Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

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After completing this article, the reader should be able to:

- Identify the various generational cohorts in today’s workplace.
- Discuss distinguishing characteristics of each generation and describe their respective workplace behaviors.
- Describe the challenges and opportunities associated with a diverse workplace.
- Explain common stereotypes associated with each generation.
- Discuss the effects of generational differences on medical imaging and radiation therapy departments.

Today’s workplace often includes workers from 4 distinct generations, and each generation brings a unique set of core values and characteristics to an organization. These generational differences can produce benefits, such as improved patient care, as well as challenges, such as conflict among employees. This article reviews current research on generational differences in educational settings and the workplace and discusses the implications of these findings for medical imaging and radiation therapy departments.

Table 1 displays some of the historical and social events that influenced each generational cohort: veterans, baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y. It is important to note that individuals from a specific generation might not exhibit all or even any of the characteristics ascribed to the group as a whole. Although no consensus exists regarding when 1 generation ends and another begins, experts agree that individuals who grew up in the same era experienced social and historical events that shaped similar characteristics and core values. Table 1 displays some of the historical and social events that influenced each generational cohort: veterans, baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y. It is important to note that individuals from a specific generation might not exhibit all or even any of the characteristics ascribed to the group as a whole. In fact, individuals might start to display characteristics of the next older generation as they advance in their careers.

Veterans

Veterans, also referred to as traditionalists and the silent generation, were born before 1946 and are the oldest generation in American culture. About
Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Veterans</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Generation Y</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Depression</td>
<td>Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td>Women’s Liberation Movement</td>
<td>Operation Desert Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>Political assassinations</td>
<td>First personal computers</td>
<td>Oklahoma City bombing</td>
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<td>Pearl Harbor</td>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>O.J. Simpson trial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-Day</td>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>Challenger disaster</td>
<td>Death of Princess Diana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>Neil Armstrong’s moon landing</td>
<td>Fall of Berlin Wall</td>
<td>School violence (Columbine massacre)</td>
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<td>Golden Age of Radio</td>
<td>Woodstock</td>
<td>Rodney King beating</td>
<td>Digital Age (Internet, instant messaging, wireless technology)</td>
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<td>Rise of labor unions</td>
<td>Television becomes dominant media</td>
<td>September 11 events</td>
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55 million veterans reside in the United States today. People from this generation grew up during the Great Depression, and many fought or were children during World War II. The hardships of the war and the economy deeply affected this generation’s values and opinions regarding family, religion, work, and government. For example, veterans are characterized as being patriotic and civic-minded because they witnessed business and government working together during the New Deal to conquer the Great Depression. They also learned to be resourceful to stretch limited funds and make small amounts of food and clothing last. Having overcome economic hardships, they developed a sense of pride and determination and, as a result, tend to work hard and prefer consistency and uniformity. Described as loyal and disciplined, veterans also value integrity, character, and sacrifice; respect authority and value boundaries between work and family life; and strive for financial security.

Although some veterans train slowly, they make work a priority and are considered team players. They are loyal to their employers; expect the same in return; and believe promotions, raises, and recognition should be based on job tenure and seniority. They also measure work ethic on punctuality and productivity. As expected, veterans often are unsure of and even resist using new technology.

Most veterans have retired, and they constitute only 2% (3.7 million) of the U.S. workforce today. As a result, only limited research regarding their presence in the workforce is available. However, more and more veterans are continuing to work later in life. In addition, health care organizations have a vested interest in understanding this generation because most Medicare beneficiaries—a significant portion of the health care consumer and patient populations—are veterans.

**Baby Boomers**

Baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 and are one of the largest generational cohorts in the United States, comprising about 76 million people. Those born between 1946 and 1955 are referred to as early boomers, and those born after 1955 are referred to as late boomers. Members of this generation grew up in a relatively steady state of free expression, economic prosperity, and an absence of world wars, although they lived through the Cold War era and the Vietnam War. As young adults, baby boomers experienced opportunities that were not available to their predecessors. Typically, they were the first in their families to earn college degrees, and their education translated into upward mobility. In school, baby boomers needed to collaborate and cooperate with their peers because there were so many of them. As a result, this generation possesses both teamwork and relationship-building skills.

Generally well established in their careers and in positions of power and authority, baby boomers are extremely hard workers and are committed to their professional goals. In fact, this driven and dedicated generation’s motto is “living to work,” and they are credited with creating the term workaholic. In addition, baby boomers are described as optimistic, friendly,
and proud of their strong work ethic. They also work longer work weeks than prior generations did, and they believe continual learning and growth lead to success.

Motivated by perks, prestige, and position, baby boomers want to be recognized for their contributions, and they view work as an exciting adventure.

Baby boomers represent approximately 29% (44.6 million) of today’s U.S. workforce. The oldest members of this generation are considering their retirement options and are seeking ways and opportunities to make their elder years personally meaningful.

**Generation X**

Members of generation X, also referred to as gen Xers, busters, and the lost generation, were born between 1965 and 1980. Approximately 53 million members of the generation X cohort live in the United States. The term buster describes this generation because their birth rates were vastly lower than those of the baby boomers. The lost generation also describes this cohort because it was the first generation of latchkey children—those left at home with negligible parental supervision—and children exposed to daycare and divorce. Many parents of generation X were baby boomers with workaholic tendencies driven by personal gratification, authority, and status. In some cases, their work habits resulted in poor home lives, broken families, and absent parents. A lack of meaningful family relationships led generation X members to create nontraditional families by bonding with friends and colleagues.

