

Fall 2011

Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce: Understanding Generational Differences for Effective Communication

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LEADING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE:
UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES FOR
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

by

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A Professional Project submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Leadership Studies

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

December 2011

Abstract

Today's workforce consists of individuals from four generations each bringing different perspectives and values to the workplace. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the generational differences to gain an understanding which may help managers communicate effectively with each generational cohort. This study uses the narrative research method.

Following a review of the literature on the subject of multi-generational work teams, the study tells the story of four individuals, one person from each of the four generational cohorts. Each of the individuals has experienced the phenomenon of working on a multi-generational work team. The stories shared reveal the individual's perspective with regard to values, communication, relationships, and motivation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Barbara J. Smyrl

I would like to thank my friends and family for their encouragement and support throughout this educational endeavor. I am grateful for the guidance and direction provided to me by each member of the College of Professional Studies in pursuit of this accomplishment.

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Leading a Multi-Generational Workforce: Understanding Generational Differences for Effective Communication

Introduction

Never before has the U.S. workforce been so diverse and unique. The mix of race, gender, ethnicity, and generation is stunning (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak, 2000). For the first time in modern history, workplace demographics now span four generations. Current economic conditions and the decision by many older workers to delay retirement have led to a rich mix of generations in the workplace, shifting workplace demographics. This shift impacts the workplace culture since values, attitudes, and work styles differ with each generation (Murphy, 2007).

Each of the generations brings its own values, work behaviors, relationship styles, and motivation to the workplace (Dois, Landrum, and Wieck, 2010). The presence of four diverse generations in the workplace can present obstacles involving respect, communication, and work styles (Aker, 2009). Despite the differences in employee values and the obstacles that may surface, today's workplace can be a positive and productive environment for workers of all ages, provided the organization has aware and enlightened managers determined to make it so (Zemke, et al, 2000).

Managing people effectively means making sure employees get what they need in order to feel a sense of balance between effort exerted and benefits obtained (Johnson and Johnson, 2010). Understanding the characteristics of each generational cohort will help managers to identify and meet the needs of their employees to successfully lead a multi-generational

workforce. The solution to effectively motivate and manage four generations is relatively straightforward: it is simply that the differences of the four generations must be understood, respected, and recognized (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

It wasn't long ago when the structure of most organizations separated the generations by rank and status. Executives were typically older employees. Middle managers were also middle-aged. The front line workers were generally the youngest members of the organization (Murphy, 2007). Today's workforce is unique because there are four distinct and separate generations working together, side-by-side, with each of the generations bringing a different approach to their company, their co-workers, and the work itself. This is a convergence of four generations, where each one is significantly different than the others, with each on a different path in work and in life (Patota, Schwartz, and Schwartz, 2007).

The convergence of four generations in the workforce is the result of several factors. Among these factors are the disproportionate size of the Baby Boomer generation, the devotion to work characteristic inherent in these individuals, and the current economic conditions, which caused many of the Baby Boomers nearing retirement to postpone their plans and continue working (Pitts-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa, 2009). There are also some Traditionalists remaining or returning to the workforce as a means to be productive or out of necessity to make ends meet. Many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers have a superior mental and physical status as compared to previous generations. As a result, these workers have been able to expand their working years beyond age sixty-five (Peterson, 2007).

With the continuance of employment by Traditionalists and Baby Boomers, this rich and diverse workforce is likely to exist for years to come. Understanding generational differences enables a greater appreciation for each group's values, characteristics, and experiences that influence the group's work ethic, motivation, and ideology of workers (Haeberle, Herzberg, and Hobbs, 2009). Companies need to find ways to use the strengths that all generations possess to foster an environment in which each person can feel comfortable, achieve balance, and contribute to organizational success (Glass, 2007). No single style or approach exists for leading the multi-generational workforce. Leaders must be able to adapt to meet the individual needs of all generations (Haeberle, Herzberg, and Hobbs, 2009).

Literature Review

Much has been written about the presence of four distinct generations in the workforce and the ways in which their view and values affect the way work gets done (Salopek, 2006). The literature defines a generation similarly: A generation is a group of people who are "programmed" at the same time in history. Each generation shares a common set of events and trends during their formative years, including headlines and heroes, music and mood, parenting style and education systems. Members of each generation learn and grow through age; they adjust their behaviors and build their skills. However, they generally do not radically change the way they view the world (Murphy, 2007). Johnson and Johnson (2010) define generation as "a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously who have common knowledge and experiences that affect their thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors."

In his paper, “The Problem with Generations” (1952), sociologist Karl Mannheim describes a generation as being not necessarily a concrete group, rather a social location, where the individuals share more than a birth year; they also share common experiences and responses to those experiences. More recently, sociologists have included cultural elements, such as music, fashion, and pop culture, along with historical, economic, and political events and characters (Parry and Tyson, 2011).

While the definition of generation is fairly consistent in the literature, the birth year or age boundaries of each generational group have shown some variance (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). The names and birth years for the generations vary from one model to another. All are considered to be arbitrary; a generation or an era does not simply end one day and another begins the next day (Murphy, 2007). In “Generations at Work” (2000), authors Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak acknowledge the difference in their age boundaries by explaining the “feel” in addition to the “face” of a generation. Following their research, the birth year boundaries were set based on the similarity of values and views of the research subjects.

Descriptions and Characteristics

For the purpose of this study, the following categories were used:

- Traditionalists, born 1945 and before
- Baby Boomers, born 1946 – 1964
- Generation X, born 1965 – 1980
- Millennials, born 1981 – 2000

In order to recognize and understand generational differences, the following section describes some of the characteristics unique to each generational cohort, and some of the defining events that represent shared experiences by individuals from each generation.

The Traditionalists (born 1945 or before) are occasionally referred to as Veterans, the Silent Generation or The Greatest Generation, a nod to the book of the same title by Tom Brokaw (1998). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, seven million Traditionalists make up five per cent of the 2011 workforce (Murphy, 2007). The core values of the Traditionalists are dedication, hard work, and respect for authority (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). The formative years for this generation were based on a strong sense of commitment to family, country, and community. Strong nuclear, extended families were the norm. As children, they were disciplined by strict parents. They matured from these experiences with their own sense of self-discipline and strong work ethic. Employees from this generation who are currently in the workforce grew up in the wake of a world-wide economic crisis. As a result of war and rations, the Traditionalists are patriotic and fiscally conservative (Murphy, 2007). Traditionalists are loyal and consistent (Stevens, 2010); they will make sacrifices and consider the common good (Murphy, 2007).

Defining, critical events for the Traditionalists include: the Stock Market crash (1929); Social Security system established (1934) (Zemke, et al, 2000); the Hindenburg tragedy (1937); Disney's first animated feature film, Snow White (1937); Hitler invades Russia, Pearl Harbor, U.S. enters World War II (1941); World War II ends (1945); Korean War begins (1950) (Murphy, 2007). Other events or trends of significance for the Traditionalists include The Great

Depression and FDR (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). The form of technology that shaped this generation was the radio (Murphy, 2007).

The Baby Boomer generation (born 1946-1964) is the largest generation in U.S. history as a result of the post-war birth rates. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60 million Baby Boomers make up 38 per cent of the 2011 workforce (Murphy, 2007). The core values of the Baby Boomers are optimism, personal gratification, and growth (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). Raised by parents who lived through the Depression and made countless sacrifices with the belief that things would be better for their children, Baby Boomers inherited that sense of optimism and the belief that they could do anything they wanted and change the world (Murphy, 2007). As children they were praised for “working well with others” and as adults in the workplace they value team orientation and relationship building (Stevens, 2010). Baby Boomers are focused and committed but struggle with balancing work and family (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). Many Baby Boomers define themselves by their job, equating work with self-worth (Nicholas, 2009). In the 1970s, the term “workaholic” was coined to describe the work ethic of the Baby Boomers (Zemke, et al, 2000).

Defining, critical events for the Baby Boomers include: first nuclear power plant (1957) (Zemke, et al, 2000); introduction of birth control pills (1960); John Glenn circles the earth (1962); President Kennedy assassinated (1963); U.S. sends troops to Vietnam (1965); world’s first heart transplant (1967); U.S. moon landing, Woodstock (1969) (Murphy, 2007); Kent State University shootings (1970) (Zemke, et al, 2000). The civil rights and women’s liberation movements were also considered seminal events for the Baby Boomer generation (Arsenault and

Patrick, 2008). The form of technology that shaped this generation was television (Murphy, 2007).

