



**South Carolina
Association of Counties**

**Tapping into Generational
Differences**



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"Building Stronger Counties for Tomorrow"

**Tapping into Generational
Differences: Finding Common
Ground Among Four Generations**

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Major Trends in the Workplace

- The workforce will be more culturally diverse
- The workforce is aging
- There are now four generations represented in the workplace which can create conflict
- There is an increasing expectation for work-life balance flexibility
- With constant budget constraints, reductions in force, and demands for service, stress related problems affecting employees morale and wellness will continue to grow. Studies show increasing dissatisfaction. For example, a study of federal workers found only 33% fully engaged in their job; 50% were partially engaged, and 17% disengaged.

The Aging Workforce: Workers 55 and older

1990	12%	15 million
2000	13.1%	18.7 million
2005	16.2%	24.3 million
2020	23.8%	39.6 million
2050	23.0%	44.6 million

Source: Mitra Toosi, A new look at long-term labor force projections to 2050. *Monthly Labor Review*, November 2006
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Four Generations in the Workplace

Traditionalists	1922-1945	68+
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	49-67
Generation X	1965-1980	33-48
Generation Y	1981-2000	32-

Traditionals (68 and older)

Seminal Events:

- ✓The Great Depression – 1929 – 1940
- ✓Social Security Act – 1935
- ✓Rise of labor unions - 1935
- ✓The New Deal – 1933 – 1938
- ✓WWII – 1939 – 1945

Popular Technology:

- ✓Radio
- ✓The "Silver Screen"

Baby Boomers (49-67)

Seminal Events:

- ✓ Cold War 1947 – 1991
- ✓ Beatniks – 1950 – 1960
- ✓ Sputnik – 1957
- ✓ Birth control pills - 1960
- ✓ "Playboy Philosophy" – 1962
- ✓ Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* - 1962
- ✓ Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* - 1963
- ✓ JFK, MLK, RFK Assassinations – 1963, 1968
- ✓ Civil Rights Act of 1964
- ✓ Vietnam – 1965 - 1975

Popular Technology:

- ✓ Television

Generation X (33-48)

Seminal Events:

- ✓ Summer of Love – 1967
- ✓ RFK assassinated 1968
- ✓ MLK assassinated – 1968
- ✓ Moon landing – 1969
- ✓ Oil crisis – 1973
- ✓ Watergate – 1973
- ✓ Massive corporate layoffs – 1979
- ✓ AIDS identified - 1981

Popular Technology:

- ✓ PC

Generation Y (13-32)

Seminal Events:

- ✓ Chernobyl and Challenger disasters – 1986
- ✓ Stock market crash (Black Monday) - 1987
- ✓ Berlin Wall falls – 1989; Cold War ends – 1991
- ✓ Columbine – 1999
- ✓ 9-11 - 2001
- ✓ Enron, Worldcom corporate scandals – 2002
- ✓ Facebook – 2004
- ✓ Twitter - 2006

Popular Technology:

- ✓ The Internet

“People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents.”

- Arab proverb

Stereotypical Traditional

- Privacy - Don't expect members of this generation to share their inner thoughts.
- Hard Work - They believe in paying their dues and are irritated when others are wasting their time. They often feel that their career identifies who they are.
- Trust - A traditionalist's word is his/her bond.
- Formality: This generation values formal dress and organizational structures.

Stereotypical Traditional

- Authority: Traditionalists have a great deal of respect for authority.
- Social Order: Other generations may view this desire for social order and placement as bias, prejudice or even racism or sexism.
- Things: This group loves their stuff and they won't get rid of it. Some would argue that they remember the depression days and keep a "you never know when you might need it" mentality

Stereotypical Boomer

- Baby Boomers did not go through economic hard times as their parents did. They had the good life and their parents, the Traditionalists, wanted them to have the best and as a result, the "Me" decade arrived.
- Competition: Boomers value peer competition.
- Change: Boomers thrive on possibilities and constant change.
- Hard Work: Boomers started the "workaholic" trend. Where Traditionalists see hard work as the right thing to do, Boomers see it as a way to get to the next level of success.

