

THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE:  
STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING  
FOUR GENERATIONS

HONORS THESIS

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by

Holly Louise Watson

San Marcos, Texas

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FOUR GENERATIONS

Thesis Supervisor:

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Kay Nicols, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Management

Approved:

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Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.  
Director of the University Honors Program

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING FOUR GENERATIONS**

by

Holly Louise Watson

Texas State University-San Marcos

December 2010

**SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: KAY NICOLS, Ph.D.**

Today's workforce consists of four generations: the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Over 60 years of knowledge, special skills, different perspectives, varying expectations, diverse experiences, and an assortment of work styles make up the workforce. This assortment of talent and varying views has potential for conflict, but organizations that take advantage of the diverse workforce may use it as a source of competitive advantage. Human resource (HR) specialists have the opportunity to capitalize on the assets of each generation as demographics and social

trends will have a significant impact on the workforce in the coming years. In this thesis, I examine several methods proposed by psychologists, sociologists, and business executives to utilize each generation's skills. I then make recommendations on how to develop a cohesive workforce, resulting in sustainability and growth for organizations.



## INTRODUCTION

Three times a year fresh college graduates enter the workforce. Many new graduates will be in their early twenties and will be entering the workforce where the U.S. Census Bureau says only 24 percent of Americans hold Bachelor degrees or higher (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2010*). This competitive advantage is a step towards a profitable career for these young graduates. However, there is an underlying barrier of entry many young graduates are facing, their age. A recent study of generations done on behalf of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) by Kimberly S. McDonald and Linda M. Hite finds that age is the most prevalent barrier to success for young professionals. McDonald's and Hite's research revealed that many individuals find their youth as "an obstacle in terms of gaining notice and being respected." One individual was quoted as saying, "I think that there are people that I have worked with that don't put any credit in things that I said because they're older than me." Another said, "A lot of older folks think they know everything. They've been around; they've fought. And so when you step up and you try to work with them, as a youth, I'm often overlooked." A common response was that "you don't feel like people are taking you seriously" (McDonald, Hite, 2008). In the competitive workforce, how will these young professionals overcome this obstacle, and what can management do to bring younger and older professionals together?

Today's workforce consists of four generations: the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Spanning over 60 years, special skills,

different perspectives, varying expectations, diverse experiences, and an assortment of work styles make up the workforce. This smorgasbord of talent and varying views has a potential for conflict, but organizations that can take advantage of the diverse workforce could see a competitive advantage develop. Human resource (HR) specialists have the opportunity to capitalize on the assets of each generation as demographics and social trends will have a significant impact on the workforce in the coming years (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to examine each generation's characteristics, provide insight into misleading stereotypes, describe management and leadership styles, and analyze key areas of an organization's work environment. The goal of this thesis is to help organizations understand generational differences, which will help create a sustainable, cohesive, and competitive workforce.

## THE GENERATIONS

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is a professional human resource association that promotes human resource management and provides education, certification, and networking to its members. SHRM also lobbies Congress on issues pertinent to labor management (About the Society for Human Resource Management). R.W. Judy and C. D'Amico, researchers of SHRM, published its predictions of the workforce in a 1997 article titled *Workforce 2020: Work and workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Judy, D'Amico, 1997). The article focused on demographic change as a major global force shaping the world economy. In a similar article published by SHRM in 2008, *Workplace Forecast*, the predictions hold true with key demographic trends such as: 1) the aging population, 2) retirement of large numbers of Baby Boomers, 3) generational issues, and 4) a greater demand for work/life balance (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008). Moreover, issues of increased retirement of older workers causes concerns of lost talent, forgotten skills, and labor shortages. However, even though the Baby Boomers are at the age of retirement, not as many are retiring as SHRM had predicted. This is due to the economic crisis, the housing crash in 2008, and the social security and health reforms made by the government. The extension of the Baby Boomers careers is a focal point for HR managers. They are looking for new retention strategies and methods to successfully manage the generational differences in terms of experience, values, motivation levels, and expectations. By looking at each generation carefully,

organizations and HR managers can successfully manage the diverse and changing workforce (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010).

Karl Mannheim, a social scientist, defines a generation in his work from the early 1920s. He says a generation is a group of people of the same age group who are connected by powerful historical event(s) (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). A September 2010 study from Jean Twenge, Stacy Campbell, Brian Hoffman, and Charles Lance supports Mannheim's 1920s theory. Twenge's, Campbell's, Hoffman's, and Lance's research says that generational cohorts include individuals born around the same time who share distinctive social or historical life events. The generations are influenced by broad forces such as parents, peers, media, economic and social events, and popular culture. These forces create common value systems distinguishing one generation from the next (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance, 2010).

