# Getting Started: Generations
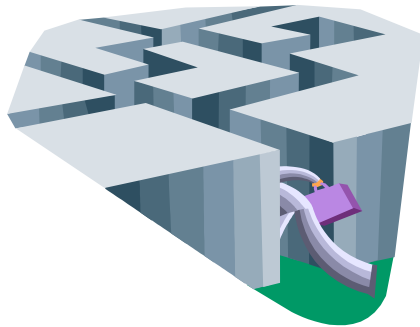
Welcome to the Generation Gaps workshop. The workplace can present challenges to management in terms of handling the different generations present. As older workers delay retiring and younger workers are entering the workforce, the work environment has become a patchwork of varying perspectives and experiences, all valuable to say the least.

While having various cultures in one workplace can present communication problems and conflicts, the benefits of such a variety in the workplace outweigh it. Both the young and older worker has many ideas to offer, which can help the organization thrive in the marketplace. Learning how to deal with the generation gap at work will help you become a better manager or co-worker.

This workshop will help you understand the various generations present at work and understand what motivates them and how to deal with them on a daily basis. Before we start learning about the generation gap at work, let us begin our session with an activity that will help us get ready for learning and learn more about each other.

Module Objectives

Research has consistently demonstrated that when clear goals are associated with learning, it occurs more easily and rapidly. With that in mind, let's review our goals for today.
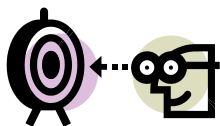
At the end of this workshop, participants should be able to:

- History behind generation gaps

- What are traditionalists

- What are baby boomers

- What are Generation Xers

- What are Generation Millennials

- Who are the next generation?

- Differences between each type of generation

Pre-Assignment

The purpose of the Pre-Assignment is to get you thinking about the Generation Gap strategies you are already using and where you need to improve

Topic	COMMENTS
What generations exist at work	
What is a traditionalist	
What is a baby boomer	
What is a Generation Xer	
What is a Generation Yer	

Topic	My Interest	My Organization's Interest	Notes (give some insight to your answers)
Understanding differences			
Communicating across gaps			
Avoiding turnover			
Breaking stereotypes			
Conflict management			
Creating a succession plan			
Benefits of generation gaps			
Learning from each other			
Managing older workers			

Generations: History

The term generation gap is a term used to describe the different values and attitudes between one generation and another. This term is typically used to describe the gap between parents and their children.

Since the 1960's, the term generation gap has also been used to describe the clash one age group has with another in various settings. The workplace is such an environment where different generations must intermingle and deal with each other's way of thinking.

This module will discuss the following topics as it relates to the generation gap in the workplace:

- What generations exist in the workplace

- What defines a generation

- What this means in our workplace

Let us begin by understanding what generations exist in the workplace.

What Generations Exist in the Workplace

Today's workplace presents many challenges that are based solely on meeting goals, business objectives, and project deadlines. Threaded throughout the normal business activities are dynamics that could present issues and conflicts if left unchecked.

Since many older workers remain on the job longer and younger workers are entering the workplace right out of college, the work environment is fragmented into various generations. In order to understand this eclectic environment, it is necessary to understand what generations are present in today's workplace.

Because humans live on average 77 to 80 years, four potential generations may exist in the workplace today.

The four generations that could be present are the following:

- Traditionalist

- Baby Boomers

- Generation X

- Generation Millennials

- Generation Z

Understanding the background, attitudes, and work styles of each generation is essential for a manager or supervisor. If they want to effectively coach and communicate then understanding these differences is paramount in creating a respectful and peaceful work environment for all employees.

This workshop will help you learn the characteristics of each of the four generations and how to deal with their uniqueness.

Before we get into the details of each of the four generations, we are going to learn what defines a generation.

What Defines a Generation

A generation is a group of people born during the same period and shares the same attitudes and values. The period is the factor to dividing the generations into groups. The four generations mentioned in the previous section have time ranges that define their period.

