Generational Communication in the Workplace

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Can’t We All Just Get Along?

Examining Cross-Generational Communication in the Workplace
Presenters

Robin Newman
Associate Dean of Students
Indiana-Purdue University
Fort Wayne (IPFW)

• BSW Social Work – Indiana State University, 1981
• M.Ed. College Student Services Administration – Oregon State University, 1983
• 3 years in current position

Born 1959 – Baby Boomer
• Born in Iowa. Father worked for the government: as a child lived in Iowa, Delaware, Marion, IN, South Dakota, and Fort Wayne, IN.
• 2nd Child of 4 biological siblings, 3rd child of 6 blended family siblings
• Father has a Masters degree in Social Work
• Mother was an RN
• All 6 children graduated from College

Krissy Mieszcanski
Associate Director Student Life
Indiana-Purdue University
Fort Wayne (IPFW)

• BS Journalism – Northern Arizona University, 2007
• M.Ed. Student Development Administration – Seattle University, 2009
• 2 years in current position

Born 1984 – Millennial Generation
• Grew up in Tucson, Arizona
• Only Child
• Dad owned his own business and Mom was an Office Manager for a private accounting firm.
• First Generation Student
Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to identify the four generations and their personal attributes.
- Participants will be able to identify position power styles in the workplace.
- Participants will learn how to communicate across generations.
- Participants will learn confrontation de-escalation skills as they relate to generational differences.
Agenda

- Generational Quiz
- Generational attributes
- Navigating a cross generational workplace
- Position power styles
- Conflict Factors
  - Communication styles
    - Confrontation de-escalation skills
- Small group discussion: Generational Case Studies
- Generational Quiz Results
- Q&A
Current Working Generations

- The Silent Generation (aka: The Traditionalists): 1925-1945
- The Baby Boomers: 1946-1964
- Generation X: 1965-1982
The Silent Generation

*Traditionalists, Matures, Veterans*

- **Defining Events**
  - The Great Depression
  - The New Deal
  - Atomic Bomb
  - Social Security established
  - Pearl Harbor attacked
  - WW II and Korean War
  - Rise of Labor Unions

- **Values**
  - Respect for authority
  - Strong work ethic
  - Dedication & sacrifice
  - Honor, duty, country
  - Respect for rules/law and order

- **Heroes**
  - Superman
  - FDR
  - Winston Churchill
  - Babe Ruth
  - Joe DiMaggio
  - MacArthur
  - Patton
  - Eisenhower
Baby Boomers

- **Defining Events**
  - Civil Rights Movement
  - Space Travel/Moon Landing
  - Cold War
  - Assassinations
  - Economic Prosperity
  - Focus on children
  - Television
  - Vietnam

- **Values**
  - Optimism
  - Teamwork
  - Personal gratification
  - Involvement
  - Personal growth/health & wellness

- **Heroes**
  - Ghandi
  - Martin Luther King Jr.
  - John & Jacqueline Kennedy
  - John Glenn
  - Feminist Movement
  - John Lennon
Gen X’ers

- Defining Events
  - Watergate, Nixon resignation
  - Challenger disaster
  - Computers
  - Single-parent homes
  - Latchkey kids
  - MTV
  - AIDS
  - Energy Crisis
  - Fall of Berlin Wall
  - Women’s Liberation

- Values
  - Diversity
  - Computer literacy
  - Fun & informality
  - Self-reliance/autonomy
  - Balance in life

- Heroes
  - Oprah Winfrey
  - Bill Gates & Steve Jobs
  - Michael Jackson
  - Michael Jordan
  - Princess Diana
**Generation Y**

*Millennials, Nexters*

**Defining Events**
- Technology
- TV talk shows
- Multiculturalism
- Desert Storm
- Clinton/Lewinsky scandal
- Schoolyard violence/bullying
- Oklahoma City Bombing
- 9/11/01
- Columbine Shooting

