Abstract

**Introduction:** This thesis investigates the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement of employees from different generations. More specifically, it is investigated whether being from a different generation moderates this relationship.

**Background:** This research focuses on the theoretical substantiation and assessment of the relationship between leadership and work engagement considering the potential moderating role of belonging to a specific generation (Babyboom, X, Pragmatic, or Y). There are differences between the four working generations that give other needs for leadership (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Chen & Choi, 2008). Based on the literature, the model of transformational leadership is used, focusing on the emotional appeal of the leader and have a positive effect on the follower (Boonstra, Muijen & Tours, 2011).

**Method:** All concepts for the study are measured with a survey among a group of 8053 people working in the Dutch Defence organisation. Within the survey, the work engagement is measured by the validated questionnaire UBES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The leadership style is measured with questions that are based on the CLIO-list (de Hoogh, Den Hartog & Koopman, 2004) and the MLQ-list (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Generations have been measured by making a distinction between older and younger generations, in line with research among employees of older and younger calendar ages.

**Results:** This study shows that the older generations have higher scores on work engagement than the younger generation. In addition, the transformational leadership style has a positive effect on the work engagement of all employees. An interaction effect between transformational leadership and the younger generations in relation to work engagement was not found.

**Conclusion:** The transformational style seems recommendable in leadership as it is associated with a higher work engagement among all four generations.

**Keywords:** work engagement; transformational leadership; generations.