Human Resource Studies

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Tilburg University

Master Thesis Human Resource Studies

Generations, leadership style and employee performance

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Preface

This master thesis is written in order to graduate for my Social and Behavioural sciences master degree at the University of Tilburg. After finishing the study Management, Economics and Law at Avans Hogeschool 's-Hertogenbosch, I have made the choice to continue studying at the University of Tilburg. The first year I followed the bachelor programme Bedrijfseconomie, but soon I realized that I made the wrong choice, so I decided to apply for the pre-master Human Resource Studies. Now, more than two years later, I finished the master programme Human Resource Studies with this master thesis. This also means that my student life ends as well, but I am looking forward to face new challenges and to explore new opportunities.

This master thesis could not have been accomplished without the support of some important people. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, drs. Hans van Dijk, for his time, guidance and support throughout the process of this thesis. Also, I would like to thank my second supervisor, dr. Rene Schalk, for his time and useful feedback. In addition, I would like to thank my co-students of the master circle for their support and pleasant cooperation while collecting the data necessary to finalize this study. Finally, I would like to thank my family and my friends for their support and encouragement throughout the entire program of Human Resource Studies.

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Abstract

Generations are raised in different times and changing cultures so they can have different ideas about leadership and employee performance. This explorative study examined how different generations think about leadership style and if this bears any consequences for their performance. In this research three different generations were distinguished, namely generation baby boom, generation X and generation Y. These generations were examined in which way they differ or have similarities in their preferred leadership style. This leadership style is based on the dimensions of the path goal theory. Path goal theory distinguishes between directive, supportive, participative and achievement oriented leadership style. Employee performance was measured by four different dimensions, namely effectiveness, quality, efficiency and innovation.

To explore the relationship between these variables focus groups has been conducted among 74 employees of Philips Lighting in Eindhoven. These employees were divided into 8 focus groups, which were organised. After performing the focus groups and transcribing them, all focus groups were coded and analyzed with a software programme, named Nvivo.

The results of this research revealed that each generation has a preference for a more supportive leadership style. Each generation expect that, if they their preferred leadership style, it might lead to an enhancement of their performance. In the discussion the main results are discussed in a broader perspective. Finally, limitations of the study are given and recommendations for further research and practice are made.

Keywords: Generations, leadership style preferences, employee performance.

1. Introduction

Many studies predict that the overall percentage of older people will increase significantly in the following years, especially in developed countries such as the Netherlands (Streb, Voelpel & Leibold, 2008). It is estimated that in 2015 people above the age of 55 will comprise more than 20 percent of the overall workforce (AARP, 2004). Demographical changes in the labor market, such as the ageing workforce, will have structural consequences for organizations (Burke & Ng, 2006).

Companies have an age difference between new employees who are new on the labor market and the older employees who are working in the company for a longer period. These generational differences between the new and older worker could create opportunities, but on the other hand it leads to issues which have to be dealt with (Yu & Miller, 2005). For example, nowadays a new generation of workers is entering the workforce or beginning to secure leadership positions in Dutch organizations. But how do these new generations think about leadership styles? Which leadership style do they prefer? And might these different preferences for leadership have an effect on the performance of the workers?

The workforce as we know it today can be divided in three generations, namely the baby boomers, generation X and generation Y. Differences between generations include communication styles, expectations, work styles, values and norms, attitudes about work and life, comfort with technology, views regarding loyalty and authority, and acceptance of change (Hu, Herrick, Hodgin, 2004). Each generation has its unique characteristics. For example, the baby boomers, which are born between 1945 and 1964, are committed to their place of employment and enjoy meaningful work (Mensik, 2007). Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, view work as 'a job' and this generation believe that it is important to have a balance between work and leisure (Mensik, 2007). Generation Y is the generation which is born between the years of 1981 and 2000. This group of workers is only just entering the workplace and therefore their influence at this time is still emerging (Yu et al., 2005). The workforce of today consist of people from these different generations who are working together (Konrad, 2006), but there are changes going on. Nowadays baby boomers near their retirement so the business concern is that the most experienced leaders leave the organization (Mathis & Jackson, 2006). Due the continuous workforce changes the most regular step is that generation X will manage the new generation Y. All these generations are raised in different times and changing cultures so they can have different ideas about leadership and performance. Therefore it is interesting to investigate these differences between the generations regarding to their preferred leadership styles and influences on their performance. In addition, this study will explore what the different preferences and similarities of generations are concerning leadership style and if they expect that it will affect the employee performance. Earlier research on team leadership and leadership styles shows that the relationship between leadership styles and organizational outcomes is an important one to study, because many empirical studies have shown that leadership style is linked with important work-related attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction, employee commitment, trust and performance (Bass

& Avolio, as cited in Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang & Lawler, 2005). The literature about leadership style has provided general support for the relationships between different leadership styles and performance (Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999).

In this study, we want to explore whether generations differ in their preferences for a certain leadership style and if these generations expect that this preferred leadership style will affect their performance. The main research question that drives this study is:

What are the differences and similarities between leadership preferences for different generations and in what manner do these generations expect that this relationship affects employee performance?

To answer to main research question this research has two sub questions:

Sub question 1: How do different generations differ in their preference for leadership styles?
Sub question 2: What qualities or behavior should a leader poses to ensure higher performance of an employee?

The scientific relevance of this study is the intention to make a contribution to the literature concerning the relationship between generational differences, leadership style and employee performance. This research has an explorative character and wants to clarify how different generations think about leadership style and if this bears any consequences for their performance. The social relevance of this study is to examine whether the developments in the labour market have an influence on the preferred leadership style and employee performance.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Generations

Researchers and social scientists use the term ''generation'' to refer to people born in the same general time span. They share key historical or social life experiences (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). As earlier mentioned in the introduction today's workforce consist of three different generations; the baby boomers, generation X and generation Y.

Of course, it is critical not to stereotype people or generations. Clearly, members of a generation do not think or act exactly alike. Each generation, however, has lived through a common set of social and historic events that have helped shape attitudes and worldviews. The effects of those life experiences tend to be relatively constant during people's lives (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Because of their shared experiences, they often bring common ideas and values to the workplace (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). These experiences in life create a unique personality of each generation (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Cennamo and Gardner (2008) suggest that each generation have different work values because they started to work at different stages in time. Therefore people of each generation might have different expectations and preferences about leadership and performance.

Baby boomers are people born between the years of 1945-1964. This generation is often described as self-absorbed. The baby boomers tend to work hard, are generally loyal to their employer and prefer a more stable working environment (Loomis, 2000). Baby boomers are willing and expecting to work with others. In terms of leadership style, baby boomers accept the chain of command. This means that they expect their managers to give direction and to lead them towards organizational goals. Furthermore baby boomers are not highly technologically educated, nor do they generally like change (Raths, 1999).

People of generation X were born between the years of 1965-1980. Generation X has a different generation's approach to workplace loyalty and contribution to their entrepreneurial spirit than the baby boomers. People of generation X will not stay at the same place of employment for more than five years and in most cases may move at the three-year mark (Chatzky, 2002).Where their parents lived to work, generation X works to live, and work/life balance is a hallmark of this generation (Conger, 2006). Generation X tends to be more independent, self-motivated and self-sufficient. Further Kupperschmidt (2000) describes generation X as technologically informed and very comfortable with diversity, change and competition. This generation aims to get fast results and they are also focused on getting the job done by relying on technology and multi-tasking. They are motivated by flexible work schedules, the newest technology and opportunities to express creative and new ideas (Tyler, 2007).

People of generation Y were born after 1980. Generation Y is the most frequent used term and addresses the generation that is just beginning to feature in the workplace. Members of this next generation are very different from previous generations and that they will challenge present work

values in a number of ways (Tapscott, 1998). People from generation Y are the most demanding of all the generations and tend to leave an organization if they are dissatisfied. On the other hand they are also more optimistic than generation X, which leads to proactiveness and flexibility of mind (Woodward, 2000). The mentality of generation Y is also different. For example, the mentality of Generation X represents normal and modesty behaviour, while the mentality of generation Y prefers self will and personal identity (Bontekoning, 2008). That is also a reason that people of Generation Y put emphasis on learning. They want to learn, because they want to deliver the best performance. This depends on if their competences are identified and matched with challenging work.

