Harnessing the Potential of Singapore’s Multi-generational Workforce

www.fairemployment.sg
In this report we use the terms Gen Y, Gen X, Baby Boomers (Early Boomers and Late Boomers) and Traditionalists to define the four different generations.

When making generalisations in this report about any group, caution is warranted. One will still find many differences within generations, in addition to differences among them.
This research, conducted by Digne Consult Asia Pacific Pte Ltd, was initiated by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) as part of ongoing efforts to make it easier for employers in Singapore to adopt fair and responsible employment practices. By raising the capability of employers in this area, discrimination based purely on a person’s chronological age can be reduced as more managers are equipped with the understanding and skills to manage multi-generations at the workplace. Arising from these findings, practical recommendations are also identified together with a systematic road map for employers keen to improve their systems and processes in this area.

With increased life expectancy, more generations of people are working together than ever before in human history. Yet as wide as this age range currently is, it will likely only further increase in the foreseeable future. An organisation’s ability to secure sustainable high performance, given the increasing age diversity in the workforce, appears key to business success.

This research builds on earlier research both internationally and locally on the generational issues that emerge at Singapore workplaces. Findings in this study were drawn from research involving over 3500 individual employees working in 30 different organisations in Singapore. Survey inputs were collected online as well as in pen-and-paper for those firms whose employees were not online. A Mandarin version of the survey was used for those employees not comfortable responding in English. Focus groups were also conducted with Human Resource (HR) personnel before and after the survey to refine the questions and clarify interpretations of the findings.

For this study, survey participants were categorised into four different generations:

- Traditionalists (born before 1946)
- Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964)
- Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980)
- Gen Y (born after 1980)

**Key Findings**

While there are differences in how different generations work, relate to and perceive other generations, there are also many common characteristics that cut across generations such as:

- The belief that having employees from different generations has a positive effect on the overall performance of the organisation.
- Most employees from all generations view that the age of their supervisor does not matter.
- Face-to-face meetings and team meetings are the preferred means of organisational communication for all generations.
- Elder care needs, e.g. looking after parents, have overtaken childcare needs as a Work-Life concern of employees.
For Gen Y, some of the key findings are:
- They value annual leave more than other generations.
- They appear more adaptable to change than other generations.
- In their relations with the different generations, they find most difficulty working with Baby Boomers.
- They are more comfortable with managing employees who are younger or the same age.
- Career and personal development opportunities are key motivators for Gen Y.

For Gen X, some of the key findings are:
- Majority of employees are now working for supervisors in the Gen X category.
- They are perceived and see themselves as being more committed and dedicated to the organisation than Gen Y.
- They appear to experience less Work-Life Harmony compared to the older generations.

For Baby Boomers, who also made up the second largest group of supervisors after Gen X, some of the key findings are:
- In terms of communication, there is no significant problem using online means of communication such as e-mail and social networking media.
- The older generations are overall more willing to work beyond contractual working hours than the younger generations.
- In terms of benefits, there is more interest in extended medical coverage.

For Traditionalists, of whom there is only a small group currently working, some of the key findings are:
- While they generally have fewer problems working with younger colleagues, among the different generations, they face more difficulty working with Gen Y.
- While overall, all generations consider that their employers treat them generally fairly, those who are older appear more likely to perceive that they have been treated unfairly than other generations.
- In terms of work, there is more interest in phased retirement options, e.g. working at less than a full load.
**Next Steps**

Managing a multi-generational workforce effectively presents many potential advantages and opportunities for the individual and organisation. Each generation brings to the table different approaches to work, from the way it prefers to interact with others, to how it views business strategies. The end result is a greater variety of opinions, creativity and talents.

**Organisations that want to successfully manage their multi-generational workforce to take advantage of the benefits it offers should consider:**

- Understanding the age-related changes occurring in the workforce and how this will impact their industry’s talent base and customer preferences. This includes not just the longer working lifespan of Singapore employees but also by how much and how fast the demographic profile of each age group is changing.

- Understanding the business case for responding to these changes means considering the implications and opportunities that these changes will mean for both their employees and their customers. This includes understanding their employees’ profile, how the talent pool is changing and the interventions that the firm can use to stay ahead. Firms in Singapore can also utilise the convenient resources at www.re-employment.sg to benchmark their age profile with others in their industry.

- Deepening their understanding of how employees of different generations may have different needs and preferences in working styles and the implications this may have on the organisation’s performance. This includes raising awareness within the organisation of the importance of understanding inter-generational issues and according due respect to the different generations at the workplace. It is, however, also important to avoid labels and stereotypes that may hinder the assessment of a job candidate or the employees’ potential to contribute to the organisation.

- Developing values that support the fair and respectful treatment of all employees so that employees from all generations can contribute to their fullest potential.
In terms of the more specific tactics that employers can adopt in this area, the study suggests that employers also consider:

- Ensuring that those handling HR functions are adequately trained and equipped to effectively guide the organisation through the developments in this area. This includes not just preparing for re-employment but also harnessing the opportunities offered by the increasing age diversity at the workplace.

- Raising supervisor capability in organising, motivating, and leading multi-generational teams. This involves assessing supervisors’ existing leadership values and raising their awareness of how employees of different generations may like to be treated. Being effective in this area is not just about treating others the way you want to be treated. It is also about understanding them enough so that they can be treated the way they want to be treated, e.g. How does Serena prefer to receive communication? How does Alvin prefer feedback? How does Joyce prefer to learn?

- Providing training to improve inter-generational understanding among all employees. This includes conducting assessments of the existing values and operating assumptions in the organisation.

- Reviewing recruitment and selection processes so that hiring is fair and merit-based. At the same time different modes of recruitment advertising should be explored to reach different groups – e.g. relying purely on online job boards or social online media may leave out potential talent that relies on more traditional methods, e.g. newspaper classified jobs.

- Encouraging the formation of multi-generational teams to tap on the generational diversity at the workplace. This includes developing and encouraging mentoring opportunities for the younger staff to learn from the more experienced employees.

- Developing a package of flexible benefits and rewards that caters to the needs of different employees.

- Reviewing existing internal communications to assess that they reach out effectively to the different generations without leading some groups to feel excluded. This extends to reviewing and offering flexible learning options so that different generations can expand their knowledge, skills and abilities effectively in a way that works best for them.

With the ongoing changes in Singapore’s workforce, this research and the recommendations are only the start of a journey for employers to equip themselves with the tools to manage a multi-generational workforce in a way that benefits both their business and their employees.
INTRODUCTION

Objectives of Study

This study on Singapore’s multi-generational workforce was commissioned by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) as part of ongoing efforts to promote the adoption of fair and responsible employment practices. The study sought to deepen the understanding of inter-generational issues that can arise at Singapore workplaces and to propose practical recommendations that employers can take up in this area to improve their business performance.

