UNLEASHING THE POWER OF GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

WPI
workplace innovation consultants
TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATIONS TO ACHIEVE OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

Generational diversity in the workplace presents a key challenge for managers today. For the first time in history, many organizations have three and sometimes four generations working together. Each generation has different work related values, attitudes, and preferred working styles. Sometimes these differences can lead to misaligned expectations, frustration and even conflict that can hinder productivity and result in decreased morale. Managers who understand how to draw upon and use the unique talents of the members of different generations and ensure effective collaboration across generational boundaries will be better able to motivate and retain their employees and achieve their desired business results.

This resource guide is designed for managers to help them create productive, inclusive work environments that leverage each generation's unique strengths and keep members of all generations highly motivated, fully engaged and effective contributors to team and workgroups.

First let's meet the different generations.

Traditionalists or Veterans (born before 1946) grew up during the Great Depression and World War II. They experienced considerable economic hardships that influenced their strong work ethic and made them disciplined, and self sacrificing. Their anticipated reward for their hard work and sacrifice was achieving economic security for their families. They are used to working in organizations that are hierarchical with a clear "pecking order," a division of labor, and where the boss' decisions were not second guessed. When working in teams, Traditionalists prefer a designated leader who is in control and who enforces the rules to keep members on task. They tend to prefer personal communications such as hand written notes, are deferent to authority, and expect formality at work.
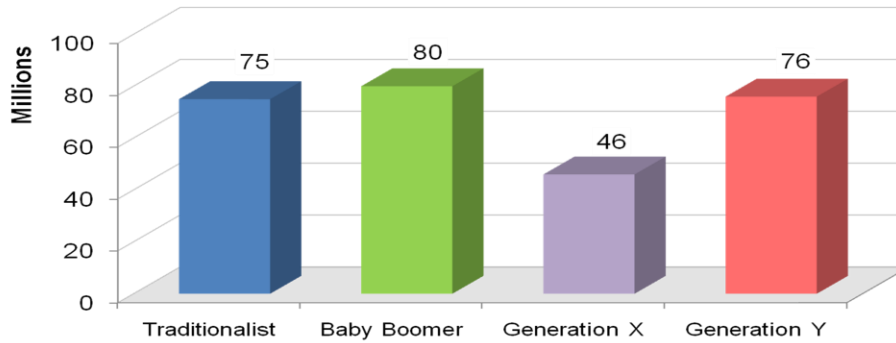
Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) were the largest generation in history around the world. They grew up during periods of relative economic prosperity and growth, yet under the constant fear of nuclear war. They experienced and contributed to significant social movements like civil rights and women's rights, and were the children of rock & roll. They spent their youth dissenting against power and demanding equality and individual freedom. Baby Boomers are generally optimistic although that optimism was tempered some by the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster, the oil embargo of the early 1970s, the stagflation of the 1970s, and the apparent helplessness experienced with the taking of U.S. embassy hostages by Iran. Baby Boomers are driven to succeed and the term "workaholic" was invented to describe them.

Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1980) are the smallest generation in the U.S. by population size. Many grew up as "latch-key" kids in a world of divorce, working moms, and the emergence of new technologies. This led to a sense of independence, resilience, adaptability, and comfort with technology tools for work and recreation. They take their work seriously but redefined prior notions of company loyalty. They experienced their parents being

laid off after giving what they perceived as "blind loyalty" to the company. As a result, they have stronger attachment to their chosen profession and the work than to any company. They work well in multicultural settings, are very pragmatic when it comes to getting the job done, and enjoy the option of moving laterally, stopping and starting their careers as needed. Work life balance is important as many delayed having families until their late 30s. They dislike highly rigid, formal, and authoritarian work settings, and simply want to know what needs to be accomplished and to have the autonomy to get it done.

Generation Yers or Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000) are the largest generation since the Baby Boomers and were raised in what is considered the most "child-centric" period in history. They received considerable attention and high expectations from their parents. They are used to "winning" and receiving praise for their efforts. They are also very adept multi-taskers and for them technology tools are essential to living and working. They tend to be optimistic, enthusiastic, goal oriented, and ambitious at work. They are used to instant gratification, regular encouragement and praise, and expect an open flow of information at work. Gen Yers prefer to work in teams and value diversity, multiculturalism, collaboration, work-life balance, and want to feel valued and respected regardless of their inexperience.

