcing deference to organisational authority a priority. These preferences are true for people of all generations, though the strengths of these preferences differ slightly.



## The Unexpected Importance of Charisma

Unexpectedly, younger people think charisma is less important for effective leadership than older people do. This is directly contrary to the general belief that we live in a world where the cult of personality dominates, and that personal influence (arising largely from the effective use of charisma) is the defining characteristic of an effective leader. The idea that leaders use charisma to connect with their followers is believed to be a standard part of effective leadership. Yet [while it is clear that charisma is perceived as being important for leadership by people of all ages, it is significantly less important for younger people than it is for older people.](#)

Why? We don't know for sure, but we have identified two possible explanations: one age-related and one context-related. It is possible that as people grow older, the leader's charisma and perceived reliability become more important than what the leader actually does. This would be consistent with people as they get older, placing more reliance in their belief in their leader's trustworthiness.

An alternative explanation has to do with how pervasive technology is. It is possible that because younger people grew up with more communication mediated by technology (e.g., e-mail, Facebook), they have been less attuned to the effects of leader charisma because technology as a medium of interaction reduces the impact of charisma. By this argument, people who grew up with less communication mediated by technology (older generations and those who have less access to technology) would place more emphasis on the importance of charisma for effective leadership because they have seen charisma have a greater effect.

## How Leaders Can Live Up to Managers' Expectations

Managers realize that it is important for 21st century leaders to carry their people with them, be inclusive, and use influence more than command and control to lead their people. A recently launched movement in the U.K. called *Engage for Success*<sup>4</sup> is a good example of the business benefit of leadership that is more focused on being participative, team-oriented, and humane. Engage for Success is supported by many of the U.K.'s leading CEOs including those of Marks & Spencer, Prudential, Barclays, BT, and PwC. In an open letter to *The Times* on 11th November 2012 they commented, "Today's report, Employee Engagement – the Evidence, shows clearly that organisations with high engagement levels outperform their low engagement counterparts in both private industry and in public service. Engaged organisations also report lower staff absence, lower turnover, fewer accidents, and are linked to increased employee wellbeing."

So, what can leaders do to live up to these expectations? At the core of what employees want to see in their leaders is consideration for others. Consideration is shown when leaders respect and invite others' opinions (participative), help teams work more effectively with one another (team-oriented), inspire and excite others to do their best work (charismatic), and help others at work (humane). So, in general, a good way to live up to these expectations is to demonstrate that you see value in others. Here are some more specific ideas:

- **To be more participative:** When making decisions about how work is done or how to handle a challenge, make it a habit to ask your team to suggest ideas<sup>5</sup>. Also, make sure that you're implementing others' ideas, not just your own. Encouraging suggestions and implementing others' ideas (when they are the better idea) demonstrates participative leadership.
- **To be more team-oriented:** Schedule meeting agendas and team project timelines with a little bit of (we know, highly precious) time built in so there really is opportunity to talk about what is happening with the work the group is doing. Teams benefit if they have the time to support one another in addressing challenges, providing constructive feedback,



Emotions are contagious, so project the enthusiasm you feel, and that you want your teams to feel.

reflecting on lessons learned, and celebrating accomplishments. Helping the team to connect in these ways will both make you more likely to be seen as a team-oriented leader, and your team will become more efficient and effective over time as they are better able to leverage their learning.

- **To be more charismatic:** Charisma at work is often about others seeing how much enthusiasm you have for your work and the people you work with. Remember that emotions are contagious, so project the enthusiasm you feel, and that you want your teams to feel. Studies have shown that leaders who are perceived as positive are also perceived as being more effective<sup>6</sup>.
- **To be more humane-oriented:** Really think about what your subordinates and co-workers need, and how you can help them both work more effectively and achieve their goals. Be understanding when employees have personal conflicts that they have to deal with, even if it interferes with work. While it can be challenging to show compassion to a team member who unexpectedly has to attend to a personal need during an inopportune moment, with good employees it will pay off over time. High-performing employees who feel they have to make too many sacrifices for work or do not have the support needed when a personal situation arises will be dissatisfied and may disengage, or leave entirely<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusion

The practical implication of this is that organisations in the U.K. should not focus their resources on tailoring leadership and management solutions to specific generations. Rather than spending time, energy, and funds on creating solutions to generational differences in leadership that do not appear to exist, organisations should instead focus on helping all leaders learn how to be more participative, humane-oriented, charismatic, and team-oriented, and to be less autonomous and hierarchical, which people of all generations will appreciate.

## Endnotes

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Codrington, G. & Grant-Marshall, S. (2011). *Mind the gap!* London, U.K.: Fig Tree.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.engageforsuccess.org/voice/2012/11/open-letter-to-the-times-the-importance-of-employee-engagement-to-the-uk-2/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.drru-research.org/data/resources/19/Hillebrandt\\_Sebastian\\_Blakemore\\_2011\\_Cog\\_Neuro.pdf](http://www.drru-research.org/data/resources/19/Hillebrandt_Sebastian_Blakemore_2011_Cog_Neuro.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Bono, J.E., & Ilies, R. (2006). Charisma, positive emotions and mood contagion. *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 16, pp. 317-334.

<sup>7</sup> Eisenberg, N., Smith, C.L., Sadovsky, A., & Spinrad, T.L. (2004). Effortful control. In R.F. Baumeister & K.D. Vohs (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 259-282). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

## Sample

The World Leadership Survey has continued to collect data online since its inception in March 2008. Participants in the research come through partner organisations, interested individuals, and enrolment in CCL programmes.

Participants fill out a survey online that is hosted by Clear Picture Corporation and takes them approximately 20 minutes to complete. In thanks for their participation, participants receive a free CCL Guidebook to download immediately upon completion of the survey. Questions about the survey are sent to the World Leadership Survey e-mail account at [WorldLeadershipSurvey@ccl.org](mailto:WorldLeadershipSurvey@ccl.org).

The sample included 180 respondents native to the U.K. Of the respondents reporting race, the majority (60.5%) were White, 4.5% were Black, 1.9% Asian, .6% Multiracial, and 32.5% reported "Other." The respondents' ages ranged from 22 to 71 with a mean age of 44. The U.K. sample also had a range of education levels represented, with 10.5% having a high school education, 20% having a Bachelor's degree, and 60.5% reporting having a graduate or professional degree. The remainder of the respondents reported "Other" (8.6%).

It is important to note that this is not a random sample of leaders in managers or employees in the U.K., and therefore it is likely not fully representative of the working population. Our sample consists of people who are employed, are currently proactively working on their own development, and who were willing to take 20 minutes of their own time to participate. Though it is not a representative sample, it is a good sample of managers and professionals at higher levels in organisations who are currently employed and are engaged in improving their work skills. They offer insight into how people who are either in current leadership roles or have aspirations for leadership roles think about life in organisations.

For a more in-depth analysis, please see: "Perceptions of authority and leadership: A cross-national, cross-generational investigation" by Jennifer J. Deal, Sarah Stawiski, Laura M. Graves, William A. Gentry, Marian Ruderman, and Todd J. Weber, in *Managing the New Workforce: International Perspectives on the Millennial Generation* (2012), Eddy S. Ng, Sean T. Lyons, and Linda Schweitzer, Eds., Edward Elgar Publishers.

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The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of executive education that accelerates strategy and business results by unlocking the leadership potential of individuals and organisations. Founded in 1970, CCL offers an array of research-based programs, products and services for leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's Top 10 providers of executive education by *Bloomberg Businessweek* and the *Financial Times*, CCL is headquartered in Greensboro, NC, with offices in Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Singapore; New Delhi - NCR, India and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



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