

WHO ARE YOUR WORKERS?

Each generation of workers are defined not only by their birth rates, and numerical age, but also by profound life-defining events. Different life experiences and perspectives have caused them to create and mould different attitudes, behaviours and cultures.

1925-1945 WAR GENERATION

Knowledgeable about the business world, have experience that is valuable to the company

Characteristics

- Cohort born between 1925-1945
- Lived through war times / depressions
- Earned smaller income, compared to today
- Raised in an era where craftsmanship was an art and skills were specialized

Characteristics in the workplace

- * Value the ability to master a particular craft or skill
- * Enjoy being the expert of one stage of the project process
- * Desire to be paid through a combination of benefits and salary
- * Resent the stereotype that they are “unable to use technology”
- * Want and enjoy opportunities to learn and use new technology

1946-1969 BABY BOOMERS

Baby boomers tend to be team oriented, relationship focused and driven to succeed.

Characteristics

- Cohort born between 1946-1964
- Delayed getting married, delayed having children and will delay retirement
- Grew up in optimistic times when their sheer numbers influenced economic expansion and growth
- Lived through the social movement era (civil rights, women’s rights, workers rights)

Characteristics in the workplace

- * Enjoy working as a team or in collaboration
- * Success is measured through promotions and new titles
- * Loyal to employer (long term focus)
- * Desire to be paid through a combination of benefits and salary, similar to their older co-workers
- * Value opportunities for self-development
- * Most likely to work into the retirement age
- * Have valuable knowledge of the business world and enjoy being consulted on it

1960-1970 GENERATION X

Generation X has been raised in a more chaotic corporate world.

Characteristics

- Born roughly around 1964-1976 (time range is more flexible for this era)
- “Not-so-loyal” corporate environment
- Less formalized approach to authority
- Experienced the decline of imperialism (Fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War)

Characteristics in the workplace

- * Desire to work independently
- * Want to see a project through from start to finish
- * Don’t believe they will be with the employer long enough to reap benefits like pensions etc.
- * Prefer a two-way learning environment (networking and mentoring)
- * Value opportunity for self-development
- * Seek a sense of family in their workplace

1980 – 1990 GENERATION Y

Generation Y will positively influence the 21st century due to sheer size, their positive expectations and global citizenry, along with their technical sophistication and tendency for collective action.

Characteristics

- Cohort born roughly between 1980’s – 1990’s
- More multicultural than previous eras
- Most have working mothers
- Consider themselves “global citizens”
- Represent diverse households (single parents, step-parents, same sex parents)

Characteristics in the workplace

- * View their job as short-term
- * Like learning new skills, and being kept up to date in their position
- * Enjoy lateral moves within their job (not necessarily a new title)
- * Prefer jobs that provides greater opportunity to work in different places
- * Less interested in traditional benefits, like retirement benefits, or pension plans
- * Want more immediate compensation like “pay per project” contracts, cell phones, company laptops, etc
- * Desire to work in collaboration with others

COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

- Everyone wants to succeed
- Everyone wants clear communication
- No one wants confrontation between co-workers or leaders
- Everyone wants to feel valued
- Everyone wants a friendly work environment
- Everyone wants to have fun

Managing the Multigenerational Workplace

What problems can arise from having 4 generations in 1 workplace? How does it affect your business productivity?

Problems and issues arise when leaders do not understand the needs and skills of employees. Without fully understanding how each generation operates, a leader will be unable to communicate effectively and efficiently: assignments, expectations related to work, and even daily conversation. Lack of clear and open communication with each generation has different outcomes: internal strife, gossip, stereotyping, or employee isolation. It’s balancing all of these differences in a variety of ways that will help appease the conflicts and struggles within the multigenerational workplace and influence productivity.

Attracting a good mix of employees is important. Take a look around your workplace – is the environment too old that it might be seen by outsiders as “out of touch”? Or is it filled with 20-somethings who may be stereotyped as “too inexperienced” to deal with the real business world? A great workplace needs a balance of the young and old, from all walks of life. **What age groups are missing in your company?** Research confirms attracting the younger employees (Generation X and Y) is a problem for some companies. Companies need to inject some fresh change, ideas, and energy into the mix. The question is, **how do you find your new employees?**

Attraction begins with visibility in appropriate places and we know that Canadian youth search for employment by checking online **job postings**, followed by **traditional newspaper listings**, and **friends**. The latter demonstrates that youth today network to find the job and career they want, using connections to get their foot in the door.

