Speaking Their Language: Boomers, Xers, & Millennials

Multiple Generations in the Workplace

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Agenda

- Introduction to session and topic
- Definitions of the generations
- Identifying the issues
- Understanding generational differences
- Strategies for managing different generations in the workplace & suggestions for NAFSA members
- Q&A

A 2004 survey of nonprofit organizations found that 65% of respondents expected to go through a leadership transition by 2009. Fifty-five percent of current executive directors surveyed were 50 years or older.

From: Up Next: Generational Change and the Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations
Baby Boomers represent 60% of the workforce aged 25 – 54, and every 7 seconds another one turns 50.

From http://www.bls.gov/emp

Introduction

- Generalizations vs. Stereotypes
- Scope and Breadth of Studies
- Age vs. Era
- Self-Identification
- Conflict as Opportunity for Learning

"Think they'd panic if we stopped to help?"
How can we define “Generation”? 

- Members linked through shared life experiences of formative years 
- Each cohort has its own: “generational personality” 
- Attitudes, values, and work style shaped by: headlines of the times, politics, economics, people, places, conditions, and events 
- From shared experiences- similar values and life approaches 

Generational Groups* 

- “Traditionalists” 
  - 1900 - 1945, “radio age”, 75 million 
- “Baby Boomers” 
  - 1946-1964, “TV age”, 80 million 
- “Gen X” 
  - 1965-1980, “computer age”, 46 million 
- “Millenials” 

* Please note that generation names and dates vary depending on source used. 

Traditionalists 

- People: FDR, Joe DiMaggio, Joe McCarthy, the Rat Pack, Bob Hope, Elizabeth Taylor 
- Things: Learned to live within limited means and do without 
- Events: Two Worlds Wars, Roaring Twenties, Great Depression, New Deal, Korean War, GI Bill
Traditionalists

- Defining characteristic: Loyal
- Respect for authority and elders
- Repository of wisdom
- Hardworking: earned retirement as reward

Baby Boomers

- People: MLK, Jr., Nixon, JFK, Gloria Steinem, Janis Joplin, The Beatles, Beaver Cleaver, Rosa Parks, The Stones
- Things: increasing number of consumer products in marketplace, TV
- Places: Vietnam, Watergate Hotel, Kent State, Woodstock, sit-ins, the suburbs, divorce court, manned flight to moon

Baby Boomers

- Defining characteristic: Optimistic
- Booming post-war economy – anything is possible!
- Raised in time of unlimited opportunity, permissiveness, and progress
- Birth and immigration rates paralleled economic growth
- Educated idealists protested the status quo and ideals of parents
Baby Boomers

- Civil rights, empowerment, and diversity
- Admire those who take charge
- Problem solvers
- Life, work, team = interchangeable terms
- Value consensus building

Baby Boomers

- “Me” Generation
- Not very positive about establishing family
- Competitive: large peer group/fight for what they’ve achieved/60 hr. workweek
- Low level of trust towards authority

Generation Xers

- People: Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, O.J. Simpson, Madonna, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Dilbert, Nelson Mandela
- Places: former Soviet Union, Chernobyl, Persian Gulf War, Space Shuttle Challenger explosion; Ronald Reagan administration, Starbucks
- Things: media inventions – VCR, video game, fax machine, microwave, pager, cell phone, cable and satellite tv, PC; HIV/AIDS
Generation Xers

- Defining characteristic: Skeptical
- Many role models indicted/exposed
- Major US institutions called into question
- High divorce rate of parents
- Value flexibility and Life-Work Balance

Generation Xers

- “Latchkey” generation
- More faith in selves and less in established institutions
- Resourceful and independent/set own standards
- Adept and comfortable with change

Millennials

- People: Chelsea Clinton, Prince William, Tinky Winky, Britney Spears, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Sammy Sosa, Tiger Woods
- Places: chat rooms, My Space, Oklahoma City, cyberspace, 9/11, war in Iraq
Millennials
- Defining characteristic: Realistic
- Aware of personal threats (Columbine, illegal drugs, proliferation of gangs)
- Aware of flaws in athletes, president, school systems, and issues such as anorexia, global warming, rain forest destruction, recycling
- Establish bonds with relatives, family friends, and neighbors to find security in uncertain world
- Culturally diverse

Millennials
- Technologically sophisticated
- Use of technology = second nature
- Always had access to cell phones and computers; no memory of time before MTV
- Due to connectedness, barriers of time and space have different meaning for them

Millennials
- Family matters
- Strong parent/child bond
- Family member as top role model?
- Resurgence of value of family
- Involved in family matters
- Highly communicative, participation-oriented parents
Cuspers

- Might identify with more than one generation if birth year falls near beginning or end of a given range of years
- Some identify with two generations and have characteristics of both generations
- Example: Traditionalist/Baby Boomer – Perhaps have strong work ethic and are eager to challenge status quo
- Often act as “translator” or mediator for different generations

Preferred Work Environment

**Traditionalists**

- Military experience: prefer chain of command style of management
- Expectation of politeness and attention
- Value loyalty to organization
- Work within the system

**Baby Boomers**

- Boomers prefer a workplace that is more egalitarian, humane and democratic
- Personal growth
- Team orientation
- Rewards that include; money, titles and recognition
**Preferred Work Environment**

