



Which Planet are you from?

Understanding Age Diversity in Project Teams

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Introduction

Have you heard somebody blurb the fact that all the young kids of today in South Africa should attend military service; according to some folks the only way to embed discipline is through enduring hardships.

Have you heard your child expressing feelings of frustration and animosity toward the unfair world that they live in?

Have you heard the SADF soldier of yesteryear expressing anger of the time wasted in the military?

Mix these views in the workplace, and see what happens.

Difference of style, appearance, and attitude between generations is not a new issue. However, the gulf between the work expectations of the four prominent generations in the current workplace is unprecedented. The dominant group in business and industry today are the Baby Boomer generation, which often finds itself unable to deal effectively with the younger members of the "X-Generation" now flooding the market place and wanting their special place in these organizations. This paper defines the major generations alive today, with the focus on the attitudes and expectations of the X-Generation, and addresses the strategies for creating a team atmosphere that allows for maximum productivity and job satisfaction from each employee.

What is a Generation?

Demographers generally define a generation as a cohort of people born within a span of 15-25 years. The exact number of years is less important than the changes in values, habits, thought processes and behaviors dividing one group from another. There are four generations currently interacting in the workplace and a fifth generation is in the formation phase (Banger Generation) The four prominent generations are The Veterans, The Baby Boomers, The Generation Xers, and the Nexters. Generation X will be the focus of this paper.

The Veterans

The Veterans (Those born in the period 1923 – 1943) came of age in hard times and then created one of the most prosperous economies of all time. They lived through the Great Depression and fought in the Great War. They were the foundation of a better life for all and were full of patriotism, honor, love of home and family, and a very strong work ethic. This generation was and continues to be focused on in history, understanding that the past must be remembered rather than repeated. Veterans believe in law and order, in respect for leadership and in personal duty “It’s the right thing to do”

The Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomers (those born in the period 1943 – 1960) came into the world focused on them. Dating parents, stay-at-home mothers and hard working fathers wanted to give their children every opportunity and a better life. Countries poured money into building schools and park facilities for this young generation. The children of the Boomer age grew up believing that they could accomplish anything, go anywhere, and change the world.

The Hippie movement, Woman’s Liberation, The Sexual revolution and the Anti-war political activities came from the Baby Boomers at the onset of their adulthood. The Boomers were able to merge their social and political beliefs with conformity sufficient enough to become successful wage earners. As they settled into working, once again their sheer numbers gave them enough say in the companies to make the Boomers a powerful force. As of 2000, Boomers accounted for more than 53% of the South African workforce.

The Boomers were the first generation to consciously make work into serious game, although previous generations had worked harder to make a living, the Boomers created workholism, spending far greater amounts of their time and energy on their careers than ever before. The Boomers paid their dues and expect that the next generation of workers will do the same, problem yes.

Generation X

Most demographers define Generation X as those born in the period 1960 – 1980, although some define the period more precisely as 1961 – 1981. Other researchers use the more limited span of 1965 – 1976 (Mitchell 1993; O’Donovan 1997) to describe generation.

The Generation Xers have been something of a lost group from birth. This was the first generation born to working mothers, whose careers were interrupted only long enough to give birth and find the proper daycare program. Raised by dual-income or single parents, Xers are the first American generation to fully expect woman to have lifelong careers (Mitchell 1993). The Xers learned self-reliance early, as they shuttled from daycare to school to after-school activities to latchkey loneliness.

“Quality time” did not equal “Quantity time” for this generation. Liberalation of divorce laws and the self-actualization frenzy in the 1970’s caused the United States to leap to the world’s highest divorce rate ever as the Gen Xers were growing up (Bagby 1998). Lacking close family support, the Xers, more than any generation before them, formed their own “families” in the shape of a small crowd of friends. This is the generation that moves in packs; boy-girl dating has been an

exception to the constant group togetherness. Although they like to think of themselves as highly individualistic, they are in fact highly dependant on their peer groups for validation and support.

