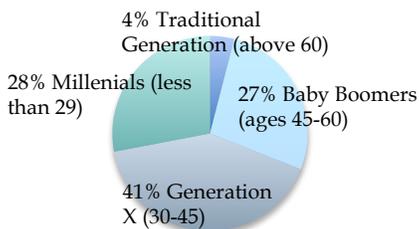


# DIVERSITY BRIEF: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

By Poonam Raj Singh

## Introduction

There is a significant generational shift occurring within all industries across the United States. Generations can be divided into 4 groups and break down into the following percentages:



Any management or leadership change initiative must incorporate an understanding of generational differences to gain a competitive advantage that leverages these trends, particularly because this is the first time 4 generations have worked side by side in the workplace (due to the recession & increasing life expectancy). Generational dynamics will impact collaboration, knowledge sharing, productivity and innovation. Two important dimensions discussed here are:

- Career Transitions
- Specific Needs of Each Generation

## Career Transitions

A few years ago, there was significant buzz that there would be a looming leadership crisis as Baby Boomers began to retire. However, due to the

global recession, Baby Boomers have postponed retirement. Therefore, Gen X'ers and Millennials are unclear on what the pathway looks like for them, and will need guidance. Furthermore, as the economy improves, organizations must prepare for the eventual career transitions that will occur.

## Specific Needs of Each Group

Each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, habits, and motivational buttons. Of course, individuals may relate to several aspects of each group, and may also lie on the cusp between groups. Table 1 below outlines some differences between the groups. Many differences exist between groups because of the major social events that have impacted their development. It is important to understand each group's needs, as well as to understand how these groups might interact. Boomers and Millennials for example may align in their idealism, but may collide as career transitions are occurring or in how they use technology to communicate.

Gen X'ers, are sometimes labeled as the "forgotten group", and have the highest attrition rate in organizations, often beginning their own ventures as entrepreneurs with a strong desire to innovate & break conventional norms (Stillman, 2002).

## Training & Coaching Strategies

Organizations can adopt strategies to address generational issues. They include:

- Raising awareness about generational groups within the agency
- Analyzing short-term/long-term incentives, personal satisfaction, work life balance, compensation, cultural issues for each group
- Providing training to learn and accept generational differences, including building bridges across groups & understanding the strengths of each group
- Career planning, including 1:1 career conferences & outlining career pathways
- Re-conceptualizing how senior positions may be more appealing to the next generation.

Table 1

	Traditional	Boomers	Gen X	Millenials
<b>Core Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Duty First</li> <li>• Deep Loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimistic</li> <li>• Workaholic</li> <li>• Questions Authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skepticism</li> <li>• Entprenerial</li> <li>• Self Reliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Balance</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Norms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phones</li> <li>• 1:1</li> <li>• Memos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phones</li> <li>• Call me anytime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cell Phones</li> <li>• Call at work</li> <li>• Emails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Social Media</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directive</li> <li>• Command and Control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consensual</li> <li>• Collegial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone is the same</li> <li>• Challenge Others</li> <li>• Ask Why</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Demoractic</li> <li>• Creative</li> </ul>