How the Study was Done

This four-month long research, which took place from October 2009 to January 2010, was administered to employees of different levels and ages. The lead researcher for this project was Frank Kuipers of Digne Consult Asia Pacific.

Following a literature review, focus groups with Human Resource (HR) personnel were conducted to refine and pilot test the questions. Inputs were then sought from employees of participating organisations via an online survey. For those firms whose employees may have had difficulty completing the survey online, responses were sought via hard copy. For those who had difficulties understanding the questions in English, a Mandarin version of the survey was also administered.

Responses were voluntary and 3541 participants from 30 organisations responded. For the purpose of this study the inputs of respondents were grouped into five chronological age groups:

- **Traditionalists**
  - born before 1946
- **Early Boomers**
  - born between 1946 and 1954
- **Late Boomers**
  - born between 1955 and 1964
- **Gen X**
  - born between 1965 and 1980
- **Gen Y**
  - born after 1980

The detailed analysis that follows is also based on these five categories. However, given the similarities that emerged between Early Boomers and Late Boomers and to simplify the findings, we have collapsed both groups into a single category called Baby Boomers in the Executive Summary and Recommendations.

Profile of Respondents

With the exception of Traditionalists (over 65) who constitute a small number in the workforce, the respondents came from all major age cohorts and were generally representative of the age profile of the Singapore workforce (Figure 1).

The respondents were also of both genders although there were more women in all categories except for Traditionalists (Figure 2).
Figure 1  Respondent profile by age

Period respondents were born

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Benchmark¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y (Born after 1980)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X (Born 1965 – 1980)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Boomers (Born 1955-1964)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Boomers (Born 1946-1954)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists (Born before 1946)</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2  Gender of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Boomers</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Boomers</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>33% (7 respondents)</td>
<td>67% (14 respondents)²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Comparison with Singapore Workforce Statistics (Source: Labour Force Survey of Singapore 2009)
²Figures in brackets are used throughout this report to indicate the actual number of respondents particularly when the number is small.
In terms of the job level, more than half (57%) of the respondents were in non-managerial positions (Figure 3). Among the supervisors who responded, Gen X made up the largest group.

**What is a Generation?**

A generation is a cohort of people “who grew up and came of age together”, experiencing shared formative events of their life course to shape a “generational character”. Typically, a new generation is formed roughly once every two decades.

The groupings used in this study provide insights into the patterns of differences between generational groups. The groupings are, however, not intended to stereotype individuals based only on their chronological age. Within each generation, there is also diversity and an individual employee may not reflect all the values of the designated generation. It is also useful to note that the character of each generation shifts over time as the cohort ages and experiences new events. For instance, with their extensive life experience and financial stability, Baby Boomers offer a whole new set of expectations and attitudes, compared with their predecessors, the Traditionalists.

**Today’s Multi-generational Workplace**

The age range of employees in many organisations is widening. Teams may include Gen Y, their slightly older counterparts Gen X, Baby Boomers (Late and Early), and even Traditionalists, born just before the end of World War II. With more people living longer and remaining employable, this is the first time that an organisation may have four generations working together.

A multi-generational workforce presents
both challenges and opportunities. Each generation brings slightly different perspectives to their workplace. The differences may manifest themselves in how they tackle an issue at work or how they interact.

As an increasing number of supervisors are from Gen X, this suggests that an increasing number of supervisors need to manage not just those chronologically younger but also workers who are older. An organisation that is not equipped to manage these different generations at work may well find dysfunctional team dynamics resulting in misunderstandings, wasted time and energy, and lower morale and productivity.

On the other hand, organisations that have developed and implemented strategies to effectively manage the multi-generational workforce, can benefit from higher productivity because of the increased diversity of perspectives. Effective management of the increasing age diversity at the workforce begins first by understanding the differences between the various generations at the workplace. It is also important to understand how each generation perceives another generation and how these stereotypes may affect the way work is done.

**An Overview of the Different Generations**

Together, Gen X and Gen Y make up 60% of the Singapore workforce. This also means that 40% of the Singapore workforce are over 45 years of age. Each and every generation has its own characteristics. Major events in our formative years shape our attitudes, opinions and perception of life, family, friends, authority, politics and work. Below is an overview of the characteristics of the four different generations and the historical events that would have impacted each of them (Figure 4).
Figure 4 **Overview of the characteristics of the different generations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Traditionalists (Born before 1946)</th>
<th>Baby Boomers (Born 1946 – 1964)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This group is sometimes referred to as veterans or the silent generation as they tend to be quieter than the Baby Boomers who replaced them. While most have already left the workplace, those remaining may include those at the senior level in control of organisations or who have unique expertise and skills. Another sub-group may be those who out of economic necessity or the need to keep active, still remain in the workforce.</td>
<td>These are those who were born in much larger numbers after the end of World War II (hence, the term Baby Boomers). As they grew up, the size of their cohort ensured that they had a significant impact on their working environment compared to other generations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iconic Technology</th>
<th>Radio 1920</th>
<th>TV 1956</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spoken movies 1930</td>
<td>Audio cassette 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radar 1935</td>
<td>Colour TV 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atomic bomb 1945</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Swing &amp; Jazz</th>
<th>Elvis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glenn Miller</td>
<td>Beatles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duke Ellington</td>
<td>Rolling Stones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TV &amp; Movies</th>
<th>Gone with the Wind</th>
<th>Easy Rider</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Wizard of Oz</td>
<td>The Graduate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wuthering Heights</td>
<td>Jaws</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Markers &amp; Landmark Events</th>
<th>First antibiotic</th>
<th>Man walks on the moon</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>Vietnam war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WW II &amp; end of Japanese occupation</td>
<td>Demise of colonialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First legislative council elections</td>
<td>Self-government</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Industrial unrest</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Popular Culture</th>
<th>Nylons</th>
<th>Flared jeans</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James Dean</td>
<td>Mini skirt</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Strengths</th>
<th>Strong work ethic</th>
<th>Dedicated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>Good team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disciplined</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotionally mature</td>
<td>Future-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belief in the “greater good”</td>
<td>Experienced and knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus and perseverance</td>
<td>Committed to customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Challenges for Supervisors</th>
<th>May be reluctant to buck the system and speak up when they disagree</th>
<th>Uncomfortable with conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes put process ahead of results</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As you review the findings from this survey, bear in mind that the patterns highlighted are primarily to facilitate understanding and analysis of the potential inter-generational issues at the workplace. As with any study of people, each individual is different and readers should be mindful not to let the findings reinforce a negative stereotype.

