

Beyond the Generational Myth: Democratic Leadership, Dedication, and Commitment as the Predictors of Organizational Effectiveness in a Multigenerational Public Workforce

¹Edgar G. Requilme and ²Nenita I. Prado

¹Student, Liceo de Cagayan University

²Professor, Liceo de Cagayan University

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ABSTRACT

A generational-management industry has grown around the premise that Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z must be led differently because cohort membership shapes workplace outcomes. This study subjected that premise to a direct predictive test in one of the most generationally lopsided workforces in the Philippine public sector. Drawing on data from 350 employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development Field Office 10 (DSWD-10), Northern Mindanao, selected through stratified random sampling, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with four leadership styles (transformational, transactional, servant, and democratic), four employee engagement dimensions (vigor, dedication, absorption, and commitment), and dummy-coded generational cohorts (with Generation Z/Others as reference) simultaneously entered as predictors of composite organizational effectiveness. Findings showed that the model was highly significant, explaining more than three-fourths of the variance in organizational effectiveness, yet only three predictors carried significant unique effects: commitment to organizational goals, dedication, and democratic leadership. Transformational, transactional, and servant leadership lost their individual significance to multicollinearity, their effects absorbed by democratic leadership given the very strong inter-correlations among the styles. Most strikingly, every generational cohort dummy was non-significant despite Millennials and Generation Z composing the overwhelming majority of the workforce: knowing an employee's generation adds nothing to the prediction of organizational effectiveness once leadership and engagement are accounted for. The findings warrant a partial rejection of the null hypothesis and a practical reorientation for public institutions: invest in participatory leadership and in the dedication and commitment of employees, and retire cohort-based programming in favor of person-centered management.

Keywords: generational cohorts, multiple regression, democratic leadership, dedication, commitment, organizational effectiveness, multigenerational workforce, public sector

INTRODUCTION

Few ideas have colonized workplace thinking as thoroughly as the generational narrative. Practitioner literature, consulting frameworks, and popular management discourse routinely assert that Baby Boomers demand hierarchy, Generation X wants autonomy, Millennials need purpose, and Generation Z requires speed and screens, and that organizations must therefore segment their leadership, communication, and rewards by birth cohort. The stakes of this narrative are rising: Millennials and Generation Z now dominate labor forces worldwide, and in the Philippines nearly half of workers are aged fifteen to thirty-four (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). Yet scholarly reviews have repeatedly cautioned that the evidentiary base for cohort-targeted management is thin, resting more on stereotype and cross-sectional anecdote than on demonstrated predictive effects (Yusof et al., 2025; Reed & Thomas, 2021; Sansa et al., 2024). What the debate needs, and what

remains rare in developing-country public sectors, is a direct statistical test: when generational cohort is entered alongside the variables organizations can actually develop, does it predict organizational outcomes at all?

The question is inseparable from a second one that correlational evidence alone cannot answer. In the workforce studied here, leadership styles and engagement dimensions all correlate significantly and positively with organizational effectiveness, but correlated predictors overlap: four leadership styles rated highly and simultaneously by the same respondents cannot all be independent causes. Identifying which variables carry unique predictive weight, holding all others constant, requires multiple regression, and the answer determines where scarce development resources should go. If a single leadership style absorbs the predictive contribution of the others, supervisory training can be focused; if particular engagement dimensions dominate, engagement programming can be targeted; and if generational cohort predicts nothing, cohort-based programming can be retired.