2.2 Leadership style preference

All these generational groups have different characteristics and this is an important issue for their leaders. Earlier research had proven that employees with different work characteristics will be more effective and productive with different leadership styles (Tulgan, 1996). Leadership is a well known concept and there are many definitions of leadership. According to f (1989) it has been defined in terms of leader behaviour, individual traits, interaction patterns, follower perceptions, role relationships, influence on organizational culture, influence on task goals and influence over followers, these different perspectives make leadership a complex, multifaceted phenomenon (Yukl, 1989). Huber, Maas, McCloskey, Scherb, Goode & Watson (2000, p. 253) defined leadership as ''a process of influencing personnel towards achieving a common goal''. According to Meindl, Erlich and Dukerich (1985) leadership is something that is attributed to people by their followers. Leadership is usually also linked to power. This something what Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985) recognize, because they said that leadership is closely related to power but it involves more than simply the power allocated to a position in the organization or claimed by a member or members of organizations.

The way how a leader exercise his leadership is important, because leadership style is not the same as leadership. Leadership style is the approach as well as the behavior by which a leader directs his or her followers toward achieving a goal (Farag, Tullai-McGuinness & Anthony, 2008). The best-known leadership styles are transformational and transactional leadership (Avolio et al., 1999). In transactional leadership, leader-follower relationships are based on a series of exchanges or bargains between leader and follower. Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999) stated that transformational leadership on the other hand enables followers to transcend their self-interest and perceptions of own limitations in order to become more effective in pursuing collective goals and to exceed performance expectations. There are also other leadership frameworks, such as the contingency theory. The contingency theory is a class of behavioral theory that claims that there is no best way to organize a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is dependent upon the internal and external situation (Fiedler, 1967). The situational-leadership model views leaders as varying their emphasis on task and relationship behaviours to best deal with different levels of follower maturity

(Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). At least, the leader-member exchange describes how leaders in groups maintain their position through a series of tacit exchange agreements with their members (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). In today's modern workplace traditional criteria no longer fits to define a successful leadership style. Nowadays leadership requires a mixture of skills, such as professional skills, experience, and education (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). That is why leaders must try to understand the mindsets of different generations, and how each group sees the world based on its experiences (Zemke, et al., 2000).

The literature points to a conclusion that baby boomers, generation X and generation Y could require different leadership styles to maximise their productivity in modern workplaces (Yu & Miller, 2005). The way how each generation views leadership, rests on the influence about differences in attitudes, values and beliefs of each generation (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). For example, baby boomers prefer a collegial and consensus style of management which encourages communication and sharing responsibilities. Following Yu & Miller (2003) previous research indicated that baby boomers tend to be more loyal to employers and willing to accept a 'chain of command' leadership style. However according to Zemke et al. (2000) this generation promoted equality in the workplace, redefined roles and rules, and that is the reason why this generation might have a preference for a more participative management style than for the command-and-control management style. This is also confirmed by Salahuddin (2010) which refers that boomers believe in a participative leadership style, but that they have problems to implement this in the workplace. This style of leadership requires skill in understanding, listening, communicating, delegating and motivating, but according to Saluhaddin (2010) this generation lack these skills.

People of generation X are egalitarian and do not generally respect authority. They value honesty, fairness, competence and straightforwardness (Sessa et al. 2007). Generation X is increasingly well-educated, independent and eager to upgrade their skills compared to previous generations. Those characteristics require different leadership styles than people from other generations with less education and skills (Tulgan, 1996). Tulgan's "Managing Generation X" (1995) was one of the early efforts to understand the needs of this generation at work. In his qualitative study he found that generation X-ers wanted effective and intelligent leaders who invest time in them and provide mentoring and skills training. Generation X-ers wanted frequent feedback from their leaders, and they wanted to be trusted and respected for the work they performed. Following Yu & Miller (2003) this generation may prefer their employer to treat them more as partner rather than a worker.

Generation Y is only just entering the workforce and will, mainly, be entering into emerging knowledge worker organizations and positions. The reason for this is that they are technically skilled at a young age and they are aware of IT (Yu & Miller, 2005). They are better educated, more individualistic and very idealistic compared with the previous generations (Tulgan, 1996). According to the study of Dulin (2008) this generation prefers leaders who are mentors. This early work relationship has the "potential to alter a young employee's behavior, attitude, and perspective, for

better or worse" (Griffith, 2002). In their early careers, this generation wants mentors as leaders to help them around the typical bureaucracies. They also want leaders who want to teach them and give them opportunities for growth. They want mentors who not only guide them, but listen to them as well. Leaders must begin finding ways to meet the work-life needs of this generation. Unlike past generations, these employees may not be nearly as willing to sacrifice personal pursuits for professional success (Dulin, 2008).

Overall, generational changes have occurred in the workforce which had a significant impact on leadership styles (Sessa et al. 2007). But there are empirical studies that support the idea that there is no best leadership style for different generations (Davenport, 1998). As mentioned above the literature points out different conclusions about the preferred leadership style of different generations. So findings concerning this subject were less clear and because of these findings it is interesting to explore this subject even more.

This study focuses on the path-goal theory of leadership for exploring the preferences in leadership style of employees. This theory, which is a situational theory of leader effectiveness, proposes that leaders motivate higher performance by acting in ways that influence employees to believe valued outcomes can be achieved by making a serious effort (House, 1971; House & Mitchell, 1974). It makes it applicable to use in this study, because aspects of the situation such as the nature of the task, subordinate attributes and work environment provide the optimal amount of each type of leader behaviour for improving subordinate satisfaction, motivation and performance (House, 1971; House & Mitchell, 1974).

The theory consist four types of leader behaviour, namely directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented leadership. Directive leadership style is when a manager clarifies expectations of employees and clearly explains to employees what their task is. The leader gives specific rules and procedures and explains to employees exactly what is expected of them. A leader also makes his or her part in the group understood and asks that group members follow standard procedures, regulations and rules (House 1971; House and Mitchell, 1974; Sims, Szilagyi and McKemey 1976, Larsen, Rosenbloom, Anderson & Mehta, 2000).

The second type is supportive leadership style. According to this leadership style a manager is approachable, helpful and friendly, does things to create a more pleasant work atmosphere, shows concern for the status, well-being and needs of employees and treats members equally, creates a facilitative task environment of psychological support, mutual trust and respect, accentuates accomplishments of employees, looks out for their welfare, attempts to establish mutual interest and builds a team climate (House, 1971; House and Mitchell, 1974; Larsen et al., 2000).

Furthermore there is participative leadership which contains a manager who consults with employees, asks their suggestions and takes these suggestions into consideration before making a decision. A participative leadership style lets employees share a significant degree of decision-making power with their superiors (House, 1971; House and Mitchell 1974).

Finally, achievement-oriented leadership is a style when a manager is setting challenging goals, seeking improvement, emphasizing excellence in performance, and showing confidence that his or her employees will attain high standards of performance who sets challenging goals (House 1971; House and Mitchell,1974).

One of the reasons for focussing on the path goal theory is because it concerns the relationships between formally appointed leaders and his or her employees in their day to day function. As mentioned earlier, it is concerned with how formally appointed leaders affect the motivation and satisfaction of their employees (House, 1996). When the motivation and satisfaction of employees is low this will have consequences for the performance.

An important reason why the path goal theory is chosen is because of the different types of leadership behavior. These different types are far apart from each other, so therefore it is easier to distinguish different preferences for leadership. Besides that also multiple dimensions of leadership behaviour were examined in the theory including: leader initiating structure, consideration, authoritarianism, hierarchical influence, and degree of closeness of the supervision (House, 1996). Each of the dimensions was "analyzed in terms of path-goal variables such as valence and instrumentality" (House, 1971, pp.321). Beside that, House (1996) reformulated the path-goal theory in a later stadium to a meta proposition of leader behaviour that enhances subordinate empowerment, satisfaction and effectiveness and work unit. It addresses the effects of leaders on individual performance (House, 1996).

Another reason to choose for the path goal theory instead of the more familiar leadership style, such as the transformational and transactional leadership, is because according a study Ogbonna and Harris (2000) much of the literature over-concentrates on the 'transformational' role of leaders in achieving high performance. Therefore is it interesting to explore the leadership preferences of different generations according to the four dimensions of the path goal theory.

