



Differences in Approach to Work

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Introduction

Workplaces today bring together a uniquely diverse mix of generations. Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z collaborate daily, each shaped by the social, economic, and technological environments of their formative years. These influences affect not only how individuals define success but also how they communicate, stay motivated, and approach teamwork. While differences in expectations and styles can sometimes create tension or misunderstanding, they also open valuable opportunities for mutual learning, innovation, and resilience. By exploring generational perspectives on values, motivation, and collaboration, this handbook provides practical insights and strategies to help organizations build inclusive environments where all generations feel recognized, respected, and empowered to contribute their strengths.



Workplace Values Across Generations

Introduction

Values I, in this context, can be defined as core beliefs regarding what matters in the workplace — such as respect, independence, security, recognition, balance, and innovation. Various generations may place different levels of importance on these values. When values conflict, either overtly or subtly, it can negatively impact teamwork, employee retention, and overall satisfaction. However, by acknowledging these differences, organizations can tailor their job design, culture, and expectations to better accommodate diverse value systems.

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Workplace values represent the guiding principles and priorities that influence how individuals make choices, engage with peers, and assess the organizational culture. They affect employees' views on fairness, authority, recognition, and collaboration. When values are aligned, teams typically experience enhanced trust, unity, and productivity; however, when values conflict, misunderstandings and disputes may occur. This is especially relevant in environments where multiple generations work together, each shaped by distinct historical and cultural backgrounds.

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, entered the job market during a time of post-war recovery, economic expansion, and social change. Many developed a profound sense of loyalty and duty to their employers, viewing long-term commitment as a sign of personal integrity. For Boomers, work often became intricately tied to their identity and legacy. They generally prioritize respect for authority and acknowledgment of experience, often preferring structured organizations with well-defined responsibilities. While some stereotypes paint Boomers as resistant to change or technology, studies reveal they are more adaptable than commonly believed, especially when provided with proper training. They flourish in environments where their contributions receive formal recognition, their expertise is appreciated, and their roles remain significant in shaping their organizations' futures.

Generation X, born from 1965 to 1980, came of age during periods of economic uncertainty, corporate layoffs, and evolving family structures, including an increase in dual-income households. Consequently, they often adopted a self-reliant and practical attitude toward work. In contrast to Boomers, who may associate commitment with long hours or job security, Gen X tends to define loyalty in terms of equitable and sustainable working conditions. They emphasize independence, flexibility, and work-life balance, feeling comfortable in more informal workplace settings. Having seen institutions fail, they often harbour scepticism toward authority and place greater emphasis on competence and accountability. Gen X workers transition smoothly to technological advances, as they experienced the shift from analogue to digital. Contrary to being labelled disengaged, as they are sometimes characterized, many Gen X professionals serve as stabilizers and mediators



between older and younger co-workers, leveraging their adaptability and independence to reconcile differing work cultures.

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are those born from 1981 to 1996 and grew up amid globalization, swift technological progress, and an increase in higher education. Their values prominently feature a commitment to inclusion, individual growth, and purposeful work. Millennials are frequently described as desiring meaningful careers; they seek employment with organizations that resonate with their personal and social principles, such as diversity, sustainability, and ethical integrity. They expect ongoing learning opportunities and clear pathways for career advancement. In contrast to Baby Boomers, who often hold traditional hierarchies in esteem, Millennials favour flatter organizational structures and collaborative settings where their opinions are recognized. They appreciate feedback and acknowledgment but prefer constructive guidance and motivation over strict performance assessments. Their adaptability and team-oriented nature have transformed many workplaces, leading to the adoption of hybrid work models, flexible work hours, and missions based on core values. Although they sometimes face accusations of being disloyal or prone to job-hopping, studies indicate that Millennials remain dedicated when their aspirations for growth and purpose are fulfilled.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first cohort of genuine digital natives. For them, technology is seamlessly integrated into everyday life rather than merely an additional tool, and they anticipate that their workplaces mirror this integration. Their perspective has been influenced by economic downturns, discussions about climate change, social movements, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have fostered values that prioritize adaptability, honesty, and mental health. Gen Z expects flexibility in how, where, and when they work, viewing it as an essential right rather than a luxury. They are realistic about job stability but still seek opportunities for advancement and equity. They are deeply concerned with personal values, sustainability, and ethical considerations, often opting for employers whose values align with their own. While stereotypes may depict them as entitled or excessively dependent on digital tools, research reveals they possess resilience, hold innovative viewpoints, and have a strong desire to learn. They respond particularly well to transparent leadership, open channels of communication, and chances for mentorship.