Are your hiring practices conducive to each generation and their search for employment?

Your Company’s Image

If you want to know why you attract a certain type of worker; consider your company’s image. **Explore the following questions:**

- What is the dress code in your workplace?
- What does your advertising look like?
- Who are your employees?
- What image do people associate you with?

Attraction also means catering to future employees’ wants; what are they searching for in the job market? What you have to offer is a part of your company’s image. While money is a big issue that will attract people to your company; research indicates it is not the top priority in the workplace in the Niagara region (ranked 6th). In Niagara, 86% of the total respondents (top-two box score) agreed that money was important in their job, but if we break it down by age only a mere 25% of the 20-29 year old cohort thought it was important. When asked what keeps this cohort in their current job it was **“regular and consistent feedback”** at number one (75%).

When it comes to your current job, how important each of the following statements (Top two box score)

Top Five Most Important Elements in the Workplace in Niagara Region	Total %
Respect	96
Stability	92
Interesting work	91
Learning new skills	90
Responsibility	86

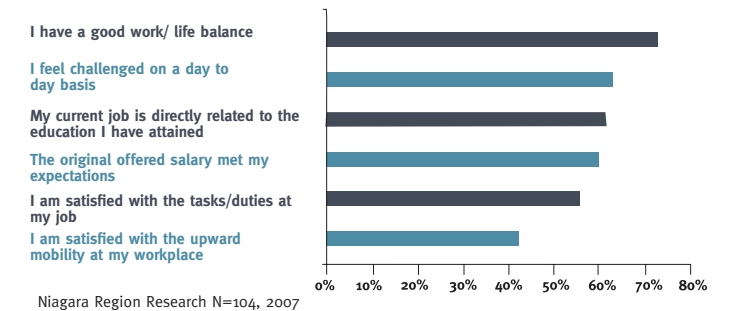
Niagara Region Research N=104, 2007

Remember that older generations enjoy the split benefits and salary, while younger generations might prefer to be paid by project or in a more immediate compensation, especially since they do not usually see jobs as long term. Upon consideration of this and based on your knowledge of what motivates the different generations, consider a **variety of options for payments and compensation ready to offer employees.**

Attraction for the older and the younger generation may also mean offering more **work/life flexibility**, so that they can fit their work into their well-rounded lives. Recent research found that in Niagara, 75% of workers agreed that they have a good work/life balance, and this sentiment was evident across all age groups.

Personal Work Experience in the Niagara Region

When thinking of your personal experience in the workforce, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (Top two box score)



Consider:

- Offering a longer “long” weekend – 4 days instead of 3
- Allowing people to work from home, the café next door, or in a space that they feel most productive and that may accommodate their schedule (appointments, errands, families etc)
- If possible offer gym discounts/memberships so people can get active and involved outside of work in the same space.

Remember, all workers in general are more productive when they have time for their lives outside of work.

Retention Work Style

Keeping each generation satisfied within your business is a major challenge, but it is not impossible. In order to keep all the generations interested, engaged and fully productive in their work, your business must **be friendly to the variety of working styles and environments these generations demand.**

Current research shows that in the Niagara region **58%** of workers agreed they were **“satisfied with the tasks/duties at my job”**. There is room for improvement in work places and it must come by offering all workers projects and assignments that are best suited to their personal way of working. For example, offer

- “Start to finish” style projects
- Team projects
- Segments of projects, rather than whole projects
- Independent work

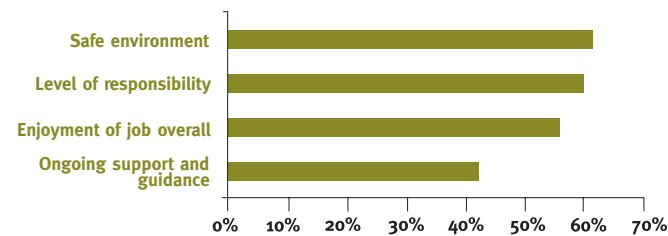
Ensure employees have continuous **adequate leadership and support to feel the project was successfully completed**. Failing to provide work where all four generations feel productive and satisfied can result in a loss in workers’ energy and moral and therefore harm the company’s productivity.