Given their upbringing, it is no surprise that generation X members expect to maintain a balance between work and family life and do not work exceptionally long hours for money or titles. Generally, they are less loyal to their employers and are more comfortable demanding flexible work arrangements. They also expect freedom and balance in their personal and professional lives, acknowledging that work contributes only a portion of the quality of life they seek to achieve. At times, generation X can be cynical, questioning authority and disliking direct supervision. Often, they resist micromanaging bosses and find them to be distasteful and undesirable.

Considered independent, self-reliant, and informal, generation X individuals multitask easily and excel while working on independent projects. In fact, they do not align themselves with the philosophy of being a team member, but they will work with colleagues to achieve a common goal. They prefer to manage their own time, set their own limits, and complete their work without supervision. This generation also finds informal policies regarding dress codes and workplace habits to be fun and motivating. They expect and embrace change and are technologically savvy.

Generation X members represent approximately 34% (52.7 million) of the U.S. workforce today. Most thrive in a casual, friendly work environment; however, they desire to build portable careers by exploring employment opportunities and changing jobs periodically to increase their marketability.

**Generation Y**

Members of generation Y, commonly referred to as gen Yers, millennials, and nexters, were born between 1981 and 2000. This generation comprises about 80 million people and constitutes the largest generational cohort in the United States today. Having grown up using computers, mobile phones, tablets, and other electronic devices, generation Y individuals are extremely technologically savvy and highly connected to the Internet.

Unlike the latchkey children of generation X, generation Y grew up being escorted and supervised by protective parents who were extremely cautious of dangers such as kidnapping, school violence, and drugs. The close interaction between parents and child gave rise to the term helicopter parents, meaning parents who are involved in every aspect of their children’s lives. In general, generation Y members are less independent, more community-oriented, and seek a sense of meaning in greater contexts. This generation is motivated by money and described as being ambitious, having a short attention span, and wanting instant gratification.

Compared with their predecessors, members of generation Y tend to be more social and confident as they seek a balance between their personal life and work. Although easily bored and impatient, they are motivated by their need for a sense of purpose and belonging to meaningful communities, and they typically enjoy experimenting and discovering new
Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Training and Education

As with the workforce, multigenerational differences often appear in educational and training settings. As higher education institutions continue to promote lifelong learning, classrooms are becoming more age-diverse. These classrooms expose future professionals to individuals from various generations and promote awareness of generational differences. As a result, education institutions and faculty must adapt to a changing classroom environment. To meet the needs of students and instructors, researchers are investigating various aspects of generational differences in the classroom, including learning preferences and technology use. This research can be used to design curricula, implement teaching strategies, and allocate resources.

Millennials’ Perspectives

Using a mixed-methods approach, Therrell and Dunneback conducted a study of 291 millennial college students regarding their perspectives on teaching and learning preferences. Their findings revealed that millennial college students preferred:

- A caring, passionate, and enthusiastic instructor.
- Clearly communicated course expectations.
- Course examinations that test only the content presented.
- Real work and practical applications of the content.
- Active learning strategies, such as role playing.
- Hands-on activities with interactive lab assignments and enjoyed real-world application scenarios over creative or reflective writing exercises. In addition, the students appreciated personable professors who tailored their lessons to the group of individuals in a specific class.

Therrell and Dunneback acknowledged that their findings were consistent with the general characteristics of millennials, including short attention spans and the need for instant gratification. They also recognized the need for future studies involving larger samples to further investigate millennial students’ perspectives on teaching and learning in a variety of courses. Although this study assessed students’ preferences in the classroom setting only, it is possible that millennial students bring those preferences into the workplace.

The Digital Divide

Salajan et al examined the perceptions of dental students and instructors regarding the use of digital learning technologies in the online classroom. Most of the instructors were either veterans or baby boomers, and most of the students were from generation Y. The researchers wanted to explore the assumption that younger generations are more technologically savvy and skilled than older generations. Specifically, the participants rated their use of email, web browsers, e-texts, personal computers, laptops, and MP3 players, as well as the course management system at the beginning of the semester and then at the end of the semester after using the digital technologies in the online classroom. The results indicated a slight but not statistically significant intergenerational difference in faculty members’ perceived use of digital technologies, although the researchers did not investigate whether the difference was associated with generational differences between the veteran and baby boomer cohorts. Students appeared to be more adept at using digital technologies than were their professors. However, the researchers warned that this conclusion was drawn from perceptual data at a rather general level of confidence (ie, not expert use). In addition, both students and faculty members were less satisfied with the course management system at the end of the
Facebook Use

Although Facebook predominantly is known as a site where family and friends can connect, it also is considered a valuable educational tool because it enables peer feedback, interaction, and learning in a social environment. Manca and Ranieri identified 5 main educational uses of Facebook:

- Supporting class discussions and helping students engage in collaborative learning.
- Developing content.
- Sharing educational resources.
- Delivering content to expose students to extracurricular resources.
- Supporting self-managed learning.

Using Facebook as an educational tool is relatively new, and little research exists regarding its benefits and challenges. To obtain descriptive statistics about the use of Facebook among college students, researchers conducted an exploratory study among 200 undergraduate psychology students, the majority of whom were members of generation Y. Of these, half were second-year students, and half were third-year students. Chi-square tests were performed to determine whether any differences existed between the 2 cohorts.

The results suggested that most of the student participants were satisfied with Facebook and mainly used it to overcome boredom. All third-year students had a Facebook account, but only 65% of the second-year students acknowledged having a Facebook account. Students cited a lack of interest and an unwillingness to post personal information online as reasons for not having an account. Incidentally, the researchers concluded that the number of Facebook users and time spent online increase with younger-generation college students, making this social media site a potential educational tool.

