“Talkin’ Bout My Generation!”

Understanding Employees from Four Generations

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Learning Goals

• To understand what makes each age group different and how generational tendencies and behaviors have developed so we can appropriately motivate and manage our workforce.

• After some brief details of events, we will explore each generation’s profile, work, management, and communication preferences.
The Four Generations Currently in the Workplace

- **Traditionalists (Veterans, Builders)**
  – Born before 1943
- **Baby Boomers**
  – Born about 1943 to 1964
- **Gen X-ers (Baby Busters)**
  – Born about 1965 to 1980
- **Millennials (Y, Nexters, Gen Net, Echo)**
  – Born about 1981 to 2000
The Four Generations Currently in the Workplace

Traditionalists (Veterans, Builders)
• Movie Trivia
  – Traditionalists can easily match these “Rat Pack” actors with the following movies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank Sinatra</td>
<td><em>Rio Bravo</em>, 1959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sammy Davis, Jr.</td>
<td><em>Little Women</em>, 1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dean Martin</td>
<td><em>Valley of the Dolls</em>, 1967</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joey Bishop</td>
<td><em>Pal Joey</em>, 1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Lawford</td>
<td><em>77 Sunset Strip</em>, 1958</td>
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</tbody>
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Their Faces
Events That Shaped Them

- Shaped U.S. as we know it today
- FDR → Rendezvous with Destiny
- Built infrastructure of highways, bridges, dams, buildings
- Miracle vaccines
- Raised largest generation of babies
- Family values = this generation’s morality
- Children in 20’s and 30’s; witnessed Depression, lost jobs, SM Crash, “Hoovervilles,” Dust Bowl of 1933
- Mantra is “Do Without”
  - Put aside individual needs for collection good = amazing things
- Over 50% of men are/were Veterans; Woman in factories
- Tolerant, loyal and efficient generation who thrive on consistency & uniformity
  - This is an important part of their sociology
- Like things on a grand scale; car symbol of freedom
- In their hearts, they are conformers; like clearly defined roles
- Choices based on past data → future is product of history
- Dying off but influence in workplace will remain for decades
  - Top down approach only sane way to organize work & society
“Hooverville”

• Shanty “pop-up” villages that destitute families built during the depression, usually tents or structures made from wood scraps.
Traditionalists
7 Million People in the Workforce; 5% of Workers

• Profile
  – Outlook: Practical, Optimistic
    • Influenced by Great Depression
  – Work Ethic: Hard Working, Loyal
    • Empire State Building – grand, tall and built by the grit of the American people. “An honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.”
  – View of Authority: Respectful
  – Leadership: By Hierarchy
  – Relationships: Personal Sacrifice
  – Perspective: Civic
    • Highly influenced by two World Wars

Profile from “When Generations Collide” p. 19; Statistic from Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce, AARP, 2011
Traditionalists - Work Preferences

- Uncomfortable with, but adapted to, technology
- Grateful for their jobs; long tenure; created Union movement; worker obedience over individualism
- Satisfaction for a job well done vs. needing meaning in their jobs
- Duty before pleasure – success and rewards come quietly
- Like to work for big companies and government who represent security and stability
Traditionalists - Managing Them

- Traditionalists are…
  - Dependable
  - Loyal
  - Wise

  **However**

- They may…
  - Buck the authority of younger managers
  - Be overbearing because “there IS only one right answer” and “WE’VE never done it that way.”

  **To keep them**

- Managers should…..
  - Keep them **engaged and productive**
  - **Offer little perks** – handwritten notes or newsletter recognition
  - **Understand you can rely on them to adapt their behavior** which is not necessarily the same as following their hearts (e.g. business casual)
  - **Get to know them** and **earn their trust** – invite for a cup of coffee
  - **Respect their experiences** but don’t be intimidated by them
  - Know they will **appreciate (eventually) honest feedback**
Traditionalists - Communicating

• Traditionalists generally do not respond well to:
  – Profanity/Slang
  – Emotional language
  – Disorganization
  – Disrespect
  – Poor grammar

Adapted from Connecting Generations “Turnoffs” p. 58
The Four Generations Currently in the Workplace

← Baby Boomers
Baby Boomers

• TV Trivia

  – Baby Boomers can easily answer these questions:

  • Who can “turn the world on with her smile?”
  • Who is “moving on up to a deluxe apartment in the sky?”
  • Name the Brady kids.
  • Finish this lyric: ”Cheer up sleepy Jean, oh what can it mean…….”
Their Faces
Events That Shaped Them

