



PEOPLE + CULTURE

Understanding Generational Differences in the Workplace

Slide 1

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Introduction

A. Purpose of the Session

- To understand how generational experiences shape work behavior, expectations, and communication.
- To identify ways to improve collaboration and reduce conflict between age groups.

B. Why This Matters

- Today's workforce includes **four distinct generations** working together.
- Generational differences can lead to miscommunication, assumptions, or even bias.
- Awareness leads to stronger leadership, better team dynamics, and employee retention.



Let's talk

Why do you think each generation tries to force the next one to be just like them? Is this a realistic approach? Does this not ignore the people within a generation, dismissing how they have grown up and what they have become?



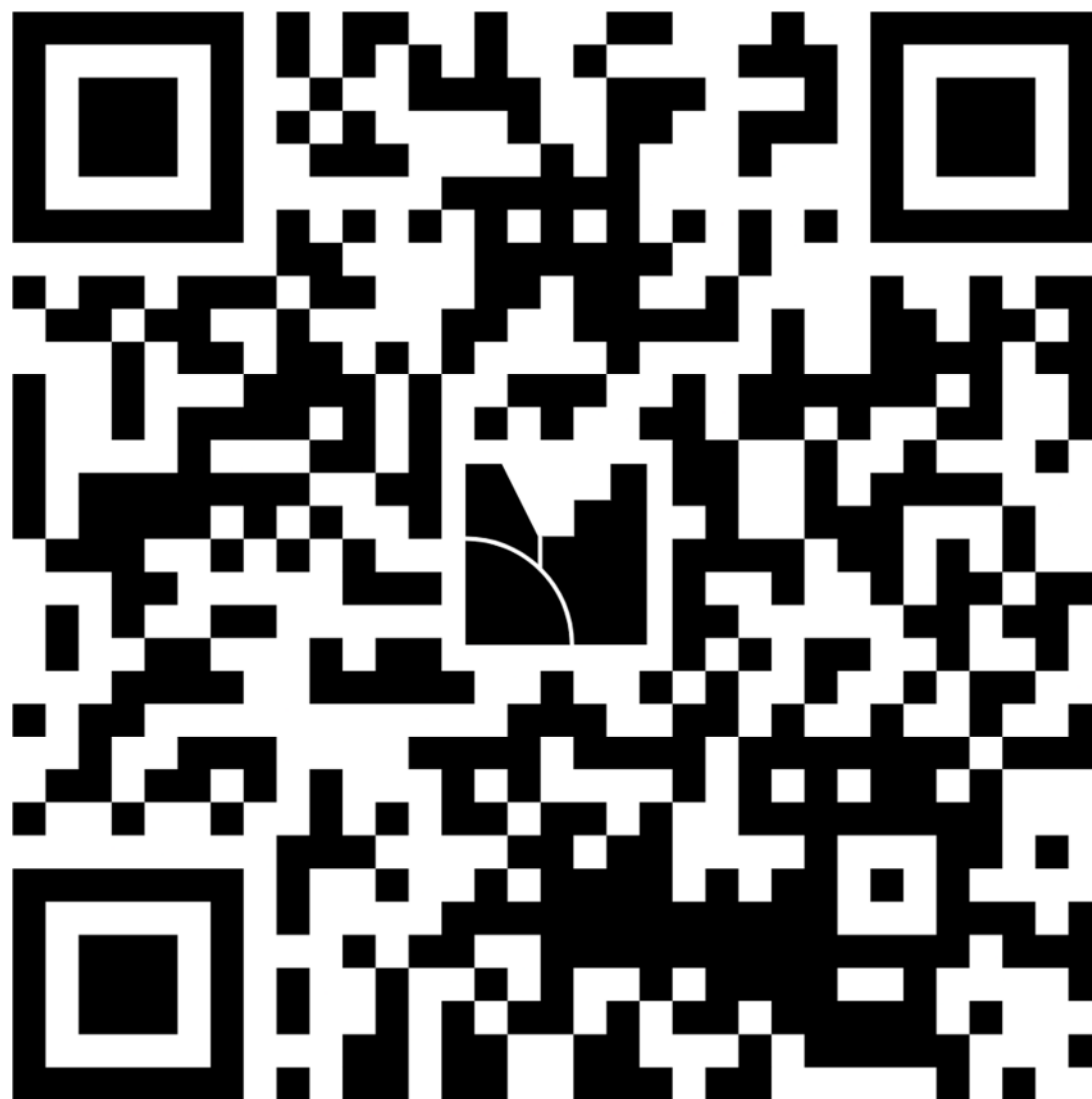
Let's talk

It is not about right and wrong, it is about recognizing that circumstances change for each generation, and they are shaped by it. They did not choose their circumstances. To an extent, the older generation created those circumstances.



Overview of Generations in the Workforce

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Birth Years</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
Baby Boomers - 25%	1946–1964	61–79
Gen X - 33%	1965–1980	45–60
Millennials - 35%	1981–1996	29–44
Gen Z - 5%	1997–2012	13–28



Formative Experiences – What Shaped Each Generation

Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

- Raised during post-WWII prosperity.
- Influenced by: Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War, the moon landing, Cold War, and Watergate, suburban expansion.
- Typically grew up in **traditional family structures** with emphasis on **hierarchy and duty**.
- First generation to broadly experience **college education and mass media**.