2.3 Employee performance

Previous research has provided support for the relationships between leadership and employee performance (Avolio et al., 1999). Cennamo and Gardner (2008) stated that by understanding the generational differences, human resource professionals and managers can improve organizational policies, which support organizational outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment and performance. Castka, Bamber, Sharp and Belohoubek (2001) refer to performance as the purpose of teamwork and they state that team performance has become a very important aspect of the research field. A lot of research articles have been published to investigate team performance (Van Knippenberg, de Dreu and Homan, 2004; Mathieu, Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers, 2000).

To achieve a high effective performance of people of different generations within the organization it depends on different fundamental characteristics of performance. An important characteristic of performance is preferred leadership style (Zaccaro, Rittman & Marks, 2001). In the

article of Zaccaro et al. (2001) they argue that leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor for the performance outcomes of members of different generations. Fiedler (1996) has provided the importance of leadership by arguing that the effectiveness of a leader is a major determinant for the performance of members, a group or an organization. However as mentioned earlier, according to Ogbonna and Harris (2000) much of the literature over-concentrates on the 'transformational' role of leaders in achieving high performance. The limited or inconclusive character of research findings in this area suggests the need to investigate further the nature of the relationship between leadership and performance (Ogbanna & Harris, 2000). Translating this to our research it is very interesting to explore further the relationship between leadership preferences of different generations and the impact on the performance of an employee.

Performance is not a unitary construct and that is the reason why it can be measured by means of different output dimensions. Hoffman, Nathan & Holden (1991) argue that performance measures can differ along many dimensions. In this study employee performance is explored by using four different output dimensions, namely; quality, effectiveness, efficiency and innovation. Quality refers to the ability to meet or exceed the required standards of the customers (Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005). Effectiveness refers to the degree in which objectives are realized (Molleman & Van den Beukel, 2004). Efficiency refers to the realization of the objectives against minimal costs (Mouzas, 2006). Innovation refers to the development of new products and / or services (Dunphy & Briant, 1996; Mollenman & Van der Breukel, 2004).

3. Method

3.1 Research design

The aim of this explorative study is to investigate whether there is a relationship between the generational differences and preferred leadership style and what the role of employee performance is in this relationship. The fieldwork is conducted based on qualitative methods for data collection. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to explore selected topics in detail and illuminate the way individuals create meaning through discussion with other people (Patton, 1990). The researcher wants to build a theory rather than test a theory, so a qualitative research design is preferable to a quantitative research design.

An explorative study is the best way to examine what generations say about their preferred leadership style and if they expect that these leadership preferences will affect their performance. An explorative study is all about investigating and creating new ideas and theories (Soudijn, 2005). According to Soudijn (2005) the researcher might have an idea about the relevance of a topic, but the assumptions are quite general when collecting data. The researcher might have expectations, but these are not strictly formulated. It is realistic that researcher might receive new ideas when collecting data, so in this research the expectations are not strictly formulated. This research is a case study because it is held at Philips Lighting in Eindhoven, which will be further explained in the sample.

In this case study design focus group discussions were mainly used for gathering primary data to enrich the study. Focus groups are a form of group interviewing, but it is not the same as group interviewing. Group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time. The emphasis being on questions and responses between the researcher and participant, while focus groups rely on interaction within group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Kitzinger and Barbour (1999, p. 20) give the follow definition of focus groups "Any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction". A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups are especially helpful "when insights, perceptions and explanations are more important than actual numbers" (Krueger, 1994, p. 30). Focus groups offer a context for comments, interaction, counselling, and exchange (Morgan, 1997), thereby giving access to in-depth information about what issues and aspects the participants consider important (Sekaran, 2003). Focus groups can also discuss what kind of preferences and dislikes the participants have and how consistently they defend their beliefs and ratings (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) and this is an important aspect of this research and an important reason why focus groups are used as a method.

In this research the preferences and believes of different generations about leadership style is the main topic. In the focus groups the researcher wants to get an impression of what the participants

thinks about important issues about this topic. By using focus groups the participants will be challenged to give their opinion during the interaction in the focus group. They will be encouraged to think about this topic and therefore it is possible to obtain information with focus groups that could not be acquired in a survey or even in an individual interview (Rogers, Meyer, Walker, & Fisk, 1998). These are the main reasons why focus groups are used as a data gathering method and not semi-structured interviews or other methods. According to Hannum (2004) focus groups can also be used to explore new ideas about a certain topic. A number of researchers, therefore, recommend the use of focus groups for the development of new insights in a specific topic and this is congruent with the aims of my study (Gray-Vickery, 1993; Morgan, 1997).

3.2 Sample

   The focus groups were conducted at the personnel staff of one sector of Philips named Lighting, which had 3206 employees at 3 January 2011. The reason for choosing Lighting is that one of the researchers works at Lightning and had connections within this sector. For this reason convenience sampling has been used to collect the participants. Information about the distribution of age groups within the organization are collected from an internal personnel data system of Philips called "PMS". All employees who work for the Royal Philips Electronics N.V in the Benelux are included in this system. By using this data system, conclusions were drawn upon the allocation of employees of the different generations and it helped to divide the sample into different focus groups.

   The numbers of groups vary, some studies using only one meeting with each of several focus groups (Burgess, 1996). In this case study a total of eight focus groups were held at the office of Philips Lighting in Eindhoven during January until April 2011, due the time and the costs no more focus groups were organized. In qualitative research, small sample sizes are considered acceptable, provided that information saturation is achieved (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The numbers of groups vary, some studies using only one meeting with each of several focus groups (Burgess 1996). Nyamathi and Shuler (1990) state that four focus groups are sufficient, but that consideration of response saturation should be made after the third. The notion of saturation is a useful concept, as the focus groups can end when no new information is coming up in the focus groups. As Mauthner, Parry and Backet-Millburn (1998) suggest, it is nearly always possible to return to a dataset and identify further themes by using reanalysis insights gained from further reading, subsequent research projects and personal life events.

   The focus groups had four to 14 participants per session (total 74 participants). The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (MacIntosh, 1993), but some researchers have used up to fifteen people (Goss & Leinbach, 1996) or as few as four (Kitzinger, 1995). A total of 201 employees from different generations of Philips Lighting were approached by email to invite them to participate in the focus groups. There were also posters placed at coffee

corners, to ask employees to participate in the focus groups. The participants could choose to participate in the focus group of their generation or in a mixed focus group.

The focus group itself can be homogeneous or heterogeneous. When there are homogenous groups the purpose is to reduce conflicts so it will lead to a positive discussion. When the purpose of the research is to compare opposite opinions or experiences, then it is better to form heterogeneous groups (Lucassen & Olde-Hartman, 2007). This study has made use of both homogene and heterogene focus groups in order to have positive discussions and also to compare opposite opinions. The numbers of participants in the focus groups was various. There was a minimum of four people and a maximum of 14 people in a focus group. A total of 74 employees of Philips Lighting participated in the focus groups. The focus groups had 31 people of the Baby Boom generation, 21 people of generation X and 22 people were related to generation Y. The first baby boom group consisted of 10 employees. The first generation X group consisted of eight employees, while the second group consisted of 11 employees. The first generation Y group consisted of 12 employees and the second generation Y group consisted of four employees. The first mixed group consisted of 14 employees; eight from generation baby boom, five from generation X and one from generation Y. The second mixed group also consisted of 14 employees; seven from generation baby boom, five from generation Y and two from generation X.

3.3 Data collection

The researchers developed a discussion moderator guide with questions to facilitate the focus groups (Appendix I). This guide was designed to cover all of the topics relating to the research objectives (Edmunds, 1999). The focus groups were conducted in different rooms at the location of Philips Lighting at Eindhoven. A total of 8 focus groups were organized of one hour each and were recorded with a voice recorder and a Marantz recorder through which reliability is supported. A typical focus-group exchange should last one to two hours (Morgan, 1997). To coordinate the focus groups two coordinators were assigned. Focus groups are managed by a moderator, who asked the questions and seek elaboration but have to stay neutral (Reiskin, 1992). One researcher was the moderator during the focus groups and open ended question were asked to the participants. The other two researchers were writing down notes and keep track who said what during the sessions. Especially in the heterogeneous groups, it was important to keep track, because of the different generations who were participating in those groups. The participants were asked to announce the name of the generation they belong to, so it made it easier for the researchers to code the voice recorder data. After the focus group sessions the data was coded and used to derive the answers to the questions.

