



**The Road to Performance Success: Understanding and  
Managing the Generational Divide**

**by**

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**n-gen** is a performance consulting company that works with organizations to achieve greater organizational performance by improving processes and people management strategies. n-gen combines traditional performance consulting methods with a unique focus on generational performance in the workplace to address gaps in organizational and team performance.

## **Abstract**

Organizations today are faced with the challenge of capitalizing on a multi-generational workforce in order to create high-performing, results driven teams. However, with four distinct generations in the workplace – Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y – there are four different approaches to work, which impact business performance. Each generation possesses unique attitudes, values, characteristics and skills based on their experiences of life-defining events. These shared experiences, bond members together into generational cohorts which represents their generational identities. Differences between cohorts are most evident in the workplace, where employee motivation, loyalty, and engagement are impact by generational attitudes and values. These generational attitudes and values are translated into characteristics and skills on the job which impact creativity, innovation and team work. This paper explores the similarities and differences of the four cohorts.

## **Introduction**

Today's workforce is comprised of four cohorts – Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Ys. Each cohort possesses different values, characteristics and skills based on its experiences of life-defining events. These differences are most notable in the workplace, where generational attitudes, values and skills impact workplace performance. Expectations, motivation, team collaboration and approaches to work are often demonstrated through dissimilar behaviours and responses to business initiatives. The challenge facing organizations today is to develop strategies that maximize the strengths of each generation to create high performing teams. This paper explores generational cohorts and how their differing identities are shaped by life-defining events. We will discuss generational attitudes and values that impact workplace performance, and examine the unique skills and characteristics that each generation brings to the workplace. The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the 'generational mindset' of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Ys, in an effort to better understand the similarities and differences in work styles between each cohort.

This paper is divided into two sections. Section one explores the concept of generational cohorts, providing a descriptive overview of the four generations and a list of life-defining events, values, attitudes, characteristics and skills for each generation.

Section two of this paper, demonstrates similarities and differences between cohorts and how each generation's mindset impacts workplace performance on six organizational factors. Lastly, we highlight challenges an organization will face in leading and managing a multigenerational workforce.

## SECTION 1: What Is a Generation?

There are no clear answers as to what constitutes a generation or what criteria should be used to determine membership in a particular generational group. Thus, the debate focuses on the parameters of defining a generation.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a generation is defined as 1) all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively, 2) the average period in which children grow up and have children of their own (usually reckoned as about thirty years). Genealogists maintain that a generation spans 15 years, because it is at about the age of fifteen that we leave childhood, and about the age of thirty that we begin our participation in historical events. Demographers typically define a generation according to the rise and fall of birth rates. Sociologists, on the other hand examine the critical events that affect a generation's collective identity in order to define a *generational cohort*. For sociologists, cohorts are bound together by a shared coming of age process, where major political, social and/or economic events create a common history and connection with others of the same age. These life-defining events are profound because they occur at time when a generation is young enough to be malleable and psychologically influenced. "In general, it is believed that an event will most strongly affect those who are coming of age at the time it happens"<sup>i</sup>

This concept of shared historical experiences is important because it suggests that generations are shaped by the life-defining events that they experience as a cohort more so

***...a generation is defined as a hybrid of both the birth rates identified by demographers and the major socio-historical events that occurred during that time period.***

than by their birth year. The challenge with this approach is identifying which socio-historical events have the greatest impact on a generation in order to determine the actual time span of a generation. What is critical to remember when defining a generation is that even though some events impact almost every group in society irrespective of age (like the attacks of September 11, 2001), these events tend to exert their strongest impact on the young. Thus, they become a life-defining event for those coming of age during that time period. For the purpose of this paper, a generation is defined as a hybrid of both the birth rates identified by demographers and the major socio-historical events that occurred during that time period.

Granted not everyone born during a particular time in history will share the same outlook or worldview. Each person has unique experiences that influence his/her perceptions, values and opinions. Nevertheless it is still accurate to talk in terms of generational identities and mindsets, because each generation has a core group of individuals who embody similar values, characteristics and skills based on their experiences of life-defining events. These commonalities shape the cohort's behavioural patterns and group dynamics. Since generational values, characteristics and skills are often quite different from each other, a divide exists between how different generations approach the world.

