GRAY AS GOLD:

THE SIGNIFICANT VALUE OF THE MATURE WORKER

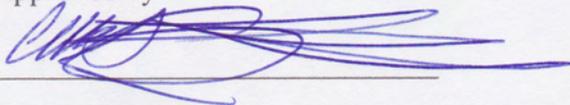By

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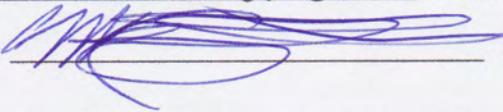THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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ABSTRACT

Today's workforce is increasingly complex due to a composition of multiple generations. Mature workers, defined as individuals 50 years or older who are members of the labor force, are emphasized to highlight how businesses can effectively utilize their strengths as well as capitalize on longitudinal years of experiential knowledge. Their upbringing in economically challenging times instilled a strong work ethic and a preference for a stable and impactful occupation. The span of generational cohorts is described along with work life characteristics are analyzed to demonstrate how mature workers can best contribute to an organization. Challenges between dichotomous ideals are addressed and are followed by prescriptive ideas that foster success within a heterogeneous labor force. A survey was conducted among a range of 83 varied-aged working individuals assessing current attitudes towards the mutigenerational workforce. Although most spoke positively towards collaborating with co-workers from a variety of backgrounds and ages, there were still areas where bias was visible and, for some, the preference for working with same-generation colleagues was apparent. Recommendations for companies grappling with a demographically diverse labor force include implementation of diversity training programs and knowledge transfer methodologies, in addition to creation of phased retirement plans to transition institutional strengths.

INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights the challenges and benefits of the United States' increasingly multi-generational workforce, with a focus on the mature worker. After reading numerous scholarly articles, assessing current prescriptive recommendations in books, and surveying 83 employed individuals, an analysis of the workforce focusing on mature workers will be made. Recommendations for action will be identified that are designed to utilize each generation for their specific strengths and work styles while simultaneously maximizing institutional success.

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATIONS

Strauss and Howe (1992) examined generations within the United States over a 400-year time span, defining a generation as a "given cohort group, in which all members are born in a limited span of consecutive years, approximately 22 years, and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality." But what is peer personality? Strauss and Howe believed that it involves a common persona, unique to each generation, defined by their age, environment, common opinions, normed behavior, and membership within a shared group. These components are what make each generation distinctive and recognizable. Peer personality is generally consistent among an age group in a specific period of time, but may vary between locations due to differing environments, varied cultural norms, and diversity of community populations.

There are four generations currently in the workforce, making it a multi-generational environment comprised of varied personalities, work styles, experiences and competencies. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, the core generations now in the workplace are Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, who also may be called Millennials. Veterans are those born between 1925 -1940 and make up approximately 10% of the current workforce. Baby Boomers were born between 1941-1960 and comprise 44%

of the employed population. Generation X is the largest current cohort with individuals born between 1961 and 1976, making up 34% of the workforce. Millennials, born between 1977 and 1992, are the newest generation to be added to the working environment. They represent approximately 12% of the workforce, a rapidly increasing cohort as Millennials increasingly move from educational settings into the labor force.

Each generation has defining events within their lifetime that predict their behavior in the workplace. Baby Boomers have parents who were impacted by the rationed lifestyle during World War II, and they began employment during the hippie movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's. They tend to be optimistic and driven since they grew up wanting to have a better life than their parents, experienced the women's liberation movement, and observed the race between the USSR and other foreign countries to have the best space program and overall educational achievement (Glass 99). Because of the large size of the cohort, Baby Boomers believe they have the power to significantly impact, even revolutionize, the society in which they live (100). They also believed that their ambition, increasing education, and hard work should ensure a financially successful life style.

Generation X is more independent because many were children of families with two parents working outside of the home. They tend to be skeptical and less loyal to a single workplace and strive to have a work-personal life balance, as compared to the self-sacrificing, work-enthused Baby Boomers. For Generation X, many were in after-school programs or were latchkey children coming home to a vacant house to fend for themselves, contributing to a sense of independence. This segment was born on the cusp of the technology boom, and the presence of most women in the workplace. Meanwhile, the divorce rate was climbing steadily (99). Since birth control became easier to access, smaller families dominated the population within the United States.

During the 1980s, there was a large round of corporate layoffs in addition to a national anxiety concerning social safety-net programs, including the potential burden of paying Social Security for its larger cohort predecessors, thus influencing how Generation X viewed the role of work. Generation Y had a booming, prosperous childhood until the events of September 11th, 2001 and approximately six years later the economic downturn, increasing skepticism of both personal and economic well-being. This is the most diverse generation, making tolerance and inclusion necessary. Glass believed that individuals in "the millennial group are the most confident generation, as they grew up in an American school system that catered to people's self-esteem" (99). Smaller families, by choice, had fewer children on which to concentrate resources, allowing parents to become dedicated to the success of their children. Parents wanted to make sure their kids had the best by ensuring numerous opportunities albeit with increasing parental involvement, leading to the term "helicopter parents". These parents sometimes "hovered" over their children, scheduling activities for them and regularly checking in on their personal lives, which gave little room for their children to step outside of the norm and explore independence. Millennials (Generation Y) also grew up with the availability of computers at an early age; they quickly became accustomed to and reliant upon using the World Wide Web to look up information and as a tool for completion of everyday life and work-related duties. Millennials tend to be team-oriented and structured because of the need for multi-tasking created by the boom of technology. With numerous faster, cheaper, and more effective ways to accomplish a simple task, Millennials tend to work with each other in an orderly and routine fashion to achieve a desired outcome.

