Motivating the Generations:
Economic and Educational Influences

Wade Herley
University of South Dakota

This paper examines the various generations that include the greatest generation, the baby-boomers, generation X, and generation Y. The research encompasses many motivational elements that each generation covets, rejects, or shares. These generations are at different stages in life and each plays a vital role within our society. The workforce has become a melting pot of generational influences that produce a unique and complex dynamic that economic entities and educational institutions must decipher.

Age is an important factor within our society. The times we live in have a direct effect on who we are and who we will be. In fact, age influences our lives so much we categorize people into generations. Currently there are four: (1) the Veterans; (2) the Baby-Boomers; (3) the Generation Xers; and (4) the Millenials or Generation Y. The business world's most important resource is the people who work for them, and that workforce consists of these four generations. The key to success in the future will be the ability to motivate across the different generations. This paper will illustrate the importance of understanding the differences and similarities between generations. Such understanding will help employee output and help attract the best of the best from the younger generations.

The Veterans

The Veterans were born from 1926 to 1944. According to Fredrickson (2003) the assets of this group are stability, orientation to detail, loyalty, and hard work. Fredrickson (2003) also states some liabilities: difficulty with ambiguity, reluctant to buck the system, uncomfortable with conflict, and reluctant to say they disagree. This is the generation that went to work many years ago expecting to spend the last years of their careers with the considerable power and privileges their superiors had been given. According to Foner (1984), this places the Veterans and the younger generations at odds, "The young are bursting with envy and resentment or at least ambivalent toward the old in control" (p.29). This is the generation with the greatest amount of experience, and once they retire they take that experience with them.

The Veterans are people who grew-up during some uncertain times. They experienced the effects of the Great Depression and most had firsthand experience with World War II. These are experiences that have left lasting marks on this generation. South Dakota's very own Tom Brokaw even has a book dedicated to this generation, <u>*The Greatest Generation*</u>. According to Brokaw (1998), "They came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America", and "I am in awe of them". American became a world power after World War II and has never looked back as it stands as the world's lone superpower today. According to Brokaw (1998), the foundation for America today was laid by this generation.

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), the Veterans core values are: dedication/sacrifice; hard work; conformity; law and order; respect for authority; patience; delayed reward; duty before pleasure; adherence to rules; and honor. This generation is America's measuring stick, and they set the standard high. Our family values and work ethic come directly from this generation. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) also state that they account for 25 percent of our workforce. Examples of leaders from this workforce are Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, Mary Kay Ash, Lou Gerstner, and Warren Buffett.

This generation grew-up during some pivotal points in American and World history: 1929, the Stock Market crashed; 1931, the Star Spangled Banner became national anthem; 1932, FDR was elected; 1933, The Dust Bowl; 1934, Social Security; 1937, Hilter invaded Austria; 1940, United States prepared for war; 1941, Pearl Harbor; 1941, United States entered World War II; 1944, D-Day in Normandy; 1945, FDR died; 1945, Victory in Europe and Japan; and 1950, the Korean War. Cultural memorabilia that marked this era included Mickey Mouse, Flash Gordon, The Golden Era of Radio, Wheaties, Charlie McCarthy, Tarzan, Jukeboxes, Blondie, and The Lone Ranger. The heroes of the day were Superman, FDR, MacArthur, Patton, Montgomery, Halsey, Eisenhower, and Winston Churchill, Audie Murphy, Joe Foss, Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio.

Those of the Veteran era are conservative in many ways. They are frugal with their money and avoid risk at just about any cost. This is a direct reaction of having dealt with crooked banks and an economy that could put them out at a moment's notice without money or hope. The times were uncertain and so was the future. Any amount of certainty or stability was grasp onto firmly. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) point out the following:

> the power and influence of the World War II generation has just begun to
> ebb. Their influence in the workplace will likely remain for decades, long

after they have retired and even died off. The hierarchical method of running a

business was uniquely suited to armies and manufacturing. It worked best to

have the brains at the top, in the executive ranks, and the brawn on the bottom,

on the front lines. Top management, the generals, made the important

decisions and passed them down the chain of command, where they were

carried out without comment, respectfully and thoroughly (43).

The liabilities of this generation include: inept with ambiguity and change; reluctant to buck the system; uncomfortable with conflict; and reticent when they disagree. Veterans tend to get satisfaction in the work, although the satisfaction tends to come from doing a job well, rather than from seeing extraordinary meaning in it. They want security and stability. The best place to find those qualities is in big companies and the government.