## Overview of the Four Generations

### Traditionalist (1922-1945)

The eldest generation represented in today's workforce is the Traditionalist, also commonly referred to as Veterans or The Silent Generation. This cohort represents almost 14 million people in North America. This generation experienced the world through war and re-building. According to Zemke<sup>ii</sup>, their hard work and vision created North America as we know it today – sprawling suburbs, highways that connect the country, and traditional structures of government and business. As children of the war, they grew up during the depression, where hard times were felt by everyone. It was an era where people learnt to “do without” and where creativity was required to make even the smallest amounts of food, clothing and money stretch further.

The hardship of the war and the great depression greatly affected this generation's values and opinions towards, family, religion, work and government.

***Traditionalists learnt to work hard and play by the rules in order to succeed.***

Members of this cohort lived in nuclear families that were patriotic and supportive of their government. They attended formal religious services and learnt right from wrong in schools. Respect for authority and adherence to the rules was enforced using corporal punishment. Traditionalists learnt to work hard and play by the rules in order to succeed.

Traditionalists honed their skills to build a strong nation and create an infrastructure that would allow future generations to live out the ‘American Dream’. Their values of dedication and loyalty, translated into a strong work ethic and belief in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

### Baby Boomer (1946-1964)

The Baby Boomer generation represents over 85 million people across North America. This generation is often divided into two groups due to its size, which includes first half and second half boomers. The division is used to distinguish between those born in the 40's and early 50's who actively participated in the events of the 60's and those born in the mid 50's and early 60's who were too late to participate in Woodstock and other movements.

As children of Traditionalist parents, Baby Boomers enjoyed a child-focused upbringing. They were wanted by their parents who had sacrificed in order to be able to indulge them and raise them in a new era of possibilities<sup>iii</sup>. As children of the 40's and 50's, Baby Boomers grew up in optimistic, positive times. North America was booming after the war, with the highest fertility rates in almost 200 years, and the greatest economic expansion the country had ever experienced.

***Baby Boomers grew accustomed to being in the spotlight and learnt that due to their size they could influence traditional systems to bend to accommodate their needs.***

Baby Boomers were doted on by parents, teachers and their communities. Their sheer numbers influenced the expansion of suburbia and the building of new hospitals and schools. Baby Boomers grew accustomed to being in the spotlight and learnt that, because of their size, they could influence traditional systems to bend to accommodate their needs. Since there were so many of them, it became essential for Baby Boomers to collaborate and cooperate with their peers.

As Baby Boomers matured they had a strong willingness to prove themselves to their Traditionalist parents who had sacrificed for their freedom. Baby Boomers' careers become their symbol of value and worth. They worked longer work weeks than generations before them and believed that success would come through continual learning and growth<sup>iv</sup>.

### **Generation X (1965-1980)**

Generation X is the smaller less observed cohort that followed the baby boom, with only 52 million people in North America. Often referred to as Baby Busters, Twentysomethings, or Thirteeners, Generation X has been labeled the "lost" generation. Living in the shadow of the boom, this generation often didn't attract the attention of parents, teachers, media or government. According to Howe and Strauss<sup>v</sup>, the members of this generation grew up in one of the most anti-child decades. They were the first children to be born to women who took pills to prevent them, and more children from this generation were born to single mothers than ever before. Divorce among Gen Xers' parents skyrocketed, while dual income families resulted in latchkey kids that became responsible for taking care of themselves.

*As North America lost military, political and economic strength this generation learnt that "things weren't going to be alright" and that they would be responsible for their own survival.*

As North America lost military, political and economic strength this generation learnt that things weren't going to be alright, and that they would be responsible for their own survival. As survivors of the economic wars of the 70's and 80's, Gen Xers developed a strong sense of personal protection and cynicism about the future. Gen Xers experienced a profound sense of limited opportunities due to reduced educational opportunities and a weak overall economy.<sup>vi</sup>

Unlike previous generations, Gen Xers were unimpressed by political and economic leaders. They learnt to resist labels from the media, teachers or parents who categorized them as lazy, as slackers that lacked the hard work and dedication of their predecessors. Many born in this cohort do not even accept the label Gen X as a definition of their identity.

In the absence of nuclear families, Gen Xers learnt to fend for themselves and create non-traditional families by bonding with friends and colleagues. Their work lives and social lives blend together to create a fluid environment where the boundaries between work and play are blurred. Unlike their Boomer parents, this generation "works to live" versus "lives to work". Gen Xers seek balance in their lives and are generally unwilling to

dedicate a disproportionate amount of time to “a job”<sup>vii</sup>. This generation seeks independent, freelance, entrepreneurial opportunities versus traditional corporate roles.

