

100 Challenges in the Workplace: 5 are the Generations

August DeBickes¹, Katelyn Stiller², MS, Lydia Pagan², BS, LT Erica Harris³, PhD

¹Viera High School/2016 DEOMI STEM Intern, ²DEOMI, Research Intern, Patrick AFB, FL, ³DEOMI, Chief Research Scientist, Patrick AFB, FL



Introduction

- The workplace is more diverse than ever, with up to five generations working in the same office (Culp, 2009).
- A generation is defined as a group of people who, during their formative years, experienced the same historical and cultural phenomena that would later shape them (Saba, 2013).
- Generational intervals are scientifically determined by the average age of the parents during child birth (Lancaster, 2005).

Table 1. Overview of the Five Generations

| Category | Traditionalists | Baby Boomers | Generation X | Generation Y | Generation Z |
|---------------|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Birth Years | 1925-1945 | 1946-1965 | 1966-1979 | 1980-1994 | 1995-Present |
| Age, in years | 71-91 | 51-70 | 37-50 | 22-36 | 21 and under |
| Nicknames | Veterans Silent Generation | "Me" Generation Hippies | Latchkey Kids MTV Generation | Millennials Echo Boomers | iGeneration Google Generation |
| Influences | Great Depression WWII | Vietnam War Postwar 60s | Pop Culture Divorced Parents | Technology Internet | Social Media 9/11 Great Recession |
| Traits | Independent Respects Authority Communicative | Values Diversity Questions Authority Well-Educated | Hardworking Family Focused Self-Reliant | Optimistic Loyal Multi-Tasker | Sophisticated Connected Volunteers |

Note: This information is cited from the following: Mecca (2010), Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon, (2008), & Haynes, (2013)

- Each generation is influenced by the major events that occurred during their formative years (Saba, 2013).
- There is conflicting research on whether the different generations:
 - Prefer different ways to communicate (Anantamula & Shrivastav, 2012);
 - Understand characteristics of other generations (Haynes, 2013); and
 - Work well in teams (potential positive and negative experiences when interacting with other generations; Mecca, 2010).

Purpose

To compare and contrast the differences between the five generations in the work environment in regards to:

- Understanding desirable characteristics of the generations
- Communication preferences
- Teamwork (potential positive and negative experiences when interacting with other generations)

Survey Methods

Design: Cross-sectional survey

Participants: 22 participants from a human relations training institution

Setting: Office

Materials: 7 open-ended questions and general demographic information

Open-ended questions: Participants responded to questions about historic events, characteristics in a person, TV shows, musicians, leaders, and personal experiences with the generations.

Comment Coding:

- The correct identification of each generation was coded.
- Each generation was assigned a communication preference.
- Positive and negative experiences of each generation interacting with other generations was coded.
- The top 3 most desirable characteristics of a person across all generations were coded.

