

Can millennial-followers perceive job as stressful due to Xer-leaders' characters?

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Abstract

This study explored how millennial-followers perception of Xer-leaders' characters influenced perception of job stress among millennial-followers in Nigerian tertiary educational setting. A convenience sample of 286 millennial, aged from 22 to 36 ($M_{age} = 30.53$, $SD = 3.84$) participated. Cross-sectional design with multiple regression analysis revealed that leaders' interest and integrity predicted perception of positive job stress. Humility is a non-significant positive predictor of millennial perception of positive job stress whereas forgiveness and gratitude negatively predicted perception of millennial positive job stress. This study is relevant in that it extended knowledge of socialization hypothesis to millennial job experience and suggested the framework for understanding millennial generation at work.

Keywords: *character, job stress, leaders, millennial, Xer*

Introduction

The experience of work can be stressful and millennial can be at risk for job stress because they are in the period in which different perspectives on issues like work ethics, leadership, and authority can cause conflict, frustration, and misunderstanding if not managed well (Murphy, 2012; Anyaegbunam, & Nwankwo, 2018). While stress describes psychological and physical strain or tension that are difficult to manage or endure (Colman, 2003), job stress refers to an extension of stress, specifically as a result of work task, the workplace, the job characteristics, role conflict, or worker capabilities (Jou, Kuo, & Tang, 2013). Millennial - those born between 1981 and 1999 (Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010) and Generational X (Xers) those born between 1960 and 1980 were raised with very different technologies and lifestyles (Bolser & Gosciej, 2015), which is capable of generating differences in work behaviors.

Currently in most tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria, millennial form majority of followers while Xers are more on the opposite exerting leadership (Anyaegbunam, 2017). In a similar

study conducted using staff of tertiary educational institution (Anyaegebunam & Nwankwo, 2018), classified the departmental heads, deans of faculty, directors, registrars, and vice chancellors as leaders if they aged 36 years and above while millennials were classified as followers if they aged less than 36 years and not exerting leadership. Thus, in the present study which was conducted in tertiary educational institution, though college of education where similar structure was available, we classified heads of department, deans of school, directors, registrar and provost as leaders if they aged 36 years and above while millennials were classified as followers if they aged less than 36 years and not in leadership position.

Leaders' characters (interest, behavior integrity, humility, forgiveness and gratitude)

Character refers to pattern of qualities of an individual, distinct from other human beings, that make up one's personality (Gilmore & Fisher, 2015), and earlier defined in in five dimensions (e.g, interest, behavior integrity, humility, forgiveness, and gratitude (Liborius, 2014; Anyaegebunam & Nwankwo, 2018). For the purpose of the present study, we defined leaders' character as "*regular and sequence of qualities of leaders which make up their personalities and distinguish them from other people*", adopted five dimensions of perceived leaders' characters (Liborius, 2014; Anyaegebunam & Nwankwo, 2018) and explored their relationships with perceived job stress of millennial-followers. *Interest* describes caring about, having important and positive feelings towards something (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2010), and has been conceptualized into *individual* and *situational*: Individual interest is more enduring, and trait-like, and can be considered a disposition which individuals take with them from one context to the next. On the other hand, situational interest is more momentary, situation bound and described as a specific reaction to something in a situation (Renninger, 2000). *Behavioral integrity* refers to consonance between leaders' words and deeds (Grahek, Thompson,