### **Generation Y (1981-2000)**

Generation Y is the most difficult cohort to categorize as there is no clear consensus on the time span and appropriate label for this generation. Often termed Nexters, Millennials, Echo Boomers or the Net Generation, this generation of almost 88 million in North America is the most observed and researched generation since the Boomers. If Gen Xers were the “lost” generation, Gen Ys are the “found” generation. Two-thirds of this generation were planned for and wanted by their parents<sup>viii</sup>. In contrast to their elder siblings, this cohort grew up in the decade of the child, and has been molded by self-esteem building parenting, education and counseling techniques<sup>ix</sup>. Their activities have been organized and planned for them by highly engaged parents. Unlike the latchkey kids of the 70's, Gen Ys have been escorted and supervised by cautious parents who are extremely protective. From birth, this cohort has been educated on the dangers of society. Kidnapping, school violence and drugs have impacted members of this cohort's lives and their view of the world as a 'dangerous' place.

As children of interracial, multicultural relationships, this generation is more open-minded and tolerant of differences in race, religion, culture, sexual orientation or economic status than any other generation<sup>x</sup>. Gen

***At ease with new technology and the notion of constant change, Gen Ys have come to expect everything immediately, including challenging career opportunities.***

Ys have established relationships that extend beyond social and cultural lines. As the first truly global citizens, technology has empowered this generation to maintain close relationships through virtual communities and chat rooms with people outside their communities regardless of ethnicity or cultural background.

At ease with new technology and the notion of constant change, Gen Ys have come to expect everything immediately, including challenging career opportunities. They are comfortable working independently however, are eager for guidance and coaching from their parents, managers and mentors. “This new wave of workers is both optimistic about the future and realistic about the present. They combine the teamwork ethic of the Boomers with the can-do attitude of the Veterans [Traditionalists] and the technological savvy of the Xers”<sup>xi</sup>.

The general overview of the identities and mindsets of each cohort can be linked to the life-defining events which have shaped and molded them. We will now explore the critical life events that have influenced each generation's collective identity and how these experiences are translated into generational attitudes, values, characteristics and skills which impact workplace performance.



## Life-defining Events

Each generational cohort experiences social, economic and cultural events that shape its mindset and identity. These life-defining events bond people together through a shared coming of age experience. To fully explore the strengths and challenges of working with multi-generations, it is important to understand the life-defining events that each cohort has experienced to better appreciate the values, characteristics and skills each brings to the workplace.

**Table 1: Life-defining Events**

<b>Traditionalist (1922-1945)</b>	<b>Baby Boomer (1946-1964)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Great Depression</li> <li>▪ Canada enters World War II</li> <li>▪ Pearl Harbor</li> <li>▪ D-Day in Normandy</li> <li>▪ Korean War</li> <li>▪ Golden Age of Radio</li> <li>▪ Emergence of the Silver Screen</li> <li>▪ Rise of labour unions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Civil Rights Movement</li> <li>▪ Cuban Missile Crisis</li> <li>▪ Assassination of JFK &amp; Martin Luther King</li> <li>▪ Vietnam War</li> <li>▪ The Cold War</li> <li>▪ Neil Armstrong landing on the moon</li> <li>▪ Woodstock – Free Love</li> <li>▪ Television becomes dominant media</li> <li>▪ Quebec Crisis and Bill 101</li> </ul>
<b>Generation X (1965-1980)</b>	<b>Generation Y (1981-2000)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Women’s Liberation movement</li> <li>▪ The first Personal Computers</li> <li>▪ AIDS</li> <li>▪ The Challenger disaster</li> <li>▪ Massive downsizing in corporate America leading to recession</li> <li>▪ Regan / Mulroney conservatism</li> <li>▪ Fall of Berlin Wall</li> <li>▪ Operation Desert Storm</li> <li>▪ Rodney King beating and riots in LA</li> <li>▪ Quebec separation referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oklahoma City bombing</li> <li>▪ Death of Princess Diana</li> <li>▪ School violence (Columbine massacre)</li> <li>▪ The digital age (internet, instant messaging, wireless technology)</li> <li>▪ Monica Lewinsky / Bill Clinton scandal</li> <li>▪ Terrorist attacks of 9/11</li> <li>▪ US led War on Terror</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Zemke et al., 2000

Based on the experience of life-defining events, each generation develops attitudes and values that influence its identity and mindset. These attitudes and values impact workplace performance by influencing motivation, loyalty and team work. “Coming of age during key socio-historical event still influences how each cohort reacts and responds in the workplace – and subsequently, why they collide with one another”<sup>xii</sup>.

