

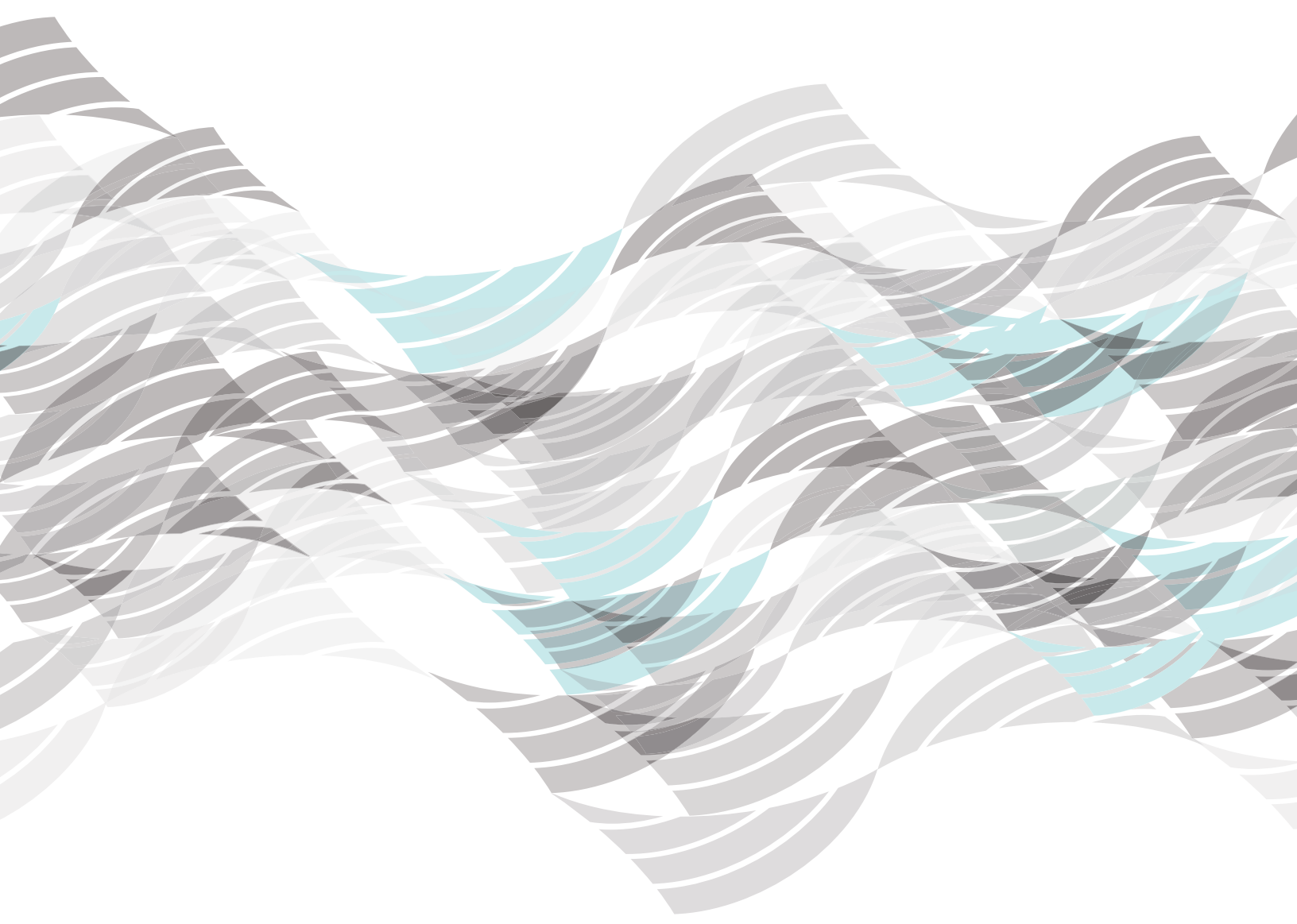
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