The inability to relate to another generation has created what is known to some as a generation gap (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). The generation gap is not a recent occurrence. A child's relationship with their parents is a great example of a generation gap. Conflicting ideas of appearances, attitudes, values, and interests cause havoc for many households. Much of the stress and arguments that build between the parent and offspring(s) occur due to miscommunication or misunderstanding; and through communication, understanding is built. This conflict may be more discreet in the workforce, but the solution can be found the same way. The willingness to understand each generation's attitudes, beliefs, values, and interests opens the lines of communication between individuals of different generations.

To further understand each generation in more detail, we will now turn to a discussion of the four generations currently in the workforce. This is to enhance understanding and promote communication in order to appreciate the unique aspects and characteristics of each generation. As a warning to HR managers and readers, the grouping of facts based on each generation is influenced by majority trends, but are not distinctive characteristics identifiable in each individual of the described generation. Just because a generation has general characteristics does not mean that all individuals within it have all of the characteristics.

**Traditionalists** December 7, 1941, also remembered as the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, is a distinctive event for the generation known as the Traditionalists (Laurel, 2005). Traditionalists' values are shaped from the hardships they faced during the Great Depression and World War II. They believe in hard work and dislike wasting time. A traditionalist holds high regards for their spoken word and believes in authority and the regular order of things (Mask, 2007). Traditionalists view work as a privilege and have a strong work ethic (Laurel, 2005). They grew up playing outside and listening to the radio for their entertainment. Today technology is changing rapidly, making it difficult for the Traditionalists to feel as if they even speak the same language as more computer savvy individuals. They have seen the world operate without technology, but unless they are willing to see technology as a necessity, not a luxury, the generational gap will take longer to bridge (Fiterman, 2003).

Though there is slight debate on the exact years that encompass each generation, today's Traditionalists are approximately 65-88 years old, and in the United States, more than 1 million workers are 75 years of age or older. Born between 1922-1945,

Traditionalists are also known as Matures, Loyalists, and the War Generation. The Korean War, rise of labor unions, and the discovery of penicillin are additional historic events that have shaped this generation (Lieber, 2010). Their characteristics of hard work, consistency, and respect for authority makes them detail-oriented, thorough, and reliable workers. However, Traditionalists are uneasy with change and conflict, often adapting their behavior but not their attitude. While enjoying good conversation and socializing is acceptable, independent initiative is not as admired (Laurel, 2005). Traditionalists hold high regards to their lifetime's worth of experience and will often disengage if they believe the organization or management does not respect their historical knowledge (Lieber, 2010).

**Baby Boomers** Between 1946 – 1964, the Traditionalists became moms and dads and the “Me” generation was born. The Baby Boomers are often referred to as Hippies or the Beat Generation (Mask, 2007). Born after WWII, the Baby Boom generation is the largest generation in the United States. The sheer size of this generation has caused a significant impact on societies worldwide. Historic events that have shaped this generation include the space race, rock and roll, women's liberation, President John Kennedy's assassination (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010), the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Woodstock, and the Cold War (Lieber, 2010).

Baby Boomers are competitive and took the concept of hard work from their parents and became “workaholics.” Committed to climbing the corporate ladder of success, they believe that hard work will propel them forward in a company. Baby Boomers seek out possibilities while accepting people who will perform to their standards (Mask, 2007).

Baby Boomers have strong characteristics of being idealistic, driven, and optimistic. They are fueled with the desire to please, but seem judgmental of those who see things differently. This can cause conflict in the workforce when other generations propose new ideas or change (Laurel, 2005). Baby Boomers have an idealistic mind-set that focuses them on values, but seem judgmental of those who see things differently (Laurel, 2005). Many are concerned that technology has hindered the ability of face-to-face human interaction in the business world (Lieber, 2010). Both Baby Boomers and Traditionalists are known to have good social skills but are resistant with change. Later discussed in this paper, we discover that Generation X and Y thrive on change while not being so confident with face-to-face interaction. This is an opportunity for HR managers to have the younger and older generations work together. Generation X and Y can show why change is good, and the older generations can use their past experience and communication skills to teach and refine new ideas.

**Generation X** Generation X, born between 1965-1981, has learned from their parent's work ethics. They work hard but are efficient so that they can spend time with their own interests and families. This has created what is known as work-life balance, a time management effort to balance both professional and personal life (Mask, 2007). Also referred to as the "latch-key" children, Generation X grew up with both parents working, high parental divorce rates, and the massive job layoffs of the 1980s. This caused Generation X to become more entrepreneurial and individualistic rather than team players (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). Additional events that have shaped this generation include the rise of MTV, the emergence of personal computers,

the AIDS crisis, massive corporate downsizing, and the Los Angeles riots (Lieber, 2010). With these events influencing Gen-X's individualistic attitudes, they prefer emails over long meeting and letters, but want access to plenty of information (Laurel, 2005).

