



Leading the Multi-Generational Workforce

An Online Continuing Education Course for Engineers

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Leading the Multi-Generational Workforce

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COURSE OVERVIEW	4
THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE	5
A SNAPSHOT OF THE GENERATIONS	6
Generations Broadly Defined	6
A Generational Snapshot.....	7
Tips on Leading Them.....	8
GENERATIONAL INFLUENCE ON LEADERSHIP	10
Applying This to your Workplace.....	14
Some Leadership Questions	15
WORKING STYLES & COMMUNICATION	16
Self-Assessment Survey	16
DEMONSTRATING OUR WORKING STYLE	21
The Working Styles Grid	22
The Analytical Style.....	23
The Amiable Style	25
The Driver Style.....	27
The Expressive Style.....	28
WORKING STYLE FLEXIBILITY	32
USING THE WORKING STYLES KNOWLEDGE	34
MOTIVATIONAL OVERVIEW	35
THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION	39
#1 Tell Me What You Expect of me.....	40
#2 Give me a Chance to Perform (and Learn).....	42

#3 Let me Know How I am Doing as I Go Along 43

#4 Give me Help and Guidance When I Need It..... 44

#5 Reward Me with Pay or Praise When I Succeed 45

MEASURING PERFORMANCE46

Are these Situations Productive or Busy?..... 47

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE GOALS.....48

MEASURING “HARD SKILLS”49

Section Review..... 53

MEASURING “SOFT SKILLS”54

Section Review..... 58

EMPLOYEES RATING EACH OTHER: GOOD OR BAD IDEA?.....59

Performance Assessment Sample Using a Likert Scale 60

APPLYING THIS TO YOUR ORGANIZATION61

COURSE OVERVIEW

Recorded history shows us there has always been concern about generational differences. Excavations of Roman ruins dated hundreds of years B.C. provided translated statements of alarmed city officials talking about their problems with the younger generation and wondering what will become of their society when the “stabilizing influence” of their elders passes away.

Technological advances in medicine, nutrition, exercise, and communication have given us increased life expectancies while social and economic changes mean people may be working longer instead of retiring or coming back into the workforce after retiring.

The workforce is becoming more diverse regarding generational makeup. Since each generation was formed during different social climates, their values and beliefs do not automatically mirror those of their parents.

So, we have the **Boomers** (1946-1964), **Generation X** (1965-1980 who are the first wave of Boomer children), **Generation Y aka Millennials** (1981-1995 sometimes called the second wave of Boomer children), and **Generation Z¹** (1996-2012) who are the most tech-savvy people ever because there never was a time in their lives without computers and the internet.

In addition, we encounter people in the workplace with whom we work very easily regardless of generation while there are others with whom we have difficulty. This is because of our ‘working styles’ and that has nothing to do with age. (We’ll talk about working styles beginning on page 16.)

I, the author of this course, am a Baby Boomer and much of my conversational content is written from that perspective. I think it will be evident where this is. I tell you this so that you will understand the context of the material at that point.

¹ The generational literature contains many different terms for these distinct groups, and these were chosen for no reason. The important aspect is their timeline, not their names.

THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

The topic of a multigenerational workforce can open hours of discussion and a wide range of topics. For our purpose with this course, we will look at the potential for conflict therein, identify some reasons for it, and provide guidelines on how leaders can negate that potential effectively and develop a strong relationship with the workforce or project team.

We must understand and address the reasons for this potential conflict if our organizations are to become as productive as possible and our employees are to develop to their full potential. (If you doubt this inherent cross-generational conflict potential, how many family gatherings for Thanksgiving Dinner have you seen go as smoothly as possible. In addition, Thanksgiving is usually when they get together for a short time annually. Imagine the conflict potential if they must work beside each other daily.)

The potential for conflict stems, at least as far as this course is concerned, from two distinct sources:

1. The **generation** (the colored vertical distinction below) within which the employee was born and,
2. The **working style** (the horizontal element with arrows) of that employee does not depend on their date of birth but is an individual characteristic of how they approach work regardless of when they were born. We will talk about Working Styles beginning on page 16.

We will identify these distinct sources individually first and then provide some guidelines for working effectively with them.

Working Styles →	Boomers Generation (Born 1946-1964)	Gen X (Born 1965-1980)	Gen Y or Millennials (Born 1981-1995)	Gen Z (Born 1996 – 2012)
Drivers				→
Expressives				→
Amiables				→
Analyticals				→

A SNAPSHOT OF THE GENERATIONS

There are some unique characteristics associated with the various generations in today's work force. If you can take time to discover them, it may make your team leading efforts go a little more smoothly.

GENERATIONS BROADLY DEFINED

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964):

- Characteristics: Competitive, workaholics, value job security and recognition.
- Communication: Formal, structured.
- Work Style: Competitive, structured. (“Business casual” was not a term they used.)
- Motivation: Job security, recognition. (The 401(k) was not an option for the older ones.)
- Expectations from Managers: Opportunities for advancement, recognition. (Spending time in grade to “pay your dues” was expected.)

Generation X (born 1965-1980):

- Characteristics: Independent, self-reliant, value work-life balance.
- Communication: Casual, flexible.
- Work Style: Independent, flexible.
- Motivation: Work-life balance, autonomy.
- Expectations from Managers: Trust, flexibility.

Millennials (born 1981-1996):

- Characteristics: Tech-savvy, seek meaningful work, value feedback and recognition.
- Communication: Digital, collaborative.
- Work Style: Team-oriented, purpose-driven.
- Motivation: Meaningful work, feedback.
- Expectations from Managers: Mentorship, regular feedback.

Generation Z (born 1997-2012): (The internet began having increased public use in the mid-1990s)

- Characteristics: Highly tech-savvy, value diversity and inclusion, prefer flexible work arrangements.
- Communication: Digital, quick, informal.
- Work Style: Entrepreneurial, adaptable.
- Motivation: Diversity, flexibility, entrepreneurship.
- Expectations from Managers: Support for innovation, inclusive environment.

A GENERATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Here is a quick snapshot of the generations and their distinguishing traits.

Baby Boomers:

- They are competitive and workaholics, so they might need clear goals and recognition for their achievements.
- They value job security, so they might be less likely to take risks that could threaten their position.
- They prefer formal communication, so managers should use structured formal methods to communicate with them. (*Texting with them may not be as effective as with the other generations.*)

Generation X:

- They value work-life balance and flexible work hours.
- They value autonomy and a hands-off management style.
- They are pragmatic and results-oriented.

Millennials:

- They seek purpose and value a company's mission.
- They value feedback and the judgment of others.
- They prefer digital communication and are beneficiaries of technology.

Generation Z:

- They are highly tech-savvy and embrace digital communications, so remote work and digital collaboration are common.
- They value diversity and inclusion, so managers should ensure that the workplace is welcoming and respectful of different backgrounds.
- They have an Entrepreneurial mindset, so they might be interested in innovation and new ventures within the company.

To view the remainder of the course material and to take the quiz for PDH credit, you must purchase the course.

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