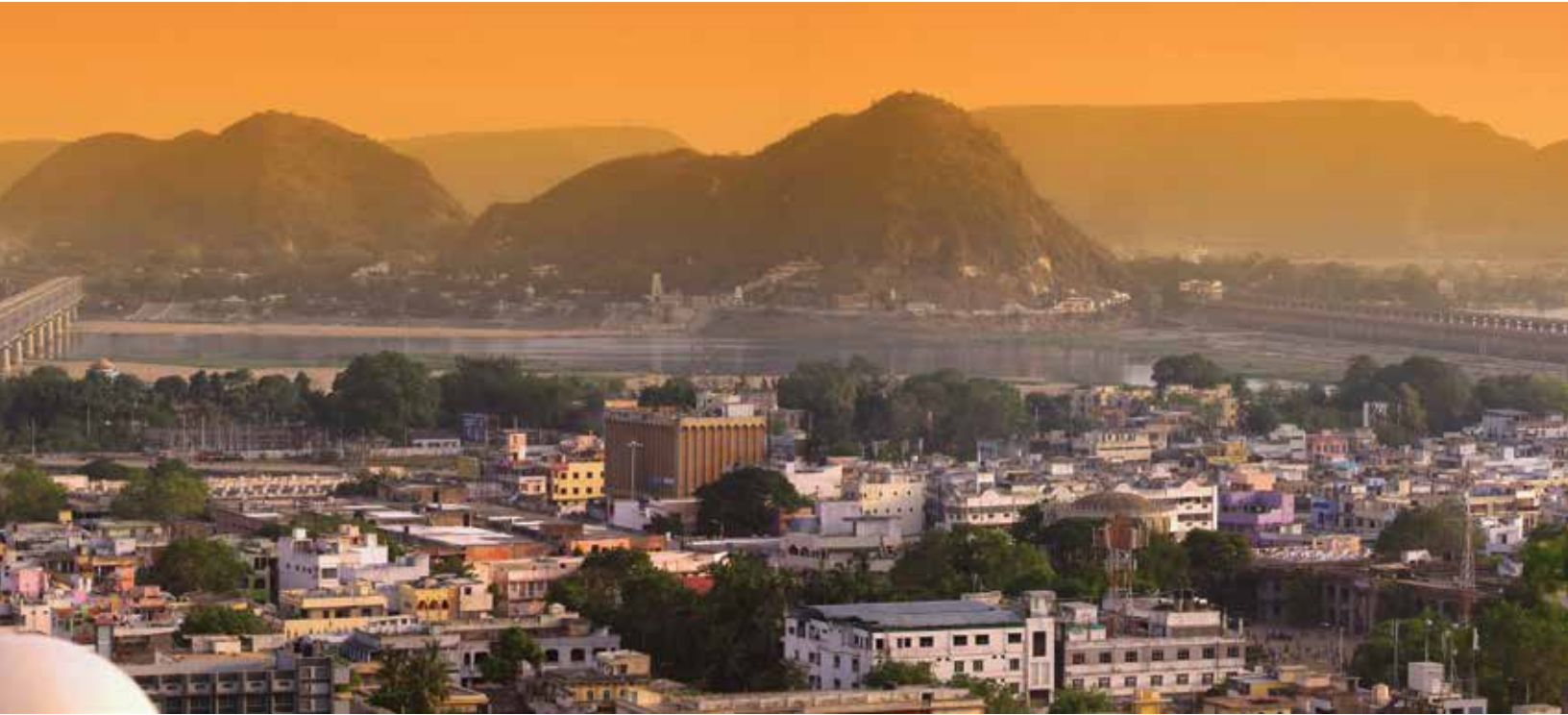
What Makes an Effective Leader? Generations in India Weigh in

