



Intergenerational Communication in the Workplace Knowledge Sheet

Purpose: This knowledge sheet is for youth, employees, and employers to understand different generations in the workplace and core challenge areas for intergenerational communication.



Five Generations in the Workplace

There are currently five generations in the workplace. The generations are defined as:

- Traditionalists/Silent Generation: born between 1922–1944
- Baby Boomers: born between 1945–1964
- Gen X: born between 1965–1980
- Millennials: born between 1981–1996
- Gen Z: born between 1997– 2012ⁱ



Generations have Different Workplace Expectations

Each generation has their own identity, world views, lived experience and attitudes towards work and careers.

Traditionalists have respect for authority and hierarchy, value

seniority and job titles and can be sometimes resistant to change.

Baby Boomers challenge authority, like democratic and structured workplaces and are cautious about change.

Gen Z may be unimpressed by authority, expect their competencies and skills to be respected and view change as an opportunity.

Millennials respect authority figures who demonstrate competence, like autonomy and independence and view change as an opportunity for improvement.

Gen Z respects the process and following directors, values flexibility, and independence and see change as a reality.ⁱⁱ



Technology Impacts How Generations Communicate

Each generation uptakes and uses technology differently in the workplace. Use of technology from phone, email to direct messaging tools may differ across each generation.

Tone and style of communication in the workplace is changing, with a shift from formal to informal. A study showed that 53% of employees use emojis at work. Those surveyed were more likely to send an emoji to someone their age or younger. But this style of communication has a generational divide – 31% of Gen Z and 24% of Millennials reported an emoji being misunderstood by a colleague.ⁱⁱⁱ



Collaboration has Different Meanings across Generations

Great workplaces know that intergenerational knowledge and diverse opinions yield better teams and results. But working together may not look the same.

In a study by Slack, employees aged 18–24 stated that *trusting colleagues to do good work* was the most valued factor of workplace collaboration. For those aged 25–44, *clear responsibilities* was most valued and those aged 45–65 valued *being able to communicate with colleagues easily*.^{iv} Each generation has different expectations of collaboration.



The Future of Work Priorities Differ by Generation

As employers look at the future of work, generations have different opinions on where they work. When asked in survey, Gen Z preferred hybrid work (43%), with millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers preferring work from home (36%).

As employers consider the future of work, each generation has different priorities in the move back to the office. When asked on concerns to in office work, Boomers/Traditionalist were most concerned on *building experience*, Gen X on *commute*. Millennials and Gen Z were most concerned on *employee health*.^v



References

- ⁱ Smith, Allen. "Generational Mindsets Affect the Workforce." *SHRM*, 10 Sept. 2021, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/generational-mindsets-affect-workforce.aspx>
- ⁱⁱ Smith, Allen. "Generational Mindsets Affect the Workforce." *SHRM*, 10 Sept. 2021, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/generational-mindsets-affect-workforce.aspx>
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Beyond the Smile: How Emoji Use Has Evolved in the Workplace." *Slack*, 13 July 2022, <https://slack.com/blog/collaboration/emoji-use-at-work>
- ^{iv} Phillips, Jennifer, "Good collaboration, bad collaboration: A new report by Slack." *Slack*, 13 Mar, 2019, <https://slack.com/blog/collaboration/good-collaboration-bad-collaboration-a-new-report-by-slack>
- ^v "Consumer and Workforce Research Series." *Salesforce*, 26 Nov, 2022, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/salesforceresearch/viz/SalesforceLeadingThroughChangeDashboard/LTCHome>