Statistical Analysis: Frequencies

Results

Figure 1. Correct Identification of Generation

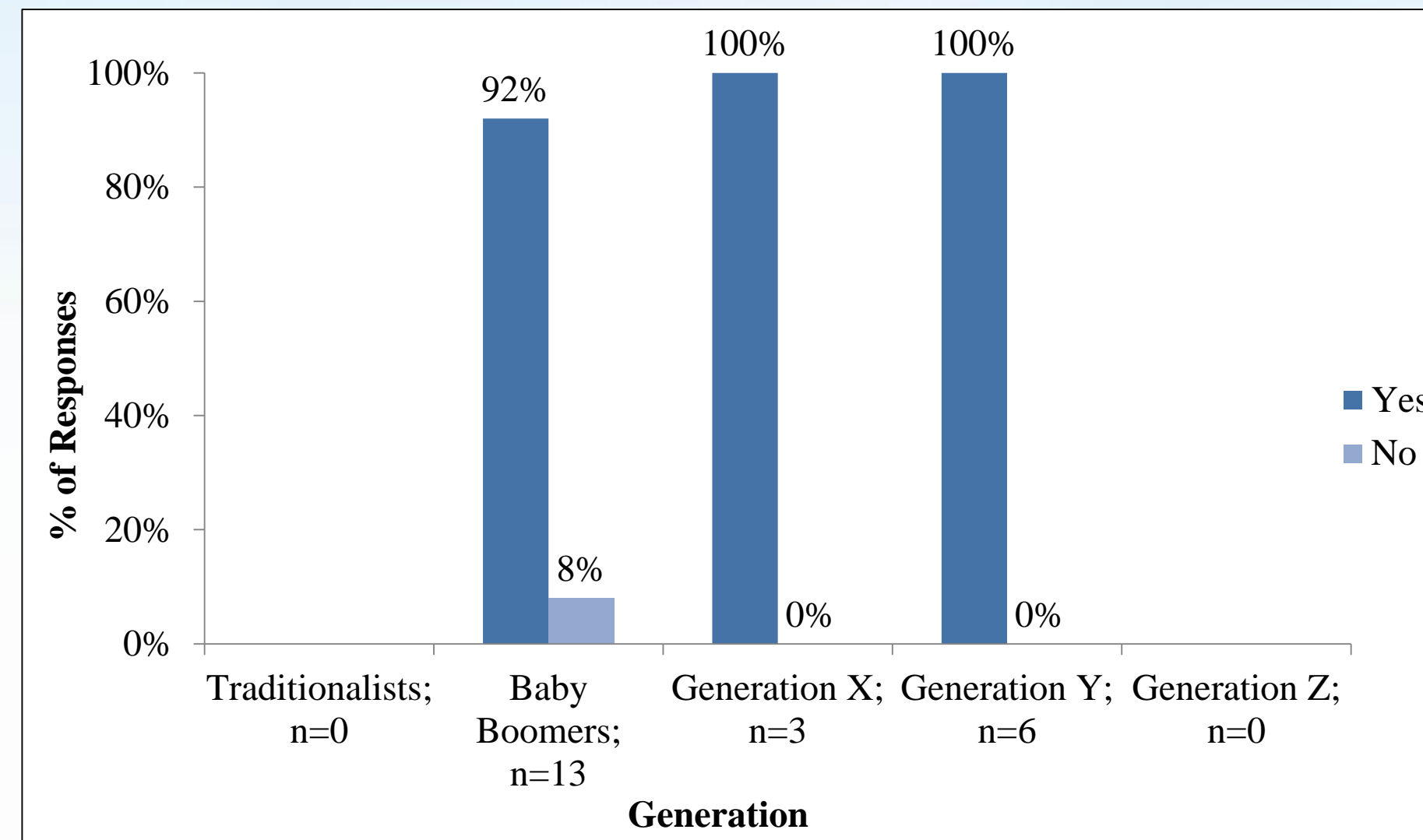
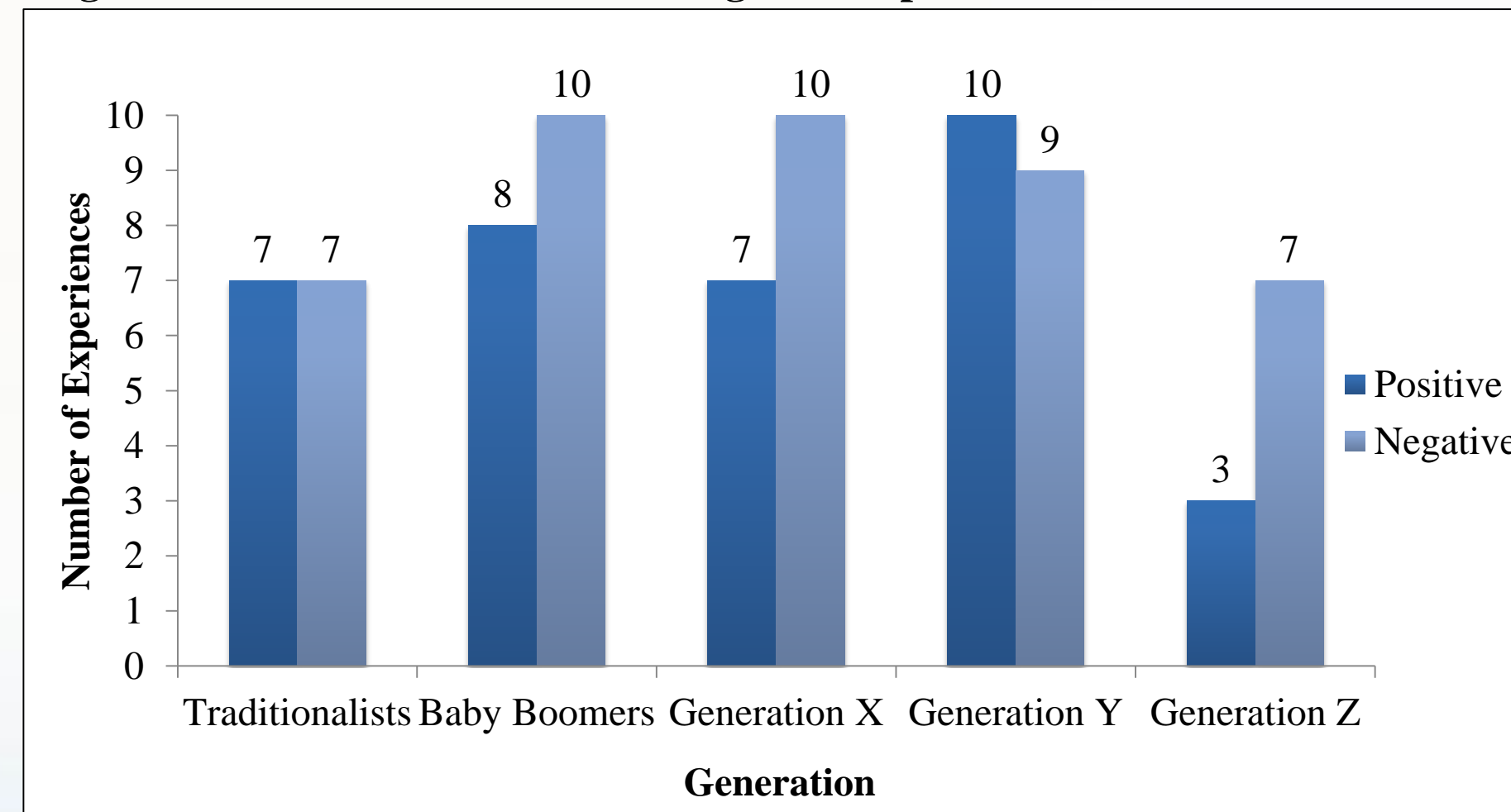