• Reversal of a downward US population trend
  – One baby born every 17 minutes for 19 years!
  – Healthiest, most advantaged, cherished, doted on babies in US history
  – Sheer numbers make them influential in the workforce
• End of rural lifestyle in US; beginning of a new world hundreds of thousands had died to make possible
• TV made it possible to witness events that permanently changed and energized these kids → Kent State, Watergate, Vietnam, Space Race, Civil Rights and Women’s movements
  – Woman were no longer worked just in the home
• Spirit of optimism → motto “if you don’t like it, change it!” So many of them as children, had to work in teams and cooperate
  – COMPETITION → sheer numbers made it mandatory – they had to fight for their place!
• Boomers relentlessly pursue dreams
  – Sometimes to their detriment Business is their WAR; Competition is their enemy; Boardroom is their battlefield
• Eternally cool! Just ask one!
  – Anything possible for this forever young generation who were encouraged to pursue their dreams.
• Change management replaced chain-of-command style
  – More inclusive, diverse style, more humane, fairer, flatter organizations
Baby Boomers

60 Million People in the Workforce; 38% of workforce.

• Profile
  – Outlook: Optimistic
    • Boomers can change the world; they are forever young
  – Work Ethic: Driven
    • Can be anything you want to be
  – View of Authority: Love/Hate
    • Highly influenced by the war in Vietnam
  – Leadership: By Consensus
  – Relationships: Personal gratification
  – Perspective: Team

Profile from “When Generations Collide” p. 19; Statistic from Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce, AARP
Baby Boomers - Work Preferences

- Grandparents and parents instilled importance of work
- Winning the “war” of work defines them; “work ethic” and “worth ethic” synonymous
- May be anti-establishment but are not anti-hard work; invented fifty-sixty hours per work week
- Opportunity is the key to where Boomers work, not glitz, glamour or security
- Love learning and made an industry out of business books; view authors as heros
- Need for affiliation evident in team building, quality circles and participative management styles
- Will redefine goals if they can’t obtain them!
Baby Boomers - Managing Them

• Boomers are…
  – Driven, dedicated
  – Team oriented

  However

• They …
  – Will not suffer in silence if you are making their life hell AND
  – Will let everyone know about it!

  To keep them

• Managers should…..
  – Treat Boomer employees as equals
  – Put them in “charge” of something; make them a change agent
  – Give them credit when due; show them how they can be a star
  – Create a warm and respectful work environment
  – Demonstrate how your Firm is a leader in the industry and does not take a “back seat” – this will be a bragging point for proud Boomers!
Baby Boomers - Communicating

- Baby Boomers generally do not respond well to:
  - Abruptness, Unfriendliness
  - Manipulation
  - Disinterest
  - Displays of power, “one-upmanship”
  - Political incorrectness
  - Overused sports and war analogies

Adapted from Connecting Generations “Turnoffs” p. 58
The Four Generations Currently in the Workplace

← Gen X-ers (Baby Busters)
Gen X-ers

• **Music Trivia**
  - Gen X-ers can easily answer these musical questions:
    • Who “just wants to have fun!”
    • What “killed the radio star?”
    • When should “you wake WHAM! up?”
    • Where does Guns and Roses welcome you to?
Their Faces
Events That Shaped Them

- Living in Boomer’s shadow; called the “lost generation”
  - Passively resist everything boomers embraced
  - Lack appreciation for big picture; “is this going to be on the test” mentality
    - Really a statement of efficient survival
- Self reliant and independent group. Understood no one would hold
- Product of high divorce rates, mom’s in workforce, latchkey kids
- Survival mentality further cultivated by early political memories
  - Iran hostage crisis, failing economy, losing Vietnam war (decline of a superpower)
- Generation inspired “Friends” → close friends are important and create a sense of family. Want to be with people they love
- Very accepting of diversity and equality because boomer moms were in the workforce
- Work to live; seek balance in work/private life and are distressed by price boomers paid for success and for what? Layoffs, downsizing, rightsizing.
- Do not trust companies are not generally loyal → “have to move out to move up”
- Holding a position of power is earned, not a given
- They think about the “job” not the “work hours”
  - Job security = building skills
  - Enjoy self command and don’t like being micro-managed
Gen X-ers
51 Million People in the Workforce; 32% of Workers.