| **Gen X**  
**BORN 1965 – 1980** | **Gen Y**  
**BORN AFTER 1980** |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The group identified as Gen X began when the birth rate decreased after the end of the Baby Boom. The term ‘Gen X’ became widespread after the 1991 publication of Douglas Coupland’s book of the same name.</td>
<td>This group has grown up in a similar environment as Gen X, but with a different parenting style (e.g. no spanking, no corporal punishment and very protective parents); extremely conscious of the global environment; open-minded and accepting of differences in race, gender, ethnicity, etc; socially conscious; concerned with personal safety.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- VCR 1976
- Walkman 1979
- IBM PC 1981

- Internet, e-mail, SMS
- DVD, iPod
- Play Station/X-Box

- INXS
- Nirvana
- Madonna

- Eminem
- Britney Spears
- P. Diddy

- ET
- MTV

- Titanic
- Pay TV
- Reality TV

- HDB & Home Ownership Scheme
- Fall of communism
- Stock market crashes
- AIDS identified
- First McDonald’s 1979

- MRT opens 1987
- ERP starts 1998
- New millennium
- Sept 11, 2001
- Tsunami

- Hyper colour
- Torn jeans

- Body piercing
- Baseball caps

- Adaptable
- Technologically literate
- Independent
- Creative
- Expect to contribute
- Willing to buck the system

- Optimistic
- Ability to multi-task
- Technologically savvy
- A global world view
- Goal and achievement oriented
- Believe in volunteerism and serving communities

- Sceptical
- Distrust authority
- May not be attracted to leadership positions

- View changing jobs as a natural process
- Likes to instil a sense of play and fun in the work

**Perceived Strengths**
- Strong work ethic
- Experienced
- Disciplined
- Emotionally mature
- Belief in the “greater good”
- Focus and perseverance
- Stability
- Dedicated
- Good team members
- Optimistic
- Future-oriented
- Experienced and knowledgeable
- Committed to customer service
- Adaptable
- Technologically literate
- Independent
- Creative
- Expect to contribute
- Willing to buck the system

**Potential Challenges for Supervisors**
- May be reluctant to buck the system and speak up when they disagree
- Uncomfortable with conflict
- Sometimes put process ahead of results
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- James Dean
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- Glenn Miller
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- Eminem
- Britney Spears
- P. Diddy
- Britney Spears
- P. Diddy
- INXS
- NIRVANA
- MADDONNA
- EMINEM
- BRITNEY SPEARS
- P DIDDY
- INXS
- NIRVANA
- MADDONNA
- EMINEM
- BRITNEY SPEARS
- P DIDDY
- INXS
- NIRVANA
- MADDONNA
- EMINEM
- BRITNEY SPEARS
- P DIDDY
- INXS
- NIRVANA
- MADDONNA
- EMINEM
- BRITNEY SPEARS
- P DIDDY
- INXS
- NIRVANA
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- Jaws
- ET
- MTV
- Titanic
- Pay TV
| Reality TV
| Reality TV

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF SINGAPORE’S MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE 11
The survey sought to uncover how the different generations perceive each other at the workplace, their motivations, view of Work-Life issues, preferred communication styles and expectations they have of supervisors.

**General Observations**

Most employees are working in multi-generational teams. 95% of respondents reported that they work with colleagues from other generations either continuously (53%) or most of the time (42%).

Most employees view that multi-generational teams improve organisational performance. There is, however, a minority (19%) of respondents who view that having a mix of generations is not linked to a team’s performance.

**Perceptions**

Most employees view their own generation as more committed than other generations. When asked which generation was more committed and dedicated to the organisation, respondents tended to rate their own generation as the most committed, with the exception of Gen Y respondents who rated Gen X as more committed than even their own generation (Figure 5).

Gen Y is generally viewed as more adaptable than other generations. When it came to perceptions of which generation is hard working or able to provide good customer service, most generations rated their own generation highest – similar to the rating for commitment. However,
when it came to “adaptability”, most respondents perceived Gen Y as the most adaptable (45% of all respondents) followed by Gen X (30% of all respondents) (Figure 6).

Some Gen X and Gen Y encounter more challenges than their older colleagues when working across generations. While the majority of respondents indicated that they rarely find it hard to work with colleagues of a different generation, among those respondents who did report some difficulty, the percentage is higher among the Gen X and Gen Y compared to Baby Boomers (Figure 7).
If any inter-generational difficulties exist, they are more likely to be between the young and the old. When respondents were probed which generation in particular they have most problems working with, Gen Y identified Baby Boomers while Baby Boomers and Traditionalists identified Gen Y (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Difficulty working with a particular generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Boomers</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Boomers</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to provide reasons why they find it difficult to deal with Gen Y, some of the remarks cited by other generations are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Difficulty working with Gen Y

- **Gen X says**
  - Lack of knowledge
  - Attitude problems; arrogant
  - Not open to feedback
  - Not mature, don't know hardship
  - Self-centred
  - Detached from work

- **Late Boomers say**
  - Short attention span
  - Overconfident; impatient
  - Unrealistic ideas about work
  - Selfish; focussed on short term
  - Lack of commitment
  - Too active
  - Wants only promotion
  - Don't show respect to senior staff

- **Early Boomers say**
  - Not flexible
  - Do it their own way
  - Job-hoppers
  - Recalcitrant
  - Hot tempered
  - Immature
  - Easily bored

- **Traditionalists say**
  - They cannot click with older people
  - Attitude problems
  - Abrupt
  - Job-hoppers
Conversely when asked to provide reasons on the difficulties dealing with Gen X, some of the remarks cited by other generations are indicated in Figure 10.

**Figure 10 Difficulty working with Gen X**

- **Gen Y says**
  - Pre-formed mindset, want to do it their way
  - They think they know it all and are smarter than you
- **Gen X says**
  - Not open to new ideas
  - Think they have it all and act accordingly
  - React based on old habits, not open to looking from different perspectives
  - Not willing to learn
  - Stubborn in their values and opinions
  - Unwilling to take risks

- **Late Boomers say**
  - Overambitious
  - Think they know it all
  - Want to work with autonomy
  - Think that older employees are outdated
  - Too demanding; insensitive to others
  - Like to show their power

- **Early Boomers say**
  - Self-centred
  - Selfish; caring for their own needs
  - Don’t accept comments
  - Calculating

When asked to provide reasons why it is difficult to deal with Baby Boomers, some of the remarks cited by other generations are indicated in Figure 11.