Figure 1. How different generations see the world (Zemke et al. 2000, p 155)

Dimension	Veterans	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Nexters
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work Ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
View of Authority	Respectful	Love/Hate	Unimpressed	Polite
Leadership by	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pulling together
Relationships	Personal sacrifice	Personal gratification	Reluctant to commit	Inclusive
Turnoffs	Vulgarity	Political incorrectness	Cliché; hype	Promiscuity

There are definitely good qualities among this young adult generation. The Xers are generally immune to prejudice and hatred. Raised In a diverse culture and more dependant on peer groups than family units for support, they are accepting of differences in race, ethnicity, national origin, family structures, and lifestyles (Mitchell 1993). In general, the Gen Xers are better educated, more technologically prepared, and more self-reliant than the Boomers were at the same point in their lives. However, they are not seeing the payback; Gen Xers in their early 30's earn only 70% in real dollars of what their Boomer parents did at the same age (Sherman 1993)

This is the first generation to expect that they will be less materially successful than their parents (Economist, quoted in Eskilson and Wiley 1999). The Xers are often seriously underemployed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that at least one in five people who graduated from college between 1984 and 1990 are working at a job that does not require a college education. They have strong financial pressures to get paid appropriately for their skills; those who are college educated are coming to the workforce deeply in debt. Due o soaring college costs, parental job downsizing, which impacted family support for college, and dwindling federal grants, Gen Xers have borrowed \$140 billion to fund their education in the 1990's alone. Adjusted for inflation, this is more than total student borrowing for the past three decades combined (Zevin & Edy 1997).

They are also somewhat fatalistic about their odds for success and security. Growing up in the age of AIDS, divorce, latchkey kids, and rising violence, they are well aware hat stability is hard to find and danger is just around the corner (Mitchell 1993).

The Nexters

The Nexters (those born in the period 1981 – 2000) are an interesting blend of the three generations before them. They are as self-reliant as the Gen Xers, as confident that the world is their domain as the Boomers, and as full of civic pride, politeness, and sense of duty as the Veterans are. Many demographers believe that the Nexters will be the most productive group in many decades.

The Bangers

Are you interested? Watch this generation, they will blow us away, hold on to your seats the world is about to change. This is the generation that will explore space travel, they will live in liquid homes, they will have virtual pets, water will be fuel they will own the space we are creating, and they will visit and touch the stars You can add everything else.

Generational Differences at a Glance

Figure 1 illustrates at a glance the major differences between the generations.

Workplace Changes and Generational Views of Work

Understanding the differences between the generations facilitates understanding the cause of many workplace conflicts. To fully appreciate the intensity of today's struggle, however, one must also understand the radical changes in the workplace.

In the earlier decades of the 20th century, organizations were primarily hierarchical in design. The traditional work structure consisted of three levels of authority, which roughly corresponded to the generations in the workforce at any given moment. Upper management, the executive level, was comprised largely of the older workers, most of whom had "risen up through the ranks." Middle-aged men and women were primarily middle managers, technical or subject-matter specialists who were preparing to assume the executive ranks as their bosses reached retirement age. The younger workers were found in direct labor apprenticeship and learning roles, being mentored by middle managers to someday take their places. It was a predictable and orderly, if sometimes stifling, model. Several key changes in the workplace have rendered the traditional model virtually extinct. Those changes include the downsizing mania started in the 1980's, the lengthened life span and abundant health of the adults, the technological changes that have changed the definition of "work" beyond recognition, and the projectization of work.

Downsizing and company loyalty

The downsizing mania that began in the 1980's has marked an indelible change in the way workers view their companies, their jobs, and the entire concept of careers. For the majority of the Veterans generation, employment with a company was a lifetime idea. The Boomers often entered the workforce with the same basic premise; that they would move around a little early in their careers, then find a good company where they would settle in to work hard and retire with a decent pension and the ubiquitous gold watch. This expectation was rudely shattered when the huge wave of middle-management firings hit. Far too young to retire and out of the competitive market for a decade or more, the displaced Boomers were forced to start over, often in very different positions than those previously held. This seismic period changed forever the concept of company loyalty for at least two generations – the Boomers who were the targets and their children, the Gen Xers, who experienced the family disruptions caused by the new economy. By 1993, surveys showed that more than 70% of American workers of all ages believe that they needed to take complete control of their careers, and less than 12% believed any promises of their employers (Sherman 1993). This major change in the implied contract between employer and employee has had profound impact on the Gen X view of work. Having watched their Boomer parents turn workaholic into a lifestyle and still suffer from the disappointments and career disruptions every time the stock market hiccups, the Gen Xers are determined not to make

work the center of their lives. They are willing to work hard, but on different terms than the Boomers; 88% of Gen Xers surveyed fully expected to be paid time and a half for any hours over 40, and 75% expect to be home for dinner every night (Bagby 1998)