Stereotypical Boomer

- Success: Boomers are committed to climbing the ladder of success.
- Teamwork: This group embraces a team based approach to business. They do not depend on the command and control style of the Traditionalist.
- Anti Rules and Regulations: They were the "Hippies." They don't need to conform to the rules and they will challenge the system.
- Inclusion: This generation will accept people who will perform to their standards.
- Fight for a Cause: While they don't seek out problems, if you give them a cause they will fight for it.

Stereotypical Generation Xer

- ✓ Generation Xers are economically conservative. They remember double-digit inflation and the stress faced by their parents.
- ✓ Entrepreneurship: Xers believe in investing in their own development rather than in their organization's. They are cautious about investing in relationships with employers because experience has shown that these relationships are not reliable.
- ✓ Loyalty: To an Xer, loyalty may mean two-weeks notice.
- ✓ Independence: Xers have clear goals and prefer managing their own time and solving their own problems rather by a supervisor.

Stereotypical Generation Xer

- ✓ Information: They want access to information and love plenty of it.
- ✓ Feedback: This group needs lots of feedback and they use feedback to adapt to new situations.
- ✓ Quality of Work-Life: This generation will work hard, but they would rather find quicker more efficient ways of working so they can have more free time. They will work hard to move up the ladder, to have more personal time for themselves and family.
- ✓ Communication: Xers like quick "sound bites." Email is preferred over long meetings and letters.

Stereotypical Generation Yer

- ✓ Generation Y represents people who grew up during the high-tech revolution. A world with high-tech video games, ATMs and high-speed access is what their generation is used to. Providing frequent and systematic feedback in real time (as it happens) is critical when working with members of this generation.
- ✓ Positive Reinforcement: This "cyber generation" values positive reinforcement at accelerated rates.
- ✓ Autonomy: They want more input into how they are doing and want to work with a good deal of independence.

Stereotypical Generation Yer

- ✓ Positive Attitudes: Growing up during peace times, they have a very optimistic outlook on life in general.
- ✓ Diversity: Through community and media coverage this group has grown up with more diversity than their predecessors.
- ✓ Money: Generation Y is used to making and spending money.
- ✓ Technology: Technology is their valued tool for multi-tasking.
- ✓ Action: Generation Y likes action, accepts challenges and looks for the challenge of opportunity.

*Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees
Young and Old Can Find Common Ground*
Jennifer Deal, Center for Creative Leadership, 2007

- ✓ Fundamentally people want the same things, no matter what generation they are from.
- ✓ Individuals of all generations differ much more from each other than any generation does from the others. That is, there are more differences within each generation than there are between generations.

Generational Differences Are Real

- ✓ Communication styles and expectations
- ✓ Work styles
- ✓ Attitudes about work and life
- ✓ Comfort with technology
- ✓ Views regarding loyalty and authority
- ✓ Acceptance of change

**Four Biggest Reasons for
Generational Conflict in Teams**

1. Choosing where and when to work
2. Communicating among team members
3. Getting together
4. Finding information or learning new things

**Benefits of the
Multigenerational Team**

1. The team can attract and retain talented people of all ages
2. The team is more flexible
3. Decisions are stronger because they are broad-based with multiple perspectives
4. The team is more innovative and creative
5. The team can meet the needs of a diverse public and can relate more effectively

Source: *Leading a Multigenerational Workforce*. AARP, 2007

What to Do?

According to a poll by Lightspeed Research-The Foresight Group (www.foresightint.com) 98% of respondents believe generational differences impact their organizations, yet only 10% have a strategy or program in place for meeting the specific needs of each generation.

A strong focus on generational differences over the past few years may have lead companies to believe that addressing the distinct sets of values, attitudes and behaviors of four generations is an insurmountable task with no real solution.

