

# GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKPLACE

## CST- West

### Western Legislative Service Agency and Research Directors Committee

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**“Our civilization is doomed if the unheard-of actions of our younger generations are allowed to continue.”**

~ Inscription on a 4,000 year old Sumerian tablet found in Ur

#### **Generational Peer Groups:**

A group whose members share a common historical location and have similar experiences

#### **Current Four Generations:**

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Born</b>	<b>Ages</b>
Silent	1925 - 1945	67 to 87
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1963	49 to 66
Generation X	1964 - 1979	33 to 48
Millennials	1980 – 2000	12 to 32

#### **Four Main Areas of Intergenerational Work Conflict:**

- Choosing where and when to work
- Communicating among team members
- Deciding on how and how often the team meets
- Gathering information/Learning environment

From: Erickson, T. *Harvard Business Journal* (Feb 16, 2009)

#### **What Makes Your Generation Unique?**

Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	Silent
1. Technology use (24%)	Technology use (12%)	Work ethic (17%)	WW II, Depression (14%)
2. Music/Pop culture (11%)	Work ethic (11%)	Respectful (14%)	Smarter (13%)
3. Liberal/tolerant (7%)	Conservative/Trad'l (7%)	Values/Morals (8%)	Honest (12%)
4. Smarter (6%)	Smarter (6%)	“Baby Boomers” (6%)	Work ethic (10%)
5. Clothes (5%)	Respectful (5%)	Smarter (5%)	Values/Morals (10%)

Note: Based on respondents who said their generation was unique/distinct. Items represent individual, openended responses. Top five responses are shown for each age group. Sample sizes for sub-groups are as follows: Millennials, n=527; Gen X, n=173; Boomers, n=283; Silent, n=205.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER SURVEY, January 2010

