

With later retirements and longer life-spans, the workplace is increasingly a multi-generational environment. Management Research Group has recently completed two large-scale studies of generational differences in leadership and motivation that provide useful information for cross-generational coaching.

The workplace is soon to be home to 5 generations of employees: the Silents (born 1925-45), Baby Boomers (born 1946-64), Generation X (born 1965-76), Generation Y (born 1977-90), and Generation Z or the Internet Generation (born after 1990). How this diversity will affect individuals and their work environment is the focus of intense interest. Management Research Group has recently completed two large scale studies of the leadership characteristics and personal motivations across the first four generations (Gen Zs are still too young to be in management positions).

THE STUDIES

In a first study, 41,352 individuals in US organizations completed the Leadership Effectiveness Analysis™, which assesses 22 dimensions of leadership behavior. The group was sampled from a wide range of management levels, professional roles, and industries, while controlling for gender and organizational level. The sampling resulted in the following sample sizes: 732 individuals from the Silent Generation, 22,879 Baby Boomers, 14,933 individuals from Generation X, and 2,808 individuals from Generation Y. The median leadership profile for each generation is displayed in Figure 1.



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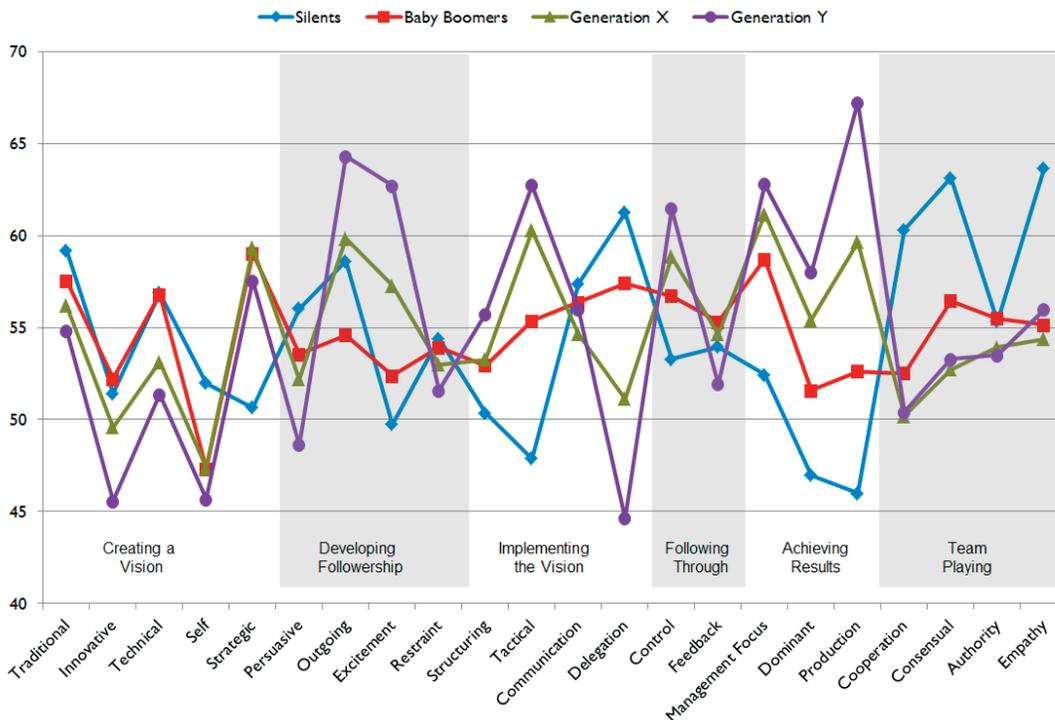


Figure 1. Leadership practices by generation

In general, Silents approached the leadership role in a more conservative manner and were more likely to cooperate with others, delegate tasks, proactively seek input from others and lead by building relationships. They were less hands-on, less likely to aggressively seek positions of power and less likely to lead by setting challenging goals. In contrast, Gen Ys were more likely to be gregarious, energetic and passionate, more hands-on and achievement-focused, and more likely to aggressively seek positions of authority. Focusing on practical tasks, they were also less likely to be innovative and to delegate to others. Baby boomers and Gen Xers fell in between.