Glass, in "Understanding Generational Differences for Competitive Success", says that each generation "possesses unique characteristics that effect work ethic and relationships, how change

is managed, and perception of organizational hierarchy" (98). With the advent of technology, the traditional work environment is being renovated and thus relationships, change, and hierarchy are viewed differently. Technology specifically has allowed individuals to adjust their lives to their work schedule by joining phone conversations while completing errands, video conferencing into meetings from home, and sending e-mails via laptops or cell phones at their most convenient time. This significantly changes the work-life balance relationship, and also affects intergenerational communication.

For example, Baby Boomers often believe that younger generations do not put as much effort into work as do they, because they are not on the clock from 8am to 5 pm every day (100). More mature businessmen view employment as a location where you work diligently for at least eight hours in an office setting, and then return home. They do not see telecommuting or work from home as productive because it does not fit into their traditional view of the work place that has been ingrained in them since they were children. They prefer to be settled in a traditional work environment where they can communicate in person with another coworker to receive or transmit a message. The Baby Boomers believe that face-to-face communication is the most efficient and productive method within a work environment. Some Boomers believe they are open to technological change and innovation as long as they perceive that the change has intrinsic value (101). The Baby Boomer cohort includes many famous innovators such as Bill Gates and the late Steve Jobs, both who contributed greatly to society's technological transformation.

Generation X, in contrast, focuses on the outcome of work, regardless of the location of the work environment or the process used to achieve the desired goal (100). As long as their task is successfully completed, they feel satisfied. They view preceding generations as too labor-

focused without an appropriate emphasis on life-work balance. Generation X wants to disconnect from their job when they get home by disregarding work emails and not finishing up extra tasks at home so that they can feel actively present in both their home and work environments. This is increasingly difficult to do in today's workplace since technology's pervasiveness is making it routine for employees to check their messages during family time and be on-call during early and late hours to meet the demand so of an increasingly 24-hour business cycle. Although Generation X has grown up with significant technological advances, they try to modulate it in a way that the younger employees do not see as possible or even advisable.

In a way similar to Generation X, Millennials focus on the end result. These two generations are the most compatible of the generational cohorts because they both want to achieve goals in a timely, streamlined process in order to see quick results. They welcome and embrace the use of technology in the work environment. Since they have grown up using technology in both their professional and personal lives, it is more difficult to enforce a separation of the work environment from the home environment. This blurred separation supports younger individuals in seeking freedom in the selection of workplace location. With technology, emails can be answered easily from the kitchen table or from an exotic destination and telecommuting from home, or having a virtual office, is not uncommon. Since Millennials do not see a discrete definition of work, they are more open to seeking and creating a non-traditional work environment. In addition, Generation Y is the first generation to be digital natives in the workplace.

Millennials grew up with the dot.com boom, the creation and innovation of cellular devices, and the advent and later pervasiveness of the World Wide Web. According to Glass, "Unlike older generations, they are unafraid of emerging technologies and are often what marketers would call

"first adapters" - the first to try, buy, and spread the word about cool new gadgets/technologies"
(101). Due to their comfortable nature around technology, they favor instant messaging, text
messaging and e-mails as opposed to face-to-face communication. Millennials may dislike
talking on the phone because it is a more personal form of communication than what they
commonly use. They also rely heavily on e-mail, which may prevent them from developing
meaningful relationships with colleagues, managers, and clients. This poses a challenge when the
need to effectively communicate with older generations who wish to talk face to face. Since each
generation within the workplace may prefer wholly different styles of communication, workplace
colleagues may feel uncomfortable when talking with someone in a different age range. They
may not fully understand the underlying inferences of the intended message because the mode of
the communication is foreign to them.

A mature worker is here defined as an individual who is 50 years of age or older who is a
member of the labor force. The mature workforce is primarily comprised of Baby Boomers, but
those born in the early 1960s, considered to be the first wave of Generation X, also fall within
this category.

THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

As the working life span of generations has increased, more and more work teams are comprised
of members from multiple generations. Although the overall percentage of Millennials in the
workforce is rising, more Americans ages 16 to 24 choose or are able to take part in long-term
educational pursuits and delay joining the labor force (Taylor et al. 1). Only 57% choose to work
today as compared to 66% of that group in 2000. Important to note is that the Bureau of Labor
Statistics projected that 92.8% of the growth in the United States labor force between 2006 and
2016 will be workers ages 55 and older (2). Although this age group is the one most likely to see

individuals leaving the workforce for retirement, they are also responsible for much of the workforce expansion due to the population bulge they represent demographically.