For example, the Traditionalist Generation represents people in a generation born before 1946. The Baby Boomers are people born between 1946 and 1961. Generation X represents people born between 1962 and 1980 and Generation Y represents people born in the 1980s and 1990s.

In each period are experiences that shaped the attitudes and values of each generation. In addition, the interaction between generations is also a factor in shaping the subsequent generation. For example, Generation X sought to be different by the larger more influential Baby Boomers. This thinking affects their behaviors and preferences.

What this Means in our Workplace

When groups have the same values and attitudes, communication and other dynamics typically go smoother. When there are multiple groups and each group brings their own style, values, and attitudes, this could create tension and other issues if not paying attention.

Multiple generations in the workplace presents challenges in many areas. Let us review two perspectives that must be managed.

First, the employee-to-employee perspective is critical; it shows how different generations interacting with each other may lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding. Furthermore, the way each generation handles confrontation may also be a point of friction.

The generation gap between employees could be seen more in the modes of communication, the words, and gestures used.

The manager-to-employee perspective is another sensitive area. Generation gaps in this situation could be difficult if the relationship starts on the wrong foot. For the manager, knowing that there are differences in the way generations communicate, view authority, life-work balance, and relationships is just the beginning.

The manager must also plan how to address these issues proactively, avoiding difficult or tense situations. Having difficult situations at work could lead to poor morale and productivity, which will reflect on the manager's performance.

Generation gaps at work means more work is needed to cultivate an environment that respects each generation's perspective and way of life. This also means the manager has to be observant and knowledgeable of the various traits associated with each generation.

Over the next three modules, we are going to learn about each of the four generations in detail. We will begin with Traditionalist first.

Traditionalist

This generation is probably the oldest generation you may encounter at work. The members of this generation were born before 1946.

Their Background

Being born before 1946 is what classifies a Traditionalist. Their background touched on dealing with some incredible social issues. For example, a traditionalist may have experienced the Great depression, World War I and World War II. The military influenced their way of life since war was a great part of their cultural event and many served during this era.

The traditionalists were brought up during "tough times" where scarcity of resources was caused by economic troubles and war. Since the country was in a military and social program mode, individuality was not celebrated. The culture saw a uniform thought pattern, which was brought on by rallying against a visible foe.

Traditional values in terms of family structure and gender roles influenced the workplace during this generation. Men mostly dominated the workplace. In essence, the traditionalist had to work hard and see that as the way to live life.

Their Characters

Traditionalists are considered hardworking because they grew up during a time when jobs were not abundant. They are willing to put in long hours and believe that hard work is the way you earn a better position in the company.

Traditionalists are loyal to their employers and tend not to move from employer to employer. They stay where they are if possible. Furthermore, traditionalists are submissive because they were taught to respect authority.

Traditionalists will avoid causing trouble and are good team players. They are the least likely to initiate conflict at work. There is also a tendency to resist change. They value safety, security, consistency, and commitment.

Their Working Style

Today, traditionalists comprise of about five percent of the working population. Most traditionalists are retired. Nonetheless, Traditionalists bring a strong work ethic to the job place. They are dedicated to their employers and value leadership and hierarchy.

Characteristics:

- Traditionalists like to be recognized for their hard work.

- Traditionalists also see work as a team effort and avoid conflict.

- This group is also technically challenged and they may struggle to learn new technology.

- They also prefer lecture style training over web-based.

Since traditionalists are near retirement, their zeal for working their way to the top may be less than the other generations. They tend to be satisfied with their life situation and do not see advancement or achievement as important as the younger generations.

Motivating a traditional employee may be a challenge because of their tenure at work and lack of desire to prove something. They will usually conform and strive to keep the status quo.

Baby Boomers

This generation has members that were born between 1946 and 1964.

Their Background

Baby Boomers were the product of post war efforts to absorb soldiers returning home from battle. The government passed the GI Bill of Rights in 1944, which gave soldiers a means to obtain a home, job and start a family.