Where to Start: Some Strategies

- ✓ This issue needs to be engaged at the top levels of the organization
- ✓ Understand the composition of your existing team as well as future staffing needs
- ✓ Initiate conversations to raise awareness about generations differences and similarities; look for common ground
- ✓ Train (retrain) the supervisory and management team to treat and respect employees as individuals

Strategies

- ✓ Minimize the “generational framework” (generalizations and stereotypes) used to view other people and situations
- ✓ Deal with changing work/life expectations
- ✓ Concentrate on increasing awareness and understanding of employees to the needs and desires of their co-workers

Strategies

- ✓ Deal with changing work/life balance needs and expectations by creating more flexible work arrangements
- ✓ Develop new measures of accountability and productivity
- ✓ Reevaluate your rewards and recognition systems
- ✓ Create flexible staff development and training options
- ✓ Establish cross-generational mentoring programs

Communication Tips

- ✓ Build awareness that the four generations bring different ideas, challenges, and opportunities to the workplace
- ✓ Speak and communicate in ways that motivate each generation
- ✓ Remember that people of all generations want respect, they just define it differently
- ✓ People in positions of authority want their decisions to be respected
- ✓ Older people want their experience and wisdom to be respected and deferred to
- ✓ Younger people would like their fresh ideas and suggestions to be respected
- ✓ Questions do not necessarily demonstrate disrespect

Work-Life Balance Tips

1. Rethink what work is and where it is done
2. Define and offer more flexible work arrangements
3. Determine which jobs can have flexible arrangements (See www.telework.gov for guidance on how the federal government sets up and manages its telework program)
4. Develop new measures of accountability and productivity

Growth and Development Tips

1. Engage younger employees in meaningful projects that validate their desire to be involved in important work
2. Reexamine workplace policies to embrace social networking
3. Establish cross-generational mentoring programs (Note that Gen Yers often need soft skill mentoring in appropriate ways to dress, speak, and write in the professional world)
4. Provide various options for training and learning

Tips for Providing Recognition and Rewards

1. Reevaluate your rewards and recognition system
2. Offer a menu of rewards and recognition
3. Ask employees what is of value to them
4. Offer on-the-spot rewards
5. Make recognizing employees an important part of every manager's job and include this as part of their performance review

Employee Engagement Tips

1. Work to retain engaged employees, don't just leave them alone to spend time with those who are disengaged
2. Transform average employees into engaged employees
3. Focus on the disengaged last. Managers need to be trained and supported to effectively terminate the disengaged

The Bottom Line: Meaningful Work

- ✓ For all generations, one thing is clear: they want to contribute and be a part of an organization they are proud of
- ✓ Each of the generations wants to do something that matters
- ✓ Everyone wants recognition for their work
- ✓ Everyone wants to feel like they are in on things

Gallup Q12™

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I require to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my progress?

Gallup Q12™

- 7. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
- 8. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- 9. Does the mission or purpose of my organization make me feel as if my job is important?
- 10. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
- 11. Do I have a best friend at work?
- 12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Source: Marcus Buckingham, VP Gallup Organization, London. Management Today, April 1998 (p112).

A Related Problem: Attracting Young People to Public Service

- ✓ Stop bashing government
- ✓ Insist on civility
- ✓ Promote the rewards of service
- ✓ Reach out to students
- ✓ Introduce teens to public affairs and service

Source: Frank Benest, City Manager, Palo Alto, California.
Help Wanted: What Can Elected Officials Do to Attract Young People to Public Service?
<http://www.frankbenest.com/help-wanted.pdf>

Resources

Leading a Multigenerational Workforce.
 AARP, 2007
http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org_/articles/money/employers/leading_multigenerational_workforce.pdf

Generational Change Task Force Report
 Government Finance Officers Association, 2010
<http://www.gfoa.org>

Supervision of Intergenerational Dynamics
 University of Iowa School of Social Work
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~nrctcp/training/documents>

Generations in the Workplace - Metlife
<http://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/mmi/publications/studies/mmi-workbook-generations-workplace.pdf>

Resources

Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace. Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak. AMACOM, 1999

Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young & Old Can Find Common Ground. Jennifer J. Deal. Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Engaging a Multi-Generational Workforce: Practical Advice for Government Managers. Susan Hannam and Bonni Yordi. IBM Center for The Business of Government.
<http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/engaging-multi-generational-workforce-practical-advice-government-managers>

Demographic Change and Local Government: Workforce Issues. Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington.
<http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/governance/demography/demogwork.aspx>