By: Jennifer Deal, Sarah Stawiski, Meena Wilson, and Kristin Cullen



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Introduction

Common wisdom suggests that the generations in India are fundamentally different from one another. There are differences in the way the generations dress, consume information, listen to music, and in their ideas about appropriate personal behavior. For example, this generation's career women don western style pantsuits or pencil skirts and jackets, discarding saris and salwaar-kameez. Newsfeeds are becoming a more popular source of information about events and people. Multi-channel television showcases how tastes in music are diverging. Traditional behaviors toward elders and between women and men also are changing, slowly but surely.¹

Based on these apparent differences, assumptions are made that the presence of more young people in the workplace will result in a substantial upheaval within organizations. As the generational tides shift due to the retirement and replacement of older employees, will there need to be wholesale changes in how leaders must behave to be effective leaders for the next generation? After all, if younger people are that different, perhaps leaders also have to be different to lead effectively.

But exactly who are the generations currently in the workforce, and what do they really think makes an effective leader?

The Currently Employed Generations in India



Within India's urban middle and upper socio-economic classes, three generations of workers emerge: Partition, Transition, and Post-Liberalization (also called the Market Generation).^{2, 3} Each generation has characteristics that arise from the unique culture, economics, and history of the country.

For those who are not closely acquainted with Indian history, in 1947, the country became independent from Great Britain, partition occurred, and India and Pakistan became separate countries. After partition, there was mass migration, a period of unrest, and the first of several Indo-Pakistani wars. Primarily socialist in policy orientation during the 1950s and 1960s, the Indian government created significant political, economic, and infrastructure programs. As a result, industrialization increased.

This period of growth was followed by considerable turbulence in the 1970s and 1980s, including assassinations of political figures such as Indira Gandhi in 1984, as well as an economic crisis.

Then in 1991, a shift in economic policies and planning opened up international trade and investment to foreign companies, industries were privatized, taxes were reformed, and inflation-controlling measures introduced. All of these actions were designed to move the country from a socialist to a Post-Liberalization economy. This shift led to substantial economic growth and development in India in the 1990s and 2000s. Across this timeframe, here are the defining features of the three generations.^{4, 5}

Generational Cohorts

| India | Partition Generation (1944-1963) | | | | Transition Generation (1964-1983) | | | | Post-Liberalization Generation (1984-1993) | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|---|------|------|------|
| Birth Year | 1945 | 1950 | 1955 | 1960 | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 |
| Approximate Current Age | 67 | 62 | 57 | 52 | 47 | 42 | 37 | 32 | 27 | 22 | 17 | 12 |

The Partition Generation, born 1944-1963 and roughly equivalent to Baby Boomers, grew up in a time characterized by instability. Many had to focus on meeting the basic needs of their families such as food and housing, as well as try to protect them from economic and social turmoil. Some people from this generation believe that to become financially successful, one must engage in unethical behavior.

This generation may have different perceptions of leadership than do younger generations, looking at leaders alternately as good moral examples or as crooks. The common perception of the Partition Generation is that they are more willing to comply with authority than are younger generations because that is how they keep their jobs.

The Partition Generation has been characterized as:

- working to ensure stability as a buffer against unforeseen circumstances
- maintaining the cultural norms they grew up with as critical for social stability
- taking safe but not fascinating jobs
- marrying as they are told—and expecting their children and grandchildren to do the same
- paying more attention to tangible product value and functionality than to branded products
- taking a long-term perspective on all purchases and decisions

The Transition Generation, born 1964-1983 and roughly equivalent to Gen X, understands what the Partition Generation experienced but does not feel it as deeply because their experience growing up was not as turbulent. Though they are concerned about maintaining cultural norms, they embrace more flexibility. They are likely to be cynical about leaders and have been less focused on obeying authority than the Partition Generation.

The Transition Generation has been characterized as:

- having more choices about lifestyles, careers, and products
- being less focused on security and stability than are older generations
- wanting to be open to many new options but unwilling to leave their cultural past behind
- enjoying the freedom of more flexibility while living within the security of the cultural and family traditions with which they grew up

The Post-Liberalization (also called Market) Generation, born 1984-1993 and roughly equivalent to Millennials or Gen Y, has grown up in a world with exponentially expanding opportunities. Their childhood has been characterized by increasing economic openness, financial stability, and individual striving, in addition to the family and community striving that is typical in India. They want leaders who can be mentors. The Post-Liberalization Generation is perceived as being less concerned about getting along with authority.