Also known as Baby Busters and Twentysomethings, Generation X is more willing to take a chance with their own investments and developments rather than with their organizations or other institutions for long-term security. Experience with corporate downsizing has shown them that those relationships are unreliable. In turn, this attitude has stereotyped Generation X as disloyal (Fiterman, 2003). They are self-reliant, pragmatic, fun, and techno-literate. Thinking globally and valuing diversity, Generation X is adaptable, unintimidated by authority, and has an ability to multitask. However they are impatient people with poor social skills who are looking for flexibility and variety to keep them challenged (Laurel, 2005). Generation X change jobs frequently in order to increase marketability (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance, 2010), and they often have conflict with management and organizations that operate according to a rigid, hierarchical structure (Lieber, 2010).

**Generation Y** Generation Y, Generation Baby Boomlets, or Nexters, are the names for the youngest generation born between 1982-2000. Generation Y is the generation that grew up with technology. Much of their ability to multi-task comes from their connection with technology, and explains why this generation appreciates positive reinforcement and feedback at an accelerated rate (Mask, 2007). The social and political media bombardment of information to this generation has increased their global orientation. The media and technology are becoming so powerful that communication



between countries is becoming a much simpler task (Alch, 2000). An opportunity for organizational growth can be found within this generation while HR managers will have to develop the understanding in this generation that technology has not been so available to previous generations.

Generation Y has the trait of adaptation and realization for continued learning. They have also watched their parents being cut from organizations due to downsizing, mergers, takeovers, and closings in order for the companies to maintain global competitiveness (Mask, 2007). They have watched several iconic companies such as Enron, TYCO, and Arthur Andersen collapse due to unethical leadership (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance, 2010), and have been influenced by reality TV, 9/11, the Columbine massacre, the U.S.-led war on terror, and Web-based social networking (Lieber, 2010).

This generation understands the importance of training and building skills, abilities, and knowledge in order to establish a career path (Mask, 2007). Generation Y thrives on positive reinforcement, autonomy, and challenge, but they welcome supervision and advice when handling difficult people issues. This combination has created a blend of collaboration, interdependence, and networking so that they may reach their career goals (Laurel, 2005). Members of the newest generation have respect for people who demonstrate expertise and knowledge, but are not interested or hindered by rank, age, or years of tenure. The group is ready for empowerment and the chance to utilize their skills by participating in decision making and company topics (Alch, 2000).

Each generation has their own skill set and preferences due to the environment that influenced their learning. The generational gap can be breached by having HR managers teach the specialties of each generation. As explained earlier, communication is key to understanding, and the realization that there only exist many different perspectives; not right or wrong perspectives, but just simply different.

## PARADIGMS TO OVERCOME

Scott Hunter, certified professional speaker, has been working with different organizations for over two decades through key note speeches, workshops, retreats, and management team coaching. Some of his clients include Deloitte & Touch, LLP, IBM, and Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company of Central Virginia.

Hunter is the author of *Unshackled Leadership – Building Business Based on Faith, Trust, Possibility, and Abundance*. In his book, Hunter breaks down the paradigm within which companies and many people operate. He suggests ways of overcoming the customs and routines many people find themselves living in without realizing the boundaries they are building. Hunter also discusses how being trapped within a paradigm causes people to pass judgment without considering the situation or the person (Hunter, 2008). This is much like Generation Y's feeling of being "overlooked" by their older co-workers and management (McDonald, Hite, 2008).

Hunter's idea of a paradigm correlates to the concept of different perceptions. Sometimes it takes great effort to change a rigid perception. Adam Smith defines a paradigm in his book *Powers of the Mind*, as a shared set of assumptions or beliefs. This shared set of assumptions can be seen in the example when people thought the earth was flat in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These people took a belief for granted and turned it into a widely accepted fact. They were all living in a paradigm. Smith continued to say that a paradigm is "the way we perceive the world. [It] explains the world to us and helps us predict its behavior. When we are in the middle of a paradigm, it is hard to imagine any other

paradigm.” A good example of this is fish to water. A fish must be taken out of water for its paradigm to be changed; otherwise, the fish does not know that any other world exists, or that it is even swimming in water (Hunter, 2008). This concept of a concealed world, which many generations have adopted, causes conflict when new ideas or different perspectives are brought or mixed into an existing paradigm.

Applying different paradigms to generations can begin with the basic concept that each generation grew up with similar social experiences. Traditionalists live within a paradigm of seeing business operate without technology. They are known to have a high sense of loyalty and dedication to their work. Baby Boomers are motivated to work because they value success and promotion through a hierarchical structure. Generation X holds a strong sense of independence since their paradigm was formed from high unemployment rates they saw with their parents. Generation Y’s paradigm is formed around technology and globalization. They see the world with a different perspective and optimistic possibilities (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010).

The paradigm discussed by Hunter is a way of describing why each generation operates differently. Each generation has different goals and outlook for their futures, and sometimes this narrowed view limits new ideas and strong methods that could become positive gains for all. These divided perceptions or generational gap can be further explained through social identity theory.

