

Thinking About Generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y at Work

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Abstract

This is a creative exploration of new ways of framing generational change within the workforce. First, common approaches to understanding generations within business literature are reviewed. Second, several 'tools for thinking' are introduced and applied to the concept of generations at work. Third, Generation Y is looked at in more detail through a summary of current business literature, refined by the author's consulting experience and reframed by the proceeding tools for thinking about generations. Finally, the practical orientation of this article is summarised with guidelines for what a workplace manager can do to address generational issues within their workforce.

Why Generations?

*"Looking at the future disturbs the present."
Gaston Berger*

Why do today's managers need to start thinking about tomorrow's workers? Because they'll be vastly different from today's workers. And, in fact, today's workers may not be quite what they used to be either, if they are looked at closely.

Generational change has evolved to become a regular cultural discussion in Western societies. Social scientists kicked off the terminology during the 1950's and 1960's and marketing strategists really got the ball rolling on researching and profiling generations through the 1970's and 1980's. In the 1990's it became common material for journalists and other cultural commentators to address the generational issue in everything from off-handed comments, full length feature articles through to book length treatises. Today, in the 21st Century, the heightened awareness of generational cultural differences has attracted several of this author's client organisations to ask for a summary of what it is all about: to make sense of the business literature on the topic. Hence, this article.

Why, exactly, are people discussing generations? Scanning the business literature a whole host of reasons emerge. Some of them, in no particular order, are:

- A new economy – In a rapidly globalising world economy new challenges and competencies are required. Increasingly western countries are operating in a knowledge economy of sorts, in a great diversity of markets with an ever expanding diversity of consumer segments. Different generations inhabit these markets and appear more or less well equipped for working in a knowledge economy;
- New technology – Underpinning the globalising economy are advances in technology in seemingly all facets of life. In short, new technology is prompting new ways of working and living, and whole new categories of products and services are both supplied and demanded. Different generations seem to want different things and appear to adapt better or worse to the changes technology brings;

- The looming boomer retirement – The generation that has done the most, in an obvious way, to build this new global economy is the ‘Baby Boomer’ generation (we’ll cover definitions later). The Boomer generation has worked hard and is now starting to look at retirement. A huge segment of the Western world’s workforce is about to move on to greener pastures, taking the knowledge and experience gained with them. While there are already many real consequences of this, and many potential outcomes, the bottom line issue for organisations is a lack of talent. Increasingly there are less qualified, competent and experienced people to do the work that organisations require;
- New kids on the block – Over the past couple of years a new generation of talent, Gen Y, have begun entering the workforce and making their presence felt. To many older generations they’re an enigma, both as workers and as consumers. Apparently harder to reach, harder to motivate and generally hard to understand, Gen Y are a significant age cohort that will increasingly require special attention to be understood, worked with and marketed to;
- Inter-generational tensions – With Gen Y entering the workforce, the inter-generational dialogue became more complex. Western countries now have around four quite distinct generations working, in many cases, side-by-side. The differences between the generations often led to an obvious ‘gap.’ Generational gaps, argue many commentators, result in generational tensions in the workplace. Today’s managers need to find ways of helping the different generations to work together otherwise their organisations may fail to work; and,
- Global challenges – Economic globalisation is arriving at the same time as global issues and problems: environmental concerns, security fears, wide-spread inequality, the list goes on. The question facing organisations today is what will the new workforce and consumer base think of these issues? How will different generations react to these world wide changes, and what will they do in response? – in working choices and in product and service choices.

The concepts of generations and generational change are increasingly being seen as a useful way to approach the above issues facing some managers of today – and many managers of a very near tomorrow.

Defining a Generation...

*“Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it,
and wiser than the one that comes after it.”*
George Orwell

So what exactly is a generation? Traditionally, a generation has been arbitrarily defined by birthdates. A legacy of sociological research, each generational age cohort has then been associated with particular world events that, during their formative years, have shaped their collective individual psyches and lead to statements of explanation for their behaviour patterns: consumer choices, working style preferences and the motivations and reasoning that either consciously or sub-consciously are driving them. Reviewing recent business literature on the topic a whole host of categories are outlined as the areas in which a careful reading of birthdates and world events can provide insight into a person’s psychology or a consumers information processing and choice making habits. A summary of these categories is presented below in Figure 1. The meta-categories used for sorting them into different groups will be discussed in more detail later.