Despite the varying priorities of each generation, there are noteworthy overlaps. Respect is a consistently valued principle across all groups, though it manifests differently. Collaboration is universally recognized as essential, albeit with varying preferred approaches across generations. Supportive settings where individuals feel valued, trusted, and capable of growth remain universally significant. Misinterpretations often stem from differences in emphasis rather than fundamentally conflicting values. For example, a Baby Boomer might perceive loyalty as enduring service to a single company, while a Millennial might interpret it as commitment to meaningful endeavours, regardless of the employer. Both viewpoints demonstrate commitment but are expressed differently.



For organizations, these insights have serious consequences. Without recognizing generational values, leaders may misread behaviours and perpetuate stereotypes. For instance, a younger employee's request for flexible work hours might be mistakenly seen as a lack of commitment rather than a pursuit of sustainable productivity. On the other hand, an older employee's preference for formal communication might be misconstrued as inflexibility instead of professionalism. To bridge these divides, leaders should foster open communication, create policies that honour both tradition and innovation, and promote practices such as intergenerational mentoring, where expertise and fresh ideas work together.

In conclusion, workplace values are influenced by generational identities and life stages. Baby Boomers underscore loyalty and acknowledgment, Generation X focuses on independence and justice, Millennials emphasize development and meaning, while Generation Z highlights transparency and wellness. Nevertheless, all generations share a common need for respect, teamwork, and nurturing environments. By acknowledging these shared values while respecting differences, organizations can build stronger, more resilient teams that leverage diverse values as a powerful source of success.

Summary description of each generation's values from our research and from external sources

Generation	Core Work Values / Priorities
Baby Boomers (approx. born 1946–1964)	Dedication, stability in employment, appreciation for the chain of command, acknowledgment of expertise, responsibility, honour/status, and the intrinsic joy found in contributing to work. Members of the Boomer generation typically hold traditional values, favour organized settings, and prefer well-defined lines of authority. They might perceive their job as a crucial part of their identity. External incentives and acknowledgment, such as titles and status, carry significant importance for them.
Generation X (born ~1965–1980)	Freedom, adaptability, and maintaining a balance between work and personal life. Comfortable with transformation, for instance, observed advancements in technology. Appreciate independence, a



	casual approach, and self-sufficiency. Generally doubtful of “company loyalty” yet anticipate fairness. Additionally, cherish stability, but may prioritize sustainable working environments over job security.
Millennials (Gen Y) (born ~1981–1996)	Expansion, open to constructive criticism, and a feeling of purpose and significance. A longing for ongoing education and personal growth. Appreciate diversity, inclusivity, and adaptability. Seek employment that resonates with individual values. Favour less hierarchical structures. Appreciate acknowledgment, a nurturing atmosphere, and effective leadership. They might anticipate more regular feedback and show less patience for strict hierarchies.
Generation Z (born ~1997–2012)	Digital natives prioritize the integration of technology, as well as flexibility in their work schedules and locations. They value autonomy, continuous learning, and quick results. They strongly emphasize purpose and ethical considerations. Many seek regular feedback and appreciate transparency. Additionally, numerous Gen Z individuals express worries about job security due to economic unpredictability, mental health, and maintaining a work-life balance. They tend to prioritize their personal values and sustainability more than previous generations.



Motivation and Demotivation

Introduction

Motivation refers to the factors that inspire individuals to perform their tasks, while demotivation pertains to what diminishes or undermines their contributions. Since different generations tend to have varying motivators and demotivators, understanding these distinctions allows leaders to foster environments where individuals of all ages feel involved and invested.

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Motivation serves as the key factor that determines the level of energy, persistence, and creativity individuals contribute to their jobs. It affects not just productivity but also levels of satisfaction, engagement, and employee retention. Conversely, demotivation drains energy and diminishes morale, resulting in disengaged employees who are less inclined to perform at their best. The elements that motivate or demotivate employees vary across generations, reflecting the social and economic circumstances they experienced in their upbringing and their current life stages. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the motivational and demotivational factors for different age groups to create inclusive work environments where every generation feels appreciated and engaged.