The result was a boom in childbirths, which is where the title Baby Boomer is derived. Baby Boomers grew up in an era of prosperity and growth in the United States. Baby Boomers grew up mostly in suburbs and experienced a similar experience in education and upbringing.

Baby Boomers grew up in the year of innocence during the 1950s and seen model lives portrayed on television. Television was a large component of the Baby Boomers' upbringing. As mothers began working outside of the home, Baby Boomers grew up more and more with television.

As the Baby Boomers moved through the 1960s, their generation was becoming more defined. The 1960s brought about social changes like Civil Rights, a different kind of war in Vietnam, and rebellion against established institutions like the Hippy Revolution.

The Baby Boomer generation represents a departure from the traditional and movement towards changes in society, beliefs, and attitudes.

Their Characters

Baby Boomers are known to be confident and independent. They were exposed to a changing world where challenging the established culture was normal. Baby Boomers are willing to confront others and they will challenge the status quo.

Baby Boomers are well educated and are exposed to more financial resources than the past generation. Baby boomers are hard -working and they define themselves by their careers and professions. Baby Boomers are disciplined and they mirror some of their parents' work ethics.

Since Baby Boomers know they make up most of the working population, they tend to have more of their generation connect with work, making it more difficult for non-Baby Boomers to affect the organization.

On the other hand, Baby Boomers support change and will advocate for it if they see it being a benefit.

Their Working Style

Baby Boomers are work-centric. They are hard-working and they are motivated by incentives. Baby Boomers tend to work long workweeks. They tend to be workaholics and think that everyone should do the same in order to advance in their careers.

Characteristics:

- Baby Boomers are career focused and enjoy achieving at work.

- They like doing complicated work that makes a difference.

- Baby Boomers are very competitive and they equate their worth by their status and position at work.

- Baby Boomers are resourceful and look for different ways to win.

- Baby Boomers do prefer a hierarchal work structure and may find it difficult to work in a flexible environment.

- Finally, Baby Boomers tend to favor face-to-face interaction instead of remote means like emails, text, etc.

Generation X

This segment of the culture was born between the mid-1960s and the mid to late 1970s.

Their Background

Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980. They are the generation right after the decline of the baby boom of the post war era. Generation Xers live during a time when the country shifted from manufacturing to servicing.

This generation grew up with technology as a part of their lives. They experienced computers, video games, cell phones, email, etc. They have seen the evolution of technology and understand its origins.

Generation Xers also experienced difficult times in the 1980s and learned to live in tough times. Finally, Generation Xers were raised in two-income homes or single-parent homes. These situations forced many Generation Xers to be placed in day care.

Their background allowed them to develop new characteristics that went against the Baby Boomers.

Their Characters

Generation Xers are individualistic people and independent. They are self-sufficient and flexible. This character trait enables them to changes jobs more frequently than the previous generations. They usually see this as a way of moving up the corporate latter.

This generation is more ethnically diverse and is better educated over their previous generation. More than half of Generation Xers attended college.

Generation Xers also believe in more balance between their work and home life than the previous generation. They rather focus on family than work and value jobs that allow flexibility in their schedules to meet the demands of their family.

Generation Xers are more willing to try new things because of their technical experience and they welcome new technology into their lives easily and adapt to them quickly. Generation Xers are also tolerant of other lifestyles and accept this as part of the change in their environment.

Generation X's perspective allows them to foster a more accepting environment at work.

Their Working Style

Generation Xers enjoy freedom at work. They crave responsibility and politely reject authority and fixed work schedules. This generation does not do well in a micro-managed environment. They will thrive in a workplace where management allows them to complete their tasks without too much supervision.

Generation Xers will be the first ones to take advantage of technology and incorporate it into their work. They see technology as a tool and a way to do things more efficiently.

Generation Xers will look for other employment opportunities if it promises advancement of their career. They are less committed to their employers than the Baby Boomers. On the other hand, Generation Xers adapt well to change in their workplace and are key drivers of change.

