Multi-Generational Workforce: Cultivating Productive Relationships

Participant Guide
Meet and Greet

The following worksheet will guide your team in identifying areas of similarity with your team members. This investment of time will provide a foundation for looking at diversity in a new way.

Instructions: As a team, identify 3 points of similarity. For example, you all have brothers, all drive sports cars, etc.

Note: The similar points cannot be work related.

Take 5 minutes to find 3 points of similarity and 3 points of difference, and record them on this worksheet.

Our team consists of:
List names:

3 points of similarity: 3 points of difference:

1.

2.

3.
How did we get here?

Our current American workplace is unique. The years have shown us rises and falls in the economy. Especially during the challenging economic times we currently face, there is a lot of competition for jobs. It is not surprising that there are challenges, fear and resentment in the workplace.

This is the first time in history that we have four different generations in the workplace. Each generation is shaped by its unique experiences growing up and its members’ diverse ideas about what they want in their work lives and personal lives. These differences affect how they interact with each other and judge each other’s behavior and performance.

◊ Advances in medical technology have increased life span; people are living longer and healthier lives and staying in the workforce for longer than any other time in the past.
◊ Older workers are beginning to think about retiring, but many will work longer than once expected.
◊ The number of individuals between the ages of 35 and 45 is decreasing due to the decline in birth rates from 1965-1978.
◊ The demand for talented 35-45-year olds will continue to rise (projected at 25%) while the number of workers available in that age range is decreasing.

Each generation brings its own unique strengths to the workplace. When we can consider and embrace the differences of each group, and identify the strengths of each, it will enable us to work more effectively together.

“We are like all others; we are like some others; and we are like no others.”

Who’s who in the different generations?

In our current workforce, people from four generations are working side by side. Each generation has something to offer the others, but the generational differences tend to collide, and the gap is often cited as problematic.

Individuals in each generation have fundamentally different life experiences than those in generations before or after them. Their experiences impact the group as a whole and bind them together as a generation. Life experiences (including the generation they are a part of) affect the way people learn and behave.

Each generation has rebelled against the previous generation.

Veterans
Born prior to 1945 Age in 2008: 63+ years old

Baby Boomers
Born 1946 to 1964 Age in 2008: 44 to 62 years old

Generation X
Born 1965 to 1978 Age in 2008: 30 to 43 years old

Generation Y
Born 1979 - Age in 2008: 0 to 29 years old

When the generations fail to communicate effectively, there may be negative ramifications. Conflict and lack of communication may impact turnover rates, tangible costs (such as recruitment, hiring, training and retention), intangible costs (such as morale), grievances and complaints. Additionally, there may be perceptions of unfairness and inequity.
The four generations

Veterans were brought up during a tough economic time. Great leaders stepped forth and led the nation, and accordingly, Veterans have a deep respect for authority. They tend to conform, and value safe working conditions and job security. Because of war rationing and difficulties in their formative years, they are known to be frugal, hardworking, and loyal employees. Their beliefs about the importance of work and of meeting obligations define them. They believe in saving and paying cash rather than using credit. They are very different from their children’s generation, the Baby Boomers.

Baby Boomers grew up during times of economic and educational growth. They attended school in a traditional system and had rigorous programs. As they developed into young adults, they faced major social upheaval and change. They bucked the system of traditional gender roles, as scores of women entered the workforce. This generation worked hard and earned well. They differed from their parents’ generation in that that their financial philosophy was to buy now and pay later. With the rise of consumerism and two-income families, the divorce rate grew. Most Baby Boomers either participated in or protested the Vietnam War, and were active in various political and social causes.

Generation X consists of the children of the Baby Boomers. They are said to have inherited the ‘social debris’ of the Boomers, with self-absorbed, often divorced parents, which resulted in single-parent, single-income families who had difficulties paying their expenses in the face of a growing national debt and failed corporations. Accordingly, they are more financially conservative, having learned from their parents’ mistakes the importance of saving. Many saw their workaholic parents being laid off from the jobs to which they were so loyal. They have learned that there is no such thing as job security.