3.4 Data analysis

Labels and categories can be used to organize and analyze qualitative data in two main ways: cross-sectional 'code and retrieve' methods and non-cross sectional analysis, which is more used by

case studies (Mason, 2002). In this research non-cross sectional analysis are used to analyze the data. The researcher devises a common system of categories which is applied with a software program, named NVivo, across the whole data set and used as a means of searching and for and retrieving pieces of labeled data. The data has been coded by using the non-cross sectional analysis. Coding means: 'fractures the data, freeing the researcher from description and forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction' (Strauss, 1987).

For this research this entails that the analysis of the focus group data takes three action flows, which are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After transcribing the recorded focus groups, the process of data reduction started. Non-relevant information is filtered out and the remaining text is abstracted and simplified (Goulding, 2002). Selecting the most important sentences was done by reading through the transcripts to look for statements in which meaningful information was given. After selecting the most important sentences to reduce the data the second step, data display, is made. This means the separation and classification of the answers on questions per protocol for every focus group. Nvivo was used to code the transcripts of the focus groups. It offers a variety of tools for systematic analysis of data, including interviews, record forms and audio text files (Weitzman & Miles, 1995). Weitzman and Miles (1995) suggest that the most important functions of this kind of software programme are coding, memos or annotation, data linking, search and retrieval, concept/theory development, data display and graphic editing. So by using NVivo it is possible to discover differences and similarities between preferences for leadership in different generations and how this has an effect on the employee performance. However the researcher determines what kind of analytic issues are to be explored, what ideas are important and what modes of representation are most appropriate (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

During the process of qualitative data coding three types of coding can be used. In this research open coding was used; meaning that all relevant sentences were coded. Other ways of coding are axial coding, that identifies relationships between open codes for the purpose of developing core codes and selective coding, to search specifically for cases that illustrate themes, making comparisons and contrasts based on these cases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). By using open coding this generates a formation of a high diversity of codes, used to organize and structure the transcripts even further. Both theoretical driven codes (codes given by the researcher based on the theory, by using the interview topics as labels) and in-vivo (codes developed based on the words of the respondents) (Mortelmans, 2007) were allocated to the sentences. This is the way to clarify patterns of answers within a certain question (Swanborn, 1999). This common system of codes is described in a codebook (Appendix II). These codes are related to literature of the path goal theory and the performance dimensions (House, 1996, Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005; Molleman & Van den Beukel, 2004; Mouzas, 2006; Dunphy & Briant, 1996; Mollenman & Van der Breukel, 2004). After open coding, the codes were reduced by listing the codes under labels; code families were created. This process consisted of linking and clustering the codes, finding main and sub codes and creating categories of codes called 'family

codes'. Code families were based on the core topics of the focus group interview script. After this, the final step was connecting the family codes to the sub questions of this research and to provide answers to them; preliminary conclusions were drawn based on the data display which consists of the main codes, sub codes and family codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All the transcripts were coded twice by one of the researchers to make sure that there were no mistakes and discrepancies. This way of analysing makes it possible to discover differences and similarities between the different generations. It also makes it possible to compare answers of questions with previous findings of the literature. This is described in the result section of the research. After the results section conclusions were drawn.

3.5 Reliability

The external reliability is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008). For this research the reliability is enhanced by description; extensively writing down what was done and how it was done in this research. The focus groups are recorded and typed out literally, using the tapes that were made. It was important to create a trusting environment during the focus groups sessions in which the participants feel free to speak. At first a little introduction was given to inform the participants about the subject and to create an open atmosphere. The focus groups were conducted in separate room where no other uninvited employees. Furthermore, the anonymity was guaranteed by formulating no names, functions, locations or other personal information in this research.

3.6 Validity

External validity referred to the extent in which conclusions are also applicable to other populations (Bryman, 2008). As this case study focused on exploring the feelings and experiences of employees about leadership styles and performance, within the Philips Lighting sector and does not have ambition to make generalizations outside of its sample space, the external validity was not very important in this research. On the other hand this study can be a good starting point for further research about this topic. Furthermore, the internal validity was enhanced to make use of respondent validation (Bryman, 2008). This meant that the outcomes of the focus groups are mailed to the respondents to check whether the respondents were understood in an accurate way. So every respondent will get a report about the focus groups and the respondent can read it and give feedback about if the report is complete and accurate.

3.7 Objectivity

The objectivity was enhanced by using focus groups with open-ended questions. The researchers made use of a discussion guide including a topic list. By using a topic list and asking open-ended questions there was less room for suggestive questions and the respondent was not pushed in a certain direction. Next to this, the researchers ensured an in depth understanding and encouraged clarification by asking questions to the participants to going deeper into the subject.

4. Results

4.1 Generations and leadership style

This chapter presents the results of the data collection and analysis. An analysis was made from the data gathered from the 8 focus groups as stated in the method section. A distinction is made between the experiences from generation baby boom, generation X and generation Y. In previous chapters theory concerning generations, preferred leadership style and employee performance is based on outcomes from an excellence perspective. These findings are based on literature and field research. This chapter shows the results of how the leadership preferences of different generations can affect the employee performance. The chapter is divided in two main sections, which correspond with the research questions. To provide an answer on the research questions, each section is concluded with a summary. The codebook (Appendix II) provides an extensive list with all the codes extracted from the literature of the path-goal theory (House, 1996) and the performance dimensions (Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005; Molleman & Van den Beukel, 2004; Mouzas, 2006; Dunphy & Briant, 1996; Mollenman & Van der Breukel, 2004) and in-vivo codes for analysing the transcripts and their frequency. There is deliberately chosen not to translate the behavioural items from Dutch to English, because there are subtle differences in language that have to be maintained.

During the eight focus groups 727 nodes were made about leadership style and 103 nodes were made about employee performance. In total 830 nodes were made. Nodes, which are used by the software programme Nvivo, are statements or opinions of respondents which are related to a certain subject.

According to the path goal theory, the leadership style item contains four different clusters, namely directive, supportive leadership, participative and achievement oriented leadership style. Each cluster is divided in a couple of categories. The first cluster, directive leadership style, contains of 12 categories. The category "Clarify expectations" is mentioned the most (25 times). This high frequency comes from statements or opinions which are derived from the eight focus groups and therefore indicates that it may be important. Other categories that have been mentioned frequently within the first cluster are "Clarifying policy, rules, procedures and protocols" and "Expected to do". Supportive leadership style is the second cluster and it contains 19 categories. Within this cluster "Attention to preferences" is the one that is mentioned the most (34 times). Furthermore "Attention to needs", "Approachable" and "Creating friendly supportive work environment" are three categories that are mentioned often too. The third cluster is called participative leadership and consists of 11 categories. The most frequent mentioned item is "Increase autonomy employee" (45 times). Two other categories which are mentioned often too are "Consult employee" and "Increase involvement employee", respectively 20 and 17 times. The final cluster of leadership style is Achievement oriented behaviour. This cluster has 15 categories and "Confidence in employees" is the most frequently mentioned category (35 times). The second most mentioned category is "Setting challenging targets" which is

mentioned 24 times. Overall, these are some general findings, which came out after coding the eight focus groups.

	Directive leadership	Supportive leadership	Participative leadership	Achievement oriented leadership	Total
Generation baby boom	46 nodes	116 nodes	52 nodes	50 nodes	264 nodes
Generation X	18 nodes	66 nodes	22 nodes	28 nodes	134 nodes
Generation Y	39 nodes	124 nodes	80 nodes	86 nodes	329 nodes
Total	101 nodes	299 nodes	153 nodes	164 nodes	727 nodes

Table 1: Coded nodes in Nvivo

Generation baby boom made 264 nodes of the total amount of 727 nodes. This means that 36,3% of all the nodes were made by this generation. Generation Y had 329 of the 727 nodes and this is 45,3% of the nodes. Generation X made 134 nodes, which means that Generation X made 18,4% of the total amount of nodes in the focus groups. Generation X had significantly less nodes in comparison with the other two generations. Therefore it is important to standardize the results. The next table shows the rate of each generation per leadership style. For example, 17,4 % of the nodes that generation baby boom made, were related to the directive leadership style.