## Attitudes and Values

Individually, we each possess attitudes and values based on our life experiences, which are unique and exclusive to us. However, what is important to consider when examining generational identities is the notion that cohorts possess a unique way of viewing the world, which collectively impacts how they respond and react to others. In order to understand why generations collide, we must explore the attitudes and values that each cohort possesses, which forms the basis for identifying similarities and differences in work approaches.

**Table 2: Attitudes and Values**

<b>Traditionalists (1922-1945)</b>	<b>Baby Boomers (1946-1964)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Loyalty</li><li>▪ Respect for Authority</li><li>▪ Dedication and sacrifice</li><li>▪ Patience</li><li>▪ Conformity</li><li>▪ Honour</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Optimism</li><li>▪ Involvement</li><li>▪ Team orientation</li><li>▪ Personal Growth &amp; Gratification</li><li>▪ Youthfulness</li><li>▪ Equality</li></ul>
<b>Generation X (1965-1980)</b>	<b>Generation Y (1981-2000)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Independence and self-reliance</li><li>▪ Pragmatism</li><li>▪ Skepticism</li><li>▪ Informality</li><li>▪ Balance</li><li>▪ Collaboration</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Confidence</li><li>▪ Diversity</li><li>▪ Civic duty</li><li>▪ Respect for authority</li><li>▪ Dedication</li><li>▪ Optimism</li></ul>

Source: Adapted from Zemke et al., 2000

As each generation enters the workforce, its attitudes and values are transformed into characteristics and skills that impact workplace performance.

## Characteristics & Skills

Generational attitudes and values come to life through actions and behaviours on the job. Workplace performance can be directly tied to an employee's attitudes and values which in turn impacts his/her collaboration, team work, motivation and leadership style.

**Table 3: Attitudes and Values**

<b>Traditionalists (1922-1945)</b>	<b>Baby Boomers (1946-1964)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Compliant</li><li>▪ Stable</li><li>▪ Detail orientated</li><li>▪ Hard working</li><li>▪ Dedicated</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Driven to succeed</li><li>▪ Team players</li><li>▪ Relationship focused</li><li>▪ Eager to add value</li><li>▪ Participative management style</li></ul>
<b>Generation X (1965-1980)</b>	<b>Generation Y (1981-2000)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Techno-literate</li><li>▪ Flexible and adaptable</li><li>▪ Creative</li><li>▪ Independent</li><li>▪ At ease with multi-tasking</li><li>▪ Results driven</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Technology savvy</li><li>▪ Dedicated</li><li>▪ Collective action</li><li>▪ Self-reliant</li><li>▪ Expressive and tolerant of differences</li><li>▪ Eager to accept more responsibility</li><li>▪ Innovative</li></ul>

Source: Adapted from Zemke et al., 2000

Each cohort has the ability to contribute and add value to business performance by maximize its skills, managing its weaknesses, and creating opportunities to collaborate across generational lines. To be most successful at creating a complementary workplace, it is important to understand where similarities and differences exist between and across generations. It is only through a deeper understanding of generational identities and mindsets that organizations, managers, and employees can create more productive, result-driven teams.

The next section of this paper demonstrates the similarities and differences between the generations at they relate to six key factors, followed by a discussion of how organizations can best manage the generational divide at a divisional and organizational level.

## **SECTION 2: Four Approaches to Work**

The issue facing many organizations today is how to capitalize on a multi-generational workforce in order to drive efficiency and achieve greater business results. With four generations in the workplace, organizations are faced with four different, and often conflicting, approaches to work. Since generations have individual / unique identities and mindsets, “generational baggage” travels with them into the workplace, impacting workplace performance. For example, when a Traditionalist’s approach to work based on respect for authority and a directive management style meets a Gen Xer’s relaxed attitude toward authority and informal approach, conflicts erupt between team members. When generational approaches to work clash, the results are loss of productivity, increased turnover, reduced employee motivation, and diminished business results.