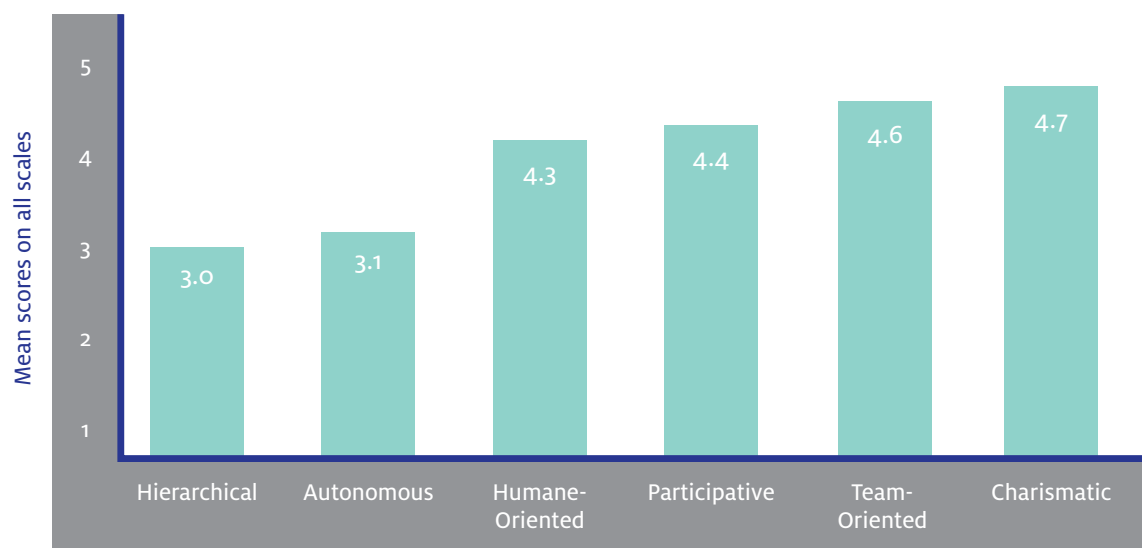
The Post-Liberalization Generation has been characterized as:

- achieving their goals through an entrepreneurial outlook and hard work
- appreciating their families and traditions
- treating the rules set by employers with skepticism
- looking to leaders and mentors as examples of how they can make their own choices and flourish

What Do the Generations Think Makes for Effective Leadership?

Overall, we find that all generations in India think that effective leaders are charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented. They are not convinced that hierarchical and autonomous behaviors make a leader effective.

Figure 1
Indian Beliefs about What Contributes Most to Effective Leadership (across all generations)



While the generations agree that being charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented are important for effective leadership, they differ in how important they think each of these are. (See Figures 2-5 on pages 6 and 7.)

Respondents overall say that it is important for a leader to be humane-oriented; there are no differences by generation on this. In addition, interviews conducted as part of other CCL research indicate that humane bosses earn special respect.⁶ Subordinates tend to admire bosses and superiors who show patience and are not easily frustrated by an employee's mistakes.

Hierarchical leadership is characterized by placing importance on social rank, following tradition, and abiding by the rules.

Autonomous leadership is characterized by self-reliance, individualism, and working and acting independently.

Humane-oriented leadership is characterized by helping others, generosity, and compassion.

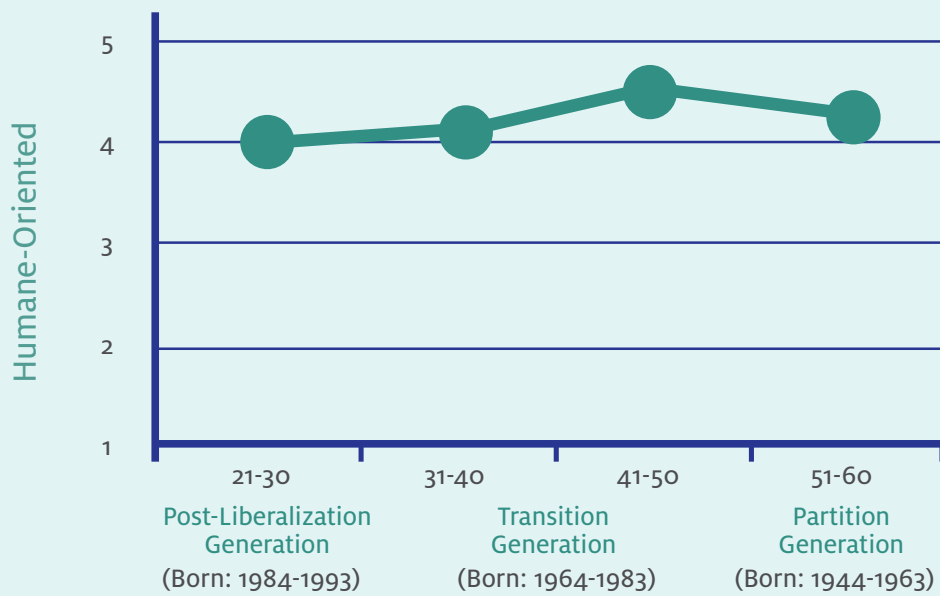
Participative leadership is characterized by collaboration and inclusiveness.