Given the limited sample size of this study, which involved only 1 higher education institution, future studies with more participants and that collects qualitative data are warranted. Qualitative data would provide student and instructor perspectives on education and social media use and would help identify any advantages or disadvantages associated with using social media. Researchers also recommended analyzing other social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram.
Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Workplace Behavior

Generational differences in the workplace can present potential benefits and challenges for organizations, particularly for managers and supervisors. Rather than relying on anecdotal evidence and broad assumptions, social scientists are accumulating empirical data regarding specific workplace behaviors of each generation. These studies not only have implications for recruitment, hiring, and retention, but also provide managers a basis for developing teamwork strategies.

Hiring and Turnover

Based on the work-related behaviors of baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y, Becton et al tested 3 hypotheses in their research study:

- Baby boomers will display fewer job mobility behaviors than will generations X or Y.
- Baby boomers will exhibit more occurrences of compliance and experience fewer instances of termination than will generations X or Y.
- Generation X will report less enthusiasm to work overtime than will baby boomers or generation Y.

To test these predictions, the researchers assessed the feedback of 8040 applicants at 2 organizations. Job mobility was measured by asking the applicants to specify the longest amount of time they spent at 1 job and how many jobs they held in the past 5 years. Compliance behaviors were measured by asking the applicants how their most recent supervisor would rate their attendance and their adherence to dress code policies. Terminations were assessed by asking the applicants how many times they had been fired. Finally, enthusiasm to work overtime was measured by asking the applicants how often their most recent supervisor would say they were willing to work overtime.

The results provided full support for the first and third hypotheses and partial support for the second hypothesis. Regarding the first hypothesis, baby boomers spent an average of 73 months as the longest time spent at 1 job, with an average of 2 jobs held in the past 5 years; generation X averaged 49 months as the longest time spent at 1 job, with 3 jobs in the past 5 years; and generation Y averaged 23 months as the longest time spent at 1 job, with 3 jobs held in the past 5 years. Certainly, it could be argued that baby boomers have been working for a longer period of time than have generations X or Y.

All 3 generations gave themselves high ratings for attendance and dress code compliance, but the baby boomers scored themselves the highest. Baby boomers also had the highest termination percentages, which could be attributed to having more years of work experience than generations X or Y. When asked to work overtime, 44% of baby boomers reported a willingness, 38% of the generation X cohort reported a willingness, and 41% of the generation Y cohort reported a willingness.

Although the results of the study indicated some generational differences do exist in the workplace, the size of the differences for each generation in this study was small. In addition, the popular assumptions concerning each generation were not always consistent with respect to workplace behavior. The researchers acknowledged the study was limited because the data were self-reported.

Work Ethic

Observing an increase in turnover rates among baby boomer, generation X, and generation Y nurses at an inpatient acute care facility, Jobe examined the increase to see whether it was directly related to the work ethic attributed to each generation. Specifically, Jobe measured 7 dimensions of work ethic:

- Self-reliance: striving for independence in one’s daily work.
- Morality/ethics: believing in a just and moral existence.
- Leisure: emphasizing nonwork activities.
- Hard work: believing in the virtues of hard work.
- Centrality of work: believing in work for work’s sake and the importance of work.
- Wasted time: having attitudes and beliefs that reflect active and productive use of time.
- Delay in gratification: being oriented toward the future and the postponement of rewards.

Of the 285 completed surveys, the data suggested work-ethic similarities among the 3 generational cohorts with statistically significant intergenerational differences related to leisure, hard work, and delay of gratification. Generations X and Y, for example, placed more emphasis on leisure activities and hard
work than did baby boomers.\textsuperscript{23} This finding varied from the traditional view that younger generations are lazy. Generations X and Y also focused more on future career plans and delaying rewards than did baby boomers,\textsuperscript{23} possibly because baby boomers are nearing retirement and deferring rewards is no longer necessary to achieve their goals. Jobe recognized that changes in work ethic dimensions could lead to strategies for improving generational conflict and decreasing job turnover rates.

A study assessing generational differences in workplace ethics and turnover intention found significant differences between generation Y and baby boomers regarding emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and turnover intention.\textsuperscript{24} As expected, individuals from generation Y indicated significantly lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions when they were exhausted than did baby boomers.\textsuperscript{24} These findings might be the result of differing interpretations of the state of emotional exhaustion and different perceptions of work centrality among the generations.

Known to place more importance on work-life balance and leisure, generation Y might attribute their emotional exhaustion to the job itself because they do not value work more than their personal life and leisure time.\textsuperscript{24} Conversely, baby boomers might be willing to endure emotional exhaustion because they highly value their job and workplace ethics.\textsuperscript{24} In addition, baby boomers place their current position and job as top priorities, whereas generation Y members might be willing to try other positions before deciding on an ideal career.

The researchers were surprised not to find significant differences between generation X and the other generations regarding job satisfaction and turnover intention.\textsuperscript{24} This result might be because generation X individuals share distinct similarities with members of both generation Y and baby boomers. Generations X and Y highly value work-life balance and are not very loyal; on the other hand, generation X’s approach to their careers is similar to that of baby boomers.