Another contributing element is the diminution of hierarchical management structures, with increased emphasis on team approaches to problem solving and with fluid management structures. This mandates that colleagues work collaboratively across pay grades, ages, and work styles in order to achieve desired business outcomes (Uhlrig 1). There are fewer levels within a non-hierarchical organization, with leadership spread among many divisions versus the typical chain of command. Decentralization of decision-making leads to employees having a higher sense of power and accountability and consequently they have more responsibility for their outcomes whether they are positive or negative. Having increased power within a role lends itself to more creative thinking and allows the employee to see ones impact in the work environment. Since a flattened work structure creates more divisional and functional hierarchies versus complex layered hierarchies, people are freer to collaborate with individuals from other specialized areas to create a better outcome. This increased sense of responsibility and freedom resonates well especially with Baby Boomers who want to see their impact in their company to ensure they are making a difference.

Since organizations are reducing their typical hierarchical structure while increasing teamwork, the pressure for collaboration soars. Companies may better foster an environment for collaboration based upon a cooperative culture (Callahan et al. 1). Collaboration may be used across functional divisions, among leaders of varying statuses in the hierarchy, and among work peers on the same team. It is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and enhanced on a daily basis. Where companies fall short on collaboration is the lack of shared information, skills, and technology (2). For example, if a large company purchases a specific toolset on the market by

Microsoft and designates it to the Information Technology branch of their company but does not allow other employees to know that there is a new tool that is available for them to better their work, they are not collaborating efficiently. "Technology makes things possible; people collaborating makes it happen (1). Without people from varying backgrounds willing to collaborate, the opportunity to develop skills and share vital information is lost and the company fails to foster future excellence.

Since organizations are increasingly flatter, generations are forced to work more closely together. If communication challenges are present or if employees have a negative bias towards members of different age groups, the issues become more pronounced and can be more detrimental to the workplace (Watt). Thus, it is vital that organizations augment their efforts in helping the many generations understand each other's preferences and educate all employees about how to effectively communicate within the workplace. The constant development of new technology may also intensify the differences among the generations. While Millennials may be eager to learn about new gadgets and software, mature workers may be wary. Baby Boomers may feel intimidated by the ever-present demand to adapt their job role based upon up and coming technology creating a mentoring opportunity for younger generations. If all generations are caught up on technology trends and are able to effectively communicate while understanding each other's preferences for work habits, the flatter organizational structural and increased reliance on technology will not harm, and may possibly benefit, organizations through enhanced cooperation.

These factors relating to organizational structure and collaboration demand effective and strategic management of diverse work teams comprised of individuals from the full range of age and generational cohorts. By diversifying members within a group and on a larger scale within a

company, teamwork is enhanced through the collaboration of members across divisional and functional areas, which is augmented by the increasingly flattened hierarchical structure.

WHY DO GENERATIONS CLASH IN THE WORKPLACE?

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical to human development because they are formative years. This is the time during which the baseline values, character, and experiential knowledge of an individual are shaped and refined. Since each generation has grown up in time periods that had different problems, different politics, and different social norms, they are faced with unique issues to solve in the workplace. Incoming younger workers are figuring out solutions to problems possessed by the previous generation, using new technology and innovative techniques. They may believe that the older generation's style is obsolete because "times have changed" and there is a "better" way to tackle the challenge. Generations may also clash when positions are passed on from a more experienced worker to a newer or younger employee. The inbound employee may have differing priorities and a variant toolbox of work skills, leaving his or her predecessor feeling dissatisfied with the perception that his or her prior accomplishments have subsequently been marginalized. The inbound employee may also impact the societal social norms in the workplace. Incoming employees are now responsible for creating the social tone for the organization since those who set the tone prior, the senior generation, are departing (Gilliland).

When looking for a cohesive company "fit", each generation tends to respond most to customized marketing tactics targeting their specific age group. In addition, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials look for cohort-specific signs that signify that they are at the right company (Glass 102). Boomers have not grown up in their adolescence with technology; therefore marketing jobs to them may requires more traditional recruitment strategies such as newspaper

ads, billboards, and word of mouth communication in addition to Internet postings. Baby Boomers know they belong to the right company for them when they are actively challenged to contribute to the organization and can visibly see their efforts making a difference. Generation X has been in the workforce for a significant amount of time and has had exposure to both traditional and contemporary marketing techniques, but they are looking specifically for companies that allow flexibility. Whether it is variable health benefits, more travel or sick time, or maternity leave, they need to know the company will be willing to respond affirmatively to their needs. To target Generation Y, companies may use company-sponsored websites or blogs to help Millennials identify and resonate with the corporate culture while still having leadership control over the content. Sensing that a potential candidate fits in with the people and the environment at a workplace is a driving sign that they belong. Since different marketing strategies and specific aspects of the job captivate each generation, it is difficult for the generations to reach a collective agreement on the definition of a "dream job".

At the leadership level, it is vitally important to clearly understand each generation's preferences and conscious or unconscious requirements surrounding the overarching idea of employment. Individuals will then have a better chance of matching with an organization to fill positions for which they best fit the role, increasing employee satisfaction and overall company performance. If an employee is content with their position, their company, and their work environment, their dedication and "discretionary effort" to achieve stated business outcomes grows exponentially.