Generation X (born 1965-1980), occasionally called Gen X, produced a generation of children whose Baby Boomers mothers worked (sometimes excessively) outside of the home creating another nickname for this generation, latchkey kids. With working mothers, and often the product of a divorced family, Generation X members became self-reliant and cynical (Murphy, 2007). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 51 million Generation Xers make up 32 per cent of the 2011 workforce (Murphy, 2007). The core values of Generation X are diversity, technoliteracy, fun, and informality (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). Gen Xers brought the concept of work-life balance to the forefront of workplace issues. This generational cohort focuses on the outcome more so than the process and the politics of work. Gen Xers believe that producing results is what matters, and prefer to do so autonomously (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). As these children witnessed their Baby Boomer parents' "live to work" approach be responded to with corporate down-sizing and lay-offs, Gen Xers developed a "work to live" approach, committed to having balance in their lives (Zemke, et al, 2000).

Defining, critical events for Generation X include: Three Mile Island accident (1979); massive corporate layoffs (1979); John Lennon killed (1980); AIDS identified (1981); Challenger disaster (1986); Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989); Tiananmen Square uprisings (1989) (Murphy, 2007); Operation Desert Storm (1991); Rodney King beating videotaped, L.A. riots (1992) (Zemke, et al, 2000). The form of technology that shaped this generation was the personal computer (Murphy, 2007).

The Millennials (born 1981-2000) are also referred to as Generation Y. This generation grew up with technology and the Internet. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 40 million Millennials make up 25 per cent of the 2011 workforce (Murphy, 2007). The core values of the Millennials are optimism, civic duty, confidence, and achievement (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). Millennials were the busiest generation to-date: schedules heavy with activities, close supervision and extensive support from their parents led this generational cohort to become goal and achievement-oriented. As a result, they have high expectations for themselves and of their employers. Millennials are well-connected and globally-minded. They have been linked in to the Internet almost since birth; global issues and multiculturalism are part of the generational identity for Millennials (Murphy, 2007).

Defining, critical events for the Millennials include: Nelson Mandela released (1990); Apartheid ends (1993); bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City (1995); Princess Diana dies (1997); Columbine shootings (1999); World Trade Center attacks (2001); Enron, WorldCom and other corporate scandals (2002); Hurricane Katrina (2005) (Murphy, 2007). Other events and trends for the Millennials include the impact of technology on daily lives, the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, and the trend of “helicopter parenting” (Zemke, et al, 2000). The form of technology that shaped this generation was the Internet (Murphy, 2007).

Values

Among the challenges facing managers today is effectively dealing with a diverse workforce. This diversity is not limited to gender, religion, ethnicity, and racial background; it also relates to the various generational values found in the workplace today (Gibson,

Greenwood, and Murphy, 2009). The previous section described the characteristics and defining events, trends, and technology for each generational cohort. Next, the literature review seeks confirmation of whether these differences in characteristics translate into value differences in the workplace. Knowledge of these values can aid in the understanding of what employees within each generational cohort want occupationally and how they can be motivated to be committed and productive members of their respective work teams (Gibson, et al, 2009).

Although much has been written about the phenomenon of four unique generations working together in the workforce today, most of the literature is not academic or empirical. An abundance of the literature resides in practitioner publications and in management consultant guide or handbooks. The academic research that does exist provides mixed evidence that there are generational differences in work values (Parry and Tyson, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, the literature review included three research studies on values and one study on work ethic. Gibson, Greenwood, and Murphy (2009) study over 5,000 participants with the research question, “Will an empirical study of values support descriptions of the generations found in the literature?” The instrument used was the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) which was developed in 1968 as a research tool to measure beliefs, attitudes, and values. The RVS measures terminal values and instrumental values. Terminal values are described as “the ultimate end goals of existence”, such as wisdom, equality, peace, and family security. Instrumental values are “the behavioral means for achieving the end-goals” and include values such as the importance of being honest, ambitious, forgiving, or logical (Gibson, et al, 2009).

Table 1

Rankings of values by Baby Boomers

Ranking	Terminal Value	Instrumental Value
1	Health	Honest
2	Family Security	Responsible
3	Self-respect	Loyal
4	A comfortable life	Capable
5	Freedom	Independent

Awareness to the value differences presented in these summaries (the actual study published the top 18 values for each category and each generational cohort) can help managers to develop an appreciation and sensitivity for these differences and leverage them accordingly. In the case of the Baby Boomers, managers can motivate them with money and overtime, use praise and position to recognize their efforts, and expect that they will be loyal. Baby Boomers will champion a cause and embrace change. They work hard and feel they have earned the right to be in charge (Gibson, et al, 2009).

Table 2

Rankings of values by Generation X

Ranking	Terminal Value	Instrumental Value
1	Family Security	Honest
2	Health	Responsible
3	Freedom	Capable
4	A comfortable life	Loyal
5	Inner Harmony	Loving

Gen Xers as children were independent and self-reliant; they tend to be cynical and suspicious. Work—life balance is especially important to this cohort. Generation X does not expect loyalty from an employer, but they will be loyal as “a means to an end” to achieve the high-ranking values of work-life balance, comfortable life, and inner harmony. Managers should strive to make their work meaningful and fun and understand the Gen Xer’s skepticism for what it is: a reflection of their honest observations about the employee-employer relationship (Gibson, et al, 2009).

Table 3

Rankings of values by the Millennials

Ranking	Terminal Value	Instrumental Value
1	Family Security	Honest
2	Health	Responsible
3	Freedom	Loving
4	True Friendship	Independent
5	Self-respect	Ambitious

Primarily as a result of being “connected” almost from birth, Millennials seek excitement and instant gratification. Millennials will want fun and relevant work assignments with much attention and feedback from their managers (Gibson, et al, 2009).

The authors conclude that the study supports the generational descriptions of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials and that the profiles of the generations can be useful to managers in understanding the differences present in each of these generational groups. Where value differences are evident, the authors advise managers: “The challenge is to provide enough motivational stimulation and communicate in various modalities in order to reach all your employees, not just the one who agree in principle with your values and beliefs” (Gibson, et al, 2009).

Cennamo and Gardner (2008) use the Work Values Questionnaire (WVQ) and Work Values Scale (WVS) to study value differences among 504 employees in New Zealand. The authors report “significant generational differences were found for individual work values involving status and freedom, but not for extrinsic, intrinsic, social, and altruism-related values.” Overall, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials had some value differences, but fewer than expected (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008). One explanation found in the literature is the career stage for the respondents, especially Baby Boomers. Current rankings for values such as status may be affected by the level of status already achieved by this cohort based on the stage of their careers (Parry and Tyson, 2011).

Arsenault and Patrick (2008) studied the value differences of the generational cohorts using the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS), a short survey about gender and political party preference, and a third instrument: a photograph of the NCAA Women’s Championship Team with President George W. Bush. The athletes in the photo were wearing flip-flops and the respondents were surveyed as to whether the footwear was appropriate under the circumstances. For the 467 respondents, the results show a significant difference in values for seven out of nine measured values: warm relationships with others; being well-respected; fun and enjoyment of life; security; self-respect; a sense of accomplishment; excitement. Differences in the values of sense of belonging and self-fulfillment were not significant. Two analyses were conducted on the appropriateness of the footwear responses. A significant difference was reported for Traditionalists as compared to the other three generational cohorts, with these respondents ranking the footwear as 2.15 on a scale of 1 being very inappropriate and 5 being very

appropriate. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers ranked the photo equally (2.48); Millennials ranked the photo 2.75 (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008).

Work Ethic

Meriac, Woher, and Banister (2010) conducted one of the first empirical studies to examine generational differences in the work ethic construct. Using the MWEP (multidimensional work ethic profile), the authors studied data from 1,860 participants collected over a 12-year period. Seven dimensions of 'work ethic' are ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale: self-reliance; morality/ethics; leisure; hard work; centrality of work; wasted time; delay of gratification. Results show that Baby Boomers ranked significantly higher than Generation X and Millennials in all work ethic dimensions except leisure. Millennials ranked significantly higher than Generation X on three dimensions: morality/ethics, hard work, and delay of gratification. The pattern of results suggests that Generation Xers manifest the lowest level of work ethic of the three cohorts included in the study. However, in identifying the limitations of their study the authors conclude that interpretation errors (on the part of the respondents), measurement errors, and career stage could have an impact on the analysis. The conclusion of the study confirms that cohorts do, in fact, differ on their level of work ethic, but in more complex ways than previously suggested (Meriac, et al, 2010).

