

5-4-2017

Leadership Communication: Why Workplace Appreciate Matters

Kasee N. Hamilton

Winona State University, knhamilt5818@winona.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/leadershipeducationcapstones>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hamilton, Kasee N., "Leadership Communication: Why Workplace Appreciate Matters" (2017). *Leadership Education Capstone Papers*. 7.

<https://openriver.winona.edu/leadershipeducationcapstones/7>

This Capstone Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Leadership Education at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leadership Education Capstone Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact klarson@winona.edu.

LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION: WHY WORKPLACE APPRECIATION MATTERS

by

Kasee N. Hamilton

Master of Science in Education: Winona State University

Abstract

As the workplace continues to evolve and generations are required to work together and lead one another, it is important to understand the implications of appreciation from leadership. The purpose of this research is to examine generational preferences for gestures of appreciation in the workplace and how generations respond to appreciation from leadership in the workplace. The study used a qualitative design using grounded theory for the research design. The research is supported by two theories, Organizational Support Theory and Leader-Member Exchange Theory. Results show that regardless of generation, appreciation from leadership has many positive implications and is relatively easy to provide. Leaders may use this information to develop better rapport with employees to increase motivation, attendance and loyalty and improve attitude, morale and productivity at work.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
List of Charts.....	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement	2
Background of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Organizational Support Theory	5
Leader-Member Exchange Theory	6
Research Method.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Limitations.....	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study	9
Summary.....	10
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Theoretical Background.....	11
Organizational Support Theory.....	11
Leader-Member Exchange Theory	13
Historical Perspective of Appreciation	14
Historical Perspective of Organizational Communication.....	16

Generational Differences in the Workplace	17
Millennials.....	18
Baby Boomers.....	18
Generation X.....	18
Generational Similarities in the Workplace	19
Leadership Communication in the Workplace	20
Organizational Communication	20
Leadership Interpersonal Communication	21
Appreciation.....	22
Summary.....	25
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY.....	26
Research Design.....	26
Rationale for Research Design.....	26
Research Questions.....	27
Research Setting.....	27
Sample.....	28
Role of the Researcher.....	29
Selection of the Participants.....	29
Instrumentation.....	30
Data Collection.....	30
One-on-One Interviews.....	30
Survey.....	31
Data Analysis.....	31

Ethical Considerations.....	32
Summary.....	32
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS.....	33
Results and Discussion.....	33
Review of the Problem Statement	33
Review of the Research Design.....	33
Research Questions.....	34
Results.....	34
Frequency of Appreciation.....	34
Millennials’ Percent of Frequency of Appreciation.....	35
Generation x’s Percent of Frequency of Appreciation.....	35
Baby Boomers’ Percent of Frequency of Appreciation.....	36
Percent of Satisfaction of Appreciation.....	36
Summary and Discussion of Frequency of Appreciation and Satisfaction.....	36
Gestures of Appreciation.....	37
Millennials’ Percent of Gestures of Appreciation.....	38
Generation X’s Percent of Gestures of Appreciation.....	38
Baby Boomers’ Percent of Gestures of Appreciation.....	39
Summary and Discussion of Gestures of Appreciation.....	39
Positive Implications of Appreciation.....	40
Millennials’ Percent of Positive Implications.....	41
Generation X’s Percent of Positive Implications.....	41
Baby Boomers’ Percent of Positive Implications.....	41

Summary and Discussion of Positive Implications of Appreciation.....	41
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS.....	43
Summary and Conclusions.....	43
Significant Findings and Implications.....	43
Millennials.....	43
Generation X.....	44
Baby Boomers.....	44
Leadership Implications.....	46
Recommendations for Future Research.....	46
REFERENCES.....	48
APPENDIX A. Consent Form.....	55

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank those who made this project possible. What would a study on appreciation be without showing my deepest gratitude to those who encouraged and helped me along the way? To all of my Organizational Leadership professors, especially my advisor, Dr. Theresa Waterbury, thank you for your unending support and guidance. To my colleagues, friends and family, thank you for your constant encouragement, genuine kindness and patience during this journey. I could not have done it without you.

List of Charts

Chart 1. Percent of Appreciation.....35

Chart 2. Percent of Satisfaction of Frequency.....36

Chart 3. Percent of Gestures of Appreciation.....38

Chart 4. Percent of Positive Implications.....40

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Appreciation in the workplace severely lacks as 70 percent of employees report receiving no praise or recognition at work (Chapman & White, 2011). Leaderships' ability to communicate effectively on an interpersonal level can substantially change staff members' perception of appreciation in the workplace. Due to generational changes in time, the way many people view work evolved. People no longer work only to earn a paycheck. Today, appreciation and recognition are now valued significantly over factors such as salary and bonuses (Fagley & Adler, 2012).

Recognition of employees is essential to the success of business. Studies indicate that people who do not feel appreciated have higher rates of tardiness, employee turnover rate and a decrease in productivity (White, 2014). The majority of companies all over the United States have employee recognition and appreciation programs yet; job satisfaction continues to decline and over half of the U.S workforce are not satisfied with the attention received (Globoforce, 2011). Companies would be at an advantage recognizing that a correlation exists between appreciation and satisfaction, particularly if they desire to improve the retention and satisfaction rates of personnel.

Organizational leaders benefit from actively working to improve strategies of showing appreciation to subordinates (Fagley & Adler, 2012). Leaders would benefit by being aware that organizational communication, such as interpersonal communication skills, can change how the appreciation is perceived.

With millennials' new expectations varying from generation x (gen-x) and baby boomers, leaders could advance by adapting the communication style they use to develop successful

interpersonal communication and rapport with personnel. These adaptations transform the organization's culture to align with the changing expectations of the workplace. Effective interpersonal communication impacts employer-employee relationships and the organization's overall success (Abugre, 2011).

Problem Statement

Little is known about how millennials, generation x and baby boomers respond to appreciation in the workplace and what gesture of appreciative communication is preferred.

Background of the Problem

The baby boomer generation is currently reaching retirement age, and the millennials are filling the void in the workplace. The outlook millennials have on work are far different than generation x or baby boomers. Millennials want purpose, are driven by development, want coaches instead of bosses, and want to develop their strengths by openly communicating in real-time instead of conducting annual reviews (Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2009, Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Because of this, leaders may have to adapt to the new demands of the workforce.

Furthermore, recent research indicates that appreciation in the workplace has substantial value by company personnel. When the workforce feels appreciated and valued, engagement increases, less turnover occurs and both employees and managers experience a sense of pride in the work they complete (White, 2014).

Beck (2016), studied in what manner managers express gratitude versus what employees prefer to receive via various mediums. These mediums included verbally one-on-one, verbally in a group setting, electronic note, handwritten, tangible and monetary. The literature suggests that the most desired medium of gratitude was one-on-one verbal communication. Thus, the researcher will focus specifically on the gesture of appreciation and the positive implications it

may have on the employee. Also, individuals of all ages and from locations across the United States were included in Beck's sample. This study will specifically be looking at workers of all three generations in the Midwest.

Using the correct mediums to express gratitude is just one of the factors that contribute to the perception of appreciation. Between frequency of gratitude and the medium used to portray thanks, leaders are missing the mark on appreciation. Beck (2016) postulates, for every two managers, only one does a worthy job of thanking subordinate personnel.

Other studies indicate the importance of organizational communication between leaders and subordinates. For instance, Abugre (2011) found that good and efficient communication from leadership can affect employees' work behaviors in a positive way and consequently impact organizational work output. This study will be looking at interpersonal exchanges, which is a sub-category of organizational communication.

Solaja, Idowu and James (2016), discovered the relationship between leadership and communication style. Communication style is the individual way of thinking and temperament during an interaction. They revealed prolific communication is linked significantly with quality leadership traits and organizational success.

A leader's communication competence is also a strong predictor of employee job and communication satisfaction (Madlock, 2008). Based on Madlock's findings, supervisors' communication competency and skills have a greater influence on employee outcomes than a supervisors' leadership style.

Previous research and theories focus mainly on leadership styles and its effect on employee outcomes. Research is lacking in management's communication competency and its influence on subordinates, particularly in regards to perception of appreciation.

Managerial communication styles also affect personnel's attitudes and behaviors. Dasgupta, Suar and Singh (2013) revealed the way managers communicate (passive, aggressive or assertive) may increase or decreases the amount of perceived supervisor support (PSS) of the employee. PSS at the workplace enriches employees' satisfaction with communication of supervisors and their organization based self-esteem. The amount of satisfaction fosters an emotional bond to the organization and thus reduces tardiness, absenteeism and furthers job performance.

In recent years, the focus in management and leadership made the shift from having the technical skills to lead to people-oriented factors such as excellent interpersonal skills. Nelson (2013), examined what it takes to achieve success as a leader. He found that soft skills, or people skills, such as being a good listener and communicator, are necessary requisites for success. Today's era is known for fierce and ruthless competition and having soft skills as well as hard skills are critical to success as a leader.

Millennials are the new workforce and along with generation x are becoming the new leaders of organizations as baby boomers retire. Appreciation is crucial to job satisfaction and success. Organizational communication, specifically interpersonal communication between leader and subordinate, is also essential. This study will be looking at the combination of both ideas to fill the gap in the knowledge base and complement similar empirical research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand what type of appreciation millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers prefer and how they respond to appreciation in the workplace.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study derives from two theories based on the literature in sociology and transformational leadership. The first theory, Organizational Support Theory (OST), stems from Blau and Homan's Social Exchange Theory. The second theory, Leader-member Exchange (LMX), was developed by Danserewa, Graen, and Haga in 1975.

