Generational leadership –
How to manage five different generations in the workforce

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The successful management of demographic change in German companies will mostly depend on their executives’ leadership capabilities. Based on the implicit leadership theory of effective leader-subordinate relationships, the perceived leadership behaviour must match individual subordinates’ leadership prototypes. As research in sociology and social psychology indicates, these leadership prototypes – consisting of employees’ work values and preferences – are influenced by generational experiences as well as by individual employees’ age. Building on these arguments, this chapter tries to develop different leadership styles for the five generations currently present in the German workforce: The Post-War Generation, the Economic-Boom Generation, the Baby-Boom Generation, the Golf Generation, and the Internet Generation. Such adaptive and generation-specific leadership should help spur high levels of work motivation, organisational commitment, and hence lead to top performance by every generation and age group within the company.

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