

Series Topics

- The changing face of workforce demographics
- Myths about older workers
- Multi-generational interaction at the workplace
- Elder care benefits
- Leveraging the changing demographics
- Marketing to the older consumer

All newsletter issues are available as PDFs at <http://www.uni.edu/iacagorg/business.htm>

Please contact us with comments, questions or suggestions...

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This information is part of a series of brief publications from the Iowa Consortium for Applied Gerontology (IaCAG) located at the University of Northern Iowa. It is designed to raise awareness about the aging population in Iowa and how these changes may impact businesses, employees, and consumers.

Multi-generational Interaction at the Workplace

Diversity of Age @ Work

Diversity of Age @ Work is a certainty today, representing an amalgamation of multiple generations - Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y. A multigenerational work-force means diversity of views, values, work ethics, and behavior.

Highlights of Distinctive Generational Preferences

Traditionalists (before 1946)

Job loyalty
Build a legacy
Work for security in retirement

Baby Boomer Generation (approx. 1946 - 1964)

Rebel against conformity
Value personal and spiritual growth
Prefer team-based work

Generation X (approx. 1964 - 1979)

Economic and psychological "survivor" mentality
Skepticism toward authority
Cautious, self-reliant
Ambitious, independent
Give importance to work/life balance

Generation Y (1980 - present)

Confident
Optimistic
Tenacious
Technologically savvy
Can-do attitude

Demographics point to the fact that the labor pool will have more older workers and fewer younger ones. To leverage the demographic changes in their favor, every business should assess its present workforce demographics. As businesses seek to optimize productivity, they need to redesign their recruitment, selection, training and other policies to accommodate a multi-generational work force. Appreciating this diversity and creating awareness and acceptance for the diversity among your work force is the first step to optimizing 'Diversity of Age @ Work'.

Areas to consider:

- **Recruitment:** The recruitment strategy of a business needs to be tailored to reach and appeal to different generations. For example, as Tom Silveri, CEO of Drake Beam Morin (DBM) points out, “While more than half (51 percent) of Mature Workers cited networking as their source for finding a new job, only 36 percent of Generation X cited the same. Rather, this younger generation tends to rely on advertisements (19 percent) and search firms (18 percent). On average, only 3 percent of all workers found opportunities through the Internet.”³ Businesses will have to use multiple recruitment channels to attract multi-generational workers.
- **Communication:** The communication styles of different generations vary significantly from each other, sometimes leading to miscommunication at work. For example, Baby Boomers may prefer to use face-to-face communication more than electronic communication. On the other hand, using technology to communicate is second nature to Generation Y. For them, an email may seem to be as natural as talking to someone in person.
- **Management style:** The traditional top-down management style is preferred and accepted by the Baby Boomer generation. Generation X, however, seems to have a preference for a more casual, participative style of management. The lack of understanding of these preferences by managers, both young and old, who manage diverse generations can result in unhappy workers.
- **Training:** Every business faces situations when they need to train workers who represent different generations and, therefore, different capabilities and needs. To optimize the investment that goes into training, it is very important to first look at the composition of your work force. For example, technologically savvy generations may not respond well to verbal presentations, while the Baby Boomers may prefer to be trained by someone who can be patient and show empathy.
- **Knowledge Retention:** One of the best ways to maximize the productivity of older workers is to tap into their experiences and knowledge. For example, many Iowa manufacturers have an aging worker pool. In order to leverage their knowledge, and to avoid losing that knowledge when the older workers retire, companies need to create ways in which this knowledge can be passed down. Programs such as coaching and mentoring, where older workers can share their expertise by being a mentor to the younger workers, encourage sharing across generations. Results of a survey by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that not many older (23%) nor younger workers (21%) said that they would be uncomfortable working with someone of a different generation.
- **Policies and Procedures:** What drives people to be happy at work varies among the generations. For example, a study by DBM found that 31% of mature workers tend to prefer more flexible work hours, so this may be a beneficial management practice for businesses employing older adults.³

Sources*:

<http://www.hr.com/hrcom/index.cfm/5/9034F0B2-240B-4317-AFE859954D34BDB0>
<http://www.hr.com/hrcom/index.cfm/2/3FC6DFBE-F7BA-11D4-9ABA009027E0248F>
<http://www.hr.com/hrcom/index.cfm/25/B3C6D287-44CC-4678-85CEC0D933811326>

*Available to HR.com members

IaCAG has been working actively with prominent regional businesses to create further awareness of this and other issues concerning management of an aging workforce and consumer base.

Visit our website at <http://www.iacag.org> for more information on other aging issues

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