& Toliver, 2010; Simons, 2002). Perceived leaders' behavioral integrity did not elevate followers to higher performance but lack of it had led to job stress and negative performance (Simons, 1999). *Humility* describes basic adjustment to leadership and life which includes effectively handling oneself in un-egocentric, positive, and offensive resistant manner (Grahek, Thompson, & Toliver, 2010); and the positive characteristics that could affect the subjective well-being of an individual (Elliot, 2010). *Forgiveness* involves granting pardon to those who have wronged us (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and displacement of negative attitudes, such as anger and revenge towards damaging situations or people, with positive attitudes such as compassion and tolerance (Reed & Enright, 2006). *Gratitude* has been conceptualized as feeling grateful for a good or kind behavior from person (Froh, Miller & Snyder, 2007); provided benefit for other people in form of motivation (Homan, Sedlak & Boyd, 2014; Wood, Froh & Geraghty, 2010); and a genuine caring attitude toward the followers and being grateful for more than just a successful result at work (Liborius, 2014). These characters which had earlier been studied together (Liborius, 2014), but have not received attention in relation to job stress among millennial employees in educational institutions in Nigeria. Given that millennial have filtered into educational institution as employees with differences in technologies and work behavior, there is need for exploratory study to establish if millennials' perceptions of Xer-leaders' characters would predict their perception of job stress. In this study, Xer-leader and millennial-follower were coined to distinguish between Xers who exercise leadership from those who do not, and millennial who are followers from those who are not.

Theoretical consideration

This study adopted socialization hypothesis which proposed that characters and values of each generation change in line with the conditions that prevailed during their formative years (Inglehart,

2008; Wils, Saba, Waxin, & Labelle, 2011). Applied to work situation, differences in millennial work behavior compared to past generational were eminent since their entry into work force (Harris-Boundy & Flatt, 2010). For example, Xers tend to express characters leading to seeking personalized careers and recognition from others (Saks, 2006). They also adapt easily to different learning methods (Howe & Strauss, 2007), are proficient multitaskers (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008), and have advanced visual memory and processing skills (Tapscott, 2009). On the other hand, millennial have shown to integrate technology into their lives and expect accommodations by organizations because of experiences, needs, and desires (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They also exhibit self-important, impatient, and disloyal (Hill, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2007); demonstrate ambition, value organizational training and development, prefer meaningful work, and seek for personal fulfillment on the jobs (Hauw & Vos, 2010). These differences resulted from millennials' styles of learning which varied from past generation (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008).

Few studies have addressed generational differences and job stress in educational institutions (e.g., Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006), and the degree of stress correlated with a person's perceived inability to deal with an environmental demand (Akoijam & Meitei, 2011). Whether those differences could generate into perceived job stress by millennials who are followers when Xers are leaders in educational institution has not been explored. This study contributed to knowledge given its exploratory nature that opens research ideas in area of job stress in educational institution.

Thus, this study aimed to explore if perceived Xer-leaders' characters (interest, integrity, humility, forgiveness, and gratitude) would predict job stress among millennial-followers in educational institutions. The following research questions were answered:

1. How will millennial-followers perception of Xer-leaders' interest predict their perception of job stress in educational institutions?
2. How will millennial-followers' perception of Xer-leaders' integrity predict their perception of job stress in educational institutions?
3. How will millennial-followers' perception of Xer-leaders' humility predict their perception of job stress in educational institutions?
4. How will millennial-followers' perception of Xer-leaders' forgiveness predict their perception of job stress in educational institutions?
5. How will millennial-followers' perception of Xer-leaders' gratitude predict their perception of job stress in educational institutions?

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of 286 college of education employees (males = 56.7%; females = 43.3%, teaching = 62.2%; non-teaching = 37.8%) millennial-followers were selected. Ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 36 ($M_{age} = 28.12$; $SD = 4.32$).

Instruments

Participants completed the 7-item Perceived Leaders' Interest Questionnaire (PLIQ: Anyaegbunam, 2017), Perceived Leaders' Behavioral Integrity Scale (PLIS: Craig & Gustafson, 1998), Humility Scale (HS: Elliot, 2010), Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS: Thompson, et al. 2005), and Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ: McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). The participants also completed Perceived Stress Scale (PSS: Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) and finally provided data on their demographics such as age, gender (male or female), staff status (teaching or non-teaching).

PLIQ: The PLIQ is a 7-item questionnaire which assessed interest about leaders. Samples items includes: *Mounting checks on workers' performance and output*. Participants responded on 5-point option format (strongly disagree = 1 through undecided = 3 to strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for score from the PLIQ for this study was 0.85.