Organizational Support Theory

Organizational Support Theory explains how the support and praise from organizations affect the overall behaviors of employees. It postulates workers develop a global perception of the extent to which organizations demonstrate appreciation and cares about their well-being, known as perceived organizational support (POS). Employees recognize whether or not the group is supportive and will then return the amount of support to the organization. POS improves by the receipt of praise and approval (Eisenberger and Huntington, 1986).

O'Driscoll and Randall (1999) explored POS and satisfaction with rewards, job involvement, and organizational commitment. A significant link established between POS and job participation and effective attachment to the company. These findings are consistent and supportive of Eisenberger and Huntington's previous work.

Moideenkutty, Blau, Kumar and Nalakath (2001) examined POS and various perceived situational factors. In particular, they explored communication satisfaction with supervisor and labor-management relationship climate. The research concluded a positive correlation exists between POS and communication satisfaction as well as happiness with the labor-management relationship climate.

Leader-Member Exchange

Unlike other leadership theories, LMX focuses on the dyadic relationship between a leader and a member. According to LMX, the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a subordinate is foretelling of the outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

The theory aims to maximize organization success by establishing positive interactions between the dyad and points to what people could do to strengthen leadership dynamics. Studies have shown that LMX positively correlates with turnover, performance, and productivity and that the quality of exchange relationships affect subordinates commitment and good will (Truckenbrodt, 2000). Truckenbrodt believes for leaders to survive the challenges of the relentless and ever-changing global market of the 21st century, there needs to be an understanding of LMX and the way it can improve dyadic communication exchanges in the workplace.

Research Method

This study will use a qualitative research method design. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The historical origin comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation. Specifically, this study will benefit from using a qualitative design because this method allows the researcher to collect data from participants in their setting and get a better understanding of the whole event and experiences that occur.

Research Questions

1. What type of gestures of appreciation do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers prefer?
2. How do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers respond to appreciation from leadership in the workplace?

Definition of Terms

Appreciation: is defined as acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it (Adler & Fagley, 2005).

Baby Boomer: human beings born between the years 1946 and 1964 (Fry, 2016).

Generation: an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generational Cohort: a generation who share historical or social life experiences (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998).

Gen-x: human beings born between the years 1965 and 1980 (Fry, 2016).

Gratitude: a feeling of thankfulness directed toward others that emerge through social exchanges between helpers and beneficiaries (Blau, 1964).

Interpersonal communication: is the close, supportive, relationship-maintaining communication occurring between two or more people (Floyd, 2014).

Leader: A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expand spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted, coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

Millennial: human beings born between the years 1981-1997 (Fry, 2016).

Organizational communication: the interaction required to direct a group toward a set of common goals (Eisenberg, Goodall Jr., Trethewey, 2009).

Superior: the person to whom you report, from whom you take orders, your leader (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

Subordinate: a person at any organizational level that reports to a superior (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

Limitations

While conducting this study, it is beneficial to address the limitations of the research. A few of the limitations of the study will be the willingness of the subjects to participate and the truthfulness of the responses of the participants. While the researcher will strive to get as much data as possible, the subjects that will be studied work many hours and overloaded schedules. Some workers may not be able to find the time to answer the questions or respond appropriately. Thus, the small sample size may not be faithful to the representation of the whole population.

Participants also could feel concern that any or all input would be shared or discovered by the leader. One might believe that the job could be impacted by the exchanged information if it were negative in any way. The researcher will provide information and a setting in which the participant will feel comfortable and confident of the studies' anonymity. By offering multiple options and avenues for filling out the survey, the researcher will address the limitation of time and busyness.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to two chiropractic offices in Southeastern Minnesota and Southwestern Wisconsin and the general Midwest. Previous research included participants from across the United States, and this study sought out to see if the results would be the same in this region.

Significance of the Study

A study of appreciation in the workplace is significant for many reasons. First, the study will help to reveal the significance of communication as well as the importance of appreciation in the workplace. The findings will give leaders an understanding of how they can influence appreciation in the workplace via their interpersonal communication skills. Leaders who want to enhance recognition in the workplace will benefit from the findings of this research. The study will give leaders and businesses an advantage by using the results to improve workplace culture and satisfaction of employees.

The findings will add to prior research that has been conducted but will specifically give insight on the thoughts of three differing generations. While the study will be carried out in chiropractic offices, the study will benefit people in all types of businesses or organizations. Future leaders can use this information to become better communicators and ensure the subordinates feel appreciated.

Summary

Five chapters make up this research study. The first results introduced the foundation of the study and provided a summary of the research to date. A problem statement was created to concisely describe the problem. The purpose of the study explained why the researcher chose to explore this topic. The chapter then gave a theoretical framework to support the perspective of

the study. Two research questions were established to address the problems discussed. Finally, this chapter explained the significance of the research and to whom the study would be beneficial.

The following literature review chapter identifies, discusses, and synthesizes relevant studies to the existing research. The third chapter, methodology, will identify and support the researcher's choice of research design and the steps taken to select the sample and collect the data. The setting, assumptions and procedures of the study will be explained in detail. Chapter four will present the results and outcomes of the data. Finally, chapter five will discuss the findings of the research which will include the researcher's interpretation of the findings, how it connects to the theoretical framework provided, give suggestions for future research and the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This study will explore millennials', gen-x and baby boomers' perception of appreciation at work based on leaders' interpersonal communication skills. The purpose of the literature review is to identify, discuss and synthesize studies relevant to the current research. The review will inform the necessity to consider the emerging need to understand differing generations and the perception of appreciation from leadership in the workplace.

Five sections comprise the literature review. The first section will provide the theoretical background to support the research. Section two will offer a historical perspective of appreciation in the workplace as well as past literature on organizational and interpersonal communication. Section three will review the generational differences that exist in the workplace. Section four will consist of various parts of leadership communication including organizational and interpersonal communication. Finally, the fifth section will discuss the aspects of appreciation.

Theoretical Background

The overarching theories to support this study are Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) and Organizational Support Theory (OST). OST was provided as the lens to look at generational perception of appreciation in the workplace. LMX detailed the importance of the relationship between supervisor and subordinate.

Organizational Support Theory

Organizational Support Theory (OST) is grounded in the idea that employees cultivate general beliefs regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Perceived organizational support (POS) elicits staffs' obligation to care

about the companies' well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). This indebtedness generates a feeling of responsibility to the organization and thus, increases the workers' commitment to stay (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). In comparison, perpetual indications of weak POS reduces the employee's perceived obligations to the employer (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997).

In addition to commitment, POS affects the workers' job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors (Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998) and job performance (Eisenberger et al., 1997). OST asserts that based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), employees exchange effort and loyalty to the organization for tangible incentives such as pay and benefits as well as socio-emotional benefits. Socio-emotional benefits involve approval, caring and esteem (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

More recently, researchers shifted the focus of POS into the twenty-first-century world of work. Baran, Shanock and Miller (2012) contend the industrial landscape has transformed in the past decade. Due to rapid globalization, the importance of managing an international workforce is increasing. To successfully compete in the global economy, POS theory continues to provide leaders a solid foundation on which to develop diverse work relationships across cultures and nations.

Neves and Eisenberger (2012) extend the research of POS by exploring management communication and employee performance. They revealed when individuals receive benefits in the form of open communication from leadership; the workers feel obligated to reciprocate appropriately by increasing task performance. Thus, management communication is a necessary antecedent of POS. Employees use the cues given by supervisors through dialogue exchanges to understand the relationship established within the organization. These findings promote Allen's

(1992) study confirming top management's communication skills correlate with perceived organizational support.

Research confirms Organizational Support Theory is relevant to today's workforce (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012, Baran et al., 2012) and continued research would be beneficial in understanding the relationship between communication and POS. This study will examine how leadership's gestures of appreciation influence millennials, gen-x and baby boomers and what this indicates for perceived organizational support.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The theoretical framework of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) explores the quality of supervisor-subordinate interpersonal relationships. The premise behind LMX is that superiors form one of three differentiated dyadic relationships with subordinates based on various types of exchanges. These relationships classify as in-group, middle-group, and out-group. (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The quality of the connection that develops between a leader and a follower is significant. This has the ability to affect an individual, group, and organizational outcomes. From an employee viewpoint, a high-quality relationship with the supervisor consists of significant levels of mutual support, respect, and trust (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Thus, high-quality exchanges create in-group relationships, moderate quality exchanges generate middle-group, and low-quality exchanges produce the out-group relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

High-quality exchanges result in greater amounts of support, communication, and responsibility. Scandura and Schriesheim (1994) discovered in-group subordinates are perceived as more productive and rated higher in job performance. Moreover, these subordinates report overall higher levels of satisfaction at work than out-group members (Sherony & Green, 2002).

Similarly, Myers (2006) postulates participants who experience in-group relationships with instructors are more motivated to communicate. While the Myers study was situated with college students, the findings suggest that high-quality in-group relationships have a positive effect on communications.

Advocates of LMX have shown that leaders do not act consistently toward all subordinates and treat subordinates in different ways. Conversely, open, supportive, and trust-based communication may be the ideal superior-subordinate relationships. The quality of exchanges impacts workers' interactions with leaders (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

LMX also offers leadership implications. In-group members are proven to have higher work productivity, job satisfaction, motivation, and engage in more citizenship behaviors (Lunenburg, 2010). Lunenburg suggests leaders benefit by cultivating as many high-quality relationships with employees as possible.