Team-oriented leadership is characterized by helping teams deal with conflict, working together, and developing cohesion.

Charismatic leadership is characterized by strong enthusiasm and by inspiring and motivating others.

Figure 2

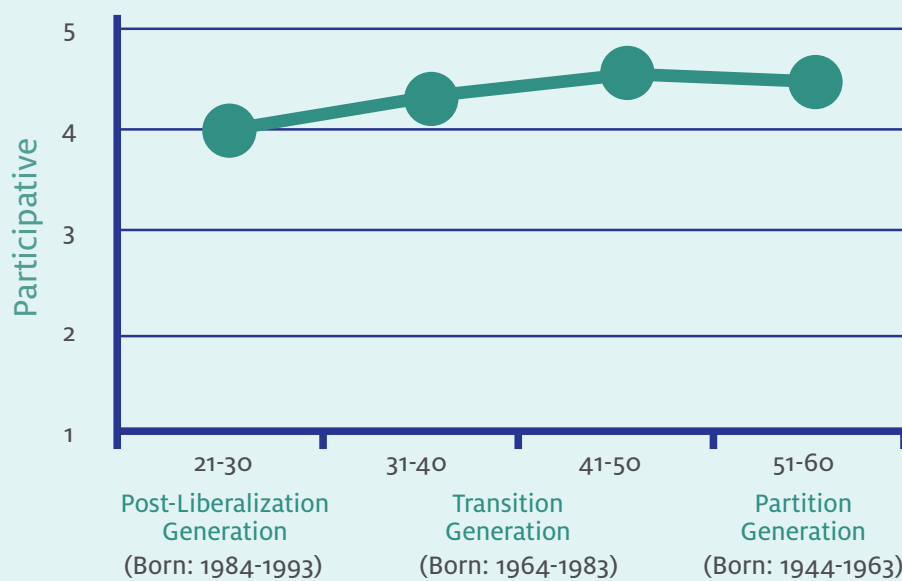
How important is it for a leader to be humane-oriented?



Older participants are more likely than younger respondents to say that being participative is important for effective leadership. This is directly contrary to the general perception that younger employees are more focused on participative leadership than older employees.

Figure 3

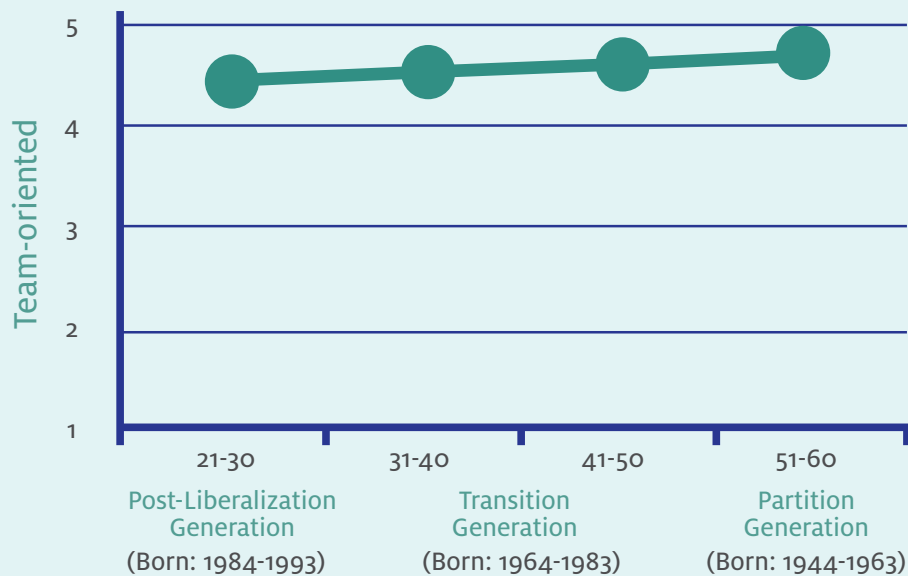
How important is it for a leader to be participative?