GENERATION DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS

**U.S. Population
By
Generations**

Bar chart (Millions):
- Traditionalist: 75
- Baby Boomer: 80
- Generation X: 46
- Generation Y: 76
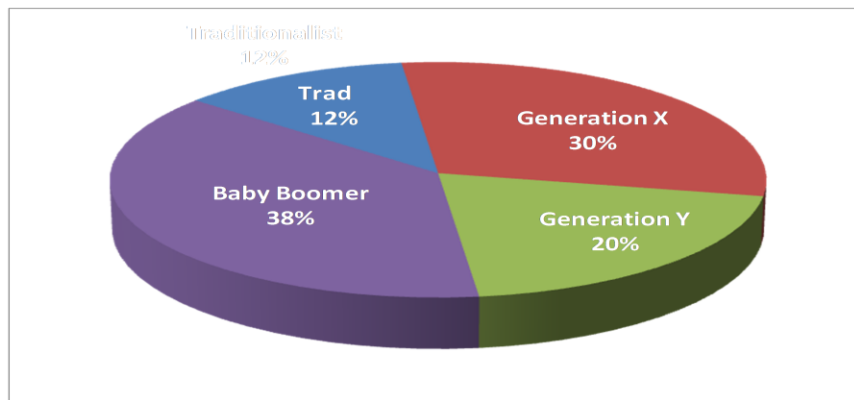
**Current U.S
Workforce
By Generation**

Pie chart:
- Trad 12%
- Baby Boomer 38%
- Generation X 30%
- Generation Y 20%

3.

KEY GENERATIONAL TRENDS IN THE WORKPLACE

There are a variety of generational trends taking place in today's workplaces. Here are a few notable ones.

- While many Baby Boomers have postponed their planned retirements due to the current challenging economic conditions, their departure from the workplace is expected as the economy recovers.
- Baby Boomers are not planning traditional retirements. Research indicates that many expect to keep working at least on a part time basis. Many are expected to start up their own businesses and/or work on a contractual basis with larger companies.
- These Baby Boomers are the keepers of important institutional knowledge. Many companies are at risk of losing this important historical, cultural, and operational knowledge.
- Baby Boomer women will be inheriting the largest transfer of wealth in history. This will provide them with a new found financial independence offering them a variety of choices and will likely influence their expectations about work and organizational life.
- Gen Xers will be moving into management and other leadership roles in organizations. However, their relatively smaller numbers is predicted to create a heated competition for their talents.
- Gen Xers highly value autonomy in their careers and work and if these needs are not met in large companies they are expected to pursue positions with smaller companies or join the growing ranks of entrepreneurs.
- Many Gen Xers have postponed parenthood to pursue their careers. However, they will not be able to do so muc longer. This generation has always valued work-life balance and this is expected to become even more important to them.
- Large numbers of Gen Yers will be entering the workplace with very different attitudes and expectations requiring a commensurate shift in how careers and work are designed and managed to attract, motivate, and retain them.
- Gen Yers are not postponing parenthood to focus on their careers. They will seek jobs that offer high degrees of flexibility that allow them to balance work and family commitments.

4.

WHAT THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS SHARE IN COMMON

The generations do have different perspectives, values, attitudes, and preferences. This is what makes each unique. However, they also share some things in common.

Baby Boomers and Gen Yers share a sense of optimism, a preference for collaboration and enjoy working in teams.

Baby Boomers and Gen Xers share a striving for individual achievement and a willingness to take on responsibility.

Gen Xers and Gen Yers are both very technology savvy and skilled at customizing such tools and devices for specific uses.

Gen Xers and Gen Yers share an interest in achieving a balance between their work and personal lives, as well as prefer and expect less formal working environments.

Gen Xers and Gen Yers share a preference for informality at work and are both motivated by flexible working environments, and seek the opportunity to make personal friends at work.

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Gen Xers and Gen Yers are both comfortable with change and enjoy discovering new ways of doing of things.

All generations seek influence and input in decisions that affect them and a desire for ongoing professional development.

THE GENERATIONS VIEWS OF EACH OTHER

Our research has identified some of the ways different generations view each other. We found that these cross-generational perceptions were both appreciative and critical. In addition, we found there were some misperceptions and misunderstandings about generations different from one's own. These can lead to conflict and frustrations, if not attended to and managed. Yet, exploring these perceptions can result in increased mutual understanding of generational differences and how such differences can be leveraged to solve business issues.

How The Generations Tend To View Each Other

Baby Boomers view **Gen Xers** as self involved, not committed to the organization, skeptical of authority, independent, and resourceful/good problem-solvers.

