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Managing Generational Diversity in the 21st Century

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MANAGING GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors

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~~Jessica Moon~~
Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Purpose

“Much has been written to describe generational differences in today's workforce, including the problems of managing a team of multi-generational workers. These differences are often a source of conflict among employees but they could also be a source of strength.” (Patota, 2007) This research is intended to show what type of generational diversity is present in the workplace in Iowa. It will be designed to show what types of conflict are common in the workplace due to generational diversity. Another aspect is the perception of each generation towards the other generations which will also be covered by this research. This information will then be used to determine whether or not the conflict can be used for productive means. Following this, the information will be used to best determine what each generation requires from management and how to best meet those needs. This will allow the Iowa workplace to be much more efficient and productive. It will also help employers to better match managers with employees and to eliminate unnecessary conflict.

It is very important to note that the research being done on generational diversity in the workplace is in its infancy. Not much time has been devoted to this area of study which means there is a lot of room to make mistakes or wrong assumptions. While much research has been done on generalized differences between the generations, this cannot be absolutely transferred to the workplace because there has been no proven correlation by a scientific study showing that these differences lead to conflict. There is only anecdotal evidence up to this point in time. Several hypotheses have been proposed, but none have received strong evidential support. The conflict and workplace issues could be related more to individual characteristics than to characteristics that are associated with the whole generation. There is a need to do more research to determine the actual cause of workplace conflict.

Literature Review

In order to begin a study of generations, an understanding of what a generation is must first be determined. Arsenault uses a definition generated by Wyatt in 1993 that quotes six main determinations. A generation must experience a “traumatic or formative event,” “a dramatic shift in the demography which shapes the distribution of resources in a society,” “an interval which connects a generation into a cycle of success and/or failure,” “the creation of a sacred place wherein sacred places sustain a collective memory,” “mentors that give impetus and voice by their work,” and “generations are formed through the work of people who know and support each other” (Arsenault, 2004). Generations have blurred edges, however. People born near the end or beginning of a generation can have qualities associated with both generations. Also, large scale events can affect more than one generation at a time such as the Vietnam War, the assassination of Martin Luther King, or 9/11 (Arsenault, 2004).

Currently there are four generations in the workforce in a wide variety of jobs. These generations all have experienced different life events that have shaped their values, beliefs, and behaviors (McGuire, 2007). Even events experienced by multiple generations affect each generation differently based on their outlook at that point in time (Giancola, 2006). Changes that stem from these major events are lifelong. Values and beliefs that have been created by these events continue and will only be changed by other major events in life. They are not associated with the age of the individual. These defining moments are what bind the generations together (Meredith, 2002 p. 7-8). The following table shows some of the major life events that have effected each generation.

Table 1. Generations Descriptions

Generation	Birth Years*	Ages in 2006	Shared Life Experiences
Traditionalists (also known as Seniors, Matures, Silent Generation)	1922-1945	61 - 84	Great Depression, New Deal, World War II, GI Bill
Baby Boomers (sometimes split into two groups: Woodstock group, born 1946 - 1956 and Zoomers, born 1955 - 1964)	1946- 1964	42 - 60	Great Society, general economic prosperity, expansion of suburbia, Viet Nam, Nixon, sex, drugs and rock 'n roll
Generation X (also known as 13ers, Baby Busters, Twenty-somethings, MTV Generation)	1965- 1980	26 - 41	Divorce, lack of faith in institutions, AIDS, Sesame Street, MTV, crack cocaine, GameBoy, PC
Millennials (also known as Generation Y, Nintendo Generation, Generation 2001, Ne(X)t, Nexters, or Net Generation)	1981 and after	25 years and younger	Internet, always connected, September 11, War on Terror

* Range of birth years may vary slightly depending on the information source and demographic model.

[Adapted from Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 2000]

(Patota, N., Schwartz, D., & Schwartz, T. (2007). Leveraging Generational Differences for Productivity Gains. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge, 11(2)*, 1-10. Retrieved October 12, 2008, from ABI/INFORM Global database. (Document ID: 1287753171).)

