

The Multigenerational Workplace

*Communicate, Collaborate
and Create Community*

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Progressive, Globally Minded and Open to Diverse Views

This generation has been exposed to more rapid social change and a changing demographic in the nation. They are accepting of others who are not like them, shrugging off differences that caused riots in earlier generations. With the globalised economy and instant communications that connect people around the world, they view the world in the same way that Boomers once may have viewed the country – a bit large, but easily navigable.

Able to Multitask

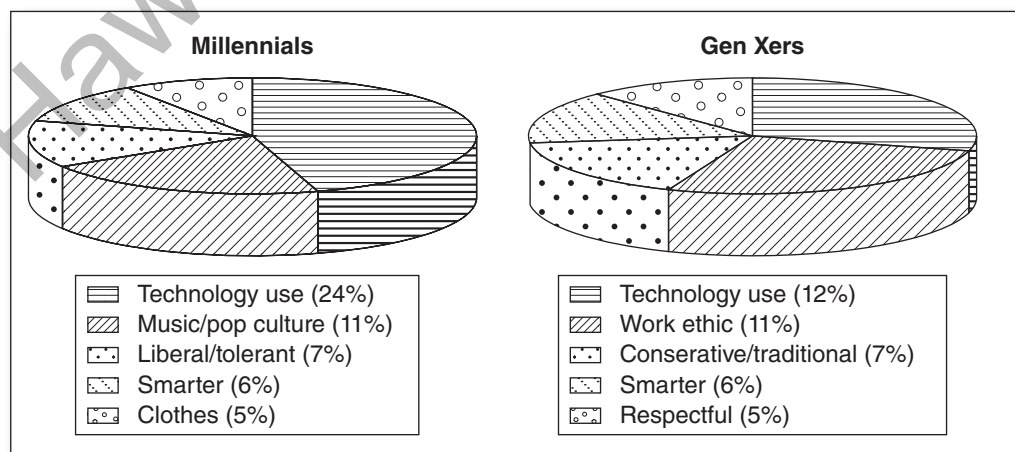
No matter what more recent research has to say about human capacity to multitask, this generation believes it can. They grew up watching television, doing homework and talking to friends at the same time. They believe they can continue their own education, hold down a job and have a social life – all at the same time. They are completely at home with technology and able to adapt to the latest innovations intuitively, without an instruction manual. Technology is a background element of whatever task is at hand. They stream their music while chatting on Facebook as they answer texts on their mobile while writing a lesson plan based on tweets that lead them to others' ideas on the Internet.

Less Prepared Than Other Generations to Handle Difficult Situations

Used to structure and authorities giving them instructions of what to do, people in this generation may be challenged by new tasks that require independence, resilience and resourcefulness. Many in this generation have not been allowed to fail before, and the possibility is frightening.

What makes your generation unique?

Here's what the generations believe sets them apart.



Gen Xers

Blunt, direct

For a generational group that introduced reality to TV, the concept of behind closed doors isn't the norm. Gen Xers yearn for transparent language. What do you want? What must I do? Because Xers are more direct, their tone may be misinterpreted. Xers may at times come across as dismissive and curt. Although they see themselves as getting down to business, others might see them as lacking interest in the big picture. They could be seen as undervaluing broader discussions around purpose and focusing only on immediacy and practicality. The "just tell me what to do" group really does challenge the other generations in communicating.

Millennials

Easy, clear, open, constant

Millennials want instant communication, short and sweet, clear and focused. They are the generation that moved from emails to 140-character tweets, from face-to-face to Facebook posts, from telephones to texts. They may be tongue-tied when confronted by in-person conversation as their social skills have revolved around communication through technology.

They need simple, authentic and helpful interaction: Here is what we are doing. This is when we are doing it. You need to bring these items. Looking forward to seeing you! If you have questions, contact me in any of these three ways. Millennials prefer more just-in-time communications that still respect them, support their work, and help them grow.

RESPONSE TO POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Traditionalists

Rule followers

Traditionalists play by the rules, save their sick days so they can accumulate the days toward retirement. They understand the reasons not to call in sick and have a sub on a Monday or a Friday, know what RSVP stands for and what they're supposed to do and will fill out the paperwork for whatever the assignment would be. This generation has a genuine respect for protocols and a regard for policy.

Boomers

They wrote the book

As the older Boomers now form many of the old guard in the organisation, they are the authors of policies and procedures, protocols, programs, strategic plans, forms, lists and proposals. Boomers have shaped the structures and systems that make the schools run. They understand the state's timelines, the rationale for annual reviews, the way to write a state or federal report – from firsthand experience. They may not agree with the policy, but they will fill out the paperwork.

ACTIVITY 4

Relational Trust Across Generations: An Innovation Configuration Map

Objective: To understand what skills are needed to develop stronger intergenerational understanding in the workplace.

Time: Ongoing self-assessment.

Materials: A copy of the map.

Directions: Circle the description that best matches you in each row. In the row labeled *evidence*, note how you demonstrate that level. In the row labeled *reflection*, consider how you might improve your capabilities to move to the next level or to continue to hone your skills. In the row labeled *impact*, describe how you think your level of skills affects your work with colleagues. Revisit the map periodically to monitor your own progress.