Lengthened Life Span

The second factor influencing the Gen X view of the workplace is the increased health and vigor of the population. A generation or two ago, retirement was mandatory at age 60 or even 55. In many cases, these older workers were definitely ready for retirement, with medical ailments, failing memory, and general loss of vigor. However, as the early crop of Boomers approach age 60, they are fit, vital, fully engaged in life, and showing no intentions of giving up their jobs in exchange for "rest. As their health and vitality allows them to keep working at the same or improved levels, their financial situation adds the necessary incentive to postpone retirement. Job changes that destroyed pension funds, soaring education costs for their college-age children. And crushing credit card debt have made the Boomer generation far less financially secure than their parents were at the same point in life. Since the Boomers show no signs of "giving up their seats" at the management table, Gen Xers look ahead to long years with little advancement opportunity. With no vertical career growth pathway clear, the Gen Xers are faced with years of lateral movement, if there is to be any movement at all for them. This prospect further dulls their appetite for staying with an employer for any length of time. The goal, as they see it, is to learn as much as possible in the current job and then move on to the next opportunity.

Technological Changes

The waves of technological change sweeping through the workplace over the past decade have served to further complicate the concept of employee value. The traditional workplace valued tenure partly because time on the job meant the employee had learned more about the business and how to do the job than any newcomer could acquire for years. This paradigm shifted when technological breakthroughs started to define "how to do the job" at a mind-numbing pace. Often now, those who have done the job for years may be less well equipped to do the job today than newcomers with the technological knowledge of new tools and no historical "bad habits." It's the Gen Xers who have grown up with adopting a new technology every few weeks and are skilled in the quick self-training required to keep current. Therefore, businesses find themselves needing the skills of the employees with whom they have the least cultural fit.

The Gen Xers, for their part, understand that they have superior technical skills and innovative ways to approach business needs, yet, in most traditional companies, they are not treated with respect and the quick promotional opportunities that they believe they deserve. They are expected to fit into traditional molds of dress, working hours, reference to managers, and other parts of company cultures that seem totally foreign to the jobs they are doing. Many of the Xers have opted out of trying to fit into a corporate culture and gone out on their own. The X generation has proven more entrepreneurial than any of their predecessors; more than 1.5 million of the 5 million people who started businesses in 1996 were younger than 30, with nearly 800,000 under 25 (Parker 1998). Most young entrepreneurs say that they did not start a business primarily to get rich; rather they put the emphasis on autonomy. Freedom from trying to conform to an outmoded corporate culture was the driving force for the majority of company start-ups (Bagby 1998).

Projectization of Work

No longer looking at continued employment with one company, the focus for many workers shift to an emphasis on building a portfolio of skills and projects that will keep the individual marketable (Handy 1990). Bruce Tulgan (1995) states that Gen X workers see themselves as independent contractors, even when they are on a corporation's payroll. For these young people, carrying out orders is a totally foreign concept; they expect to be respected, challenged, and left alone to accomplish good things. If there was any traditional command and control structure left, the Gen Xers are rapidly destroying it. The concept of apprenticeship, growing up through the ranks, and "putting in their time" is totally foreign (Munchnick 1996). Joining a project team with a specific role to play is much more desirable to these young people than taking a job in functional silo, where they are expected to grow slowly. Given these conditions, a career built on project work is a perfect fit with the new worker attitude.

How to Manage Gen X Workers

Keeping Gen X workers satisfied and productive is not really difficult, if the manager understands the background paradigms and expectations of this age group. Many models have been suggested for managing Gen X Workers. All are similar in content, but may place different emphasis, depending on the bias of the author. Meredith Bagby (1998) has an economic viewpoint of generational differences. Her advice for managing Gen X workers encompasses four domains:

- Leveraging the Web – Because of the technological savvy of the Gen Xers, recruitment demands a strong Web presence. After hiring, the young generation will expect their workplace to be fully web – enabled and will quickly leave an environment that relies on paper reports and other low – tech work tools.
- Constant training – Lacking company loyalty, the main reason for a Gen Xer to stay with a job is constant exposure to training and skills development. Apprenticeship is not of interest to workers who have no illusions about long – term employment; Gen Xers want to build their portfolio of portable skills.
- Hands-on approach – Classroom training and reading procedure books will send a Gen Xer running for the exit door quickly. They expect to be immersed in the job immediately and train as they go. They resent micromanagement and expect their manager to behave more like a coach, giving regular feedback one-on-one, but leaving them alone to hone their skills in between.
- Quality of life – Balanced lifestyle is key to happiness for the Gen Xers. Recreation, time for family and friends, personal growth activities, and work are all roughly the same in importance. This generation has firmly rejected the workaholicism of the Boomer parents, and will leave a job quickly if the demands or stress is too high.

Mark Muchnick published his rules for engaging Gen X workers in his book *NAKED Management* (1996). His NAKED model is based on “getting real” with this generation that has no tolerance for corporate games or traditional rules. His advice on what Gen Xers want:

- Necessary Freedom – Gen Xers require autonomy and freedom in the way they do their jobs. They expect latitude and the ability to experiment with improving their assignments. Micromanagement is a major turn-off.
- Active Involvement – The Gen Xers are bright, well-educated, and multi-processing thinkers; they expect to be able to help their organization evolve. They will question policies, procedures and processes, and they need to feel that their ideas are welcome. If their creativity is not welcomed and their ideas evaluated fairly, they will be out the door.
- Key recognition – Promotion and opportunity should be based completely on merit. Tenure, time in grade, “paying dues” are concepts that are totally foreign to the Gen Xers. They expect to get credit for their innovations and accomplishments and they will flee from a manager who tries to hold them back or take credit for their ideas.
- Empathy – Because work is only one component of a balanced lifestyle, Gen Xers require managers who understand that. The culture needs to be supportive of family and health, and respectful of alternative viewpoints.
- Direct communication – Perhaps driven by the lack of parental interaction as the Gen Xers were growing up, they crave communication. Feedback from the manager needs to be frequent and personal. Honest assessment of progress, ideas for improving and setting clear expectations will help a Gen Xer feel safe and cared for.

In *Beyond Generation X* (1997), Claire Raines speaks for her generation with the following advice model for managers:

- Appreciate us – Gen Xers need recognition and appreciation more than the previous generations. Verbal recognition, personal thanks, small bonuses such as ice cream sundaes in the middle of a tough afternoon, and sincere feedback on a job well done will pay large dividends with these younger workers.
- Be flexible – Due to Gen Xer’s emphasis on a balanced lifestyle, managers who want to retain these talented workers must be willing to bend and experiment. Flexible work hours, job sharing, cafeteria benefits, and tolerance of different dress styles are examples of non-expensive shifts that make a world of difference.
- Create a team – The Gen Xers grew up forming their own family groups to replace parents who were absent or consumed with work. On the job, they are still looking for that feeling of belonging to a small group. Team assignments are ideal for Gen X workers. Organizing them to work in team efforts encourages the “tribe membership” that is so important to the Gen X mentality.
- Develop us – The Gen X worker is looking for constructive coaching and lots of opportunity for learning. The manager who can help the younger worker feel appreciated and autonomous while coaching him to grow will be extremely successful at retaining Gen Xers.
- Involve us – Gen X workers are bright and creative, and they know it. Involving them in decision-making, brainstorming, and work design is a win-win situation. The manager who believes that younger workers will get “too big for their hats” if asked for their opinion will not retain Gen Xers.
- Lighten up – Gen Xers definitely believe that work would be fun. They bring their music and headphones to listen to as they code programs, they want to play video games at lunch or for stress release breaks, and they believe that dressing formally every day is silly.
- Walk your talk – One of the chief complaints that Gen X workers have about their Boomers managers is insincerity. Managers who talk of inclusively and empowerment but continue to manage hierarchially are instant turnoffs for young workers.

Summary

The young workers in their twenties and thirties who are known as Generation X are complex and extremely different from their Baby Boomers parents and managers. They are well educated and, even more important; they know how to learn at a constant and rapid pace. They have much to offer a company that understands how to manage them. However, they cannot be managed with the traditional workplace rules and cultures.

