Navigating Multigenerational Teams and Leadership Strategies

Caveat

- If you are averse to generalizations and stereotyping, you might resent being pigeonholed as belonging to a specific group defined largely by the year of your birth.

- However, if you have experienced the social phenomenon known as the "generation gap" in the workplace, you might appreciate a greater understanding of the intergenerational differences among your colleagues, from the youngest to the oldest.

"It is natural for youth to be full of hope and full of confidence, and to think that the present is more important than the past, and it is natural for young nurses to think their elders who advise are croakers and wet blankets."

- This observation, expressed by a nurse in 1936, shows that generational differences in nursing are far from new.

- However, with five generations working side by side for the first time in history, we are now seeing much more than just the "young" vs the "old."
Calling all Generations

• A nurse manager, desperate for more staff, telephones all her nurses to ask whether they will pull an extra shift.

• Stovall, S.J. (May 2010). “Leading a Multigenerational Nursing Workforce: Issues, Challenges, and Strategies.” Online Journal of Issues in Nursing. 15(05), Manuscript ID: 15.05.05.001.001.8.

Calling all Generations

The first nurse says, “What time do you need me?”

“Over time, Veterans learned that they were rewarded if they obeyed the rules and worked hard.”
Calling all Generations

The second nurse says, “Call me back if you can’t find anyone else.”

The attention and prosperity afforded the Baby Boomer generation, along with changing world and societal values, created an emphasis on freedom to be yourself and the “me” generation.

Calling all Generations

The third nurse says, “How much will you pay me?”

“Generation X nurses want to make money and have job satisfaction, but will not sacrifice their personal life for an employer who could let them go at any time.”

Calling all Generations

The fourth nurse says, “Sorry, I have plans. Maybe next time.”

“Today Millennials demonstrate a renewed sense of interest in contributing to the collective good and are volunteering for community service and joining organizations in record numbers.”
According to Bonnie Clipper, author of *The Nurse Manager's Guide to an Intergenerational Workforce*, these different responses are typical of the 4 different generations of nurses currently working side by side in nursing.

* In the same order as the previous responses, these generations are:
  * The “traditionalists” (also called the “veterans”);
  * The “baby boomers” (“boomers”);
  * The "X-generation" ("Xers"); and
  * The “Millenials” (also known as the “iGeneration” or “nexters”).

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**Uncharted Territory**

* Social scientists maintain that this is the first time in history that 4, or 5, generations of nurses have worked together.

* In previous years, earlier retirement from nursing and shorter lifespans kept the workforce to 3 generations.

* Recently, however, many nurses have continued to work using the conventional retirement age of 65, the baby boomers are now in their eighth decade of life.

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**Uncharted Territory**

* However, because the youngest nurses of the traditionalist generation are now 71 years old, this generation is shrinking rapidly and will soon be replaced by a new, recently named generation of nurses born in this century.
Generation Z

- A significant aspect of this generation is its widespread usage of the Internet from a young age.

- Members of Generation Z are typically thought of as being comfortable with technology and interacting on social media websites for a significant portion of their socializing.

- Some commentators have suggested that growing up through the Great Recession has given the cohort a feeling of unsettlement and insecurity.

Generational differences have become another type of diversity, adding complexity to the nursing workforce...
...older nurses are often dependent upon younger peers for coaching, mentoring, and guidance in using the computer...the transition to the Information Age literally flipped generational relationships.
"...learning from the unique strengths of each generation can both decrease tension and facilitate personal growth."

Generations: Defined
What is a “Generation”

- A generation is defined less by age or time period than by having:
  - similar life experiences
    - people
    - places
    - major events
    - popular culture and
  - the various characteristics and attributes common to its members.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EO5R_pFdRFU
• Generations typically span about 20 years, although shorter periods can encompass cultural differences.

• People born around the same time tend to be affected by the same set of experiences, so age is one defining factor.

• Clipper emphasizes that:
  • “It is important not to over-generalize about an individual based on his or her generation.”

• Moreover, there is substantial overlap in generations, and some people even straddle generations.

• Those born near the dividing line between generations (called “cuspers”) can understand, relate to, appreciate, and display the behaviors of both generations.