Baby Boomers, who were born between 1946 and 1964, often find motivation in recognition, job stability, and the chance to contribute meaningfully. For them, work is more than a means to earn a living; it is a platform to showcase their dedication, create a legacy, and experience a sense of usefulness. They are more likely to respond positively when their long-term dedication is acknowledged, whether through recognition from leadership, status enhancements, or opportunities to mentor younger employees. Conversely, they can feel demotivated if their experience is undervalued or overlooked. Being overlooked in favour of younger employees, facing bureaucratic hurdles, or being compelled to adapt to new technologies without adequate support may cause them to feel disrespected. For Boomers, demotivation is often linked to a lack of recognition of the skills and insights they contribute rather than a resistance to change.

Generation X, individuals born between 1965 and 1980, grew up during times of corporate downsizing, rapid technological advancements, and the increasing importance of dual-income families. Therefore, they often prioritize autonomy, flexibility, and fairness over job titles or long-term loyalty to a single employer. They feel motivated when workplaces grant them independence, clarify expectations, and refrain from excessive micromanagement. They desire to be trusted to achieve results and typically take pride in their problem-solving abilities and leadership roles. However, they can easily disengage when regulations feel too strict, when work intrudes excessively on their personal lives, or when there is a lack of transparency. They may also become frustrated if they find themselves in



positions with limited growth opportunities or when swift changes are enforced without sufficient support. While they may be mischaracterized as sceptical or indifferent, many members of Generation X are highly motivated by competence, clarity, and the ability to manage their work-life balance on their own terms.

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, are often linked to the quest for meaningful work. They prefer their careers to reflect their personal and social values and flourish in workplaces that promote inclusion, diversity, and purpose. Key drivers for this generation include opportunities for self-improvement, regular feedback, and nurturing leadership. They frequently view their jobs as avenues not only for professional advancement but also for making a significant societal impact. Conversely, Millennials can lose motivation in strict, bureaucratic settings that offer few chances for growth or lack constructive feedback. They become particularly disheartened when their values conflict with those of the organization, when they feel ignored, or when they are confined to roles with little advancement potential. Despite the stereotype of being disloyal job-hoppers, studies indicate that Millennials remain committed when their aspirations for growth, adaptability, and meaningful involvement are fulfilled.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has joined the workforce under distinctive circumstances influenced by economic downturns, technological advancements, and the global pandemic. This generation highly values stability, but unlike Boomers, they anticipate that this stability will come with flexibility. They are driven by clear career trajectories, ongoing learning opportunities, and modern tech tools that align with their upbringing in a digital world. For Gen Z, motivation is also closely linked to mental health, safety, and alignment of values. They desire workplaces that acknowledge the significance of well-being while also providing immediate feedback and recognition. They may feel demotivated when leadership lacks consistency, when communication is unclear, or when their workplace feels disconnected from a greater purpose. Engagement may decrease if digital tools are outdated, if they view their work as lacking impact, or if their desire for flexibility is regarded as entitlement. The lack of transparency and support for mental health can be particularly detrimental to this generation.

While generational differences are notable, there are also significant similarities. All generations respond favourably to acknowledgment, fairness, and respect, even though the formats may differ. Boomers appreciate formal recognition of their loyalty, Gen X values trust and independence, Millennials prioritize coaching and feedback, and Gen Z desires transparent, timely communication. In all groups, disengagement tends to occur when individuals feel overlooked, undervalued, or excluded from decision-making processes.

For organizations, grasping these motivational dynamics has substantial implications. Strategies that adopt a one-size-fits-all model often miss their mark because they overlook



generational specifics. Leaders should instead tailor their strategies to meet both universal needs and unique expectations. Recognition programs that celebrate long-term dedication can invigorate Boomers, while flexible scheduling and opportunities for independent choices can retain Gen X's commitment. Initiatives focused on career development and inclusive leadership will resonate with Millennials, whereas Gen Z will excel in clear, technology-driven environments that prioritize mental health and lifelong learning. Mentoring programs connecting Boomers with younger staff can uplift the older generation by valuing their expertise while guiding younger employees towards stability. Thoughtfully implemented flexible policies benefit not only Millennials and Gen Z but also Gen X employees in managing their work and personal lives.

Ultimately, motivation and demotivation are not inherent characteristics of generations but rather reactions to environments that either fulfil or disregard basic needs. Baby Boomers seek acknowledgment and meaning, Generation X looks for fairness and autonomy, Millennials yearn for growth and inclusivity, and Generation Z prizes transparency and well-being. By recognizing these priorities, organizations can cultivate environments where energy and creativity thrive across all age groups, transforming generational diversity into resilience rather than conflict.