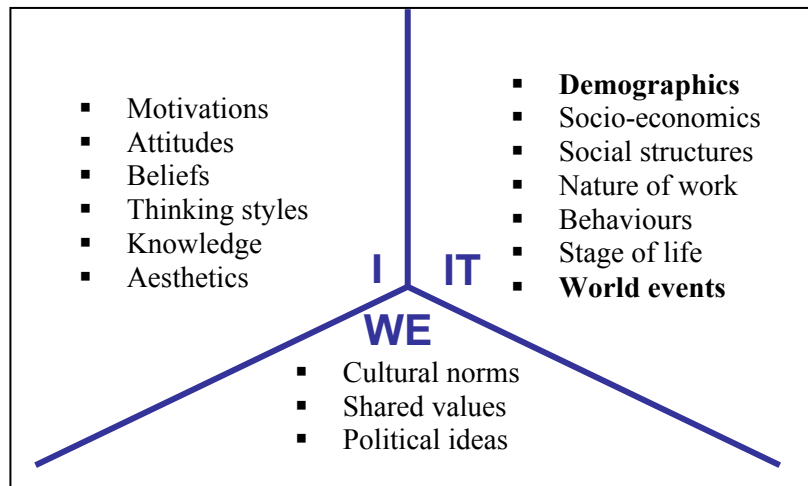


Figure 1: Categories for defining a generation in recent business literature

So what is a reliable definition of a generation? Well, it seems, there isn't one. They're fluid abstractions of reality – stereotypes that help orientate people to a broader perspective that can inform the details of their day-to-day challenges of managing workers and relating to customers of different ages. That said, however, we'll take two conceptions of the age-cohort based definition as a general guide. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (*Australian Social Trends* 2005) offers the following breakdown of generations in Australia:

- Traditionalists – Born before the mid 1940's, make up 20% of the population and are currently aged 59 and over;
- Baby Boomers – Born between 1946 and 1953, they make up 10% of the population and are currently aged between 52 and 58;
- Generation Jones (late Baby Boomers) – Recently sub-sectioned into their own behaviour group, they are born between 1954 and 1965, make up 15% of the population and are currently aged between 39 and 51;
- Generation X – Born between 1965 and 1981 making up 26% of the population and are currently aged between 23 and 39;
- Millennials or Generation Y – Born between 1982 and 2000 they make up 27% of the population and are currently aged between 4 and 22; and finally,
- Tecnodes or Generation Z – Born since 2001 they are 2% of the population and are currently aged 4 years and under.

As a broad and statistically aligned generational categorisation it is a useful backdrop to the following, more commonly used (and the one implied in the rest of this article), age definition of generations in the workforce:

- Boomers – 1946-1964;
- Gen X – 1965-1977; and,
- Gen Y – 1978-1990.

Common Confusions

“Before you go and criticize the younger generation, just remember who raised them.”
Anonymous

No matter what rough dates for generations you work with, there are bigger issues that cloud the conceptual approach to generations in the business literature, and likely, elsewhere. Appreciated by schooled sociologists, here is a list of some ‘common confusions’ that can be readily found in the business literature on generations:

- Ethnicity, socio-economic background, education and other common categories for understanding groups of people still provide crucial insights into their work and consumer behavioral characteristics and will often shed more light on a situation than poorly defined generational stereotypes. Generational concepts are not substitutes for other sociological, human resources, and marketing research, but additions for use when summing up larger profiles of groups of people;
- The concepts of generations you will be familiar with, even in passing, are really only relevant to Western countries. Other cultures will have rather different characteristics. In fact, even different Western, industrialized, nations are likely to display different generational features. So in a globalised world where your managers are working with Gen Y by age cohorts in China and Australia for example, the business literature descriptions will only really be useful in Australia – you’ll need to ask Chinese cultural commentators about the character of any Chinese Gen Y;
- Life cycle issues are often mixed in with generational ideas. ‘This new generation is so bold and foolish’ says the person who forgets that youth, throughout the ages, have been described as bold, foolish and so on. Other life cycle issues such as age 30-40 child rearing issues or age 50-60 retirement and illnesses issues will be faced by every generation and need to be distinguished from broader generational features;
- Different work and place attract different people. It seems simple, but is often forgotten. Different locations of work and types of work will often attract different kinds of people. This means that, in practice, any generational concepts need to be tempered with an understanding of the place and nature of work offered by an organisation; and,
- As we’ll discuss later, people from all age cohorts can adopt the new generation’s ‘wave of societal change.’ Thus a Boomer may be seen to take on Gen Y characteristics and vice versa. In balance to this observation, however, it is important to remember that the ‘new’ generation, by age, personify the changes that are occurring and thus stands out in their adoption and display of the generational characteristics.

Generation Y Contradictions

“We don't see things the way they are. We see things the way we are.”
Talmud

Even with an awareness of the common confusions outlined above, and the other aspects of workers and consumers that are important to understand, contradictions in how generations are described abound. This article is taking a practical focus on the new generation in the workforce, Gen Y, so here are some of the contradictions you will spot if you review a range of articles in recent business literature about generational changes and ways for managers to respond to them:

- Committed or fickle? – Gen Y are variously seen as being ‘highly committed’ to whatever they set their mind to or are described as ‘fickle’ and ‘flighty’: the generation that personifies attention deficiency disorders;
- Civic minded or ‘all about the money’? – Gen Y are seen as both highly altruistic and idealistic, choosing what products and services they buy, and organisations they want to work for, based on

perceptions of issues like environmental impacts, corporate governance, and Western standards of labor rights for foreign factory workers. On the other hand, they are also described as being solely motivated by the money – offer them more and they'll switch loyalties before you can get your HR department to calculate their current employment benefits;

- High self-esteem or highest rates of self-esteem issues? – Gen Y are described by different business culture and human resource management commentators as having self-esteem levels that border on outright arrogance, and yet, it is commonly known that this generation is afflicted with more mental illnesses, crises of self-esteem as expressed in suicide rates and the like;
- Ladder climbers or disregard of hierarchy? – Gen Y are seen as 'go getters,' keen to 'climb the corporate ladder' for the rewards and power, and yet apparently they disregard hierarchy, its norms of authority, respect and due rewards;
- All about relationships or 'all about me'? – Strategies for managing Gen Y employees often emphasise that they are all about quality relationships where they can collaborate, contribute and develop, but the next consultant's strategy will often emphasise that for Gen Y 'its all about me' and what I get, want and can be seen to be doing;
- Nice, polite and respectful or bold, bratty and expectant? – In terms of character in the workplace Gen Y have been depicted as either nice, polite and respectful as a default disposition or bold, bratty and expectant; and,
- Dislike online advertising or are more easily reached there? – The above mentioned contradictory descriptions of Gen Y often lead to contradicting strategies for marketing to them. Different consultants, for example, will recommend either investing in online advertising because that's the easiest way to 'reach them where they are,' or to avoid it as Gen Y find it annoying.

With these, and many more possible contradictions spread throughout the business literature on generations, the average manager conducting a review to gain insight into how to deal with their talent has every right to be confused and it should be expected that such information will only result in confused strategies with little assurance of success. A better way of thinking about these contradictory 'reports from the field' is obviously required.

Tools for Thinking About Generations

These difficulties with defining, understanding and applying the generational stereotypes explain the call from many of today's managers for a more sophisticated frame of reference for approaching generational issues. Two tools for thinking that can be helpful are built on two insights: a) generations are usefully considered as general 'waves of societal change,' and, b) there are 'multiple dimensions' to generational change.

Generations as Waves of Change

*"Every generation is convinced there has been a deplorable breakdown of manners."
Byron Dobell*

One way of approaching the loose definitions of generations that are put forward is to consider generational descriptions as depictions of general 'waves' of societal change. General waves of societal change encompass the reality that anyone can make the same changes and the fact that it is the existing working and consuming generations that have driven the creation of the changes in the first place! New generations 'personify' the changes more readily, putting their unique 'spin' on the adoption of them as 'second nature,' but others can also make the transition, if, however, with a little more effort.