Generation Y is the most educated, technologically sophisticated generation ever. They grew up in a world of computers, the Internet and cell phones. Generation Y saw unprecedented events such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine High School massacre and September 11, 2001. Being exposed to such fear and lack of security has caused them to value job satisfaction, security and opportunity for advancement as priorities over financial compensation. They aren’t as concerned about saving as the previous generation. Their motto could be “Earn it, Spend it.” They are dubbed the “Why Me” generation.
## Four generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Means of Communication</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veterans:</strong></td>
<td>A dream</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
<td>No news is good news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baby Boomers:</strong></td>
<td>A right</td>
<td>OK to call after hours</td>
<td>Once a year, with lots of documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation X:</strong></td>
<td>A means to an end</td>
<td>Do not call me after hours</td>
<td>Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation Y:</strong></td>
<td>A huge expense</td>
<td>Internet, cell phone, texting</td>
<td>Feedback whenever I want it/at the click of a button</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Work Preference</th>
<th>Family</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veterans:</strong></td>
<td>Respectful of authority; job security</td>
<td>Jobs with security and longevity</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baby Boomers:</strong></td>
<td>Optimistic; Collaborative</td>
<td>High-paying and high-status jobs</td>
<td>Disintegrating/divorces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation X:</strong></td>
<td>Skeptical, informal</td>
<td>Flexibility, reward for productivity vs. longevity</td>
<td>Latch-key kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation Y:</strong></td>
<td>Confident, realistic</td>
<td>Contract approach, will sacrifice pay to learn and to have latest technologies</td>
<td>Blended families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, people from each generation have different values and behaviors, due to their experience and upbringing.
Focus on similarities

List people you work with in the chart below.

Veterans
Someone I know in this generation: ________________________
Something I have in common with this person: ______________

Boomers
Someone I know in this generation: ________________________
Something I have in common with this person: ______________

Generation X
Someone I know in this generation: ________________________
Something I have in common with this person: ______________

Generation Y
Someone I know in this generation: ________________________
Something I have in common with this person: ______________
My generation

Where do I fit?

Characteristics I identify with

Characteristics I do not identify with
Tips for approaching each generation

Veterans
Veterans like to hear:
◊ “Your experience is respected and valued.”
◊ “Your perseverance is valued and it will be rewarded.”

Baby Boomers
Baby Boomers like to hear:
◊ “Your contribution is unique.”
◊ “You are important.”
◊ “We need you. We approve of you.”

Generation X
Generation X likes to hear:
◊ “We use the latest technologies.”
◊ “There aren’t a lot of rules here.”
◊ “Do it your way.”

Generation Y
Generation Y likes to hear:
“You’ll be working with other bright, creative people.”
“You can be a hero and turn this place around.”
Present your case to Chris to take the lead for the task force

Consider:

◆ Motivators
◆ Values
◆ Contributions
◆ Preferred work environment
◆ What they like and don’t like
◆ Tips for best approach to communicate with them

Chris, the Veteran

What will you do and say to persuade Chris to become the leader of the task group for this new initiative?

Chris, the Baby Boomer

What will you do and say to persuade Chris to become the leader of the task group for this new initiative?
**Chris, of Generation X**

What will you do and say to persuade Chris to become the leader of the task group for this new initiative?

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**Chris, of Generation Y**

What will you do and say to persuade Chris to become the leader of the task group for this new initiative?
What are the stereotypes?

A stereotype is an oversimplified, false or generalized portrayal of a group of people.

Veterans

Baby Boomers

Generation X

Generation Y
Overcoming stereotypes

◊ Keep communication lines open
◊ Engage others in dialogue to avoid misunderstandings
◊ Recognize that the stereotype is an assumption
◊ Strive to find the positive

Veterans

Baby Boomers

Generation X

Generation Y