The Baby Boomers

According to Fredrickson (2003), the Baby Boomers were born between 1944 and 1964. Their assets are that they are service oriented; driven; willing to go the extra mile; good at relationships; want to please; and good team players. Their liabilities are that they are not naturally budget-minded; uncomfortable with conflict; reluctant to go against peers; may put process ahead of results; overly sensitive to feedback; judgmental of those who see things differently; and self-centered.

Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1998) indicate this was the first generation in which child-rearing was a hobby and a pleasure rather than an economic necessity and a biological inevitability. The children of the Baby Boomers were healthier, more wanted, and attended to. Their generation's personality was formed by the following events: 1954, McCarthy HCUAA hearings; 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a bus in Alabama; 1957, first nuclear power plant; 1960, birth control pills were introduced; 1960, Kennedy was elected; 1962, Cuban Missile Crisis; 1962 John Glenn circled the earth; 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated; 1965, Vietnam; 1968, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated; 1969, Woodstock; and 1970, Kent State University shootings. The Baby Boomer heroes were; Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John and Jacqueline Kennedy, and John Glenn. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) point out the following:

It was a heady, tumultuous time. But it was not a Golden Age, as some would have us believe. Domestic violence was as prevalent then as now, but it went unreported. People with problems had few places to turn. Unhappiness was kept secret. Racist and sexist jokes were the norm, the handicapped were sometimes treated maliciously, and the retarded were often warehoused. The few gays who chose to come out of the closet became targets of derision and violence. (66)

This was a time when fallout shelters were being built in the basement and people talked of World War III. This is also the time when Laugh-In, The Ed Sullivan Show, and poodle skirts were popular. Extreme contrasts were at work influencing the Baby Boomers. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) explain the rift that was placed between the Veterans and the Boomers as a result of the Vietnam conflict, which caused many young people to question the integrity of leaders. Boomers who fought in the conflict returned home and never really understood what they had fought for and why they had sacrificed so much. It seemed as though nothing had been accomplished even though some paid the ultimate price. The distrust in the government that exists to some extent today spawned from this era.

Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) posit the Boomers developed some core values from their upbringing and their surroundings: optimism, team orientation, personal gratification, health and wellness, personal growth, youth, work, and involvement. They also began redefining roles, searching for more fulfilling relationships, seeking immediate gratification, and manipulating the rules to meet their needs. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) state the following:

Boomers are very firm about their sense of individuality and not being a part of a predictable, statistical group, Boomers are Boomers by virtue of one indelible fact: They experienced the same growing pains and forces, were preached to by the same geography-spanning media, and understood the impact these same said forces have had on others in their cohort group. (71-72)

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), Boomers work in all types of organizations, the key being opportunity. They are the generation that helped the self-help book segment explode, and pushed night class enrollment up 40 percent. They prefer democratic, humane, and casual environments, but can be found scattered throughout industries. Boomers

tend to work well in the service industry because they are good at reading people and great at making the customer happy.

Generation X

Dennis Miller, the popular comedian, had something like this to say about Gen X: It's no wonder Xers are angst-ridden and rudderless. They feel America's greatness has passed. They got to the cocktail party twenty minutes too late, and all that's left are those little wieners and a half-empty bottle of Zima.

Gen Xer's were born between 1964 and 1980. Fredrickson (2003) states that their assets are adaptability, techno-literatcy, independence, they are unintimidated by authority, and creative. Their liabilities are impatience, poor people skills, inexperience, and cynicism. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) state Generation X didn't really register on the map until recently because of the long shadow left by the Boomers. The number are about seventy-six million Boomers to the Gen X's fifty-one million. Members of the other generations, especially the Boomers, decided the Xers were not the rescuers the previous generations had been. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) point out the following:

> Gen X's collective psyche was to be shaped by a survivor mentality and can
> be summed up by the question, "Just tell me, is this going to be on the test?"
> It's a more important question than it seems at first. Xer critics see that
> sentiment as a sign these kids don't have the right stuff, don't care about the
> larger picture, and are only concerned about themselves. It is an inaccurate or
> at least simplistic critique. This generation has developed an almost myopic
> concern with survival, both economic and psychological. The question really
> means, "What does this have to do with my survival?" They sensed early that
> no one was going to hand-hold them, so they must take care of themselves.
> That single question signals a very different agenda to the teacher, parent,
> professor, or boss. Minimize it as a signifier of slacker ennui, and you miss
> the message and a critical part of this gen's heartbeat. (95)