Each new generation grows into the emerging changes more easily than other generations because they generally occur during their ‘formative years’ where they are rapidly changing quite naturally. Society, through its institutions, laws and norms, demonstrates an understanding and expresses support for this age of ‘growing up.’ In contrast, older generations, while they are producing the changes in general, are likely to find it harder to adapt to them as they haven’t ‘grown up with them’ like the new generation has. Their ‘spin’ on the adoption of the changes are thus often seen as characterised by a little difficulty in transition, or slightly less competence on the whole in comparison to those ‘born into’ the changes.

Thinking about generations as waves of societal change leads to an important insight: each new wave of change adds to the previous ones, they don’t replace them: it’s ‘transcend and include’ – the old plus the new, if, with a few modifications of the old along the way.

Multiple Dimensions of Generational Change

“Theory is extremely useful, because your theory determines what you can see.”
Albert Einstein

Thinking about the broad waves of societal changes represented by different generations as they enter their 20’s still leaves many questions. One of the core problems for any manager looking closely across a large market place, or a large organisation, is that the differences *within* generations are as large as those *between* generations. Compounding this complexity is the observation, based on this author’s experience, that each generation see the others differently. So a Gen Y employee and Boomer employee could easily describe the same Gen X employee quite differently. Not only that, but a second Gen Y employee may describe the Gen X employee less like their age cohort has and more like their parental age cohort Boomer employee has. What is going on here? And how can managers wrap their mind around these differences in a bigger picture?

The key insight, for this author, is to recognise that inter-generational conflict and dialogue, because generations represent general waves of societal change, happens *within* people as well as *between* people. This invites new approaches to understanding generational change on an individual level: or where ‘the rubber hits the road’ so to speak. It can be accommodated through thinking about an employee or consumers adaptation to different waves of societal generational change in different dimensions in their life. These dimensions are outlined below in Figure 2.

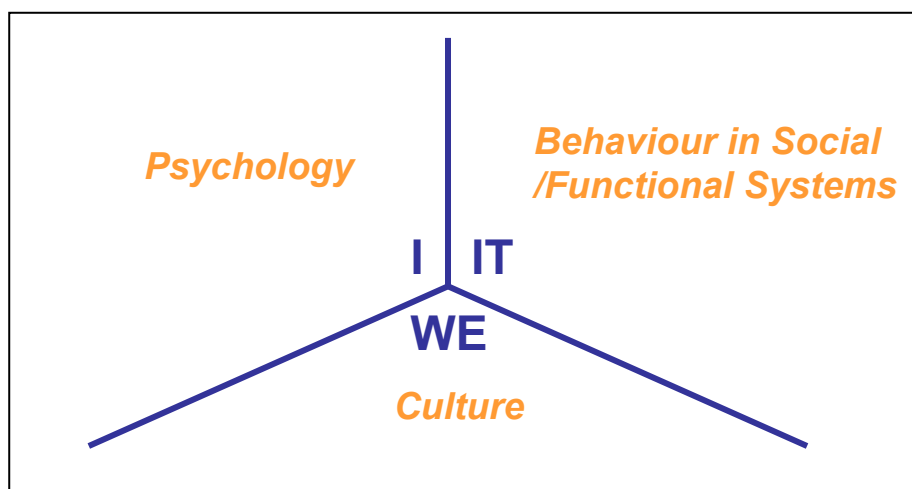


Figure 2: Dimensions for thinking about characteristics of generations

The same categories were used in Figure 1 to group the different features of generational descriptions. The categories are drawn from a long tradition of philosophers stretching back to the days of Plato and Socrates with the ideas of the ‘good, the beautiful and the true.’ Here, they have been applied using questions to grant access to different dimensions of generational features:

- Psychology – What’s meaningful, beautiful, and personally important?
- Behaviour in Social/functional Systems – What’s true, factual and observable?
- Culture – What’s good, right and just?

Applying The Tools For Thinking

With these tools for thinking – seeing generational change as general waves of societal change, and recognising different dimensions of change, and the insights these both come from and lead to – we can now provide an example of a more detailed application of them to current workforce issues.

