



September 2008

## Generations and training

*article by Vicky Soloman*

*Vicky sheds light on the challenges trainers face in the intergenerational workforce*

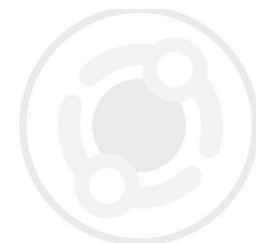


### Article at a glance

Generational theory is for all intents and purposes deceptively simple yet the effects of intergenerational differences on training within the workplace are anything but simple and increasingly are having a profound effect on the roll-out of training in organisations. This is prompting those responsible for the training portfolio to reassess how to train, how often and in what subject.

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## Intergenerational training requires different approaches...

*Course content needs to be relevant to the job at hand, it should also bear relevance to personal lives which are as, if not more, important*

Gone are the days of pure technical training where the outcome is centered on learning a skill intended to directly improve performance on the job. The need for increased emotional intelligence in the workplace has brought about a far greater need for programmes that offer development in areas like assertiveness skills, negotiation and how to handle difficult conversations which are aimed at Engineers and Sales Consultants alike. So while course content needs to be relevant to the job at hand, it should also bear relevance to personal lives which are as, if not more, important.

Traditional classroom learning too is being tossed out of the proverbial window. The new buzz word is impact learning, which requires trainers and teachers to act as facilitators - knowledgeable experts who, while imparting course content, develop relationships with their delegates, entertain and are able to adapt their personal training style and techniques to the requirements at hand.

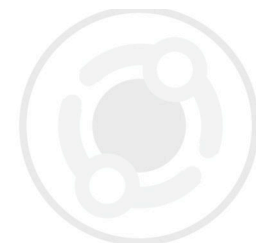
Within this context and conscious of the changing profile of those sitting in the training room, it is important to have an understanding of the different generational attitudes to training and development. Without this framework the ability to connect and appeal is defunct.

*Traditional classroom learning too is being tossed out...the new buzz word is impact learning*

Before unpacking the “identity” and profiling each generation it’s important to recognise that a generation is defined as people born roughly at the same time, during the same era in history, and is usually about 20-years in duration. The theory claims that the core of our value system is formed during the first 10-years of life and is influenced by the major events happening at the time and how the people of most significance (parents, grandparents, teachers, priests...) reacted to these events.

### **Silent Generation (born in the 1930s and 1940s).**

Workplace training is a relatively new concept for the Silent Generation. In years gone by, one gained the skills necessary to complete ones work through on-the-job training. People Skills (Soft Skills) were not seen as essential to getting the job done.



*they prefer a conservative trainer, a knowledgeable expert*

As participants in training sessions, they tend not to speak unless spoken to, and expect a high degree of order, structure, and consistency, based on a clear and precise agenda. They prefer a conservative trainer, a knowledgeable expert, and preferably one who has earned credibility either through age, qualifications or reputation.

How to get them into the training room? Link the content to the overall good of the company: how will this increase productivity and performance, and how will this enable me as an employee of the company to contribute to this?

### **Baby Boomers (born 1950s and 1960s)**

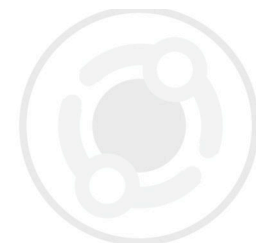
*the challenge for the facilitator is to provide opportunities within the training session to turn this knowledge into practical skills*

Baby Boomers are possibly the best academically educated generation in the world today. Having transformed the workplace of the Silent Generation, they created the differentiation between technical skills, and people skills aimed at, amongst others, improving communication, raising awareness to diversity, leading as opposed to managing employees, and managing conflict in the workplace. This generation enjoys a session based on collaborative learning, interaction and teamwork. The facilitator is viewed as a knowledgeable friend, and it is crucial to establish a relationship with the learners. Credibility is based on qualifications (and, if age allows, reputation). They value intellectual knowledge, so the challenge for the facilitator is to provide opportunities within the training session to turn this knowledge into practical skills.

How to get them into the training room? Show how this course can further my career, is linked to best-practice, and perhaps even provide a networking opportunity (business school seminars, and the like).

### **Generation X (born in the 1970s and 1980s)**

This generation is, by and large, frustrated by traditional classroom style education, as any learning that needs to be done can be done quicker and easier on-line! Global research reveals that this generation spends an average of between 3-5 years in any position, so any training needs to be related to personal skills development, and increased marketability. The facilitator is viewed as a human guide and must be seen as a subject matter expert, no matter the age or qualification, who is



*training needs to be related to personal skills development, and increased marketability*

expected to demonstrate their proficiency and expertise immediately in order to earn credibility. The training session itself must be fun, and multi-styled, as these learners get bored very quickly: the highest praise a facilitator can hope to receive on their evaluation form would be along the lines of “Wasn’t bored for one second!”! They are highly motivated learners who, once you have their attention, will ask plenty of questions and ensure high levels of interaction; but equally important, they are independent learners who prefer to acquire knowledge and skills through experience rather than set-ups which draw attention to individuals, such as role-plays.

Successful training programmes for Generation X make use of videos, DVDs and audio formats.

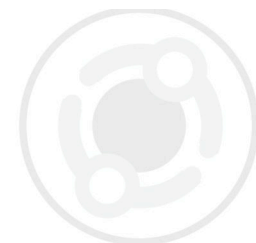
### **The Millennial Generation (born 1990s and 2000s)**

*this generation will know more than we can ever hope of knowing: all the knowledge they require is literally at their fingertips, at the touch of a button*

Millennials are fast making their way into the training rooms of companies and organizations country-wide. They know they’re young, but they’re smart, they learn fast, and they want to gain real-life experience. This generation will know more than we can ever hope of knowing: all the knowledge they require is literally at their fingertips, at the touch of a button. What they lack is skills, and competence. It is because of this that any training must be immensely practical, and immediately applicable, and must offer as close to real experience as humanly possible. This generation responds well to authority, and respects qualifications, and to them, age means that you have lived it first-hand! As such, they view facilitators as experienced mentors who can offer life-lessons.

They believe very strongly in the power of teamwork, and the more diverse the team in all aspects, the more learning can take place. They are most comfortable in an informal, adaptable setting which relies on multimedia and multiple focal points to hold their attention.

These generational differences are requiring the training industry and the facilitators within them to not only know their content but to adapt their personal training style and techniques to suit an audience that is more diverse than ever..



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