The basis for generational differences is that these events affect people for the rest of their lives and later events are not likely to change these views (McGuire, 2007). Each generation is based on a different period of time in which a group of people with similar values were born. The four generations that are currently in the workplace are:

- Traditionalists (1922-1945)
- Baby Boomers (1945-1964)
- Generation X (1965-1980)
- Millennials (1981-2000) (Zemke, 2000, p. 3)

While these years seem to mark a specific end to each generation, there is a lot of debate as to when each generation truly ends and when a different one begins. Many of the people from one generation according to this model have much more similar values to the one before or after the one they were born into (Giancola, 2006). This is one of the problems with creating a generalization of the characteristics of one particular person who was born near the end or beginning of one generation. The differences between individuals may be greater than the

similarities in the generation. As stated above, events in a person’s life affect their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Generalizations can be made about each generation’s values and beliefs and are summed up in this table:

Table 2. Generations’ Core Values and Expectations/Beliefs

Generation	Core Values	Expectations/Beliefs
Traditionalists	Dedication/sacrifice Hard work Conformity Law and order Respect for authority Delayed reward Duty before pleasure Adherence to rules	Security from the institution Promotions based on longevity Loyalty to the organization Wait to be told what to do Respect based on position/title
Baby Boomers	Optimism Team oriented Personal gratification Health and wellness Personal growth Youth Work Involvement	Live to work (70 – 80 hour work week) Optimistic and driven Relentless pursuit of goals Change is painful but inevitable Rule the workforce, created the culture Prefer a casual, team-oriented environment
Generation X	Diversity Thinking globally Balance Techno literacy Fun Informality Self-reliance Pragmatism	Work to live (work/life balance required) Security from options vs. commitment Promotions based on ability vs. seniority Mobility vs. stability Computers are part of everyday routine Attitude/fun important in the work place Expect a say and want to be heard
Millennials	Optimism Civic duty Confidence Achievement Social ability Morality Street smarts Diversity	Team oriented (socialize/work in groups) Hard working Multi-taskers Prefer structured environments Acknowledge and respect position/title Want a relationship with their boss Relate best with the Traditionalists

[Adapted from Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 2000]

(Patota, N., Schwartz, D., & Schwartz, T. (2007). Leveraging Generational Differences for Productivity Gains. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge, 11(2)*, 1-10. Retrieved October 12, 2008, from ABI/INFORM Global database. (Document ID: 1287753171).)

However, it is important to understand that at this current point in time, research in this field has only just begun (Arsenault, 2004). These characteristics may not be more than over-extended stereotypes. There is some general truth behind them, but the differences of the individual have the potential to be quite different from these generalizations. While these generalizations are often true of the generation as a whole, one must remember that the individual is often not going to be an exact replication of each of these traits.

Many of these characteristics are in contrast with those of another generation and are a source of conflict because of simple misunderstandings (McGuire, 2007). However, this conflict can be much more narrowly defined in terms of disagreements in the areas of work ethic, how willingly people accept change, and organizational culture (Glass, 2007). These differences must also be accepted at face value by employees. These differences are not positive or negative and shouldn't be viewed that way; they just need to be acknowledged (Patota, 2007).

A suggestion to help take account of these differences is to profile your employees. Create a base set of questions for each generation and then answer those questions for each employee. Whichever generation most closely matches the employee will then be used to determine how to avoid conflict and what type of incentives would be best matched for the most productivity (Meredith, 2002, p. 31-33).

The way the generations interact can possibly be shown to follow a pattern somewhat like groups when they get together or how people react when they first meet a group of people from a different ethnicity; they go from initial contact to conflict, conflict to cooperation, and from cooperation to assimilation (McGuire, 2007). Conflict is a typical step in the process, so it's not surprising that generational conflict happens. It is likely to occur because one generation feels threatened by another generation, and then a fight for dominance ensues (McGuire, 2007). Feedback is also important. Older generations need less feedback than younger generations do, so when one of these generations is managing the other, communication is key (Glass, 2007).

Communication is a very important part of the workplace. Managers need to communicate with their employees to relay tasks, goals, and many other work functions. This needs to be done in a fashion that is familiar to the employee whether it be by e-mail or a face to face meeting. It needs to make the employee feel comfortable and like they are important. Their

thoughts must also be able to be communicated and disseminated throughout the workplace in order for them to feel as if they have been included. However, informal communication is also necessary. This helps to get employees to know each other much better and helps to avoid the conflict from being started (Meredith, 2002, p. 178-179).

Since communication is so important, listening becomes a very important aspect of the job. Oftentimes the younger generations don't listen to the older generations, but it is important for them to do so, because older generations have a wealth of experience that is often correct in the advice (Kyles, 2005). Focusing on differences is another source of conflict. People need to learn to look past these differences and get to know the person they are managing (Kyles, 2005).

Each generation has certain characteristics that make them more likely to create conflict. According to Meredith, it is very important for managers to recognize these "flashpoints." The Millennial Generation will likely have conflict based on an unrealistic expectation of immediate success and a need for secure community because of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Generation X will have problems based on their belief that the system is not perfect and formality is overrated. This generation also has a strong need to be able to work on their own, but they also need to be appreciated and know that they are doing a good job, but when this need is ignored conflict can quickly ensue. Likely points of conflict from the Baby Boomers come from the need to be included in the flow of information, possibility of sexual harassment, and a need for self-expression and self-fulfillment. The Traditionalists are most likely to create conflict over the need for structure and resistance to change (Meredith, 2002, p. 169-177).