### For Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Birth Year</th>
<th>Proportion of Nursing Workforce</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>1925-1942</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Dedicated, hard-working, loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby boomers</td>
<td>1943-1960</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Optimistic, productive, workaholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Xer</td>
<td>1961-1981</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Cynical, independent, informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>1982-2000</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Confident, impatient, social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does it matter?

- As a colleague, understanding generational differences is important to maintaining effective and satisfying relationships at work.

- Managers in particular must strive to appreciate these differences if they want to build high-performing teams, establish respect, and create harmony among their staff.

Millenials....the future of nursing...

“In four years, Millennials — will account for nearly half the employees in the world”

Does it matter?

- Chelsea enters the unit, chewing gum and texting on her new smart phone. Deb stands there, waiting to get report. Minutes pass as Chelsea chuckles and continues to pound out a couple more texts on her phone. She then looks up to see Deb, arms folded staring at her with an annoyed glare. Chelsea shrugs her shoulder and says, “What?” Deb starts to say, “Well miss, when you’re late for report and it’s time to pass out medications.” Before Deb can complete her sentence, Chelsea interrupts with, “I’m here so that’s all that matters.” Shift report is completed and the nurses go their separate ways. Soon chatter spreads through the unit as staff choose sides — the lazy new nurse with the obnoxious attitude or the cranky old nurse who needs to lighten up and have a little fun.
The pay-off is higher employee engagement and improved patient care.

Traditionalists (born 1925-1942).

- The oldest cohort of workers still in the workforce grew up during the Great Depression and World War II, events that taught them about hard work, responsibility, and sacrifice.
- This group understands rules, is patriotic and loyal, and dislikes waste.
- They have a strong work ethic and look to their leaders for direction and guidance.
- They are likely to remain with the same employer for many years, are the least comfortable with technology, and are the most resistant to change.

Boomers (born 1943-1960).

- Currently the largest cohort in the workforce, boomers were shaped by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, presidential assassinations, and the "peace and love" movement.
- Boomers are the original "workaholics" and "achievement," often defining themselves by the work they do and their success.
- Despite party or other social engagements...some of the facts....
- They are independent, critical thinkers who see financial security, promotions, and a sense of accomplishment and personal fulfillment from work.
- According to a survey conducted in 2008, boomers are the most productive of the generations.


- The Xers are the smallest cohort in the workforce.
- Xers were influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the AIDS epidemic, and MTV.
- They are the latchkey generation -- the children who went home to empty houses after school because both parents were working.
- Many are children of divorce.

- They are considered independent, assertive, and innovative.
- This group is also well traveled and values individualism.
- Xers “work to live” rather than “live to work”
- They tend to be less loyal to the organization and less tolerant of authority than previous generations.
- However, they are flexible and adaptable to change, and they embrace technology.

- The Millennials, a large and fast-growing cohort, grew up in the age of domestic and international terrorism, and the explosion in social networking and information technology.
- They tend to be protective and careful, yet also confident, expressive, optimistic, and -- according to a recent survey -- self-indulgent.
- They are the least religious, best-educated, and most racially diverse of recent generations.


- The millennials are strong networkers, sophisticated and street-smart.
- They like to work in teams but also crave instant gratification, feedback, and recognition.
- A disadvantage is their impatience: if they are unhappy, they will give up and move on to another job at another organization.
- Significant impact on "turnover" / retention.
  - With the group, maintains Cipper, "We need to engage them early, allow them flexibility, like allowing them to change units, so they don’t get bored."

modern family
Intergenerational Communication

- One of the most obvious and important differences in nurses from different generations is their communication styles and preferences.

- Traditionalists prefer face-to-face discussions and staff meetings, and are less likely to use email or texting for communication.
• Boomers prefer face-to-face group meetings, and telephone calls for away dialogue.

• Their style of communication is more open and less formal than the previous generation.

• Xers prefer email and texting, with direct and to-the-point communication; they dislike prolonged discussions.

• Millennials prefer fragmented, short, and frequent communication via text or Twitter.

• They like to share their opinions electronically as well as in person.
So, what's the issue?

- Nurses from different generations frequently diverge in how they give or accept feedback, whether it is praise or criticism.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

So, what's the issue?