Project work is ideal for Gen Xers for the following reasons:

- Being assigned to a project team satisfies their need to be part of a smaller cohort in the workplace, where they can feel a sense of belonging.
- Projects are limited in time and scope, which appeals to the Gen X impatience with doing the same task over and over.
- Project role descriptions are specific in terms of expected outcomes but flexible in terms of how the role is actually carried out. This speaks to the Gen X preference for autonomy in their daily work, within a framework of understandable expectations.
- Project managers are different from functional managers in terms of their expectations of workers. Project managers know that they will have the service of a team member for only a finite period of time, and normally without the positional power of a functional manager. For these reasons, project managers lead a team based on personal leadership power and the need to coax the best from each team member in a short amount of time. This management style is much more in line with gen X desires than traditional management.
- Gen X workers assigned to a project team are given a role that they alone can fill. This eliminates the sense of “working their way up” in a more traditional work environment.
- In general, project managers are more lenient about work hours and personal quirks, as the overriding goal is getting the assigned tasks completed on time and budget.

The excellent project manager is already well positioned to achieve great results with Gen X workers. Understanding the particular concerns and needs of this group of employees will allow even more productivity and aid in employee retention and loyalty.

How old is Grandpa???



Stay with this -- the answer is at the end. It will blow you away.

One evening a grandson was talking to his grandfather about current events. The grandson asked his grandfather what he thought about the shootings at schools, the computer age, and just things in general.

The Grandfather replied, "Well, let me think a minute, I was born before:

- ' **television**
- ' **penicillin**
- ' **polio shots**
- ' **frozen foods**
- ' **Xerox**
- ' **contact lenses**
- ' **Frisbees and**
- ' **the pill**

There were no:

- ' **credit cards**
- ' **laser beams or**

' **ball-point pens**

Man had not invented:

' **pantyhose**

' **air conditioners**

' **dishwashers**

' **clothes dryers**

' **and the clothes were hung out to dry in the fresh air
and**

' **man hadn't yet walked on the moon**



**Your Grandmother and I got married first, . . . and then
lived together.**

Every family had a father and a mother.

**Until I was 25, I called every man older than me, "Sir".
And after I turned 25, I still called policemen and every
man with a title, "Sir."**

**We were before gay-rights, computer- dating, dual
careers, daycare centers, and group therapy.**

Our lives were governed by the Ten Commandments, good judgment, and common sense.

We were taught to know the difference between right and wrong and to stand up and take responsibility for our actions.

Serving your country was a privilege; living in this country was a bigger privilege.

We thought fast food was what people ate during Lent.

Having a meaningful relationship meant getting along with your cousins.

Draft dodgers were people who closed their front doors when the evening breeze started.

Time-sharing meant time the family spent together in the evenings and weekends-not purchasing condominiums.



We never heard of FM radios, tape decks, CDs, electric typewriters, yogurt, or guys wearing earrings.

We listened to the Big Bands, Jack Benny, and the President's speeches on our radios.

And I don't ever remember any kid blowing his brains out listening to Tommy Dorsey.

If you saw anything with 'Made in Japan ' on it, it was junk

The term 'making out' referred to how you did on your school exam.

Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and instant coffee were unheard of.

We had 5 & 10-cent stores where you could actually buy things for 5 and 10 cents.

Ice-cream cones, phone calls, rides on a streetcar, and a Pepsi were all a nickel.

And if you didn't want to splurge, you could spend your nickel on enough stamps to mail 1 letter and 2 postcards.

You could buy a new Chevy Coupe for \$600, . . . but who could afford one?

Too bad, because gas was 11 cents a gallon.

In my day:

- ' **"grass" was mowed,**
- ' **"coke" was a cold drink,**
- ' **"pot" was something your mother cooked in and**
- ' **"rock music" was your grandmother's lullaby.**
- ' **"Aids" were helpers in the Principal's office,**
- ' **" chip" meant a piece of wood,**
- ' **"hardware" was found in a hardware store and**
- ' **"software" wasn't even a word.**



And we were the last generation to actually believe that a lady needed a husband to have a baby. No wonder people call us "old and confused" and say there is a generation gap... and how old do you think I am?

I bet you have this old man in mind...you are in for a shock!

Read on to see -- pretty scary if you think about it and pretty sad at the same time.

Are you ready ?

**This man would be only 59
years old**