Another important aspect that is different between the generations is the reason for doing different aspects of their job. The older generations (Baby Boomers and Traditionalists) don't need to understand why. They will do what they are asked to do because that's their job. This is

not true of the younger generations (Generation X and the Millennial Generation). These groups of people want to understand why. In order for them to put effort into a project, they need to see the purpose of doing it, then follow up with how it will benefit them. This is critical for them to take part in a project and to put their full effort into it (Crampton, 2007).

However, the conflict created between different generations can also be used productively to create competitive advantage in terms of synergy and differing viewpoints (Zemke, 2000, p. 156-158). In the modern workplace, diversity is unavoidable (Lancaster, 2002, p. 323). When dealing with people in the workplace, you must keep generational differences in mind (Lancaster, p. 331). These differences can be categorized as strengths and weaknesses and are highlighted in this table:

Table 3. Generations Strengths and Weaknesses

Generation	Strengths	Weaknesses
Traditionalists	Accountability Clear communication Managing resources Organization/management Service orientation Working collaboratively	Adaptability Initiative Technology Valuing diversity Delay rewards Valuing training (helps employees leave the company)
Baby Boomers	Accountability Adaptability Clear communication Initiative Organization/project management Problem solving Service orientation Working collaboratively	Look for immediate gratification Technology Valuing diversity (everyone should fit in)
Generation X	Adaptability Initiative Managing resources Problem solving Technology Valuing diversity Value training	Tend to speak technical jargon – with no frills/embellishments Organization/ project management Service orientation Working collaboratively Loyalty to organization
Millenials	Accountability Organization/project management Service orientation Technology Valuing diversity Working collaboratively	Communicate informally with text messages Problem solving Loyalty to organization Technology integral to life style

(Patota, N., Schwartz, D., & Schwartz, T. (2007). Leveraging Generational Differences for Productivity Gains. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge, 11(2)*, 1-10. Retrieved October 12, 2008, from ABI/INFORM Global database. (Document ID: 1287753171).)

These differences are also very beneficial in a team setting when employees do not focus on the weaknesses of other generations more than the strengths (Patota, 2007). They create a synergy of the talents of each of the members so that the product equals more than the sum of its parts (McGuire, 2007). When the combination of values and competencies are used correctly to meet goals, they can overshadow any negative conflict that is created (Patota, 2007).

The literature offers some generic advice that could be used in a variety of circumstances. Increased contact between different generations can help to avoid conflict. Most times, conflict is only created because the different generations don't know what to expect from each other (McGuire, 2007). Talking openly about how individuals feel also helps to eliminate conflict (Lancaster, 2002, p. 43, 320). Advice should be willingly given and taken into consideration because different generations have different viewpoints (Lancaster, 2002, p. 332). The vast majority of the literature currently on this subject is based on advice from people who have been in a position which requires interaction with the different generations. There have been few studies done to determine what actions can be taken to actually make the differences in the generations less of an issue. Meredith asserts that most of the changes in the workplace that have currently been implemented to account for these generational differences are superficial and do not actually reach the underlying issues because managers have yet to realize that generational differences are the root cause (Meredith, 2002, p. 11-12).

To help avoid conflict, people need to learn to be positive. According to Whitacre, it is the path to success. Focus on the positive side and on what can be done or tried in order to succeed. Don't focus on the negatives or what can't be done. Also, people are all looking for the same outcomes of work in the forms of salaries, a challenge, a secure job, and a safe environment (2007). The differences between the generations come when they rate these

different outcomes. Younger people will rate them differently than older people with the former giving more importance to salary and the latter focusing more on a secure job. Managers need to get to know what each generation wants and begin to communicate to them in those terms to help them understand how to get what they want out of their job (Whitacre, 2007).

Another new hypothesis that has come about, according to Tomkiewicz, is that there is a need to hire younger managers to manage new young employees because of the vast generational differences (2008). The hypothesis states that younger employees will have more respect for managers closer to their age. This stems from the belief that managers similar in age to their subordinates will be able to communicate with them better than older managers. In his recent study Tomkiewicz compared the perception of managers in general to the perception of managers over 50 and the perception of managers under 30. His results showed that managers in general were held to be good people. Those over 50 were very close to managers in general with a lack of negative characteristics. Managers under 30 did not score as well and had negative characteristics associated with them (Tomkiewicz, 2008). The finding of his research was actually the reverse of his original hypothesis.