Furthermore, according to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), these are some of the influential events that effected Gen Xers: 1970, Women's Liberation protest; 1972, Arab terrorists at Munich Olympics; 1973, Watergate scandal; 1973, Energy crisis began; 1976, Tandy and Apple PCs;

1979, Three Mile Island nuclear reactor nears meltdown; 1979, Massive corporate layoffs; 1980, John Lennon shot and killed; 1986, Challenger disaster; 1987, Stock Market crash, 1988 Terrorist bomb blew up flight 103 over Lockerbie; 1989, Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill; 1989, Fall of Berlin Wall; 1991, Operation Desert Storm; and 1992, Rodney King beating videotaped, and Los Angeles riots. Generation X's heroes list is a short one, none. Gen Xers also have issues with the media. The media had thrust the Boomers into the spotlight and generously created new nicknames for them such as the Beat Generation or Yuppies. The last thing the Gen Xers wanted was a label, especially if it came from the Boomers.

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) the Gen Xer's have core values that consist of diversity, thinking globally, balance, technoliteracy, fun, informality, self-reliance, and pragmatism. This group were children when it was unpopular to be one. The latchkey child was born. It was a time when the youth of America had to learn things on their own. Gen X had to be self-reliant and they bring that with them to the workforce. The real difference that sets them apart from the previous generations was that a job is just a job and that there was a life outside of work. Gen Xer's grew up watching corporate downsizing and their parents losing their jobs. As the Xer's came of workforce age they became highly adaptable and a sort of nomadic corporate worker, jumping from entry level job to entry level job and laughing at the words "company loyalty". Company loyalty isn't even in the mix for Xer's; all they know is that you have to look out for yourself, because no one is going to do it for you. The step to the next level was real work experience and the jump in internships for graduating seniors (3 percent to a full third) was evidence of this generation's drive for hands-on working knowledge.

The Nexters

According to Fredrickson (2003) Nexters were born between 1980 and 2000. Their assets include collective action, optimism, tenacity, heroic spirit, multitasking capabilities, and technologically savvy. Their liabilities include need for supervision, and inexperience, particularly in difficult people issues. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) indicate that if Gen X is the lost generation, the Nexters are the found generation. This group has the largest diversity of parents yet. Some are Xers and some are Boomers. The age ranges from adolescents to mid-lifers. All the analysis that went into studying the previous generations is being used to mold the Nexters

into a happy, well-educated, and well-adjusted group. That is what the parents' of the Nexter generation wanted, and they got it. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) state the following:

> For the first time in history, kids are the authority. They know far more than their parents about one of the basics. There aren't just the three R's anymore, as in reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, there's a fourth: the Internet. And it's as natural as breathing for Generation Next. So much so they don't even marvel at it much. Sure, in the past there have been things that kids were better at and knew more about than their parents, but not one so all-encompassing as digital technology. It is changing the basic dynamics of families. Today, as always, parents know more about most things; but today, as never before, kids actually know more about technology, and are teaching and coaching their parents. The Boomers who make that choice (to learn the technology) will find they're standing on the edge of a generation gap wider than their worst nightmares. (128)

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) some events that effected the Nexters are the Oklahoma City bombing, schoolyard shootings, technology, over-planned lives, stress, Clinton/Lewinsky, Columbine High School massacre. Some of their core values are optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, sociability, morality, street smarts, and diversity. Some of the Nexters heroes are Michael Jordan, Princess Diana, Mark McGuire, Sammy Sosa, Mother Teresa, Bill Gates, Kerri Strugg, Mia Hamm, Tiger Woods, and Christopher Reeves. This is the group with the greatest amount of exposure to multiculturalism. Zamke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) state the following:

> The next baby boom will be the first generation to seriously question all traditional racial categories. The reason is that many of today's children and teens are of mixed races. The larger share of minorities in the next baby boom means that there is far more inter-action between people of different races than there was for most of the baby-boom generation. Even in more affluent suburbs, schools include an increasingly more diverse population. (137)

The Way They See Things	Veterans	Boomers	Xers	Nexters
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
Work Ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
View of Authority	Respectful	Love/Hate	Unimpressed	Polite

Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999)

The Next Step: Motivation

Benge and Hickey (1984) indicate there are obstacles to motivation: "If management says to workers, 'this is the way we have always done things in this company', it implies that it does not care for the employees as human beings. Instead, management regards them as nothing but cogs in the production machine. One obstacle to motivation is senseless company policies that persist when management lacks the determination to rid the company of them." (78) According to Benge and Hickey (1984), bad supervision and bureaucratic organizational structure are the other two obstacles to motivation. Lack of productivity and motivation occur within the group because of careless organization and direction by management. The real motivator is how the workers (this applies to all generations) truly feel about their jobs. Workers want to be a part of something, they want to feel like a valuable part of the team, and they want to be challenged. They want to be noticed for a job well done, and they want responsibility for what gets done and what doesn't get done. Accountability is a good thing. Managers are responsible for setting their subordinates up for success by clearly defining goals, and know the strengths of the individuals that make up the group.

