Best of Future Connect

Workforce Diversity

FMI FutureConnect
Food Marketing Institute
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Shifting Generational Values

Each generation with different assumptions about how the world works

Based, in part, on common interpretations of shared experiences
Piaget’s Theory: Cognitive Structures Form from the Interpretation of Events

Four Developmental Stages

- **Sensorimotor stage (birth - 2 years old)**
  - Concepts about how physical objects work based on direct physical interaction with the environment

- **Preoperational stage (ages 2-7)**
  - Intuitive intelligence related to concrete physical situations

- **Concrete operations (ages 7-11)**
  - Logical structures related to concrete objects or physical experiences (numbers, for example)

- **Formal operations (ages 11-15)**
  - Conceptual reasoning and abstractions
  - Mental models that will persist throughout adulthood
Our Mental Maps Are Shaped by Many Factors

- National and global events and trends
- Parents’ views
- Religion
- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Many other factors

Shared views and common perspectives
Traditionalists

Shared Experiences of the 1940’s and 1950’s

• Allied military success in World War II
• The early days of the Cold War
• A wave of new technology
• Booming Post-War economy
• Growth of suburbs
• Increased availability of consumer goods
United States: Born 1928 to 1945

Traditionalists

Common Characteristics

• Joiners
• Loyal to institutions
• Accepting of hierarchy and rules
• Respectful of positional authority
• Interested in money as a metric of success
Boomers

Shared Experiences of the 1960’s and 1970’s

• Kennedy’s idealistic “Camelot” Presidency
• The Cuban Missile Crisis
• Vietnam
• Civil Rights
• Women’s liberation
• Widespread protests
• Assassinations of Kennedy, King, and other idealistic leaders
• Watergate and Nixon’s resignation
• Lots of other Boomer teenagers!
Boomers

Common Characteristics

• Competitive – viewing life as a “zero-sum” game
• Hard-working and driven
• Anti-authoritarian
• Idealistic
United States: Born 1961 - 1979

Generation X
Shared Experiences of the Late-1970’s through the Mid-1990’s

• Troubled economy
• Widespread lay-offs from re-engineering
• Women entering the workforce
• Rising divorce rates
• Challenger disaster
• Era of “Greed is Good”
• CNN and electronic games
• The first Gulf War
Generation X

Common Characteristics

• Self-reliant
• Mistrustful of institutions
• Rule-morphing
• Tribal
• Dedicated parents
• Information-savvy
Generation Y

Shared Experiences of the Mid-1990’s through the Late 2000’s

• Terrorism: 911, World Trade Center, Oklahoma City
• School violence: Columbine
• Ubiquitous technology
• Clinton’s sexual indiscretions and impeachment
• Working mothers
• Unprecedented bull market
• Pro-child culture
Generation Y

Common Characteristics
• Immediate and eager to live each day to the fullest
• Confident and determined
• Optimistic and upbeat
• Digital natives
• Tolerant and spiritual
• Family-centric
Gen Y: Strikingly Family-Centric

• Trustful of authorities
  – Trust parents (86%), teachers (86%) and the police (83%)

• Parents as role models and heroes
  – Today, 90% of teens report being very close to their parents
  – In 1974, more than 40% of Boomers said they’d be better off without their parents!

• Near-zero generation gap
  – Parent-child co-purchase decisions are common
  – Expect to retain close parental bonds even after leaving home
  – Likely to consult their parents on major decisions – including work!

Sources include: Applied Research & Consulting LLC; Gallup
The “Re-Generation”: Born After 1995

- Recession
- Resource shortages – energy, water
- Refinancing

Reality
Renewal
Regeneration
Used to attract a cohort whose values include:

- Respect for authority and hierarchy
- Attraction to charismatic authority figures
- Desire to affiliate with an institution

The Authority Figure Invites you to Join the Team
Recruiting the Boomers

Used to attract a cohort whose values include:

• Idealism
• Personal growth and self-occupation
• Anti-authority

Where the “Me Generation” Can Follow Its Dream
Used to attract a cohort whose values included:

- Independence and responsibility
- Comfort with technology
- Distrust of institutions
- Desire for customization and flexibility

