

# UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKPLACE



Strengthening Collaboration Across a Multigenerational Workforce

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**My goal is to bring back  
humanity to the workplace  
and to leadership.**

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# Introduction

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## 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.



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## 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?



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## 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 (2024)

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<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



## Overview of Generations in the Workforce (2025)

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<u>Generation</u>	<u>Birth Years</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
Baby Boomers - 15%	1946–1964	62–80
Gen X - 31%	1965–1980	46–61
Millennials - 36%	1981–1996	30–45
Gen Z - 18%	1997–2012	14–29



## Formative Experiences – What Shaped Each Generation

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### **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

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### 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

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### 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

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### 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

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<b>Generation</b>	<b>Attitudes Toward Work</b>	<b>Core Work Values</b>
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

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<b>Generation</b>	<b>Feedback Style Preferred</b>	<b>Motivated By</b>
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

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## **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



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## 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?



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## 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?

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## See • Name • Invite (everyday micro-habit)

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**See It:** Notice a strength in someone's approach or experience.

**Name It:** Say it out loud so it's visible to the team.

**Invite It:** Ask for their input where that strength fits.

### Examples of strengths you may encounter (people vary):

- Deep system memory and stakeholder history
- Pragmatic independence and calm under pressure
- Collaborative energy and learning-mindset
- Digital fluency and inclusive lens



## Ask • Offer • Learn (person-to-person prompts)

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**Ask:** ‘What helps you do your best work here?’

**Offer:** ‘Here’s a strength I see in you—how could we use it more?’

**Learn:** ‘Teach me one shortcut you rely on; I’ll share one of mine.’

**Reset:** ‘What’s one small change that would make working together easier?’



# Human-Centered Working Agreements

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**Share your preferences** (comm channels, response time, feedback style).

**Agree on a few basics:** meeting length, recap norms, decision clarity.

**Revisit each quarter:** new members add their preferences.

Keep it one page and friendly—guidelines, not rules.



# Make Space for Every Voice

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Rotate facilitation and note-taking so unique styles show up.

Use round-robins for key questions; invite quieter voices first.

If you speak a lot, be sure to leave room others; learn to promote other viewpoints within conversations.

Appreciate contributions publicly— giving credit builds trust.



## Bridge with Language (say this, not that)

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Try: 'Help me understand your approach.' | Skip: 'That's the old/new way.'

Try: 'What problem are we solving?' | Skip: 'My generation learned...'

Try: 'Let's combine your experience with this tool.' | Skip: 'You just don't get tech/history.'

Try: 'What's one thing we should keep, one thing to try or challenge?'



# Share Stories, Not Stereotypes

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**Origin moments:** ‘A lesson I learned the hard way...’

**Pivotal projects:** ‘A time our team surprised me...’

**Thank-you rounding:** name a cross-generational individual you appreciated this week.

**Finish with:** ‘Because of you, we...’ connect the person to the outcome.



**Thank you for spending  
your time with me today.**