Benge and Hinkey (1984) point out demotivating conditions can easily appear: Promotion based on favoritism or seniority rather than on ability and accomplishment, Failure to deal with the employees' problems in a timely and constructive manner as they arise, Encouraging employees to develop more efficient methods of performing their jobs and then using that information to cut out jobs, Implementing a highly authoritarian style of management that induces tension and distrust, Pay increases that come automatically with time and not effectiveness. (89-90)

Related to motivating employees, Benge and Hinkey (1984) lay out some basic principles:

Start by recognizing peoples strengths, Don't ignore weaknesses, Avoid treating subordinates like children, Determine the best way to deal with each specific situation, you needn't always be docile or conciliatory, When you must disapprove or correct your employees, always aim at their behavior, never at them as persons, Instead of blaming a person when something goes wrong, enlist the workers' cooperation in solving the problem, Always be honest, trustworthy, and straightforward, but don't always act the same in your dealings with subordinates. People's actions are strongly affected by their emotions, which vary with each individual. (92)

Connellan (1978) states that motivation is more of a behavior problem. Some workers seem unmotivated because their behavior is not what is expected. An employee that comes in late is considered unmotivated, but the real problem is the employee's behavior. In order to motivate the employees one must alter their behavior to something that is more toward the established norms of the company.

Connellan (1978) posits Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow has a type of needs pyramid. The base or foundation represents physiological needs like food and water. These are things we absolutely, above all else must have for survival before we can move to the next level in the needs pyramid. The second level is safety and security. The third level is the social or sense of belonging level. The fourth is ego. The fifth and final level is the self-fulfillment level, or the "be all you can be" level. Maslow's needs theory directly relates to Connellan's position on changing behavior equaling motivation. The higher levels of Maslow's pyramid can be manipulated to an extent, the foundation cannot.

Pacetta (1994) focuses on the passion within the leadership to motivate. He states "Are you a manager or a leader? There's a difference, a big difference" (53). "Most businesses are over-managed and under-led. That's why they get into trouble. There's got to be a balance. Right now, in most places, leaders aren't particularly welcome. They're looked on as flaky and unpredictable" (53). Pacetta (1994) also states that leadership is closer to art than science, making it hard to teach, and define. It begins with a genuine respect for people. You must have the ability to see things from others perspectives, in other words, put yourself in their shoes.

According to Pacetta (1994) he can't exactly define leadership, but his definitely knows it when he sees it. He does allude to some characteristics of a leader:

> High energy, vision, relentless pursuit of goals, careful planning, risk taking,
> highly focused, effective listening ability, compassion, perceptiveness,
> coaching and motivational skills, adaptability, creativity, fairness, toughness,
> loyalty, honesty, articulateness, decisiveness, willing to share power and
> responsibility, ready to recognize the contributions of others, willing to give
> quick feedback, and able to serve as a positive role model. (69)

A leader needs to be a manager and a leader. A leader must develop teamwork within the group to motivate.

Community Banker (July 2002) suggests these techniques for managing across the generations: For managing seniors you must assert your authority and do it with respect. Give them a safe work environment and benefit from their vast experience and knowledge. When they retire try and keep them on part-time as consultants and coaches. Managing the Baby Boomers moves into facilitating results. Boomers seek flexibility, authority, and challenges, so give it to them. Generation X requires a higher level of communication and they want credit when credit is due for a job well done. Push them but also reward them. Nexters or Echo Boomers are the newest generation in the workforce, get to know them and see what they can do. They need roles that will find their limits, and they need speed, customization, and interactivity. Overall you need to "be flexible, give people the benefit of the doubt, and don't forget the little things"(48).

Bakasta and Lea (March 2000) state that research done on volunteer workers show what motivates people without the effects or involvement of money. The people they worked with seemed to have a large affect on motivation. People want to work with people they like and get alone with. Independence was also important to people who volunteer. They want an opportunity to at least try their way. The quality of the organization was another motivating factor. Volunteers want to work for a good organization; one that is really helping to get something accomplished. Last but not least, volunteers want variety. This study also showed that Veterans get the most satisfaction out of volunteer work and are the easiest to motivate for it.