While these differences seem obvious, new research is concluding that generations may not be all that different after all. According to Johnson (2008), stereotypes of the generations are not that accurate because they were originally designed to be used for marketing. Also, differences due to defining events may be more related to the age of the person at the time of the event rather than the differences associated with the time they were born. Giancola (2006) has found that the differences between generations may not even be as great as the differences within the generation due to the large time gap between the beginning and end of the generations.

Another point is that as time progresses, the differences between generations are growing smaller and significant differences are very rare.

Research Questions to be Answered

Since there is little research completed on this topic, there are many aspects of this topic that need to be covered. The objective of this research is to determine what type of conflict is created by employees and how much of this conflict is created by generational differences. This is important, because it will help to determine how management needs to react to the conflict that is created and how to best avoid conflict. Research done on this aspect will also help to determine if the generation is the most important factor in creating conflict or if the reasons are based more on individual characteristics.

The research is also designed to determine which qualities are most associated with each generation. While this information has already been determined, it can help to see if Iowa deviates from the national norms. It also becomes important in determining the best way to make the workplace run smoothly. Information gathered on the characteristics can give employers an ability to build synergy in the company by placing people together in workgroups to help them be able to improve themselves based on the strengths of the opposite person.

Methodology

In order to gather the information needed to do research on generational diversity, a survey was created that covered the topics discussed above. It contained open-ended questions and questions based on a rating system. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A. In order to administer the survey in an efficient manner, www.surveymonkey.com was used. The

survey was designed to determine if the established norms from the above studies hold true in the Iowa workforce. Other aspects of the survey were designed to determine the opinions of each generation towards other generations. If the opinions of each generation were the basis of conflict, the survey would be able to determine the specific reason why the conflict arose. After the reason was determined, the data could be used to find sufficient ways to avoid the conflict and to help make the workplace more efficient.

The survey was developed with the intent of eliminating as much bias as possible by placing the only questions that asks a personal opinion at the end of the survey so as to not bias the participant earlier. The focus was primarily on conflict and who created it and if it was productive. Responses to the survey came from the food service, insurance, retail, manufacturing, and grocery industries with a slightly larger portion coming from food service. Each question was included to help determine the effects of each generation on conflict in the workplace or the perceptions of each generation towards one another. The survey asks which generation the respondent is a part of first in order to categorize the data. Following the determination of the generation the participant was asked an open-ended question about a general description of each generation. This question was designed to see if there were any characteristics of the generations that I did not cover in the rating system. Also the question could help to determine reasons why a manager would prefer to manage or not to manage members of a generation.

After this description, participants were asked to rate each generation on a variety of categories. The topics covered in the ratings were conflict, work ethic, criticism, acceptance of technology, commitment, motivation, organization skills, need for feedback, and need for instruction. The rating system was designed to determine differences between the generations in

their performance of their job. These characteristics were chosen because they would be likely to create conflict based on the values of each generation. The ratings would be able to help determine if the characteristics being rated were based on generational traits or individual differences. A similar rating throughout all generations would mean that the characteristic would not likely be a generational trait. The last section of the survey asked what type of conflict is created by each generation, which generations are most likely to be in conflict, and which generations are most or least preferred to work with in open-ended question format.

Iowa was the geographic area covered by this survey. It was sent to over 300 companies across the state based on the availability of contact information in on-line databases and company websites. Companies from as many industries as possible were contacted to try and gain a diversity of the sample pool with the hopes of finding the true feelings of employees in Iowa. Companies of less than twenty employees were omitted from the survey because the diversity exhibited in these companies is not likely to be large enough for a valid participant to have enough experience with each generation. Initial contact was made by e-mail to the contact listed on their website or on LexisNexis Academic, a database of companies in the United States. However, the search was limited to just companies in Iowa to maintain the geographic area. Those companies that responded to the initial contact were asked to distribute the link to the survey on www.surveymonkey.com to managers in their company. The companies were given a twenty-five day period to distribute and fill out the survey.

The information was then gathered and analyzed to determine if any patterns were present. Answers for each question were categorized according to generation. Compilation of this manner allowed for the comparison of one generation to another in order to see how each generation answered each question. A collection of all the answers to a particular question were

also used to see the overall reaction to each question. The compilation of all the answers was used in order to eliminate any bias due to a particular generation’s dislike of another generation.