PLIS: The PLIS is a 30-item questionnaire assessing perceived integrity about leaders. Sample item includes: *Ridicules people for their mistakes*. Participants responded on 5-point option format (strongly disagree = 1 through undecided = 3 to strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for score from the PLIS in the present study was 0.80

HFS: The HFS is an 18-item instrument assessing people's levels of forgiveness in three dimensions: Forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations. Each sub-scale has 6 items developed for self-report measures. However, the instrument was modified in this study to assess followers' perception of their leaders' forgiveness. For examples, the former items which were personalized for use as self-report measure were modified to suit perception of others' tendency to forgive self, others, and situations. The sample items and modifications are: *I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done*, modified to read, *My leader holds grudges against himself for negative things he has done*; *I continue to punish a person who has done something that I think is wrong*, modified to read, *My leader continues to punish a person who has done something that he thinks is wrong*; and *When things go wrong for reasons that can't be controlled, I get stuck in negative thoughts about it*; modified to read, *When things go wrong for reasons that can't be controlled, my leader gets stuck in negative thoughts about it*. This study adapted total measure of the scale in which the higher the score from the HFS, the higher the individual indicates higher levels of forgiveness and

the vice versa. Participants responded on 5-point option format (strongly disagree = 1 through undecided = 3 to strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for score from the PLIS in the present study was 0.92.

HS: The HS is a 13-item instrument which assessed humility of persons. The scale was a self-report measure of humility but was modified in this study for perception of leaders' humility by millennial-followers. For example, *I am usually quick to rationalize my failures*, was modified to read, *My leader is usually quick to rationalize his mistakes*; *The challenges ahead of me cause me to feel overwhelmed*, was modified to read, *The challenges ahead of my leader often cause him to feel overwhelmed*. Participants responded on 5-point option format (strongly disagree = 1 through undecided = 3 to strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for score from the HS in the present study was 0.66.

GQ: The GQ is a 6-itemself-report measure of gratitude about individuals. Also, the questionnaire was modified to assess perception of leaders' gratitude by their followers. For examples: *I am grateful to wide variety of people*, was modified to read; *My leader is grateful to wide variety of people*. Participants responded on 5-point option format (strongly disagree = 1 through undecided = 3 to strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for score from the GQ in the present study was 0.69.

PSS: The PSS is a 10-item questionnaire assessing perceived stress about the employees. Sample item includes: *In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed*. Participants responded on 5-point option format (0 = Never, 1 = Almost Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly Often, 4 = Very Often). The Cronbach alpha for score from the PSS in the present study was 0.76.

Procedures

Permission to carry out this study was granted by the local authority through the Research and Ethics Committee (REC) of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe Anambra State. The questionnaires were administered to the college of education staff in school and departmental board

meetings which hold once every month and to non-teaching staff in their usual monthly meeting by the researcher and research assistants under guide, after obtaining their consent and explaining to them the purpose of the study. Upon satisfying all relevant procedures, participants were encouraged to be as explicit and completely cooperative as possible. Further, assurances were also given regarding confidentiality of participants' responses, and they were specifically instructed to be anonymous. The questionnaires were self-administered.

Design/statistics

The study adopted cross-sectional design which employed multiple regression analysis to predict millennial-followers' perception of job stress from Xer-leaders' characters.

Results

The results of correlation analysis in Table 1 showed that leaders' interest had positive relationship with perceived job stress, $r(286) = 0.48, P < .001$. Also, leaders' integrity has positive relationship with Perceived Job stress $r(286) = 0.68, P < .00$. Humility has a low but positive relationship with perceived job stress, $r(286) = 0.31, P < .05$ while forgiveness and gratitude have negative relationship with perceived job stress, $r(286) = -0.31, P < .005$, and $r(286) = -0.46, p < .001$.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations for Xer-leaders' characters and millennial-follower's job stress