Douville (EAP Association Exchange, Sept-Oct 2001) suggests that one must keep in mind that even though we are dealing with different generations and each generation shares some experiences and values, we must remember that we are still dealing with individuals. These individuals' are just that, individual. They may be linked by a common bond of a certain generation, but a cookie cutter approach should not be taken. Each person needs to be handled

differently because every person is different. A good path to follow to understanding these different generations and these individuals is the path that starts with understanding yourself. Your foundation for understanding other generations should start with understanding your generation, and your values, and your influences.

Stoneman (American Demographics, May 1998) indicates that every generation is trying to achieve what they perceive as the American Dream. Collectively it comes across as a goal to achieve a level of comfort and security for a somewhat uncertain future. The Veterans are looking to covert assets and make their money last as long as they do. The Boomers are striving for early retirement and time for more personal fulfillment. The Xers are trying to take things into their own hands. They want to be entrepreneurs. They want to do things their way on their terms.

Zemke , Raines, and Filipczak (1999) point out not all organizations are struggling with generational issues. Some organizations have found ways to benefit from the generational diversity within their workforce. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) posit the following:

There are two keys to creating a successful intergenerational workforce, aggressive communication and difference deployment. In aggressive communication, general conflicts and potential conflicts are anticipated and surfaced. General differences are based primarily on unarticulated assumptions and unconscious criteria; therefore, surfacing them takes a giant step toward solving them. The energy of behind-the-back complaining, passive-aggressive behavior, and open hostility is re-channeled to projects that can profit from different points of view, particularly the fresh perspectives of the young and the wisdom of the experience. Difference Deployment is, simply, the tactical use of employees with different backgrounds, experiences, skills, and viewpoints to strengthen project teams, customer contact functions, and, at times, whole departments and units. (153-154)

Having balanced groups, rather than what the norm currently is of the perfect employee, is the best way to have your team ready to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) indicate each generation needs to be managed differently - just like every person needs to be managed differently. This customized management sounds like it might border on the impossible, but in reality we deal with different people every day. The real difference is how well we know them. The importance of getting to know the people

you lead and manage cannot be over stated. It takes quite a commitment to get to know your subordinates both professionally and personally.

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) motivating the Veterans, the Boomers, the Xers, and the Nexters all begins with understanding your own generation and attempting to know theirs. Understanding what influenced them can help you to understand their perspectives and their views. Each generation seems to push away from its predecessor. The Boomers rebelled against the Veterans. The Xers rebelled against the Boomers. The most interesting of all the workplace generation mixing is occurring right now. No one really knows what to expect from the Xers mixing with the Nexters. The Xers feel about the same for the Nexters as they did for the Boomers. The Xers feel the Nexters received entirely too much attention, just like the Boomers. The Nexters feel the Xers tend to ignore them. These two groups mixing in the workforce looks like a recipe for disaster, but then again, so did the others. Sometimes things just have a way of working out for the better. There will definitely be a give and take on both sides.

Conclusion

When I began the research paper I was surprised at the sheer amount of specific information that exists on the subject of motivation, generations, and how they correlate. The problem that arose from a surplus of information was finding a way to conduct the research and not overload the project.

Some of the information was uninteresting, and some surprised me with the accuracy that it described my generation, the Gen Xers. I could actually read down some of the description lists and match it word for word with my own feelings. Of course, not everything matched, and some of the information I came across was severely dated. The differences between the generations are interesting. The times we grow up in really do affect our values and perspectives.

The part of motivating generations that fascinated me the most, is the balance that is needed to be a leader/manager. Balance plays a large role in everything we do. The old saying "too much of a good thing can be bad" rings true to many things. In today's business world the true leaders/managers are closer to artists than any other quantity. They bring intangibles to the table that cannot be taught or quantified. They cannot be purchased or sold in little packages. They are learned through life lessons, a thirst for knowledge, and a commitment to know the people they are leading. Together these things allow us to understand those around us better. The

true leaders/managers, of which there are very few, bring with them a whole new level of understanding that goes beyond empathy. They can place themselves in another person's shoes. They can feel how that person feels.

It will be interesting to see just how the Gen Xers and the Nexters get along together as they slowly take over the reins from the Veterans and, eventually, the Baby Boomers. The makings of a volatile climate seem to be there, but that is what they said before about other generations, and so far things have worked out pretty well. Only time will tell how the Xers and Nexters will do. There is one certainty: just as they get comfortable, the next generation will be along to take their place as the generation that has gone awry - the generation that will be the end of us all, or so it will seem.

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