Results

There were twenty-one total responses to the survey. Responses came from six companies who were interested in taking part in the survey research. This represents less than a two percent response rate to the companies contacted. There are a few problems with the survey data that was collected. First off, there was a small sample size, so inferences and trends were hard to define. Also, a response bias based on general feelings towards a specific generation could have skewed a respondent’s answers without them consciously knowing it. Another problem could stem from responding managers who have not had an opportunity to work with people from some of the other generations. Basic information about the results is included in the tables below. Following the tables is an explanation of the results organized by each generation’s thoughts on the other generations followed by the combined perceptions. It is important to remember that 5 is a positive response in all categories except “need for frequent feedback” and “amount of instruction before beginning a project.” 1 is a negative response in all categories except feedback and instruction.

Makeup of Respondents

Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Traditionalist 1922-1943	5.0%	1
Baby Boomer 1943-1960	15.0%	3
Generation X 1960-1980	55.0%	11
Millenial (Generation Y) 1980-2000	25.0%	5
<i>answered question</i>		20
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Least Preferred Generation to Manage				
Traditionalist	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	No Preference
6.67%	20.00%	0%	60.00%	13.33%

Most Preferred Generation to Manage				
Traditionalist	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	No Preference
6.67%	20.00%	53.33%	13.33%	6.67%

Respondent statement ratings on a 1-5 scale. 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

Generation	Traditionalist	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial
Answer Options	Rating Average	Rating Average	Rating Average	Rating Average
They have a strong work ethic.	4.50	4.00	3.46	2.13
They respond well to criticism.	3.00	3.15	2.54	2.13
They willingly and quickly embrace new technology.	2.14	3.15	4.46	5.00
They are strongly committed to the organization.	4.50	4.00	2.92	2.19
They exhibit strong internal motivation to perform well on the job.	4.36	4.00	3.77	2.44
They show good organization skills	3.64	4.08	3.69	2.50
They show a need for frequent feedback on how they are performing their job.	2.57	3.08	3.23	4.00
They require little instruction before beginning a project.	3.29	3.25	3.08	2.44
They are not likely to create conflict during a meeting or on the job.	3.07	3.50	2.62	2.00

Traditionalists- The traditionalists made up the smallest part of the participants with only one. They described their generation with the term war, the Baby Boomers with the term cold-war, Generation X by cold-war, and Millennials by no war. When rating themselves on the 5 point scale, with a 4.00, or above average in work ethic, willingly embracing new technology, and

commitment to the organization. On response to criticism, internal motivation, organization skills, need for feedback, and amount of instruction, they rated themselves average with a 3.00 rating. They disagreed with the statement that they were unlikely to create conflict by rating themselves as a 2.00.

For the Baby Boomer Generation, work ethic, response to criticism, amount of instruction needed, and commitment to the organization were rated below average with commitment to the organization given a 1.00 and the rest 2.00s. Internal motivation, organization skills, and likelihood to create conflict were all rated 3.00. A 4.00 rating was given to the Baby Boomers for both the ability to embrace new technology and requiring a need for frequent feedback.

Generation X scored 3 on work ethic, response to criticism, internal motivation, organizational skills, need for frequent feedback, and likelihood to create conflict. They were rated a 2.00 on commitment to the organization and need for instruction. Willingness to embrace new technology was their highest score with a 4.00.

When scoring the Millennial Generation, willingness to embrace technology was given a 5.00. Strong work ethic and criticism were both rated a 4.00. Commitment to organization, internal motivation, need for frequent feedback, need for instruction, and likelihood to create conflict were all rated 3.00. A 4.00 was given to the Millennials for organizational skills.

Baby Boomers- Three Baby Boomers completed the survey. When describing the generations, they used terms like conservative, hard working, rational, and trustworthy. When describing themselves, they used terms like moderate, hard working, involved, and practical. They

described Generation X with moderate, free-spirited, and more work-life balance. The Millennials were described with carefree, unreliable, and technology driven.

When rating the generations, two responded, and the Baby Boomers gave Traditionalists work ethic, likelihood to create conflict, and criticism a 3.00 rating. Commitment to the organization was given a 5.00 and internal motivation was given a 4.50 rating. A 3.50 rating was given to organization skills, need for frequent feedback, and little instruction needed before beginning a project. The lowest rating was willingness to accept new technology with a 2.50.

Only one of the Baby Boomers rated themselves. Work ethic, organization skills, and need for frequent feedback were all given 5.00. A 4.00 was given in the categories of response to criticism, willingness to embrace new technology, commitment to organization, internal motivation, and requiring little instruction before beginning a project. They gave themselves a 2.00 for likelihood to create conflict.

Two of the Baby Boomers rated Generation X. Willingness to embrace new technology was given a 5.00. Organization skills and need for frequent feedback were both given a 4.00 rating. A 3.50 rating was given in the categories of work ethic, internal motivation, and requiring little instruction before a project. Commitment to the organization received a 3.00 and response to criticism and likelihood to create conflict in the workplace were given 2.00s.