For effective leadership, being “team-oriented” is considered as equally important by all generations. Team-orientation has to do with the degree to which a leader builds cohesion among team members and emphasizes the growth of the team.

Figure 4

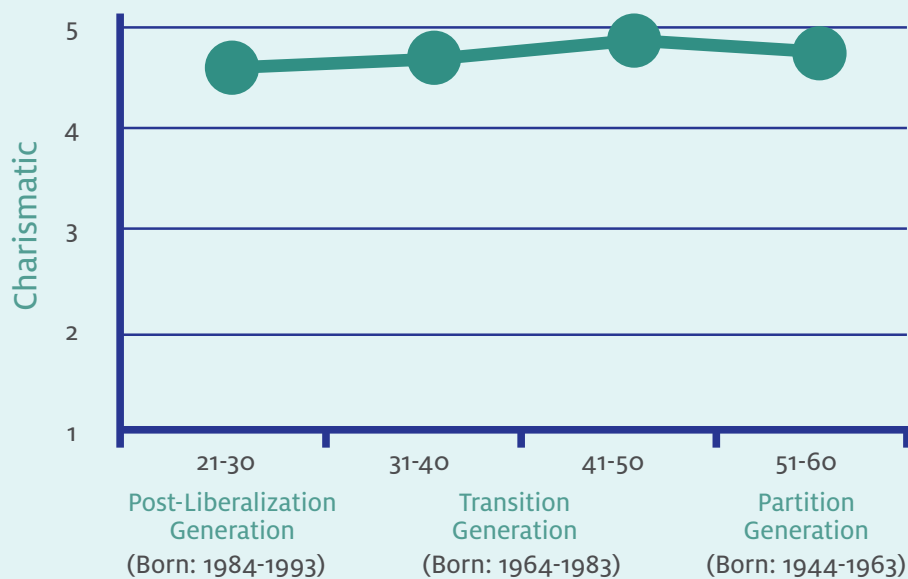
How important is it for a leader to be team-oriented?



While being humane-oriented, participative, and team-oriented are all important, what stands out is the extent to which people believe charisma contributes to effective leadership. It is especially interesting that older participants believe charisma is more important for effective leadership than do younger participants.

Figure 5

How important is it for a leader to be charismatic?



The Unexpected Importance of Charisma

Unexpectedly, “charisma” is perceived as the most important component for effective leadership and is seen as more important than the other five characteristics. (See the figure on page 5.) At the same time, these data show that younger people think charisma is slightly less important for effective leadership than older people do, even though it is still critically important for all generations.

This is directly contrary to the general belief that we live in a world where for youth, the cult of personality dominates and personal influence, arising largely from the effective use of charisma, is the defining characteristic of an effective leader. Why do younger people seem to perceive charisma as slightly less important? We do not know for sure but speculate that this could be a result of the increase in technology-mediated communications, which reduce the impact of charisma. Having grown up with more technology-

based interactions such as e-mail, instant messaging, texting, and Facebook, perhaps younger people are less attuned to the effects of leader charisma. By this argument, people who grew up with less technology-mediated communication (older generations and those who have less access to technology) can be expected to value charisma in leaders because they have directly experienced the impact of charismatic communication.

To summarize, though there are small differences among the generations in their perspectives, there is overall consensus about what makes an effective leader. Effective leaders avoid being overly hierarchical and autonomous. Nor are they overly deferential to authority. **The primary take-away is that effective leaders exemplify charisma, team-orientation, a participative style, and a humane orientation.**