	Directive leadership	Supportive leadership	Participative leadership	Achievement oriented leadership	Total
Generation baby boom	17,4%	43,9%	19,7%	18,9%	100%
Generation X	13,4%	49,3%	18,7%	21,4%	100%
Generation Y	11,9%	37,7%%	24,3%	26,1%	100%

Table 2: Percentages (%) nodes per generation.

4.1.1 Generation Baby boom and leadership style

In total, the baby boomers gave 264 nodes about the leadership style subject. A total of 17,4% of the all the nodes of generation baby boom were related to the directive leadership style, 43,9 % about supportive leadership style, 19,7% about the participative leadership style and 18,9% about the achievement oriented leadership style.

According to the directive leadership style a lot of baby boomers had an opinion about the category "Clarify policy, rules and procedures". A total of 11 statements were made about this

category. Baby boomers think that it is important that a leader has a vision, which he can clarify towards his employees:

> *Babyboomer: Nou visie is denk ik heel belangrijk. We moeten toch met z'n allen een bepaalde richting op gaan, anders gaan allerlei mensen verschillende kanten op. We zijn natuurlijk allemaal heel erg eigenwijs, zeker als je hier al 25 jaar zit (lach). Wel handig als je een manager hebt die probeert om iedereen dezelfde richting op te krijgen.*

Another important point for baby boomers is the preference for a manager who will clarify what he is expecting from his employees. A total of 10 statements about this topic were made. One baby boomer made the following statement:

> *Baby boomer: Kijk hij zal in ieder geval moeten ventileren wat er van buitenaf van ons gevraagd wordt of wat de plannen zijn op de langere termijn. Hij hoeft het natuurlijk hier niet altijd mee eens te zijn. Wat mij betreft mag je dat ook best zeggen waar hij het wel en niet mee eens is. Dat is best prettig.*

However the most statements for the baby boomer were made about the supportive leadership style. A total of 109 nodes about this leadership style were made by the baby boomers. The most mentioned category was "Attention to needs". Baby boomers made 14 statements about this category, where they argue that it is important for a leader that he knows what kind of facilities the employees need to do their jobs:

> *Baby boomer: Ik denk dat het de algemene consensus is dat een manager toch vooral bezig zou moeten zijn met er voor te zorgen dat de mensen onder hem goed kunnen werken en daar alle voorzieningen voor treffen, zodat die mensen hun werk zo goed mogelijk kunnen doen. Op het moment dat een manager besluit dat dat minder belangrijk is, dan is dat voor de groep geen goede manager meer*

In line with this, the baby boomer also agreed that they prefer a leader who has attention for the preferences of his employees and that he has attention for the wellbeing of his employees. These two categories were the second and third most mentioned by respectively 13 statements and 11 statements.

Baby boomers gave also statements which were related to the participative leadership style. In total 47 statements are coded and related to this leadership style. The most mentioned category is "Increasing autonomy employee". Baby boomers indicated that they prefer an increase of autonomy for themselves, which is given by their leader. They would like to have a manager who is telling them

what to do, but they want to decide by themselves how they will do it.

> *Moderator: Zou je het wenselijk vinden dat die andere stijl wat meer tot uiting zou komen? Zou je je dan meer gerespecteerd voelen in wat je te bieden hebt?*
>
> *Baby Boomer 1: Ik ben een secretaresse. Ik kan me voorstellen dat een manager zich beter ergens anders op kan oriënteren dan zich te bemoeien hoe een kalender wordt ingevuld. Je kan daar wel afspraken over maken, maar dan denk ik toch dat je als secretaresse vrijheid moet hebben om dat na je eigen inzicht in te vullen.*
>
> *Baby Boomer 2: is dat niet hetzelfde punt als wat net ook genoemd is, dus meer sturen op het wat en minder op het hoe.*
>
> *Allen: Ja*

Baby boomers made 50 statements which have been coded to the last cluster, namely achievement oriented leadership style. Baby boomers seem to have not much in common with this kind of leadership style, except with a few categories within this cluster. Baby boomers made 13 statements about the category "Confidence in employee". They find it important that a leader turn out his faith in his own employees and all what they are doing.

> *Baby Boomer: Vertrouwen is het kernbegrip. Vertrouwen in de eigen medewerkers. Persoonlijk besodemieter je de zaak niet. Je levert misschien 10 bonnen in waar nog geen euro te veel op staat. Het vertrouwen in het juiste gebruik van de telefoon, het juiste gebruik van je laptop, het juiste gebruik van de werktijden. Als jij 8 uur per dag maakt, of meer, is dat toch prima. Hoe dat je dat dan doet, is aan jezelf.*

The baby boomers find it also important that their leader is setting challenging goals, mission or targets for them. A total of 16 statements related to this subject were made by the baby boomers. They want to be kept challenged by their manager, but they also want to have autonomy to set their own goals in dialogue with their manager.

> *Moderator: Hij zegt van hier liggen de uitdagingen.*
>
> *Babyboomer: Ja hij geeft aan waar de uitdagingen liggen en hij laat je eigenlijk zelf uitdagende doelen stellen.*
>
> *Moderator: Oké, hij denkt daar in mee.*
>
> *Baby Boomer: Hij denkt daar in mee, maar hij daagt je wel uit*

4.1.2 Generation X and leadership style

In total the respondents of generation X gave 134 nodes about the leadership style subject. This generation had different statements about the leadership style they prefer. They gave 18 nodes about directive leadership style, 66 nodes about supportive leadership style, 22 nodes about the participative leadership style and 28 nodes about the achievement oriented leadership style. The most respondents of generation X had an opinion which is related to the supportive leadership style. This might indicate that they have a preference for this kind of leadership style. However they have also a strong opinion about two aspects of directive leadership, namely "Clarifying perception of employee" and "Expected to do". A total of 10 statements were made by people of generation X for these two categories. Generation X-ers like to know what they have to do at the work floor.

> *Generation X-er: Wat ik heel belangrijk vind is dat het duidelijk is wat er van mij verwacht wordt. Het beste element is dan wat er verteld wordt wat ik moet doen en niet hoe want dat kan ik zelf wel uitzoeken.*

As earlier mentioned the most statements by generation X were made about the supportive leadership style. During the focus groups it was strongly coming out that this generation has a preference for this type of leadership. People of generation X stated that they think that it is really important that a manager is approachable for them. This category delivered 14 statements by this generation. The overall message, that the people of generation X made, is summarized by a statement of one respondent:

> *Generation X-er: Ik denk dat het inderdaad heel erg belangrijk is voor onze leeftijdgroep dat de leider gezien wordt"*

The approachability of a manager is not the only thing, which is important for them, also the concern for what the employees' needs and preferences are. They also like to see that the manager will fill in the role as coach for them. This is illustrated by the statements of the people of generation X.

> *Generation X-er: Ik denk dat een leidinggevende vertrouwen in zijn werknemers moeten hebben en dat de werknemers het pad moeten aangeven. Dat de leider inderdaad een coach is en niet een bestuurder dan.*

In total 26 statements were made about participative leadership. According to generation baby boom, the most mentioned statement of generation X was related to "Increase autonomy of employee". A total of 12 statements were made about this category. This shows that people of generation X also wants to have freedom in their function and however they want guidance by their

leader, they still want to have some space in their function to decide how they work. The respondents describe this need for autonomy as follow:

> *Generation X-er: Je moet de vrijheid hebben om het op je eigen manier aan te pakken. Wat jou het beste ligt.*

Furthermore the respondent of generation X had some opinions which are related to the achievement oriented style. Just like the baby boomers, people of generation X find it important that a manager shows his confidence in his own employees, because this was mentioned eight times. However they had also some statements about the continuously seeking improvement. Other generations didn't mention this, but generation X referred five times to this subject. The quote below illustrates:

> *Generation X-er: Management door mensen onder de duim te houden is een stijl maar management door mensen groot te maken is veel beter en management om mensen beter te maken als jij is zelfs een tweede stijl.*

4.1.3 Generation Y and leadership style

Generation Y made the most usable nodes by far during the eight focus groups. A total of 329 statements were made by generation Y and this is slightly surprising, because this generation has the least work experience. This generation is just beginning to feature in the workplace. However this generation has a strong idea, how they would like to be managed by their future managers. This generation made the most statements which are related to the supportive leadership style, 122 statements in total. Respondents of generation Y mentioned the directive leadership style for 39 times. Furthermore 80 nodes were made about the participative leadership style and 86 nodes about the achievement oriented leadership style.