# GENERATIONS AT WORK

	Traditional Generation 1925 - 1945	Baby Boomer Generation 1946 - 1963	Generation X 1964 - 1979	Generation Y 1980 – 2000
<b>Historical &amp; Social Markers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WW I and II</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Segregation</li> <li>• The New Deal</li> <li>• The Bomb</li> <li>• The Cold War</li> <li>• McCarthyism</li> <li>• Strong family structure</li> <li>• Low mobility</li> <li>• Increase in colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-war optimism</li> <li>• Economic prosperity</li> <li>• Emergence of U.S. as Superpower</li> <li>• Growth of suburbia</li> <li>• Civil Rights</li> <li>• Vietnam War</li> <li>• Sit-ins &amp; protests</li> <li>• Woodstock</li> <li>• More women, minorities in college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watergate &amp; Nixon resigning</li> <li>• Three Mile Island</li> <li>• Iran-Contra</li> <li>• AIDS</li> <li>• Challenger explosion</li> <li>• Recessions, Layoffs,</li> <li>• 40%+ mortgage rates</li> <li>• Both parents working (latchkey kids)</li> <li>• Berlin Wall falls</li> <li>• Personal computers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dow Jones Record</li> <li>• Globalization</li> <li>• Immigration</li> <li>• Women in leadership roles</li> <li>• Helicopter Parents</li> <li>• Desert Storm</li> <li>• Terrorism</li> <li>• Columbine</li> <li>• 9/11</li> <li>• Cell Phones</li> <li>• Social Networks</li> </ul>
<b>Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conformity, authority and rules</li> <li>• Logic</li> <li>• Defined sense of right and wrong</li> <li>• Loyalty and respect for authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal gratification</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Health and wellness</li> <li>• Personal relationships</li> <li>• Seek self-improvement or hobby-related learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Work/life balance</li> <li>• Prefer informality</li> <li>• Family/friend relationships important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-expression</li> <li>• Marketing &amp; branding</li> <li>• Respect must be earned</li> <li>• Social responsibility</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Life style flexibility</li> </ul>
<b>Attributes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplined and stable</li> <li>• View an understanding of history as a way to plan for the future</li> <li>• Dislike conflict</li> <li>• Detail-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimistic</li> <li>• View world as theirs</li> <li>• Attention-seeking</li> <li>• Spiritual, always seeking to improve understanding of themselves</li> <li>• Relatively self-absorbed</li> <li>• Traditional male/female roles shared</li> <li>• Avoid conflict</li> <li>• Service-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliable</li> <li>• Survivors</li> <li>• Skeptical</li> <li>• Always asking "why" to understand the purpose of a decision, plan or process</li> <li>• Technologically savvy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt rapidly</li> <li>• Crave change and challenge</li> <li>• Create constantly</li> <li>• Exceptionally resilient</li> <li>• Committed and loyal when dedicated to an idea, cause or project</li> <li>• Accept others of diverse backgrounds easily &amp; openly</li> <li>• Global in perspective</li> </ul>
<b>Work Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climb ladder with longevity</li> <li>• Dutiful and loyal</li> <li>• Willing to pay dues</li> <li>• Consistency and uniformity</li> <li>• Past-oriented</li> <li>• Command and control leadership style</li> <li>• Prefer hierarchical organizational structures and will continue to view horizontal structure in a hierarchical way</li> <li>• Effort is rewarded at some point</li> <li>• Task-focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climb the ladder by working harder</li> <li>• Driven</li> <li>• Seek growth and expansion</li> <li>• Achievement oriented</li> <li>• Personal identity tied to work</li> <li>• Team-orientated and processed focused</li> <li>• "Workaholics"; may have difficulty balancing work and home; little understanding of those who seek work/life balance</li> <li>• Work ethic=worth ethic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climb the ladder by working smarter</li> <li>• Work very well independently</li> <li>• Little patience for office politics</li> <li>• Will make every effort to complete a project or task, but will not be taken advantage of</li> <li>• Adaptable</li> <li>• Want balance-quality of life is critical</li> <li>• Work is a place to grow, not age.</li> <li>• Not intimidated by authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climb the ladder with good ideas and potential</li> <li>• Want to know how what they do fits into the big picture and need to understand how everything fits together</li> <li>• View work as an expression of self</li> <li>• Exceptional multi-taskers</li> <li>• Seek active vs. passive involvement</li> <li>• Less likely to seek managerial or team leadership positions</li> <li>• Seek flexibility in work hours, work environment and dress code</li> <li>• Expect corporate social responsibility</li> <li>• Seek work in teams</li> <li>• Seek continuing learning</li> <li>• Expect everything instantly</li> <li>• Seek to balance lifestyle and work, with more focus on lifestyle</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autocratic</li> <li>• Authoritarian</li> <li>• Hierarchical</li> <li>• Inaccessible</li> <li>• "Football Team"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participative</li> <li>• By consensus</li> <li>• Accessible</li> <li>• Sometimes micro-managers</li> <li>• "Soccer Team"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-directed</li> <li>• Hands-off</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• "Swim Team"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Inclusive</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• "Anyone can join our team"</li> </ul>
<b>View of Authority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Follow the rules</li> <li>• By-the-book</li> <li>• The final word</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love-hate</li> <li>• Anti-bureaucracy</li> <li>• Relationships come first</li> <li>• Need to know "why"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimpressed</li> <li>• Skeptical</li> <li>• Not fond of rules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polite</li> <li>• Relaxed</li> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Help create the rules</li> </ul>
<b>Management Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate respect for their experience and knowledge of the past</li> <li>• Reward employees for effort and a job well done in tangible ways—note from manager, pen, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on individual contributions that make the organization successful</li> <li>• Identify ways in which the individual is a unique contributor</li> <li>• Express the value the individual provides to the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the Gen X employee to work on multiple projects, of their choosing if possible, and prioritize their time.</li> <li>• Allow independent work</li> <li>• Confirm that you understand and appreciate life outside of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite participation, ideas and independence— micromanaging is not appreciated.</li> <li>• Ask questions. Make sure these employees have the training they need and feel comfortable asking questions. They are less likely to</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite older workers to mentor younger workers, especially Gen Y workers</li> <li>• Provide feedback in person, not through email or text</li> <li>• Ask questions. Make sure these employees have the training they need and feel comfortable asking questions. Traditional</li> <li>• Generation employees are less likely to ask for help for fear of appearing incompetent or generating conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a relationship with the employee and allow opportunities to work in groups to plan projects and processes</li> <li>• Praise publicly and create opportunities for others to praise the individual</li> </ul>	<p>work and help your employee balance work and home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback often</li> <li>• Be consistent in administering policies and providing rewards and recognition</li> <li>• Show Gen Xers how they can leverage office politics to obtain their goals</li> </ul>	<p>ask for fear of appearing incompetent but they want to do a good job.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a mentor—coach new employees on how their creativity and work produces meaningful results to the big picture</li> <li>• Provide immediate feedback</li> <li>• Focus on the individual and their personal lives—this generation wants your interest and approval</li> <li>• Involve these employees in decisions that affect their work and employment to every extent possible</li> </ul>
<b>Communication: Dos</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written, typed</li> <li>• On letterhead</li> <li>• Face-to-face</li> <li>• Direct</li> <li>• Respectful, tactful</li> <li>• Correct grammar</li> <li>• Formal, polite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face</li> <li>• In groups, meetings</li> <li>• Attention to detail</li> <li>• Honest, open</li> <li>• Provide the context</li> <li>• Confirm to close the loop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politically correct</li> <li>• Brief</li> <li>• Informal</li> <li>• Facts, details</li> <li>• Cell, email, text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very informal</li> <li>• Immediate, FAST</li> <li>• Cell, email, text, IM, blog</li> <li>• Expressive</li> <li>• Appreciative</li> </ul>
<b>Communication: DON'Ts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slang, profanity</li> <li>• Emotional language</li> <li>• Disorganization</li> <li>• Disrespect for their experience</li> <li>• Don't assume first name basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brusqueness</li> <li>• Unfriendliness</li> <li>• Not showing interest in them</li> <li>• Shows of power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schmoozing</li> <li>• Inefficient use of time</li> <li>• Flashiness</li> <li>• Exaggeration</li> <li>• Corporatespeak</li> <li>• Complex policies</li> <li>• Meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynicism</li> <li>• Sarcasm</li> <li>• Unfairness</li> <li>• Condescension</li> <li>• Divisiveness</li> </ul>

**Table Adapted from:** Gilroy, Christine M. (2009). *Generations in the Workplace*. University of Colorado Grand Rounds.

Howe, Neil (2010). *Millennials in the workplace*. Lifecourse Associates.

[http://www.valueoptions.com/spotlight\\_YIW/workplace\\_chart.htm](http://www.valueoptions.com/spotlight_YIW/workplace_chart.htm)