WHY IS THE MATURE WORKER SO IMPORTANT TO THE WORKFORCE?

As graduating students join the workforce and experienced employees choose to retire, the labor force is seeing a constant prism of young and inexperienced employees coming in and older and experience-rich employees leaving. Although there is a continuous life cycle of positions,

valuable knowledge can be lost in transition when mature workers leave the workforce (Calo 404). This is a significant risk for companies and should be viewed as comparable to tangible loss prevention. Knowledge, skills, and abilities are an asset and when educated individuals leave a company, they take their experience with them. This leaves the company at a disadvantage because they must replace that position with someone who may have a complementary or even slightly different set of skills, but not ones that are yet well-developed. It then takes significant time training the new employee and building up their skill set to match the contributions provided by the now-exited seasoned employee. Even though most companies are aware of the risk associated with mature workers exiting the workforce, many organizations continue to maintain a short-term focus by laying off talented core senior (and more expensive) workers and facilitating early retirements or buy out programs *before* putting in place a strategy to capture and retain the valuable knowledge that is lost when the most experienced individuals leave the organization (Calo 405).

It can be hard to accept the idea that managing the workforce based on demographics is as important as managing a company's technology department or its financial capital. Human Resources is a vital piece of most companies' management of individuals, as they distribute benefits, promote workplace happiness, and recruit incoming talent while balancing outgoing employees, but it is incumbent upon institutional leadership at every level to safeguard the intellectual capital within a company through effective personnel management. There is not enough emphasis placed on well-defined succession plans and the transition of roles between employees (2014 Succession Planning and Talent Development Survey). It is too little too late when a retiring individual has a week to pass on their storehouse of not just formal procedural knowledge but the equally valuable corporate and political wisdom. Although this short period of

time may be helpful for the incoming employee in building certain connections, understanding key tasks, and familiarizing themselves with new technology, it is simply not enough time to fully benefit from the experience and corporate cultural competencies of the retiring employee. Time is a luxury in business, and most companies believe that they cannot afford to give up significant time to fully acculturate a new employee, not to mention incentivizing a possibly eagerly retiring employee who is ready to leave the workplace. This makes the transition of knowledge a formidable challenge because there is never enough time or effort to bring a new employee up to speed for their upcoming role. Although a business can never ensure that all of the knowledge of the retiring employee is passed on, there are ways to mitigate the risk of them exiting and taking a valuable asset away from the company.

Calo, in "Talent Management in the Era of the Aging Workforce: The Critical Role of Knowledge Transfer", asserts that there are three main issues created by demographic trends that impact how the American workforce should be managed. These include the loss of knowledge due to the large quantity of Baby Boomers retiring, a predicted shortage of workers within the labor force, and the aging workforce as employees tend to work longer and enter the work environment later (405). The largest generation in the United States, the Baby Boomers, is in the heat of the retirement process. Companies are at great risk for losing their stores of knowledge and experience from their imminent retirement. Although some of the skills can be passed on, each generation specializes in unique communication tactics and technological abilities based upon the era in which they grew up in and when they entered the workforce. For example, a retiring Baby Boomer may have excellent in-person argumentative and sales techniques and are apt to using a telephone while a millennial is much more likely to use technology to communicate and persuade a customer, possibly over e-mail or via less personal mediums.

Mature workers may possess qualities and information that have not been captured within the organization's archive or have not been personally transferred to other individuals in the organization. They themselves are the assets to the company, and an impending large-quantity loss of human capital will occur between now and 2020 unless organizations take initiative to set up a system where knowledge and skills from valued longtime employees are passed on to not only their successors, but to the organization's community as a whole.

Knowledge management has been defined as "a conscious strategy of getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time" and using that knowledge to benefit the organization (405). Since it is such a broad concept, it is difficult to devise a plan for transferring the knowledge from one person to many others because it lacks a natural or systematic method. Employees do not naturally build in time every day to teach their possible successors, if they are even known at the time, the tricks and trades of their job role. This implies that there needs to be a mentorship role taken on by experienced and mature employees to aid in the knowledge transfer process before employees leave the work environment and their knowledge is lost forever. Mature employees play a special role in knowledge transfer because they may initiate or engage in mentorship roles with younger or less-experienced staff members. Through their relationship, information is naturally passed on from one person to another and the knowledge may continue to snowball throughout the organization. This shows the importance of the mature employee involved in the process of knowledge transfer and preparing incoming employees for their current job position.

THE VALUE OF THE MATURE WORKER: STRATEGIES FOR RETENTION

According to, "Encouraging Retirees to Return to the Work Force", there are six primary strategies that are vital to keeping mature employees in the workforce (Stassen 39). They include

flexible work options, training and development, designation of challenging and purposeful tasks, recognition and respect practices geared towards mature employees, unbiased performance feedback, and superior compensation and increased benefits due to experience.