Historical Perspective of Appreciation

One of the first experiments conducted to observe employees in the workplace occurred in the late 1920's and early 1930's. This series of experiments, later referred to as the Hawthorne effect, took place at a Western Electric factory under the supervision of Mayo. The study was set to observe variances in worker productivity when conditions, such as lighting and rest breaks, changed (Jones, 1992). While many factors had an impact on productivity, the experimenters concluded one of the most important factors behind increased productivity was improved personal relations between workers and management (Wickstrom & Bendix, 2010).

Since the Hawthorne experiments, scholars have taken much interest in organizational behavior and the different impact factors may have on its success (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). However, appreciation in the workplace is a relatively new notion (White, 2014).

Historical studies on appreciation focus primarily on relationships, personal emotions, psychological benefits and social life.

Regardless, the concept and aspects of appreciation remain the same across all fields. Therefore, historical inquiries and findings should not be dismissed. Social psychologists, Emmons and McCullough (2003) recognized the interest the general population had in the construct of gratitude and studied the effect of a grateful outlook on well-being in daily life. Gratitude-outlook groups presented heightened well-being, signifying that having a keen focus on daily blessings has emotional and interpersonal benefits.

Psychologists Adler and Fagley (2005) stated that appreciation is a disposition, but it is also something people can learn over time, which makes it a valuable construct to measure. They identified eight aspects of appreciation; they have focus, awe, ritual, present moment, self/social comparison, loss/adversity, interpersonal and gratitude. According to their research, gratitude refers to noticing and acknowledging a received benefit and feeling thankful for the efforts and actions of others. An overall level of appreciativeness can be found by combining all eight aspects.

Social scientists, Watkins, Woodward, Stone and Kolts (2003) took an interest in gratitude as a trait and evaluated the relationship between gratitude and subject well-being. Grateful individuals have a sense of abundance, appreciate simple pleasures, and appreciate the contributions of others to their welfare. Being a grateful person increases overall happiness and the likelihood of showing gratitude to others. Adler and Fagley's (2012) study substantiates the significant relationship between appreciation and the positive correlation between life satisfaction and feelings of well-being.

Historical Perspective of Organizational Communication

In 1976, a comprehensive review by Porter and Roberts determined that studies of communication in the workplace were grossly underrepresented in the empirical research literature and suggested future research in the effects on both individual and organizational levels. However, Roberts and O'Reilly (1979) completed a review of communication studies literature and discovered three categories were consistently discussed. These included the effects of power and status on superior-subordinate communication, trust as a moderator, and semantic-information distance as a source of misunderstanding between management and staff. Roberts and O'Reilly suggested future research be increasingly developmental and longitudinal in nature.

Since then, researchers such as Hatfield and Huseman (1982) began to look at the relationship between communication amongst managers and subordinates and the congruent satisfaction with work, supervision and job satisfaction. Through this study, it became apparent communication significantly related to satisfaction in the workplace. Subsequently, Snyder and Morris (1984) reviewed perceived communication variables and overall organization performance. The quality of supervisory communication and information exchange within colleague workgroup were strongly related to overall organizational performance.

Organizational communication is essential to strategic direction and employee commitment, as well. Mayfield and Mayfield (2002) and Van den Hooff and Ridder (2004) maintain leader communication strategies increase worker loyalty. Management can stimulate employee dedication to the organization by enhancing the quality of task related exchanges. Leadership that exhibits openness in communications achieves a higher trust relationship. Trust also creates a supportive and committed attitude in employees (Van den Hooff & Ridder, 2004).

Generational Differences in the Workplace

Generations differ in many aspects including attitudes, beliefs, values, motivation and work style preferences. These differences are believed to influence how each generational cohort views leadership and worker roles in the workplace. As new workers enter the workforce, managers are encouraged to observe generational differences and take into account generational organizational values (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007).

Millennials

One of the most evident differences between Millennials and other generations in the workplace is their unique relationship with technology. Technological developments over time played a key role in the way they learn, interact and communicate (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Millennials personify with terms such as tech-savvy, social networking and constant connectedness (Gibson et al., 2009). They prefer to learn both hard and soft skills on the job (Tolbize, 2008).

Crumpacker & Crumpacker (2007) state millennials are stereotypically spoiled, absent-minded, and dependent on technology. Work ethic is group-oriented and multi-tasking. As for feedback, they seek prompt responses and always seek approval and praise (Tolbize, 2008). This generation has been shaped by parental excesses (Tolbize, 2008) and has come to age in a tough time in the United States economy (Whitehouse, 2014).

Millennials also have a clear set of convictions about what the supervisor-worker relationship encompasses. Unlike baby boomers, millennials prefer to have a close personal relationship with bosses and want supervisors to take an interest in them (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Sessa et al. (2007) assert generational cohorts differ in valued leadership attributes. These traits include a leader who is encouraging, listens well and is supportive.

While employees of all generations desire work-life balance, millennials are inclined to demand it from employers. This conversion comes from personal observation and societal shifts toward focusing on families and home life. Millennials who feel valued, looked after, and appreciated respond with loyalty to organizations. Loyalty equates to having ample opportunities and an abundance of coaching and mentoring (Hershatte & Epstein, 2010).

Generation X

The majority of gen-x adults grew up in the first dual worker families. This, in turn, made them self-reliant and a desire to have work-life balance. As they saw divorce become more common and the downsizing of corporations, they became less loyal than the generation before them. Generation x desire career options and a fun work environment in which they are willing to move around to find (Gibson, Greenwood, Murphy, 2009).

Gen-Xers became computer savvy and enjoy working in teams and rely heavily on relationships. They are known to be able to multi-task, are comfortable with diversity and enjoy competition (Smola & Sutton, 2002). On the other hand, they also can be stereotyped as cynical, pessimistic and too individualistic (Wong, Gardiner, Land & Coulon, 2008).

Tolbize (2008) found generation x values family, love and integrity the most. The most important aspects of workplace culture are fairness, ethical, straightforward, and social. Their top reasons for happiness in the workplace are feeling valued, recognition and appreciation, and having a supportive environment.

Baby Boomers

The baby boomer generation values attributes that suggest a publicly impressive leader with qualities such as dedication and having a big-picture orientation. They desire a leader who

shares in the decision making process through listening, teaching, and delegation. The attribute of delegating most clearly distinguishes this cohort from all others (Sessa et al., 2007).

Andert (2011) specified baby boomers ranked competent, forward-looking, inspiring, caring and honest as the top five characteristics of a leader. They commit to work environments that are democratic and humane and wish to leave their mark on the organization.

Boomers were raised to respect authority figures and grew up in an era of prosperity and optimism. They witnessed and partook in the political and social turmoil of the Vietnam War, the civil rights riots, and the assassinations of Kennedy and King (Tolbize, 2008).

This cohort is stereotyped as hard working, resisting authority and a feeling of having merited the right to be in charge. Boomers welcome change and will advocate for a good cause (Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2009). Work ethic is efficient, logical and hard working. Work also takes priority over all else, such as family and friends (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007).

The baby boomer generation started the workaholic trend and are uncomfortable interacting with authority figures. They are insulted by continuous feedback and supervision, prefer to learn soft skills on the job and hard skills in the classroom (Tolbize, 2008).

Generational Similarities in the Workplace

In contrast, Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) indicate a consensus exists that generations are more similar than different at work. Regardless of age, employees are similarly satisfied at work, feel a sense of personal accomplishment and are happy with pay and benefits. Thus, this research disagrees that differences in work attitudes are dramatic. They propose leaders are better served by identifying individual differences in the workplace instead of generational cohorts.

Comparably, Wong, Gardiner, Lang and Coulon (2008), observed differences in personality and motivation. The results suggest most differences observed are better explained by age rather than generational differences. In sum, the differences they found were minimal and suggested stronger differences occur between individuals in the same generation than those between cohorts.

Leadership Communication in the Workplace

As Millennials continue to enter the workplace rapidly, an interest in the differing communication orientations and skills between generations has become a central area of concern for leadership and organizations. These concerns primarily focus on Millennials' abilities to create functional work relationships with older employees to increase organizational performance (McGuire, By, & Hutchings, 2007). Studies on generational differences, especially in regards to communication, lead to implications for current managers and future leaders to consider these variances while leading diverse organizations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

Organizational Communication

Organizational communication is the interaction required to direct a group toward a set of common goals. Defining organizational communication for the twenty-first century requires the leader to acknowledge the hard and ever-changing workplace. It is no longer relevant to use traditional ways of doing business and communicating because they are out of date and not effective (Eisenberg, Goodall Jr., Trethewey, 2009).

Nonetheless, all leadership has a communicative component with constant certainties. Contemporary observers agree effective communication with employees on the part of leaders has essential characteristics. Leaders influence workers through communication that is open, supportive, motivating and empowering (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

Abugre (2011), explored workers' perception on organizational communication and employee satisfaction in the workplace. Effective communication creates more job satisfaction and positive commitment from employees. Also, reliable and efficient communication from management can affect employees' work performance in a positive manner which subsequently affects output.

Among all the organizational processes, communication is the most imperative to employees. Welch (2011) concurs internal communication is key to employee satisfaction. Successful internal communication promotes employee awareness and fortifies organizational effectiveness because it contributes to efficient relationships between management and staff.

Leadership Interpersonal Communication

Communication provides various functions in the workplace, including information sharing, organization, influence, enthusiasm, and decision making (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Significant work tasks and organizational goals occur through communication-based interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal communication has many processes in the workplace as well. These include becoming familiar with supervisors, becoming acquainted with coworkers, acculturating, developing job competency, negotiating roles and recognition (Myers, Seibold, Park, 2011).