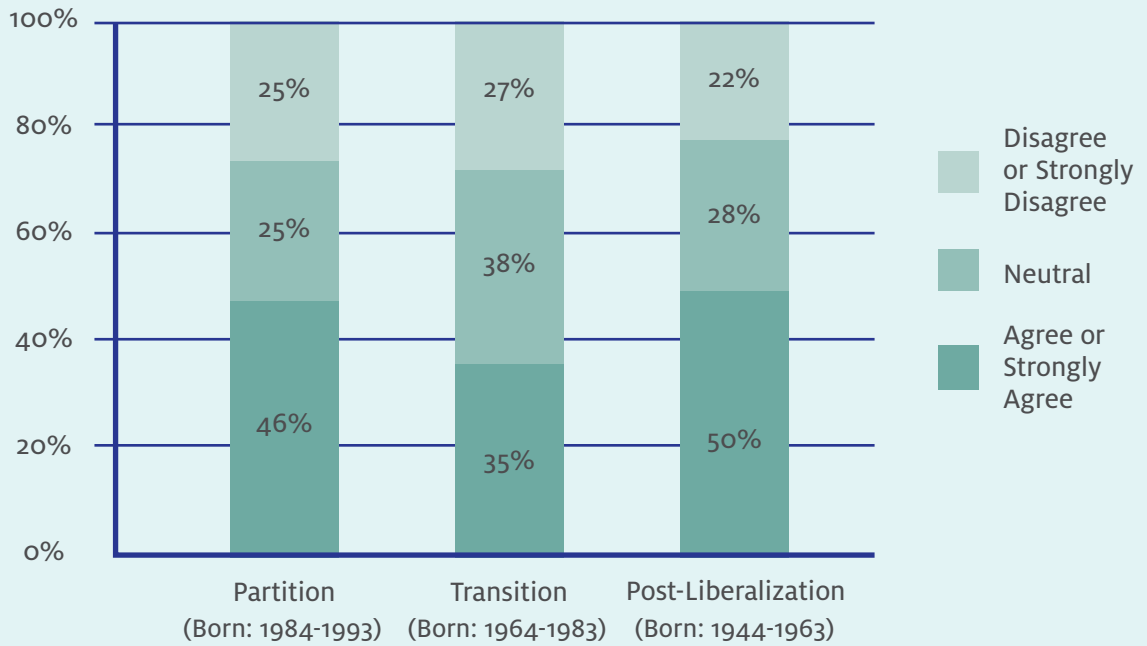


Organizational Authority

If your manager tells you to do something, how important is it for you to do as you're told? One could assume that older employees are more likely to uphold the dictum "you better do it." In fact, only 46% of the Partition Generation, 35% of the Transition Generation, and 50% of the Post-Liberalization Generation strongly agree or agree that it is important to comply with managers' instructions. What stands out is that across generations, there is a range of opinions about the importance of deference to authority. This finding is relevant because "deference to authority" is generally valued in the Indian culture.

Understanding how employees view organizational authority has important implications because this impacts how much employees choose to comply with directives from their managers and other superiors. To some degree, compliance with authority is important for ensuring rules are followed and order is maintained. However, in some cases, questioning authority can be a healthy practice. For instance, employees who are willing to question authority may prevent mistakes from happening or poor decisions from being made. Our sample of leaders in India represents a wide range of perspectives regarding authority, and this wide range of responses is similar across all generations.

Figure 6 "If your manager tells you to do something, you better do it."



However, the issue of how pervasively “deference to authority” is practiced in India merits further investigation. Although the data show that 46% of respondents from the Partition Generation, 35% of respondents from the Transition Generation, and 50% of respondents from the Post-Liberalization Generation believe they should do something just because the manager tells them to do so, managers and executives in India often observe many subordinates behaving deferentially. In the extended families that are prevalent in India, a great deal of respect is shown to the head of the household, whose decisions and decision-making authority is seldom questioned. This habit of substantial deference to authority transfers to the workplace and is demonstrated by using titles with seniors, addressing them as “Sir” or “Madam,” giving priority to following their instructions to the last letter, and spending time listening to their wisdom.

In our interviews and conversations with senior managers, we also hear that fewer deferential subordinates are desired—that is, subordinates who readily express their opinions and ideas are becoming more and more necessary for creating eco-systems to support innovation. Senior leaders believe that future top leaders will come from the ranks of confident employees who assume greater accountability for delivering results, who willingly take risks that can entail mistakes, and who do not always look for guidance and approval from their bosses. In this sense, today’s top leaders want more assertiveness and less deference from the next generation of leaders.

How Leaders Can Live Up to Managers' Expectations

Now that we know the preferences of employees of all ages and at all levels, what can leaders do to live up to their expectations? Here are some specific ideas.