Knowledge Transfer

Concern about knowledge transfer as a management strategy frequently surfaced in the literature. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 2011 workforce is comprised of 67 million or 42% of workers who are near or beyond retirement age (Murphy, 2007). As older

employees are phased out, knowledge and information loss are looming concerns for most U.S. companies (Aker, 2009). Many organizations clearly understand the importance of transferring knowledge among the generations (Lesser and Rivera, 2007).

Knowledge transfer is a continual process vital to sustaining any institution. All organizations could face a challenge from the impending wave of Baby Boomer retirements combined with the smaller size of the incoming workforce. With many fewer workers entering the workforce than exiting, the implications for employers are staggering (Spence and Reester, 2008). It is estimated that the incoming workforce is approximately 16 per cent smaller than the Baby Boomer workforce which poses a threat of labor and skill shortages. There is also the risk of losing a significant amount of knowledge and skills of the Baby Boomer workers if the knowledge and skills are not transferred to others before they leave the workforce, whenever they retire. A related concern is how to make the best use of the older workers who remain in the workforce. With retention and productivity in mind, employers will need to change the nature of the employment relationship and learning opportunities for older and younger workers alike (Calo, 2008).

Information becomes knowledge when it is understood, manipulated, and can become tied to an idea or purpose (Stevens, 2010). As employees mature within an organization, they acquire a set of knowledge that is customized to the organization's operations, structure, and culture. The more unique and insightful this knowledge is, the more difficult it is for the organization to replicate or replace when employees transfer out of or retire from their positions.

To remain competitive companies need to develop strategies to retain this knowledge from older workers and transfer it successfully to other employees within the organization (Stevens, 2010).

To successfully manage a multi-generational workforce, companies will need to provide training and technology that fits the learning styles and lifestyles of this diverse workforce (Ware, Craft, and Kerschenbaum, 2007). However, wide age spreads can present significant challenges and barriers to companies with potential issues pertaining age bias and differing values and work habits among their multi-generational workforce. These differences can create knowledge transfer barriers (Stevens, 2010). Organizations need to provide multiple options for training and communication in order to meet the varied needs of each generational cohort to achieve their individual goals. A singular approach to training and communicating will not work with the multi-generational workforce (Ware, et al, 2007).

Understanding how each generational cohort learns is essential to develop effective training programs and knowledge transfer strategies. Workers from the Traditionalist or Baby Boomer generations will prefer classroom and instructor-led training methods. Gen Xers and Millennials prefer and expect technology-based learning (Lesser and Rivera, 2007). Mentoring is often an effective training method and knowledge transfer strategy, with an older worker acting as trainer or mentor to a younger worker (Parry and Tyson, 2011). Many successful people attribute mentoring as a factor to their career development. An organization's culture needs to be supportive in order for mentoring relationships to develop and become effective. Mentoring requires intense one-on-one contact, is dependent on adequate time with organizational policies that permit unstructured time for workers to spend together, and a strong

working relationship between two colleagues. Many organizations recognize that the human touch is crucial to transfer knowledge and develop methods that make the most of mentoring relationships. Mentoring relationships are highly desirable for all involved (Lesser and Rivera, 2007).

Reverse mentoring is now viewed as a successful knowledge management and transfer strategy as well. Although challenges can exist, reverse mentoring is critical for older workers in order to refresh important skills and to remain productive, effective, and relevant in the workplace (Stevens, 2010). Jack Welch, former General Electric Company Chairman and CEO instructed his senior managers to actively look for relationships with younger employees to improve company performance. Reverse mentoring programs have shown the value of treating generational differences as a competitive advantage to enhance creativity rather than as a source of conflict and misunderstanding (Patota, et al, 2007).

Companies using the reverse mentoring strategy will benefit from the transfer of knowledge. Benefits also exist for both younger and older workers in this process. Younger workers can learn about the organization and social networking from their older colleagues, and experienced workers can gain so much from their tech-savvy colleagues with regard to technology and proficiency (Aker, 2009).

Motivation

One of the consequences of the impending wave of Baby Boomer retirements is the loss of accumulated knowledge and expertise. Another consequence of retaining the older workers is productivity loss. With age comes valuable expertise and wisdom. However, age can also bring

on outdated skill sets, health problems, and lower motivation due to job and career status and inertia (Calo, 2008).

It appears that age is not the sole factor for reduced work motivation. There is some evidence that achievement motivation declines with age, but the motivation to have a positive effect and positive self-conception become stronger as a worker ages. Organizations need to consider job design to complement the motivational phases of the multi-generational workforce in order to maximize job performance. Older workers are not necessarily less motivated than when they were younger, but they are differently motivated (Calo, 2008). As stated earlier, each generation in the workplace is on an entirely different path in work and in life (Patota, et al, 2007). As organizations accept this reality it will lead to the realization that the content and design of jobs and the career path for older workers needs to be modified (Calo, 2008) so that these older workers remain engaged and gain a sense of self-satisfaction with the effect they can continue to have in the workplace.

To effectively motivate and manage four generations, the differences in their values and characteristics must be understood, respected, and recognized (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Motivational messages and strategies should be tailored to speak to the individual's unique needs and ideals. Traditionalists tend to be motivated when managers connect their actions to the overall good of the organization (Murphy, 2007). Showing respect for their experience and loyalty will result in support of business objectives.

Baby Boomers are inherently optimistic and still recognize the land mine of possibilities that are available to them (Zemke, et al, 2000). They are motivated by leaders who get them

involved and show how they can make a difference (Murphy, 2007). “Do it your way” will motivate the Generation X workers (Zemke, et al, 2000). Managers should allow them to get the job done on their own schedule (despite how unorthodox it may seem) (Murphy, 2007).

Millennials are also optimistic and are goal and achievement-oriented; they (and their helicopter parents) have high expectations (Arsenault and Patrick, 2008). Millennials tend to be motivated when their managers connect their actions to their personal and career goals (Murphy, 2007).

Communication

Recognizing, understanding, and respecting the differences of the four generations is essential to effectively lead a multi-generational workforce (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Respecting employees for who they are includes respecting communication methods (Aker, 2009). Murphy (2007) recommends that the Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’, be adapted for the diverse workplace into the Titanium rule: Do unto others, keeping their preferences in mind.

Traditionalists prefer communication to be respectful, with words and tone, with good grammar, clear diction, and void of any slang or profanity. Language should be somewhat formal and professional, relating messages to the common good or the company’s history and long-term goals (Murphy, 2007). Feedback is preferred in the form of memos, letters, and personal notes. Traditionalists’ sense of discipline impacts their preferences on feedback, believing “no news is good news” (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).

Baby Boomers are relational focused and prefer phone calls and personal interaction. Managers should plan conversations over coffee or lunch, integrating mutual interests into the

dialog. Linking the conversation to the team or individual vision, mission, and values will have an impact on Baby Boomer workers. Communication with Baby Boomers should be participative, inviting their input in the process (Murphy, 2007). By contrast, Generation X workers want direct, straightforward communication. An email or voicemail with specificity and clarity will suffice (Murphy, 2007).

Millennials have redefined “timely” as it relates to feedback. The high expectations of this cohort extends to performance related feedback and they want it in an instant (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Managers should communicate with a positive tone, delivering messages face-to-face or via text messaging. Tie the message to the worker’s personal goals will make the connection to these achievement-oriented individuals. Millennials will have higher regard for managers who are not condescending, cynical, or sarcastic (Murphy, 2007).

Summary

According to the literature reviewed for this study, a generation is a group of individuals whose values, attitudes, and beliefs are shaped by the events and trends from their formative years. Although the literature addressing the topic of generational differences is plentiful, the majority is descriptive, practical, and informative. Empirical studies regarding the connection of workplace values to generational values are somewhat limited.

The impending departure of the Baby Boomer population from the workforce encourages many organizations to develop strategies to transfer knowledge to other workers. Managers who understand the differences each generational cohort will increase the opportunities to effectively motivate and communicate with their workers. Job design, including schedule flexibility, can

contribute to higher retention of employees of all ages and career phases. Adapting to the desired vehicles, methods, and styles of communication preferred by each generation will aid the process of communication and help to develop respect between managers and employees. Managers will be in a better position to effectively manage their multi-generational work teams if they are able to recognize, understand, and respect the differences of their employees.

Research Method

For this qualitative study, the narrative research method will be used, following a biographical approach. This method begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. The procedures for this method consist of focusing on studying a small number of individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Data was collected through interviews with four individuals whose experiences tell a story about their personal characteristics which add interest to the topic of multi-generational work teams. These life stories are a starting point, the initial exploration of a life as lived (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010).

Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text which gives an account of an event or action, chronologically connected. Often when individuals tell their stories they do not present them in a chronological sequence. The researcher's role is to analyze the stories, chronologically order the meaning of the experiences, and then "restory" them into a framework that makes sense, providing a causal link among ideas (Creswell, 2007).

There are some challenges to the narrative approach, particularly in the researcher's role in "restorying" the story. This process reveals several important considerations, such as: "Who owns the story? Who can tell it? Who can change it? Whose version is convincing?" (Creswell, 2007). Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) credit ownership to the author: "On the one hand, academic writers have a responsibility to make interpretations and an obligation to take responsibility for those interpretations, but on the other, we couldn't write if the lives hadn't been shared by those who lived them in the first place." A distinction is made in that the content comes from life stories as selectively told, rather than as lived, by the individuals (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010).

Creswell (2007) cites many recent books on narrative research but refers to it as a "field in the making." Narrative research best fits when the researcher wants to capture the detailed stories or the life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals. In a narrative study, Creswell advises the researcher to find one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored (Creswell, 2007).

Four participants were selected for this study. Each of the four participants is a personal or professional associate of the researcher. Each was accessible and willing to participate in the research project. A signed consent form was obtained prior to the commencement of the interview process (see Exhibit A). The participants represent the four generational cohorts and

each confirmed their year of birth as one of the criterion for inclusion in the study. Each individual has experienced the phenomenon of working on a multi-generational work team.

The participant's stories were collected through face-to-face interviews, conducted in public, but quiet, environments. The focus of the qualitative interviews was to collect life stories from the participants in order to contribute to the purpose of this paper, which is to gain an understanding of the generational differences among today's workers and share their perspectives regarding values, communication, relationships, and motivation.

A semi-structured interview, or interview guide, was developed in preparation for the interview (see Exhibit B). The interview guide included fairly specific topics but still provided the interviewee with a great deal of leeway in how to reply. The semi-structured interview approach set the tone for a discussion that could be flexible and allow the interviewee the openness to "ramble" or go off on tangents, which led to rich, detailed answers to the interview questions. In qualitative research, this openness is beneficial to the researcher as it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important (Creswell, 2007). "Qualitative interviews are conversations in which the researcher gently guides a conversational partner into an extended discussion" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The pre-formed interview questions provided an effective tool to guide the conversations, focused on gathering data for the research topic.

Qualitative researchers are interested not just in what people say but also in the way they say it. The use of a recording device ensures that the researcher will be able to capture a complete account of the interview exchanges and makes the researcher available to take notes on the non-verbal elements of the interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). With the participant's

permission, each interview was recorded with a digital recording device. As a back-up measure, notes were taken during the interview. The recorded content was transcribed immediately following the interview. The transcription was coded to identify themes for the purpose of analysis.

Methods of Verification

Many perspectives exist regarding the importance of validation of qualitative research, how to define it, which words best describe it, and the procedures for establishing it (Creswell, 2007). In place of the quantitative research approaches of validity and reliability, many qualitative researchers substitute these approaches with credibility, usefulness, and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba as cited by Creswell, 2007). Creswell documents his stance on validation as “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings” as best described by the researcher and the participants. Extensive time in the field, detailed thick descriptions, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants all add value or accuracy to the study or report, which is essentially a representation by the author (Creswell, 2007).

Writer Harry F. Wolcott takes quite a different stance on the topic of validation in qualitative research. While Wolcott does not dismiss validation, he places it in a broader perspective, citing that it “neither guides nor informs.” Wolcott sees his research and writing as an effort to “understand” and believes that seeking validation distracted from his work of understanding what was going on (Creswell, 2007).

Member checking, considered by Lincoln and Guba to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Creswell, 2007), is conducted by a review of the findings and

interpretation by the study participant, providing the individual with an opportunity to reflect on the accuracy of the report. This type of review allows the study participant to correct any errors, challenge the interpretations, or add additional information. Although there are drawbacks to this approach, including the potential for conflicting views or interpretations of the data, the procedure is generally a valid verification technique (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006), not to mention a courtesy to the participant of the study.

Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) acknowledge that many researchers employ some type of respondent validation by showing their interpretations and writings to those they concern, offering them the opportunity for comment or even alteration. In their use of this practice, Bathmaker and Harnett found that most respondents do not want to read what has been written, often feeling that their participation and collaboration through the interview process was sufficient involvement in the process. Author Laurel Richardson is cited for suggesting that “control of the text be kept by its author, which is especially important when one is writing personal narrative” (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010).

In the process of sharing life stories, participants make choices about what to put in and what to leave out, about what emphasis to make, and which words to use in order to create a particular impression. Researchers and writers make the same sort of decisions; however, ethical research demands authorial honesty (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010). For their own ethical test, Bathmaker and Harnett follow a simple, bottom-line test: “How would I feel if I, members of my family, or my friends were to be involved, treated, and written about in the way the research in question involves, treats, or depicts its participants?”

Considering the existing relationships between the participants and the researcher, the risk of researcher bias is high. To ensure that the perspectives shared during the interview process were accurately captured, two verification strategies were employed. First, the interview recordings were transcribed into a word document which was used to review the data and then to compare and confirm the interview as the source for the written content contained in this report. Second, the written interpretation of the interview, or data sections, was provided to each participant to allow participants the opportunity to review the interpretation of their interview.

Data

The data for this study was captured through one-on-one interviews with four individuals, one from each of the four generational cohorts present in today's workforce. To protect the identity of the individual, a pseudonym will be used to refer to the individuals in this report.

The Traditionalist

The Traditionalist perspective was obtained in an interview with "Tom" who was born in Manchester, New Hampshire, in 1942. Tom's father was absent for the first three years of his life, serving in the military until the end of World War II. Caring for Tom during this time was his mother and her sister, Tom's aunt. Within a year of his father's return, a baby brother joined the family and another son followed six years later.

In his youth, Tom recalls his love for the outdoors and his desire to keep busy. The family spent summers on Lake Winnepesaukee. Tom's work life began at age twelve, carrying newspapers. Another early job, and by far his favorite, Tom recalls working at a girl's dormitory

doing odd jobs and receiving compensation in the form of breakfast with the residents. To this day it remains “the best job I ever had.”

While in high school, Tom admits to poor grades and “flunking” Ancient History. As a result, he had to attend a session of summer school. When back in full semester, his typical homeroom (categorized by the student’s last name) was full. He was alternatively placed in the “W” homeroom. A small twist of fate would result in Tom’s life path crossing the path of Trudy Wagner (also a pseudonym), the woman who would be at Tom’s side for at least the next five decades.

Tom’s parents valued education and each of their three sons was encouraged to get a college education. Tom initially pursued an accounting degree but quickly recognized the mismatch to his real interests: being outdoors and working with people. He shifts his focus of study to the field of sales and marketing in order to better suit his personality and interests.

In the early 1960s, the United States was actively drafting young men to serve in the Vietnam War. Tom managed to evade the process for awhile, but ultimately the military’s request for his service caught up with him. As Tom prepared to report for the mandatory physical, he and Trudy, along with their families, gathered together for a family meal prior to his departure. Tom draws a comparison of this breakfast outing to “The Last Supper.” Another twist of fate would soon change the mood of the family. Although not completely exempt from service, Tom’s initial entry into the military was down-graded to a status which sent him back home to Trudy and his family. At that time, the military had a policy which prevented soldiers

with flat feet from being accepted for service. Tom was unaware of the military's policy and also unaware that he was flat-footed.

Once Trudy finishes her college career in Maine, the couple marries and settles in Manchester. Tom's professional career begins with his entry in a management training program with a major manufacturer of tire and rubber products. Over the next several years, Tom would advance from credit manager to store manager to district manager. His advancements would come with frequent relocations for Tom and his wife, moving about every 18 months. Tom's job requires a great deal of travel within his district and, despite the hardship of being away from Trudy and their two young children, he enjoys the time on the road. This role allows Tom the ability to interact with people, building relationships, and succeeding on his sales goals. Although Tom's work kept them separated during the week, the couple enjoyed their weekends together on their boat.

Tom stayed with his first employer for more than ten years. A better opportunity and the freedom of the road encourage him to change employers. Throughout his professional career, Tom is loyal to each employer changing jobs only four times. The transitions allow Tom to leverage his skills in sales and the relationships within the industry which he built while spending years on the road. Each job change provides Tom with the excitement and challenge of something new, along with the comfort of familiarity that comes from establishing himself in a particular industry and role.