• Profile
  – Outlook: Skeptical
  – Work Ethic: Balanced
    • Changing jobs is a strategic imperative to acquiring skills and making yourself marketable
  – View of Authority: Unimpressed (especially with Boomer bosses)
  – Leadership: Competence
  – Relationships: Reluctant to commit
    • They want balance now when they can enjoy their family, friends, hobbies and intellectual enrichment
  – Perspective: Self

Profile from “When Generations Collide” p. 19; Statistic Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce, AARP.
Gen X-ers - Work Preferences

• Extreme opposite of Baby Boomers
• Independent and self-reliant; little hierarchy
  – (first of “latch-key” children); just enough supervision works for them
• “Work will be there when I get back” attitude; enjoy life
• It’s just a job; no loyalty
• Want flexibility; informal, casual environments
  – Casual days seen as a way to “neutralize” environment
  – Many are entrepreneurs right out of college
• To embrace a workplace trend, technology would have to be involved
• Excellent parallel processors and can simultaneously absorb and deal with a lot of diverse information
  – may seem like “not paying attention” or “ignoring me” to Boomer managers
Gen X-ers - Managing Them

- Gen Xer’s are…
  - Adaptable, independent
  - Challenge-oriented

However

- They …
  - Look out for “number one”
  - Will jump ship if too closely supervised

To keep them

- Managers should…..
  - **Train, train, train!** Realize that the “skills acquisition” process is important to X-ers and satisfying their appetite can be accomplished internally – **keep them on a path**
  - Let them **do some things their way**; give them freedom
  - Provide them with the proper, most innovative **technological tools**
  - Offer **sincere feedback/attention** when needed
    - Yearning for this stems from many absent parents
  - **Don’t glamorize a repetitive task.** Be frank and honest about routine, but necessary tasks.
Gen X-ers - Communicating

• Gen X-ers generally do not respond well to:
  – Schmoozing
  – Inefficiency
  – Flashiness
  – Hyperbole or corporate-speak
    • “I nearly died trying” or “think outside of the box”
  – Incompetence
  – Bureaucracy/complex policies

Adapted from Connecting Generations “Turnoffs” p. 58
The Four Generations Currently in the Workplace

← Millennials
Millennials

• Instant Messaging Trivia
  – Millennials can instantly tell you what these “instant messaging” acronyms mean:
    • RUS
    • BRB
    • G2G
    • ROTFL
    • TTYL
    • IDK, IDC
Their Faces
Events That Shaped Them

- **Helicopter generation**
  - Boomer parents will “hover over” and advocate for them
- **Wanted and planned children** and this creates in them a sense of confidence but also entitlement.
- **Have grown up in an inclusive world** and they appreciate diversity and collaboration
- **Fast-paced workers** who need to be challenged and motivated
- **Has seen more “school violence”** (Columbine, Nickle Mines, Virginia Tech) than any other generation – this has motivated them to seek change!
- **Occupy Movement**
  - Politically Active/Vocal
- **Demanding generation who are used to getting what they want**
  - Good negotiation skills because parents included them in decisions (vacations, room decoration, restaurants, etc…)}
A Word About How Millennials Communicate

• Highly influenced by digital age; authority on the Internet (cannot remember a time without it).
  – Work in collaborative media
    • Posters = webpages
    • Diaries = blogs
    • Phone calls = text messages
    • PowerPoint = movie clips

• Limitless connectivity enables and allows them to test boundaries combining work and play → cyberspace communities
  • facebook, twitter, YouTube, blogging
  • Verbal communication skills suffer → on-line communication

• “Intellectual Tapas”
  – Tend to skim things for interesting or relevant content. Are they absorbing or assimilating anything?

• “Narrative Depravation”
  – Tend to watch an entire series all at once, often alone. No cliff hanger or hook to discuss “what if’s” with companions.
    • How will this change/mediate their ability to understand and produce work?

• Will revolutionize the workplace, BUT will need and want mentors
Millennials
40 Million People in the Workforce; 25% of Workers

• Profile
  – Outlook: Hopeful
  – Work Ethic: Ambitious
  – View of Authority: Relaxed, polite
  – Leadership: Achievers
    • Respect bosses who are credible, collaborative
  – Relationships: Loyal
    • Seek professional growth, satisfaction
  – Perspective: Civic
    • Actively involved in classroom “mock” elections and charitable causes

Profile from “When Generations Collide” p. 19; Statistic Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce, AARP
Millennials - Work Preferences

- Oldest members are now in the workforce
  - Many unemployed/underemployed
  - There will be enough in the future to fill all jobs but need to train/prepare them!

- Teamwork ethic (learned in the classroom!) of Boomers and “can do” attitude of Traditionalists
  - Hard work and goal setting will help achieve a dream

- Education system has prepared them well for the workforce, as does their technological sophistication, positive expectations and capitalization on collective action with Boomers
  - Very literate (soaring book sales), fast-paced and busy
  - Economists predicting an **increase in productivity** with Millennials; **ready to sacrifice personal pleasure for collective good**; will demand equal pay, fewer job definitions, may very well downgrade executive salaries, revitalize the union movement and establish more labor standards/regulations.
Millennials - Managing Them

• Millennials are…
  - Tenacious
  - Technologically savvy and expect to be able to use these tools at work
  - Teamwork oriented

However

• They may …
  - Be a very demanding workforce
    • clear view of how work should be and are used to getting what they want; may insist on “mobile media”
    • parents will advocate for them
  - Require supervision and structure
  - Need to be coached on how to handle difficult issues – remember they are young!