Theory offers competing expectations. Mannheim's Theory of Generational Cohorts implies that shared formative experiences should translate into cohort-level differences in workplace outcomes, and some studies report generational effects on perceptions and preferences (Pietrantonio et al., 2025). Against this, organizational scholars argue that strong institutional cultures, standardized civil service norms, and a shared mission homogenize behavior across cohorts, attenuating generational differences in outcomes (Yusof et al., 2025; Reed & Thomas, 2021). On the leadership side, the Full Range Leadership Theory of Bass and Avolio and its extensions anticipate positive effects of transformational and transactional behaviors (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022), while Gastil's Democratic Leadership Perspective and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory predict effects of participation and stewardship; when styles co-occur at high levels, however, their unique effects can be statistically suppressed by shared variance (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). The Job Demands-Resources Model and Social Exchange Theory position engagement dimensions, particularly dedication and commitment, as prime candidates for unique prediction of performance outcomes (Bakker et al., 2023; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Saks, 2019).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development Field Office 10 (DSWD-10) offers an unusually clean setting for adjudicating these expectations. The agency's workforce is generationally lopsided, with Millennials and Generation Z jointly comprising 86.2% of employees, so if cohort effects operate anywhere in the Philippine bureaucracy, they should surface here; simultaneously, its supervisors are rated highly across four leadership styles and its employees report high engagement, creating exactly the correlated-predictor conditions that regression is designed to disentangle. This article reports the predictive component of a larger dissertation study on leading across a multigenerational workforce; the descriptive workforce profile, the bivariate correlational structure, and the best-fitting structural model are presented in separate companion papers.

Statement of the Problem and Hypothesis

This study determined which variables, singly or in combination, significantly influence organizational effectiveness among employees of DSWD-10. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: Which among the leadership style sub-variables (transformational, transactional, servant, and democratic), employee engagement sub-variables (vigor, dedication, absorption, and commitment), and generational cohorts (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials/Generation Y, and Generation Z) significantly influence organizational effectiveness?

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance: H0₂: Leadership style, generational cohort, and employee engagement, whether considered individually or in combination, do not significantly influence organizational effectiveness among employees of DSWD-10.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a causal research design, the appropriate approach when the objective is to estimate the extent to which a set of independent variables explains variance in a dependent variable and to isolate the

unique contribution of each predictor while statistically controlling for the others. The analysis reported here belongs to a larger dissertation study of the DSWD-10 workforce.

Setting, Participants, and Sampling

Respondents were employees of DSWD Field Office 10, whose main office sits in Cagayan de Oro City and whose field and satellite offices span Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, and Bukidnon. Applying Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error to the population of 2,784 employees yielded a sample of 350, allocated proportionately across offices through stratified random sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). Generational composition emerged naturally from the office-based strata: Millennials ($n = 172$, 49.1%), Generation Z/Others ($n = 130$, 37.1%), Generation X ($n = 44$, 12.6%), and Baby Boomers ($n = 4$, 1.1%).

Measures

All predictors and outcomes were measured with adapted, validated instruments. The leadership styles came from an adapted Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire for transformational and transactional leadership (Garzón-Lasso et al., 2024), the Servant Leadership Scale (Grobler & Flotman, 2020), and an adapted democratic leadership measure (Pažur, 2020). The engagement dimensions derived from an expanded Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019) supplemented by commitment items adapted from Meyer and Allen's Affective Commitment Scale. Composite organizational effectiveness aggregated job satisfaction (adapted Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire-Short Form), workplace productivity (adapted Individual Work Performance Questionnaire; Koopmans et al., 2014; van der Vaart & Linde, 2021), and service quality (adapted SERVQUAL-based public-sector instrument; Zahri et al., 2023). Generational cohort was classified from year of birth: Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012). Expert panel review established content validity, and pilot testing with thirty non-sample employees produced Cronbach's alpha values of 0.807 to 0.985 across all scales.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Survey administration, in electronic and printed form, followed the approval of the DSWD-10 Regional Director and coordination with division heads. Respondents took part voluntarily upon informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity were assured, findings were reported in aggregate, and all data handling observed the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173).

