

Four Generations – Four Approaches to Work: A Synopsis



By Giselle Kovary and Adwoa K. Buahene, co-founders of n-gen People Performance Inc.

As small and large businesses alike seek to become more high-performing, their challenge is to engage a diverse workforce. Leaders and managers have often been working in the sector their entire careers, and as younger employees enter the field, the differences in expectations and behaviours between Traditionalists, Baby Boomers on one side, and Gen X and Gen Y on the other side, become more apparent.

There are four generations in today's workplace – Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Ys.

Traditionalist	1922 - 1945	65 - 88 Years
Baby Boomer	1946 - 1964	46 - 64 Years
Gen X	1965 - 1980	30 - 45 Years
Gen Y	1981 - 2000	10 - 29 Years

Generational cohorts possess unique values, behaviours and skills based on their experiences of life-defining events. The commonality of these shared events creates generational identities. The generational identities shape the viewpoints that each cohort has on life and work. These characteristics are important to understand, because they impact individual, team and organizational performance.

For Traditionalists, the effects of the Great Depression and the world wars caused them to be a generation of institution-builders, with deep rooted values of honour, loyalty, dedication and sacrifice. They transfer these qualities into the workplace where they are stable, detail-oriented and hard-working. They are loyal to the organization and are focused on building a legacy.

Baby Boomers were raised in the optimistic post-Second World War era. Because of their sheer number (9.3 million in Canada), society catered to their needs by building suburbs, hospitals and schools. When this cohort entered the workplace, they were faced with high competition and the need to constantly prove their value in order to move ahead. They are known for their strong commitment to their careers, organizational political savvy, and drive to add value.

Gen Xers grew up in less optimistic times. High rates of divorce and witnessing the effects of corporate downsizing caused this generation to be very independent. Since organizations could no longer guarantee stability, Gen Xers pledged to take care of themselves. This cohort is constantly seeking

to learn new marketable skills as a way of controlling their future. In the workplace, they are eager to work on multiple projects that are focused on producing results, and are determined to have a work-life balance.

While Gen Ys have been exposed to negative socio-historical events such as 9/11 and school violence, they are being raised in extremely positive environments both at home and at school. Many are raised in a peer-to-peer relationship by their parents, where their opinions are solicited, listened to, and acted upon. In school, the philosophy is to build self-esteem. Gen Ys enter the workforce with high levels of confidence, and expect managers to treat them as colleagues and peers.

With such different values, behaviours and expectations, it is no wonder that on a team, there might be generational conflict. But why should you care about meeting the needs of all four generations? As many AOLS member organization face an aging workforce, it is becoming increasingly important to get the right person, in the right job, at the right time in order to facilitate the required knowledge transfer, training and succession.

	Traditionalists 1922-1945	Baby Boomers 1946-1964	Gen Xers 1965-1980	Gen Ys 1981-2000
Attitudes, Values And Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loyalty Respect for Authority Dedication Sacrifice Conformity Honour Privacy Stability Economic conservatism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimism Involvement Team-Oriented Personal growth and gratification Youthfulness Equality Career-focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence Self-reliance Pragmatism Skepticism Informality Balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence Diversity Civic duty Optimism Immediate access to information and services
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliant Stable Detail-orientated Hardworking Dedicated Fiscally frugal Trustworthy Risk averse Long-term focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driven to succeed Team player Relationship-focused Eager to add value Politically savvy in the workplace Competitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Techno-literate Flexible and adaptable Creative Entrepreneurial Multi-tasker Results-driven Individualistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Techno-savvy Collective Action Expressive and tolerant of differences Eager to accept challenges Innovative and creative

Why is it so hard to engage most of your employees, most of the time? In part, you may not be looking at your workforce from a generational lens. By adopting this perspective you will be able to create management techniques and strategies that are effective at engaging all employee groups. Research has proven that an engaged employee is a more productive employee. Creating policies and strategies that tap into what is most important to each generation allows you to engage more of your employees more often.

So, organizations need to find strategies that engage and retain the experienced worker, while creating a work environ-

ment that is appealing to new entrants to the workforce. Understanding generational identities allows you to retain and tap into the wealth of existing knowledge held by experienced employees that you need to sustain and grow your business. The experienced generation holds your organizational memory and can serve as great mentors and coaches. You



need to re-engage experienced workers by demonstrating the value that they continue to bring to your organization. Often taken for granted, organizations and managers do not specifically focus on rewards, recognition or interesting work assignments that engage the more experienced worker.