Summary from what Motivates Each Generation (and What Demotivates)

Generation	Key Motivators	Key Demotivators
Baby Boomers	Valuable employment; appreciation; prestige; acknowledgment from leaders; sense of purpose; sharing knowledge; secure setting; esteem.	Being overlooked; being required to use new tools without guidance; absence of acknowledgment; sensing that their expertise is unappreciated; excessively complex or ineffective processes.
Generation X	Independence; adaptability; equity; balance between work and personal life; skillfulness; transparency; reduced oversight; purposeful tasks; chances to take charge or address challenges.	Excessive oversight; rigid regulations; disregard for personal time; feeling stagnant with no opportunities for advancement; low levels of transparency; being forced to adjust to fast changes without assistance.
Millennials	Individual growth; regular feedback; varied	Strict hierarchy; bureaucratic procedures;



	backgrounds & inclusivity; adaptability (in terms of time and place); nurturing leadership; values and significance in culture.	insufficient feedback; limited opportunities; disconnection with the company's values; being categorized; lacking a platform to express opinions.
Generation Z	Defined career trajectories; ongoing education; technological resources; a balance of stability and flexibility; mental wellness and safety; alignment of values; immediate feedback and appreciation.	Unreliable leadership; absence of transparency; disjointed collaboration; efforts that lack effectiveness; sluggish progress in digital adoption; inadequate mental health resources; conditions that fail to appreciate flexibility.



Work Styles and Collaboration

Introduction

Beyond individual values and motivations, employees preferred working style — including their organizational preferences, collaborative methods, and communication habits — differ across generations. This encompasses aspects such as the style of feedback they prefer, their attitudes toward hierarchical versus flat organizational structures, their technology usage, views on remote or hybrid work arrangements, and their inclination for rapid decision-making versus thoughtful consideration.

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Work styles influence the way individuals communicate, address challenges, and engage with their co-workers. They determine preferences for structured hierarchies or flat teams, formal dialogue or casual conversations, and individual tasks or group collaboration. Since work styles are profoundly affected by cultural and generational backgrounds, teams composed of multiple generations often face friction when their expectations diverge. Nevertheless, when these differences are acknowledged as complementary strengths, they can serve as a significant source of innovation and resilience.

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, typically favour well-defined structures, formal communication, and authoritative leadership. Their early experiences in conventional workplaces lead them to equate professionalism with authority, respect for experience, and direct interactions. For Boomers, effective collaboration occurs when roles and responsibilities are explicitly outlined, decisions are made through established processes, and authority is recognized. Although they have adjusted to digital tools, many still prefer face-to-face meetings for crucial discussions, viewing them as vital for fostering trust and accountability. Boomers may feel uneasy when digital platforms dominate communication without sufficient direction or assistance, and they might perceive a casual tone or quick responses as unprofessional. However, they bring discipline, consistency, and institutional knowledge to collaborative efforts, often offering stability during periods of change.

Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, experienced a shift from traditional to more adaptable workplace environments. Consequently, they are generally comfortable in both structured and autonomous situations. Gen X values independence and self-sufficiency but is also realistic enough to operate within established hierarchies when needed. They prefer collaboration that honours their autonomy, valuing clarity and fairness over excessive oversight. While Boomers may opt for lengthy, formal meetings, Gen X is inclined toward efficiency, finding a balance between collaboration and the capacity to work solo. Having come of age during the digital transformation, they are adept at handling both analogue and digital communication. In multigenerational teams, Gen X often acts as a mediator, bridging



the formal approach of Boomers and the casual style of younger colleagues, while also contributing realistic and balanced viewpoints.

Individuals in the Millennial generation, born from 1981 to 1996, prioritize collaboration as an essential aspect of their work approach. They grew up in educational systems and workplaces that highlighted teamwork, inclusiveness, and ongoing feedback. Millennials appreciate open communication, flexible work settings, and team arrangements where contribution is valued over hierarchy. For them, collaboration thrives when leadership is supportive, communication is clear, and feedback is regularly provided. They adapt well to digital-first environments and often advocate for the use of collaborative platforms, virtual tools, and hybrid meeting options. Although they favour flatter organizational structures, they still seek clear guidance and coaching. Millennials may feel frustrated in rigid settings that limit participation or hinder innovation, but they excel in inclusive teams where all voices are acknowledged. Their collaborative style tends to promote creativity and strengthen team unity, although their need for constant feedback might be misinterpreted by older colleagues as craving validation or impatience.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, approaches collaboration with influences from their digital adeptness and the uncertainty of the global landscape. Commonly seen as preferring solely digital communication, research indicates that Gen Z still values face-to-face interactions, particularly for mentorship and receiving feedback. They are at ease with instant messaging, video conferencing, and collaborative tools, perceiving these as standard rather than intrusive. For Gen Z, effective collaboration hinges on transparency, inclusiveness, and technological integration. They anticipate clear expectations and role definitions but show less tolerance for rigid hierarchies that hinder openness. Many of them prefer collegial, team-focused structures where contributions are swiftly acknowledged and feedback is prompt. However, they may feel disengaged if collaboration relies excessively on outdated technologies or if communication lacks consistency. Their adaptability and appreciation for diversity enable them to be valuable members of collaborative settings, yet they thrive best in organizations that combine digital skills with personal mentorship.

