

Blending of generations in the workplace

[Business](#), [Human Resources](#)



Human Resources is a unit of a company that must have consistent rules and programs for all employees but this can be a challenge. The challenge is in large part due to the fact that employees have different needs. For a company to be successful in the arena of Human Resources it must recognize these differences and adjust without discrimination. This paper will examine the concept that different generations will have different needs and concerns in the workplace and that the ability of a company to address/blend these needs is critical.

Competencies and capabilities no longer correlate to age or experience, so respect for others' ideas and input is more critical than ever. Understanding and appreciating one another's perspective has always been the key to good teamwork. But in today's multi-generational workplace, an organization's success could depend on it. To understand fully what generations are currently in play in the workforce let us start by defining the generations.

Baby Boomers are defined as the group of people born from approximately 1946 - 1963. They welcome team-based work, especially as an anti-authoritarian declaration to "The Silents" ahead of them, but they can become very political when their turf is threatened. They long to stabilize their careers.

Generation X is defined as the group of people born after the demographic baby boom, from roughly 1964 to 1979. They grew up very quickly amid rising divorce rates, latchkeys, violence and low expectations. They entered the job market in the wake of the Boomers, only to be confronted with new terms like "downsizing" and "RIFs" as the economy plunged into recession. It's hardly surprising, then, that they tend to be skeptical toward authority

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and cautious in their commitments. Their self-reliance has led them, in unprecedented numbers, to embrace "free agency" over company loyalty. Ambitious and independent, they're now striving to balance the competing demands of work, family and personal life.

Generation Y is defined as the group of people born from 1980 to present. They were the beneficiaries of a backlash against hands-off parenting and a cultural elevation of stay-at-home moms. Sometimes said to be described as coddled and confident. They're attracted to organizations whose missions speak to a purpose greater than a bottom line. They're technologically savvy with a positive, can-do attitude that says: "I'm here to make a difference."

Now that the generations have been briefly defined we can look at how they have created a trend in Human Resources and how it has caused a problem. As Boomers, Generation X and Y cross in the workplace, their attitudes, ethics, values and behaviors without doubt collide.

When asked what some disadvantages of hiring older workers were, 7% of human resource professionals responded that older workers do not work well with other generations. The issue here may just be that "older workers" just do not have enough in common with younger workers and find it hard to work as a team. Many Human Resources activities can be implemented to help with team building but even these efforts can fall short of bringing the generations together. A leader in Human Resources may have to address everything from dress code to appropriate work conversations. These are policies that may already be in place but when issues arise it may be due to the fact that workers are offended by a younger works dress of work place conversations. The Human Resource leader must decide if the policies are

truly being broken or if the older worker just has an issue with the way the younger generation dresses or the topics they discuss at work.

According to the 2004 Generational Differences Survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), “ most human resource professionals (60%) said they were not aware of intergenerational conflict among employees at their organization, while 40% said they were aware of conflict.” The fact that 40% of “ human resource professionals” noted that they were aware of a conflict leads to the idea that the differences are being addressed.

If a company does not address the issue of conflict between the generations it can lead to diminished performance, an issue with retaining quality employees and trouble fitting employees into the right roles. If a company is only able to cater to one generation it may lead to a non age diverse workforce which would hurt overall ability to come up with creative solutions to problems.

We can start by acknowledging that the workplace is forever changing. Human Resources need to look beyond the clash of the generations and look for ways to leverage these different perspectives to their benefit. HR needs to be careful about what they say but more importantly they need to pay close attention to how it is said. When employees are moved from position to position or are given a different job description it must not seem that they are being moved because of their age but rather because of their skill set. Along with being careful about how employees are being communicated to Human Resource personnel must institute programs or activities that not only help the generations work together but that also help them understand more

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about each other. Keep an open mind about attitudes. Just because others don't share the same work ethic doesn't mean they're lazy. If GenXers seem like slackers to the Boomers, perhaps it's because they're mindful of how workaholicism affected their own upbringing. They've seen the damaging effects of blind loyalty to an organization (many of their parents were laid off) and aren't apt to fall victim themselves.

When asked what their organizations were doing or had done to deal with the multi-generational workplace, 50 percent of human resource professionals mentioned that keeping workers for different age groups apart was an unsuccessful approach, while 98 percent mentioned communication information in multiple ways (such as via e-mail and during meetings) as very, moderately, or slightly successful. (Burke, 2004: 10). The idea of making sure everyone gets the communications of the company is very important. Today in the business world almost everyone would be expected to use and work with emails however reinforcing communications in meetings and in person may be a good way to work with the multiple generations.

We're all living through profound changes in the business world. Traversing this generational landscape, bolstered by new learning and respect for differing ideals about the workplace, will get the job done better and faster. Look for what unites you with your peers. You'll be better prepared to welcome the generation that comes next.