In order to create an environment that will be appealing to younger entrants into the industry, you must have an organizational culture which will entice them to be a part of it. First your organization should survey existing employee expectations to determine what your current culture is like. Is your culture formal and defined by rules and policies? Is your culture highly structured, where ‘paying your dues’ by working long hours are expected? If so, then these are a couple of indicators that your culture may be Traditionalist or Baby Boomer dominated; so you need to evaluate what in your culture may need to adjust, to also attract younger employees. It is not about changing your organizational culture entirely, rather the key is to expand both your formal and informal culture, such that it speaks to the values, motivations and expectations of all four generations. Colleagues from each generation have to recognize the strengths and the differences of others. Younger colleagues who enter into your organization need to understand the organizational history and the value more senior generations bring to the team. Conversely, the experienced generations need to understand that the younger generations often demonstrate strong competency and possess different and useful skills sets earlier in life.

As a manager you should evaluate your existing management practices and policies to gauge how effective you are at driving current productivity. Analyse this reality in contrast to future organizational goals and the type of workforce that you will need to be successful in the future. Invest in understanding generational values, expectations and

behaviours and adapt your work style, management style and communication style to drive greater engagement. Each individual manager must assume greater accountability for creating stronger team collaboration. Also, we need to drive down that accountability to every colleague, individual contributor or associate. Ultimately, creating an engaged workplace requires the collaboration of everyone – from senior leaders who make strategic decisions to front-line employees who work on multigenerational teams every day. By focusing on how to maximize the strengths of each generation, while managing conflict points, recruitment, retention and most importantly engagement can be improved.



Adwoa K. Buahene and Giselle Kovary are the authors of *Loyalty Unplugged: How to Get, Keep & Grow All Four Generations* and co-founders of **n-gen People Performance Inc.**, which is a performance improvement company that provides training products and consulting services that layer on a generational perspective. n-gen has worked with 10 of the 14 Canadian Fortune 500 companies. n-gen’s diverse clients span small, medium & large enterprises, including 5 of the top 6 Canadian banks, 12 of Canada’s largest energy companies, 20 leading post-secondary institutions in North America, and government agencies at the federal, provincial, and municipal level. More than 25,000 people have benefited from n-gen’s expertise in the last 6 years, by attending a workshop or a presentation. Giselle Kovary was the Plenary Session speaker at the 2010 AOLS AGM. A copy of her presentation can be found on the Members’ side of the AOLS website at www.aols.org.

n-gen’s training programs, e-learning, and consulting services provide people managers at all levels, from front line to CEO, the strategies and techniques needed to manage, engage and lead a multigenerational workforce. For more information, visit www.ngenperformance.com.

NEWS FROM 1043 cont’d

Bruce MacNabb is no longer with **Monarch Corporation**. He is now working at **Lochna Consulting**, 297 John Aselford Drive, Kanata, ON K2W 1A8.

Del Bosco Surveying Ltd. in Sudbury is now the Sudbury branch office of **Tulloch Geomatics Inc.** **Anne Cole**, who was formerly working in the Thessalon office, is the managing OLS.

Bill Zizek has changed his working location. He is working with **HP Enterprise Services** (formerly EDS Systemhouse) located at 5150 Spectrum Way, Mississauga, ON L4W 5G1.

Anil Agnihotri has changed his location at **Teranet** to 1 Adelaide Street East, Suite 700, Toronto, ON M5C 2V9. Phone and fax remain the same. The office of **Smith and Smith Kingston Ltd.** has moved to 637 Norris Court, Unit 1, Kingston, ON K7P 2R9.

The office of **Biason Surveying Inc.** has moved to 2 Marconi Court, Unit 9, Bolton, ON L7E 5R7. The phone remains the same.

David Brubacher is now the Senior Information Management Specialist for **AquaResource Inc.**, 31 Beacon Point Court, Breslau, ON N0B 1M0. Phone: 519-772-3777 ex. 122.

THE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO LAND SURVEYORS IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE FOLLOWING WERE SWORN IN AS ONTARIO LAND SURVEYORS:

Aziz Abdelshahid	1926	Jan. 18, 2010	Mitsche and Aziz Inc.
Angela Jeffray	1927	Feb. 18, 2010	Trow Geomatics Inc.
Dwayne Cummings	1928	Jan. 18, 2010	Kerry Boehme OLS, A Division of Ivan B. Wallace Ontario Land Surveyors
Christopher Wahba	1929	Jan. 18, 2010	Rady-Pentek & Edward Surveying Ltd.
Zoltan Herman	1930	Jan. 18, 2010	J.D. Barnes Ltd.
Walid Belal	CR202	Jan. 18, 2010	Town of Oakville