

Generational Challenges in Military Leadership: A Case Study from the Portuguese Navy

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Abstract

At a time when growing generational diversity is placing new demands on traditional models of leadership, this research analyzes the challenges of intergenerational leadership in the context of the Portuguese Navy. Rapid social, cultural and technological transformations have intensified the differences among generations, with an impact on values, expectations and working styles. The objectives of this research were: to identify the main generational differences in terms of perceptions, values and attitudes; analyse the impact of these differences on team leadership; understand the perception of military personnel regarding the support provided by the Navy's organizational culture; and propose practical recommendations for more effective leadership adapted to the intergenerational context.

The adopted methodology was based on conducting semi-structured interviews with military personnel from different generations, with subsequent qualitative analysis of the data. Thematic coding made it possible to identify significant patterns and relevant divergences.

The results offer relevant empirical information for leadership training and educational practices in military and other highly structured organizations and suggest that although there are generational differences, these are not deterministic. Factors such as the differentiated acceptance of criticism, the unequal perception of institutional support and the coexistence of traditional and transformational leadership styles in the same organization stand out. Generation Y stands out as a bridge between generations, facilitating mediation and adaptation. On the other hand, demanding contexts can lead younger leaders to adopt more authoritarian stances, revealing an adaptive flexibility in leadership styles.

The findings provide a basis for developing new pedagogical and training frameworks within military academies to foster adaptive leadership in diverse organizational environments. Leadership, being an interpersonal relationship, is shaped by multiple factors, of which the generational is just one. The ability to adapt and the appreciation of generational diversity are therefore fundamental to promoting more cohesive and effective teams in the context of the Portuguese Navy.

Keywords: Generations, Generational Challenges; Leadership education; Military training.