**Figure 11 Difficulty working with Baby Boomers**

- **Gen Y says**
  - Not open to new ideas
  - Think they have it all and act accordingly
  - React based on old habits, not open to looking from different perspectives
  - Not willing to learn
  - Stubborn in their values and opinions
  - Unwilling to take risks
- **Gen X says**
  - Don’t listen
  - Inflexible
  - No respect for younger staff
  - Think they have the most experience and, based on that, may make the decisions
  - Resistant to change
  - Do it their own way
  - Fixed views on environment

- **Baby Boomers say**
  - Pre-formed mindset, want to do it their way
  - They think they know it all and are smarter than you

- **Late Boomers say**
  - Overambitious
  - Think they know it all
  - Want to work with autonomy
  - Think that older employees are outdated
  - Too demanding; insensitive to others
  - Like to show their power

- **Early Boomers say**
  - Self-centred
  - Selfish; caring for their own needs
  - Don’t accept comments
  - Calculating
When asked to provide reasons why they find it difficult to deal with Traditionalists, some of the remarks cited by other generations are shown in Figure 12.

**Figure 12 Difficulty working with Traditionalists**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inflexible</td>
<td>Not open to accept new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant to change</td>
<td>Slow in understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand feedback</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not open to learn</td>
<td>Inflexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow pace</td>
<td>Fixed mindset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The older generations are more accepting of working longer hours compared to the younger generations. When asked if it is acceptable for the organisation to expect them to work beyond contractual office hours on a regular basis, the percentage of Traditionalists (43%) and Early Boomers (40%) is significantly higher than that for Gen Y (13%) and Gen X (20%).

Even Gen Y does not think it is confident in technology. Given that some older generations expect their younger colleagues to be more technologically savvy, it is interesting that the percentage of Gen Y respondents who did not consider this their strength is similar to that of other generations.

Each generation has a slightly different view on how inter-generational differences at work can be bridged. There is a general agreement that creating opportunities where workers of different age groups can work together would help. Providing training to create awareness and foster respect for one another was also generally rated high, although slightly less so by Gen Y (Figure 13).
Figure 13  Ways to help different generations work well together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do the different generations think the organisation should do to help employees of different age groups work better with one another?</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create opportunities where workers belonging to different age groups can work together</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train employees to create awareness &amp; respect for each other</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t make assumptions based on age</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start mentoring (learning through guidance from more experienced colleagues and interaction) programmes for employees</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate that a multi-generational workforce is important to the workplace</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss differences of any kind</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire people who can work with people of different generations</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect not less or more because of someone’s age</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set rules for team cooperation</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let multiple generations participate in panel interviews for new hires</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivation

Employee motivation changes depending on an employee’s life situation. While good pay and benefits rank high across all generations in retaining staff, there are still differences, e.g. Gen Y values personal development opportunities (Figure 14).

Figure 14 Motivators to retain staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important motivators to remain in the organisation</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good pay and benefits</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging, stimulating and varied work</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring and supportive colleagues</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a supportive and caring boss</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good personal development opportunities</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having autonomy over how I work</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear organisational values and vision</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation’s reputation or having a well-known product</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation openly supports corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different generations are attracted to different employment benefits. While there are some common elements, e.g. all appreciate a performance bonus, there are differences in the relative value that each generation places on different benefits. For example, those older value extended medical coverage while the Gen Y sees annual leave as important (Figure 15).

**Figure 15  Preferred benefits by generations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits the respondents would like the organisation to provide</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance bonus</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended medical coverage (dental schemes, health screening)</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended medical coverage to family members</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work hours</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra annual leave</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-related training</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement programme</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational facilities</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation allowance</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare subsidies</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock options</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School fees</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All generations want to work for an organisation that is concerned for its employees. All generations rank this as either No. 1 or No. 2. Beyond this, Gen X tends to value the flexibility to manage its own work and life. Gen Y values career development opportunities and training which are less important for Traditionalists. The older generations appear to value recognition more (Figure 16).

### Figure 16  Motivation by generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What motivates respondents?</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working for an organisation that is concerned for its employees</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a positive, optimistic and energetic environment</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving recognition for my work</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the flexibility to manage my work and life</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 2</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a manager/supervisor who values my opinion and contributions</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving respect for my knowledge, experience and insight</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what is expected of me and having the resources to achieve them</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having career development opportunities &amp; training</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to see how my actions affects the overall organisation's performance</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 8</td>
<td>No. 6</td>
<td>No. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a manager/supervisor who gives me regular feedback about how I perform</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
<td>No. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with creative people</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being allowed to do my work my own way</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 11</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>No. 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work-Life

Given the growing importance of Work-Life issues at workplaces, the study sought to uncover how this was affected by generational changes.

Elder care needs (e.g. looking after parents) have overtaken childcare needs as a Work-Life concern for employees. Given that many current workplace Work-Life interventions are geared towards those with children, it is interesting that practically every generation, except Gen X, sees meeting elder care needs as important to a greater degree than childcare (Figure 17).

Most employees find Work-Life Harmony programmes important for productivity. 66% of respondents find that Work-Life Harmony programmes are important as they help them be more productive. When asked why they think organisations have implemented Work-Life Harmony programmes, 58% said it is to help employees be more productive.

Figure 17 Importance of Work-Life Harmony programmes

![Importance of Work-Life Harmony programmes graph]

Why are Work-Life Harmony programmes important?

- To meet childcare needs
- To meet elder care needs (e.g. looking after parents)
- Allows those approaching retirement more time to pursue personal interests
- Helps me to be more productive
- Others
Gen Y and Gen X appear to experience less Work-Life Harmony. A slight difference among the generations was detected, in that those who experience good Work-Life Harmony tend to be older (Figure 18).

Figure 18 Rating of Work-Life Harmony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do they rate their Work-Life Harmony?</th>
<th>Overall results</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The younger generations appear less open to working beyond the official retirement age. While overall, the majority do want to work beyond retirement, the inclination to do so is higher when they are older (Figure 19).

Figure 19 Working beyond official retirement age

- Overall
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 57%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 20%
  - Don’t know: 23%

- Gen Y says
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 44%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 24%
  - Don’t know: 32%

- Gen X says
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 55%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 21%
  - Don’t know: 24%

- Late Boomers say
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 66%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 17%
  - Don’t know: 17%

- Early Boomers say
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 77%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 11%
  - Don’t know: 12%

- Traditionalists say
  - Willing to work beyond the official retirement age: 90%
  - Unwilling to work beyond the official retirement age: 0%
  - Don’t know: 10%
Communication

The study sought to identify how generational differences affect communication and knowledge transfer within an organisation.