Interpersonal interactions in work groups serve to create and maintain essential work relationships among team members. Effective interpersonal communication generates relationships. Interpersonal relationships, including social relations, are indispensable to organization's life and sustainable success. (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2014). Communication strengthens employees' commitment to the organization when a clear view of values and goals

are conveyed by the leader (Vuuren, Jong, & Seydel, 2007) and increases worker productivity (Solaja, Idowu, & James, 2016).

Leadership communication drives relationships and structures the attitudes and behaviors of employees. Open, honest, and need-based communication from management intensifies perceived organizational support that can foster communication satisfaction. (Dasgupta et al., 2013). Employees want to work and stay in organizations where communication bestows the intrinsic value of employees, delivers respect, and instills recognition outside of financial rewards (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2014).

Madlock (2008) explored the link between leadership style, communicator competence, and employee satisfaction. The results presented a strong relationship between supervisor communicator skill and employee communication satisfaction. The research establishes a moderate correlation between leader communicator competence and overall employee job satisfaction.

Research also indicates leadership interpersonal communication is imperative to organizations in regards to worker satisfaction, loyalty, productivity, and commitment. Solaja et al. (2016) confirm the purpose of communication in an organization is to effect change and to inspire action toward the wellbeing of the group. Research is lacking concerning effective interpersonal communication and the perception the employee has of appreciation in the workplace.

Appreciation

Recently, research on appreciation and gratitude has been increasing in a variety of scholarly arenas and research areas. Studies indicate appreciation has a positive impact on quality of life (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman & Dean, 2009), romantic relationships (Algoe,

Gable, & Maisel, 2010), new and old friendships (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008), in the military (Stocker, Jacobshagen, Semmer, & Annen, 2010), and communal relationships (Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, Graham, 2010).

Being recognized as a valued employee by superiors and coworkers is a vital part of feeling accepted into the organization and gaining a sense of self-efficacy. Despite its significance, there is a dearth of research concerning the role of recognition or appreciation in the workplace. However, recent studies illustrate recognition is a critical process to organizations' success (Myers, Seibold, & Park, 2011).

White (2016, pg. 20) confirms, "When individuals feel appreciated and valued for their contributions in the workplace, good results follow, including increased employee engagement, less staff turnover, higher customer satisfaction ratings and the organization grows in its sense of purpose." Without a sense of being valued by leadership and fellow colleagues, workers feel like a commodity and motivation begins to diminish over time (Chapman & White, 2011).

Appreciation is also an essential factor in day-to-day workplace welfare and success. It contributes to employees' ability to uphold social bonds and develop trust on the job (Fagley & Adler, 2012). Respect and recognition also factors into employee satisfaction and commitment to stay with the organization (Dasgupta et al., 2014).

Gratitude in the workplace is multifaceted and not as straightforward as other business aspects. Internal communication plays a strong role in conveying appreciation. Employees feel socially valued and increase prosocial behavior when they receive authentic gratitude from leadership (Grant and Gino, 2010). Chapman and White (2011) reiterate the most important ingredient to appreciation is individualization. Communicating appreciation globally across an

organization is not as effective as communicating specifically to the employee. Notably, the difference in this is focusing on performance plus the employee's value as a person.

Chapman and White (2011) consider five languages of appreciation, or five ways to show appreciation to others. These include words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, tangible gifts and physical touch. Each person has a primary and secondary language of appreciation. The primary language communicates more deeply than the others and, if used, is more efficient in conveying appreciation. Identifying workers' most valued language would minimize the challenges managers face in actually expressing gratitude in organizations.

Furthermore, Stocker et al. (2010) found as well as increasing job satisfaction, feelings of resentment reduced when workers felt appreciated. When high appreciation was provided even in unusual circumstances, such as working long hours or completing tasks outside of role expectations, the employee reported even greater job satisfaction rates.

Beck (2016) explored the use, effectiveness and dark sides of managerial gratitude communications from the perspective of the subordinate employee. The research supports that receiving administrative gratitude is important especially if it is perceived as sincere. Sincere gratitude is precise, personalized, timely and equivalent to the amount of the effort given.

Conversely, dark sides of managerial gratitude exist as well. Inappropriate or ineffective communication can cause adverse outcomes. Over-communication, withholding, undeserved, unfair selection, lack of relationship and insincerity influence employees' opinions of managers just as much as sincere and efficient communications (Beck, 2016).

Challenges arise when managers try to convey appreciation. Busyness, a personal discomfort with communicating appreciation, and feeling overwhelmed with existing priorities are a few oppositions that Chapman and White (2011) discovered while researching managers

hesitations of implementing gratitude into daily work life. By prioritizing, putting things into perspective and looking at the value appreciation has on the success of the business overall, leaders can overcome uncertainties.

Summary

While scholarly research exists in the areas of organizational communication, gender differences and appreciation in the workplace, the research supports the need for current studies in the significance of appreciation in the workplace for the three divergent generations. Therefore, this study will add to the research by exploring millennials, gen-x and baby boomers' view of appreciation and whether or not leadership communication plays a role into the perception of gratitude.

Chapter two presented literature to support the theoretical background utilizing Leader-Member Exchange Theory and Organizational Support Theory, the historical perspective of appreciation, past literature on organizational and interpersonal communication, generational differences and similarities that exist in the workplace, leadership communication including organizational and interpersonal communication and finally, the aspects of appreciation. Chapter three comprises the research design and methodology for a study addressing varying generational preferences of gestures of appreciation in the workplace and the implications it may have on workers.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This qualitative study will explore the relationship of a leader's interpersonal communication and the perception of appreciation in the workplace. Chapter three will present the research methods, the rationale for research design and two research questions. The setting, sampling, and selection of participants will then be discussed. Next, the role of the researcher, assumptions, procedures, selection of participants, instrumentation will be provided. The chapter will conclude data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

A qualitative research design will be used to explore the work experiences of chiropractic office workers in a non-leadership role. This study selects a qualitative design as it allows the research to be conducted in a natural setting and uses the researcher as the principal instrument. Qualitative researchers are intrigued with the intricacy of shared interactions as expressed in everyday life and with the meanings the participants attribute to these relations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Rationale for Research Design

Grounded Theory is chosen because it is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data that is precisely gathered and analyzed. Through continuous analysis and data collection the theory is developed as the same time as research is being conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The researcher will be using grounded theory to develop a theory which offers an explanation about the main concern of the population and how the concern may be resolved.

Research Questions

The following two research questions will guide this study:

1. What type of gestures of appreciation do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers prefer?
2. How do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers respond to appreciation from leadership in the workplace?

Research Setting

The setting for the one-on-one interviews of this study will be two Bluff Side Chiropractic (BSC) offices within Southeastern Minnesota and Southwestern Wisconsin. BSC are chiropractic and massage clinics with four offices combined. The two BSC locations chosen for this study employ 17 people, two of which are in a supervisory or leadership role.

Research setting A is located in southwestern Wisconsin and has around 18,000 people. The racial composition of the city is 90.7% White, 1.1% African-American, 0.3% Native American, 5.7% Asian, 0.5% from other races, and 1.7% from two or more races, and 1.6% of the population are Hispanic or Latino of any race. Persons under the age of 18 contribute to 24.9% of the population, 59.8% are between the ages of 18-65 and 15.3% are over the age of 65. The median age is 38.5 years (La Crosse County, 2015).

Research setting B is in southeastern Minnesota. Setting B has a population of roughly 27,000 people. The racial makeup of the city is 92.3% White, 2.4% African-American, 0.02% Native American, 2.5% Asian, 2.0% and .9% of the population are Hispanic or Latino of any race. 14.4% of residents are under the age of 18; 33.2% between the ages of 18 and 24; 18.5% were from 25 to 44; 20.5% were between 45 and 64; and 13.3% were 65 years of age or older. The median age is 26.7 years. (Winona County, 2015).

Sample

Purposeful sampling will be employed to choose the interview participants who will best assist the researcher in understanding the problem. Participants will be identified and selected based on how experienced they are with being subordinate to a leader (Bernard, 2011). The parameters of the study involve gathering insight from millennials, gen-x and baby boomers who have worked in a non-leadership role for more than one year. Thus, purposeful sampling will ensure the appropriate participants are chosen (Creswell, 2014).

Participants for the survey will be selected by convenience sampling via networking contacts the researcher has established in the area. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants that are easily accessible to the researcher and thus is most timely and cost effective (Marshall, 1996). The researcher will contact members of the social and business network and inquire, via a phone call or visit, if management would like to provide the survey to their employees. Once permission is obtained, the researcher will email the consent form and Qualtrics survey link to the leader. The leader will then be asked to forward the email to all employees, who then can decide if they would like to participate.

For the face-to-face interviews, this study will strive to achieve a sample size of nine to collect sufficient and comprehensive data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher will ensure at least three people of each generation are interviewed. The sample for the study will consist of males and females. The nine participants will be of various roles in the office. Billing assistants, front office staff, therapists and associate doctors will constitute the sample population. The participants have various backgrounds and work experience which will ensure a true representation of the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher will attempt to collect at least forty survey responses. The survey will be administered and open for responses for ten days. After ten days, the researcher will pull the analysis and reports from Qualtrics to begin analysis.

Role of the Researcher

Since this is a qualitative study, the researcher will serve as the instrument and primary data collector. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data collection and data analysis to generate themes and then the researcher interprets the meanings of the data. (Creswell, 2014). During data collection, the researcher must be cognizant of the impact and diminish any disruption of the setting (Merriam, 2014).