As mentioned above the respondents of generations Y made the most statements about the supportive leadership style. This might indicate that they have a preference for this kind of leadership style. One of the categories of this cluster that have a lot of statements made by generation Y is "Creating friendly supportive work environment". This category had 20 statements by respondents of generation Y. Unlike the other generations, generation Y seems to find it very important that the manager create a good atmosphere on the work floor.

> *Generation Y-er: Ik denk dat als ik kijk naar het werkklimaat, dat het belangrijk is als een leider van een groep ook een team kan maken. Want als je een groep individuen hebt, werken ze allemaal aan hun eigen weg, maar als je een team hebt dan kunnen ze op elkaar rekenen en van elkaar leren.*

Just as generation baby boom and generation X, people of generation Y find it important that a leader is concerned about what the employees needs and preferences are (total of 20 nodes). They also find it very important that there is mutual trust between employee and his leader. People of generation Y want to feel trust from their leader, so they can trust their leader. A lot of examples were made by people of generation Y to explain why they consider mutual trust, which is related to openness and honesty, as such important. This is illustrated by the statements of the people of generation Y.

Generation Y-er: Ik denk gewoon dat het belangrijkste is wat een manager moet doen is dat hij aandacht voor je heeft, dat er sprake is van wederzijds respect, dat hij het uitdagend voor je probeert te maken en dat hij wanneer daar sprake van is op het juiste moment net dat schouderklopje weet te geven. Hierdoor zullen mensen zich gewaardeerd voelen en uiteindelijk misschien net die extra effort willen leveren voor hun baas.

Generation Y-er: Ja op zich als ik nou vertrouwen krijg is dat eigenlijk een heel breed begrip, wat er heel sterk bij samenhangt is, hoe zie je toekomst binnen Philips? Is dat bijvoorbeeld onzeker, dan zie je dat dat ook het vertrouwen met je leider en het team minder wordt. In het kader daarvan zou ik ook willen zeggen dat openheid en eerlijkheid erg belangrijk zijn. In onzekere tijden vooral vind ik ook dat de leider daarin ook open en eerlijk moet zijn.

However generation Y made a lot of statements which are related to the supportive leadership style. They also want to have clarification from their leaders about the policy, rules and expectations (22 statements). These items are related to the directive leadership, which is mentioned fewer than the other leadership styles (a total of 39 nodes). Generation Y had the most connection with the supportive leadership style, but they have also made statements which are related to participative and achievement oriented leadership style.

In total 80 statements were made about participative leadership. Generation Y gave in imitation of generation by baby boom and generation X a lot of statements about the increase of autonomy. From the 45 statements who were made in total about this category, 18 statements came from generation Y. This shows that people of generation Y, just as people of the baby boom generation and generation X want to have freedom in their work. They want to have trust of their managers that they may take their responsibility of what they are doing in their job. A respondent of generation Y describe this need for autonomy as follow:

Generation Y-er: Maar ik wil zelf verantwoordelijk zijn voor het geen wat ik doe en daar hoef ik niet steeds iemand bij te hebben, die me constant op bepaalde zaken zoals doelstellingen wijst.

Generation Y would also like to see that their leader encourage them to participate in decisions. A total of 9 statements which are related to this category were made by generation Y, unlike generation baby boom and generation X who had respectively zero and one statements about this subject. The statement below illustrates this:

> *Moderator: Jouw prestatie. Wat zou je manager moeten doen, om een omgeving te creëren om jou op je best te laten presteren.*
> *Generation Y-er: Ik zou zeggen, geef me vrijheid en neem ook risico's eens in de zoveel tijd om mij beslissingen te laten maken en om fouten te laten maken.*

Finally, the respondents of generation Y made some statements which are related to the achievement oriented style. Just as generation baby boom and generation X, generation Y finds it important that a manager shows his confidence in his own employees. Generation Y have given the most statements about this category (14 times). What generation Y differentiates from other generations is that they expect more of a manager regarding challenging employees by setting challenging goals, missions or targets. This was a node that is mentioned a lot by the people of generation Y during the focus groups. In total there were 21 statements given by generation Y which confirms the theory that generation Y wants to be challenged. Two statements of people of generation Y confirm this:

> *Generation Y-er 1: Ik wil wel gechallenged worden en dat kan wel goed door doelen te stellen*
> *Generation Y-er 2: Ik vind het ook wel belangrijk dat ik veel kennis kan vergaren, ik ben nog jong dus ik wil veel leren.*

It is interesting to see that there are differentiations between the generations, but that there are also similarities about the preferences for leadership of each generation.
Looking at the number of nodes, it can be concluded that generation baby boom still has a tendency to a more directive leadership style than the other two generations. People of this generation are used to this kind of leadership style, because in the past this was a more general used leadership style. Generation Y had also some nodes about this leadership style, because the most of them just begun in the workplace. However during the focus groups it became clear that this generation baby boom also wants to be supported in the way they are doing their job and this generation is not the only one. According to the amount of nodes each generation prefer the supportive leadership style the most.

An important aspect of this leadership style is that a manager has attention for preferences of the employees. This aspect was stated the most by each generation. A manager has to know what kind of people he is managing. In the focus groups conducted, there were indicators that generation Y has

more affinity with the leadership styles, participating and achievement oriented, in relation to the other two generations. Many respondents of generation Y mention that they only stay as long as their ambitions can be fulfilled. This is an aspect that fits with the achievement oriented leadership style of a manager. Careerism orientation does not play a role for everybody and that maybe the reason that generation baby boom prefer a more supportive leadership style.

4.2 Generations and employee performance

During the focus groups the subject "employee performance" was introduced to the respondents. It is investigated if people of different generations expect if their preferred leadership style could have an influence on their performance. A total of 103 nodes were conducted in the focus groups about this subject. This variable can be divided in 4 clusters, namely effectiveness, efficiency, innovation and quality.

	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Innovation	Quality	Total
Generation baby boom	35 nodes	2 nodes	1 nodes	4 nodes	42 nodes
Generation X	20 nodes	1 nodes	0 nodes	2 nodes	23 nodes
Generation Y	26 nodes	9 nodes	0 nodes	3 nodes	38 nodes
Total	81 nodes	12 nodes	1 nodes	9 nodes	103 nodes

Table 3: Coded nodes employee performance in Nvivo

	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Innovation	Quality	Total
Generation baby boom	83,3%	4,8%	2,4%	9,5%	100%
Generation X	86,7%	4,3%	0%	8,7%	100%
Generation Y	68,4%	23,7%	0%	7,9%	100%
Total	78,6%	11,7%	1%	8,7%	100%

Table 4: Percentage (%) nodes per generation

The first cluster of the variable employee performance is effectiveness and it contains six categories. The category "Serving the purpose he/she is intended to serve" is mentioned the most (22 times). Second most mentioned category is "Performing well" (17 times). The second cluster is efficiency, which contains four categories. The category "Spend time well" is mentioned the most (four times). The third cluster is innovation and it contains three categories. The category "Develops new and improved way of working" is the only category which is mentioned during the focus groups one time. The final category of the variable employee performance is quality. This cluster contains three categories. The category "Delivering good products or services" is mentioned the most (eight times).

4.2.1 Generation Baby boom and employee performance

People of generation baby boom expect there are some effects on their performance, when they are receiving there most preferred leadership style. The baby boomers made 35 statements during the focus groups about the effectiveness of their performance. The category that is mentioned the most was the category "Serving the purpose he/she is intending to serve". This could be an effect of the preferred leadership style for the baby boomers on their performance, to do their job in a right way, when there manager uses a management style which they prefer. When a baby boomer receive there preferred leadership style seems to walk the extra mile for there boss.

