

Communicating Across Generational Diversity

For the first time in history, our workforce spans five generations- The Silent/Traditional Generation (2%), Baby Boomers (25%), Generation X (33%), Millennials (35%), and Generation Z (5%). Every day, 10,000 Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age as Generation Z is entering the workforce for the first time. By 2028, Gen X will outnumber Baby Boomers however, 65% of Baby Boomers plan to work past retirement age. For Millennials and Gen Zers, most haven't been in work environments without technology. Millennials tend to avoid phone calls and prefer online messaging platforms, email, and texting. However, Gen X is showing a preference for face-to-face communication (NDMU, 2022).

To effectively support teams with diverse age groups, it's essential to first recognize our generational differences and biases. How have significant cultural and historical events shaped my generation? How does belonging to a certain generation influence my communication style? How does it affect my leadership approach and decision-making? How have these factors contributed to the organizational culture and my own work experience?

People are not easily categorized; our identities are multifaceted, and our individual identities form a complex whole. These generational characteristics are not meant to be prescriptive or universal. A Baby Boomer might love texting and a Millennial might prefer to meet face-to-face. This resource is offered in the spirit of increased understanding of how a diversity of lived experiences impacts the workplace. Inclusion is the practice of understanding the diversity in the room and allowing that diversity to shape the way the work is done. Once we understand our default behaviors and their potential impact on others, we can foster inclusivity for various approaches—regardless of what generation we are a part of.

What is this resource?

This resource includes two exercises to understand the impact of generational differences in the workplace. The exercises can be facilitated by an Executive Director or DEI lead for the full staff or the DEI committee across multiple sessions. Exercise #1 can also be used as pre-work for Exercise #2.

Who is it for?

- DEI committees
- Full Team

What will you gain from this resource?

- Communication and leadership styles associated with each generation
- Identify biases that impact our understanding of generations
- Strategies to work across generations and leverage our differences to increase our impact and success
- Collaboration practices and feedback protocols

Exercise 1: Working Across Generations Webinar

Activity Time: 90 minutes

Instructions:

1. **Watch TREC Webinar:** [Working Across Generations, we can work it out!](#) – 61 min
2. Individually reflect on the following prompts:
 - a. What key themes or ideas stood out to you?
 - b. Was anything surprising or an a-ha! Moment?
 - c. Was there anything you were challenged by or wondered about?
 - d. What are key takeaways or learnings from this presentation?
2. **Pair + Share:** In groups of two or three, share responses to the reflection questions.

Exercise 2: Designing a Generationally Inclusive Workplace

Activity Time: 60 minutes

Instructions:

1. **Individually complete the worksheet below.**
2. **Pair + Share:** In groups of two or three, share responses from the worksheet.
3. In a large group, ask one person from each represented generation to share their worksheet responses. *For teams with low or no generational diversity, ask for multiple participants to share.*
4. As a full group, debrief the activity using the following prompts:
 - a. What trends did you notice? What are the similarities and differences?
 - b. Was there a characteristic or workplace preference presented by another generation that surprised you?
 - c. What is one stereotype about your generation that you would like to dispel?
 - d. How can we be mindful of generational differences when communicating amongst our team? What techniques could we use? How can we begin implementing these techniques now?

Define your Generation					
What Generation are you a part of? <i>(circle one)</i>	Traditional Generation 1929 - 1945	Baby Boomers 1946 - 1964	Gen X 1965 - 1980	Millennials 1981 - 2000	Gen Z 2001- 2020
What are 3 events that you think define your generation?					
What 5 strengths or values do you associate with your generation?					
What 5 misconceptions or faults do you associate with your generation?					

Design your Ideal Work Environment

Physical Environment

Virtual, hybrid, or in-person.
The size, layout and location of a workplace, whether work is conducted indoors or outdoors, the facilities offered in a workplace and the furnishings used while working.

Company Culture

The way a company and its employees operate, what effective communication looks like between different levels of staff, employees' perspective of company leaders, the company's goals and what the organization values.

Working Conditions

Pay, length of the workday. It can also cover recreational activities and other initiatives to promote a healthy workplace.

Sources

- [Working Across Generations, we can work it out!](#) – TREC Webinar
- [Technology in Workplace Communication by Generation](#) - Research Paper
- [Managing People from 5 Generations](#) - Harvard Business Review Article
- [Want to have better conversations about racism with your parents? Here's how](#) - NPR
- [Younger Generations Work Differently. What Does This Mean for the Future Workplace?](#) – Gensler
- [The Evolution of Communication from Boomers to Gen Z](#) – Notre Dame of Maryland University
- [Generational Differences in the Workplace](#) – Purdue Global

Additional Resources

TREC: Collaboration Practices and Feedback Protocols

- [COIN Feedback Model Worksheet](#)
- [Stop, Challenge, Choose Model Worksheet](#)
- [Effectively Delivering and Receiving Feedback](#)
- [Creating a Feedback-Rich Culture](#)
- [Feedback and Crucial Conversations](#)
- [Embracing Inclusive Leadership](#)

Articles

- [How to Manage Generational Differences in the Workplace](#), *Forbes Article*
- [Tackling 4 Key Challenges of the Multigenerational Workforce](#), *Business News Daily Article*
- [The Workplace Generation Gap](#), *Monster.com Article*
- [Marketing to Young Donors](#), *Constant Contact Article*
- [Managing Intergenerational Conflict](#), *SHRM Article*
- [2012 Job Satisfaction Snapshot](#), *SHRM PDF*
- [PTR Model](#), *The Management Center Article*