On Your Own, Your Own Way
For Parents

YOU MADE THEM STRONG.
WE’LL MAKE THEM ARMY STRONG.
Recruiting with Benefits for Parents

“At SkyWest Airlines our employees and their parents have access to worldwide travel discounts on airfare, rental cars, hotels, all inclusive resorts and cruises.
So, go ahead, tell your kids to apply . . . And have them give you the world for a change.”
Practical Steps for Attracting and Retaining Y’s

• Communicate, particularly during the recruiting process, in Y-friendly ways
• Address parents as an explicit part of your recruiting strategy – messaging, awareness, concerns
• Shift performance management to focus on task completion, not time spent
• Embrace time shifting, asynchronous work, and flexible schedules
• Invest in technology . . . and in your technology skills
• Provide frequent feedback – coach first-line managers to teach, rather than assess
• Create a collaborative, team-based environment
• Encourage Boomers in your midst to mentor Y’s
• Don’t over-define the task – let Y’s “figure it out”
• Re-design career paths to offer frequent, lateral moves
• Provide world-class learning opportunities in all forms
Taking Stock: Gen X Today

- Invested in education
- Queued up behind a generation of Boomers in a weak economy
- Bought homes at peak values
- Conflicted by parenting values and workplace demands
Practical Steps for Attracting and Retaining X’ers

• Design career paths that broaden options, rather than narrowing them
• Give them choice and control over their career paths
• Leverage their entrepreneurial instincts – give them voice and influence
• Minimize moves that sever social connections
• Provide family-friendly flexibility
• Create “on ramps” for those who have stepped off the track in their 30’s
• Invest in technology – and provide the time required to incorporate it
• Develop the leadership skills required for future challenges
Managing Older Workers

• Ask questions.
  – Avoid coming in with preconceived notions.
  – Listen carefully to the views of those in your group.
• Go out of your way to signal that you recognize and respect the positive elements of “the way it has been done so far.”
  – Avoid implying that the old way has no value.
  – Approach any change from the perspective that you will be adding to the strengths of the past.
• Don’t worry about convincing the other guy that you have the necessary skills and experience.
  – Demonstrate that you do.
• Develop a strong interpersonal relationship.
Gen X: Valuable Contemporary Traits and Perspectives

- **Accelerated contact with the real world** . . . inclined to meet commitments and take employability seriously
- **Distrust of institutions and self-reliance** . . . strong survival skills and the ability to handle change with resilience: a well-nurtured portfolio of options and networks.
- **A sense of alienation and preference of “alternative”** . . . inclination to innovate, to look for a different way forward; outward-facing
- **Awareness of global issues and multiculturalism** . . . a more unconscious acceptance of diversity than any preceding generation and the ability to welcome the contributions of diverse individuals
- **Skepticism and ability to isolate practical truths** . . . rich humor and incisive perspective
- **Childhood experiences** . . . fiercely dedicated to being good parents, raising important questions about balance beyond the corporation
- **Pragmatism** . . . a practical and value-oriented sensibilities, and the ability to serve as effective stewards of both today’s organizations and tomorrow’s world.

The most difficult elements of X’ers’ past may well be those that provide the strongest capabilities for today
Practical Steps for Attracting and Retaining Boomers

• Retire retirement – encourage them to stay
• Recruit those who retired early and regret it now
• Create a variety of bell-shaped curve career options – including cyclic work and options for both less and more responsibility
• Encourage giving back -- through mentoring, community service, knowledge sharing
• Position new programs as positive steps forward
Leading a Four Generation Workforce

- Withhold judgment – don’t jump to conclusions
- Legitimize diverse perspectives
- Establish clear and effective group norms
- Make a significant investment in building trust-based personal relationships

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“Across the Ages” at http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/erickson/

“Ask Tammy” at www.tammyerickson.com
Resources for Further Reading


“Unconventional Wisdom in a Downturn: “Give Me the Ball!” Is the Wrong Call in a Downturn,” Harvard Business Review, November 2008

“Gen Y in the Workforce,” (Case Study), Harvard Business Review, February 2009


My blog: http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/erickson/