

11 things you need to know about generational differences in the workplace

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Workplaces have never been this diverse. We are witnessing about five different generations in the workplace today. These are:

1. Traditionalists—born 1925 to 1945
2. Baby Boomers—born 1946 to 1964
3. Generation X—born 1965 to 1980
4. Millennials—born 1981 to 2000
5. Generation Z—born 2001 to 2020

This presents new challenges in terms of managing people, communicating and collaborating. How big are these differences and what impact do they have on the success of an organisation? Dr Bea Bourne, DM, a faculty member in the School of Business and Information Technology at Purdue University Global is an expert on generational differences and generational response to organizational change. In the infographic below, she shares her research regarding:

1. How today's talent stacks up by generation, including their defining values, beliefs, and worldviews
2. The significant historical events that shaped each generation
3. How to best motivate and manage workers from each generation

How do you manage generational differences in the workplace?

To devise a winning method of managing generational differences it is important to know just how significant are generational differences in shaping workplace attitudes and job satisfaction? In a study titled, Generational differences in workplace attitudes and job satisfaction: Lack of sizable differences across cohorts published in the Journal of Managerial Psychology, Dr Cucina and his team aimed to investigate whether there are generational differences in workplace attitudes and whether Millennials have lower job satisfaction. The research team conducted two studies using large samples sizes to investigate this.

They found that Millennials did score slightly less than Baby Boomers and Generation X on some job attitude items, such as personal accomplishment and enjoying the work they do. However, when looking at job attitudes collectively, Millennials scored slightly higher than Baby Boomers and Generation X. The study also showed that children of Baby Boomers and Generation X did have lower job satisfaction than their parents. However, this was not a large difference. Another pivotal finding is that generational differences only explained 2% of the variance in workplace attitudes, suggesting that most differences in

workplace attitudes arose within, rather than between, generations.

Differences between generations of employee attitudes about their work and work satisfaction may not be as significant as assumed. The findings from these studies suggest that generational differences in workplace attitudes are small, warranting caution and scepticism when considering the root cause of variances and differences in the workplace. A more critical and evidence-driven approach to generational differences is recommended.

What should managers do?

A good recommendation comes from an article titled, *Generational Differences At Work Are Small. Thinking They're Big Effects Our Behavior* from the Harvard Business Review. It states that:

“Managers would benefit from recognizing that employees often change over time due to varying priorities, demands, experiences, and physical capacities. These changes can take many forms. For instance, research has shown that people face different types of work-family conflict at different stages of their lives, from young adulthood through middle adulthood and into late adulthood. However, not every employee within the same age group will have the same experiences at the same exact time. Therefore, engaging in an ongoing and open dialogue with employees to discuss shifting needs can help managers keep their hard-working and experienced employees engaged, happy, and productively collaborating with others for the long haul.”

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