Baby boomer: Wat je merkt is dat door het vertrouwen wat hij geeft, ik bereid ben om een stapje extra te zetten

A reason for this could be that the people of generation baby boom seems to more happy, because of the preferred leadership style they receive. When people are feeling themselves happy, they want to walk the extra mile. This example is not only typical for generation baby boom, but also for other generations. However not all the baby boomers expected that a certain leadership style would have an effect on their performance. A baby boomer stated:

Baby boomer: Maar ik denk niet dat dat voor iedereen hetzelfde is, want of ik nu een goede baas of een slechte baas heb, de motivatie om mijn werk goed te doen ligt bij mij zelf. De motivatie om het goed te doen en resultaten te halen dat zit in mij en dat wil ik graag.

4.2.2 Generation X and employee performance

Generation X did not have a clear opinion if a certain leadership style could have an effect on their performance and that is important to notice. They made the least statements about this subject, but during the focus groups became one thing clear. The people of generation X were the people who would like less interference of a manager. People believe that a large amount of interference of a manager is not good for their overall performance

Generation X-er: Ik denk dat ik dat zelf ook zo zie inderdaad ja. Ik denk dat mijn generatie niet betutteld moet worden. Dit zijn jouw doelen en dit is jouw pad dusja dan zie maar dat je er komt.

4.2.3 Generation Y and employee performance

People of generation Y had a more concrete opinion about what kind of effects on their performance they expect, if they receive their preferred leadership style. People of generation Y stated that the possibility would increase that they would perform better, if a manager uses their preferred leadership style. The respondents stated that they expect that their performance on the work floor would enhance especially in the way how effective and efficient they will be. This is also related to the opinions of generation baby boom and generation X. Other characteristics of performance, such as innovation and quality were mentioned less. A statement about the effects on their effectiveness:

Generation Y-er: Als je op een bepaalde manier wordt aangestuurd die jij fijn vind en waar je je prettig bij voelt, denk ik dat dit wel zal uitleiden tot een hogere prestatie van mij zelf.

The generations expected that a preferred leadership style might have an effect on the performance of an employee. The general opinion of the three generations was the same. The point which was mentioned the most was effectiveness. The respondents of the three generations were clear, that an improvement of effectiveness could be the main effect on their performance. Although the other dimensions were also mentioned for a couple of times, it was clear the every generation seems to find effectiveness the most important.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In this study the relationship between the preferred leadership style of generations and the effects on the performance of employees was investigated. The purpose of this study was to make a contribution to the literature concerning the relationship between generational differences, leadership style and employee performance.

On the basis of relevant theory (Sessa et al., 2007; Zaccaro et al., 2001), research questions were stated to explore the relationships between the constructs further. To explore the relationship between generational differences, leadership preferences and employee performance the following two research questions were formulated:

What are the differences and similarities between leadership preferences for different generations and in what manner do these generations expect that this relationship affects employee performance?

Studying the answers of the 74 respondents, supportive leadership style is the most preferred leadership style of all the generations. The perception of what kind of management style the baby boomers prefer is diverse. The results of this thesis show that baby boomers prefer the supportive leadership style more than the participative management style. Baby boomers like to have a manager which has attention for the needs, wellbeing and preferences of people. Besides that, this generation finds it very important that there is mutual trust between the manager and the employee. According to the literature Zemke et al. (2000) the baby boomers promoted equality in the workplace and this is confirmed in the focus groups and this is also a dimension of the supportive leadership style. It is interesting to see that generation baby boom prefers a supportive leadership style, while the literature (Zemke et al, 2000) stated that they should have more preference in a directive way of management or a participative manner of management. A reason for this could be the tremendous changes at the work place. With all the new technology changes, it seems to be that this generation has a need for help and support of their manager to put them through this process. According to the results generation baby boom still has more tendencies with directive leadership styles than other generations. The literature confirms that this generation is associated with a more direct management style than other generations, because this generation is grown up in another time so they have different work values (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Yu & Miller, 2003).

The results of the focus groups shows that generation X prefer a leader who invest time in them and provide mentoring and skills training. Generation X wants frequent feedback from their leader and they want to be trusted and respected for the work they perform. The manager in a supportive role seems to be very important for this generation. These results are confirmed by the theory of Tulgan (1996), which stated that generation X prefers a coaching type as a leader. A reason for this may be that Generation X tends to be more independent, self-motivated and self-sufficient.

They don't like to have a manager which is directing them explicitly about what they should do. They rather would like to hear what they have to do and than decide how they will do it. Maybe that is also the reason that generation X did not make a lot of statements, which are related to the directive leadership style. However this generation is not the only generation, who would like to see that a manager trust them and having respect for the way they work.

The results of the focus groups shows that the youngest generation, generation Y, also likes to see these characteristics in a manager. According to the study of Dulin (2008) this generation prefers leaders who are mentors which are supporting them and to help them around the typical bureaucracies. This is supported by the results of this research and it can be clarified by the fact that this generation is just entering the labor market. This implies that they don't have any experience and that they would like to have a leader, who is a mentor for them. However this generation prefers a supportive leadership style to guide them in the early state of their career, instead of a directive way of management. This is supported by the results that show that a directive leadership style is the least popular leadership style of this generation. They also want leaders who want to teach them and give them opportunities for growth. This is maybe the reason, that the results of this research show that the second most mentioned leadership style is achievement oriented management style. People of generation Y seem to have more connection with this leadership style than other generation. A reason for this lay in the fact that they are very idealistic compared with the previous generations (Tulgan, 1996). The outcome of the focus groups is that this generation is more ambitious to achieve at a higher level than other generations and they want to be challenged by their manager. This is in agreement with previous literature, because according to Tapscott (1998) people from generation Y are also the most demanding of all the generations and wanted to be challenge by their manager.

Regarding the first sub question: *How do different generations differ in their preference for leadership styles?* the answer would be that it is very likely that generations have a preference for one certain leadership style, namely the supportive leadership style. Respondents of all the generations made many statements about their preferred leadership style, which are related to this leadership style. However the generations also liked certain aspects of other leadership styles, the results shows that the supportive leadership style is the most preferred leadership style of the three generations.

Besides this some interesting findings came out for answering the second sub question: *What qualities or behavior should a leader poses to ensure higher performance of an employee?* With the preferred leadership in their mind, the respondents were asked to give their opinion about if they expected if this preferred leadership style could affect their performance and in what way this will occurred. Generations revealed that that they expect that a good leader would increase their performance on several ways. In the article of Zaccaro et al. (2001) it has been argued that leadership represent perhaps the most critical factor for the performance outcomes of members of different generations. So the statement of Zaccaro et al. (2001) that the preferred leadership style is an important brick for the performance of employee is confirmed.

As mentioned above, supportive leadership style is the most preferred leadership style of the three generations. So this contains that this kind of behaviour of a leader will ensure a higher performance of employees. According to the results, this will especially be related to the effectiveness of people. The fact that respondent mentioned that a leader should have attention for the preferences of his employees, which is an element of supportive leadership, has to ensure that a manager should know what characteristics each generation has. Eventually, it is expected that this will lead to a higher performance of employee. This is confirmed in the literature of Cennamo and Gardner (2008). They stated that by understanding the generational differences, human resource professionals and managers can improve organizational policies, which support organizational outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment and performance.

The discussion of the existing literature coupled with the empirical findings of this study across one organization has shown that an effect is expected between leadership preferences and performance of different generations. Therefore, we explored what kind of essential behaviours a leader should posses to ensure a higher performance and how different generations differ in their preference for leadership styles. By exploring these two research questions should lead to an answer of the main research question.

5.2 Limitations

Unfortunately, the study contains a number of weaknesses and restrictions hindering the generalizability of the results and corresponding conclusions. The most important comment concerns the small sample size. First of all this study has a limited sample; 8 focus groups were conducted in which 74 respondents participated. However the literature says not much about a minimum number of groups, it must be noted that the results are based on the 8 focus groups, which can be extended by working with bigger datasets in the future in order to do more extensive qualitative research. Besides that the sample was not composed using a random sampling technique, but it was a convenience sample. For this reason, the conclusions may not be generalized to the population.

Furthermore, it must be noted that this research was conducted within a specific organization; Philips Lighting in Eindhoven. Philips Lighting has an aging workforce, because it contains a lot of baby boomers and generation X-ers, but not many people of generation Y. This could have an influence on the thoughts and opinions of the people within this organization.