Because this study was based on data from 1 branded hotel management company, its limited sample size cannot be generalized to other populations, including health care professionals. In addition, the researchers acknowledged having more female than male respondents, and they did not consider the possibility of gender partiality in responses. However, given that younger employees have lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions compared with older employees, the researchers stressed that managers need to consider implementing strategies (eg, flexible hours and adequate supervision) to address work-life balance for those younger employees.\textsuperscript{24}

### Expectations

Newly licensed registered nurses from 3 generational cohorts (baby boomers, generation X, and generation Y) were surveyed regarding their work-related experiences, including their general characteristics and attitudes.\textsuperscript{25} Of the 2369 nurses in the sample, 251 (10.5%) were baby boomers, 1643 (68.8%) were generation X, and 465 (19.4%) were generation Y.\textsuperscript{25} The researchers examined their work attitudes, attributes, and demographics, as well as their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, and intention to stay in a job.\textsuperscript{25} No statistically significant intergenerational differences existed concerning intention to stay and job-search behavior.\textsuperscript{25} Incidentally, approximately two-thirds of the nurses in each generational cohort were employed in the same position as the previous year.\textsuperscript{25} However, findings revealed significant differences among generations in several other areas:\textsuperscript{25}

- Baby boomers reported higher work motivation than did generations X and Y.
- Generation X demonstrated the highest levels of work-to-family conflict (the degree to which employment hinders family life) and family-to-work conflict (the degree to which family life interferes with work).
- Generation Y had greater levels of commitment to the organization, higher perceptions of promotional opportunities, and mentor and supervisor support than did baby boomers or generation X cohorts.

Unlike generations X and Y nurses, baby boomer nurses reported that they did not complete an employee orientation program,\textsuperscript{25} possibly because they were older and might have been perceived as less in need of a formal orientation program. Orientation is a vital part of new nurses’ adjustment to their organizations and their recognition in the profession. Compared with the...
other generations, a higher percentage of baby boomers worked in jobs other than as staff nurses.\textsuperscript{25} A much lower percentage of baby boomers worked in intensive care units, but reported higher work motivation than did generations X and Y.\textsuperscript{25} It could be inferred that the baby boomer nurses in this study were better prepared to move into management positions although they were new graduates.

Nurses from generation X rated higher in work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict than did the other groups.\textsuperscript{25} As expected, those from generation X struggled with finding a balance between home and work life. Those from generation Y reported greater organizational commitment and were more likely to work 12-hour shifts and the night shift than were the other generations.\textsuperscript{25} Nurses from generation Y also expressed the importance of training with an experienced mentor and receiving support from direct supervisors.\textsuperscript{25}

As organizations continue to provide and improve orientations for newly licensed nurses, it is important to mold these programs to support nurses at the start of their careers and encourage their ongoing commitment to the profession. Although this study focused on nursing graduates, these findings are applicable to new radiologic technologists and radiation therapists. Managers of medical imaging and radiation therapy departments should invest time and effort into providing new graduates and new hires with adequate training and orientation that clearly state work expectations and encourages a commitment to the organization and profession.

To evaluate the importance that different generational cohorts place on specific workplace factors, Mencl and Lester distributed a survey to 636 employees aged 18 and older across government, health care, manufacturing, technology, real estate, and nonprofit organizations.\textsuperscript{1} The researchers analyzed data from a final sample size of 505 respondents who represented 3 generations (baby boomers, n = 273; generation X, n = 144; and generation Y, n = 88).\textsuperscript{1} The survey focused on 10 workplace factors:\textsuperscript{1}

- Involvement in decision making.
- A financially rewarding job.
- Work-life balance.
- A climate of diversity.
- Continuous learning.
- Career advancement.
- Immediate feedback and recognition.
- Teamwork and collaboration.
- Flexible work arrangements.
- A challenging job.

All 3 generations placed importance on 7 of 10 workplace factors, demonstrating that the generations were more alike than different.\textsuperscript{1} The findings suggested the most significant generational differences concerned career advancement opportunities, which generation Y valued more than did generation X and baby boomers.\textsuperscript{1} The training and development value and the decision-making value also were statistically significant for generation X and baby boomers.\textsuperscript{1}

Although this study suggested that more similarities than differences exist among the generational cohorts, a limitation of the research was the unequal group sizes. The researchers recommended using the same group size for each generational cohort in future research. One key implication of these findings is that managers need to be educated and informed about generational differences and similarities rather than making assumptions.\textsuperscript{1}

**Teamwork**

Effective teamwork can be fostered in an environment that acknowledges the values, talents, and work ethics of each generational cohort.\textsuperscript{3,26} Several research studies documented generation X preferences for working alone.\textsuperscript{27-29} One study examined the attitudes of baby boomers and generation X on team formation.\textsuperscript{27} Using a survey design, the researchers discovered that members of generation X were more competitive, independent, and had a greater preference for working alone compared with baby boomers.\textsuperscript{27} In another study with similar results, baby boomers were more comfortable working with others and favored teamwork more than did generation X.\textsuperscript{28} Medical imaging and radiation therapy managers should inquire whether generation X employees prefer working alone or with others when assigning workload and other tasks.

When team members do not respect and value one another’s generational differences, conflict, distress, and incivility are unavoidable.\textsuperscript{1} Leiter et al collected
survey responses from more than 500 nurses to analyze the effects of generational differences and the implications for establishing a healthy work environment that promotes teamwork and good retention rates. The cohort sample represented baby boomers and generation X. Survey responses revealed that generation X experienced more incivility from coworkers and supervisors and overall higher levels of distress compared with baby boomers. The researchers concluded that negative social encounters at work contributed to nurses’ distress and suggested conflicts in values occur between baby boomer and generation X team members. Future research is warranted to include generation Y perspectives and contributions to teamwork.

**Patient Care**

Each generational cohort brings benefits to patient care within a health care organization. Growing up in an era when technology was not available, most veterans and baby boomers are aware of subtle cues and changes in a patient’s status long before a monitor or test shows patient deterioration. This type of experience bolsters veteran and baby boomer health care providers as experts in their respective departments. Conversely, generations X and Y grew up using technology and therefore can act as resources and assist older generations with better understanding and using technology in patient care. Overcoming generational differences among health care teams is important because generational issues can result in poor patient care, poorer outcomes, unsafe patient conditions, and decreased patient satisfaction.