Section one of this paper outlined how the four generations differ as per life-defining events, attitudes, values, characteristics and skills. These differences translate into four different approaches to work which impact creativity, innovation and collaboration. The following table lists similarities and differences between the generations, as they relate to six key root causes that impact workplace performance.

**Table 4: Generational Similarities & Differences**

Root Causes	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Gen Ys
<b>Loyalty &amp; Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal and supportive of traditional establishments (government, military, big business)</li> <li>▪ Trust in formal structures, believe that they will serve the best interests of the people / employee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to one's own needs through on-going growth, development and self-gratification</li> <li>▪ Anti-establishment demonstrated through activism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to self through independence and self-reliance</li> <li>▪ Lack of trust in formal establishments (government, media), skeptical of motivations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to individual and team goals through dedication and hard work</li> <li>▪ Trust in centralized authority</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship with Authority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect for authority and hierarchical system</li> <li>▪ Seniority and job titles are respected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Challenge authority</li> <li>▪ Desire flat organizations that are democratic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unimpressed by authority</li> <li>▪ Competence and skills are respected over seniority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect for authority who demonstrate competence and advanced skills</li> <li>▪ Flip traditional roles on their head by teaching superiors how to use technology</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship with Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to the organization</li> <li>▪ 'Pay your dues' mentality</li> <li>▪ Climb the corporate ladder</li> <li>▪ Career = opportunity</li> <li>▪ Understands the volatile nature of employment</li> <li>▪ Formal relationships with superiors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to the team</li> <li>▪ 'Live to work' mentality</li> <li>▪ Career = self worth</li> <li>▪ Wants job security</li> <li>▪ Personal relationships with superiors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to the manager</li> <li>▪ 'Work to live' mentality</li> <li>▪ Career = one part of me</li> <li>▪ Expects to be downsized</li> <li>▪ Informal relationship with superiors</li> <li>▪ "Tell me what you can do for me"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyal to colleagues</li> <li>▪ 'Work to contribute' mentality</li> <li>▪ Career = opportunity to add value</li> <li>▪ Very casual relationship with superiors</li> <li>▪ "Show me what you can do for me <b>right now</b>"</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Generational Similarities & Differences (continued)**

<b>Root Causes</b>	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Gen Xers</b>	<b>Gen Ys</b>
<b>Relationship with Colleagues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formal relationships</li> <li>▪ When in conflict, defer to seniority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal relationships</li> <li>▪ Avoid conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Colleagues as friends</li> <li>▪ Open dialogue to resolve conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Casual and social relationships</li> <li>▪ Debate and challenge each other to achieve compromise</li> </ul>
<b>Work Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work hard - 'Get it done'</li> <li>▪ Focus on process and rules</li> <li>▪ Don't rock the boat</li> <li>▪ Follow the leader</li> <li>▪ Linear work style</li> <li>▪ Learn from elders / more experienced</li> <li>▪ Dislike change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bend the rules</li> <li>▪ Work in teams</li> <li>▪ Focus on people not numbers</li> <li>▪ Structured work style</li> <li>▪ Cautious of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on results</li> <li>▪ Change the rules</li> <li>▪ Work independently with little supervision and informal team structure</li> <li>▪ Multi-task</li> <li>▪ Flexible work style</li> <li>▪ At ease with change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on quickest solution using technology</li> <li>▪ Challenge the rules</li> <li>▪ Work independently with supervision and direction</li> <li>▪ Fluid work style</li> <li>▪ Desires change</li> </ul>
<b>Management Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Command and control</li> <li>▪ Demand respect</li> <li>▪ "Do what I say, not what I do"</li> <li>▪ Micro-management</li> <li>▪ Dictatorial</li> <li>▪ Rigid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participative</li> <li>▪ Decisions by consensus</li> <li>▪ Open-minded</li> <li>▪ 'flavour of the month'</li> <li>▪ Desire alternative management styles but face difficulty in implementing</li> <li>▪ Political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fair</li> <li>▪ Straightforward</li> <li>▪ Flexible</li> <li>▪ Brutally honest</li> <li>▪ Not political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inclusive</li> <li>▪ Personal</li> <li>▪ Opinionated</li> <li>▪ Still to be determined</li> </ul>

## Managing the Generational Mix

Managing the generational mix has become a critical business skill for organizations striving to improve business results. Given a multi-generational workforce, it is reasonable to expect challenges in managing and leading a diverse group of employees. However, organizations increasingly are losing valuable time and resources when they are unable to create a collaborative work environment where generational teams can thrive.