Table 2. Communication Preference among the Generations

| | E-mail | Text | Phone | In-Person | No Preference |
|-----------------------|--------|------|-------|-----------|---------------|
| Traditionalists (n=0) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Baby Boomer (n=13) | 15% | 15% | 0 | 62% | 8% |
| Generation X (n=3) | 33% | 0 | 0 | 67% | 0 |
| Generation Y (n=6) | 17% | 33% | 17% | 33% | 0 |
| Generation Z (n=0) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Figure 2. Number of Positive and Negative Experiences with the Generations



Note: There are multiple responses per participant.

Sample sizes include: Traditionalists (n=0), Baby Boomers (n=13), Generation X (n=3), Generation Y (n=6), Generation Z (n=0)

Summary of Results

Correct Identification of Generation

- 100% of Generation X and Generation Y participants were able to correctly identify their generation.
- 8% of respondents incorrectly identified themselves as Generation X when they in fact belong to the Baby Boomer generation.

Communication Preference

- 62% of Baby Boomers and 67% of Generation X participants preferred in-person communication.
- People in Generation Y tied in preference with both texting and in-person, both receiving 33% of responses.

Positive and Negative Experiences with Generations

- People had the greatest number of positive experiences with Generation Y and the greatest number of negative experiences with Generation X and Baby Boomers.

Honesty was the most popular characteristic across all three recorded generations followed by integrity and intelligence.

Best Practices

Although there has been minimal empirical evidence in regards to how to deal with/resolve conflict due to generational differences (Deyoe & Fox, 2014), the following strategies have proven useful when dealing with a multi-generational workplace.

Table 3. Best Practices to Resolve Conflict Due to Generational Differences

| Communication | Education | Leadership |
|--|---|---|
| Leaders should know the communication preferences for each generation | Leaders should be educated on the generational differences | Flexible leaders can allow for multiple generational perspectives to be considered |
| Communication based on problem solving, adaptability, & teamwork is most effective with multiple generations | Avoiding generational stereotypes can reduce the possibility for conflict | Attitudes and beliefs affect leadership styles |
| Technology is the biggest difference among the generations | Institute programs that teach all employees about the generations | Leaders can develop plans to utilize differences between cohorts to strengthen the organization |
| Communication can be improved with cross-generational work teams | | |

Note: This information was borrowed from Hillman (2012)

Future Directions

Business strategies can be created for how to work with and manage the five generations.

Such strategies would include:

- Ways to increase communication, teamwork, and overall workplace harmony to result in an increase in company morale, productivity, and participation

Future research should investigate what additional differences in communication preferences exist among the generations

- For instance, prior research has found the younger generations (Generation Y and Generation Z) prefer texting and emailing yet the current research suggests they prefer in-person communication.
- Why does Generation Y prefer in-person communication instead of technology-based communication as previous research indicates?

Acknowledgments

- This research was supported, in part, by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) 2016 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Internship Program.
- Special thanks are given to all participants who completed the survey.
- Special thanks are also given to LT Erica Harris, Katelyn Stiller, and Lydia Pagan for their help in guiding this research and creation of the poster.

References

Available Upon Request.