Generational differences also can affect how patients perceive their care. Veteran or baby boomer patients might expect face-to-face communication from physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals, whereas generation X and Y patients might prefer to have electronic communications rather than face-to-face interactions.

One research study questioned whether 1 generation was more caring than another based on an emotional intelligence proficiency. The results did not indicate substantive differences in emotional intelligence among the baby boomer, generation X, and generation Y nurses. However, the researchers noted that individuals from younger generations often required additional training on how best to communicate face-to-face. Finding ways to help younger generations become more comfortable with this type of communication is key to ensuring adequate patient care.

**Perceptions of Other Generations**

In a study by Gursoy et al that explored how each generation perceives the other generations, managers from the baby boomer generation expressed a very low opinion of generations X and Y. They believed the younger employees had no work ethic and considered them to be slackers. Baby boomer employees did not have very high opinions of their generation X managers. They indicated the generation X managers did not have the experience to lead, did not respect the baby boomers’ life experiences, and relied too heavily on technology.

Generation X managers did not think highly of generation Y employees. They considered them to be slackers, but admitted that they were very quick learners. Generation X, however, had very high opinions of their generation X managers. They indicated the generation X managers did not have the experience to lead, did not respect the baby boomers’ life experiences, and relied too heavily on technology.

Incidentally, generation X employees found their baby boomer managers to be poor team players and somewhat out of touch with innovative ideas because of their fear of change.

This study relied on focus group sessions among a small group of hotel employees for data collection. Although 10 focus group sessions were conducted, findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study. Descriptive statistics and data collected from a sample of health professionals might be beneficial for future studies involving generational differences.

**Challenges**

Some scholars have acknowledged the difficulty with defining generations. As stated previously, no official years mark the beginning or end of a generation.
Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

A lack of theory to support generational differences also presents a challenge. However, Cadiz et al argued that methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, guide research, not a lack of theory. They mentioned several theories to support the concept of generational differences: social forces theory, social identity theories, and lifespan development theories. However, Cadiz et al believed the way generational cohorts were examined in the literature is flawed. They suggested that a study involving generational differences is only helpful if the following conditions are met:

- The idea of being part of a specific generation becomes a part of people’s social identity.
- A generation is identified with specific events that truly have a formative effect on people.
- Reciprocal influences and exchanges within and between generations are studied along with the differences.

An Alternative Approach

Wang and Peng proposed an alternative approach to understanding generational differences specific to conducting organizational research. They suggested allowing the participants to decide which generation they identify with. Using a survey, checklist, or open-ended questions, the participants could rate the extent to which they identify with each category or statement. An analysis of their responses would allow researchers to classify the participants accordingly and proceed with their original research. Rather than being associated with a generation based on a birth date, Wang and Peng believed this might provide better research on generational differences and might explain conflicting results in previous studies.

This subjective, continuous approach could help researchers better understand generational differences in the workplace. By treating generational differences as a series of variables rather than just 1 categorical construct, this alternative approach provides a more theoretical definition of generational differences and presents a more reliable measurement. This approach potentially could result in stronger predictions of the effect of generational differences on work attitudes and behaviors.

Stereotypes

Another challenge related to generational differences in the workplace is the idea of publicizing generation-based stereotypes at work. Internalization of generational stereotypes could cause problems for individuals and organizations. Research has shown that stereotyping in the workplace results in negative job attitudes, poor mental health, and greater intentions to resign. Negative metastereotypes—what a particular group believes those in other groups think about them—also can be exacerbated. Metastereotypes related to generational differences could cause individuals to overcompensate to challenge the stereotype they believe others hold about them. To counteract these negative stereotypes, the focus should build on the positive aspects of diversity and on developing a more inclusive work environment.

Costanza and Finkelstein acknowledged that stereotypes exist because people from one particular generation do not share the same qualities, personalities, and values as members of other generational cohorts. For example, the veteran generation is stereotyped as being conservative and disciplined. These individuals grew up during the Great Depression, which is thought to have instilled in them values of frugality and hard work. Most would agree that this is a logical outcome; however, not all people who emerged from tough financial times embraced frugality. As an example, Costanza and Finkelstein discussed veterans who achieved success later in their adult lives, spent money impulsively, eventually declared bankruptcy, and ended up living in poverty again.
To address stereotypes associated with generation Y, Rentz conducted a mixed-methods study using surveys and focus group sessions. He discovered that this generation defied some of the general stereotypes associated with their generation but exhibited some stereotypical features as well. Contrary to common complaints about their poor work ethic, managers rated generation Y employees as having high standards, working hard, following through, and being realistic about rewards and raises. They also accepted criticism, did not require extra praise, took initiative, and were self-directed and resourceful.

Rentz also documented support for certain stereotypes associated with generation Y. These included leveraging technology, having a strong interest in what it takes to succeed in the company, being less interested in employee news and other facets of the big picture, and having an inflated sense of some of their abilities. Because generational stereotypes exist, Rentz suggested it was important to teach employees about generational differences and promote a work atmosphere of respect where all generations can contribute and feel valued.

Despite the negative connotation, some scholars consider the use of such stereotypes as necessary and acceptable. When comparing human groups, whether it is men, women, ethnic groups, leaders, service workers, nurses, or generations, stereotyping can be helpful and is expected. In almost every case, variances in traits exist within a group, and in most cases, the differences within the group are larger than the variances between groups. In addition, although stereotypes are key to understanding perceptions and identity in organizations, some researchers substitute the word stereotype with the more neutral term prototype to minimize the negative connotation.