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Stress	32.24	5.96	-								
2. Interest	22.67	3.32	0.48*	-							
3. Integrity	101.43	13.06	0.68*	0.62*	-						
4. Humility	44.48	5.21	0.23*	0.43*	0.59*	-					
5. Forgiveness	61.63	7.05	-0.31*	0.58*	0.64*	0.71*	-				
6. Gratitude	18.68	3.32	-0.46*	0.25*	0.61*	0.35*	0.19*	-			
7. Staff status	1.25	0.46	-0.05**	-0.17***	-0.05**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-		
8. Gender	1.32	0.46	-0.08*	-0.02**	-0.08**	-0.01**	-0.00**	-0.06**	-0.04**	-	
9. Age	28.12	4.32	0.05**	-0.07**	-0.03**	-0.02**	0.08**	0.07**	0.04**	0.04**	-

Note. $N = 286$; * = coefficients are significant at $p < .001$; ** = coefficients not significant; *** = coefficient significant = .004 (2-tailed)

Perception of Xer-Leaders' interest, behavior integrity, forgiveness, humility, and gratitude were regressed on millennial perception of their positive job stress. The equation model was significant, $F(5, 285) = 75.95$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.74$, with 55% variance accounted for by the predictor variables. The results further showed that Xer-leaders' behavioral integrity predicted millennial-followers' perceived job stress most strongly $t(281) = 10.64$, $p < 0.001$, next were interest $t(281) = 3.46$, $p < 0.001$, and forgiveness $t(281) = -5.26$, $p < 0.001$. Humility $t(281) = -0.52$, $p = 0.61$ and gratitude $t(281) = -1.19$, $p = 0.23$ had the least predictive influence on job stress of the millennial-followers.

Table 2: Summary of multiple regression analysis of Xer- leaders' characters predicting millennial-followers' perceived job stress

Characters	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	95% Confidence Interval (CI)	
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	5.00	2.28		2.12	0.03	0.518	9.486
Interest	0.30	0.09	0.31	3.46	0.001	0.130	0.467
Integrity	0.41	0.04	0.43	10.64	0.000	0.347	0.488
Humility	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.52	0.62	-0.099	0.169
Forgiveness	-0.31	0.06	-0.33	-5.26	.000	-0.441	-0.201
Gratitude	-0.11	0.09	-0.10	-1.19	0.23	-0.274	0.067

Note. $N = 286$; $R = .72$; $R^2 = .56$; LL = lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit

The results further revealed that Xer-leaders' interest was a significant positive predictor of millennial-followers' positive job stress ($\beta = 0.31$, $R^2 = 0.56$), Xer-leaders' integrity was significant positive predictor of millennial-followers positive job stress ($\beta = 0.43$, $R^2 = 0.56$), and Xer-leaders' humility was non-significant positive predictor of perceived millennial-followers' positive job stress ($\beta = 0.04$, $R^2 = 0.56$). Forgiveness ($\beta = -0.33$, $R^2 = 0.56$) and gratitude ($\beta = -0.10$, $R^2 = 0.56$) were negative predictors of millennial-followers' positive job stress.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study showed that perceived Xer-leaders' interest and behavior integrity are positive predictors of millennial-followers' perceived job stress while Xer-leaders' humility is a non-significant positive predictor, forgiveness and gratitude are negative predictors of millennial followers' perceived job stress in educational institution. This implies that millennials used in this study perceive Xer-leaders as not being consistent in their words and actions which invariably made the millennials

vulnerable to job stress (Simon, 1999). So, among the participants in this study, Xer-leaders' perspectives on work behavior, leadership and authority which manifest in their interest and behavioral integrity result to perceived job stress among millennial-followers. For the first time, this study provides empirical evidence on the followers' perception of their leaders' characters as stressful in educational institution. In addition, this is one of the first study to open study on how Xer-leaders' characters predicted perceived job stress among millennials.

Interest and behavioral integrity produce job stress when they are perceived as lacking and inconsistent in Xer-leaders. Millennials' perception of leaders' interest and behavioral integrity as stressful could result from the fact that leaders in educational institution used in this study lack behavioral integrity. Thus, it may be appropriate for leaders in other educational institutions to demonstrate behavioral integrity and maintain interest that will accommodate that of millennial for the avoidance of job stress. This is apt since millennials have found entry into work, and soon will begin to assume leadership positions.

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