Organizations often face inter-generational challenges in the following six areas:

### 1. Managing and Motivating

- Clashes between Baby Boomers' management style and Gen Xers' expectations
- Gen Xers managing older employees
- Gen Xers / Gen Ys gaining credibility from Traditionalists
- Traditionalists gaining respect from Gen X & Ys

### 2. Growth and Enrichment

- Creating career opportunities for Gen X & Y employees
- Cross-training Traditionalists
- Continuing to provide challenging work experiences for Baby Boomers
- High turnover among Gen X employees

### 3. Team building

- Conflict between Traditionalists and Gen Ys' approach to making decisions and taking action
- Equality and respect for all team members
- Compensation based on results not tenure

### 4. Sales and Service

- Gen X and Gen Y's informal, casual communication style with customers
- Cohort marketing

### 5. Training

- Different learning styles for each generation
- The need for alternative delivery platforms and flexibility in scheduling

### 6. Recruiting

- Attracting the best and brightest from each generation
- Creating a win-win employment relationship

Adapted from Zemke, et al., 2002

It is imperative that different generations communicate to understand their similarities and find ways to resolve differences, so that team, divisional and organizational

performance can be increased. A high-producing, integrated organization will be best equipped to respond to the demands of a changing economy. The successful organization must focus its efforts on people management strategies that bridge the gap between generations to create more productive relationships. By leveraging the knowledge of the similarities and differences between generations, organizations can create a work environment that complements generational skills and avoids clashes and conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

Some critics may assert that generational conflicts have always existed and don't require any special attention or dedication on the part of organizations. They may argue that despite these conflicts "organizations have been successful thus far, why change now?" In our current business environment, every organization must look to improve key performance indicators such as productivity, cost reduction and flexibility in responding to rapidly changing customer demands. "How people react and respond to these changes often sets them on a collision course"<sup>xiii</sup>. The speed at which each generation can adapt to our changing world will greatly impact an organization's ability to remain competitive in a global marketplace. Minimizing conflicts and maximizing the skill sets of generational approaches to work will ensure key performance indicators are maximized.

According to Don Tapscott, unless Traditionalists and Baby Boomers come to accept their younger counterparts, we may be on a collision course that has both social and economic implications. "An older generation, mistrustful and threatened by new ideas and new tools, will be pitted against a new generation increasingly resentful of attempts to curtail its growth and rights"<sup>xiv</sup>. Frequent inter-generational power struggles in the workplace need to be resolved in order to improve team, divisional and organizational performance.

Today intergenerational issues are "unique...[as] they reflect the challenges business are having as they struggle to move out of the workplace of the past [and] into that of the future...the fact is everyone, regardless of age, is a member of the workforce of the future. Everyone, regardless of generation, must become flexible, entrepreneurial, techno-savvy knowledge workers focused on getting great work done – or risk becoming obsolete. This is the common ground on which everyone must collaborate and on which [organizations] must manage"<sup>xv</sup>.

Each generation must play an active role in building bridges between cohorts to ensure increased communication, collaboration and productivity. Organizations that don't address the generational chasm, and the consequent gaps in performance, will risk losing customer loyalty, competitive advantage and overall shareholder value.



## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Craig and Benette. **After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X**, 1997, p.5
- <sup>ii</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000
- <sup>iii</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000
- <sup>iv</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000
- <sup>v</sup> Howe and Strauss, “**The New Generation Gap**”, 1992
- <sup>vi</sup> Craig and Benette. **After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X**, 1997
- <sup>vii</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000
- <sup>viii</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000, p.130
- <sup>ix</sup> Tulgan, **Managing the Generation Mix**, 2002
- <sup>x</sup> Tulgan, **Managing the Generation Mix**, 2002
- <sup>xi</sup> Zemke, **Generations at Work**, 2000, p.143
- <sup>xii</sup> Tulgan, **Managing the Generation Mix**, 2002,p.xv
- <sup>xiii</sup> Tulgan, **Managing the Generation Mix**, 2002, p.xviii
- <sup>xiv</sup> Tapscott, **Growing up Digital**, 1998, p.12
- <sup>xv</sup> Tulgan, **Managing the Generation Mix**, 2002, p.113/114

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