Millennials were scored lowest by the two Baby Boomers that rated them. Embracing new technology was their highest score with a 5.00. Organization skills was given a 3.50 and need for frequent feedback a 3.00. Internal motivation received a 2.50 as did requiring little instruction before a project and likelihood to create conflict on the job. Commitment to the organization was rated with a 2.00. Work ethic and response to criticism scored lowest with a 1.50 rating.

Generation X- Eleven of the responses came from Generation X. Old fashioned, resistant to change, and loyal were terms Generation X used to describe Traditionalists. The Baby Boomers were described as hard working and dependable. Generation X described themselves as independent and less committed to their employer. Millennials were associated with technology and were said to be impatient and self-centered.

When asked to rate each of the generations, Generation X scored the Traditionalists very highly in the work ethic, commitment to the organization, and internal motivation categories with a 4.89, 4.67, and 4.56 respectively. Relatively average ratings, between 2.40 and 3.60 were given in the categories of response to criticism, organization skills, need for feedback, amount of instruction needed, and likelihood of creating conflict. The Traditionalists were rated poorly in the willingness to accept new technology category with a 1.89.

Generation X rated the Baby Boomers favorably overall. Work ethic, commitment to the organization, internal motivation, and organizational skills were the highest ratings with the first two receiving a 4.44 and the latter two receiving a 4.11. Response to criticism (3.11), little instruction needed before a project (3.33), and likelihood to avoid conflict in the workplace were all scored slightly above average. Willingness to accept new technology and need for frequent feedback were rated 2.89 and 2.44 respectively.

When rating themselves, Generation X was not overly generous. High ratings were received in willingness to embrace new technology (4.43) and internal motivation (4.00). Slightly above averages were given in work ethic, commitment to the organization, organization skills, need for frequent feedback, and requiring little instruction before a project with ratings

ranging from 3.14 to 3.57. They were rated slightly below average in response to criticism and likelihood to create conflict.

Like the Baby Boomers and Traditionalists, Generation X scored the Millennials poorly. They were rated very likely to create conflict and their response to criticism is likely to be poor with a rating of 1.67. Work ethic was the worst score with a 1.44. They scored slightly below average in internal motivation (2.11), organization skills (2.00), and needing little information before beginning a project (2.67). A rating of 4.33 was given for a need for frequent need of feedback which means Millennials need frequent feedback. However, the Millennials were rated very highly in acceptance of new technology with a 5.00 rating.

Millennial Generation- Five responses to the survey came from the Millennial Generation. When asked to describe the generations, Millennials used terms like hardworking, dependable, and traditional to describe the Traditionalists. Timely, driven, and selfish were terms used to describe the Baby Boomers. Generation X was described with rebellious, wild, and questioning. Millennials described themselves with lazy, promising, and trendy.

Like the other generations, the Millennials also filled out the rating questions. For the Traditionalists, they rated them highly on work ethic (5.00), internal motivation (4.50), organizational skills (4.50), responding well to criticism (4.00), and organizational commitment (4.00). Millennials said that Traditionalists were slightly less average to create conflict at work with a 3.50 rating. They were rated average on the amount of instruction needed before a project. They were rated below average about the amount of feedback with a 2.50 which means they need less feedback than the average employee. However, they were rated poorly on acceptance of new technology with a 2.00.

The Millennials rated the Baby Boomers as relatively average employees. The Baby Boomers were given a 4.00 rating in internal motivation, organization skills, and a need for frequent feedback. Work ethic, commitment to the organization, and likelihood to create conflict were all rated a 3.50. An average rating of 3.00 was given in the categories of response to criticism and the amount of information needed to start a project. Like the traditionalists, they were rated less likely to accept new technology (2.50) by the Millennial Generation.

Generation X was also rated by the Millennial Generation. Embracing new technology and organizational skills were rated highest for Generation X with 4.00 rating. Internal motivation was next with rating of 3.50. Generation X was rated average (3.00) in work ethic, amount of instruction before a project, and likelihood to create conflict. The Millennial Generation rated Generation X below average in response to criticism (2.00), commitment to the organization (2.50), and a need for frequent feedback (2.50). However, scoring below average on a need for frequent feedback is not necessarily bad.

Like all other generations, the Millennial Generation rated themselves poorly, but not as poorly as the other generations. Acceptance of new technology was the highest score with a 5.00 rating. They also rated themselves 4.25 in requiring frequent feedback. The rest of the Millennials ratings for themselves were slightly below average. Work ethic, response to criticism, and commitment to the organization were all given a 2.75 rating. A 2.50 rating was given for organizational skills. Internal motivation and amount of instruction needed before a project were given 2.25 ratings. The worst score they gave themselves was likelihood to create conflict with a 2.00 rating.