Dimensions Within Generations At Work

“I only work at things worth failing at.”
Fred Kofman

The following Table 1 outlines a feature from each dimension for the three main workforce generations in Australia now and into the near term future: Boomer, Gen X and Gen Y. Seeing these descriptions as waves of change allows for the accommodation of the following example of a modern manager:

‘Successful in his career, financially secure and with the position to afford sufficient freedom, he is now working for meaning. He is looking for each project, each new product, to really offer something useful to the world, the company and those who work to bring it to fruition. Reflecting on his situation, he is happy that he has finally been accorded the position of authority – recognition for his loyalty to the company through two decades of dedication. His preferred mode of operating now, after completing an MBA mid way through his career, is well defined cross-functional teams. The approach has meant he not only achieved recognition for commitment, but for also achieving better results through his management of work breakdown and integration of functions.’

	I - Motivation	WE – Cultural Respect	IT – Work Method
Boomer	Working for security	Organisational culture respects commitment and longevity based rewards (the gold watch, long service leave, the super package etc)	The Institution - silos
Gen X	Working for freedom	Organisational culture respects acknowledgement and merit based rewards (financial, prizes, public recognition etc)	Functional groups - teams
Gen Y	Working for meaning	Organisational culture respects collaboration and competence based rewards (training opportunities, direct personalised feedback, negotiated benefits)	Relational networks – interest groups

Table 1: Dimensions within generations at work

Generational Changes Within a Person At Work

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The above outlined character example of a late career manager fits a unique profile within the three dimensions of generational change. The motivation is characteristic Gen Y, the mode of operation Gen X and the culture of values, as with the age cohort described, Boomer in preference. In Figure 3 below a range of other common mixes, or typologies, of generation features are outlined. A brief characteristic description for each is provided following.

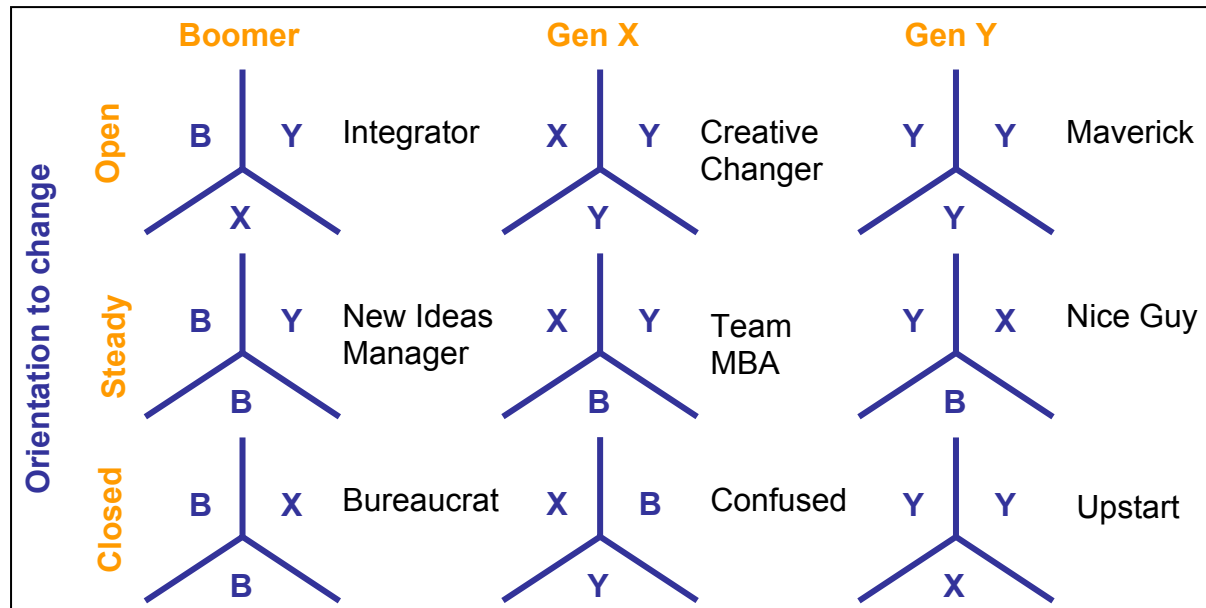


Figure 3: Some common typology profiles of generational change within individuals at work

Open

Integrator – A successful entrepreneurial manager who has solid personal discipline, and flexible cultural orientation and an up-to-date competence in operational matters.