Data Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed with the four leadership style sub-variables, the four engagement sub-variables, and the generational cohort dummy variables entered simultaneously as predictors of composite organizational effectiveness. Because cohort is categorical, it was dummy-coded with Generation Z/Others as the reference group, producing separate indicators for Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Simultaneous entry evaluates the model's overall predictive power and, critically, each predictor's unique contribution net of all others, enabling hypothesis tests for individual predictors at the 0.05 level of significance. The intercorrelations among the predictors were examined to assess multicollinearity prior to interpreting the individual coefficients, given the theoretically expected overlap among the four leadership style dimensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Levels and Relationships of the Study Variables

To establish the variables entered into the regression, Tables 1 to 3 first summarize the measured levels of the leadership styles, engagement dimensions, and organizational effectiveness outcomes, and Table 4 presents their bivariate relationships; the full descriptive and correlational treatments are reported in the companion papers of this research program.

Table 1. *Summary Table on the Level of Leadership Styles*

Leadership Style Dimension	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Transformational Leadership	4.31	0.793	High
Transactional Leadership	4.24	0.812	High
Servant Leadership	4.26	0.814	High
Democratic Leadership	4.29	0.760	High
Grand Mean	4.28	0.795	High

Scale: 4.51–5.00 Very High; 3.51–4.50 High; 2.51–3.50 Moderately High; 1.51–2.50 Low; 1.00–1.50 Very Low.

Table 2. *Summary Table on the Level of Employee Engagement*

Engagement Dimension	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Vigor and Energy at Work	4.20	0.817	High
Dedication	4.62	0.669	Very High
Absorption in Tasks	4.07	0.862	High
Commitment to Organizational Goals	4.29	0.825	High
Grand Mean	4.30	0.793	High

Table 3. *Summary Table on the Level of Organizational Effectiveness*

Organizational Effectiveness Dimension	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Job Satisfaction	4.11	0.634	High
Workplace Productivity	4.45	0.609	High
Service Quality	4.45	0.600	High

Tables 1 to 3 show a uniformly elevated profile: all four leadership styles were rated High with tightly clustered means (4.24 to 4.31, grand mean = 4.28), engagement was High overall (grand mean = 4.30) with dedication uniquely Very High (M = 4.62), and organizational effectiveness was High across job satisfaction (M = 4.11), workplace productivity (M = 4.45), and service quality (M = 4.45). These are the eight continuous predictors and the composite outcome that, together with the dummy-coded generational cohorts, enter the regression model.

Table 4. *Relationship Between Organizational Effectiveness Outcomes and Leadership Style and Employee Engagement Sub-variables*

Variable / Sub-variable	Job Satisfaction (r)	Workplace Productivity (r)	Service Quality (r)
Leadership Styles			
Transformational	0.685	0.485	0.509
Transactional	0.719	0.508	0.518
Servant	0.725	0.503	0.514
Democratic	0.723	0.556	0.564

Variable / Sub-variable	Job Satisfaction (r)	Workplace Productivity (r)	Service Quality (r)
Employee Engagement			
Vigor	0.685	0.633	0.616
Dedication	0.643	0.701	0.726
Absorption	0.580	0.585	0.551
Commitment	0.758	0.656	0.665

All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $n = 350$.

Table 4 confirms that every leadership style and every engagement dimension correlates positively and significantly with all three effectiveness outcomes. Precisely this pattern motivates the regression analysis: with all predictors significantly correlated with the outcome, and the leadership styles strongly inter-correlated with one another, only simultaneous estimation can reveal which variables carry unique predictive weight when all others are held constant.

Regression Analysis

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression of Factors Influencing Organizational Effectiveness ($n = 350$)

Predictor	B	β	t	p	Decision
Transformational Leadership	0.072	0.094	1.645	.101	Not Significant
Transactional Leadership	-0.025	-0.032	-0.467	.641	Not Significant
Servant Leadership	-0.005	-0.006	-0.079	.937	Not Significant
Democratic Leadership	0.215	0.269	3.675	< .001	Significant
Vigor	0.071	0.088	1.895	.059	Not Significant
Dedication	0.266	0.278	6.310	< .001	Significant
Absorption	0.064	0.074	1.840	.067	Not Significant
Commitment	0.232	0.285	6.083	< .001	Significant
Generation X	-0.079	-0.047	-1.612	.108	Not Significant
Millennials / Gen Y	0.010	0.009	0.325	.746	Not Significant
Baby Boomers	-0.058	-0.011	-0.416	.678	Not Significant

Overall model: $R = 0.875$; $R^2 = 0.766$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.758$; $F(11, 338) = 100$, $p < .001$. Reference group for cohort dummies: Generation Z/Others.