- According to Clipper, traditionalists like to hear feedback privately and tend to anticipate bad news.
- Boomers also prefer to receive criticism in private, one-on-one sessions, although praise can be given in front of peers.
- Both traditionalists and boomers will work hard to improve any deficiencies brought to their attention.

So, what's the issue?

- Yors tend to take criticism more poorly and may overinterpret what is said.
- Millennials, although accustomed to receiving a lot of advice, also have difficulty accepting constructive criticism, but they happily accept praise in front of their peers.
Getting Along: Mutual Understanding and Respect

- Because the workplace environment is partly determined by the nature of collegial relationships among nurses, it is imperative to support and enhance these relationships.

- The danger of not doing so is that the coexistence of different generations in the workforce can be:
  - a source of workplace conflict,
  - contribute to low job satisfaction,
  - impede retention of staff, and
  - have detrimental effects on patient care.

- The well-described problem of incivility (a.k.a. workplace bullying) in nursing can also be rooted in intergenerational differences.

- At the same time, however, it is helpful for nurses to remember that they have more in common than they have differences:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDA_TunjOf
• At the same time, however, it is helpful for nurses to remember that they have more in common than they have differences.

• All nurses, from old to young, chose nursing as a career and share a fundamental desire to deliver high-quality patient care and achieve professional satisfaction.

• All want to be respected by their peers and other professional colleagues.
  • Maintaining ethical integrity = foundational goal

• All share a need for lifelong learning, a desire to work effectively as a team, and aspirations to improve the profession of nursing.

• These shared goals are far more meaningful than whether one nurse has a tattoo and another must use reading glasses.

• The nurse who is burdened by having young children at home might assume that an older colleague has a less stressful life because her children are grown:
  • But the older nurse could be taking care of aging parents, making the situations of these two nurses more similar than different in many respects.

• If nurses focus on their similarities and common goals as much as their differences, mutual understanding and respect will follow.

• A great way to enhance understanding among the generations is with intergenerational mentoring.

• Mentoring is, ideally, a two-way street:
  • A mentor shares, educates, and inspires, but also learns from the relationship.

• Although mentor and preceptor relationships might be smoother if both parties are from the same generation, pairing nurses from different generations can encourage learning about generational differences and similarities.
Leadership Strategies

1. Halper (2004) recommended that nurse leaders conduct a generational inventory of their work units that looks at the nursing team’s generational mix, age profile, and the generational issues on the team.

2. It is important that every employee is held to the same work expectations, organizational policies, and procedures, yet nurse leaders should also consider individual employee needs and generational differences.

   • Accommodating generational preferences in areas such as coaching and motivating, communicating, and resolving conflicts will help to promote an environment of inclusion (Hatt, 2006).


3. Different generations have had different experiences in their family and educational settings.

4. Although every member of a generational cohort is unique, these experiences in general create cohort preferences about how a generation wants to be coached and motivated by those who lead them.
Gen X

- Generation X staff prefer a more equal coaching environment in which they have opportunities to demonstrate their own expertise in the learning environment and in which they do not feel micromanaged.
- Baby Boomers desire to feel empowered in the work setting and to be asked for their feedback. Generation X nurses believe that recognition and career advancement should be based on merit.
- They like to see rapid progress toward the goals they set for themselves.
- Traditional organizational rewards may not have as much value as paid time off, cash awards, or participation in cutting edge projects.

Millenials

- Millenial nurses expect more coaching and mentoring than any other generation in the workforce.
- They are optimistic and goal-oriented but also want structure, guidance, and extensive orientation.
- Internships and formalized clinical coaching and mentoring programs are highly valued by this generation.
Millenials

- Personal feedback is important to Millennials along with opportunities for self-development.
- Flexible scheduling is also valued by Millennial Nurses.
  - Organizations can expect a high turnover of staff in this generation if their expectations and needs are not met.

Sensitivity

- Utilizing communication strategies that will work effectively with different generations is a challenge for many nursing leaders.
- Sensitivity to communication differences and preferences across generations can help bridge gaps and create unique solutions that appeal to each generational belief system.
- It is also important to ensure that communication is understood, so as to reduce the risk of errors that come with communication failures.