**Social Identity** Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, later explained in this paper, identifies social needs. People have a natural desire to be accepted, have companionship, and be loved. According to social identity theory, individuals classify

themselves and others into groups that are relatable to that individual. These separate groups include, but are not limited to, race, gender, national origin, and age (Cherry, Kendra. “Social Learning Theory”, 2005). Identity threats arise in many forms due to the inability to relate with some characteristics. Many relationships are built because two or more people naturally relate to similar interests, values, and morals. These relationships that are built boost self-esteem, and according to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs fulfill the deficiency need level of being accepted and loved within a group. Moreover, the inability to relate to a person poses a threat. The varying views, characteristics, habits, and morals are generally viewed as unfavorable. Threats to one’s social identity cause disengagement and withdrawal from the out-group member and results in the lack of the psychological feeling of safety and value. In a work environment this could lead to employee disengagement.

The chart below shows how even each generation has varying views of work, authority, and relationships. It takes effort to understand a different perspective, and as described earlier each generation has varying goals and views of work.

**Mixture of Perspectives (Table 1)**

	Traditionalists 65 – 88 yrs. old	Baby Boomer 46 – 64 yrs. old	Generation X 30 – 45 yrs. old	Generation Y 10 -29 yrs. old
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work Ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
Authority	Respectful	Love/Hate	Unimpressed	Polite
Leadership	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pull Together
Relationships	Personal	Personal	Reluctant to	Inclusive
	Sacrifice	Gratification	Commit	
Turnoffs	Vulgarity	Political	Cliché/Hype	Promiscuity
		Incorrectness		

(Laurel, 2005; Buahene, and Kovary, 2009)

Social identities arise from dynamic relationships and are important in intergroup and organizational development. Research has shown that demographic similarities foster greater perception of similarities in values and historical experiences that lead to greater unity within a group. Even in the work environment, a co-worker whose age is viewed as similar to one's own age heightens identification with that co-worker, resulting in greater job meaningfulness, psychological safety, and work engagement (Avery, 2007).

However, limiting work groups within an organization can be dangerous and lead to group think. Social psychologist Irving Janis coined the term "group think" in order to define the danger with in-group member decision making. Janis says group think occurs when cohesive in-group members feel pressured to strive for unanimity often resulting in the deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. Often

undetectable until a costly result occurs, groups affected by group think make decisions without considering alternatives, ethics, or appropriateness. Each member of the in-group is often more concerned with maintaining a high level of cohesion causing new ideas to be suppressed due to a member's fear of becoming unaccepted or devalued (Hart, 1991).

Overall, each generation lives within its own paradigm. The members are conscious and aware of established ideas and trends, and accepted views are supported by the in-group members of each generation. However, danger presents itself when outside perceptions challenge the way in-group members think. So in order to avoid conflict amongst the multigenerational workforce, every generation needs to realize that others view the world differently. Differences in age, race, national origin, and gender bring in creativity, innovation, and diversity, and for change and new developments to occur thinking outside one's confined paradigm is important.

Managers and HR professionals can use Albert Bandura's social learning theory as a tool to capitalize on generational differences while creating unity in the workforce. In the late 1970s, Albert Bandura introduced the idea of social learning theory. Bandura, who has his Ph.D. in psychology, argued that people can learn new information and behaviors from watching other people. He says, "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do." Managers and organizational leaders can use this theory when forming groups of varying generations. Organizational leaders have to create an environment of understanding, value, and open communication amongst their employees (Cherry, Kendra. "Albert Bandura Biography", 2005). After being given

autonomy and encouragement, co-workers should share ideas and skills through communication and observational learning.

More methods of overcoming generational differences are discussed later in this paper, but for now, understanding that there are common grounds for all generations to relate to is an important foundation to establish.



## COMMON GROUND

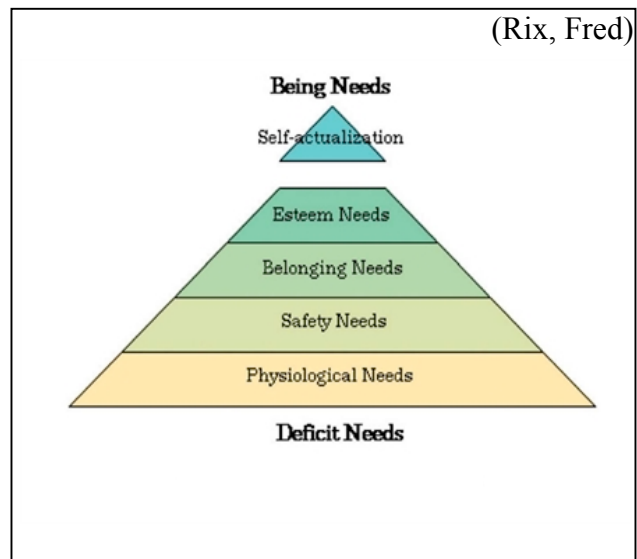
The realization that people are all the same, but come from different backgrounds and experiences is a valuable step in working within a diverse workplace. C.S. Lewis said in his book *Surprised By Joy*, “Nothing, I suspect, is more astonishing in any man's life than the discovery that there do exist people very, very like himself (Lewis, 1955).”