A Powerful but Selective Model

The regression model was highly significant, accounting for 76.6% of the variance in organizational effectiveness ($R = .875$, $R^2 = .766$, Adjusted $R^2 = .758$, $F(11, 338) = 100$, $p < .001$), an unusually large explained proportion for field research on organizational outcomes. Yet the model's power is selective: of eleven predictors entered, only three carried significant unique effects. Commitment to organizational goals produced the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .285$, $p < .001$), followed almost identically by dedication ($\beta = .278$, $p < .001$) and democratic leadership ($\beta = .269$, $p < .001$). These results warrant a partial rejection of H_{02} : the null hypothesis is rejected for democratic leadership, dedication, and commitment, and retained for all remaining predictors.

Why Three Leadership Styles Disappeared

Transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, each strongly correlated with effectiveness at the bivariate level, yielded no significant independent effects in the combined model ($p = .101$ to $.937$), with transactional and servant leadership even showing trivially negative coefficients. The explanation is statistical rather than substantive. The four styles intercorrelate very strongly in this workforce, from $r = .831$ to $r = .919$, because employees who rate their supervisors highly on one style tend to rate them highly on the others; correlations of this magnitude signal substantial multicollinearity among the leadership predictors. Under such conditions, the variance shared among the styles is attributed to the strongest unique claimant, and democratic leadership emerged as that claimant, while the remaining styles were left without significant independent effects. This is precisely the suppression pattern described by Fischer and Sitkin (2023) for studies in which multiple leadership styles co-occur at high levels. The correct reading is therefore not that transformational, transactional, and servant behaviors are inert, but that within an integrative multi-style supervisory repertoire, the participatory, consensus-seeking component is the one that carries distinctive predictive weight for organizational effectiveness. The finding coheres with evidence that participatory leadership improves productivity when coupled with human capital development and knowledge sharing (Costa et al., 2023), enhances performance through satisfaction and trust (Hutama et al., 2024), and strengthens institutional performance in government settings (AlAbri et al., 2022), and it is contextually intelligible in a welfare bureaucracy whose young, mission-driven workforce expects voice and involvement in decisions.

The Engagement Core: Dedication and Commitment

Among the engagement dimensions, dedication and commitment dominated, while vigor ($p = .059$) and absorption ($p = .067$) fell short of significance despite approaching the threshold. The two significant dimensions share a motivational rather than energetic character: dedication captures the sense of significance, pride, and purpose employees attach to their work, and commitment captures their psychological bond to organizational goals and willingness to exert discretionary effort. That these, rather than raw energy or task immersion, uniquely predict effectiveness is consistent with the Job Demands-Resources Model's designation of motivational states as central to performance (Bakker et al., 2023) and Social Exchange Theory's account of committed employees reciprocating through effort and quality (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Saks, 2019). It also converges with evidence that the dedication component of engagement is the one most strongly associated with performance in public-serving institutions (Deepalakshmi et al., 2024; Varshney & Goel, 2025) and that commitment sustains productivity under demanding conditions (Schaufeli et al., 2019). For a social welfare agency, the message is direct: the meaningfulness of the mission and the strength of the employee-organization bond are not soft correlates of performance but its strongest unique statistical predictors, within the bounds of the study's cross-sectional design.

