



# CUTTINGS

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## The Generation X and Y Factor

**M**anagers are facing some challenges in motivating their employees. In recent editions of *Cuttings*, I have reported on the recent growth of emphasis in employee engagement as a major theme for organisational success. The motivational theories that underpin the engagement practices are not generally new – we have known about the impact of positive reinforcement, feedback and development for years. But perhaps their time has come with the growing change in the workforce demographics as Baby Boomers retire and Generation X and Y employees take more significance in the workforce balance.

In recent months, I have found the subject of generational values to be of growing interest to managers looking for ways to address the demands of their changing workforce. Now a survey conducted by *Management Today* puts some numbers to some of the differences between the generations.

Members of every generation want to do something that provides satisfaction. But each generation has a distinct attitude and approach to work and careers. Here's what we've learned about the work and career needs of each generation:

### ***The silent generation (b. 1933-1945)*** ***"Follow the rules"***

Although now mainly retired, this generation's values have shaped the HR practices and policies of a number of large corporations. They valued respect for authority and adherence to rules, achieved success through their discipline, hard work and teamwork. And, for those still working, most are eager to continue to learn and build on their abilities.

### ***The Baby Boomers (b. 1946-1964)*** ***"Hard workers"***

As the post war generation, Baby Boomers have had a huge influence on corporate environments. Boomers are competitive and industrious. And,

learning from their Generation X children, they are now re-examining their careers and looking to bring new balance to their lives. Boomers are looking forward to more time freedom, but to be active - 80% plan to work at least part-time in their retirement years.

### ***Generation 'X' (b. 1965-1976)*** ***"Free agents"***

Generation Xers went to work in a chaotic, no guarantees work world. Their independent childhoods led them to seek workplace autonomy and independence. They seek opportunities to make a visible difference and use their creative abilities. They saw Baby Boomers devoting their lives to their work, and saw that loyalty repaid in layoffs and unstable corporations. They realise no organisation can guarantee employment, so they put their own skill sets and work-life balance first. They value diverse experiences and are comfortable with "job hopping."

### ***Generation 'Y' (b. 1977-1998)*** ***"Confident"***

The Internet and Google generation, Gen Y are self-confident and optimistic, independent and goal-oriented. They're blunt. They're savvy. They're contradictory. They are demanding and high-maintenance. They think in terms of their personal fulfilment, asking: Is the job interesting and satisfying? Is the work meaningful and important? Gen Y are loyal, committed employees only so long as their organisations provide them with variety and opportunity. They are entrepreneurial, out-of-the-box thinkers who relish responsibility, demand immediate feedback, and expect a sense of accomplishment hourly. They thrive on challenging work and creative expression, love freedom and flexibility, and hate micro-management.

### ***The current position***

As Generation X begin to succumb to some of the pressures of the insecurity of the economy with the

needs to care for children and ageing parents, it is Generation Y who are demanding the changes.

In terms of ambition and enterprise, 41% of Gen Y expect to progress rapidly in their current organisation (with the emphasis on rapid) – compared to only 20% of Gen X. 20% of Ys expect to start their own business, compared to 15% of Xers and 11% of boomers.

Job-hopping and free-agency came in with Gen X. Gen Y do it at speed! The average tenure of an Gen Y is 16 months. You can expect an Xer to be in a job for 3 years and a boomer for 5. 54% of Gen Y have already held three or more jobs (and they are still relatively 'young' employees), and 30% expect to have a job in a different industry within five years.

In terms of employment perks, Gen Y also show they are accelerating the Gen X factor. 28% expect gym membership, compared to 17% of Xers and only 9% of boomers. Over half think sabbaticals are important compared to 45% of Xers and 13% of boomers. 22% of Gen Y are likely to take time off to travel in the next five years compared with only 10% of Xers and 9% of boomers (perhaps highlighting the increasing financial strain descending on Gen X).

So engagement is critical for success, as it has always been, but the rules of engagement have changed dramatically. The 'war for talent' and being an 'employer of choice' means doing very different things. Generation Y is showing that whilst free agency and being more 'self-centric' is not a new trend, they seem to be the most successful in seizing the opportunities. The new employment contract needs to be one based on short-term commitment, flexibility and high expectations.

*MT/FreshMinds Work 2.0 Survey  
Management Today March 2008*

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# Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

- ✂ “Divide and rule, a sound motto. Unite and lead, a better one.” *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*
- ✂ “You better live your best and act your best and think your best today, for today is the sure preparation for tomorrow and all the other tomorrows that follow.” *Harriet Martineau*
- ✂ A senior manager told of how each member of his staff should feel after an appraisal. “Everyone must leave with a balloon” – in the mode of children leaving a birthday party. *An email response to Cuttings 72*
- ✂ “A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something.” *Wilson Mizner*
- ✂ “I try to learn from the past, but I plan for the future by focusing exclusively on the present. That’s where the fun is.” *Donald Trump*
- ✂ “When you are through changing, you are through.” *Bruce Barton*
- ✂ “Leaders do many things. They inspire, motivate; they set strategy, they wield power: they align people: they set an example: they represent an organization to outsiders. More than anything else, however, leaders help the people around them make sense of the world in which they find themselves. Inspiring, strategizing and acting all depend on sense making... This ‘sense making’ role is often underplayed... When leaders come to a shared understanding of the world, all their other jobs get easier.” *Thomas Stewart*
- ✂ “Idleness, indifference and irresponsibility are healthy responses to absurd work” *Frederick Herzberg*
- ✂ “A sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organisation can have.” *Pat Summit*
- ✂ “Look after your people, The bottom line will look after itself.” *Val Butcher*
- ✂ “Remove the barriers that stop people from being as good as they can be.” *W Edwards Deming*
- ✂ “Meet the new boss, Same as the old boss, we won’t get fooled again.” *Song lyric, The Who*
- ✂ “Bosses don’t have to act like parents and workers don’t have to act like children” *Ricardo Semler*

## Book Review Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management

by Sarah Lewis, Jonathan Passmore and Stefan Cantore: Kogan-Page: ISBN: 978-0-7494-5071-7

This book is one of the most significant contributions to the library of books devoted to the process and practice of strengths based change. The sub-title of ‘Using AI to Facilitate Organizational Development’ is a very clear summary of the book’s content

It is not a ‘how-to’ for AI itself – instead, it focuses on exploring conversational approaches, of which Appreciative Inquiry is at the forefront.

The first part of the book focuses on making the difference between conversational and mechanistic approaches, with comparisons between the two approaches and reflecting on the historical strands of theory and practice from which the view of organisation as an living human systems emerges.

Part 2 explores the skills and guidance that support being a practitioner using conversational practice as a key tool. Chapters look in depth at the power and form of questions; conversation and how to promote and use it in organisation development; working with story; and practices other than Appreciative Inquiry that centre on conversational practice – such as World Café, Open Space, The Circle and Future Search. The section ends with a discussion on being an appreciative conversational practitioner.

Part 3 is devoted to case studies, written not just by the consultants who focus purely on the highlights, but with the line managers involved to identify and reflect the complexity and the ups and downs of the experience. They thus provide some meaningful insights into the difficulties and real benefits of the approaches.

Taken as a whole, this is one of the most significant contributions to the practice of conversational interventions in recent years. The book is clearly written and uses relevant underpinning of theory and experience to advocate the expansion of conversational practice. It will help facilitators to analyse situations more effectively and develop and improve their understanding and skills in adopting these techniques with the organisations with whom they interact.

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