*Generation Xers*

- Xers prefer a fast-paced environment
- Functional with looser boundaries around leadership
- A more balanced personal-work perspective
- Flexible, informal

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**Preferred Work Environment**

*Millennials*

- Millennials prefer a collaborative, creative and positive work culture
- They are comfortable in a place with more supervision and structure
- They like to be rewarded for their achievements and technology savvy
- Prefer frequent feedback

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**Work Expectations**

*Baby Boomers*

- Boomers are more process oriented
- Personable
- Tend to like agreement and harmony
- They want to avoid conflicts when possible
Workplace Expectations

*Generation Xers*
- Xers are often frank and honest
- Evaluate ideas on merit, not on years of experience
- Welcome change as opportunity
- Like freedom to do it their way
- Admire competence but don’t work well under micromanagers
- Prefer to set up their own schedules and work terms

Workplace Expectations

*Millennials*
- Millennials can be positive and engaging
- Technology is a way of life for them
- They embrace new technological ideas and implement them easily
- They expect to earn a living in a place that is fair and where diversity is the norm

Work Ethic
- Boomers: “No one wants to pay their dues anymore”
- Xers: “It is just a job”
- Millennials: Very impatient and want everything done “here and now”
- Xers and Millennials known to be “questioning generations”
Work Training Style

**Baby Boomers**
- Boomers prefer a variety of formats
- Team building
- They like seminars and workshops

Work Training Style

**Generation Xers**
- Like to learn by doing
- Like opportunity to practice their skills
- Like Xers prefer computer-based learning
- Immediate feedback

Work Training Style

**Millennials**
- Open to learning anytime anywhere
- They like a clear orientation
- Cross-training
### Changing Work Ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditionalist</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by $ security</td>
<td>Motivated by like missions</td>
<td>Motivated by actions and accomplishments</td>
<td>Motivated by Internet discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifetimers</td>
<td>Work cycle is 7 to 10 years</td>
<td>Work cycle is 2 to 3 years</td>
<td>Work is ever changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology absent</td>
<td>Use technology for some work tasks</td>
<td>Use technology as a basic work tool for most tasks</td>
<td>Less than the best is cruelty</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Work is work</td>
<td>Work is a life mission</td>
<td>Work is a means to a life mission</td>
<td>Work is discovery or nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boss is the Boss regardless</td>
<td>The Boss is to weed out poor performers</td>
<td>The Boss is a coach and mentor</td>
<td>Who’s the Boss?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will put in needed hours according to the Boss</td>
<td>Will put in more than the needed hours for the cause</td>
<td>Will put in needed hours to complete the needed tasks</td>
<td>Time is not the issue</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Assumed “no news is good news”</td>
<td>Need occasional feedback</td>
<td>Need constant feedback</td>
<td>Immediate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy and work don’t mix</td>
<td>Want philosophical discussion</td>
<td>Reject most philosophical discussion unless it explains action steps</td>
<td>Discussion is for negotiation &amp; collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took action when directed to regardless of consequences</td>
<td>Slow to take action while considering consequences</td>
<td>Fast action regardless of consequences</td>
<td>Action is innovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generations Interview*

- What generation do you generally consider yourself to be a member of?
- What do you like about your generation?
- What do you wish other generations knew or understood about your generation?
- Do you feel all your work-related talents and skills are used on the job?
- What challenges do you face at work that may have to do with your generation?

*From “Diversity and Generations” by Claire Barnes

Working for the Common Good

- Decisions made from many perspectives will reflect the diverse needs of international education administrators
- Many talents may be recognize when individuals are working as a group
- Acknowledging and incorporating values, ideas and perspectives of each generation.

For the Common Good

- When differences are encouraged, creativity and productivity are increased
- Important to be sensitive to some of the generational differences that might be affecting daily relationships
Management Strategies

*Traditionalists*

- Value their experience by creating ways that they can mentor others
- Provide part-time jobs and job-sharing for those who want to continue to work (i.e., retirementjobs.com)
- Provide proactive technology support services if they are not techno-savvy
- Use due process and explain the reasoning behind decisions

Management Strategies

*Baby Boomers*

- Send the message that long hours at work are not necessarily a badge of honor
- Redesign their jobs to provide flexibility
- Spotlight personally fulfillment, meaningful work, intangibles
- Help them explore the next set of workplace options, and demonstrate how your organization can continue to use their talents

Management Strategies

*Generation X*

- Reward their initiative
- Provide flexible work environments (i.e., telecommuting, flex-time)
- Resist micromanaging them (and ask them what it means to be micromanaged!)
- Help them get the most out of every job position by discussing what the job can do for them and what they can learn from it
Management Strategies

*Millennials*

- Make groups and teams part of their jobs
- Personalize their work – one size does not fit all
- Make their work interactive, like their technology, and group oriented, like their social preference
- Communicate the civic side of your organization

Q & A

Resources:

- Inspired by powerpoint by Chris Fleek, North Dakota State University and Bonnie Robertson, Leadership Development
- *Generations at Work* by Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak
- *When Generations Collide: Who They Are, Why They Clash. How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work*, by Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman
- *Engaging the Generations*, by Devon Scheef and Diane Thielfoldt
Thank you for coming!