**Generation-based Discrimination**

The general perception that differences among individuals relate to specific generational cohorts can pose some risk. Although it is tempting to consider these generational stereotypes as innocent misperceptions, they might, in fact, be quite harmful. Although age discrimination is prohibited by law, discrimination based on generational differences is not explicitly prohibited. Cox and Coulton noted that older individuals are offered some protection by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; however, generation Y individuals are too young to qualify for legal protection. Thus, it is not clear what would happen if an employer terminated a younger employee based on his or her perceptions of generation Y. As expected, proving a termination decision was based solely on generational membership would be challenging.

Legislation that prohibits generation-based discrimination is unlikely, although considerable evidence shows that people refrain from making employment decisions based on stereotypes they believe are neither permitted nor appropriate. Cox and Coulton stated it was possible an enlightened supervisor might resist the temptation to ascribe behavior to age given the current legislation protecting older workers; however, the supervisor might feel that attributing behavior to generational differences is acceptable because legislation does not address the issue.

**Opportunities**

Generational challenges and stereotypes within an organization might abound, but positive opportunities also exist. A multigenerational team can be an asset to an organization. Each member brings unique strengths, viewpoints, and skills relative to his or her generational cohort. Health care leaders who have an understanding of generational differences and strengths can improve staff satisfaction and facilitate constructive working relationships to increase morale and productivity.

**Strategies to Increase Morale and Productivity**

Nelsey and Brownie stressed the importance of creating a work environment where employees, regardless of their generational background, feel supported and valued. They believed this work atmosphere could result in increased morale and productivity. Assessing a nursing workforce, they suggested providing generation Y nurses with opportunities for continual improvement and personal growth because these individuals tend to be ambitious and career focused. Nurse managers can provide generation Y staff nurses with opportunities to lead teams and attend professional development workshops that focus on career advancement and promotion. These opportunities would allow generation...
Y nurses to feel important to the organization, and they potentially will work harder after receiving such recognition.

The researchers also suggested providing generation X nurses with opportunities to work independently on projects because nurses from this generation tend to be self-reliant and resist being micromanaged. Generation X nurses are less likely to view their supervisors in a negative manner when tackling self-directed tasks, and ultimately it can increase morale and productivity within the organization. Other general strategies managers can use to supervise generation X employees include:

- Providing staff incentives.
- Being supportive, trustworthy, professional, and dependable.
- Demonstrating good communication skills.
- Meeting regularly with staff members to provide feedback.
- Leading by example.

Nelsey and Brownie noted that an awareness of generational differences allows nursing managers to try various strategies to bridge those gaps, and they are likely to use the expertise of each group to optimize patient care and meet the needs of the organization.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring and continual support are essential to a new employee’s successful transition and professional growth, especially in the health care setting. Mentoring often is used to increase retention and decrease turnover rates. Nelsey and Brownie defined a skilled nurse mentor as one who assists new employees and less experienced staff by sharing clinical expertise and familiarizing them with the work setting. Of course, mentoring requires a commitment from both the mentor and mentee and is based on mutual trust, teaching, coaching, counseling, and friendship. Understanding generational differences and the common characteristics associated with each cohort can result in effective mentoring.

New nursing graduates from generation Y are professionally confident and outspoken yet require lengthy orientation and continual feedback as they make the transition to the clinical work environment. Baby boomers, with their superior clinical knowledge and extensive clinical experience, are well positioned to act as mentors and preceptors, in particular to younger generation Y nursing graduates. Mentoring is effective only when both the mentors and mentees earn mutual respect and benefit from the coaching process. In addition, because other research studies indicated younger generations train best with veterans, the possibility of veterans serving as mentors should be considered.

In organizations without formal mentoring systems, Nelsey and Brownie suggested encouraging new employees to seek mentors from other venues. In the health care setting, mentoring can help older employees feel valued by sharing their knowledge and expertise, and as mentees, younger generations can develop a sense of belonging and importance. Managers also can offer mentoring through one-on-one sessions, group programs, discussion panels, and roundtable discussions.

**ACORN Precepts**

ACORN (accommodate, create, operate, respect, and nourish) is an acronym for the 5 precepts or operational ideas used by successful companies to develop solid organizations. The use of these 5 precepts supports a generationally comfortable work environment where employees focus their energies on accomplishing the mission instead of on conflict. Table 2 explains each precept and provides an example of how managers can use these principles when dealing with a multigenerational department.

**Impact Within Radiology**

Because research pertaining to medical imaging and radiation therapy is extremely limited—most of the research pertains to radiologists—it is difficult to examine the effects of generational differences within the profession.

**Perceptions Among Radiologists**

The American College of Radiology (ACR) hosted a forum to discuss the effect of generational differences among practicing radiologists. Younger radiologists (generations X and Y) were perceived as being less committed to their profession than were prior generations. They more commonly viewed...
nonworking hours as an opportunity to pursue vocational and family activities rather than an opportunity to advance their medical knowledge, clinical practice, or the profession.\textsuperscript{12} Older radiologists (veterans and baby boomers) believed this attitude potentially could compromise the strength and vitality of the radiology profession and professional organizations such as the ACR.\textsuperscript{12}

Veteran radiologists were described as hard working and sacrificial; baby boomer radiologists were identified as being workaholics and efficient; generation X radiologists were characterized as needing balance between home and work life and preferring flexible work hours; and generation Y radiologists were labeled as being goal oriented, collaborative, and multitaskers.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, veteran radiologists viewed work as an obligation, baby boomer radiologists viewed it as an exciting adventure, generation X radiologists viewed it as a contract, and generation Y radiologists viewed it as a means to an end.\textsuperscript{12}

Ultimately, the ACR thought it was critical to appreciate the varied needs, desires, and motivators of different generations to help foster a harmonious and productive radiology workforce.\textsuperscript{12}

**Job Satisfaction Among Radiologists**

Moriarity et al assessed generational differences related to workplace satisfaction and workplace characteristics among 1577 practicing radiologists from the baby boomer and generation X cohorts.\textsuperscript{43} Despite widely reported differences among generations, the findings indicated baby boomer and generation X radiologists shared similar characteristics.