**Values**
- Optimism
- Civic duty
- Confidence
- Achievement driven
- Respect for diversity
- Social/Fun

**Heroes**
- Michael Jordan
- Mother Teresa
- Tiger Woods
- Lance Armstrong
Generations at Work
Traditionalists (1925-1945)

**Assets**
- Stable
- Detail oriented
- Thorough
- Loyal
- Hard working

**Liabilities**
- Inept with ambiguity & change
- Reluctant to buck the system
- Uncomfortable with conflict
- Uncommunicative when they disagree

Represent about 25% of working population
Traditionalists (1925-1945)

**Training & Development:**
- Take plenty of time
- Give them the big picture
- Emphasize long-term goals
- Let them share their experience

**Messages that motivate:**
- “Your experience is respected here”
- “It’s important for the rest of us to hear what has and hasn’t worked in the past.”
- “Your perseverance is valued and will be rewarded.”
Boomers (1946-1964)

**Assets**
- Service Oriented
- Driven
- Willing to “go the extra mile”
- Want to please
- Good team players

**Liabilities**
- Not naturally “budget minded”
- Uncomfortable with conflict
- Put process ahead of results
- Sensitive to feedback

72 million strong
Boomers (1946-1964)

Training & Development:
- Focus on the near future
- Focus on challenges & their role
- Provide developmental experiences
- Use business books & training tapes

Messages that motivate:
- “You are important to our success.”
- “We recognize your unique & important contribution to our team.”
- “What is your vision for this project?”
- “You are valued!”
Gen X’ers (1965-1982)

Assets
- Adaptable
- Independent
- Creative
- Not intimidated by authority
- Techno-literate

Liabilities
- Impatient
- Poor people skills
- Inexperienced
- Cynical

17 million strong
Gen X’ers (1965-1982)

Training & Development:
- Focus on work/life balance
- Provide resource list
  - Keep materials brief/bulleted
- Offer them access to many different kinds of information

Messages that motivate:
- “Do it your way”
- “We’ve got the latest computer technology”
- “There aren’t a lot of rules here”
- “We’re not very corporate”
**Gen Y/Millennials (1982-1995)**

**Assets**
- Loyalty
- Optimism
- Multi-tasking
- Fast-thinking
- Tolerant
- Technological savvy

**Liabilities**
- Need for supervision & structure
- Inexperience particularly with handling different people issues
- Service levels are low

68 million strong
Gen Y/Millennials (1982-1995)

Training & Development:
- Take plenty of time
- Communicate expectations
- Model behavior you want to see
- Large teams w/ strong leadership
- Let them know what they do matters

Messages that motivate:
- “We provide equal opportunities here”
- “You are making a positive difference to our company”
- “You handled that situation well”
## Personal & Lifestyle Characteristics by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Values</th>
<th>Traditionalists</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Gen X-ers</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect for authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Optimism &amp; Involvement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skepticism &amp; Fun/Informality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Realism, Confidence, Social</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional/ Nuclear</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disintegrating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Latch-key Kids</strong></td>
<td><strong>Merged Families</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Dream</strong></td>
<td><strong>A Birthright</strong></td>
<td><strong>A way to get there</strong></td>
<td><strong>An incredible expense</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rotary phones, One-on-one, Write a memo</strong></td>
<td><strong>Touch-tone phones, Call me anytime</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cell phones, Call me only at work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internet, picture phones, email</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Put it away, Pay in cash</strong></td>
<td><strong>Buy now, pay later</strong></td>
<td><strong>Save, Save, Save, Conservative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Earn to spend</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Mixing & Managing Four Generations of Employees
## Workplace Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Gen X-ers</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Ethic &amp; Values</strong></td>
<td>Hard work; Duty before fun; rules</td>
<td>Workaholics; desire quality; question authority</td>
<td>Want structure &amp; direction</td>
<td>What’s next; multi-tasking; goal-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work is...</strong></td>
<td>An obligation</td>
<td>An adventure</td>
<td>A difficult challenge</td>
<td>A means to an end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Style</strong></td>
<td>Directive; command-and-control</td>
<td>Consensual Collegial</td>
<td>Everyone is the same</td>
<td>Take charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive Style</strong></td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Team player; loves to meet</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Participative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Formal Memo</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Direct &amp; immediate</td>
<td>Email or voicemail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td>No news is good news</td>
<td>Don’t appreciate it</td>
<td>Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?</td>
<td>Whenever I want it; push of a button</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work &amp; Family Life</strong></td>
<td>Ne’er the twain shall meet</td>
<td>No balance; work to live</td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Mixing & Managing Four Generations of Employees
Five Bases of Power