To keep them

• Managers should…..
  - Send plenty of motivating messages – “You will be working with bright people.”
  - Spend lots of time orienting; explain the work environment, expectations and long-term goals
  - Make sure to “Gender Blend.” Toss out preconceived notions about traditional gender roles.
  - Create diverse teams and appoint a team leader
  - Provide OTJ and recognize that it is viewed as an extension of their education
  - Assign them to a credible and seasoned mentor – they will learn from each other
Millennials - Communicating

- Millennials generally do not respond well to:
  - Cynicism
  - Sarcasm
  - **Unfairness**
  - Condescension
  - Phoneys
    - Avoid trying to come across as “hip”

Adapted from Connecting Generations “Turnoffs” p. 58
But Wait…..
A Fifth Generation?
Generation “C”

Generation “C” for CONNECT
…the youngest Millennials!

• By 2020, the youngest generations will account for nearly half of the employees in the world and will be dominant in the workforce
• By 2016 the earliest of the Millennials will be 35, some holding leadership roles.
• Need to encourage “Social Learning”
  – Employees learning from each other, in a pragmatic, interpretive way.
  – Not just consuming knowledge, but imparting, deciphering and deconstructing what methods work as workplaces change and grow
Texts and Tweets

• Truncated and quick writing of twitter and text messages....
  – Some fear tweeting and texting will “dumb down” the English language affecting the appropriate use of language, grammar, spelling, word choice and ultimately, writing skills.
  – Others argue that tweeting and texting encourage shorter, more concise and deliberate expression, word choice and sentence structure...Less is more.
Feedback

What it means…

- Traditionalists seek no applause but appreciate a **subtle acknowledgement** that they have made a difference.
- Boomers are often giving feedback to others but seldom receive, especially positive, **feedback**.
- Xers need **positive feedback** to let them know they’re on the right track.
- Millennials/Generation C are used to praise and may mistake **silence for disapproval**. They need to know what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong.

Slide from Duke University “Cross Generational Communication” presentation
To sum it up…

• **Traditionalists** just want to be valued. They create **legacies**.

• **Boomers** just want to be loved. They create **exceptional** careers.

• **Xers** just want to be respected. They create **portable** careers.

• **Millennials/C’s** just want to be taught. They create **parallel** careers.
Mixing it up!

• Get employees talking about their generation
  – Storytelling is a great way to get to know and to understand those from different generations and their particular “baggage.”
    • If we understand differences, we are less likely to judge.
    • Create opportunities through employee activities.

• Ask employees about needs/preferences
  – Don’t assume what works/ed for you will work for others
    • Older workers prefer private work spaces; younger workers thrive in collaborative environments
    • While workers tend to favor working with and seeking advice from those in their own age category, different generations are willing to and capable of working together
    • Workers generally appreciate and learn from the point-of-view of other generations, as well as their contributions to the work community

Adapted from Connecting Generations “Successfully Mixing Generations” p. 44
Mixing it up!

• Recognize that one size does NOT fit all
  – Offer **options** → schedules, job sharing, work spaces and tools

• Be flexible
  – Manage each person as an individual

• Watch for emerging strengths
  – Encourage employees to work with “**emotional intelligence**” by developing their natural talents, strengths and skills.

• Create generationally-diverse teams
  – Actively recruit multi-generational and culturally diverse employees so that different perspectives are supported and encouraged. Let teams develop naturally

If you are sensitive to these issues, it is possible to enjoy a wonderfully integrated and harmonious workforce
How To Help!

- Recognize that your website is a valuable recruiting tool. Include less about history and tradition and focus on firm innovations, career pathing, mentoring, rewards, work-life balance and diversity.
- Include information in printed marketing and recruiting materials that is relevant to a diverse candidate base.
- Consider using technology to gather and improve the frequency and quality of various feedback.
- Allow the appropriate use of twitter, facebook, blogs and other social media.
- Include young professionals on teams or committees…they are used to being asked for their opinions and will be motivated by being included!
- Remember that the new generations are respectful of authority, but not awed or intimidated by it.
Reference Sources

- Murphy, Ph.D, S (2011). *Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce*, AARP.
Music

• **Traditionists**
  – I’ve Got You Under My Skin, Frank Sinatra

• **Baby Boomers**
  – I Wanna Hold Your Hand, The Beatles

• **Gen-Xers**
  – Orange Crush, R.E.M.

• **Millenials**
  – Somewhere Only We Know, Keane

• **Generation C**
  – Call Me Maybe, Carly Rae Jepsen