Another limitation was the measurement of employee performance. In this study the employee performance perception was divided into four dimensions. As the literature showed (Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005; Molleman & Van den Beukel, 2004; Mouzas, 2006; Dunphy & Briant, 1996; Mollenman & Van der Breukel, 2004) effectiveness, efficiency, innovation and quality were good indicators to measure performance. However performance is not a unitary construc, so it can be measured by other output dimensions. Besides that, during the focus groups respondents seem to find it difficult to talk about the outcomes of their performance if they experience a particular leadership

style in public. Therefore it might be better show how respondents alter or reconstruct their viewpoints in response to semi structured interviews or other methods, such as questionnaires, instead of the answers that the respondents provide in focus groups. For future explorative research it might be advisable to make use of interviews, so the respondents are in a safe environment by speaking one to one with the interviewer.

An important critique on this research is that both employees as managers were participating in the same focus groups. A subject like performance is difficult to discuss, especially when employees are having this discussion with their supervisors. The employees may feel themselves uncertain to make statements about leadership and performance in the presence of managers and supervisors. It is advisable to use only a homogenous sample, with only employees or with only managers. By using heterogeneous focus groups for even different generations as for employees and managers it seemed that there was some bias, because respondents might feel themselves uncertain to discuss the topics in the presence of their manager or supervisor.

The next limitation concerns the answering of the research question. Answering the research question seemed to be difficult as it was not always clear whether the answer of respondents on the focus group questions entailed their perception or their opinion based the thoughts of how their generation should think about different cases. This might be dependent on how the respondents understood the interview questions.

The last limitation concerns the interrater reliability. The transcripts were coded by the researcher. After this was done, the researcher discussed the coded transcripts together with two other researchers which also coded the transcripts. The researchers reached an agreement about the coded transcripts, without calculating how much homogeneity or consensus there was in the transcripts. Each researcher used these agreed coded transcripts for their own research. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate the interrater reliability to increase the reliability of this study.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

Despite the shortcomings, this study might be an indication for further research to be conducted, thereby contributing to further clarification of the impact of the relationships between generations, leadership style preference and employee performance. Based on this study's results, several recommendations for further research should be considered.

Results in this research showed that generation baby boom has the most affinity with the supportive leadership style. However previous literature shows that this generation also prefer a more directive leadership style. Further research should point out if this is outdated or not. Thus it might be interesting to investigate whether there are other explanations for this change of leadership preference.

In this research the path goal theory is introduced to examine the leadership preference at the hand of this leadership model. Of course, this is not a leading model, so for future research it might be interesting to look further than this model by using the models of transformational- and transactional

leadership for example. It is interesting to investigate if these generations have the same ideas about their preferred leadership style in context to another leadership style theory.

The study was also done in a cross-sectional setting, which means that the data was gathered on a single moment in time. The results are therefore context related. Future research should set up a longitudinal study, since the respondent actually started to think about this subject during and after the focus groups.

One recommendation for future research concerns the reliability of this research. Concerning reliability it seems good to broaden the scale of the research by means of collecting data from more than one organization. This allows comparing the results of different organizations. Doing quantitative research to reach a higher number of participants and to create a broader picture is also a possibility. By using quantitative research it is probably better to investigate the effect of a leadership style preference on employee performance, because of the anonymity of the respondents and the use of performance scales to measure performance more precisely.

5.4 Practical implications

One of the consequences of the aging workforce is that it will lead to a transition of leadership positions, which will be secured more and more by people of new generations. This leads to opportunities but on the other hand it leads to issues which have to be dealt with (Yu & Miller, 2005), such as the leadership style preference of employees towards their new leaders. As this study has explored that leadership can be a good predictor for performance, it is important for organizations to deal with this carefully.

Organizations and HR managers must realize that leadership can have an influence of the performance of people. By paying attention to the preferred leadership characteristics of generations, organizations might be able to create higher performance outcomes of their employees. The results of this study clarifies that generation prefer the supportive leadership style. Organizations should keep this in minds, when they are training their future managers. New innovative manager training courses are required to make sure that future managers manage the three generations as effectively as possible. Organizations should this also keep in mind that, when recruiting, new managers should be employed on the basis of supportive leadership style characteristics, in order to manage the employees of the different generations and to attempt to enhance their performance.

5.5 Conclusion

Findings from this study show that every generation has a preference for a certain leadership style and that each generation expect that this leadership style can have an effect on the performance of people. Respondents, representing the three generations, stated that they feeling themselves the most secure, if a leader is showing a supportive leadership style. This has been the main reappearing theme throughout the whole result chapter and therefore it is a very strong result. When receiving this

preferred leadership style, respondents expect that it would have an effect on the performance. The main result is that they believe that it would increase their effectiveness of work. The negative influences of a leadership style which they don't prefer could be a diminishing of the employee performance.

Overall, this study provides a basis for further research as well as suggestions for future research by offering additional opportunities to further investigate the effects of leadership style preference of different generations on employee performance. So, this study extends the literature that emphasizes the preferences of different generations according to their leadership style and how this is expected to affect their performance.

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7. APPENDIX I: Discussion guide

Preparation (15 min.)

Set up meeting room and test the presentation equipment.

Introduction of focus group (5 min.)

• Greeting

• Purpose of focus groups

• Explain ground rules:

  - Role of moderator

  - Recording equipment

  - Confidentiality of comments

  - Individual opinions (no right or wrong)

  - Speak one at a time and as clearly as possible

Warming-up discussion (5 min)

- Introduction of the subject

Questions (40 min)

- What are important characteristics of a leader?

- What kind of leadership do you prefer?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure a good climate or culture?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure high or good performance?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure high satisfaction?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure high engagement?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure a good work-life balance?

- What behavior or qualities should a leader poses to ensure trust?

Closing session (10 min)

- Summarize outcomes focus group

- Any questions and comments

- Thank respondents

Evaluation

After the participants have left, the coordinators will evaluate the focus group.

APPENDIX II: List of keywords and number of nodes

Leadership style: Path goal theory

Directive leadership style	Number of nodes
Giving guidance	13
Maintain standard performance	0
Coordinate work	3
Extrinsic reward	3
Grip	3
Schedule work	0
Planning work	0
Psychological structure employee	4
Clarify policy rules and procedures	24
Clarify perception employee	12
Clarify expectations	25
Expected to do	16

Supportive leadership style	Number of nodes
Attention to needs	28
Attention to satisfaction	9
Attention to preferences	34
Attention to well-being and welfare employees	21
Treats employees equally	12
Approachable	28
Establish mutual interest	6
Coaching	17
Creating friendly supportive work environment	30
Giving social satisfaction	17
Helpful	16
Reducing stress	5
Increase performance	9
Increase dignity	11
Alleviate frustrations	2
Friendly	4
Mutual respect	14
Mutual trust	25
Giving confidence	18

Participative leadership style	Number of nodes
Encourage participation decision making	10
Opinion employee about decision	8
Consult employee	20
Including suggestions employee	10
Considering suggestions	7
Increase autonomy employee	45
Increase involvement employee	17
Increase empowerment employee	16
Increase decision influence employee	8
Increase cooperation employee	9
Solicit suggestions	4

Achievement oriented leadership style	Number of nodes
Encouraging excellent performance	16
Achieve challenging targets	8
Continue increase performance	6
Continuously seeking improvement	17
Create environment confidence employees in their abilities to achieve their goals	11
High standards performance	5
Emphasizing accomplish difficult tasks	1
Setting challenging targets	24
Setting a mission	11
Setting targets	6
Radiates self confidence	0
Shows much effort	1
Increase responsibility employee	19
Confidence in employees	35
Expects highest level performance	4

Employee performance

Quality	Number of nodes
Delivering good quality products or services	1
Getting complaints about the quality of products or services	0
Having satisfied customers	9

Efficiency	Number of nodes
Works efficient	4
Achieving goals in a short period	4
Making unnecessary costs	1
Spends time well	4

Effectiveness	Number of nodes
Performing well	17
Achieving his/her goals	10
Accomplishing objectives	13
Meeting the requirements	8
Fulfilling the mission	9
Serving the purpose he/she is intended to serve.	22

Innovation	Number of nodes
Develops new and improved way of working	1
Develops new ways to meet the expectations of customers	0
Develops new product or services	0