Misunderstandings frequently occur when these distinct work styles intersect. A Baby Boomer might perceive Gen Z's preference for instant messaging as overly casual or unprofessional, while Gen Z may view an email-dominant approach as inefficient or antiquated. The Millennials' call for frequent feedback might come across as excessive to managers who are used to traditional, formal performance assessments. Gen X may feel exasperated with structured check-ins they deem unnecessary, whereas younger colleagues might find Gen X's inclination for independence to be isolating or lacking in communication. Such clashes can hinder decision-making, erode trust, or foster stereotypes that undermine collaboration.



Despite these hurdles, successful cross-generational collaboration is achievable and often yields outstanding results. Organizations that encourage open discussions about communication styles and create hybrid frameworks that balance flexibility with consistency are more likely to effectively navigate these differences. The COVID-19 pandemic hastened the shift towards remote and hybrid work models, revealing generational variances in preferences while also showing that all groups can adapt. For many Boomers and Gen X, remote work necessitated a shift toward less personal interaction, while Millennials and Gen Z found it to be a natural transition. The crucial factor for leaders is to acknowledge that each generation offers distinct advantages: Boomers provide experience and stability, Gen X brings independence and practicality, Millennials contribute collaboration and inclusivity, and Gen Z injects digital fluency and innovative ideas.

One particularly effective approach is reverse mentoring, where younger team members impart digital skills to older employees while receiving support and career insights in return. This not only enhances skillsets but also promotes mutual respect, challenging stereotypes on both sides. Leaders are essential in facilitating effective collaboration across generations by fostering psychological safety, defining roles, and encouraging inclusive communication practices. When leaders create environments that incorporate digital tools while also appreciating traditional interaction methods, teams can benefit from the strengths of both approaches. Ultimately, collaboration thrives when respect takes precedence over stereotypes. Generational differences should be viewed as complementary strengths rather than obstacles. The structured approach of Boomers offers stability, Gen X's practical mindset provides balance, Millennials' spirit of collaboration encourages inclusion, and Gen Z's comfort with technology boosts innovation. By thoughtfully integrating these various approaches, organizations can build teams that are not only multigenerational but also multi-strength, where diverse working styles contribute to creativity and resilience instead of conflict.



Key takeaways

- The values, motivations, and work styles of different generations are influenced by the social, economic, and technological environments they experienced while growing up.
- Baby Boomers offer loyalty, stability, and a wealth of experience; Generation X brings independence and practicality; Millennials focus on growth, inclusivity, and meaningful engagement; and Generation Z values transparency, flexibility, and well-being.
- Regardless of stereotypes, individuals from every generation can adapt and succeed when they are supported by environments that promote inclusivity and respect.
- Motivation tends to be highest across generations when there is recognition, fairness, opportunities for development, and open communication; conversely, demotivation can occur when contributions are overlooked, autonomy is limited, or core values are not aligned.
- Collaboration styles vary, older generations typically favour formal, structured communication, while younger generations lean towards flexible, digital, and feedback-oriented methods. When these differing preferences clash, misunderstandings can arise, but they can be addressed through open dialogue, clarity, and mutual respect.
- Strategies such as reverse mentoring, hybrid work arrangements, and multigenerational team designs are effective for closing generational gaps. These methods allow generations to gain insights from one another and turn their differences into collaborative strengths.
- Throughout all generations, shared values like respect, fairness, and teamwork remain essential. By acknowledging both the distinctions and commonalities, organizations can cultivate trust, engagement, and resilience within multigenerational teams.
- Leaders have a vital responsibility in harmonizing diverse values and preferences, ensuring that motivation and collaboration are reinforced through inclusive practices rather than being hindered by stereotypes.



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