When discussing flexible work options, variable workdays and non-rigid schedules are important elements. Mature workers may be concerned with their own and familial health and well-being, and need to know that they can elect to take unpaid leaves of absence to address these personal needs. While they may be the most senior generation in the workforce, there is likely a generation above them still living. Baby Boomers and Veterans are in a unique position where they may still be taking care of their children and grandchildren but caring for their elderly their parents as well (Parker and Patten). Individuals in this position are defined as the "sandwich generation." They are "sandwiched" between two generations that both require large amounts of care, responsibility, and monetary assistance. Approximately 47% of adults in their 40s and 50s are responsible for another adult over 65 in addition to caring for a young child or financially supporting a child 18 or older (1). This creates a strong emphasis on maintaining a work-life balance. In order to promote a balanced lifestyle between work and family, they are also open to reduced hours and job sharing. This may best suit a company where the mature employee's knowledge and experience is valuable, but whose physical or virtual presence may not be necessary for a forty-hour workweek. An example of a company that is doing this effectively is Volkswagen of America (Tishman et al. 13). They incorporate options for flextime, compressed work schedules, job sharing, and telecommuting into their schedules to allow mature workers decide what is best for them and what benefits the company. They also allow retirees to be rehired after their official retirement for lessened-hour jobs, consulting, and miniature assignments.

Training and development consists of practices that target skills needed to succeed in a specific job, as well as the training of other staff about the values and utilization of more experienced employees. Generations vary in their specialty skills, depending on the technology prevalent during their adolescence and young adulthood. For example, if a Millennial were to be asked to use a typewriter, the machine most likely would confuse them. In contrast, if a Baby Boomer was asked to create coding for a website, they may not be familiar with the computer language developed in the late 20th century. In order to boost the older generation's skills and keep their experience current, training in current and emerging business practices and technologies is critical. Equally important is the training for colleagues on how best to utilize and leverage the distinct attributes of mature employees in the workforce. Namely, if a task required strong in-person communication skills, Generation X and older may be the most effective representatives to take on the activity because younger generations are more comfortable with asynchronous communication mediums.

Mature employees must be stimulated in as many ways and as often as younger employees who have just joined the workforce. Mature employees, as do all employees, feel as if they are a significant member of the team when they are given responsibility and assigned activities that contribute to the overall mission of the company. Companies should find areas in which the employee excels, and challenge them to use that skill to better the work environment. A way to take advantage of the life and work experience of a more mature employee is assigning them as mentor to junior colleagues. This allows their knowledge and proficiency to be transferred it to a new or younger member of the work team. It can also work vice versa where younger employees may teach upcoming skills to mature workers. Mentoring programs not only builds relationships between coworkers but also ensure that the company is not losing valuable information, skills,

and historical knowledge and context. For example, Proctor & Gamble, Siemens, and GE each implement reverse mentoring programs comprised of younger staff members who teach leaders within their respective company, mostly mature workers, about new technologies (Tishman et al. 17). This creates more interaction between the generations in addition to increasing and preserving technological skills within the organization.

Respect for their many years of dedication to the workforce and appropriate recognition for professional achievements is extremely important to older generations. This may be due to the "respect your elders" value instilled in them during their youth, and now Baby Boomers and Veterans expect that in return. Many grew up during large-scale wars, including World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, and they are used to receiving commendation as a sign of meeting or exceeding the requirements of their assigned duties. Since this was a known method of recognition, tangible rewards such as certificates, thank you cards, and gifts are well received and serve as motivators. Personal recognition for their contribution to the organization is extremely important to mature employees because it shows their value to the workforce and confirms their goal of "making a difference".

Although Millennials are often represented as the generation that always needs assessment of their performance and confirmation of their good deeds, mature employees also require regular evaluations in order to feel satisfied in the workplace. Regardless of age, their feedback should consider the achievement of their goal and the process taken to get there. Managers taking the time to meet with their senior direct reports and discussing their progress allows them to reflect on their contribution to the business and give them an idea of what their future would look like while staying with the company. This ultimately leads to a higher retention rate. Protiviti, a global consulting firm based in Menlo Park, California, had a large problem regarding the

turnover rate of younger employees and after an internal survey, the cause was that mentoring was not occurring between mature leadership personnel and younger employees (Sedensky 1). They changed their performance review system, emphasizing more feedback to their employees. Protiviti also engaged mature leadership in training classes that emphasized generational differences, which further emphasized their relationships with their fellow coworkers. This method of feedback served as an awareness tool for Protiviti's mature employees and helped assess their roles within the company as well as their general performance. The additional training, provided after the feedback, also strengthened their relationships within the organization. This motivates employees to stay with the company, which subsequently increases retention rates. Regular and consistent feedback is valued, and encourages them to face future challenges, mend obstacles that occurred in the past, and perform consistently for the company. Salary and a range of benefits are increasingly important as people age in the workforce. As health begins to deteriorate and money becomes tighter due to the possibility of supporting family members and increased medical bills, employees become more concerned with their bottom line and various methods of compensation given by the employer (Stassen 41). Although salary is important, benefits like vacation time and medical, dental, and vision insurance packages are vital to retaining mature employees. Since they want to maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle, it is important that they feel supported by their employer in more ways than just financially. One reason why they may want to work is to have insurance for times when pharmacological co-pays increase and trips to the doctor become more frequent. Since this is a main driver for staying employed, it is crucial that businesses emphasize all types of compensation in their human resources program.