People have basic needs to be satisfied no matter their age or generation. Abraham Maslow demonstrates this idea in his concept of hierarchy of needs. Maslow first introduced his idea in his paper “*A Theory of Human Personality*” written in 1943. Often displayed as a pyramid, Maslow’s concept consists of five different levels progressing from the most basic needs to more complex needs.

The basic physical requirements including the need for food, water, sleep, and air is the first level of the hierarchy. These needs are the most basic and instinctive within the hierarchy because all needs become secondary until these physiological needs are met. Progressing from the physiological needs level to the security needs level, a person desires the need for safety and security. While not as important as food, water, and sleep, security needs include steady employment, health insurance, safe neighborhoods, and shelter.

Physiological needs are provided to children as they grow from birth into adulthood. This is why one can see these basic needs as instinctive and important in order to avoid unpleasant feelings or deprivation. Eventually security needs are gained once the child

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Table 2)**



becomes less dependent upon the parent. Wrapping up the basic needs, also known as the deficit needs, is the third level known as the social needs level. This includes the needs for belonging, love, and affection. Acceptance and companionship in work groups, social groups, or religious groups are an important part of this level. This level was mentioned earlier when discussing the social identity theory.

The growth needs, also known as the being needs, form the last two levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Esteem needs become increasingly important after the first three levels are satisfied. This level consists of self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment. While these needs are validated by the people who surround a person in their work and personal life, they are desired by all ages. Children look for approval of their first steps; teenagers look for approval of scholastic, athletic, or artistic achievement from their parents; friends seek social recognition and acceptance from other friends; and co-workers look for praise from managers.

The final level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the self-actualizing need. This is often the most difficult level to reach (Cherry, Kendra. "Hierarchy of Needs: The Five...", 2005). Self-actualizing people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, and less concerned with the opinions of other. Some characteristics of self-actualized people include the following, as described by Maslow:

- Self-Acceptance: Self-actualizing people tend to lack inhibitions and treat others the same regardless of background, current status, or socio-economic and cultural factors.
- Acceptance and Realism: Self-actualizing people view things logically and rationally rather than fearing the different or unknown. They have a realistic perspective of themselves, others, and the world around them.
- Problem-centering: Self-actualizing people are satisfied with who they are and who they are becoming. This allows them to be more concerned with solving problems outside themselves. Motivated by personal responsibility and ethics, these people enjoy helping others and finding solutions to problems in the external world.
- Spontaneity: This characteristic allows self-actualizing people to be open and unconventional with their methods. While still following general accepted social expectations, they do not feel confined to these social norms (Cherry, Kendra. "Hierarchy of Needs: Self-Actualization", 2005).

While Maslow's hierarchy is portrayed as a pyramid with a distinct step by step method, Maslow notes that the order these levels of fulfillment are achieved does not always have to be in a methodical fashion.

People of all ages are looking for praise, recognition, and acceptance (Cherry, Kendra. "Hierarchy of Needs: The Five...", 2005). This results in each member from the four generations having common grounds to initialize understanding with each other. This understanding and foundation of acceptance can be the beginning of breaking paradigms and rerouting social groupings.

## **BRIDGING THE GAP**

Each generation's identifiable characteristics translate into distinct workplace behaviors with regard to relationships with the organization, authority, and colleagues as well as to varying work, management, and learning styles. HR managers can use Maslow's pyramid and the knowledge of social identity and social learning in order to build a cohesive organization across the generations. When used in this paper cohesion means connection and unity, but does not mean conformity. The desired cohesion is understanding and willingness to communicate in spite of generational differences. Cohesive work environments will spark interest, innovation, and diversity amongst the co-workers allowing the organization to develop and grow. Moreover, SHRM defines this action as engagement, or a productive relationship between an organization and its employees. "The relationship must align with employees' values, expectations and behaviors from a *generational* perspective" (Buahene, and Kovary, 2009).

**Leveraging Generational Differences** Skipping the first two tiers of Maslow's Hierarchy, needs that can be obtained by the employees themselves, and focusing in on the final stages can grow both the individual and the organization. Focusing in on what each generation's career goals are is the first step in creating value and belongingness in the work place (Jenkins, 2008). This values approach assumes that people will be motivated by activities and outcomes that they see are important. Work values, as defined through research done by Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance, are the outcomes people desire and feel they should attain through work. There are two

distinctions between work values, extrinsic values and intrinsic values. Extrinsic work values focus on tangible rewards external to the individual. These tangible outcomes include income, advancement opportunities, and status. In contrast, intrinsic work values focus on the process of work and are more intangible. This includes learning potential, creative reign, job security, and altruistic rewards such as helping others or contributing to society (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance, 2010).