A career milestone that Tom identifies as "the hardest day of my life" was the day he had to inform his team of fifteen employees that their business was closing and they were all out of a

job. Interestingly, Tom and Trudy spend the last fifteen years of their professional careers working together for the same small employer. His reputation and abilities were sought by the employer, and Tom proudly reports sales growth in his area from \$700,000 to \$2.5 million during his tenure. Now retired and reflecting on his career, Tom says he “always enjoyed working, always taking work seriously.” He viewed work as more than a job, but “a sense of duty and obligation to do the best you can do.”

Following their retirements, Tom and Trudy settle into a new home in the Midwest. The location choice is partly an escape from the fast-paced east coast and partly to live closer to their son. Fate intervenes again and their son moves away from the area just as the couple settles into their retirement home. Once the arduous tasks of building a new home and moving half-way across the country end, Tom finds himself feeling bored and missing the interaction with people that he enjoyed so much in his previous jobs.

The area in which Tom and Trudy live is a tourist haven and the work opportunities are mostly seasonal in nature. Tom’s interest in the outdoors and boating lead him to a local ferry company, where he finds that opportunities are limited due to the stability of the company’s current workforce, a rare 99% return rate. The purchase of a boat from a local retailer results in a part-time job for Tom. This particular job ended when the economy took a down-turn, but Tom continued to seek work.

Tom is back in the workforce post-retirement and loving it. He balances the seasons by working at the Welcome Center of a resort community in the area during the summer, and volunteering at a local hospital in the winter. Each role gives Tom the chance to do what he

loves: interacting with people and being helpful by providing a service people want or need.

Generally, these part-time roles provide Tom with what he needs, an opportunity to be productive and useful. He enjoys the flexibility, especially during the off-season, to be able to take time off if he and his wife choose to do so.

When prompted to make observations about today's workforce, two specific situations were presented. The resort conducts refresher training at the beginning of each summer on basic skills for interacting with people. Tom has spent three summers at the resort community, each year in a different customer-facing role. While Tom expects the need for task training related to each unique role, he referred to the re-entry training as "stupid." Tom felt that this may be beneficial for "the kids" but for the rest of the workers, mostly retirees, he believes the training is unnecessary and "stupid." The second situation Tom shared was an observation of a young co-worker who settled herself into the booth at one of the resort's entry gates, all stretched out, and barely rising to greet incoming guests. "The image is wrong; you're representing the company," he said and added that correcting the young worker was "not his place." Tom's assessment of his younger colleagues: "these kids just don't have the dedication to the company, which probably isn't the smartest thing."

Tom seems content with his life, post-retirement. As for his summer job at the resort community, he says he'll work there as long as he can, "or as long as we're in this area." Fate has intervened in Tom's life before and it sounds like Tom is always ready for another twist of fate.

The Baby Boomer

The Baby Boomer perspective was obtained in an interview with “Ellen”, who was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1958. Ellen’s nursing career has spanned 32 years with the same employer. Ellen reflects on always having had an interest in the field of nursing, noting that she felt the options for women were somewhat limited at the time she was contemplating college and career. At age 14, Ellen volunteered as a candy-striper at a local hospital which she believes was connected to having been a Girl Scout. While in college, Ellen worked as a Dental Assistant.

As her journey through college and early professions are being described, Ellen quickly adds that her real goal was to be a mom and wife, indicating that the pursuit of a nursing degree was not her sole focus and purpose. Ellen met her husband, Greg, in college and the couple married soon after graduation. She shares that their wedding was in April and their first daughter was born the following February, noting that this was “not the plan.” Although the time for the baby’s arrival was earlier than planned, the couple had wanted their babies to be close in age: Ellen gave birth to three daughters within three years.

Ellen worked as a full-time Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) for just one year. As the babies came, Ellen was able to reduce her work hours to a part-time basis. The couple balanced their work schedules in a way that required a very small amount of child or day care arrangements. As the girls begin to grow, the couple starts saving money, planning for a move to a bigger house. The practice of working a part-time schedule earned these nurses a label, “refrigerator nurses.” This moniker was used to identify the nurses who worked just enough to

acquire a new appliance, or new car. After ten years on a limited work schedule, Ellen increases her hours at the hospital.

In the late 1980s, the world of health care was changing rapidly. The introduction of HMOs resulted in changes such as shorter hospital stays for patients. The hospital where Ellen works responded to the changes with major lay-offs and staff reductions. “You never think it’s going to happen to you,” recalls Ellen. Although her job was spared from the massive cuts, she was keenly aware that it was vulnerable and that the health care industry could change in an instant as a result of political and economic conditions. Yet, since hers was the second income, she wasn’t considering a change of careers.

Not long after moving into the house they had saved for and built together, the couple was required to move due to residency requirements of Greg’s new job. Ellen remembers crying a lot, they put so much work into building the home and she wasn’t ready to sell it. Of course, the move occurs and soon after they begin to build another home.

Greg’s new job and the new house put an enormous strain on the marriage. After a couple of years in the new house, Greg reports that he “wasn’t happy” and the process of divorce begins. Ellen notes that Greg himself was a “rebellious teenager” and as their daughters entered high school, his interest in being a parent diminished. With Ellen being away nights and weekends, she learns that her daughters knew more about the marital troubles than Ellen herself knew.

Once the marriage ends, Ellen is able to return to school. She seizes this as an opportunity to earn a degree and change careers, perhaps finally having more conventional work

hours than those available to her as an LPN. While pursuing her degree Ellen is troubled by the idea of “voluntarily starting over” in a new profession. The real epiphany, though, was Ellen’s realization, “I am a very good nurse.” Recognizing that the role of an LPN would soon be phased out, Ellen changes her direction at school, now focused on completing a four-year Registered Nurse (RN) degree, “the best thing I ever did”, she says. The short pursuit of a business degree would provide more than an epiphany. Ellen credits the curriculum for giving her perspective and knowledge regarding business structure and organization.

In addition to becoming an RN, Ellen spends an additional year obtaining a certification on bereavement. A requirement for the certificate program was a volunteer stint at a local crisis shelter. In this capacity, Ellen was the house mother, working with runaway teens, explaining the bereavement connection: “loss doesn’t always mean death.”

Ellen recalls an experience earlier in her nursing career; while working as a “floater” nurse during the time she was on a part-time schedule. She was assigned to the critical care area of the hospital, and she noticed that the patient’s families really needed to hear from someone on the medical team. Since then, she felt that this was an area of need, and one that she could fulfill. After earning her RN status and the bereavement certificate, Ellen began conducting training sessions on the topic for other nurses, another area of need. Often, she says, the situation can become about the nurse, rather than about the family and their loss.

When Ellen starts to reflect on her current work environment, she says there is more age diversity now than she has seen before. In her early career, many of the nurses were long-time employees with little interest in leaving the profession. Departures are far more common now

with nurses leaving as a result of the difficult schedule, pay issues, or simply life changes such as marriage or relocation. The scheduling demands of a professional nurse have been in existence since before the days of the “refrigerator nurses.” As a 24/7 environment, there is a need for nurses to work days, evenings, weekends, and holidays. Ellen acknowledges this challenge and the struggle for many nurses to balance the demands of the job while meeting the demands of their own families. For her own situation, working nights and weekends provided her with a premium wage and minimized the family’s expenses for child care. There is resistance, Ellen says, from the younger nurses when it comes to working weekends. The hospital pays a higher wage for weekend hours, but as staff shortages arise, everyone gets assigned to the less desirable shifts. Today’s nurses are quite willing to make a change to obtain a schedule more favorable to their personal lives. Pay issues were mentioned by Ellen when referring to a nurse who opted to take a waitress job instead of continuing in her nursing career because she could make more money.

Team cohesion is a dominant theme in Ellen’s description of her work team. With their structure of primary care nursing teams attending to a group of patients, Ellen is passionate about team cohesion as a necessity. “You can’t do it alone, and you have to count on someone else doing their part without having to tell them what to do,” she explains. This type of cohesion isn’t a given; “sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t”, Ellen admits. The team itself puts in some effort toward team-building activities, organizing social outings and team gatherings. Despite the scheduling demands of the job, Ellen believes it really does matter if the team has a connection outside of work and spends some non-work time together.