Each generation has a slight difference in preference for communication. While

Figure 20 Communication preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the respondent’s preference for how their employer communicates with them?</th>
<th>Overall results</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team meetings</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone conversation</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town halls (informal public meetings with all employees)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messaging (SMS)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed internal memoranda</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messaging (IM)</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perception of Treatment

The study sought to detect if there are differences in how employees perceive their treatment by their organisation and colleagues.

Most employees view that they have not been treated unfairly by their organisation because of their age. However, this perception declines with age (Figure 21).

**Figure 21  Perception of being treated unfairly**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have respondents been treated unfairly by their employer due to their age?</th>
<th>Overall results</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, never</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, frequently</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the age-related remarks by respondents which highlight the potential sensitivities of each generation when it comes to working with colleagues of different generations are indicated in Figure 22.

**Figure 22 Age-related remarks at the workplace**

**Gen X says**
- “Not old enough for a promotion to director or managerial level.”
- “Age has been a factor in consideration for promotion and salary bars.”
- “Most benefits are given to older staff, which younger staffs are not entitled to.”
- “The older employees need not take on additional responsibilities.”
- “Typical remark that the older generation uses on younger colleagues is ‘I’ve eaten more salt than you have rice’ when they insist on having things their way.”

**Gen Y says**
- “I am too old already for any promotion.”
- “Better opportunities are given to the youngsters.”
- “Age-limit policy for certain sponsored courses.”
- “Good and costly training course are offered to younger colleagues first.”
- “I was not allowed to attend an event as my boss said it is waste of time due to my age.”
- “We have an unfair treatment in the appraisal system and bonus system.”
- “Calling us ‘Uncle’ or ‘Aunty’.”
- “Long serving staff are often referred to as ‘dead wood’ or ‘dinosaurs’ by the younger generation.”

**Late Boomers say**
- “I am too old already for any promotion.”
- “Better opportunities are given to the youngsters.”
- “Age-limit policy for certain sponsored courses.”
- “Good and costly training course are offered to younger colleagues first.”
- “I was not allowed to attend an event as my boss said it is waste of time due to my age.”
- “We have an unfair treatment in the appraisal system and bonus system.”
- “Calling us ‘Uncle’ or ‘Aunty’.”
- “Long serving staff are often referred to as ‘dead wood’ or ‘dinosaurs’ by the younger generation.”

**Early Boomers say**
- “Company told me to leave after working faithfully and effectively for 10 years, when I hit the age of 55.”
- “They are only looking at younger staff for promotion.”
- “Doing the same job, but different pay compared to other age groups.”
- “Give higher performance bonus to younger staff holding same position.”
- “More workload and no pay increase; no ways to raise the issue, no union, human resource unable to solve the unfair treatment for the old staff.”
- “Poor wage restructuring policy.”
- “For some training, they will give the opportunity to younger staff.”
- “We tell these younger colleagues about our experience and then they will say ‘what worked in the past won’t work now’ or ‘when you have a lot of experience means you are admitting you are old already’.”
- “You are too slow and take more time to complete compared to younger ones.”

**Traditionalists say**
- “Older workers are getting lower pay because they are regarded as slow and unproductive workers due to eyesight.”
- “Positive discrimination; more often than not, difficult cases were assigned to older workers because of their experiences.”
- “They make such remarks behind my back but not to my face.”
**Relationship with Supervisor**

The study sought to detect if there were relevant variations in what each generation expects of their manager or supervisor and vice versa.

**Gen X make up the majority of supervisors.** Of the respondents, 54% reported working for a Gen X supervisor.

**Most employees from all generations view that the age of their supervisor does not matter.** 63% of respondents view that the age of their supervisor does not matter. 31% are still more comfortable with an older manager.

**Some Gen Y and Gen X prefer to manage employees younger or around the same age to a greater extent than supervisors of other generations.** 79% of the managers/supervisors said that age does not matter; they can manage people of any age. Generally, the older the managers, the more comfortable they are with managing people of any age (Figure 23).

**Figure 23  Supervisor’s preference for employees’ age**

- **Gen Y says**
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are older than me: 9%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are younger than me: 28%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are the same age: 59%

- **Gen X says**
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are older than me: 2%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are younger than me: 2%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are the same age: 76%

- **Late Boomers say**
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are older than me: 1%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are younger than me: 9%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are the same age: 88%

- **Early Boomers say**
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are older than me: 2%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are younger than me: 10%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are the same age: 86%

- **Traditionalists say**
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are older than me: 0%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are younger than me: 0%
  - I am more comfortable managing employees who are the same age: 88%
When probed, some of the reasons why supervisors prefer younger employees surfaced, as indicated in Figure 24. This suggests skill gaps that younger supervisors may need to acquire. For older employees, it also suggests a need to be mindful of how their reactions may be misperceived by younger colleagues.

**Figure 24 Reasons why supervisors prefer younger employees**

- “I feel "pai seh" managing or directing older employees as I grew up learning to respect and not challenge my elders.”
- “I find it difficult to reprimand older staff.”
- “Older people don't seem happy when we correct them or give feedback.”
- “People who are older do not like being managed by younger supervisors; they feel it as an insult.”
- “Older employees come with a wealth of experience and differences in working style. This may result in older employees using experience as the reason for their ways of doing things.”
- “Their perception that young means inexperienced.”
- “Subordinates who are older are likely to be more experienced in their scope of work as well as life experience. Hence, they may not give respect to their supervisors who are younger.”

*pai seh: Hokkien word for ‘feel bad’*
All generations value working for caring, inspiring and competent supervisors. Supervisors able to give clear directions and support are particularly valued (Figure 25).

**Figure 25 What different generations expect from their supervisor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do the different generations expect from their immediate manager/ supervisor?</th>
<th>Overall results</th>
<th>Gen Y says</th>
<th>Gen X says</th>
<th>Late Boomers say</th>
<th>Early Boomers say</th>
<th>Traditionalists say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gives me clear directions and support</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me freedom and flexibility to do my work</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides consistently constructive feedback</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps to balance my work</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves me in making decisions that affect my job</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praises me, gives recognition and rewards</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats me as full member of the organisation, no matter the position</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports me in my success</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives promotions to those who best deserve them</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows me to learn by making mistakes</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on performance</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Insights from Other Studies

Over the years, there has been increasing research on managing a multi-generational workforce. Overall, the results from the study of Singapore’s multi-generational workforce are generally consistent with previous international research. All highlight that while there are differences between the generations, there are also many commonalities.