Ongoing Learning

Your workers, whether overtly or not, are stereotyping each other by their age and skill set. This is a very sore spot for conflict and resentment, especially when it comes to associating each generation to their technological capabilities. Not all Generation Y-ers know everything there is to know about iPods, PDAs, Microsoft Excel etc. Also not all War Generation employees are clueless about the latest software, MP3 player, or even Facebook! What has been recommended to appease this type of tension is to offer **comprehensive learning sessions**, where all staff are invited to update and refresh their skills. It is your responsibility to keep your staff up-to-date, comfortable, and efficient in their work environment.

Satisfaction with Employer in Niagra Region

Please tell us how satisfied you are with your employer for the following job elements (Top two box score)



Niagara Region Research N= 104, 2007

Workers in Niagara do not feel their employers are providing them with the support and guidance needed. When asked to evaluate their employer based on the above criteria, a little over one-third were actually satisfied. Support and guidance dissatisfaction can be reconciled by providing employees with learning and training experiences.

Communication Tools

“It is imperative that opportunities exist for different generations to communicate with management and colleagues.”

Communication is key to ensuring tasks are completed and that success and value is felt amongst all employees. Use good communication skills to deter any gossip or misrepresentation of the company’s actions or future plans like promotions, lay-offs, lateral moves, etc. As a total, workers in Niagara find it easy to speak their co-workers.

Please rank how easy you find it to communicate with the following types of co-workers (Top two box score)

Percent %	Total	20-29	30-34	35-45	45-54	55+
Co-workers your age	92	75	100	93	90	95
Co-workers significantly older than you	85	50	63	83	90	95
Co workers younger than you	85	50	88	86	81	95

Niagara Region Research N=104, 2007

Interestingly, it is Generation Y that expresses difficulty communicating with older and younger co-workers, yet older generations do not feel they have any type of communication problem with co-workers. This could be an indication of the younger cohort being over critical about their communication with co-workers and older generations not communicating effectively with the young cohort. There is an obvious need for improved communication, and it is up to employers to figure out gaps and implement a comprehensive communication plan. Good communication is an essential component in creating a cohesive work environment that supports productivity and success.

Communication and interaction between co-workers and leaders can be facilitated through

- Message boards
- Organized Lunches
- Online forums
- Meetings that recognize teams and individual achievements

Accommodate all four generation’s interests, remembering the formality of older generations and informality of the younger. Balance it accordingly, with lunches, dinners, pub nights, or even cultural celebrations.

Don’t be afraid to let loose with your co-workers and leaders. We are all human and enjoy talking, laughing and hanging out with each other. If your workers can enjoy each other’s company outside of work, think of how it can open up conversation, understanding and productivity inside the office.

“Everyone needs to blow off some steam, laugh and enjoy each others’ company outside the workplace”

Overall, don’t be daunted by the variety of opinions, attitudes or cultures in your workplace. Instead, embrace them with your own variety of solutions. We are unique in our own ways, but there are some commonalities between all 4 generations that exist like wanting to succeed, to feel valued, to be at peace at work, to have clear lines of communication, a friendly working environment, and of course to have fun. Remember to talk to all your workers for their input on how to improve their workplace environment. **Respect your older generation workers** – they are experienced and have valuable knowledge and skills. **Embrace your younger generations** –they are hard workers, pragmatic and self-starting. Four generations in one workplace can be an amazing experience. Take the step and make the little or big adjustments necessary, so that your company is efficient, productive and happy.

WORKING ON IT

4 GENERATIONS - 1 WORKFORCE

What is the impact on your productivity?
 Today’s workforce is different than any other workforce we have seen in the past. Many workplaces now have four generations. Upon consideration of new and challenging workplace environments, the question is “how is your workplace coping with this transformation and what’s the impact on your business and its productivity?”