In summary, employers "need to demonstrate that they value the experience, knowledge, and

skills of mature employees, show appreciation when mature employees do a good job, and ensure that mature employees are treated with respect by others in the organization" (43). Not only does this make sure Generation X, Baby Boomers, and Veterans remain members of the workforce, but also it shows younger generations that they will be taken care of when it is their time to age within the workforce. This builds trust and loyalty within a company and may lead to overall higher retention. The Corporate Leadership Council reports that highly engaged organizations have the potential to reduce staff turnover by 87% (Corporate Leadership Council). Knowledge and skill transfer between experienced staff and new members of the labor force will occur, reinforcing the intrinsic value of the ongoing cycle of employees flowing in and out of the business world.

RETIREMENT DRIVERS AND TRANSITIONS TO RETIREMENT

"Work harder, work longer" is a slogan that describes how many mature employees are postponing retirement age and sacrificing work-life balance to seek continuing success in their jobs as a matter of self-fulfillment or to respond to financial setbacks that have placed plans for retirement targets in peril (Black 1). Adults are healthier, thus living much longer, and are able to work past the traditional retirement age of 65. When 65 was set as the age where retirees and individuals could claim their Social Security money in the 1930s, the life expectancy at birth was 58 years for men and 62 years for women (Social Security). This number is significantly low because many individuals died during childhood due to incurable diseases. Once a person reached the age of 21 in this time period, their chances to live to 65 were approximately 57%, on average between men and women. The current life expectancy of those born in the United States in 2013 is 78.62 years (The World: Life Expectancy 2013). Although the life span has dramatically increased, the Social Security benefit age has not increased proportionately.

Many employees view retirement as the light at the end of the tunnel because for many people it is their first long-term break from work since they were in their early twenties or younger. In the year 2011, approximately 11,500 Baby Boomers retired every day (Gilliland). Retirement can be envisioned as a period of your life to relax, vacation, and spend time with family. If retirement is seen as an accomplishment or goal achieved after devoting one's life to a job well done, why are mature workers delaying retirement? According to the Pew Research Survey, the majority of those who keep working past the retirement age work because of the intangible rather than the economic rewards. Another reason individuals may keep working past the typical retirement age is that since 1972, benefits increase each year one defers receiving Social Security from age 62 to age 70 (Black 66), reaping a higher monthly check. If an individual is financially stable and is employed throughout their sixties, they may choose this route to make retirement even more comfortable.

Conversely, the Pew Research Center states, "Only about half (51%) of all current retirees say they retired because they wanted to" (1). Many people want to continue working to retain health insurance benefits and to maintain a steady income, and feel like a productive member of society, but other forces may be in play that forces them to retire. Health issues and employer-forced retirement are the two main causes for unwanted retirement. Even if they choose to retire on their own, or are forced to because of circumstantial issues, still nearly one-in-six " reluctant retirees" continue to be actively involved in some part- or full-time work (Taylor et al. 3).

In order to transition Baby Boomers into retirement effectively, a phased-retirement model based on the slow reduction of work hours should be put in place. Since most baby boomers place a high importance on balancing leisure and work, many of them want to leave the workforce of their full-time demanding job, but are seeking other less-time-consuming opportunities to stay

involved. As The Journal of Women and Aging has concluded, Baby Boomers "no longer want to work full-time, but they are not prepared to be "put out to pasture either" (Winston and Barnes 139). Another factor initiating the desire for remaining in the work environment is the unstable economy (140). Having a consistent and reliable salary provides security as Baby Boomers are living considerably longer. To successfully transition from an arduous work schedule to a more relaxed lifestyle, a Baby Boomer should slightly modify their lifestyle within the months prior to retirement, if that ability is available. An example of this would be a Baby Boomer working fewer hours in order to experience more free time in addition to being less focused on their life at work. This provides the opportunity to use hours outside of the work environment to find social groups, educational activities, or part-time jobs that will be available when the retirement period begins. This also reduces the hours at the current work place, allowing the successor for that position to take on some of the responsibility for that role while the organization adjusts to job transition and functioning without that certain member of the team.

An organization that is currently implementing an effective phased retirement program is the Lee Memorial Health System (Tishman et al. 13). Before retirement, they allow flexible schedules including part time, job sharing, working at home, and other methods of flexible work hours. Regarding retirement, they are executing a phased retirement and seasonal-months- off program for a specific period of time for both full- and part-time employees. This helps employees to take time off when necessary or desired, and slowly transitions them into a more personal rather than work-focused period of life. The Lee Memorial Health System addresses the issue of losing benefits by allowing their staff to work reduced schedules for a maximum of six months without decreasing benefits. Another example is the CVS/Caremark Company (Tishman et al. 16). They enthusiastically hire mature workers for entry-level positions in order to keep them in the

workforce while giving them flexible, part time schedules. This makes them feel more stable since they have an income and possible benefits, while the company completes the necessary tasks in the entry-level positions.