Creative Changer – Personally fighting for new ways, always – sometimes good, sometimes missing the complexity of thinking required to adequately manage the operations and cultural norms.

Maverick – A bold innovator who sees straight past old hierarchies and ways of doing things to new functions and methods of efficient and effective operations and cultural norms while not being actively anti-hierarchy.

Steady

New Ideas Manager – Someone who is trying to stay up to date with the external world, but with old thinking – positively regarded, but hamstrung with practical details.

Team MBA – Has learnt from ‘new ideas manager’ about case studies of ‘adaptor’ so has a Boomer cultural preference which fits well with senior management.

Nice Guy – Integrating to get along and smoothly works within existing hierarchies towards their aspirations.

Closed

Bureaucrat – Established (commonly) middle management – updated in the 80's to Gen-X but 'nothing new thanks.'

Confused – Learnt early, never got updated on new technology beyond what was mandatory, but is following popular culture and feeling highly disjointed and ineffective as a result.

Apathetic Upstart – Has bright ideas, but is actively anti-hierarchy and struggles to integrate with surrounding cultures of operation enough to be a smoothly effective contributor.

Insights for Managers

While the above generational change profiles at the individual level have not been based on objective research, they are based on the personal experience of the author in dealing with these issues within educational and organisational contexts. Managers may find some of the typologies relevant and/or other combinations of the three generational waves of change more appropriate within their organisational reality.

The primary value of using this 'tool for thinking' about generational change is to recognise the complexity of societal change as it plays out for individual employees. This can be useful as:

1. A general reminder to think with more sophistication about the stereotypes we apply to age groups and how we translate these into practical situations with individuals;
2. When assessing, for example, the suitability of talent for a certain position, ensuring a 'functional fit' between the work requirements and the characteristics of the potential employee; and/or,
3. In designing a survey, say, of current employees and analysing the results in a process of developing more appropriate strategic workforce management strategies.

Many other applications, of course, are possible.

Trends of Generational Change

"The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible – and achieve it, generation after generation."
Pearl S. Buck

Having looked at some of the complexity, at the individual level of generational changes, it is important to remember the general utility of generational descriptions is in their big picture stereotyping. Reviewing the vast body of business literature on generational changes and generational differences, particularly between Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y, it is possible to discern some consistencies in the way these waves of change have unfolded in the domains of employees and consumers. Using the multiple dimensions outlined in Figures 1 and 2, and the guiding questions mentioned above, three core trends of generational change can be seen in Western society, with both 'good news' and 'bad news' styled consequences:

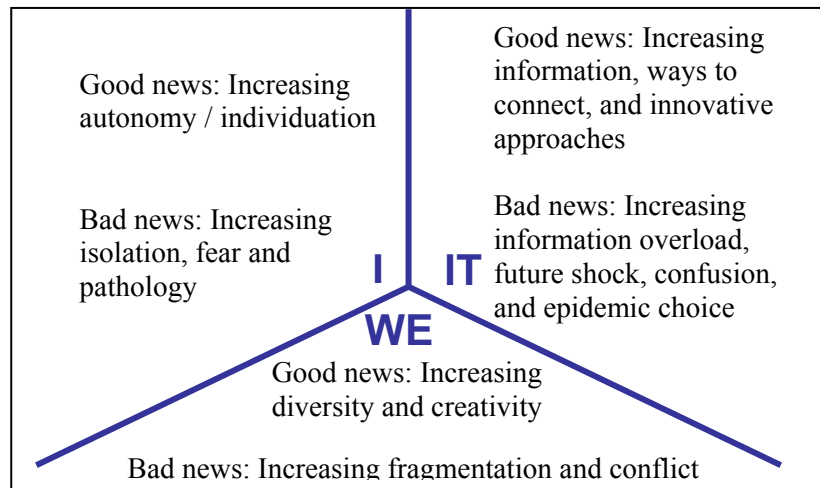


Figure 4: The good and bad news of three trends of generational change

New Responses to Generational Trends

“The age of reason has ended, and now we must organize around chaos.”
Watts Wacker, CEO, First Matter

With this high level overview, and keeping the more detailed individual generational typology in mind, the following ‘strategies of response’ have been summarised from recent business literature on the topics of Gen X and Gen Y as both employees and consumers.