The amount of time the team spends together on-duty is longer than a conventional work schedule; nurses' shifts are typically twelve hours in length. This is a long time to be together at work, and it is also a long time to be away from home. Although technology makes staying connected very convenient, the hospital has implemented a policy for zero-tolerance for the possession of "entertainment devices." Ellen's tolerance for the use of a cell phone in the workplace is significantly higher. "What's worse," she asks, "a quick text or phone call to say 'baby's OK' or a nurse being distracted throughout her shift wondering if the baby is OK?" Given the length of her career, Ellen also wonders if the texting technology is really any worse than a nurse leaving the floor to make a phone call, or making a call that others are able to hear, causing a potential distraction to the rest of the team. A particular incident Ellen shares was an evening visit by one nurse's family who came to the hospital with ice cream to enjoy a treat together. While Ellen felt the check-in calls or texts were appropriate, she also feels there needs to be a limit on the amount of work time spent checking in or visiting with family, saying, "it boils down to common sense, are you there to work?"

Ellen always had an interest in caring for others, a passion which was refueled when she observed patients and families in the critical care unit needing to talk with someone. Her compassion is most available to families while working nights and weekends. Daytime shifts are so hectic with many distractions, she says, "it allows for no time to pull up a chair and talk to the patient." This type of schedule continues to be a burden to maintaining a normal life. Additionally, the world of health care has changed, Ellen says. Once feeling that being a nurse and caregiver was at the center of her professional choice, there is now a feeling that it's just a business and not solely focused on delivering care and compassion. This feeling conflicts with

her core values so her next career step is being considered. She contemplates being a procurement specialist (for organ donation) but also hopes to someday have a life with weekends free. The choice she faces is not unlike her younger colleagues, but she notes the difference in being “20-something, living with your parents, yet being able to drive an SUV.” Ellen evaluates the schedule, benefits, and wages, along with the desire for weekend time to spend with friends and family. “I’m not picturing myself staying until 65-ish,” she says.

The Gen Xer

The perspective of Generation X was obtained in an interview with “Alex”, who was born in New York in 1979. Alex started working at age 14. For the next three years, he would have several jobs: Alex was employed as a golf caddy, a grocery bagger, a shoe salesman, video rental sales associate. Alex’s parents “did very well for themselves” financially, coming from “dirt poor” roots. From early on, Alex and his two siblings were encouraged to work for their spending money. Once Alex was able to drive, his parents provided him with a used car and covered his insurance, but money for gas was his responsibility and a big motivational factor for his next several jobs.

Alex’s viewpoint on work takes shape from job one, day one: in fact, he quits the caddy job after one day. Bagging groceries lasts longer: a full year. When talking about this role, Alex says, “With any job, you have to make your own fun. And, I was good at it.” About work in general, he adds, “I’m a really good worker for my own selfish reasons, it makes the time pass.” In the role of a shoe salesman, Alex says, he was effective but not necessarily from the perspective of someone who was paid commission. He would often recommend the least

expensive purchase to customers when he believed it to be in their best interests. The down-time on this job was spent cleaning and dusting, anything to make the time pass. In his next role, video rental sales associate, his work uniform consists of a tuxedo, complete with cummerbund. He had to have a job, he explained, and this one was available.

During these early jobs, Alex not only recognizes that keeping busy is a way to make the day go by faster, but he also notices that when co-workers are happy, the day also goes by faster. For his part, Alex tries to make others happy by providing them with what they need to be happy, which was often a quick smoke break, which he would cover for them.

The next job is described by Alex as “the best job ever.” He is employed as a gas station attendant, working 3rd shift, which he calls “a very romantic time.” The traffic (of customers) is not heavy and you could do anything you wanted. He admits that with this level of freedom he is the most irresponsible he’s ever been as an employee. It didn’t start out that way, but it became evident to him that the store manager didn’t seem to care if any extra work was done or even if the cash drawer was balanced at the end of the shift. By the manager’s own performance, Alex did not sense there were any repercussions, discipline, or even work standards. Raises were awarded regardless. “Even though I was an idiot kid, I was getting rewarded for it,” Alex says. Rather than dusting or straightening displays, he spent his free time developing a spreadsheet to evaluate the probability of lottery numbers. He announces the time was well spent as this time filler actually became profitable for him.

While in high school, Alex earns good grades, in large part because of the time he had available to work on his homework while working 3rd shift at the gas station. Once he moved

near his college campus, he could no longer justify the long drive back to the suburbs and quit “the best job ever.” Alex wanted to take a year off of school following high school, but knew that this was not in sync with what his parents wanted for him. “I hate school; I don’t want to be told what to do, unless I’m getting paid for it,” he explains. His approach toward assignments in college was often described as a process of staying up all night, reading the book or “skimming for key passages”, and he would generally do well. Writing assignments were executed with his strategy of writing to appeal to the professor’s personality, whether he or she was emotional or liberal. When he was “kicked out” for poor grades, he claims he got himself reinstated by his talent for writing, pleading his case in letters to the school administrators.

Alex, an inquisitive sort, prefers reading non-fiction and watching documentaries. He says he is just “not a fan of forced learning”. On many levels, Alex says, “college was a disappointment to me.” Two particular areas of disappointment were the policy on required attendance and the low standards by the professors. Alex’s college expectations were that it would be interesting and challenging. While in high school, Alex started to pursue an interest in music; he was writing songs and playing with high school bands. He wanted to approach music more compositionally and study classical guitar, which didn’t fit well with the high school approach, so he started to associate with older people with interests similar to his. The college music curriculum, he felt, was too basic and what he achieved on his own while in high school was more advanced than what he was learning in college. As a result, he shifted his major to political science, which he believed would be more suited to his writing skills and talent due to most of the course requirements being essay-based.

Another college job for Alex was as a brewery tour guide. His father was an executive at the brewery, and Alex was so determined to be selected for his abilities rather than his last name that he actually contemplated applying under a different name. He didn't follow-through on this plan, and was hired as a tour guide. Alex admits to not being overtly social, and a little on the shy side. Yet this role seems suited to his personality, particularly his sense of humor. Once learning the script he finds ways to inject his own jokes into the content, humor appropriately matched to his audiences. He flourishes in this role, frequently being requested to conduct tours for VIPs and other executives. Alex, feeling bored, leaves the job after two years, saying, "I believe you shouldn't stay in a job longer than a year, unless the job changes."

Time was running out for Alex to land his next job so he accepts a position at an arts venue. He starts in an entry-level customer-facing role, and receives promotions to a lead role, then to an administrative salaried position. His down-time in his first position provides him with the opportunity to continue his interests in statistics, creating spreadsheets, charts, and reports on the business activity. In the lead position, Alex continues to focus on understanding the needs of his colleagues so that he can meet those needs, make his team members happy, and as a result of these efforts, enjoy a happy, productive work environment. He cites the promotional opportunities as being primarily centered on his performance, which stands out from the others, and his personal quest for new challenges.

The non-profit sector appeals to Alex, but this particular environment presents him with many circumstances that cause him to be frustrated, even annoyed. A few of the circumstances are described: there was, Alex says, a lack of reward or recognition for an employee's

contribution, causing many employees to feel unappreciated. Despite the frugal climate of a non-profit organization, Alex felt there were things the employer could have provided employees with that didn't have a cost, such as praise. He cites an all-staff gathering when an announcement was made about the board's decision to not issue wage increases that year. The manner in which the news was delivered was especially evident of why this was an annoyance to Alex. The director, while trying to make the news palatable, said employees 'should simply feel privileged to work there'. The negative impact of this statement lingers. Alex says, "There was no reason in the world to say that. Just say 'I'm glad you all work here' or say nothing. It's just expensive." Alex explains, "They [the employees] are not going to get another job unless they look for one, but you can prevent them from looking for one by being nice." Alex concludes that the managers in the organization had a lack of knowledge or interest in what motivates their employees. When he announces his own departure, the leaders are genuinely surprised, which he calls "arrogance on their part."

In his final semester of college, Alex takes a job as an operational analyst with a company that sells communication and entertainment services. Within a short time the company is benefitting from Alex's mostly self-taught skills of projecting business probabilities, which earns him a promotion to Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Shortly after graduation, Alex and his wife move to Canada to pursue their interests in film and music. The company retains Alex, allowing him to work remotely from Vancouver until they find a replacement.

Alex returns home a short time later, alone. Following a divorce, he is back in his home town and seeking to reestablish himself in a very difficult economic climate. At age 30 he is

presenting a resume with a path from golf caddy to shoe salesman to video clerk to brewery tour guide to non-profit analyst to CFO. “That’s normal to me,” Alex says, when reflecting on his employment journey.