Research suggests that abrupt retirement will change into a more staggered or gradual process, which supports the phased retirement mode (Phased Retirement and Flexible Retirement Arrangements 4). Social Security has made it easier for older workers to continue working past the full retirement age without losing benefits, providing an incentive to continue earning a salary while maintaining benefits into later years. Using a phased retirement system will allow business to better prepare and anticipate for losing skills and labor through retirement. "By identifying the required skills of their current and future workforce, by monitoring key positions and employees affected by worker turnover and retirement, and by initiating succession planning for these critical positions, organizations can retain their most skilled and experienced workers through aggressive work- force planning efforts" (14). This benefits the employers because training and hiring costs are reduced, former employees can be easily contracted as consultants, in addition to increased productivity in the work environment due to a proper work/life balance. The skills of Baby Boomers and other mature workers are capitalized on, while making the transition into retirement easier for both the individual and the company.

CURRENT STATE: PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

In order to develop and execute a comprehensive business prescription to ensure organizational success employing multi-generational work teams including mature workers, current organizational policies and practices need to be assessed. According to "Understanding Generational Differences for Competitive Success", there are four main areas of focus that ensure mixed-demographic workplaces are successful: changing human resource policies and

corporate philosophies, ensuring an environment of effective communication, incorporating collaborative decision making, and developing internal training programs that focus on the differences.

Unit leaders, C-Suite executives, and a highly involved Human Resources department are vital in creating and sustaining a welcoming environment that promotes retention. Although salary is important in determining where people are employed, benefits, rewards, community, and job flexibility can also be deciding factors among various generations. As noted, some age groups put more emphasis on salary while others favor a strong work/life balance. For example, Boomers do not want to hear about stock options because of their uncertain nature (Glass 101). They want guaranteed security; therefore they are focused on their numerical salary. Generation X places a strong emphasis having a balance between work and family time, so they are more likely to take a job if it has flexible hours. Millennials are unique in wanting to combine many traits of companies that lead to quick success while climbing the corporate ladder. They want to work in team settings that make decisions collaboratively and receive constant feedback from managers that identify and reward positive actions.

Effective communication occurs when multiple people can discuss a topic and understand each other's point of view without distortion of information or harmful attacks on opinions or ideas. Proper communication skills should emphasize listening, how to effectively get a point across, how to clarify when necessary, as well as the ability to bridge multiple ideas together and create a consensus (Glass 101). Successful interactions are seen through a variety of discussion mediums such as the telephone, email, text messaging, and face-to-face talking. Each medium has unique roles in society and may be more or less useful in specific situations, making it necessary for employees to know when to use which medium.

Channel richness is defined as the "amount of information that can be transmitted during a communication episode " (Daft & Lane 275) It is influence by three main characteristics including the ability to handle multiple cues at the same time, the ability to provide quick two-way feedback, and the ability to create a personal focus for the communication. Communicating with someone in person is the richest form of communication because you can analyze their body language, tone of voice, and emotions making it easy to process the multiple cues, Talking also provides both parties with the ability to give feedback in the moment as well as center the discussion on a specific topic or goal. Moving down the continuum following the telephone, then email and text messaging, followed by memos and letters and then formal reports (275). These mediums do not allow the communicating parties to have a high ability to read and react to each other's cues and provide feedback in the same instant. Since the generations prefer different mediums that are composed of varying channel richness, conflict arises.

To bridge the gap apparent between styles of communication, a corporate trainer Dana Brownlee suggests that employees should start with a foundation of respect for each other, and then they can point out the differences and understand why they are there (Goudreau 1). For example, Millennials can discern why Baby Boomers prefer face-to-face contact and rely less on technology while oppositely Baby Boomers can learn about the benefits to quick communication via email (Glass 101). The blame for communication problems cannot be placed on a specific generation but must be combated by all in order for goals to be achieved.

Collaborative decision making, with collaboration defined as "a process through which people who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Callahan et al. 2). Applying this to making decisions, collaboration fosters new ideas and solutions from the

combination of varying perspectives, experience and knowledge that aids in achieving a goal. As the old saying goes, "two heads are better than one", but what is even better is if those two heads have different perspectives and background knowledge because they can both cooperate on a shared task, achieve a more well-rounded outcome, and possibly exchange skills and experiential information to one another to help them increase performance in the future. "Differing ways of looking at the world, interpreting experience, solving problems and predicting future possibilities work together to produce a distinctive mental tool set" (Folk-Williams 1). Groups who are able to look at the world from different angles consistently outperform those who have a single outlook on the issue at hand. Groupthink may withhold creativity and unique ideas from discussions that revolve around accomplishing a task, therefore it is extremely important for teams to be diverse in age, ethnicity, education background, and in many other categories. The integration of collaborative decision-making should be a goal that a company is striving to achieve. Once a collaborative, synergistic decision is made, an organization cannot reduce its focus on diversity management. A company has to work at incorporating efficient teamwork into their organizational structure every single day.