To complement the findings from the Singapore study, what follows are highlights of related overseas research observations that provide greater depth to understanding the issues.

Perceptions

In our research, respondents indicated that they rarely encounter difficulty working with colleagues of other generations, and are already working in teams of different generations.

A study by the World of Work offered a slightly different view when their research found that the four generations of workers rarely interact with one another and often fail to recognise each other’s skills or work ethic.

Additionally, the following is a compilation of other related observations from earlier research on the different generations at work.

Traditionalists

- Traditionalists might misinterpret dry humour or sarcasm since they prefer open, direct and honest communication.
- Respecting authority, they tend to prefer the straightforward, ‘tell-me-what-you-need-me-to-do’ approach.
- Traditionalists tend to be offended and uncomfortable with uninhibited workplace banter, especially if the younger colleagues are freely expressing views on personal and sensitive issues. Their resulting non-participation or confrontation may be viewed as crabbiness.
- Traditionalists despise workers who appear to jump ladder rungs up to a promotion (not paying their dues).
- Traditionalists might not be as conscious as subsequent generations to issues relating to cross cultural awareness.

Baby Boomers

- Younger managers and staff might see Baby Boomers’ long hours as evidence that they have an unhealthy Work-Life ethic.
- In organisations in which telecommuting is possible, Gen X might misinterpret Baby Boomers’ demands for employees to stay on-site as limited confidence in their work or decreased trust.
Baby Boomers might believe that employees who fail to put in ‘extra time’ lack commitment, focus, and loyalty.

Baby Boomers might not recognise or fully appreciate the off-site contribution of employees.

**Gen X**

- Older employees may not be comfortable reporting to a supervisor who is the same age as their own children.

- Gen X might lose interest in meetings where non-critical information could have been shared in more expedient ways (e.g. e-mail, overhead announcements). Likewise, they might withdraw from team meetings where a decision seems painfully obvious. Their disinterest might be perceived as a failure to get along with co-workers or to be a team player.

- As a result of their independence, Gen X may need to be reminded to delegate. Failure to delegate might cause other generations to feel under-appreciated and/or unwelcome.

- Gen X’s off-site contributions to an organisation might go unrecognised. Examples include taking work home, doing independent research and social networking.
Gen Y

- Those not comfortable with technology might perceive Gen Y’s PowerPoint presentation and Excel graphing as attempts to ‘show off.’

- Gen Y might assume that fellow employees share the same technological skills in the workplace. When helping an older co-worker, they may jump ahead several sequences: “It’s easy. All you have to do is modify your settings so that you allow keychain encryption.”

- Gen Y’s passionate political and social advocacy interests (i.e. “Don’t serve shark’s fin”, “Save a tree”) might not be shared by other generations. Gen Y may be confused as to why no other age group wants to organise and work to save the Earth.

- Gen Y finds letters, pagers, faxes, answering machines and e-mail communication too slow. Requisitions for wireless and/or immediate communication technologies may be disregarded by an employee of an older generation.

- Gen Y’s multi-tasking abilities can become evident in a situation when they are searching the Internet, listening to a conference call and talking to a fellow staff person simultaneously. To Gen Y, this multi-tasking is second nature. Older generations may see this as rude and insulting.
• To maximise real-time communication within limited screen space (e.g. text messaging on cell phone screens), Gen Y uses popular acronyms such as BRB (Be Right Back) and LOL (Laughing Out Loud). These may inadvertently appear in notes and e-mail to members of other generations. Older staff might view them as cryptic, unnecessary and exclusionary.

Motivation

Despite some of the differences noticed in our research, the main drivers, motivators and benefits are generally shared by the different generations. The following is a compilation of other related observations from earlier research on the motivations of different generations at work.

Traditionalists
• Traditionalists are looking for due process and fair play—and when they find it they are loyal to the company and work within the system.

• They expect others to behave responsibly and honour commitments, whether or not they are the bosses.

• Many Traditionalists are still very interested in their future and in trying new things at work. They are not interested in sitting around and stagnating; they want to keep learning and being challenged. They want to know that their employer values their work and that they are making a contribution. Traditionalists want respect and recognition for the work they have done and for what they know.

Baby Boomers
• Baby Boomers are looking for new ways to work—and opt for different business responsibilities, new opportunities, and ways to give back to their organisation, or avenues for working with younger employees.

• Baby Boomers need personal satisfaction from their jobs; they crave development and challenge above all. Boomers prefer to have flexibility so that they can balance family and work responsibilities.

• Baby Boomers like collaborative learning, working in teams, and transferring their knowledge to the younger generations.

• It is important to listen to Baby Boomers and take their ideas seriously. Because of their experience, many of the creative options provided by them can save the company money.

• To make it easier for Baby Boomers to work beyond retirement age, offer part-time positions and phase retirement schemes that show they are valued.

Gen X
• Gen X shares characteristics such as independence and a desire to belong and do meaningful work. Even though their tenure at one job may be brief, their on-
the-job dedication is often high. Honour that and make the career opportunities clear to them. They may prefer to work for the same organisation instead of job-hopping.

- Pay is important only to the extent that they are also able to pursue their outside work interests.

- Gen X wants access to professional development opportunities; they want to train themselves for other jobs. The more training they get and the more professional development they enjoy, the more likely they are to stay.

- Gen X expects a lot more feedback than their predecessors, and immediately. They do not want to wait six months or a year for a formal appraisal. They want praise, to know that they are contributing and to see how they fit into the big picture.

- Involve them in decision-making. All workers want to be part of key decisions about the company. But today’s new workers are particularly eager to be included in determining how work goals will be met.

Gen Y

- Gen Y is career-driven and expects a lot from an employer; they will not hesitate to leave if their expectations are not met. Gen Y is fast moving and demands immediate results. With the average anticipated length of tenure between two and four years, employers need to visibly add value to Gen Y employees to counter this trend and retain them.

- Strong leadership is important for Gen Y. They value managers who can offer the advice and support to help them reach their goals and progress their career.

- Align their current role to career aspirations and enable them to make use of their skills and qualifications through set responsibilities that will increase over time.

- Make learning and development a priority. Offer regular programmes to help your Gen Y employees develop their career within your organisation. Gen Y wants to continually learn new skills, so it is crucial to provide opportunities to utilise these skills.