Since the researcher is closer to reality during the research versus an instrument's ability, interpreted data provides high internal validity. Internal validity is a strength of qualitative data. However, triangulation will be employed to increase the validity even further. Method triangulation is the process of integrating data collections from multiple data sources to test validity of the data used to generate conclusions (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Selection of Participants

The recruiting strategy to achieve access to members will require the researcher to contact the office management of the BSC offices and other networking companies and request permission to visit and explain the research to the potential participants over the lunch hour. Once the discussion of the study is complete, prospective participants will exchange contact information to meet.

The researcher once worked for BSC in a lone department. The researcher did not have any supervisory or leadership role over the participants and guarantees anonymity during all interviews.

Instrumentation

The researcher will be conducting this investigation via two different ways of data collection. Interviews via purposeful sampling and a survey via convenient sampling will be completed to develop a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection

Data collection methods in this study will be comprised of the following: collecting information through one-on-one group interviews and a Qualtrics survey. Data obtained during the interviews will allow the researcher to develop the questions for the survey.

One-on-One Interviews

First, individual interviews will be performed for data collection. Personal interviews involve a casual, interactive progression that utilizes open-ended questions. The fluidity of the questions is meant to invoke responses of particular lived experiences of the participant. Open-ended questions will be employed to gather data in regards to the perception of appreciation in the workplace based on varying generational cohorts. The researcher will schedule 20-minute interviews with the participant at a pre-determined location, such as the office breakroom or the library. The interviewer will take detailed notes of responses provided. The information collected from the personal interviews was used to develop survey questions number two, four and five along with the response categories.

Survey

Once the one-on-one interviews are completed, a survey will be developed using the information gathered in the responses to the interview questions. The survey will be created in Qualtrics to collect data about participants' opinions of appreciation in the workplace. The survey will then be administered via email to the employees of the businesses previously contacted. The survey will begin with a consent form and acknowledgment of anonymity and the participant must click agree to move forward. The survey will consist of five questions and should take less than five minutes for the participant to complete. The researcher will be analyzing the results of the findings by using reports in Qualtrics to answer the two research questions.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers build patterns, categories and themes by organizing data using an inductive process. Once a comprehensive set of themes are apparent the researcher deductively reflects on the topics to determine if more evidence can support each theme or whether they need to obtain further information (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis will proceed at the same time as other parts of the study and it is fluid in nature. The process begins with organizing the raw data and preparing for analysis, reading through the data, coding, establishing themes and descriptions and interpreting the meaning of the topics (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher will bracket (to set aside) any prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions so as to not influence the process (Merriam, 2002). Qualtrics will be used to capture themes and make meaning of the data by analyzing the survey responses.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, to a large extent, the validity and reliability of the study depend upon the ethics of the researcher. Ethical dilemmas may emerge concerning data collection and the dissemination of the findings. It is the researcher's responsibility to produce an ethical study by using guidelines, experiences, government regulations and above all else act morally to establish trust of the researcher and the study overall (Merriam, 2002).

To maintain privacy of the participants, the researcher will make it known that anonymity is guaranteed and all research documents will be secured in a private file in a secure, password protected laptop. Participants will be fully informed of the nature of the research and the role they have during the interviews and surveys.

Summary

Chapter three introduced the methodology for the research study. The qualitative design was chosen to explore the relationship of a leader's interpersonal communication and the perception of appreciation in the workplace by millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers. Chapter four will comprise of the findings and results of the two research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand what type of appreciation millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers prefer and how they respond to appreciation in the workplace. Chapter three offered a qualitative method to conduct the research. Chapter four presents the findings of the research collected from the survey and a summary and the researcher's interpretations of the results. Chapter five summarizes the conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research.

Review of the Problem Statement

Little is known about how millennials, generation x and baby boomers respond to appreciation in the workplace and what method of appreciative communication is preferred. Previous research suggests it is necessary to study appreciation in the workplace in more detail for leaders to understand how to lead various and differing generations (Adler & Fagly (2005), Beck (2016), Chapman & White (2012), Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy (2009) and Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown (2007).

Review of the Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study. The study explored millennials, generation x, and baby boomers in the workplace. Specifically, the researcher looked at the preferences and positive responses to appreciation from leadership according to generation using grounded theory to answer two research questions.

Research Questions

1. What type of gestures of appreciation do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers prefer?
2. How do millennials, gen-x, and baby boomers respond to appreciation from leadership in the workplace?

Results

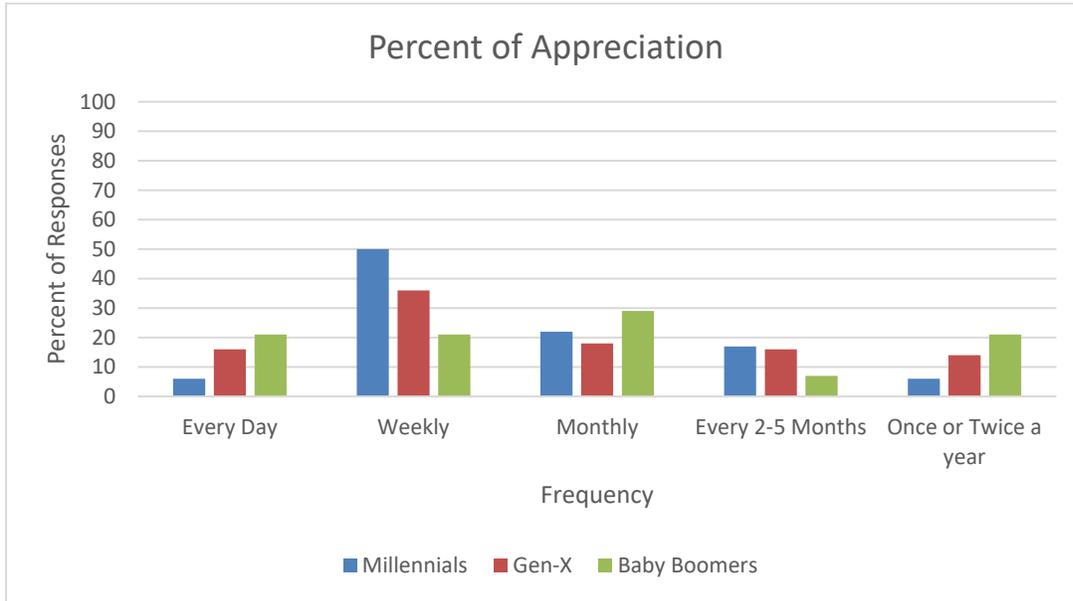
The survey consisted of five questions that was completed by fifty people via convenience sampling. The questions prompted participants to share the frequency, satisfaction, preferred gestures of appreciation and implications of appreciation received at work. Of the fifty people surveyed, eighteen were considered millennials, eighteen were gen-x, and fourteen were baby boomers.

Frequency of Appreciation

The survey collected responses to gather data about the frequency of appreciation received at the work place. Responses included every day, every week, every month, every 2-5 months, once or twice a year and never. The data show no one of any generation responded “never.”

Chart 1. Percent of Appreciation

Bar graph demonstrating generational responses to first survey question regarding the percent of frequency of appreciation shown.



Millennials' Percent of Frequency of Appreciation

Of the eighteen millennials, the data show 50% received appreciation from leadership every week. Twenty-two percent reported every month, 17% every 2-5 months, and 5% (one person) responded every day or once or twice a year.

Generation X's Percent of Frequency of Appreciation

Generation X reported the highest frequency as weekly (33%). Twenty-two percent equally responded as every day or every 2-5 months. Sixteen percent reported once or twice a year and 5% responded every month.

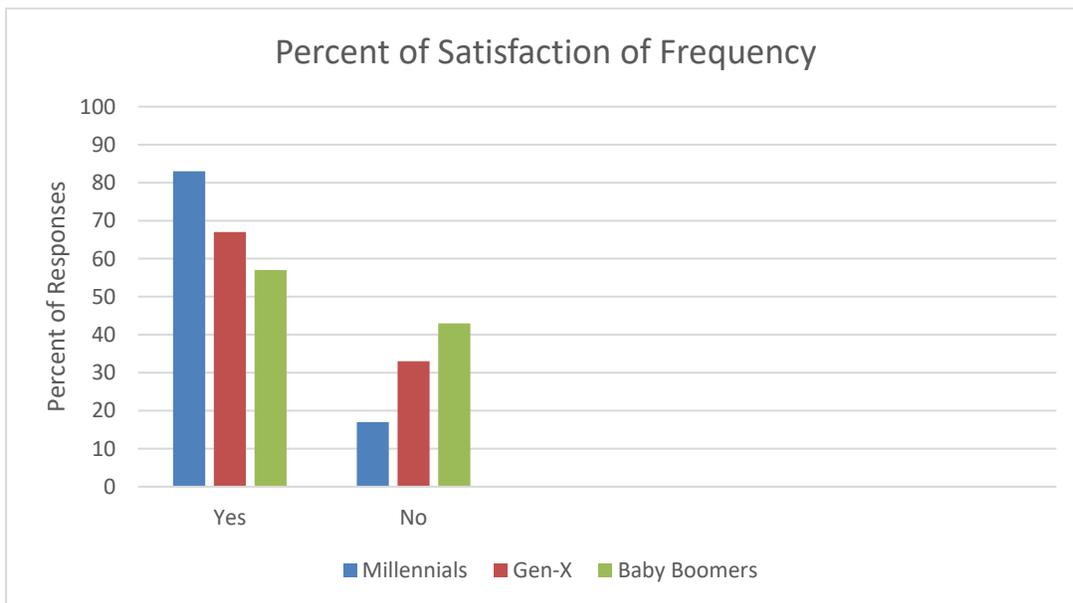
Baby Boomers' Percent of Frequency of Appreciation

The highest frequency reported by baby boomers indicated 29% received appreciation on a monthly basis. Three categories tied at 21% responding to every day, every week or once or twice a year. One person (7%) reported every 2-5 months.