Now in his present job for two years, Alex feels his current employer has provided him with “no reason to look for another job.” The company provides him with enough new challenges to keep him engaged, allows him to listen to his iPod while he’s working, and pays him well enough to meet his financial obligations. By comparison to the arts venue, Alex says, “They get their money’s worth and I’m not drained from it.” Aside from the one very negative experience, Alex’s goal is to return to the non-profit sector. He sees this as a way to be surrounded by people who really want to be there and have a genuine commitment to the mission of the organization. Although he is not actively seeking other employment at this time, Alex sums up his approach to work: “I am not the kind of person who can do the same thing over and over. I need to move on. Despite the wage increases, I gotta go if I’m bored. You could double my salary, but if I’m done – I’m done.”

The Millennial

The perspective of the Millennial generation was obtained in an interview with “Jenny”, who was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1989. Four months before the interview, Jenny graduated from college with four-year degree and three majors. As she begins to tell the story of her educational journey, it becomes clear that being an over-achiever is just part of who she is.

Attending a Catholic, college-prep high school, Jenny fills her time with numerous activities including campus ministry as a retreat leader, acting as an ambassador for the school,

and serving as a mentor and “buddy” to younger students. However, the biggest commitment of her time is to school sports; “athletics was huge”, she says. During her high school career Jenny participated on the golf, basketball, track, and soccer teams. This level of participation was not by her own choice. Jenny explains that when she visited the high school with her mother, it was her mom’s actions that caused Jenny’s schedule to be filled with sports and other activities as an attempt to keep her busy. “Mom was insistent that she didn’t want us ‘wandering the streets’ or sitting around watching t.v.,” Jenny recalls. Despite not being self-selected, Jenny enjoys the busy schedule, especially the socializing opportunities since she “loves being around people.”

Jenny credits her parents early on during the interview as a factor for her accomplishments and success. Based on her father’s success of earning a Master’s degree and her parents’ encouragement for good grades, she understood the high expectations they had for her and was motivated to do well from a very early age. She says she also knew the financial sacrifice her parents made to send her to this particular school, which provided her with even more encouragement to do well. Jenny shares a story from grade school when she received a “C” grade in a class, causing her mom to go right into the principal’s office to discuss it. “I saw my mom’s disappointment when I got a C and I knew I never wanted to see that again,” she says.

Students were required to attend one spiritual retreat each school year, which Jenny recalls as one of her favorite high school experiences. She appreciated the chance to take this “break from life” where the students are completely separated from their families and hectic schedules. The themes of the retreats range from relationships to leadership, a role which Jenny stepped into for each year following her freshman year, leading the discussions at future retreats.

The communication between students was the part Jenny enjoyed the most; “we got to hear a lot about what other people are going through.” She fondly reflects on these faith-based outings, again crediting her parents’ example of attending church and being active in their parish. “Faith is something you need, it ‘builds you’,” she says.

Jenny’s busy schedule with athletics and other school activities provided no time for employment opportunities during the school year. During the summer breaks she joins a friend and they work together for the County’s Parks and Recreational Department at a local pool. This role appealed to her athletic side and “gave me something to do; I like to keep going,” she explains. Of course, Jenny knew that college was her destiny, “it was just a matter of where.” She also didn’t know what she was going to study, until a conversation with a teammate during a golf outing would help to set her direction. One of her teammates mentioned pursuing a career as a golf course superintendent and that suggestion inspired Jenny to follow a similar goal. Her golf coach was an inspirational figure for Jenny and he provided her with advice on which schools to pursue. When Jenny selects a school nine hundred miles from home her parents try, unsuccessfully, to persuade a different choice. Jenny admits feeling a little hesitant herself but a fellow student tells her that when she gets to the campus that “you’ll just know” if it is the right one for you. After a short flight and a long drive, Jenny and her mom set foot on the rural campus and, indeed, it just felt right to Jenny and she announced in the parking lot, “This is the one.” The other colleges offered similar programs in terms of academics and athletics. In the end, it was the small campus with the family-like atmosphere that was most convincing.

Just as she did in high school, Jenny fills every bit of her free time with campus jobs and athletics. The first paying job came in the form of an email simply asking students if they “like to talk and want to make money.” Perfect combination, Jenny thought, and for the next three years she spends several hours each week calling prospective students to tell them about the school, a role very similar to her ambassador position in high school. Another position comes to her by a chance encounter. A visit to the Academic Assistance Center to say hi to a friend results in Jenny sharing her insight on a problem several in the room tried for hours to solve. When she provided a quick solution, the advisor in the room handed her an application for a position as a tutor. Jenny was reluctant, feeling that she had plenty to do with her other job and studies. However, the advisor boosted Jenny’s confidence by saying, “You just solved this problem that none of us could.” She was flattered and convinced and began tutoring in math; ultimately she would tutor in every subject for the next three years.

Recognizing a pattern of long-term commitments to her part-time jobs Jenny goes into detail about one example which she believes explains how this trait developed and why she remains as committed as she does to her choices. Jenny’s golf activities began with her mom signing her up for just about every possible sports team in high school. The golf coach was the first one to call, so the golf journey was set into motion. Jenny had never even played golf, but her mom was determined to keep her busy and active. After struggling with the sport and feeling less capable than her teammates, Jenny tells her parents she wants to quit. They were insistent that she keep trying; “my parents emphasized never quitting anything” so this was a long battle. Her parents finally conceded and told her to “go ahead and quit.” When she got to her next practice round, the golf coach approached her and invited her to join the varsity team. Staying

with the golf team throughout high school and then having the sport influence her choice of majors and college location gave Jenny an epiphany. “Now that I can look back at where it took me,” she says, “I realize why I was encouraged not to quit, and why it’s important not to quit.”

When she came home for summer between her sophomore and junior years, Jenny quickly identifies this as her “life changing summer.” She interviewed with a major league sports team for an internship as a groundskeeper, her “dream job.” Jenny was confident that the position would be offered to her and that she would not only get the required internship credit but that when she completed her degree in Turf Management, she’d be working for the team for years to come. “Yeah, it didn’t work out that way,” she reveals. Devastated and without options, her roommate starts a search on her behalf for a new internship as a way to get Jenny moving again. Jenny takes over the search and finds an internship at a t.v. station, which would apply to her communications degree. When Jenny describes her interests during the interview, the interviewer announces “we already have a sports person; check back with us next year” and rises to open the door, implying the interview was over. Jenny quickly gathered her thoughts: “I was rejected once and I was not going to accept another rejection.” Politely asking for two more minutes of the interviewer’s time, Jenny explains that her real interest is in communication. Although sports broadcasting was her initial focus, she tries to demonstrate that her capability in “talking and writing” would make her suitable in a news role as well. Her case successfully pleaded, Jenny is given a quick interview with the news director and is offered an internship to start the next day. “Turns out that’s what I fell in love with”, and the rejection from the first internship led her to an area “where I feel like that is where I belong.”

When she added a second and third major, Jenny's college advisors tried to warn her about the workload. These warnings would inspire and challenge Jenny "to prove I could do it." Her confidence was reinforced during the summer internship when an experienced anchor woman took Jenny under her wing. "That this successful person would see something in me, and spend time with me really made me feel like I wanted to work harder and show her it was worthwhile to have spent her time with me."

Like most college seniors, Jenny spends time in her final semesters sending out resumes and maintaining the contacts she has made, especially with the team from the television station, hoping to join them again in a paid position. The prospect of working at a golf course is an idea that was mostly dismissed until another challenge surfaces in an off-handed comment made to Jenny while attending a seminar hosted by a manufacturer of landscaping equipment. The comment was simply an observation about gender, which Jenny interpreted as a challenge that women in the golf course management role were mismatched. To prove this as untrue, she accepts a three month internship at a golf course in California. Finally having their daughter home, her parents are furious about this choice. After two weeks, Jenny herself feels she's made a mistake, but knows a trip home would warrant an "I told you so" from her dad. She perseveres. A week later a letter from dad arrives in the mail with his apology for not supporting her choice. Jenny resigns herself to the fact that she will, as always, fulfill her commitment to the internship and return home when the assignment ends.

The internship is successful in convincing Jenny that working on a golf course is not her destiny, and in giving her possibly the first moments of "alone time" in her life. She believes

this opportunity to think and be alone gave her the opportunity to really choose where she wants to take her life. When moving to her college campus, and then again when moving to California for the brief internship, one of the first things Jenny did was find a church where she could continue to attend mass. While in college, she felt this was a way to feel connected to her family because while she was attending mass, she knew the whole family was also attending mass and this made her feel close to them. Jenny would often recruit her college roommates to attend mass with her, and continues to ‘build herself’ in a faith-based community. Another college job Jenny held was as a confirmation counselor for the church. One particular student’s transformation during the confirmation class had a powerful effect on Jenny. Initially, the student was disengaged and uninterested in the process of becoming confirmed in the Catholic faith. Jenny provided her with encouragement and guidance; following the confirmation ceremony the student thanked and credited Jenny for changing her life.