In a second study, 3,027 US participants completed the Individual Directions Inventory™ (IDI), an instrument measuring 17 emotional drivers or personal motivations. Again, gender and organizational level were controlled. In this sample, 40 participants were from the Silent generation, 1,694 were Baby Boomers, 1,118 were from Generation X, and 174 were from Generation Y. Their median motivation profiles are displayed in Figure 2.

Silents tended to be more attracted to situations that allowed close relationships involving give and take, and personal expression. They described themselves as less driven and competitive than other groups. In contrast, Gen Ys were more attracted to situations that would allow them to push themselves, aggressively master their environments, and achieve positive regard through personal charisma. Again, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers tended to fall between these two groups. Since these studies were cross-sectional in nature, there is no way to disentangle the influence of generation experiences and simple maturation. In either case, there is evidence that people of different ages currently in the workforce differ significantly in both their personal motivations and their leadership styles and practices.

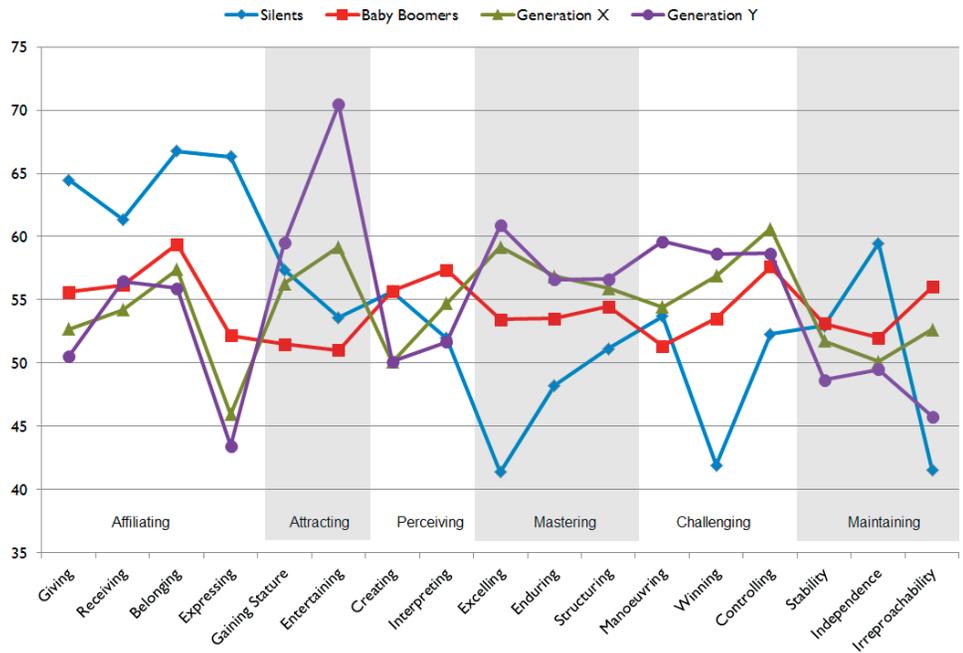


Figure 2. Emotional drivers by generation

APPLYING RESEARCH INSIGHTS

As people remain in the workforce longer and organizations continue to flatten and become more matrixed, multigenerational teams will become increasingly common. The current research adds to a body of literature that suggests that generations have differing approaches to leadership and differing personal motivations. These differences can engender misunderstanding and conflict in organizations, leading to decreased effectiveness and personal distress. Coaching around generational issues may help to alleviate many of these difficulties. We would suggest coaching that focuses on the advantages that come with diversity, an exploration of commonalities (such as a desire to do a good job and make a valuable contribution), and an exploration of differences including expectations regarding how to accomplish tasks and reach goals, how to organize work and work/life balance, preferred modes and content of communication and feedback, and preferred approaches to handling conflict.

To learn more about MRG's Generational Research, please visit our website: www.mrg.com/research



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