	General	HR	Management	Marketing
I	Personalised, highly flexible solutions	Tailored contracts = contract management for organisation	Accessibility to, yet relative autonomy from, management	Niche and meta messages and strategies
WE	Integrative /synthesising and co-creative emergent cultural norms	Hiring for fit, diversity, be okay with high maintenance & fluid connections	Cultural, values, negotiation and coaching skills required	Responsive /interactive, authentic relationship building
IT	Provide meaningful, evolving pathways /roadmaps, ‘meta-data’	Tailored or varied styles of as-needed education, training, mentoring and learning experiences	Competence based management – emphasis on knowledge networks	Values based marketing/PR that accounts for whole/balanced picture of org, market & customer

Table 2: General strategies of response to trends of generational change

The central message of these guidelines for responding to the most recent manifestations of the societal waves of generational change is that *‘complexity requires flexibility.’*

Generation Y - Up Close & Personal

“That which seems the height of absurdity in one generation often becomes the height of wisdom in the next.”

John Stuart Mill

The newest wave of generational change, that personified by Gen Y, is beginning to be felt in workplaces, market bases and throughout society generally as Gen Y, and the changes they represent, ‘come of age,’ so to speak, for all of us in Western societies. These changes, and how to deal with them, are what is of most concern in current business literature on generations. A summary of the available information on the topic, aided by interpretation through the above ‘tools for thinking about generations’ and refined through this author’s experience with designing organisational response strategies, follows.

The summary of characteristics of the new and a sampling of example response strategies are organised in the three dimensions outlined above: psychological, cultural and behavior in systems. It is important to note that the characteristics for each dimension are cast in an individual light. That is, how an individual will relate to personal psychological issues, cultural matters and operational conditions and forms. The example response strategies are brief and are intended to serve as ‘guideline principles’ for more detailed strategy design based on a deeper appreciation of an organisation’s operational context and position requirements and individual employee generational typologies.

Character Highlights	Example Response Strategies
▪ Authenticity – Personal integrity, someone-I-know-credibility and personal principles are front and center; ▪ Meaning – Need reasoning of ‘why’ for any activity; seeking to find work meaningful and providing meaningful things to others; ▪ Independence – <i>Expect</i> creative freedom; rights equal to responsibilities in work; and, ▪ Personalisation – Life-style aspect to every work, social and consumer choice. Used to getting tailored solutions through an interactive/transactional approach.	▪ Marketing – Values and emotional design – To messages, products and interaction with company; ▪ Management – Reasoning upfront and accessible – Lead with rationale of outcomes, personalise if possible, and be open to discuss and reinterpret; ▪ Management – Make Space – For creative reflection and in-house innovation; provide formal, clear lines of responsibility and rights; and, ▪ Management – Employee centred approach – Negotiating tailored benefits for performance; personal, specific feedback; emphasise life-style/career path benefits.

Table 3: New “I” - “I” – Psychology

Character Highlights	Example Response Strategies
▪ Global – Thinking, researching, buying and exploring globally via the internet and media; often justify decisions within global context; TBL+ is important; ▪ Networked – Natural ‘P2P’ approach to respecting other’s competence, work collaborations, learning environments, social life and product/service information; and,	▪ Marketing – Respect the decision context – Global trends and issues matter, yet so do global/local differentiations and whole of company supply chain perception; ▪ Marketing – Friends/personal experience is king – Experiential, life-style and user + social benefits in communications; grass roots and buzz marketing approaches; ▪ Management – Constant collaboration –