- Gen Y is loyal to an employer who is honest and respectful. Support company values, deliver your promises, meet their needs and be considerate of individual skills, goals and expectations. Honour their optimism, and welcome and nurture them. They want to be happy at work and, therefore, seek organisations that are friendly in nature.
Work-Life Harmony

In our research, we noticed that Work-Life Harmony is a priority among all working generations. This is consistent with research elsewhere. A Conference Board report suggested that employers need to inform employees of possible career paths and be clear about the options and the value proposition of those choices for both the employee and organisation.

One element of Work-Life Harmony important to all generations is flexibility — how, where, or when they get their work done. But flexibility is viewed differently by each generation. According to Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans in their article Multi-generational Management, the mindsets for each generation are:

- **Traditionalists**: “I’ve earned it.” This is my time to spend with my family or think about retirement.

- **Baby Boomers**: “I want it.” Now that my children are grown-up, I want to travel and pursue my own interests, or have time to care for ageing parents.

- **Gen X**: “I deserve it.” I want to choose how and where I do my work or spend my time. Give me space to make decisions.

- **Gen Y**: “I expect it.” I want freedom — not to be tied to a desk. Thanks to technology I can work anytime, anywhere.
Communication

While the Singapore research found that generations prefer face-to-face meetings and team meetings, there are also useful insights gleaned from other research on the differences between generations in the area of communication:

**Traditionalists**
- Due to the private or silent nature of this group, do not expect members of this generation to share their thoughts immediately. Your word is your bond. Focus on their words; body language is less important.
- Face-to-face or written communication is preferred. Value statements should be clear and evident. Formal titles are expected. Schedule a time to connect versus just stopping by. From their perspective: “No news is good news.”

**Baby Boomers**
- They prefer having lots of meetings to tackle problems and concerns. Consensus building is important for many Boomers, and face-to-face discussions are their preferred way to make this happen.
- A conference call is a second option, as long as everyone has an opportunity to participate. For Boomers, body language is very important. You need to speak openly and directly but avoid controlling language. You have to respond to their questions with thorough answers and expect to be pressed for details. Present options to demonstrate flexibility in your thinking.

**Gen X**
- They prefer communication by e-mail because it is efficient and ‘in the moment’. They do not like to waste time or energy. Meetings are for those occasions when no other option is available, and you may even find them checking their e-mail or sending e-mail even during a meeting.
- Use a short concise approach to conversations as they prefer an informal communication style. Ask them for feedback and provide regular feedback.

**Gen Y**
- They are constantly surrounded by technology and plugged into multiple options; it is quicker and easier to send an e-mail or a text message than answer the phone. Gen Y resents being talked down to.
- Seek their feedback constantly and provide regular feedback.
Relationship with Supervisor

The Singapore research found many similarities across the generations in what they expect of their supervisors. Research cited by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that leadership style preferences are reflected in selected admired leaders of each generation.

Baby Boomers, for example, prefer leaders who are caring, competent and honest. Gen X and Y want leaders to challenge the system and create change. Their study also found that each generation ranked honesty, competence and loyalty among the fundamental leadership qualities, with honesty topping the list.

Additional differences detected in other research on the preferred leadership styles of each generation are:

- **Traditionalists** prefer a fair, consistent, clear, direct and respectful leadership style.

- **Baby Boomers** prefer to be treated as equals by their leader; they are looking for a warm and caring, mission-defined leadership style with a democratic approach.

- **Gen X** wants a direct, competent, genuine, informal, flexible and result-oriented leadership style that is supportive of learning opportunities.

- **Gen Y** is looking for a motivational, collaborative, positive, educational, achievement-oriented and coaching leadership style.
Recent studies by Gallup Group and the Leadership Council have documented that employees do not leave companies; they leave managers.

The manager plays a key role in establishing understanding and agreement among the different generations. To make this happen, they suggest that a manager needs to:

- **Throw out all assumptions about generations and set an example of respect, tolerance, and appreciation of employee efforts and contributions.**

- **Establish a culture of trust and confidence by giving people freedom to achieve outcomes their own way.**

- **Manage different people differently; be aware that not everyone has the same motivation for success or perspective of the way work is done.**

- **Care about the people who work for them, and step in when misunderstandings arise.**

- **Encourage cooperation and a “team mentality”.**

Workers of all ages want to be recognised for their accomplishments, particularly from leaders, supervisors, and colleagues. However, different age groups define this recognition and acknowledgement differently:

- **Traditionalists**: Feedback is not necessary, but they want to know that they have made a difference, that the organisation respects their vast experience and values their perseverance.

- **Baby Boomers**: Documented feedback on a yearly basis is sufficient. They want to know their contributions are noticed, and reflected in bonuses or cash rewards.

- **Gen X**: They want frequent, honest feedback to know they are on the right track and regard personal acknowledgements from the manager and senior executives and monetary rewards as equally essential.

- **Gen Y**: They want immediate feedback that tells them what they are doing right and wrong. They prefer quarterly over yearly bonuses.
HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF SINGAPORE’S MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE
As Singaporeans live and work longer, the age diversity of Singapore’s workforce will increase. The findings of this study highlight to employers and organisations that there are differences in how the various generations operate at the workplace.

A diverse team that is effectively managed will have energised employees who are more creative and have higher morale. As they work well together and know how to leverage on each other’s differences and strengths, the turnover will also be lower. The result is superior performance. Organisations that know how to deal with such diversity are also open and able to tap on a wider pool of talent which can contribute to the business.

Conversely, if not effectively managed, the increasing diversity in the workforce can adversely affect performance as negative stereotypes, misperceptions and misunderstandings lead to lower energy and morale, dysfunctional team dynamics, working in silos and a higher turnover.

Employers who want to prepare their organisation for the increasing age diversity in Singapore’s workforce should consider:

- Deepening their understanding of the age-related changes occurring in the workforce and how this will impact their industry’s talent base and customer preferences. This includes not just the longer working lifespan of Singapore
employees but also by how much and how fast the demographic profile of each age group is changing.

- Understanding the business case for responding to these changes. Having an effective diversity programme is not just an exercise in political correctness. To be sustainable, managers need to understand how this impacts the bottomline. This includes understanding the current employee profile, how the profile of the talent pipeline is changing and the interventions that the firm can use to stay ahead. Firms in Singapore can also utilise the convenient resources at www.re-employment.sg to benchmark their age profile with others in their industry.

- Deepening their understanding of how employees of different generations may have different needs and preferences in working styles and the implications this may have on the organisation's performance. This study provides a starting point.

- Developing values that support the fair, responsible and respectful treatment of all employees so that employees from all generations can contribute to their fullest potential.