Percent of Satisfaction of Frequency

Chart 2. Percent of Satisfaction of Frequency

Bar graph representing satisfaction level for frequency of appreciation in the workplace.



Overall, the data show 83% of the millennials, 67% of gen-x and 57% of the baby boomers are satisfied with the frequency of appreciation given at work.

Summary and Discussion of Frequency of Appreciation and Satisfaction of Frequency

Regardless of generation, the overall majority of people (36%) responded to receiving appreciation from leadership every week. Eighteen percent reported receiving appreciation once a month. Sixteen percent reported every day or every 2-5 months and 14% said

once a year. The majority of the responses stated people received appreciation every week or every month. In addition, data show 70% of people surveyed confirmed satisfaction with the frequency of appreciation shown.

These results are not consistent with the trend Chapman and White (2011) found while studying people nationwide in the United States. They stated 70% of employees reported never receiving praise or recognition at work, whereas the data collected show over half of the participants receive it daily, weekly or monthly. Not one respondent stated “never.” It also is inconsistent with statistics provided by Globoforce (2011) stating that over half of the U.S. workforce are not satisfied with the attention and appreciation received.

The research supports Tolbize (2008) idea that millennials prefer open and consistent communication from management and will demand it, if need be. Millennials received the most frequent amount of appreciation of the three generations and it could be because they are not afraid to ask for it. In addition, they were the most satisfied generation.

However, Tolbize (2008) also stated baby boomers are insulted by continuous feedback and the data show the majority of baby boomers received appreciation, a form of feedback, only on a monthly basis. This may mean that leaders already recognize the difference between generations. However, baby boomers were the least satisfied in the frequency of appreciation shown, thus leaders might be missing the mark with appreciating all employees. This finding supports Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) whom indicated leaders are better served by identifying individual differences instead of generational cohorts in the workplace.

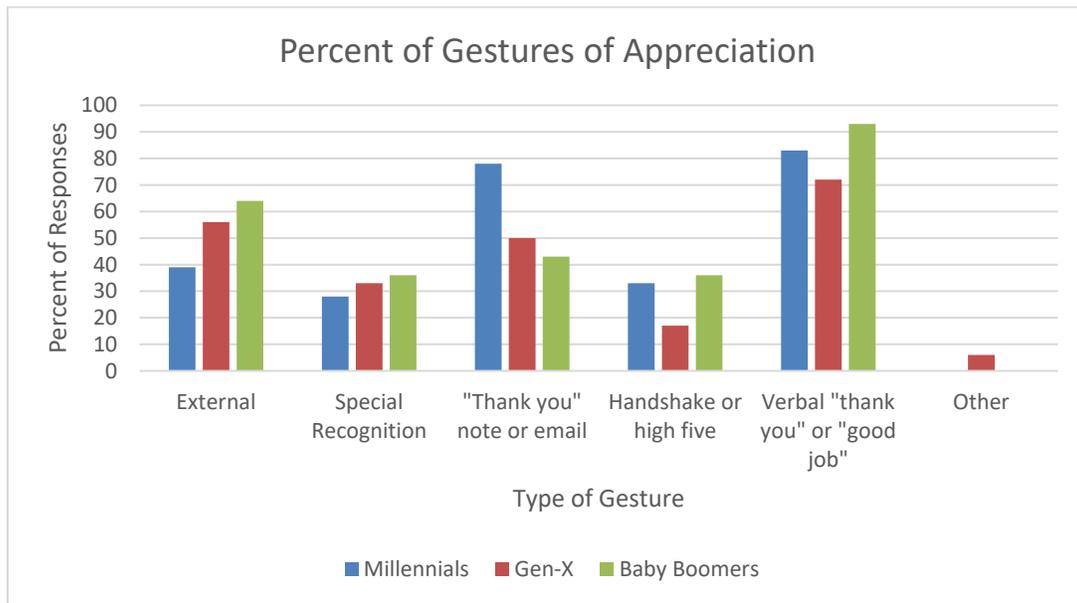
Gestures of Appreciation

The researcher collected data on the type of gestures of appreciation participants preferred. The responses included external such as monetary or a gift, special recognition, a

“thank you” email or note, a handshake or high five, verbal “thank you” or “good job” or other. The participants were allowed to choose more than one response, if applicable.

Chart 3. Percent of Gestures of Appreciation

Displaying the variations in preferences of gestures of appreciation shown by leadership to differing generations at work.



Millennials’ Percent of Gestures of Appreciation

A verbal gesture of appreciation ranked highest with 83% of millennials stating they prefer a verbal “thank you” or “good job.” Seventy seven percent also reported a “thank you” email or note. Thirty-eight percent stated an external gesture, followed by 33% wanting a handshake or high five. Finally, 27% desired special recognition announced at a meeting.

Generation X’s Percent of Gestures of Appreciation

Seventy-two percent of Gen-Xer’s reported a preference of a verbal “thank you” or “good job,” and 55% stated an external gift. Fifty percent reported a “thank you” email or note, 33%

would not mind special recognition at a meeting, and 16% wanted a handshake or high five. One person reported wanting “other” gestures of appreciation.

Baby Boomers’ Percent of Gestures of Appreciation

The majority of baby boomers, 93%, reported wanting a verbal gesture of appreciation, such as “thank you” or “good job.” Sixty four percent stated an external gift and 43% preferred a “thank you” email or note. Lastly, 36% reported liking special recognition and a handshake or high five.

Summary and Discussion of Gestures of Appreciation

Of the fifty respondents, an overwhelming 82% marked that a verbal gesture of appreciation, such as a “thank you” or “good job” would be the most desired type of gesture. Similarly, the next highest at 58% reported a “thank you” email or note is preferred. As for external, such as a gift or a bonus, the data show 52% chose this response. Thirty-two percent enjoy special recognition and the least desired (28%) was a handshake or high five.

The results illustrate the significance of the medium or gesture of gratitude given to employees as Beck (2016) documented. The research supported Beck’s data that the most desired medium of gratitude was one-on-one verbal communication between leader and subordinate. More support was given to Fagley and Adler (2012) in that employees valued appreciation and recognition more than external rewards such as a monetary bonus.

Since all responses provided an example of each language of appreciation created by Chapman and White (2011) and every response was checked more than one time, the researcher can conclude there are indeed five areas of appreciation. These included words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, tangible gifts and physical touch. While this study did not explore

the five languages of appreciation specifically, it does support people have preferences to how they are shown appreciation.

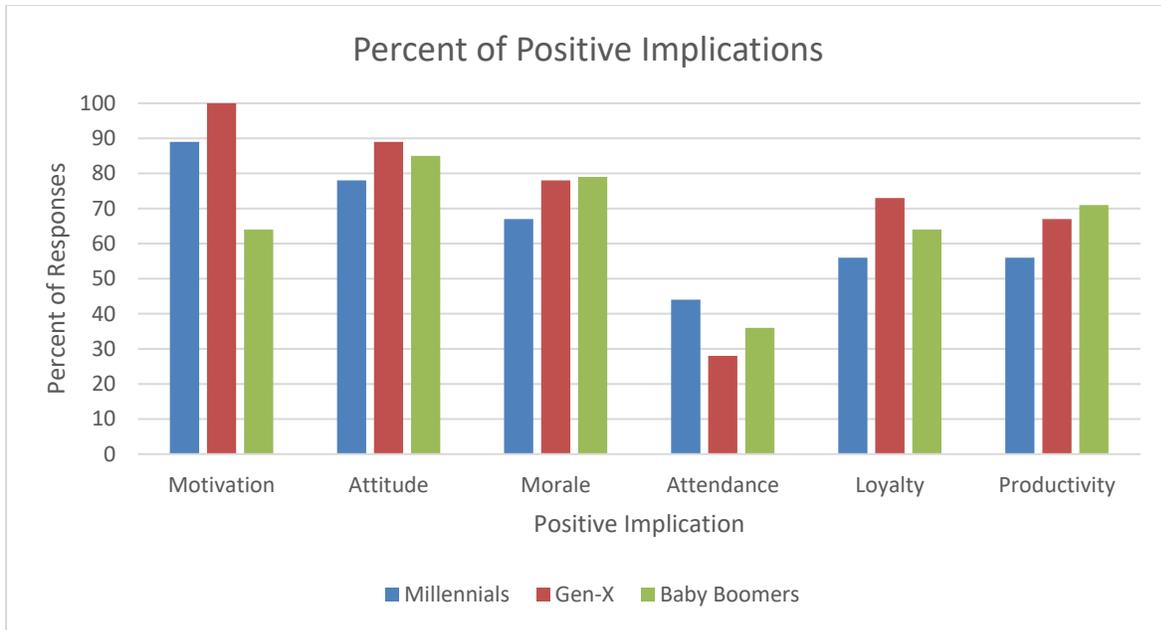
Of all generations, millennials were least likely to respond well to an external gift or monetary bonus and were more apt to wanting a personal gesture of appreciation, which shows they do want supervisors to take an interest in them and to have a close relationship with leadership as Hershatter and Epstein (2010) discovered.