Social psychologists French and Raven, in a now-classic study (1959), developed a schema of five bases of power which reflect different bases or resources that power holders rely upon in their relationships with others. Often a person’s power is based on different combination of these.

Content adapted from: http://www.barefootguide.org/
Positional Power

This is the formal authority people get from their position in an organization or society, often backed by policy or law. This is one form of *power over*. 
Reward Power

This power depends upon the ability of the power wielder to give valued material rewards, benefits, time off, promotions or increases in pay. In the development sector, this power is particularly held by donors and other intermediaries who distribute funding. It is also power over. Some donors who dispense funding do so out of a spirit of solidarity and deep humanity and are uneasy with this power, preferring to develop partnerships based on power with. There is a tension in here that has not been resolved in the development world, yet is seldom discussed between the givers and receivers of funding.
This is the power or ability of people to attract others, to build strong inter-personal skills of the power holder. This is an example of *power within*, but it can be used as *power over*. Where the world is becoming more democratic, relying less on positional power and more on consensus, this form of power becomes all the more significant, requiring a deeper focus on individual empowerment.
Expert Power

This power is the power people derive from their skills, knowledge and experience and the organization’s need for those skills and expertise. Unlike the others, this type of power is usually highly specific and limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified. Being well-informed and up-to-date with useful information is part of this power. This is also an example of power within but it can be used as power over (positively or negatively) especially where expert skills and knowledge are perceived to be desperately needed.
Coercive Power

This power is the application of negative, fear-based influence on others. It might be based on any of the above power or even physical strength to ensure the obedience of those under power. Coercive power tends to be the most obvious but least effective form of power as it builds resentment and resistance. A covert form of coercive power is the power of victims to use guilt to influence situations in their favor.

Confrontation De-escalation Skills
Sources of Generational Conflict

- Judging work on merit or time and effort
  - Traditionalists & Boomers criticize X-ers and Millennials for their lack of work ethic.

- Collaboration and teamwork (or lack thereof)
  - Boomers consider participation a direct sign of work ethic.
  - Gen X-ers and Millennials believe in hard work but want to do it when and where they want.

- Different communication styles
  - “We see these (communication) differences as personality differences, but they’re not. They’re differences in cultural attitudes and values, and personalities are fairly similar across all generations.”

Adapted from: Birkman
Sources of Generational Conflict

- The technology divide
  - Gap between Xers and Boomers relatively small
  - Gap between Xers and Millennials is very large due to rapid technology growth
  - Older generations see Millennials as too removed and moving too fast because of social media
    - Millennials think older generations spend too much time trying to understand or accomplish a “simple” task

“Organizations that want to reduce generational tensions within their workplace teams must increase awareness, understanding and acceptance of different workplace styles”

Adapted from: Birkman
Effective Cross-Generational Communication

1. Pre-Boomers like face-to-face time
   - They are logical & conservative communicators. Don’t make it too personal, they don’t express their inner thoughts easily.

2. The Boomers are personal & all about meetings – get together and discuss it
   - They use both face-to-face and electronic communications, but for those big decisions, they want to “sit down and talk.”

3. The X-ers want you to prove to them you know what you’re talking about
   - They are individuals first and group second. Make it quick and direct, they don’t have time for chit chat. They prefer electronic communication because it’s more efficient.

Adapted from: Leadership Management AU
4. Gen Ys need feedback and are overall very positive
   - They have an affinity for networking & collaboration is their middle name. Text messaging is mandatory, however they are great face-to-face with the Pre-Boomers (people of their grandparents’ generation).