	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
	Able to define characteristics of various generations.	Has a general knowledge of some characteristics of different generations.	Recognises that different generations are working together.	Has not thought about the relationship of different generations at work.
	Recognises and honours coworkers' generational differences.	Is able to identify some characteristics of at least one coworker that may be related to the coworker's generation.	Understands that different generations are going to act differently, but may have stereotypical ideas.	Has not considered how generational influences affect people's attitudes and actions.
	Adapts communication style to meet different generational needs.	Is aware that different generations have different communication preferences (beyond technological) and sometimes targets communication to others' styles.	Is aware of generationally-different communication styles (beyond technological) and occasionally attempts to vary communication.	Limits understanding of communication style differences between generations to technological differences (face-to-face versus texting) and does not adjust to meet others' styles.
	Differentiates professional learning to meet generational needs.	Understands that different generations have preferences regarding their professional learning.	Modifies professional learning strategies without generational awareness.	Offers professional development the same way it has always been done.

(Continued)

- If we cannot resolve a conflict ourselves, we will schedule time to meet with our manager or another appropriate third party to help us work through our issues.
- We are willing to forgive one another when our imperfect communication results in misunderstandings and/or hurt feelings.
- We will hold one another accountable for the above principles and guidelines.

Source: Martin and Tulgan (2006, p. 132).

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

The generation gap, according to Deal (2007, p. 1) is “in large part the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding, fueled by common insecurities and the desire for clout – which includes control, power, authority, and position.”

From greeting someone at the staff mailboxes in the main office while on the way to our classrooms to our daily lunch routines, to our after school collaboration and staff meetings, day-to-day adult-to-adult communications in schools are moments when we build trust and make connections.

One Millennial found out the hard way about generational differences in communication. A Boomer boss worked closely in a small office with just a handful of others, all of whom were younger than she was. Although her office was the last door on the hallway, she kept her door open and encouraged the staff to greet her when they arrived in the morning and let her know as they left for the day (she kept typical Boomer work hours). The unspoken norm became an issue with one Millennial who did not catch on that everyone in the office was essentially “punching the clock” with the department head. The young woman went right to her desk in the morning without turning left to poke her head in on her boss. To the young woman, it was out of the way and out of her mind to travel down the hall to say good morning. At the end of the day, she was focused on getting home.

The Boomer, irritated, told the young woman, “My door is always open. Stop by.” She made a joke about it a time or two. The Millennial missed the subtle directive. In a few months when her probation period ended, she found herself out of a job.

Tony Bryk and Barbara Schneider study the role of social relationships in schools and conclude that a base of trust in school heightens functioning and lets staff work at a higher level, achieving more ambitious goals (Gordon, 2002). They say that schools with higher levels of relational trust help raise student achievement because staff members are more able to make the kinds of changes that help students.

How deep should the final pool be? Fernandez-Araoz, Groysberg, and Nohria (2009) say the ideal is 10 to 12 carefully generated candidates.

A principal had just interviewed a student teacher and decided he was not going to give her the job. He struggled with how to give her feedback. He was perplexed as to why the student's master teacher hadn't helped her realise that she should have had a formal lesson plan for her model lesson and that she shouldn't have worn thongs. He struggled with how to help her understand the impression she had left. Did he really have to tell her that there is an implicit dress code during model lessons? Did he really have to specify that she turn in a written plan?

Hire

The ideal interview group not only is motivated, but also has training. Some research has shown that even hiring at random may be better than hiring a person recommended by poor interviewers. Some young Millennials now are in supervisory positions and may never have interviewed candidates before. Interviewing is a skill set that should be learned – and taught. Fernandez-Araoz, Groysberg, and Nohria (2009) say that relying on “gut feel” that a candidate has what it takes is too subjective and results in poor choices. The authors say such personal preference and traditions in hiring should be avoided.

They recommend that the interview committee include the position's supervisor, that person's supervisor, and a human resources administrator. They suggest providing simulated situations and asking prospects for details of how they would respond and their reasoning.

“Given the ad hoc quality, lack of specified criteria and inconsistency of practices among the companies we studied, it's no wonder that usually about a third of promising new hires depart within three years of being recruited,” they write.

Another element that may be adding to earlier departures is that interview committees may not interview on site. Candidates have been hired without meeting the colleagues they'll be teaching with, sometimes without spending any time with their potential department chair or learning team leader. Making sure that the candidate will fit in with the team is essential with the need today to work more collaboratively. Although the logistics may be challenging, the interview committee should ensure that final candidates and the team take a little time to interact before a final decision is made.

One small suburban region was faced with several primary schools needing a new principal in the following year. There was a lot of hand-wringing since the region had only two secondary schools with one assistant principal each. One teacher leader that the region administrators had cultivated was thinking more about retirement than a promotion, and another had recently left the region for

Differentiating Professional Learning for the Generations **6**

Three teachers take a seat in the mandatory professional development induction for new teachers. Ron just graduated and is earning his Master of Education as he begins his teaching career. Malaya graduated university and then spent several years in the Australian Civilian Corps and two years with Teach for Australia; she has no additional formal teacher preparation classes. Frieda left her career as a social worker after 15 years and received an alternative certification to teach.

These new teachers arrive with vastly different preparation. Their lens on their own learning is affected by those experiences and also by their ages – a young Millennial, an older Millennial and a Gen Xer. For those preparing teacher professional learning, meeting teachers' needs is as challenging as teachers working to meet student needs – each needs a little something different.

What expectations do different generations have for what and how they learn? What are the differences in their learning styles? What supports do Millennials and Xers need that Boomers don't? How do you make information relevant to them?

THE HOW

When it comes to adult learning, the generations have some things in common. Most teachers, no matter what their generation, want to collaborate – share ideas and talk about their practice (Coggsall et al., 2010). According to Coggsall et al., most also agree that their opportunities to collaborate vary, and half of those surveyed are not satisfied with the opportunities they have.