Baby Boomers view **Gen Yers** as overly engaged with technology, lacking social acumen, having unrealistic expectations about work, & open to change.

Gen Xers view **Baby Boomers** as having sense of entitlement, blind loyalties, being highly achievement oriented, & hard working.

Gen Xers view **Gen Yers** as naively optimistic, self absorbed, very technologically adept, & open to new ideas.

Gen Yers view **Baby Boomers** as uncomfortable with change, conflict avoidant, committed to their work, & socially aware/skilled.

Gen Yers view **Gen Xers** as overly task & outcome focused, individually oriented, pessimistic, "out-of'box" thinkers, & committed to work-life balance.

6.

COMPARISON OF GENERATIONAL WORK VALUES, ATTITUDES & PREFERENCES

Work Characteristics	Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y
Leadership Style	• Collegial & participative • Strive for consensus • Respect for positional authority & "chain of command" • Focus on process as well as results	• Direct, competent, & fair • Focus on results • Expect independent thinking & action	• Too early to know -- yet they : expect collaboration & teaming • Non-hierarchically oriented • Value "knowledge" & achievement
Work Values & Attitudes	• Live to work • Loyalty • Teamwork • Stability • Competitive • Desire to have influence • Conflict avoidant • Cautious optimism • Need to "pay your dues" • Technically challenged	• Work to live • Autonomy & Independence • Self Reliance • Pragmatic • Skeptical • Adaptability • Flexible scheduling • Informality • Work/life balance • Diversity • Technically savvy	• Work & live • Meaning & variety • Flexibility • Teaming & networking • Informality • Optimistic • Globalism • Social responsibility • Reject having "pay your dues" • Highly tech savvy
Work Expectations	• Money & recognition Reward • Job security • Liberal • Sense of entitlement • Highly competitive • Step by step promotion • Authority • Employee	• Educational reward • Job challenged • Pragmatic • Entrepreneurial • Extreme individuality • Quick promotion • Flexible/Freedom • Ownership	• Significance in work • Immediate respect & Input • Development • Fast paced advancement • Fun and sociability
Communication Preferences	• Face to face & personal interaction • On an "need to know basis"	• Straight forward & direct • Efficient—whatever works	• Positive and affirming • Instant & complete • Technology based

7.

GENERATIONS ENGAGEMENT MODEL

This model outlines four recommended sequential steps for building collaboration and productive working relationships with members of generations different from your own. While it is important to move through each step in sequence, the time spent in any one step and the overall pace of moving through all steps may vary depending on the situation and past history of the working relationship.

Model Step	Step Related Goals	Recommended Manager Actions & Tips
1. Observe & Acknowledge	• Identify when a difference is might be generations based. • Create a climate of openness & collaboration with a member of another generation.	1. Watch and listen without evaluating or judging. 2. Avoid minimizing or joking about generational differences. 3. Demonstrate authentic interest in the other generation and its point of view. 4. Stay aware of your own feelings/reactions
2. Inquire & Validate	• Explore generational differences to strive for increased understanding • Acknowledge & legitimize the value of having generational differences	1. Demonstrate genuine curiosity to learn more about the other generation's frame of reference and point of view. 2. Use active listening techniques (e.g. open-ended questions, paraphrasing etc.) to learn more about the other generation's preferences. 3. Demonstrate "positive regard" for the possibilities offered by the other generation's perspective & preferences.
3. Explore & Accept Differences	• Identify the nature and source of identified generational differences • Accept identified differences and begin to bridge such differences	1. Focus on behavior and avoid "mind-reading" or interpreting the behavior. 2. Explore differences and identify areas of agreement 3. Acknowledge the value of having different generational views to you and your team.
4. Adapt & Integrate	• Modify your prior views to include some elements of the other generational point of view • Reach agreement for how to manage future generational differences	1. Examine your assumptions and consider how you might modify them to accommodate alternatives 2. Experiment with a different generations preferred way of doing something. 3. Negotiate solutions that include both generational points of view 4. Always demonstrate respect for the other generational point of view, even if you do not fully agree with it.

8.

STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES FOR MOTIVATING & RETAINING DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

BABY BOOMER WORK VALUES & PREFERENCES	MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES &TECHNIQUES
Seeking "Relevance" & Respect for Experience & Past Accomplishments	• Acknowledge and seek out their experience based knowledge & skills—seek their advice as appropriate • Solicit/invite sharing of "organizational knowledge & memory" to help establish richer context for younger & newer staff • Invite and use their input/advice for how to manage political dynamics associated with implementation of change • Engage them in managing emergent issues &" crises"
Strong Work Ethic, Dedication & Loyalty	• Recognize effort and hard work as well as results achieved • Engage them as mentors in helping younger workers learn critical workplace skills & how to navigate the organization culture • Keep them busy but avoid overloading them with work • Provide structure & stability to work as much as possible
Achievement Oriented & Competitive	• Set stretch performance goals & targets • Create playful internal performance related competitions among teams & team members • Balance individual accountabilities & rewards with team base ones
Relationship Focused	• Engage in face to face conversations & phone calls • Meet over breakfast, lunch, and/or coffee to discuss issues • Show a personal interest in their family & children and mutual interests outside of work
Conflict Avoidant & Consensus Driven	• Encourage their expression of views & opinions different from your own & the majority view • Normalize and legitimize the expression of different points of view and debate-- • Engage them in helping build consensus among team members

9.

GENERATION X WORK VALUES & PREFERENCES	MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES
Self Driven & Autonomy	• Set clear expectations & accountabilities for desired outcomes then allow freedom for how these are accomplished • Avoid overuse of teams to accomplish work • Provide increasing scope & levels of individual responsibility • Reinforce/leverage their individuality & nonconformity
Pragmatic & Efficiency Focused	• Engage them in efforts to streamline operations & business processes • Actively solicit ideas for alternative and improved ways of doing things • Allow for "experimentation" with different ways of accomplishing goals • Maintain emphasis on "solutions" & the task to be accomplished
Adaptability & Resilience	• Engage them as "early adopters" of change & change agents • Provide variety in assignments & accountabilities
Communications	• Be direct & straightforward—avoid 'beating around the bush"--say what you want & when you want it • Avoid lengthy or elaborate explanations • Use electronic tools for quick information sharing
Work To Live Not Live To Work	• Offer flexible work schedules & telecommuting options • Integrate fun activities & play with work • Support their efforts to manage work-life balance

10.

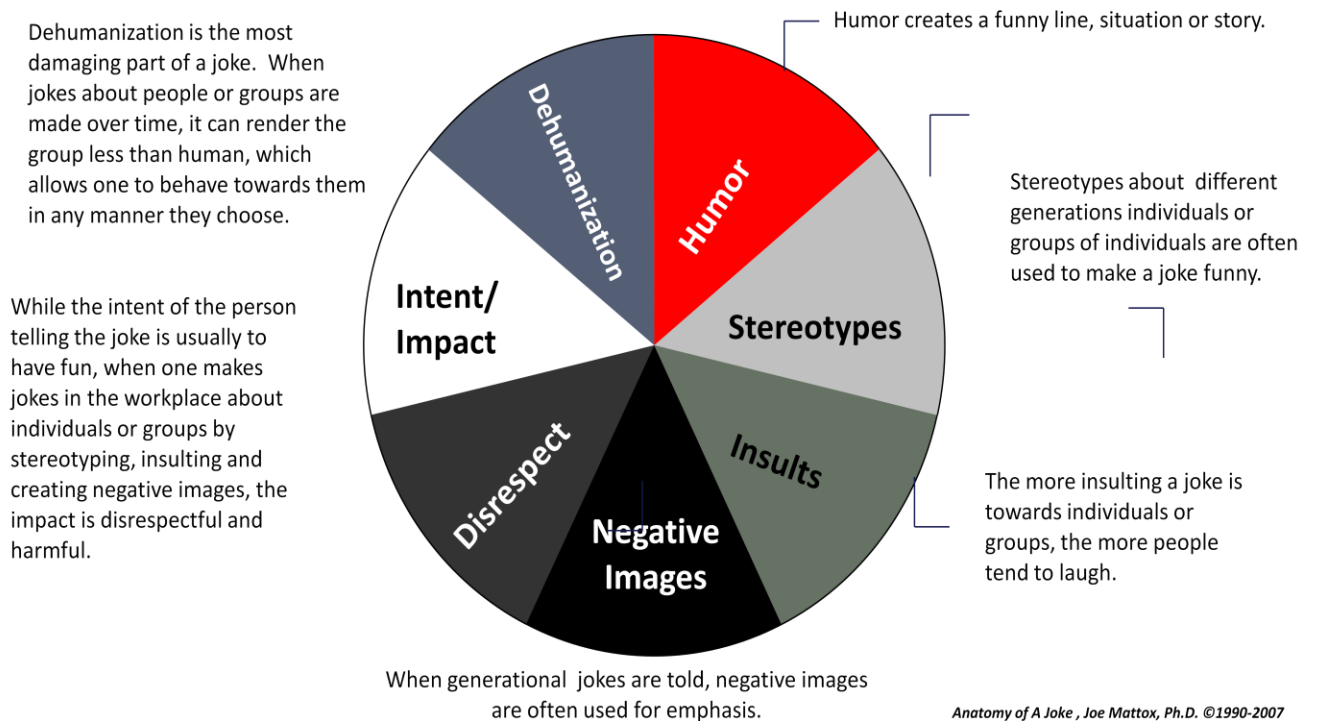| GENERATION Y WORK VALUES & PREFERENCES	MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES
High Expectations for Development & Rapid Career Advancement	• Hold career development discussions on a quarterly or at least semi-annual basis to explain how to prepare for and work toward stated personal goals. • Place assignments given & work responsibilities within the context of how such experiences will contribute to desired career goals. • Replace notion of "paying dues" with gaining experiences to achieve personal career goals • Provide ongoing development (training) opportunities
Accustomed to Instant Gratification & Frequent Feedback	• Break assignments & tasks into smaller "chunks" or milestones and provide frequent constructive feedback on performance • Provide regular formal & informal feedback balancing positive reinforcing with corrective feedback. • Schedule regular "check ins" on progress on assignments for opportunities for feedback & coaching
Seek Meaning & Variety	• Provide rationale and reasons behind what you are asking them to do • Explain how work role & assignments contribute to company/LOB mission and strategic goals & personal goals--make the connections explicit. • Find opportunities to vary the nature and type of assignments and look for creative, challenging assignments –let them show what they can do • Vary work schedules as appropriate
Informal Approach to Authority	• Encourage expression of their own point of view & demonstrate that their views and ideas matter regardless of their limited experience • Influence and guide through persuasion and expertise rather than positional authority • Avoid cynicism, sarcasm, or being condescending