Workplace satisfaction among baby boomer and generation X radiologists was 78\% and 80\%, respectively.\textsuperscript{43} Both generations indicated higher job satisfaction when they felt optimistic about the future of radiology, when they perceived a narrow difference between their desired and expected age of retirement, when they emphasized social interactions, and when they valued professionalism among their peers.

Baby boomer radiologists displayed greater job satisfaction when they worked in an environment that valued diversity, whereas generation X radiologists were more satisfied if they were paid well and worked in an environment that promoted job security.\textsuperscript{43} No significant association was seen between satisfaction and generation, sex, practice setting, or additional administrative work.\textsuperscript{43} The researchers concluded that workplace satisfaction among radiologists was high, and the 2 dominant generations of practicing radiologists had similar workplace satisfaction rates and preferred workplace characteristics.\textsuperscript{43} A research study involving radiologic technologists and radiation therapists is warranted to see if the results would be similar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>ACORN Precepts$^a$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precept</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating employee differences</td>
<td>Meeting the needs of employees by accommodating their unique preferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating workplace choices</td>
<td>Allowing the workplace to shape the work performed to serve customers and employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating from a refined management style</td>
<td>Providing specific goals and measures to achieve and allowing employees freedom to complete the tasks in their chosen manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting competence and creativity</td>
<td>Assuming the best from all employees (from new staff members to the most seasoned).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nourishing retention</td>
<td>Retaining employees by providing frequent feedback, rewards, and recognition; encouraging lateral movement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

**Leadership Tactics**

As leaders of the department, managers need to understand each generation, recognize the generation they belong to, and use each group’s unique characteristics to their advantage. Facilitating employees’ growth and development is an important part of leadership; however, the presence of a multigenerational department makes this difficult to achieve. Medical imaging and radiation therapy managers are encouraged to lead multigenerational departments using the following tactics:

- Seek ways to understand each cohort and accommodate differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Cultivate generational strengths to motivate all employees in the department.
- Develop the ability to be more sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of each cohort, especially in the area of technology advancement.
- Promote tolerance to avoid generational conflict and to enrich teamwork skills.
- Capitalize on generational differences to improve the overall quality of work and to enhance patient care outcomes.

**Managing Veterans**

In today’s struggling economy, many veterans have remained in the workforce. As previously mentioned, veterans like to be recognized for their years of service and experience. Pairing them with a newly hired young technologist can boost their morale and promote long-term benefits for the department as well. Veterans know a plethora of shortcuts and tips to achieve the perfect image during difficult procedures, and younger technologists can gain a wealth of information by learning from experienced technologists.

Considering the continual advancements in medical imaging and radiation therapy technology, veterans might need additional training when learning new equipment or software. Veterans are hard workers and will take the time to learn the equipment, software, and procedures even if they involve new technology. Individual support when learning how to operate new radiographic or therapeutic equipment also might be beneficial to a veteran radiologic technologist or radiation therapist. If applicable, radiology managers should modify a veteran’s job duties to accommodate his or her abilities.

In summary, Johnson and Johnson suggested the following tips for managing veteran employees:

- Make them mentors to younger employees.
- Provide training for new systems and procedures.
- Accommodate their needs.
- Recognize and applaud their contributions.
- Give one-on-one support.

**Managing Baby Boomers**

Although baby boomers are nearing retirement, they should not be shunted to the side and ignored until they leave. They have wisdom and experience that can provide valuable information for managers as they make important decisions about daily operations in the department. Like veterans, baby boomers feel valued and appreciated when they are given the opportunity to mentor a younger technologist. Of course, with any mentoring relationship, mutual respect and trust are essential.

Managers from younger generations are encouraged to lead baby boomers by respecting their experiences and service to the department, motivating them on their own terms, and arranging for recognition and credit. Younger managers can prove themselves to baby boomer technologists and therapists by being a working manager and assisting with examinations and treatments during busy times or when short staffed. In summary, suggested tips for managing baby boomers include:

- Make them mentors.
- Do not ignore or give up on them.
- Ask for continuing contributions.
- Offer opportunities to volunteer.

**Managing Generation X**

Although generation X employees tend to seek individual recognition, this does not imply that they cannot or will not work well on teams. Johnson and Johnson argued that creating collegial teams where generation X employees work with colleagues to accomplish a common goal can benefit an organization. Providing a flexible work schedule can be a difficult task for medical imaging and radiation therapy departments; however,
staggering start times, rotating shifts, and allowing time off for various family functions are a few ways managers can offer flexibility to generation X employees.

Generation X individuals have a slightly different take on work than baby boomers and veterans. Johnson and Johnson suggested more tips for leading generation X employees because they believed attracting and retaining generation X individuals allows managers to become more aware of employee needs, more open to different ways of doing things, and more agile and adaptable. Their tips include the following:

- Create opportunities to bond.
- Offer mentoring, coaching, and guidance.
- Give praise that is specific, significant, and sincere.
- Provide constructive, specific criticism in private.