- Millennials have grown up with instant messaging and cellular phones.
  - They like immediate feedback and may become frustrated if their e-mails or telephone messages are not answered quickly.
  - They also enjoy teamwork and appreciate team meetings as a forum for communication.
  - As a result, they read less.
  - Hence distributing lengthy policies and procedures via e-mail may not be effective.
  - E-mails and that include good mechanisms for providing communication updates for this generation.
Conflict Resolution

• It is important that every employee is held to the same work expectations...yet also consider individual needs and generational differences.

Conflict Resolution

• Understanding how to maximize the talents of each individual nursing staff member by addressing both their individual and generational needs is critical to good leadership.

• When each generation is appreciated for the strengths they bring to the team, generational diversity will lead to a synergy that brings the team to a much higher level of performance.

Conflict Resolution

• Differences in generational values, behaviors, and attitudes have the potential to create significant conflict in the workplace.

• Two major sources of conflict in today’s nursing environment are the perceived differences in work ethics among generations and the use of technology.
• Both Generation X and Millennial nurses respect the achievements of their Baby Boomer leaders but seek work-life balance and are less likely to accept overtime or schedule changes to accommodate the needs of their work units.

• Veteran and Baby Boomer nursing leaders frustrate Generation X and Millennial staff if they resist technology advancements or if they don’t become competent with the technology available in the work setting.

• Unresolved conflict on the nursing team can lead to a loss of productive time, errors, staff turnover, and decreased patient satisfaction.

• Staff education about differences in generational attitudes and values is an important initial step.

• Ground rules that reinforce the importance of respect and tolerance for all generations are key to promoting an atmosphere in which all viewpoints are considered legitimate.

• Highlighting mutual team goals and keeping patient care as the focal point will promote effective conflict resolution.

• Hobbs et al. (2005) have proposed a generational synergy model that involves reframing the traditional look at generational differences in a way which focuses on contributions of each cohort, thereby reducing conflict in the workplace.
• Veteran nurses should be valued for the wisdom and organizational history that they bring to nursing teams. When technology fails, as it has during several of our recent natural disasters, Veteran Nurses can assist a unit to quickly shift to back to the traditional ways of assessing and caring for patients.

• Baby Boomer nurses should be valued for their clinical and organizational experience.
  • Utilizing them to coach and mentor younger nurses will be important to ensure that the intellectual capital or knowledge of organizations will not be lost when large numbers of this generational cohort begin to retire.

• Generation X nurses should be valued for their innovative ideas and creative approaches to unit issues and problems.
  • They can be instrumental in helping organizations design new approaches to nursing care delivery.

• Millennial nurses should be valued for their understanding of technology and insights as to how it can be used in practice.
  • Although novices to nursing, they can be instrumental in helping organizations implement computerized systems and other forms of technology.
  • They can also serve as technology coaches to older generational cohorts.

Leadership Strategies
• Several nursing directors have been at the hospital center for greater than 15 years with some boasting nursing careers greater than 40 years. A new nursing director, of the Generation X cohort, has joined the facility with 2 years of post-level management experience and 10 years of nursing experience. At weekly meetings to discuss issues with the ODI, the Generation X director feels like an outsider to the group, finding it more comfortable just to listen rather than to speak up and be perceived as being new and not understanding. During a recent discussion of staff reward and recognition, the director with longevity (Veterans and Baby Boomers) came to the agreement that staff should not be rewarded for "doing their job" since they were given a paycheck to perform their job. The newest nursing director expressed a concern that without recognition and rewards, as cited in the literature, retention of staff would continue to be a problem. Response to her input was met with extreme verbal negativity. Resisting conflict has left the youngest nursing director wondering if she has made the wrong choice coming to this hospital.

• Managing Multiple Generations: Scenarios From the Workplace (J. A. Hahn)

• A newly hired nurse in the Emergency Department (ED) has been posting on a local networking site for professionals work experiences. She included graphic photos of an ED scenario following a multiple trauma case. No patient identifiers are being used but details of the circumstances of the multiple trauma and resulting injuries are discussed along with the nurses’ personal feelings. Other ED nurses are part of her local networking group and are reacting and commenting at the workplace about the postings. This young nurse defends herself to her coworkers by explaining she is not using patient names and has the right to her own personal thoughts and the freedom to discuss them when not at work. Staff has begun to take sides in the issue and communication between the younger nurses (Millennials & Generation Xers) versus the older Baby Boomers has resulted in tension and a lack of team synergy. Not all staff members have taken sides and there are those in the middle (of varying generations) who verbalize they can identify with both sides of the issue.