▪ Tolerance – The ethnic, sub-cultural, physiological, religious etc kinds are expected. Full stop.	Support knowledge networks (inside and outside of organisation) and collaborative work approach; and, ▪ HR – Active diversity – Recruit to reflect social environment and customer mix.
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Table 4: New “I” - “WE” – Culture

Character Highlights	Example Response Strategies
▪ Flex-Flow – Intuitive with technology; capable multi-skillers; enjoy creative tension of parallel projects; ▪ Both/And – See whole-of-system: want this reflected in ‘wants’ (a little of everything), work (diverse, multi-functional), and decision making (systemic impacts and execution implications); and, ▪ Immediacy – ‘Just-in-time’ strategic approach to thinking, learning and communicating; expect efficiency, timing and relevance (especially with technology, information and knowledge management); automated processes wherever possible – especially repetitive tasks.	▪ Management – Vary work tasks/patterns – Variety is the spice of interest and feeds commitment; training and experience are key rewards; ▪ Management – Need unfettered access to information and people – To inform thinking, task meaningfulness, and decision making; ▪ HR – Train them to keep them – Cohort tailored, on-demand, training can be used as reward for performance within <i>mentor management</i> approach; and, ▪ Management – Open to innovation – must actively encourage ideas for technological and process efficiency.

Table 5: New “I” - “IT” – Behaviour in Systems

In Your Situation

“If you're certain you're right ...you shouldn't be afraid to include opposite voices at your table.”
Paul O'Neill

Here are some general recommendations for managers approaching generational issues within an organisation. First, carefully assess your workplace or marketplace *before* developing any strategies and enacting them. It is advisable, as with most strategic initiatives, to run experimental testing of the strategies on a small scale to check that the thinking behind them usefully reflects the reality of the situation being addressed. Second, use frameworks for understanding the complexity of the issues that are up to the task. Although not brought to the foreground within the above text, the ‘tools for thinking about generations’ in this article have come from:

- **Spiral Dynamics** (see www.spiraldynamics.org), providing insight into levels of personal values changes and cultural worldviews;
- **Integral Theory** (see www.integralinstitute.org) providing useful frameworks for considering whole-of-system/society changes in multiple dimensions; and,
- **Strategic Foresight** (see www.emergence.net.au) for strategy development methodologies for preparing for a range of diverse future possibilities in the way generational changes may unfold.

Third, and finally, in order to drive awareness of the need to think and act strategically about generational issues within an organisation – now – the following questions example ‘stimulations’ that can get the issue on the priority agenda of internal stakeholders:

- Where will current generational changes, eg demographic based reduction in talent, lead in 3, 5 or 10 years?
- How will that change how we recruit, manage, and market?
- How can you meet future challenges – now? Because if you don’t, you won’t have the talent or customers to survive, let alone thrive...

In Summary

*“Confidence, like art, never comes from having all the answers;
It comes from being open to all the questions.”
Earl Gray Stevens*

Managers and marketers need to go beyond the current business literature’s confusing conceptions of generations and generational change if they are to develop more effective strategies. This can involve using a couple of ‘tools for thinking’ about generations: as ‘waves of societal change’ that occur in ‘multiple dimensions’ for each individual. It is important to remember that anyone can adapt to generational changes and that this is leading to a bright, but complex, future requiring an insightful blending of ‘big picture sophistication’ applied to an individual level of detail. In a word, flexibility.

For managers already dealing with Gen X and Gen Y disruptions to the previous status quo in their organisations and/or markets, much of the impetus for understanding generations and generational change is already present. Hopefully, this creative approach based on experience will generate more insights for them. For managers who are yet to feel the force of generational change in the form of Gen Y, the ‘bell is tolling’ about the need for preparation. Change needs to happen *now* for organisations to be ready for the ‘talent crunch’ and the strong forces for changing methods of operation it will bring with it. Hopefully this article will be a useful springboard for considering these issues in a strategic way in their organisational context: with foresight and insight.

References

*“I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today,
for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words.
When I was a boy, we were taught to be discrete and respectful of elders,
but the present youth are exceedingly wise and impatient of restraint.”*

Hesiod (800-720BC)

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, *Australian social trends*, cat. no. 4102.0, ABS, Canberra.