1. Be more charismatic: Charisma at work is often about others observing how much enthusiasm you have for your work and for the people with whom you work. Emotions are contagious, so it is worthwhile to project the enthusiasm you feel and that you want your teams to feel. Studies have shown that leaders who are perceived as positive are also perceived as being more effective.⁷

2. Be more team-oriented: Schedule meeting agendas and project timelines with extra time built in so there is an opportunity to talk about the group's work. Teams benefit when they have the time to support one another to address challenges, provide constructive feedback, reflect on lessons learned, and celebrate accomplishments. By helping your team to connect in these ways, you will be

seen as a team-oriented leader; your team members will become more efficient and effective over time due to their social interactions and learning.

In India, the last decade has created both vast opportunities and fiercely competitive attitudes. To realize ambitious business growth, teams at all levels can become a collection of individuals who are intensely focused on their own agendas, jockeying to claim credit for achievements and maneuvering for personal career advancement. In this context, it becomes especially important for Indian leaders of all ages to adopt and practice team norms which encourage collaboration, collective reflection, mutual appreciation, and professional connections.⁸



3. Be more participative: When making decisions about how work is done or how to handle a challenge, make it a habit to ask your team to suggest ideas.⁹ Make sure you are implementing others' ideas, not just your own. Encouraging suggestions and implementing others' ideas when the ideas are genuinely better demonstrates participative leadership. It also builds subordinates' confidence in their own problem-solving ability. They become motivated to take initiative and assume responsibility for achieving team objectives.

Building confidence, initiative, and accountability is especially important in the Indian work context. Cultural traditions teach Indian subordinates to listen and follow the instructions of their bosses and superiors. Frequent scolding for not doing precisely what one has been told to do or for having made a mistake is accepted as normal. Unfortunately, frequently chastised employees are not typically motivated to learn and improve. Under these conditions, over time, subordinates lose their desire for independent thinking, mistrust their own judgment, lose confidence, and do not perform as well as they could. A leader who educates and empowers subordinates and invites their participation will consistently achieve superior results.

4. Be more humane-oriented: Really think about what your subordinates and co-workers need and how you can help them to work more effectively and achieve their personal and work-related goals. Be understanding when employees have work-family conflicts. Supporting a team member or employee when he or she has to unexpectedly attend to a personal need at an inopportune moment is difficult—but typically, employees will return the favor with loyalty and future hard work. High-performing employees who feel they have to make too many sacrifices for work, or do not have the support needed to address personal situations—such as special family celebrations, illness, bereavement, or other unexpected events—will become dissatisfied with their work conditions, and may disengage or leave entirely.¹⁰

Humane behaviors are especially valued in India because socio-economic differences between various strata of Indian society are dramatic. Although being considerate of the personal circumstances of others is not automatic, this habit can and must be learned. For example, to get to work, employees may walk from miles away or use an autorickshaw, bicycle, bus, motorbike, or car. They may drive themselves or be chauffeur-driven. Their dwelling could be simple one-room housing with a joint family living together or a huge multi-room mansion with back quarters where domestic staff is on call for cooking, cleaning, and gardening.¹¹

Perhaps humane behaviors are especially valued in India because consideration for the personal circumstances of others is an ethos arising from the joint family system. Simple actions that recognize others' personal situation can go a long way—for example, inquiring about a sick child or attending an employee's wedding. The point is that life circumstances and events have a significant impact on employee performance, and humane leaders consciously take such factors into account.



Conclusion

The practical implication of this is that organizations in India should focus on helping all leaders learn how to be more charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented, and less hierarchical and autonomous. All employees will appreciate leaders who meet their deep and basic needs while ensuring that they adapt their communication in ways that create connections between the generations.

At the core of what employees want to see in their leaders is consideration for others. Leaders show consideration when they inspire and excite others to do their best work (charismatic), help teams to work more effectively with one another (team-oriented), respect and invite others' opinions (participative), and help others at work (humane-oriented). So, in general, a good way to live up to employee expectations, no matter what their generation, is to demonstrate that you see value in others.

About the Sample

The sample included 173 respondents native to India. The respondents' ages ranged from 22 to 78 with a mean age of 46. The sample also had a range of education levels represented, with 26.1 % having a high school education, 29.6% having a bachelor's degree and 36% reporting having a graduate or professional degree. The remainder of the respondents reported "other" for educational level (9%).

Endnotes

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