Upon reflection, Jenny believes youth ministry is really part of her destiny. Spiritual retreats during high school, acting as a confirmation counselor in college, and a lot of alone time on the golf course have informed her decision to help others on their spiritual journeys. She remembers a high school coach commenting on her early plans to work as a golf course superintendent, saying “That’s not where you’re going. You need to work with people.”

Discussion and Conclusion

“Storytelling is a powerful medium. Individuals can compose stories about their life journey, focusing on the people, places, and events that have influenced their understanding of leadership” (Bolman and Deal, 2001). In each of the interviews, the participants told their

stories, helping to inform the topic of generational traits and characteristics. The differences in individual and generational values and motivations are revealed through the stories of their personal and professional journeys.

The core values of the Traditionalist were evident throughout the research conversation with Tom. His dedication, hard work, and respect for authority shape his strong work ethic. Traditionalists are loyal and consistent and Tom is a model example of these characteristics. Tom is motivated by the satisfaction he gets from being productive and useful, and he expects that his time and contribution be respected. The refresher training, for example, seemed to be an insult to the years of experience he has and the “people skills” he brings to the workplace, and frankly, a waste of his time. This situation also illustrates the Traditionalist’s view about and need for feedback, “no news is good news.” The impression left by Tom’s comments about the training was that the training should be directed toward those employees whose performance warranted the need for additional training, rather than a universal approach of delivering refresher training to all employees. Tom’s reaction to the employee whose physical presentation was disrespectful toward the image of the company she was hired to represent shows the typical Traditionalist’s characteristics of respect, dignity, and loyalty. The assertion that correcting the young co-worker’s behavior was “not his place” demonstrates the Traditionalist’s regard for authority and hierarchical work environments.

Ellen’s story reflected some of the classic Baby Boomer traits and values. In her case, the generation’s optimism and desire for personal growth were apparent in her plans for herself, her husband, and her family. Ellen and Greg graduated from college, unlike their parents, and

had well-paying professional careers which provided them and their three daughters with a comfortable life. The common dilemma for Baby Boomers, work-life balance, contributed to the couple's divorce due to their choice of balancing schedules to minimize child care expenses, but jeopardizing their time together.

Ellen, like many in her generational cohort, recognizes the value and importance of relationships and teamwork particularly her chosen field of nursing. She sees the benefit of having time with her colleagues outside of the hospital. Additionally, Ellen sees the need to carve out time for herself now, with work-life balance becoming a priority. She may be ready to consider options to have weekends free to pursue her personal interests. Scheduling was a major motivational factor for Ellen when she had three small children at home. Scheduling continues to be a major motivational factor for Ellen as she focuses on the remainder of her professional journey.

Having fun was a dominant theme in the research conversation with Alex, the Gen Xer. In addition to having fun, Generation X core values include technoliteracy, diversity, and informality. By passing time calculating the probabilities of lottery drawings, Alex easily assimilates these analytical skills into software programs and earns a CFO title before the age of thirty. The formality, policies, and politics he experiences in college and the non-profit sector cause him some irritation and incentive to move on to the next opportunity. Very early in his work life Alex understands the value and importance in knowing what motivates employees. As a result, he has little tolerance for experienced managers who do not possess this skill. This

often cynical generational cohort values simple, straightforward gestures and talk. “Just being nice” is a retention strategy that he identified when he was first developing his workplace values.

Work-life balance is likely the most significant motivational factor for Alex and his cohorts. With their own financial obligations and commitments, there is a sense of responsibility present in Gen X workers, who ‘work to live’ rather than ‘live to work’ like their Baby Boomer parents did. Gen Xers expect that the work will provide them with frequent new challenges. In the absence of challenging assignments, Generation X workers will move on to the next place where challenging and fun opportunities await.

Jenny, the Millennial, provided the perspective of a child who had the overwhelming, extensive support of her parents, and a schedule heavy with activities. The core values of this generational cohort are optimism, civic duty, confidence, and achievement. Jenny’s academic and athletic achievements were numerous. Her confidence was also reinforced through the attention from successful or inspirational figures and the many challenges she encountered throughout her college career.

After graduation, experiencing “alone time” for the first time, Jenny is able to reflect on what really motivates and inspires her. The faith-based foundation built by her parents, teachers, and coaches, leads her into a role where she can serve the interests of others as a youth ministry counselor. Millennials are accustomed to heavy schedules and they are as optimistic as their encouraging parents that they will continue to achieve success in anything they pursue. Jenny is an example of this in that she is confident that her goal of working in youth ministry will be

balanced with a role in sports broadcasting. With her two primary goals figured out, the only thing Jenny is uncertain of is which one will be part-time and which one will be full-time.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “life histories of important people may reveal their formative experiences, for example, what shaped the values and ambitions of a president of the United States. Life histories of ordinary people enable researchers to learn about the way people live.” The purpose of this narrative study was to collect life stories from ordinary people to gain an understanding of the unique values, motivations, and perspectives each generational cohort may bring to today’s workplace. Understanding the characteristics of each generational cohort will help managers to identify and meet the needs of their employees to successfully lead a multi-generational workforce.

This paper tells the story of only four people. A limitation in this approach is that the participants may not necessarily reflect the norm within each generational cohort. Additionally, all of the participants reside in the Midwest and each comes from an intact, two parent family. Each of the four participants is college-educated. These factors could impact the participants’ values, motivation, work ethic, and life view. In addition to understanding the characteristics of each generational cohort, managers need to have an understanding of the individual’s characteristics in order to effectively identify and meet their needs in the workplace.

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EXHIBIT A

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Perspectives of Employees in Multi-Generational Workplaces
Barbara Smyrl, College of Professional Studies

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to gather information about multi-generational workplaces from employees, one from each of the four generational cohorts: Traditionalist (born 1900-1945), Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), and Millennial (born 1981-1999). The final outcome will be four narrative stories (told by one member of the cohort) about each generation's perspective on experiences of working within a multi-generational workplace. This study will attempt to answer the following question: "What challenges (i.e., technology, communication, relationships, and value differences) exist for a manager of a multi-generational work team?" You will be one of approximately 4 participants.

PROCEDURES: Participants will be personal and professional contacts of the PI, Barbara Smyrl. Participants will be selected on the following criteria: a) year of birth, in order to include one participant from each of the four generational cohorts; and, b) experience of working on multi-generational work team. Participants will be interviewed about their experiences at work, with emphasis on technology, communication, relationships, and values. The results of the interviews will be transcribed and coded to identify themes relevant to the research question.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of a face-to-face interview which should take about 90 minutes, with possible follow-up emails or phone calls for clarification, if needed.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. The risks are no more than you might encounter in everyday life. There is a risk of your name being identified as a participant in this research. Every precaution will be taken to keep this information confidential. Personal information may be discussed during the interview which could present the risk of feeling uncomfortable. You may opt out of any question during the interview, and may terminate the interview at any time.

BENEFITS: There are no specific benefits that you will experience as part of this research study. However, this research may be beneficial to managers who may become more effective in communicating with a multi-generational workforce.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. The audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed following the transcription process. Individual quotes may be used in the final research paper; however, the quotes will be associated to a pseudonym, not your name. All data collected will be kept in a locked drawer in Barbara Smyrl's home office, or on a password-protected laptop computer, for a period of at least three years after this research project is completed. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the option to withdraw at any time. If you wish to withdraw, a verbal or written request to the researcher will suffice. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all data collected will be destroyed

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Barbara Smyrl 414-881-2957 or barbara.smyrl@mu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

EXHIBIT B

Interview Guide

- I. Education
 - a. Interests
 - b. Motivations
 - c. Family history
- II. Early Employment Experiences
 - a. Type of jobs
 - b. Reasons for selection
 - c. Expectations (for training, advancement, compensation, etc.)
 - d. Lessons learned or experiences gained
- III. Personal Development and Experiences
 - a. Other interests (hobby, social)
 - b. Relationships
 - c. Goals or aspirations
- IV. Current Employment
 - a. Type of jobs
 - b. Reasons for selection
 - c. Expectations (for training, advancement, compensation, etc.)
 - d. Lessons learned or experiences gained
- V. Thesis Area of Focus
 - a. Communication (methods used, effectiveness, applicability)
 - b. Structure of work units
 - c. Sources of conflict or unity
 - i. Relationships
 - ii. Value differences
 - iii. Competency
- VI. Additional Discussion Areas
 - a. Epiphanies
 - b. What's next