Formative Experiences – What Shaped Each Generation

Generation X (1965–1980)

- Grew up during economic uncertainty, increased divorce rates, and latchkey parenting.
- Influenced by: End of the Cold War, rise of personal computers, MTV, AIDS crisis.
- Known as the "skeptical" or "forgotten" generation.
- Learned **self-reliance**, **pragmatism**, and **adaptability**.



Formative Experiences – What Shaped Each Generation

Millennials (1981–1996)

- Came of age during a tech explosion and major world events like 9/11 and the 2008 Recession.
- Influenced by: Internet, smartphones, social media, climate anxiety.
- Highly educated but entered a tough job market.
- Tend to be **purpose-driven**, **socially conscious**, and value **work-life integration**.



Formative Experiences – What Shaped Each Generation

Gen Z (1997–2012)

- True digital natives; raised with smartphones, Wi-Fi, and social media.
- Influenced by: COVID-19 pandemic, mass school shootings, climate protests, AI, social justice movements.
- Value **individuality**, **mental health**, **diversity**, and **immediacy**.
- Expect technology-enabled work and **frequent feedback**.



Work Attitudes and Values

Generation	Attitudes Toward Work	Core Work Values
Boomers	Loyal, competitive, team players	Job security, respect, recognition
Gen X	Independent, pragmatic, skeptical of institutions	Autonomy, flexibility, results
Millennials	Collaborative, idealistic, feedback-driven	Purpose, development, flexibility
Gen Z	Entrepreneurial, digital-first, socially aware	Inclusivity, mental wellness, meaning



Feedback Expectation and Motivators

Generation	Feedback Style Preferred	Motivated By
Boomers	Annual/formal reviews	Promotions, titles, stability
Gen X	Minimal, hands-off	Results, independence, rewards
Millennials	Ongoing, constructive	Growth, coaching, team contribution
Gen Z	Real-time, transparent	Progress, visibility, purpose



Leadership & Management Preferences

Traditionalists & Baby Boomers

- Top-down management style, clear authority
- Respect for tenure, experience-based leadership

Generation X

- Leadership should be earned, not assumed
- Prefer managers who are hands-off but provide guidance when needed

Millennials

- Favor mentorship, coaching, and transparency in leadership
- Value managers who support work-life balance and personal growth

Generation Z

- Expect leadership to be collaborative, diverse, and empathetic
- Prefer a coach-like style of leadership, and mentorship programs



Let's talk

With this being our baseline, what is your initial thought around generations working together?

Every generation has unique experiences and skills. How have you sought to leverage these differences successfully?



Let's talk

The tension that I have seen is when you create the square peg round hole scenario but it is generations be forced into a mold they neither understand nor could fit into.

Think of a team you lead or are a member of. What are the generations present? How do you see their strengths playing out every day? Strengths that you would never want them to give up?



How can generations work together with cohesion?



How can generations work together with cohesion?

1. Promote Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing

What research shows: Studies in the Journal of Knowledge Management find that when older workers share institutional knowledge and younger workers share digital/technical expertise, both groups feel valued.

How to apply: Create reverse mentorship programs (e.g., Gen Z teaching tech/social tools, Boomers mentoring on leadership and client relationships).



How can generations work together with cohesion?

2. Focus on Shared Goals, Not Differences

What research shows: Harvard Business Review notes that focusing on generational stereotypes increases division, while emphasizing shared purpose builds trust and teamwork.

How to apply: Leaders should frame projects around common organizational goals, such as customer success, innovation, or quality outcomes, instead of focusing on differences.



How can generations work together with cohesion?

3. Adopt Flexible Communication Approaches

What research shows: Studies in *International Journal of Human Resource Management* find communication breakdowns are the top driver of generational tension.

How to apply: Train teams to adapt messages across channels:

- Summaries in email (Boomers, Gen X)

- Quick chats in Slack/Teams (Millennials, Gen Z)

- Clear, respectful tone across all



How can generations work together with cohesion?

4. Encourage Cross-Generational Teams

What research shows: Diverse teams (age included) are more innovative and better at problem-solving (*Journal of Organizational Behavior*).

How to apply: Mix ages in project groups intentionally. Rotate leadership opportunities so everyone sees different approaches.



How can generations work together with cohesion?

5. Address and Debunk Stereotypes

What research shows: *A Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* study highlights that stereotypes (e.g., “Millennials are lazy,” “Boomers resist change”) cause tension and lower performance.

How to apply: Include sessions or workshops where employees discuss **myths vs. facts** about generations. Build awareness that preferences ≠ performance issues.



How can generations work together with cohesion?

6. Leverage Inclusive Leadership

What research shows: *Center for Creative Leadership* emphasizes that inclusive leaders who are **curious, flexible, and open to feedback** reduce generational friction.

How to apply: Train managers to:
Ask for individual preferences
Recognize contributions publicly across all age groups
Create space for open dialogue