**Dissertation Argument Short Outline**

**Significant Shifts in the Workforce**

As the largest generation, baby boomers, begin to age and leave the workforce sooner than the anticipated 67 years of age at record paces due to the global pandemic, we are unaware if they will return (Hertz, 2022). This reality has created greater urgency for organizations to examine their current workforce and evaluate the leader and leadership gaps they anticipate experiencing over the next five years. In addition, executive leaders will need to begin to invest more intentionally in developing the future leaders of their workforce to mitigate the significant talent loss and expert gaps they will undoubtedly experience in a marketplace. Unfortunately, since the next three generations are not as large as the baby boomer generation, a limited pool of eligible candidates will be available to fill leadership positions.

The next generation of workers, Generation X, Y, and Z, is more diverse, tends to job-hop, and has high expectations of company cultures to be relational, equitable, and flexible (Hirsch, 2017). The workforce will also have a small segment of Generation Z, who have comparable values to Millennials and value financial stability and work-life balance. Both these generations are digital natives comfortable with technology and internet content. More importantly, technology is essential to their lives and how they navigate and facilitate daily tasks and communications (Mahmoud et al., 2021).

**Implications for Companies**

Since there are some “fundamental differences across generations, the way age groups connect events, people and experiences” (Mahmoud et al., 2021, p.194), understanding generational nuances is a vital context organizational leaders must consider as they look to hire and retain the next generation of leaders. “Therefore, organizations need to work continuously on changing organizational practices to adapt to the diverse nature of the multigenerational workforce” (Mahmoud et al., 2021, p. 194). As these labor shifts occur, organizations are forced to become nimbler and transfer tasks to less seasoned staff. According to Day (2008), this task migration can occur across disciplines as organizations remove layers of organizational hierarchy and flatten organizational structures, increasing shared leadership opportunities for more incredible innovation and shared accountability.

“Effective leadership development must happen within a clearly articulated leadership philosophy and framework. This ensures that all stakeholders have a consistent view of the leadership agenda, desired behaviors, and the mindset required for leadership success” (Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018, p. 12). With that in mind, executive leaders must understand which variables can accelerate leadership development through experiential learning.

**Variables to Consider**

The mentoring movement has been helping corporations develop supervisors with mentor mindsets in the last five years to ensure that young professionals in internships or their first job have a quality experience that develops the necessary soft and hard skills needed in a nurturing and supporting environment. This work was significantly interrupted and transformed during the pandemic. College students, especially first-generation students, did not have access to internships at the same rate as in the past.

Researchers found that 1 in 5 students engaged in internships during the summer of 2020, creating a gap between those students with economic affluence and access securing internships and first-generation Latinx and Black students securing these experiences (The National Foundation Study of Online Internship by the Center for Research of College- Workforce Transitions at UW- Madison, 2021). Research has shown that young people who have paid internships during their college career are more likely to get hired in quality, well-paid positions than their counterparts that do not (Braven, 2021). I am interested in understanding when first-generation Latinx and Black students do get access to internships and what variables must be present to accelerate their leadership development and maximize the experience to create a career trajectory that potential can lead to executive leadership positions.

**Research Questions, Subjects, and Design**

My dissertation will focus on what role mentoring and psychological safety will help accelerate leadership development through experiential learning for college students that have had internships during their college careers.

I would like to conduct a quantitative study to determine if the variables of mentoring and psychological safety in college students’ internship experience help them develop soft and hard skills they can use in the future and if it helped develop some of the mental models that allow for the experience to be accelerated. I will use two groups of students to compare the experience and outcomes. The first group is the students across the country in internship programs where MENTOR or a local MENTOR affiliate conduct mentor training and expectations for supervisors of the interns. The second group will be college students in internships whose supervisors did not receive the training.

To mitigate my biases as a leader of an affiliate that conducts the training and manages similar programs, I will have a group of advisors to ensure my personal perspectives do not create blind spots. The anonymous surveys will also help me to stay objective regardless of the impact mentoring and psychological safety impacts the interns.

**References**

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