Finally, this generation believes in a healthy balance between work and their personal life. They also like to have fun at work and believes in a work and play hard ideal. Generation Xers like a dynamic work environment that challenges them yet support their need for fun and balance between work and home life.

Generation Y: Millennials

This group was born between 1979 and 1994

Their Background

Generation Y's are those born from the mid to late 1970's through the 1990's. The earliest part of this generation is just entering the workplace. The Generation Y group had technology as a normal part of live and do not know what it is to be without a computer, cell phone or any other electronic device the older generation had to adapt into their lives.

This generation can thrive on electronic communication and prefer that than face-to-face conversation. Generation Y prefers using the Internet as a means of learning and making purchases. They are exposed to vast amounts of information, music, and media than the older generations.

This generation was exposed to more group interactions through playgroups, team sports and other group activities than the previous generation. This was due in part to their parents' higher education and success.

Finally, this generation is used to getting what they want when they want it. The speed of technology and information coupled with rapid delivery systems has made this generation expect things to be done faster and better.

Their Characters

Generation Y is prone to communicating via electronic devices and is capable of multi-tasking while carrying a text messaging conversation. This generation relies on technology to do their jobs and expect to have the resources available when they are at work.

Generation Y is family-centric and value family over work. This generation looks for flexible schedules at work and a balance between work and life. They are willing to take less pay for this benefit.

This generation is achievement-oriented and is confident. Generation Y will question authority without fear and challenge ideas and motives. Generation Y enjoys meaningful work and are ready to keep on learning new ideas and things.

Generation Y works well in a team environment. They seek positive reinforcement from others and believe no one should be left behind. They rather slow the process down in order to give a teammate the opportunity to catch up.

Finally, the Generation Y group appreciates feedback and being kept updated on the latest developments. They do require periodic recognition and praise for their work.

Their Working Style

Generation Y's working style is vastly different from those of the previous generation. This generation is motivated by benefits that give them the ability to have flexible schedules. They are less motivated monetarily.

They are not happy with long working hours and this may send the message that they do not care about work or are lacking discipline. Family is first for Generation Y and they will push back on work that crosses this boundary.

This generation does expect a lot from their employer in terms of new challenges and the opportunity to achieve things. Generation Y does see promotions and climbing the corporate ladder as a way to demonstrate their worth.

Generation Y is loyal to their employer and seeks to be included in important activities at work. They will call attention to themselves by suggesting bold ideas and challenging the status quo. However, they do become concerned with what others think about them and need affirmation every so often.

Since this generation is relatively young in the workplace, there is a need for mentoring. They see this as normal and expect it from their leaders. The like guidance and development when it comes to their careers.

Generation Z: Who are they

This group was born after 1995.

Their Background

Generation Z are those born from the mid 1990's through the 2000's although is not yet a consensus of the ending birth date

A significant aspect of this generation is the widespread usage of the Internet from a young age; members of Generation Z are typically thought of as being comfortable with technology, and interacting on social media websites for a significant portion of their socializing. Some have suggested that growing up through the Great Recession has given the cohort a feeling of unsettlement and insecurity.

Their Characters

The Generation Z, while happy, they are not giddy like so many Generation Y kids were in the 90s. They tend to be more realistic not idealistic, seemingly jaded from the tough economy, terrorism and complexities of life.

They are more private than the millennials. While they are using social media, they don't want to be tracked

Like Millennials, this generation plan to be pioneers, not merely settlers in a career. 72% of current high school students want to start a business. They feel like hackers, not slackers. Since they're more jaded, they know life is hard and requires work.

Their Working Style.

By almost every measurement so far, Gen Z will take multi-tasking to a new level. They prefer to be on 5 screens at once, not 2 screens like Millennials. Get ready to communicate to them while they look around, not into your eyes. This generation can't imagine not being connected all the time. There is much still to be learned about this generation's working style.