Communication Across Generations

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Overview
• Defining generational communication
• Importance of learning about generational communication
• Different intergenerational perspectives
• Qualities of different generations
• Strategies for dealing with intergenerational conflict

Communicating Across Generations
• What is a generation?

What experiences have you had communicating with different generations?
Challenging interactions?
Beneficial interactions?
Why learn about intergenerational communication?

- Five generations currently working together:

![Graph showing the number of individuals in different age groups from 1900 to 2010.](image)

Why learn about intergenerational communication?

- We interact with different generations everyday.
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Workplace

- Differences can create obstacles.

Learning how to successfully navigate communication in various situations can make us more effective workers, family members, and friends.

Intergenerational Communication

- Two perspectives
  1. Shared events influence each generation. These events lead to similar thoughts, values, and behaviors. These qualities differ among generations.
  2. Differences are caused by people being in different parts of their life or career stage.

Byeend (2005); Jahangir, 2003; Yang & Gap, 2006)

Both perspectives benefit from understanding unique experiences and histories.
Intergenerational Communication

Different Generations

- The Silent Generation (Pre 1945)
- Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
- Generation X (1965-1976)
- Generation Z (1995-?)

**The Silent Generation (Pre 1945)**
- Influencing events:
  - WWII, Korean War, Great Depression, New Deal, etc.
  - Raised by parents of the great depression.
- Values:
  - Adherence to rules
  - Sacrifice

**Baby Boomers (1946-1964)**
- Influencing events:
  - Civil Rights, Vietnam War, space travel.
  - Promised the American Dream.
- Values:
  - Optimistic
  - Competitive

**Generation X (1965-1976)**
- Influencing events:
  - Civil Rights, Vietnam War, space travel.
  - Promised the American Dream.

**Millennials (1977-1994)**

**Generation Z (1995-?)**
Different Generations

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- **Millennials** *(1977-1994)*
- **Generation Z** *(1995-?)*

**Influencing events:**
- Watergate, increase of dual income families/single parents, latchkey, energy crisis, downsizing corporations
- First generation to not do as financially well as parents.

**Values:**
- Skeptical
- Work-life balance

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**Influencing events:**
- 9/11, rise of internet and technology, school shootings, war in Middle East, increasing costs for higher ed
- First generation to grow up with internet.

**Values:**
- Self-expression
- Flexibility

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**Influencing events:**
- Global terrorism, 2008 recession, ?
- First generation to be born into constant media/technology.

**Values:**
- Entrepreneurial
- More risk-adverse
Different Generations

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- Generation Z (1995-?)

What happens when we combine multiple generations in a workplace or other interaction?

- Each generation has unique circumstances that influence values and behaviors.
  
  - Often, these values/behaviors clash with others.

Stereotypes?
Intergenerational Conflict

What sources of conflict do you see between generations?

What frustrates you about other generations?

Strive for flexibility
Respect differences
Seek out perspectives
Find common ground
Revise your story
Seek for flexibility

Managing Intergenerational Conflict
Managing Intergenerational Conflict

- Strive for flexibility
- Respect differences
- Seek out perspectives
- Find common ground
- Revise your story

Revise Your Story

- What story are you creating?
  - How are you explaining the person’s behavior? Your role in the interaction?
    - Victim stories, “It’s not MY fault…”
    - Villain stories, “It’s really all THEIR fault…”
    - Helpless stories, “Nothing that I can do will fix this…”

- Beware of the self-fulfilling prophesy or confirmation bias
  - Self-fulfilling prophesy: a prediction that causes itself to be true
  - Confirmation bias: searching out information that confirms your beliefs.

Revise Your Story

- Review the facts.
- Focus on behavior, not the story.
- Use generational differences to explain and understand, not critique.

- Research between generations:
  - Baby Boomers and Millennials agree on the appropriateness of using technology (Arnold et al.)
  - No differences found among Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials on personality and motivational drivers (Wong et al.)
  - Overall, research does not support claims about generational differences (DeMeuse & Mlodzik)
  - Generational differences may be more individual differences or life stage differences than generational
Managing Intergenerational Conflict

- Revise your story
- Find common ground
- Seek out perspectives
- Strive for flexibility

Find Common Ground

• What is your common goal?

Millennials and Older Workers Have Many of the Same Career Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents with the Following Long-Term Goals</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make a positive impact on my organization</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help solve social and environmental challenges</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with a diverse group of people</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for an organization among the best in my industry</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do work I am passionate about</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become an expert in my field</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage my work-life balance</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a senior leader</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve financial security</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start my own business</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find Common Ground

• People across all generations share many more similarities than differences:
  1. Similar values (e.g., family, generosity, etc.).
  2. Everyone wants respect.
  3. Trust matters.
  4. People want credible and trustworthy leaders.
  5. Organizational politics are a problem.
  6. People dislike change.
  7. Loyalty depends on context, not generation.
  8. It’s as easy to retain a young person as an older person, as long as you do the correct things.
  9. Everyone wants to learn.
  10. Most people want a coach.
Managing Intergenerational Conflict

- Revise your story
- Find common ground
- Seek out perspectives
- Respect differences
- Strive for flexibility

Seek Out Perspectives

- Ask questions and seek out information.
  - Is it a normal part of their generation?
  - Is it a personality issue?
  - What is it that they want or need?
Respect Differences

- Differences are neutral.
  - Baby Boomers were told the future was theirs to own;
  - Gen Xers found the future disheartening;
  - Millennials question whether there even is a future for them.
- How are their life experiences different from your own? How might their perspectives be different from your own?

Managing Intergenerational Conflict

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Strive for Flexibility

- Accommodate differences
  - Recognize and facilitate differences that help people be more productive
- Create workplace choices
  - Create options that allow workers to make choices based on working style
- Operate from a sophisticated management style
  - Be flexible and interact with each person based on their personal record
- Respect competence and initiative
  - Assume the best in people whenever possible.
- Nourish retention
  - Make your workplace a “magnet for excellence.”
Review
• Defined intergenerational communication
• Reviewed the benefits of learning about intergenerational communication
• Examined two approaches to generations
• Explored the qualities of each generation
• Overviewed strategies for dealing with intergenerational conflict

Questions and Discussion