Leveraging the competencies employees offer adds value and meaningfulness to an individual's work environment. Managers can utilize an employee's many talents and strengths in order to provide challenging opportunities. These challenges will result in increased retention and engagement of workers since they will not feel as if their capabilities are being neglected (Jenkins, 2008). Traditionalists may become distraught and frustrated if management tasked them on a project that continually changed; moreover, Generation Y would become bored and disconnected if management insisted tasks be completed in a highly bureaucratic manner that is rule- or process-driven (Lieber, 2010). Becoming knowledgeable in what each generation is seeking in their work allows for opportunities to be structured appropriately (Jenkins, 2008).

Traditionalists seek respect. They are motivated by the acknowledgement of their historical experience and expertise. They dislike wasting time and are willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater good of the organization. Management and other generations can learn from the Traditionalist's experiences and skillful ability to maintain professional relationships. Social observational strategies can be implemented by management in order to showcase these skills. Management can schedule time where a

young employee job shadows a Traditionalist at work. This will cause interaction among the generations and transfer of knowledge.

Baby Boomers need success. As competition and climbing the corporate ladder formed their “workaholic” behavior, many cohorts of this generation are money motivated (Lieber, 2010). Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance compared a sample of workers in 1982 with a sample in 1989. Their results show that extrinsic rewards are most important to this generation (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance, 2010). However, due to the current age of the Baby Boomer generation and the refusal to retire, some work values have shifted. Flexible working conditions and the opportunity to give back to society is trumping the sheer size of the pay package. Additionally, Baby Boomers were asked to rate seven types of rewards that compared to compensation, and they listed working with high-quality colleagues, in an intellectually stimulating environment, while being recognized for their contributions as their top desires (Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2009).

Generation X needs autonomy. Supervisors and managers should give feedback but not orders. This generation thrives on flexibility and enjoying a work-life balance due to the environment in which they were raised. Long meetings and hierarchical structure disengages this generation (Lieber, 2010). A solution could be found in revamping communication strategies through emails and professional networks (Jenkins, 2008).

Generation Y needs validation. Considering everyone from the CEO to the mail clerk their peers, this generation has a casual approach to work. Often believing in a self-absorbed and inflated image of themselves, this generation seeks personal growth and is

highly motivated (Lieber, 2010). However, research shows that, much like the Baby Boomer generation, altruistic incentives are more intriguing than a large paycheck for Generation Y. Also when given the choice to work from home or in the office, 83% of this generation says that giving the freedom to choose motivates them to give 110% (Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2009).

Leveraging these different generational characteristics could be beneficial to any organization. The next section will present different methods management can use in order to capitalize on the characteristics each generation provides the workforce.



## **REENGINEERING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Organizations that hold back on the changing styles of business will have trouble retaining their employees. The most difficult part for management is keeping these self-sufficient generational cohorts aligned with corporate goals. The solution is to require strategic planning and constant internal communication. As the young generation brings in new ideas and throws out office politics, the seasoned generations will be able to help the younger workers keep these new ideas focused on the company's objectives (Alch 2000; Lieber, 2010).

**Company's Mission** A common goal amongst organizations, businesses, and teams is rallying together for a common cause. A way to get a multigenerational work group on the same page is to have teams or departmental groups write their own mission statement that aligns with the company's mission statement. This exercise will rally the teams together superseding generational differences. Regardless of which generation people are from, every employee needs to understand the business they are investing themselves in and how they can go about fulfilling that goal.

**Compensations and Benefits** Older generations are holding off retirement for various reasons such as the health care reform, social security regulations, the stock market crash, and the current condition of the economy. However, intrinsic work value trends have pointed towards older and younger workers wanting more time off and flexible work loads. Even giving full medical benefits to older workers who decide to

work part-time can be an effective way of retaining skilled knowledge rather than spending company dollars on new employee training (Jenkins, 2008).

Other compensation and benefit programs have been tried by companies in order to attract both the younger and older generations. UBS created a graduate deferral program where new hires postpone their arrival for a year. This is attractive to recent graduates interested in devoting time to community service or the acquisition of new skills. UBS offered to pay half the base salary and a stipend for health insurance, while holding the promised job open for the individual. Many in this program used the year to do things such as learn Spanish in Argentina, participate with the economic development in Vietnam, study econometrics, or volunteer for major relief efforts.

CVS Pharmacy, a division of CVS Caremark, has locations in every region of America. They created a Snowbird Program that allows experienced store employees to move seamlessly among CVS locations according to their seasonal preferences. This program was very attractive to older workers who prefer warm winters in the south and cooler summers in the north. CVS was awarded a high-profile award from the American Society on Aging for this program (Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2009).

**Awareness** A rudimentary way of getting generations to work together is to provide them with educational tools and opportunities to educate one another on each generation's history, characteristics, milestone events, and culture. It is helpful for representatives from each generation to put together small programs to educate people and facilitate dialogue. If time does not allow for a program to be presented, create flyers and discussion topics in the break room or even through email (Jenkins, 2008).