Generations Combined- To gain an idea of the overall appearance of the generations, the results from the survey were combined. The descriptions of the generations are all listed above, so they will not be included in this section because they have not changed, however, the ratings will be covered.

The Traditionalists scored highly on work ethic (4.53), commitment to the organization (4.47), and internal motivation (4.40). Organizational skills was rated 3.67. Traditionalists scored a 3.27 on requiring little information before starting a project and a 3.20 on the likelihood of creating conflict. Response to criticism, a need for frequent feedback, and willingness to embrace technology were rated 2.87, 2.67, and 2.13 respectively.

Overall, the Baby Boomers were rated slightly above average employees. Organizational skills (4.07), commitment to the organization (4.00), and work ethic (4.00) were the highest ratings. Baby Boomers also scored relatively well on internal motivation with a 3.93 rating. Right behind these scores are likelihood to create conflict with a 3.54 rating, requiring little instruction before a project at 3.23, and willingness to embrace new technology with a 3.07. Response to criticism was the lowest rating, but it scored an average 3.00.

Generation X was rated highest in willingness to accept new technology with a 4.46 rating. They were rated 3.77 in internal motivation, 3.69 in organization skills, and 3.46 in work ethic. Need for frequent feedback (3.23), requiring little instruction before a project (3.08), commitment to the organization (2.92), and likelihood to create conflict (2.62) all received close to average scores. Response to criticism was Generation X's lowest score with a rating of 2.54.

As was evidenced in the individual breakdowns above, the Millennial Generation scored relatively lower than the other generations. However, they also received the highest rating of any of the generations as well with a 5.00 in willingness to accept new technology. They

received a 4.06 in need for frequent feedback as well. The rest of their scores were all below average. Requiring little information before beginning a project, organization skills, and internal motivation were slightly below average with ratings of 2.59, 2.41, and 2.35 respectively. The Millennials lowest scores were commitment to the organization (2.18), work ethic (2.06), response to criticism (2.06), and likelihood to create conflict (1.94).

Questions about conflict were also included in the survey. The first question about conflict asked what type of conflict was associated with each generation. Traditionalists were most likely to have conflict over accepting change and new technology. Unwillingness to accept new technology also is a source of conflict with the Baby Boomer generation along with perceiving people not performing the way the Baby Boomers expect. Generation X creates conflict based on trying to implement change too fast and expecting to get more than they deserve. Lack of focus, poor performance, lack of commitment, and personal problems are all sources of conflict associated with the Millennial Generation.

When asked which generations were most likely to create conflict with one another, the Millennial Generation was chosen as the generation most likely to create conflict in the workplace by 12 of the 15 participants who answered that question. Both the Traditionalists and Baby Boomers were listed as most likely six times. Generation X was selected only four times. When asked which generation the participant preferred to manage, Generation X was chosen eight times. The Millennial Generation and the Baby Boomers were chosen three times. Traditionalists were only chosen once. The final question asked which generation the respondent least preferred to manage. Millennials were chosen nine times. Baby Boomers were chosen three times, Traditionalists once, and Generation X was not specified as the least preferred generation.

Discussion

The limited amount of data that was collected allowed for only a few trends to be established. In order to avoid the issue of over-applying the sample, one must keep in mind that while the trends that are presented are prevalent in this sample, they may not hold true in all circumstances. Prevalent, in this situation, is determined by an overall majority of responses indicating a specific answer. Trends are determined by using the combined data of all generations because each individual generation had too few respondents to define a trend.

Overall, the Millennial Generation was perceived to be poor workers by all generations, including their own generation. It must be kept in mind that these trends are based on small amounts of data. They scored significantly lower in the categories of work ethic, internal motivation, and organization skills when significant is defined as 1 point below the average scores of the next lowest generation's average. When the definition of significantly is changed to be .5 points lower, the list of characteristics is expanded to include commitment to the organization, requiring little instruction to begin a project, likelihood to create conflict, and need for frequent feedback (the scale for this is inversely related to the rest of the scales). Millennials were also selected as the generation most likely to create conflict in the workplace by 12 of the 15 people who answered the question in the survey. Nine of the respondents also chose the Millennial Generation as the least preferred generation to manage.