Arising from the specific findings, employers are encouraged to consider the following:

- **Encourage multi-generational teams.** Assign employees to teams or workgroups based on their development needs, skills, abilities, and work style preference. To increase their engagement, communicate to them why they have been assigned to that project. As often, colleagues tend to cluster according to age. Making an active effort to diversify teams can help bring new perspectives and approaches to initiatives. To minimise the potential for conflict, stress the importance of maintaining an open mind, and of welcoming different ideas and strategies.

- **Audit existing communications.** Assess whether current communications channels and styles are sufficiently flexible to meet the preferences of all groups of employees. Employ a range of communication methods that are inclusive and avoid those that may make some groups feel excluded.

- **Offer flexible learning.** All generations want to learn and expand their knowledge, skills and abilities to improve their own and their organisation’s performance and productivity. Yet learning can take place in different ways and many forms. Different types of work also require different styles of training to master the work. Provide multiple activities that allow employees to learn in many different ways, e.g. coaching on the job and eLearning.

- **Encourage mentoring opportunities.** Institute a mentoring programme where older and experienced employees
mentor the younger employees in technical or mechanical process improvement. Train the older employees to guide the younger employees — what to do and not to do. A well structured mentoring programme has the added benefit of allowing unwritten institutional knowledge to flow from one generation to the next.

• **Provide multiple rewards, benefits and compensation options.** Recognise that people from a mix of generations have different needs and preferences, so design your human resource strategies accordingly. Offer a variety of benefits, flexible schedules, and an array of opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Steps can be taken to ensure that HR practices are progressive, up-to-date, and comply with regulations and tripartite advisories. It is also important that HR professionals are adequately trained and prepared to fulfil their roles and add value to the organisation. These days, with information so easily disseminated via numerous electronic options, any unfair or irresponsible practices within an organisation may be effortlessly exposed, thus creating a negative impact on morale, productivity and staff retention.

• **Develop meaningful training programmes.** Conduct ‘Employee Workplace Values Assessments’, foster experiential learning and personal commitments to avoid inter-generational conflicts to the best of one’s abilities. Inter-generational misunderstandings can be fundamental to workplace problems. We advise that organisations weave this topic of inter-generational understanding into their other workplace training programmes.

• **Raise employee awareness.** Build on the strengths of each generation and individual employees in your organisation. Make sure that mixed-generation work teams recognise the unique strengths of each member regardless of their generation. Help individuals develop their talents to reach their potential and contribute in their own ways. Begin meaningful dialogue and initiate strategies to eliminate barriers.

• **Raise supervisor capability and awareness, and assess leadership values and style.** As managers/supervisors are responsible for organising, motivating, leading and assessing their workers, it is extremely important that they recognise their own preferred work values and work style. It is equally important for managers/supervisors to learn more about the preferred values and styles of their employees regardless of their generation. For example,
  - How does Serena prefer to receive communication?
  - How does Alvin prefer feedback?
  - How does Joyce prefer to learn?
• **Engage every employee regardless of generation.** Every day, managers are perplexed as to why they are not effective in the workplace. Perhaps the manager and employees are failing to connect with unseen and unrecognised inter-generational barriers. As far as possible, managers should tweak their style so as to have the most impact when they interact with each of their staff.

• **Ensure fair hiring.** It is important that HR staff, in close cooperation with management, focus on recruitment and retention, particularly to ensure that hiring the best candidate for the job is based on merit and the principles of fair employment practices.

• **Explore different modes of recruitment advertising.** Public announcements of job openings should take advantage of as many modes of release as possible. Baby Boomers prefer networking, newsprint and search firms. Gen Y seeks jobs via the internet and keyword web searches. The more ways the job is posted, the better the organisation’s chances of securing a highly competent employee. Search for a candidate who has demonstrated working successfully with people from multiple generations.

• **Prepare for re-employment.** Employers need to be prepared for the challenges of an ageing workforce. The Government will enact re-employment legislation by 2012 to enable more people to continue working beyond the current statutory retirement age of 62, up to 65 in the first instance and, later, up to 67. The earlier and more prepared an organisation is, the more its competitive advantage.

• **Introduce training on multi-generational issues.** It is essential that managers are aware of the multi-generational differences and learn to deal with different generations and/or different employees. To achieve this, we recommend that managers undergo a training programme to understand better the different generations and adopt a management style that fits each team member and their work environment. In the current multi-generational work environment, they need to become leaders who inspire others, engage their team members regardless of their generation, empower people and establish a positive work climate.
• Ensuring that those handling HR functions are adequately trained and equipped to effectively guide the organisation through the developments in this area. This includes preparing for re-employment. Employers should also make use of the training resources provided by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) to enhance their employment practices.

• Identify the current age stereotypes that may be affecting the organisation’s current employment practices. For example, a common stereotype is that a person who is chronologically older may not be able to perform well at a job compared to a younger colleague. However, depending on the nature of the job, the older person’s experience, skills and higher likelihood of continuity may well allow him or her to be just as effective in the job.

A multi-generational workforce can provide many benefits to companies that maximise the assets of each group.

By capitalising on the strengths and values of all generations, organisations can create a competitive advantage while employees can realise their full potential.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to managing a multi-generational workforce. By sharing our survey results, we hope you gain some insights to guide you through this ever-developing landscape.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Commissioned by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP), this report was prepared by Mr Frank Kuijsters of Digne Consult Asia Pacific Pte Ltd.

Our appreciation goes to all participating organisations for their support and inputs which contributed greatly to the successful completion of this project:

Abacus Travel Systems Pte Ltd
Employer Alliance
Fujifilm Hunt Chemicals Singapore Pte Ltd
Jason Electronics (Pte) Ltd
Kemin Industries (Asia) Pte Ltd
LG Electronics Singapore Pte Ltd
Ministry of Manpower
National Healthcare Group
National Healthcare Group (Diagnostics)
National Healthcare Group (Pharmacy)
National Healthcare Group (Polyclinics)
National Skin Centre
NTUC-ARU
NTUC Club
People's Association
PestBusters Pte Ltd
Philips Electronics Singapore Pte Ltd
Power Automation Pte Ltd
Republic Polytechnic
Right Management Pte Ltd
Sanofi Aventis Pharma Manufacturing Pte Ltd
Savi Technology Asia Pte Ltd
SHATEC Institute Pte Ltd
Singapore National Employers Federation
Singapore Press Holdings Ltd
Sybase (Singapore) Pte Ltd
Tan Tock Seng Hospital
Taylor & Francis Asia Pacific
Tuan Sing Holdings Ltd
Wiley Services Singapore Pte Ltd