**Mentoring** The goal of this strategy is to help ensure the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. However, mentors do not have to only come from the older generations. A key step in effective mentor programs is to survey the employees to reveal their learning and development goals. Then pair them with an employee who can grow and develop the desired skills (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). This creates cross-organizational dialogue among generations and furthers understanding for a cohesive work place (Jenkins, 2008).

Time Warner recently developed a mentoring program that engages people on both ends of their careers. They launched Digital Reverse Mentoring which allowed tech savvy college students to mentor senior executives on emerging digital trends such as Facebook, Twitter, and other Web 2.0 applications. This also allowed Generation Y the opportunity to showcase some consumer behavior trends and communication styles to the older generation, as well as a powerful way to break paradigms (Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2009).

Other mentoring models can include one-on-one mentoring sessions, group mentoring programs, and senior leadership discussion panels (Jenkins, 2008). Studies even show that 58% of Generation Y members look for professional advice and guidance from the Baby Boomers (Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2009). This is a great method to retain knowledge and actively engage each generation in working together, resulting in new avenues of communication and social groups. SHRM quotes, “Mentoring builds strong intergenerational working relationships, strategic use of intellectual capital and increased retention, and at its core, ensures a continuous flow of knowledge management across generations” (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010).

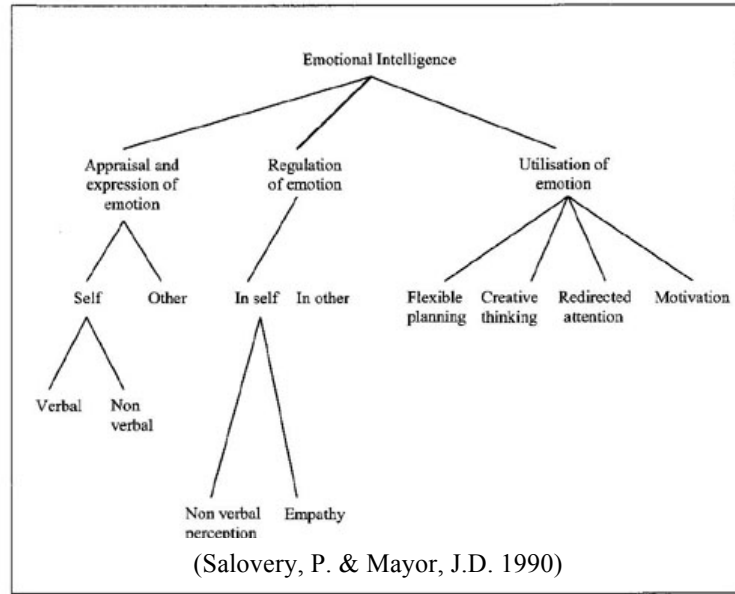
## RECOMMENDATIONS

Through my research there are additional topics that lack direct correlated efforts of bridging the generational gap; however, these areas should still be considered by management for further understanding of the multigenerational workforce.

**Emotional Intelligence** In 1990 two psychologists, John Mayer and Peter Salovey, brought the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) to the forefront of thinking. Before emotional intelligence, a person's intelligence quotient, better known as IQ, was the standard testing of someone's success in life. Now a new way of looking at intelligence has come into play that affects how many people interact and react to themselves and those around them (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence is an individual's "ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action." It is the ability to get along, develop trusting relationships, and communicate effectively with others. The image below shows how emotional intelligence can be diagramed relative to an individual's awareness of their own and other's degree of emotional intelligence (Morand, 2001).

### Emotional Intelligence (Table 3)



Emotions are impulsive reactions to a given situation, but understanding where these emotions come from or how to express emotions maturely is learned. Newborn babies cry to express sadness and anger when they are hungry or tired because they do not know how to communicate what they are feeling. Albert Bandura's social learning theory helps define the process of growing into a mature adult and realizing how to communicate emotion. People learn from their surroundings and experiences. A young teenager may not want to hear the well-meant advice of his or her father about social problems, but the father has valid experience because he has lived through similar situations (Morand, 2001).

The teaching of emotional intelligence begins as a child and is taught by parents. Generation Y could be viewed as poor communicators because social networks, texting, and other forms of technological communication has inhibited face-to-face interaction. Though this generation is praised for their teamwork skills, many of the teams they have had to interact with are amongst their peers. These teams are created within a comfortable socially identifiable environment. In Illinois, kindergarteners through high school seniors

are required to go through specific learning standards in SEL, or social and emotional learning programs. These programs are resulting in increased academic accomplishments, decreased misbehaviors, and more positive behaviors (Goleman, 1995).

**Using Emotional Intelligence at Work** The idea that breaking molds of social identity and growing the understanding of emotional intelligence could lead to better work environments and job satisfaction is plausible. The *Harvard Business Review* said Daniel Goleman's writing of emotional intelligence in his book, *Emotional Intelligence Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, is a "ground-breaking, paradigm-shattering idea, one of the most influential business ideas of the decade" (Goleman, 1995).