11.

GENERATION Y WORK VALUES PREFERENCES (CONT)	MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES (CONT)
Communications	• Provide "straight talk" be truthful –avoid "spin-doctoring" • Be positive, encouraging & show interest in them as individuals • Stay in touch via use of electronic devices (e.g. texting) • Use "blogs" and discussion boards for idea sharing
Camraderie & Sense of Community	• Engage them in a variety of teams for accomplishing work • Encourage use of "social networking" sites to facilitate sharing of ideas and staying connected with co-workers • Hold regular social activities for the team outside of the workplace • Encourage & provide opportunities to engage in community service, socially responsible and volunteer activities
Diversity & Globalization	• Use opportunities for international work, travel, and involvement on globally based teams as incentives • Engage them in globally based teams and business initiatives

12.

ANATOMY OF A JOKE: A Tool for Managing Cross Generational Diversity

The *Anatomy of a Joke Tool* is used to highlight the unintended aspects that joking with others about generational differences in the workplace. It provides a useful framework that will allow you to have important conversations with your staff who may not be aware of the impact their joking behavior may have on others.

ANATOMY OF A JOKE TOOL

Avoid generational jokes. A generational joke has elements of humor (intent), and elements of insult (impact). Despite the intent, making fun of others in the workplace is a lot more than fun and games. So, what's in a joke? Start with the section called, "humor", and take a closer look using our anatomy of a joke tool.

Dehumanization is the most damaging part of a joke. When jokes about people or groups are made over time, it can render the group less than human, which allows one to behave towards them in any manner they choose.

While the intent of the person telling the joke is usually to have fun, when one makes jokes in the workplace about individuals or groups by stereotyping, insulting and creating negative images, the impact is disrespectful and harmful.

Humor creates a funny line, situation or story.

Stereotypes about different generations individuals or groups of individuals are often used to make a joke funny.

The more insulting a joke is towards individuals or groups, the more people tend to laugh.

When generational jokes are told, negative images are often used for emphasis.

Anatomy of A Joke , Joe Mattox, Ph.D. ©1990-2007

Think about the anatomy of a joke before you decide to tell a generational joke in the workplace

13.

FOR FURTHER READING

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Workplace Innovation Consultants is an organization development consultancy dedicated to assisting senior leaders of organizations and their members to maximize their talents and potential to achieve desired business results. WPI consultants are highly experienced specialists in the areas of organization change implementation, organization redesign, organization culture realignment, executive team development, board development, executive coaching and leadership development, as well as assisting organizations to develop highly inclusive work environments that engage successfully all employees.

14.