The Generational Non-Effect

The study's most consequential finding is what did not predict. All three generational cohort dummies were non-significant (Generation X, $p = .108$; Millennials, $p = .746$; Baby Boomers, $p = .678$), with standardized coefficients near zero ($\beta = -.047$ to $.009$). In a workforce where Millennials and Generation Z together constitute 86.2% of employees, and against a reference group of the youngest cohort, membership in any generation contributed nothing to the prediction of organizational effectiveness once leadership and engagement were held constant. If generational identity governed workplace outcomes as the popular narrative claims, this maximally youthful, cohort-diverse setting is where its effects should have registered; they did not. The result empirically corroborates scholarly cautions that generational effects are routinely overstated and that shared organizational culture, standardized civil service norms, and a common institutional mission homogenize workplace outcomes across cohorts (Yusof et al., 2025; Reed & Thomas, 2021; Sansa et al., 2024). Generational cohort, in this evidence, is contextual rather than causal: it describes who is in the workforce, not how effective the workforce will be. The practical corollary is that cohort-segmented interventions, generational training tracks, cohort-tailored reward menus, and the like, target a variable with no demonstrated predictive payoff, while the variables with demonstrated payoff, participatory leadership and motivational engagement, are cohort-blind and developable in every employee.

CONCLUSIONS

Four conclusions emerge. First, leadership styles, engagement dimensions, and generational cohorts jointly explain a very large share, 76.6%, of the variance in organizational effectiveness in DSWD-10, confirming that human factors are the dominant determinants of institutional performance in this setting. Second, the unique predictive burden is carried by only three variables: commitment to organizational goals, dedication, and democratic leadership, in that order of standardized weight, leading to the partial rejection of H0₂. Third, the non-significance of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership reflects multicollinearity within an integrative supervisory repertoire rather than the irrelevance of those behaviors, with democratic leadership functioning as the repertoire's distinctive predictive component. Fourth, generational cohort exerts no significant influence on organizational effectiveness, even in a workforce overwhelmingly composed of Millennials and Generation Z, indicating that generational identity should be treated as workforce context rather than a management lever. As with all cross-sectional regression, these findings establish predictive association rather than causation, and because the study was conducted within a single regional office of one government agency, the results should be generalized only to comparable institutional contexts and with appropriate caution. The simultaneous structural behavior of leadership and engagement as latent constructs is examined in the companion structural modeling paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Public welfare institutions should redirect resources from cohort-based programming toward the three demonstrated levers. Supervisory development should make democratic competencies, consultation, consensus-seeking, participatory evaluation of work processes, and open dialogue, core and observable standards in performance management and promotion, while continuing to cultivate the full leadership repertoire from which they draw. Engagement strategy should center on deepening dedication and commitment: articulating the social mission behind every role, designing meaningful work, and strengthening the employee-organization bond through recognition and inclusion of non-regular personnel. Human resource units should replace generational segmentation with person-centered management that responds to individual needs, career stages, and circumstances rather than birth-year categories. Policy-makers in the civil service may draw on these results in designing leadership competency frameworks and engagement-oriented reforms.

For future research, several directions are recommended. First, the robustness of the generational non-effect may be tested across multiple public agencies, local government units, private organizations, and non-profit institutions, and through comparative studies across sectors and countries, to determine whether the finding holds beyond a single regional welfare office. Second, longitudinal designs are encouraged to move beyond the causal limitations of cross-sectional regression and to trace how leadership and engagement relate to organizational effectiveness over time. Third, moderation analyses may examine whether employees of different generations respond differently to particular leadership behaviors; although generational cohort exerted no significant direct effect in this study, the possibility of interaction effects between leadership styles and generational cohorts remains an open empirical question worth investigating. Fourth, subsequent studies may incorporate additional organizational variables, such as public service motivation, perceived organizational support, organizational culture, psychological safety, leadership trust, and employee well-being, which may further explain organizational effectiveness beyond leadership style and engagement. Finally, researchers may examine the near-threshold effects of vigor and absorption with larger samples and pursue the structural configuration of leadership and engagement as joint drivers of effectiveness, which is examined in the companion paper of this research program.

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