Managers and organizational leaders can learn how to interact with their employees and co-workers more effectively by developing a better sense of emotional intelligence. Being able to read and understand how another person can be motivated and led takes practice. Hunter mentions the act of listening with an open mind to others' opinions. Additionally, managers should create a good balance between constructive criticism and praise. Harry Levinson, a psychoanalyst turned corporate consultant, gives the following advice for critiquing with praise:

- Be specific: Indicate an incident that occurred and exactly what problem needs to be changed. Highlight what was done well, but do not be vague. This creates confusion and anger in the recipient.
- Offer a solution: The feedback should help direct the recipient to fixing the problem. Managers want to be careful not to demoralize or demotivate their employee, but instead encourage them to improve.

- Be present: Face to face communicate is most effective. People can respond better and quicker in order to resolve the problem with a clear solution.
- Be sensitive: Empathy goes a long way in relating to and encouraging the employee. Destructive effects occur when the critique is hurtful or becomes personal (Goleman, 1995).

As stated before, each generation is motivated through recognition and praise. This method is also beneficial for Generation X since the message is to the point, concise, and quick.

Management styles should develop from command and control to a more flexible and adaptable coaching model. Baby Boomers and Traditionalists are well versed in communications and can help teach and improve the relationship Generation X and Y have with people skills and emotional intelligence.

Adwoa K. Buahene, a managing partner for n-gen People Performance Inc., says she consistently hears that managers still need training on how to engage a multigenerational workforce and the need to layer on generational perspectives to performance management and on-boarding (Buahene). I believe that looking into the levels of emotional intelligence each employee has regarding their work could further reveal areas of opportunities for HR managers to develop. Seminars, exercises, and awareness programs could be implemented for understanding and realization of how to handle varying emotional intelligence levels.

**Leaders vs. Managers** “Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work towards a common goal” (Goleman, 1995). The attitude and excitement brought into a team begins with the core leaders. Leadership is the ability to motivate, encourage, and develop those around you into happier, confident, enthusiastic people. But what are managers looking for in their teams? People are influenced and taught how to think by the world around them. Different perceptions and attitudes are always going to be present, and with this come disagreements. However, people have a natural tendency to pass false judgment due to someone else’s perception being outside their social context or paradigm. It is up to management to terminate these stereotypes and build a constructive environment. So the popular debate continues, what does the workforce need? Good managers or good leaders? Marcus Buckingham, author of *First, Break All the Rules and Now, Discover your Strengths*, has a useful strategies for young leaders.

Buckingham begins by saying that “leaders and managers are completely different beasts.” A leader is a person who can communicate his/her ideas for the future clearly and passionately so that others believe and want those ideas to be achieved. Leaders focus on what people have in common so that a goal can be reached. They focus on the big picture and the common themes. However, a manager focuses on each unique quality of each unique individual. Managers dive into the details and understand the individual strengths of the people who make the ideas into reality (Reynolds, 2010).

Finding the cohesive bond between being a good leader and a good manager would be most advantageous for the multigenerational workforce. According to Jean



Phillips, writer for *HR Magazine*, by 2020, 16 percent of the U.S. population will be 65 years old and over. Other companies are at risk of losing a substantial number of their executives within the next five years. Nevertheless, many leaders of these organizations are ignoring the potential problems of the aging workforce.

As older generations retire, so does their experience and knowledge of the business. In the book, *Deep Smarts: How to Cultivate and Transfer Enduring Business Wisdom*, written by Dorothy Leonard and Walter C. Swap, it takes up to 10 years to develop and train the kind of knowledge that these highly experienced workers will take with them when they retire. Not only is this a loss of knowledge for a business, but a cut in their competitive edge and relationships with loyal customers (Phillips, 2007).

Managers and leaders are both needed, but not necessarily in two different people. One person can be both a manager and leader. As a manager, one needs to be directive and disciplined; as a leader one needs to be aware of themselves and those around them. Leaders should strive to bring out the best in their employees while managers delegate challenges and opportunities to learn (Marston, 2009).

This concept can help upper management and HR managers develop a supportive and positive work environment. Additionally, the attitudinal change of managers being effective leaders would also synchronize with the preferred working conditions of both Generation X and Y.

## **CLOSING**

Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y are today's workforce. More than 60 years of knowledge and skills are available to companies and managers. If each generation's talents were capitalized on, the outcome would be tremendous.

The Traditionalists have years of experience and historic knowledge. Baby Boomers have a work ethic and drive that has propelled them forward. Generation X is independent and balances the Baby Boomers' work drive with a desire for a work-life balance. Finally, Generation Y brings efficiency due to their ability to multi-task.

Ultimately, HR professionals and organizations have the unique opportunity to leverage the strengths from each generation to create a competitive advantage for their organization. Managing four generations in today's workforce is of growing interest, and organization leaders must see this trend. New generations are forming in elementary and junior high schools today. Although predicting the future of these generations is impossible, learning to create dialogue and address current generational differences now is a progressive movement for building a cohesive, sustainable workforce.

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