• Managing Multiple Generations: Scenarios From the Workplace J. A. Hahn

• ACORN

• An acronym for the five precepts or operational ideas used by successful companies to grow “next-generation” organizations.

• The use of these five precepts supports a growth-friendly comfortable work environment where employees have their dignity and self-worth respected, conflict is seen as healthy, and is a valuable tool in dealing with multigenerational conflict.

• Hahn, Nursing Forum Volume 46, No. 3, July-September 2020
A

- Accommodate employee differences—
  - Employees are treated as customers with employers learning about their employees, working to meet their specific needs and accommodating them according to their unique preferences to create a friendlier workplace in a tangible manner.

C

- Create workplace choice—
  - Generationally friendly companies allow the workplace to shape the work being done to serve the customers and the employees.
  - Decreased bureaucracy is a clear goal with a shortening of the height and width of the chain of command.

O

- Operate from a sophisticated management style—
  - Generationally friendly managers are more direct and tactful.
  - Employees are given the big picture to include specific goals and measures, and then the workforce is given the freedom to perform.
  - Managers give frequent feedback, reward, and recognition to their staff.
R

- Respect competence and initiative.
- Assume the best from your employees.
- Treat the newest employees to the most seasoned employee as if they have great things to offer and are motivated to always perform at their best.

N

- Nourish retention.
- Generationally friendly companies understand that keeping staff is as important as finding and retaining customers.
- Lateral movement is encouraged but also broadens assignments and utilizes your staff’s best skills.

The issues?

- Accommodate employee differences—The Veterans and Baby Boomers are the most resistant to change and may be feeling their power and management style is being threatened by the newest director (Generation X).
  - Generation X are very self-focused and without knowing the past history of the group dynamics, it is possible that the newest director did not ask for help when first entering into the director role and how to be best to perform on her own.
  - Uncomfortable to the Generation X, she may have built the barrier to becoming one of the team while simply trying to find her own way in the beginning, which now has escalated to this conflict.
- The enthusiasm to share and implement evidence-based literature review knowledge may be perceived as a negative commentary on their management style.
The issues?

- The challenge for the CNO will be to create a culture of excellence in her management style that plays to the strengths of all her directors.

- The Generation Xers and the Millennials often are the most comfortable with the social networking tools and sites. These were the nursing students who utilized electronic learning sites and communicated with faculty and classmates through a variety of electronic sites.

- Electronic media is inherently seen as a valid form of communication (i.e. “technology natives”).

- The Baby Boomers as a cohort are new to electronic communication as it applies to social networking (“technology immigrants”) and, as a cohort, may feel the moral obligation to follow the rules and regulations of the organization and the law.

- Digital literacy can transcend generational lines, and the wise leader will tap into the human capital resources his/her staff brings to the workplace.
• Communication between staff in a nonthreatening atmosphere with a facilitator would be a foundational beginning.

• Educational information on the ethical and legal implications of social networking at the workplace from the organizational perspective is required from the nurse executive, human resources (HR) department, and legal department.

• The choice would be required attendance by all staff at seminars or intranet educational modules.

• Leaders who know what motivates employees of different generations are more effective in keeping them engaged.

• How does that happen?

• As a leader, we need to become educated, creative, open minded, and inventive.

The bottom line is....

• That every person on the team desires meaningful work.

• They desire to belong to the team and to be part of an organization that distinguishes them as an important individual of the team.
• To help managers, directors, and other leaders become more effective in coaching and mentoring, send them to class so they can learn about generational differences.

• Attitudes must begin at the top and filter down.

• It’s important that as leaders we transform rather than trying to alter the workers.

The following are summary recommendations for nursing leaders who are leading a multigenerational workforce and enabling that workforce to thrive and to meet tomorrow’s health care challenges.

• Seek to understand each generational cohort and accommodate generational differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors.
• Develop generationally sensitive styles to effectively coach and motivate all members of the health care team.

• Develop the ability to flex a communication style to accommodate generational differences.

Great things never came from comfort zones.

• Promote the resolution of generational conflict so as to build effective work teams.
• Capitalize on generational differences, using these differences to enhance the work of the entire team.

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