Positive Implications of Appreciation

In addition, data was collected to answer research question 2. The participants were asked to provide the positive implications, if any, appreciation had at work. More than one response was allowed. Categories included motivation, attitude, morale, attendance, loyalty, productivity or no change.

Chart 4. Positive implications reported by varying generations.

Demonstrating generational differences in the positive implications appreciation has in the workplace.



Millennials' Percent of Positive Implications

Millennials responded that motivation (89%) was most effected by receiving appreciation from leadership at work. Seventy-eight percent reported improved attitude, 67% better morale, 56% reported both loyalty and productivity and finally, 44% stated it would influence attendance.

Generation X's Percent of Positive Implications

One hundred percent of gen-x participants reported motivation as the greatest positive implication appreciation has at work. Eighty-nine percent stated attitude is improved and 78% said it would increase morale. Loyalty was selected by 72% of the participants and productivity was chosen by 67%. As for attendance, 28% responded that it would help them show up to work (attendance).

Baby Boomers' Percent of Positive Implications

The greatest implication appreciation had on baby boomers was attitude, as 86% reported a positive change. Seventy-nine percent reported improved morale and 71% stated increased productivity. 65% responded to more motivation and increased loyalty. Thirty-six percent said it would impact attendance.

Summary and Discussion of Positive Implications of Appreciation

The participants had the option to choose any or all positive implications of appreciation at work, including an option which stated “no change.” Of the fifty responses, not a single person selected “no change.” Whereas, 86% reported a positive impact on motivation, 84% attitude, 74% morale, 64% loyalty and productivity and only 36% answered it would change attendance rate.

The amount of Millennials and gen-x participants who reported motivation is impacted by appreciation differed greatly from baby boomers. For the majority of baby boomers, attitude and morale were more improved by appreciation. Here, generational differences arose and back the research of Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal and Brown (2007) who endorse the idea that managers should observe and take into account generational differences.

The results are consistent with the past decade of research in that appreciation is significantly important and has a great impact on the workplace. How leadership communicate with employees can affect employees' work behaviors in a positive way as Abugre (2011) found. Support is provided to Dasgupta, Suar and Singh's (2012) work stating recognition factors into employee satisfaction and commitment. Furthermore, 86% reported improved motivation as Chapman and White (2011) suggested. The data display lowered rates of tardiness and absence and increased productivity are products of appreciation as well (White, 2014).

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusions

This research study explored generational differences of appreciation in the workplace, including preferences, satisfaction and positive implications. Previous chapters one through three presented the background of the problem, the theoretical framework, research method and a detailed review of the literature. Here, the researcher explained the importance of exploring the idea of generational differences in the work place and why appreciation in the work place is significant. Also discussed was the researcher's methodology to support chapter four. Chapter four discussed the findings of the research collected and key findings, including the researcher's interpretation of the results. Chapter five presents significant finding and implications and recommendations for future research.

Significant Findings and Implications

Millennials

Millennials, most evidently were shown appreciation most frequently (on a weekly basis) and were the most satisfied with the amount shown compared to other generations. Tolbize (2008) suggested millennials always seek approval and praise. This may confirm millennials will reach out for feedback and praise or will only stay working for a company who provides this for them.

It is easy for leadership to show millennials appreciation, as they best respond to verbal or written notes stating "thank you" or "good job." The positive implications reported were very close in percentage as well, showing that it really does not matter how they are shown appreciation, millennials simply just want to be appreciated.

Generation X

Gen-Xers reported the most varied answer to the frequency of appreciation from leadership. The greatest percentage reported was 33% received appreciation every week. While two-thirds of them were satisfied with the frequency of appreciation it is hard to conclude the preferences for this generation.

Similar to the baby boomers, gen-x prefer a verbal or external gesture of appreciation but stood out as the generation who least preferred the physical form of appreciation such as a handshake or high five. Once again, the findings are inconclusive to whether they truly do find happiness at work when feeling valued, recognized and shown appreciation as Tolbize (2008) reported.

Baby Boomers

The research showed baby boomers received the least amount of appreciation and were the least satisfied with the frequency of appreciation shown to them. While the literature suggests baby boomers typically do not need to be shown appreciation and are uncomfortable with interacting with leadership and do not need feedback (Tolbize, 2008), the baby boomers studied here suggest otherwise.

When shown appreciation, baby boomers best responded to a verbal gesture or an external gesture such as a monetary bonus or gift. This generation stood out by ranking the external gesture higher than almost all other forms of appreciation. If baby boomers are shown appreciation, they react more positively than the millennial generation as they had more positive implications with higher percentage responses. This is interesting to note since previous research has shown millennials to be the neediest generation when it pertains to appreciation and feedback (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

Leadership Implications

Leadership should be held accountable for ensuring appreciation is shown to everyone in the workplace. The findings are significant; regardless of generation the positive implications are great. While the researcher could not conclude whether true generational differences exist, the research supports the literature and previous studies in that preferences for gestures of appreciation vary. Discovering the type of appreciation a person desires (White, 2014) and then providing it to them will have incredible effects on morale, attendance, motivation, attitude, loyalty and productivity in the workplace.

To effectively lead, there are many challenges leadership face in regards to the diversity of the workplace. This study only examined generational cohort as the guideline and did not consider gender, race, religion, or ethnic backgrounds. The researcher cautions that generations should not be overgeneralized or stereotyped due to membership of Millennial, gen-x or baby boomer cohort.

This research aligns with Organizational Support Theory; support and praise from organizations affect the overall behaviors of employees. Positive Organizational Support improves by the receipt of praise and approval as found by Eisenberger and Huntington (1986). Similarly, the research supports Leader-Member Exchange theory showing the quality of the connection that develops between a leader and a follower is significant. When the leader connects and continuously shows appreciation, they have the ability to affect individual, group, and organizational outcomes (Danserewa et. al, 1975).

Summary of the Findings

The research sought to find the answers to two research questions. Discovered within the analysis of the research reports were the generational preferences to the types of gestures preferred while being shown appreciation in the workplace and how workers respond to appreciation from leadership.

Overall, millennials favor a verbal “thank you” or “good job”, followed by a “thank you” email or note. Generation x also desire a verbal “thank you” or good job or an external reward such as a monetary bonus or a gift. Finally, baby boomers prefer a verbal “thank you” or “good job” or a “thank you” email or note, just as the millennials.

Thus, generations are not very different after all, and have more in common than previous literature provides. The research aligned with Kowske, Rasch and Wiley’s (2010) work in that generations are more similar than they are different. It also appears that providing appreciation could be as simple as remembering to genuinely provide a personal “thank you” more often to ensure employees are motivated, happy, loyal and efficient. Appreciation had an immense positive effect for each category studied on employees at work. It should be noted motivation and attitude were greatly impacted for all generations, regardless of cohort.

Recommendations for Future Research

Studying appreciation specifically in the workplace is a fairly new area of research, however, the previous research along with the findings of the current research suggest more research is needed. The complexities of generational versus personal preferences, gestures of appreciation and interpretations demand further studies.

The researcher discovered a lack in research that could be used as recommended future research. While the literature reviewed provided many studies about leadership showing

subordinates appreciation, there was little to be found about subordinates appreciating leaders. The existing literature suggests generational stereotypes are prevalent, however, it may be interesting to conduct a future study focusing on individual differences rather than relying on generation.

REFERENCES

- Abugre, J. (2011). Appraising the Impact of Organizational Communication on Worker Satisfaction in Organizational Workplace. *Problems of Management in the 21st Century Journal*, (1), 40-54.
- Adler, M. G., & Fagley, N. S. (2005). Appreciation: Individual differences in finding value and meaning as a unique predictor of subjective well-being. *Journal of personality*, 73(1), 79-114.
- Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2010). It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships. *Personal relationships*, 17(2), 217-233.
- Algoe, S. B., Haidt, J., & Gable, S. L. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: gratitude and relationships in everyday life. *Emotion*, 8(3), 425.
- Allen, M. W. (1992). Communication and organizational commitment: Perceived organizational support as a mediating factor. *Communication Quarterly*, 40(4), 357-367.
- Andert, D. (2011). Alternating leadership as a proactive organizational intervention: Addressing the needs of the Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 8(4), 67.
- Baran, B. E., Shanock, L. R., & Miller, L. R. (2012). Advancing organizational support theory into the twenty-first century world of work. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(2), 123-147.
- Beck, C. W. (2016). Perceptions of thanks in the workplace: Use, effectiveness, and dark sides of managerial gratitude. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 21(3), 333-351.
- Blau, P. (1964). *Exchanges and Power in Social Life*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Bernard, H. R. (2011). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Rowman Altamira.
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014, September). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. In *Oncology nursing forum* (Vol. 41, No. 5).
- Chapman, G., & White, P. (2011). *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*. Chicago:

Northfield Publishing.