The statistics in the survey show that the Millennial Generation is much less likely to be good employees. The tendency for the Millennial Generation to be a poor employee is most likely based on the environment in which they grew up. The life experiences that they have been through have made them less capable employees. Technology has been around them all their

lives making things easier. Parents have experienced a period of economic success which has been translated to more money at home and the ability for parents to provide extra amenities for their children. With this extra pampering, the Millennial Generation has grown accustomed to getting what they want and are therefore less likely to perform adequately in the workplace.

However, an alternate explanation exists to this hypothesis. Millennials have been in the workforce for the shortest period of time, so they may not have learned the skills necessary to be a productive employee. This is most likely not the case, because little information exists to show that this has been experienced when other generations have entered the workforce.

Acceptance of new technology was the one category where Millennials were rated better than the other generations. Millennials were given a 5.00 rating which is the highest rating any generation scored in any category. This leads to the conclusion that the Millennial Generation would be suitable as a test group for new technology. The constant increase in the level of technology has made Millennials accustomed to change which would make this generation excellent for implementing any new change. They would be able to show if the change was going to be successful or not.

Since technology is being increased at an ever growing pace, it is no surprise that the younger generations are the more likely generation to accept the change. Willingness to accept new technology decreases as age increases, with each older generation accepting the new technology less than the one younger than it. The amount of feedback needed also decreases with age. However, work ethic, commitment to an organization, and internal motivation all increase with age. The amount of information needed to start a project also decreases with age.

As a final reminder, these trends are based on limited sample data. While these trends are the strongest shown in the data, they are still not necessarily true as is little of the research done on this topic. The weaker trends were omitted because of a lack of sampling base.

Research in generational diversity is more important now, than ever. Advances in health care have made it possible for people to live longer, so there will be a greater number of generations in the workforce at one time. More people are staying in the workforce longer now as well. The recent global economic downturn has hurt people's pension and retirement plans making it necessary for them to continue to work after they are eligible to retire. If the recession continues, this will just be more reason for them to continue working long past 65, the current age of retirement. The longer each generation is in the workforce, the more time they have to interact and the likelihood of conflict from generational differences increases.

The Millennial Generation shows a large amount of differences in the values and beliefs characteristic of the older generations which is evident both in the survey results by the lower ratings and the research in tables one and two. Differences exhibited in this case, are often the source of conflict amongst the generations which is the reason why this area of study is critical for future success. Millennials are having a hard time transitioning into the workforce because the expectations of managers and the expectations of the Millennials are contradictory. These differences in expectations are due to the events that each generation grew up experiencing. Without more information about why these groups act the way they do, conflict in the workplace is more likely to increase.

At this point in time, a large portion of the Millennial Generation has not even entered the work force yet. This group of people has grown up experiencing great economic growth, and is now witnessing an economic meltdown, which would be a large event that will shape the way

this generation acts for the rest of their lives. The economic meltdown will have a profound effect on this generation because it is the opposite of what they have grown up facing. Up to this point, this generation has grown up expecting to get a high paying job because the economic growth the country had been experiencing forced employers to fight for each employee. This decreased the employee's commitment to the organization and also instilled a false sense of security in the fact that if they do not like what is happening, they can go elsewhere. Generations previous to the Millennial Generation did not grow up experiencing this type of growth, so commitment was the fastest way of moving up the corporate ladder.

This is just one example of how the workplace is changing due to generational differences. The generations have experienced different events and now have different expectations of what needs to happen in order to make them satisfied with their place of employment. Trends such as this will continue to change in the future, so research is needed now to better understand why these trends are occurring and what can be done in the workplace to make these trends less of an issue. Long term results must be sought after in order to help managers better understand how to get the most productivity out of their employees from different generations. Because of the current lack of information, managers are not in the best position to make the decisions necessary to motivate, manage, and avoid conflict with their employees.

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Appendix A-Survey Questions

1. Please identify the generation in which you are included. This information is used for categorization of the data. If within 1-2 years of the dates listed, please choose the generation you relate to most.

Traditionalist 1922-1943
Baby Boomer 1943-1960
Generation X 1961-1980
Millennial 1981-2000

2..Please list three words or phrases that you feel describe each of these generations. Exclude your generation

3-6. For the Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please use a 5 point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree.

They have a strong work ethic.

They respond well to criticism.

They willingly and quickly embrace new technology.

They are strongly committed to the organization.

They exhibit strong internal motivation to perform well on the job.

They show good organization skills

They show a need for frequent feedback on how they are performing their job.

They require little instruction before beginning a project.

They are not likely to create conflict during a meeting or on the job.

7. Explain what types of conflict are generally created by each generation.

Traditionalist-

Baby Boomer-

Generation X-

Millennial-

8. Which generations are most likely to create conflict with each other?

9. Which generation do you prefer to manage?

10. Which generation do you least prefer to manage?