Managing Generation Y

Generation Y employees have different work requirements and expectations than do their baby boomer and generation X managers. Understanding these differences helps managers to be effective and their generation Y employees to flourish. By creating opportunities to bond, radiology managers can provide generation Y technologists with the rapport they are accustomed to with their teachers and parents. Johnson and Johnson stressed that managers should insist generation Y employees follow the rules, complete their tasks, meet their deadlines, and produce quality work. If they meet goals, managers should applaud them for their service. If not, managers should help, coach, encourage, and even counsel them to establish that bond so generation Y employees know what is expected of them.

Medical imaging and radiation therapy managers should check in with generation Y technologists and therapists daily, offering praise when deserved and providing corrective feedback when needed. Managers also should communicate specific work expectations; generation Y employees need to be aware of what is expected of them and what their responsibilities are. If possible, managers should offer generation Y technologists and therapists flexibility in terms of work hours and schedule. In conclusion, suggestions for managing generation Y include the following:

- Create opportunities to bond.
- Offer mentoring, coaching, and guidance.
- Give praise that is specific, significant, and sincere.
- Provide constructive, specific criticism in private.

Preparing for Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as gen Z, iGeneration, and linksters, were born after 2000. An estimated 23 million people in the United States compose this generation, and the group is growing. Most of the characteristics that define this generation have yet to emerge; however, because they have been exposed to digital communication and technology throughout their lifetime, they are described as being highly connected. They tend to interact electronically more than personally, and they might choose to text message someone even if they are standing next to him or her. The Box lists some of the historical and social events experienced by generation Z individuals.

Although young, it appears that generation Z will mobilize around causes and be more socially and environmentally aware than previous generations. Many older individuals from generation Z are beginning to enter the workforce, and they are the most technologically savvy of any generation. They are connected to their peers through social media, are intelligent and have higher IQ scores than members of previous generations, and generally are accepting of diverse populations. This is the largest home-schooled generation, and they require less direction and supervision because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influential Historical and Social Events Experienced by Generation Z</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War on Terror</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active shooter incidents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swine flu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hurricane Katrina</td>
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<tr>
<td>iPods and iPads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook and other social media sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011 tsunami in Japan</td>
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</table>
they already have access to digital tools that enable them to do almost anything.  

Members of other generations must be able to work with and adjust to generation Z’s changing social skills that are driven by advancing technologies.  This generation can present themselves as an open book with very little concern about sharing private and personal matters. Like generation Y, individuals from generation Z are close to their parents and consider them to be their best friends.  

As more generation Z members enter the workforce, they easily can handle job requirements that involve technology but will have a tougher time with face-to-face communication with customers and coworkers. In addition, as higher education becomes more cost prohibitive, generation Z will seek alternative ways to enter their preferred, chosen professions.  

**Conclusion**

Multiple generational cohorts coexist in the workplace today. Each group brings different viewpoints, expectations, desires, dreams, values, and ideas about work and life. For health care organizations, these generational differences can enhance teamwork and improve patient care; they also can present challenges such as conflict and stereotyping. By understanding generational differences, managers and organizations can foster a work environment that embraces diversity and promotes productivity. Because very little research on generational differences in the radiology workplace has been conducted, research specific to the medical imaging and radiation therapy professions is warranted.

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7. Smither S. Facing generational differences: understanding is key. *Vet Team Brief.* 2015;45-47.


Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

1. Which of the following describes the environment baby boomers grew up in?
   - steady state of free expression
   - economic prosperity
   - world wars

   a. 1 and 2
   b. 1 and 3
   c. 2 and 3
   d. 1, 2, and 3

2. Which generation dislikes direct supervision and resists micromanaging bosses?
   - veterans
   - baby boomers
   - generation X
   - generation Y

3. Which generational cohort represents the largest group of workers in the U.S. workforce today?
   - veterans
   - baby boomers
   - generation X
   - generation Y

4. In the study by Becton et al, which generational cohort scored themselves the highest with respect to attendance and dress code compliance?
   - veterans
   - baby boomers
   - generation X
   - generation Y

5. In the study by Mencl and Lester, which workplace factor resulted in the most significant difference among the generational cohorts?
   - career advancement opportunities
   - involvement in decision making
   - work-life balance
   - continuous learning

continued on next page
6. Which statement is true regarding the study by Gursoy et al on perceptions of other generations?
   a. Baby boomer managers believed younger generation employees had a strong work ethic and considered them to be hard workers.
   b. Baby boomer employees did not have high opinions of their generation X managers.
   c. Generation X managers thought highly of generation Y employees.
   d. Generation X managers said baby boomer employees were fast learners and good with technology.

7. Proving a termination decision was based solely on generational membership would be challenging.
   a. true
   b. false

8. Strategies to increase morale and productivity among generation X employees include:
   1. providing staff incentives.
   2. being supportive, trustworthy, professional, and dependable.
   3. leading by example.
   a. 1 and 2
   b. 1 and 3
   c. 2 and 3
   d. 1, 2, and 3

9. The American College of Radiology determined which generation of radiologists considered work to be a contract?
   a. veterans
   b. baby boomers
   c. generation X
   d. generation Y

10. Which generation of radiologists displayed greater job satisfaction based on job security and good compensation?
    a. veterans
    b. baby boomers
    c. generation X
    d. generation Y

11. Which of the following are strategies for leading veteran employees?
    1. using electronic communications such as email
    2. providing training for new procedures
    3. giving one-on-one support
    a. 1 and 2
    b. 1 and 3
    c. 2 and 3
    d. 1, 2, and 3

12. Which of the following describe generation Z?
    1. beginning to enter the workforce
    2. intelligent with high IQ scores
    3. the most technologically savvy generation
    a. 1 and 2
    b. 1 and 3
    c. 2 and 3
    d. 1, 2, and 3