- Clifton, J. (2016, September 7). How Millennials Want to Live and Work. Retrieved from Gallup: http://gallup.com/opinion/chairman/191426/millennials-live-work.aspx?g_source=how%20millennials%20work&g_medium=search&g_campaign=titles
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Crumpacker, M., & Crumpacker, J. M. (2007). Succession planning and generational stereotypes: should HR consider age-based values and attitudes a relevant factor or a passing fad?. *Public Personnel Management*, 36(4), 349-369.
- Daniels, T. D., Spiker, B. K. & Papa, M. J., (1997). *Organizational communication: Perspectives and trends*. Sage.
- Dasgupta, S. A., Suar, D., & Singh, S. (2012). Impact of managerial communication styles on employees' attitudes and behaviours. *Employee Relations*, 35(2), 173-199.
- Dasgupta, S. A., Suar, D., & Singh, S. (2014). Managerial communication practices and employees' attitudes and behaviours: A qualitative study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 19(3), 287-302.
- Eisenberg, E. M., Goodall Jr, H. L., & Trethewey, A. (2009). Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint (Sixth., p. 448). *Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford/St. Martin's*.
- Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., Rexwinkel, B., Lynch, P. D., & Rhoades, L. (2001). Reciprocation of perceived organizational support. *Journal of applied psychology*, 86(1), 42.
- Eisenberger, R., Cummings, J., Armeli, S., & Lynch, P. (1997). Perceived organizational support, discretionary treatment, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(5), 812-820.
- Eisenberger, R., Fasolo, P., & Davis-LaMastro, V. (1990). Perceived organizational support and employee diligence, commitment, and innovation. *Journal of applied psychology*, 75(1), 51.

- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchinson, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 71*, 500-507.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: an experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 84*(2), 377.
- Fagley, N. S., & Adler, M. G. (2012). Appreciation: A spiritual path to finding value and meaning in the workplace. *Journal of management, spirituality & religion, 9*(2), 167-187.
- Floyd, K. (2014). Interpersonal Communication's Peculiar Identity Crisis. *Communication Studies, 65*(4), 429-431. doi:10.1080/10510974.2014.927291
- Fry, R. (2016). Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation. Retrieved October 06, 2016, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>
- Gerstner, C. R., & Day, D. V. (1997). Meta-Analytic review of leader–member exchange theory: Correlates and construct issues. *Journal of applied psychology, 82*(6), 827.
- Gibson, J. W., Greenwood, R. A., & Murphy Jr, E. F. (2009). Generational differences in the workplace: Personal values, behaviors, and popular beliefs. *Journal of Diversity Management, 4*(3), 1.
- Globoforce. (2011, September 1). Retrieved from Workforce Mood Tracker: <http://www.globoforce.com/news/press-releases-archive/globoforce-reveals-2011-workforce-mood-tracker-survey-results/>
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The leadership quarterly, 6*(2), 219-247.
- Grant, A. M., & Gino, F. (2010). A little thanks goes a long way: Explaining why gratitude expressions motivate prosocial behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 98*(6), 946.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American sociological review, 161-178*.

- Hatfield, J. D., & Huseman, R. C. (1982). Perceptual congruence about communication as related to satisfaction: Moderating effects of individual characteristics. *Academy of Management Journal*, 25(2), 349-358.
- Hershatler, A., & Epstein, M. (2010). Millennials and the world of work: An organization and management perspective. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 211-223.
- Jones, S. R. (1992). Was there a Hawthorne effect?. *American Journal of sociology*, 451-468.
- Kowske, B. J., Rasch, R., & Wiley, J. (2010). Millennials' (lack of) attitude problem: An empirical examination of generational effects on work attitudes. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 265-279.
- Lambert, N. M., Clark, M. S., Durtschi, J., Fincham, F. D., & Graham, S. M. (2010). Benefits of expressing gratitude expressing gratitude to a partner changes one's view of the relationship. *Psychological Science*.
- Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., Stillman, T. F., & Dean, L. R. (2009). More gratitude, less materialism: The mediating role of life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(1), 32-42.
- Leadership. BusinessDictionary.com. Retrieved October 02, 2016, from BusinessDictionary.com website: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/leadership.html>
- Lunenburg, F. C. (2010). Leader-member exchange theory: Another perspective on the leadership process. *International journal of management, business and administration*, 13(1), 1-5.
- Madlock, P. E. (2008). The link between leadership style, communicator competence, and employee satisfaction. *Journal of Business Communication*, 45(1), 61-78.
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family practice*, 13(6), 522-526.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage.
- Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2002). Leader communication strategies critical paths to improving employee commitment. *American Business Review*, 20(2), 89.
- McGuire, D., By, R., & Hutchings, K. (2007). Towards a model of human resource solutions for achieving intergenerational interaction in organizations. *Journal of European industrial training*, 31(8), 592-608.

- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.
- Moideenkutty, U., Blau, G., Kumar, R., & Nalakath, A. (2001). Perceived organizational support as a mediator of the relationship of perceived situational factors to affective organizational commitment. *Applied Psychology, 50*(4), 615-634.
- Moorman, R. H., Blakely, G. L., & Niehoff, B. P. (1998). Does perceived organizational support mediate the relationship between procedural justice and organizational citizenship behavior?. *Academy of Management journal, 41*(3), 351-357.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Myers, S. A. (2006). Using leader-member exchange theory to explain students' motives to communicate. *Communication Quarterly, 54*(3), 293-304.
- Myers, K. K., & Sadaghiani, K. (2010). Millennials in the workplace: A communication perspective on millennials' organizational relationships and performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 25*(2), 225-238.
- Myers, K., Seibold, D.R., & Park, H.S. (2011). The sage handbook of interpersonal communication. M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.). Sage Publications.
- Nelson, D. (2013). "Management Works in the System; Leadership Works on the System" The Interpersonal Skills on Corporate Threshold. *Language in India, 13*(4), 22-31.
- Neves, P., & Eisenberger, R. (2012). Management communication and employee performance: The contribution of perceived organizational support. *Human Performance, 25*(5), 452-464.
- O'Driscoll, M. P., & Randall, D. M. (1999). Perceived organizational support, satisfaction with rewards, and employee job involvement and organizational commitment. *Applied Psychology, 48*(2), 197-209.
- Roberts, K. H., & O'Reilly III, C. A. (n.d.). Measuring Organizational Communication. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 59*(3), 321-326. Retrieved November 11, 2016.
- Scandura, T. A., & Schriesheim, C. A. (1994). Leader-member exchange and supervisor career mentoring as complementary constructs in leadership research. *Academy of management Journal, 37*(6), 1588-1602.

- Sessa, V. I., Kabacoff, R. I., Deal, J., & Brown, H. (2007). Generational differences in leader values and leadership behaviors. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 10(1), 47-74.
- Sherony, K. M., & Green, S. G. (2002). Coworker exchange: relationships between coworkers, leader-member exchange, and work attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(3), 542.
- Snyder, R. A., & Morris, J. H. (1984). Organizational communication and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(3), 461.
- Solaja, O. M., Idowu, F. E., & James, A. E. (2016). Exploring the relationship between leadership communication style, personality trait and organizational productivity. *Serbian Journal of Management*, 11(1), 99-117.
- Stephen R. G. Jones. (1992). Was There a Hawthorne Effect? *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(3), 451-468. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781455>
- Stocker, D., Jacobshagen, N., Semmer, N. K., & Annen, H. (2010). Appreciation at work in the Swiss armed forces. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology. Handbook of qualitative research, 17, 273-85.
- Wey Smola, K., & Sutton, C. D. (2002). Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 23(4), 363-382.
- Tolbize, A. (2008). Generational differences in the workplace. *Research and training center of community living*, 19, 1-13.
- Truckenbrodt, Y. B. (2000). The relationship between leader-member exchange and commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. *Acquisition Review Quarterly*, 7(3), 233.
- Van den Hooff, B., & De Ridder, J. A. (2004). Knowledge sharing in context: the influence of organizational commitment, communication climate and CMC use on knowledge sharing. *Journal of knowledge management*, 8(6), 117-130.
- Vuuren, M., de Jong, M. D., & Seydel, E. R. (2007). Direct and indirect effects of supervisor communication on organizational commitment. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(2), 116-128.

- Watkins, P. C., Woodward, K., Stone, T., & Kolts, R. L. (2003). Gratitude and happiness: Development of a measure of gratitude, and relationships with subjective well-being. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 31(5), 431-451.
- Weinberg, R., & McDermott, M. (2002). A comparative analysis of sport and business organizations: Factors perceived critical for organizational success. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14(4), 282-298.
- Welch, M. (2011). The evolution of the employee engagement concept: communication implications. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(4), 328-346.
- White, P., Dr. (2014, May 7). Appreciating Your Staff Makes Business Sense. Credit Union Times. Retrieved September 20, 2016, from <http://www.cutimes.com/2014/05/02/appreciating-your-staff-makes-business-sense>
- White, P. (2016). Appreciation at Work training and the Motivating by Appreciation Inventory: development and validity. *Strategic HR Review*, 15(1), 20-24.
- Wickstrom, G., & Bendix, T. (2000). The "Hawthorne effect"—what did the original Hawthorne studies actually show?. *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 363-367.
- Winston, B. E., & Patterson, K. (2006). An integrative definition of leadership. *International journal of leadership studies*, 1(2), 6-66.
- Wong, M., Gardiner, E., Lang, W., & Coulon, L. (2008). Generational differences in personality and motivation: do they exist and what are the implications for the workplace?. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 878-890.

Appendix A

Survey Consent Form

Hello,

My name is Kasee Hamilton and I am completing research for my graduate capstone project at Winona State University. I am gathering information about appreciation from leadership in the workplace.

If you would like to participate, please read the following:

I volunteer to participate in this research project. I understand this survey should take approximately 2-5 minutes to complete.

My participation in this project is completely voluntary. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

If I would like to obtain the results of this study, I may request a copy from the researcher when the research is complete by emailing: knhamilt5818@winona.edu.

If you agree, please continue by **clicking the link below**. If you do not want to continue, disregard this message.

https://winona.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_afR6jthKAkLzss5

Thank you for your contribution and time!

Kasee Hamilton
Organizational Leadership Graduate Program
Winona State University