5. Understand their motives (who is right, who is wrong or is it all grey area?)
   - X-ers can discuss an issue without having to be right
   - Boomers tend to be the “my way or the highway” type
   - Pre-Boomers see things in black & white with ethics being first and foremost
   - Gen Ys look for the greater good, almost like “all for one, one for all”
6. It’s not what you say, but how you say it
   - All of our communication styles must adapt to the realities of today, i.e. face-to-face meetings combined with technology options.

7. Look beyond appearances
   - Someone who appears “old” isn’t brain-dead; someone who is a “kid” may have a brilliant idea if you’d just take the time to listen.

What effective cross-generational communication tips would you add?

Adapted from: Leadership Management AU
11 Ways to Minimize Generational Differences in the Workplace

1. Focus on similarities rather than differences
2. Recognize that change does occur
3. Recognize the value and the perils of the “tried and true”
4. Be aware that “new” technology may not be you
5. Develop a curiosity for things unknown to you
6. Ask questions rather than make statements
7. Avoid characterizations based on age
8. Define your acronyms
9. Paraphrase before answering
10. Be careful about cultural or historical references
11. If that other age-group worker was right after all, say so.

Adapted from:  Calvin Sun - 1.18.11
Ways to Encourage Teamwork

1. Talk about generational differences
   - Generational information awareness/sharing sessions

2. Expand communication strategies
   - Keep in mind each team member’s communication preference

3. Offer mentoring programs/focus on team building
   - Ensures critical skills sets and job knowledge is transferred to and from all generations

4. Create workplace choices & accommodate differences
   - Treat employees as you do your customers. Where and when possible, work to meet their working preferences.

5. Respect competence and initiative
   - Treat everyone, from newest to most seasoned employee as if they have the great things to offer & are motivated to do their best.

Adapted from: www.birkman.com
Always Use the ACORN Approach

- Accommodate employee differences
- Create workplace choices
- Operate from a flexible management style
- Respect competence and initiative
- Nourish retention
Case Studies
Case Study 1

You are a millennial supervisor and have hired a student worker who is 20+ years older (Gen X or Baby Boomer) than you and has little to no computer skills. You assign her a task of entering data into Excel and show her how to format columns, etc. She does OK the first time but upon giving her another Excel data task a couple of days later, she has completely forgotten how to do it. What do you do?
Case Study 2

Your boss is a part of the Traditionalist generation. He/she uses both positional and expert power leadership styles. Your current office consists of Baby Boomers, Gen X’ers, and Millennials, which creates a disconnect. Camaraderie is not encouraged and all forms of communication are demanded in the form of an email. There are few if any meetings and the only time you get feedback is when you’ve done something wrong or it’s evaluation time. You have received one evaluation in 5 years and you had to write it yourself. While office meetings are few, communication is almost always formal and often only exists when you’ve done something wrong or at your yearly evaluation. What could be done to improve communication or lighten the work environment?
Case Study 3

You are a millennial supervisor who oversees a staff of 30+ who are up to three years younger than yourself. When holding staff meetings, often cell phones, lap tops, and other electronic devices are in use during the presenting of information even after rules have been set in place to discourage this. Up to several days following the staff meeting, the staff is still asking questions which were previously discussed at staff meeting and the information was not processed correctly. Therefore, the staff is not doing their work properly. What do you do?
Wrapping it up
Quiz Results

How to find your score:
• Every “A” = 1 point
• Every “B” = 2 points
• Every “C” = 3 points

• 5 points = Traditionalist
• 6-10 points = Baby Boomer
• 11-15 points = Gen Xer
• 16-20 points = Millennial

My preferred generation is:

______________________________________________

My actual generation is:

_______________________________________________

After learning about the styles, traits, values, etc. of the different generations, I feel I fit mostly in this generation:

_________________________________________________
“If I were given the opportunity to present a gift to the next generation, it would be the ability for each individual to learn to laugh at himself.”

~Cartoonist, Charles Schulz

Thank you for joining us today. Any questions/comments?