Internal resources, specifically diversity training programs, are used to maximize employee potential through identifying differences and reaping their benefits. The main reasons for emphasizing and controlling "diversity are to improve productivity and remain competitive, to form better work relationships among employees, to enhance social responsibility, and to address legal concerns (Wentling and Palma-Rivas)". A diversity program at a Fortune 500 company located in Phoenix emphasizes taking personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Test, strengths and weaknesses tests, forming groups with individuals of similar and different ages, as well as bonding over shared passions. This has been assessed to be effective because people are meeting

others in different areas of the business and forming lasting relationships that enhance the cooperative attitude of the company. Employees have been able to draw upon different strengths of fellow coworkers to create a better outcome for whatever task they are completing. "The Diversity Training Handbook: A practical guide to understanding & changing attitudes" recommends that training should stress understanding. Although many employers and employees know the facts, putting them into practice and understanding why they are important is another facet of training (Clements et. al 139). The training should highlight attitudes and how they can translate into behaviors (141). If employees understand they have a natural bias towards one group of people, or unreasonably dislike an associate for one particular reason, the training program can raise awareness about why their attitude is the way it is, and how this can negatively impact their behavior. Vice versa, it is important to show how positive and cooperative attitudes can create harmony in the workplace.

Although there are educated prescriptions on how to work with the multigenerational workforce, it is unseen as to what the individuals actually prefer and how certain methods, such as communication and mentoring, work within actual organizations. Questions remaining include how often work teams encompass individuals from a variety of ages and backgrounds, whether or not company cultures foster an integrative work environment, and whether individuals feel that working in a diverse setting nurtures creativity and success or harms it. In addition, questions relating to age and experience related to mentoring, communicating with individuals with unique perspectives, and reporting to members of different age groups should be addressed.

METHOD

A survey was created in order to assess employed individuals' of different ages perspectives on

how multi-generations affect the workforce and whether their presence is perceived to contribute to success or if multigenerational diversity is seen as a detracting factor from teamwork. The survey (Appendix A) was electronically distributed to 130 potential respondents from all working age demographic groups with a completion rate of 63.84%. The respondents were found among a range of companies, but a large concentration of respondents was found from three business sectors: retail (12 respondents), education (17 respondents) and healthcare (20 respondents). The retail companies where the respondents are employed ranged in size from 26,000 employees to 151,000 employees. Many of the respondents working within the education field held positions at a university or within an elementary school district. The healthcare industry respondents worked in a variety of areas including family doctors, hospital employees, geriatric care, and healthcare lobbying. A larger range of number of employees was seen here, where some companies employed less than 10 individuals, while other healthcare companies employed over 60,000 staff. Positions ranged from individuals recently hired at the company who are in start off positions all the way to higher executives positions. They were contacted via e-mail regarding taking survey, the time expected, and how the survey would contribute to the outcome of the paper. The e-mails were forwarded throughout companies and were also emailed to other interested individuals, therefore increasing the demographic range of respondents and snowballing the concentration of respondents within the education and healthcare sectors. They were told that their names and companies would not be revealed to ensure the accuracy and secrecy of their responses.

Employees (83) from a variety of companies responded to the survey, most working for their respective companies for between zero to five years with 37 individuals working under a year for their institution and 23 employees working between two and five years. A total of 14 individuals

had worked for their company for over 16 years, providing a range of work experience between individuals who have just started a company and those who have been employed in the same institution for a considerable period of time. Most of the respondents (37) were between the ages of 20 and 24. This number correlates with those working for under a year for their company because these individuals are just starting out in the workforce and it is most likely one of their first jobs. The second and third most prevalent group was between the ages of 50-54 (10) and 60-64 (9). There were no respondents past the age of 64. This may affect the aggregate data because it lacks the opinion and perspective of a certain age group present within the workforce. Respondents were asked to assess their satisfaction with their workplace and their coworkers, the amount of teamwork and collaboration used within the workplace, and the degree to which their job requires coworker interaction on a daily basis in addition to their communication skills. Also, the survey addressed individuals' preference to working with individuals who are within or outside of their age range, how they feel reporting to employees who are older or younger than they are, and how having multigenerational teams affects team work and communication. They assessed how their teams were made up in their workplace and if it applied, how a range of ages within their team positively or negatively affects their outcomes. Lastly, individuals analyzed whether mentorship was based on age and/or experience.

RESULTS

The respondents replied to a series of 18 questions along a scale ranging from: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Most individuals seemed satisfied with their workplace with 72 answers of agree and strongly agree, with even more (79) enjoying the company of their coworkers. There were 68 respondents who said they do at least some of their work in teams while but when asked if they wanted more group collaboration in their

workplace, only 34 replied with agree or strongly agree and 14 replied with disagree and strongly disagree. The majority (35) remained neutral, possibly signifying their content state with the amount of group collaboration that is currently integrated within their workplace. Only 7 individuals disagreed that they have a large amount of coworker interaction every day while 45 individuals strongly agreed and 25 individuals agree. Overall, this data exemplifies an extremely collaborative work environment composed of a variety of teams that require daily interaction with fellow employees to achieve a goal.
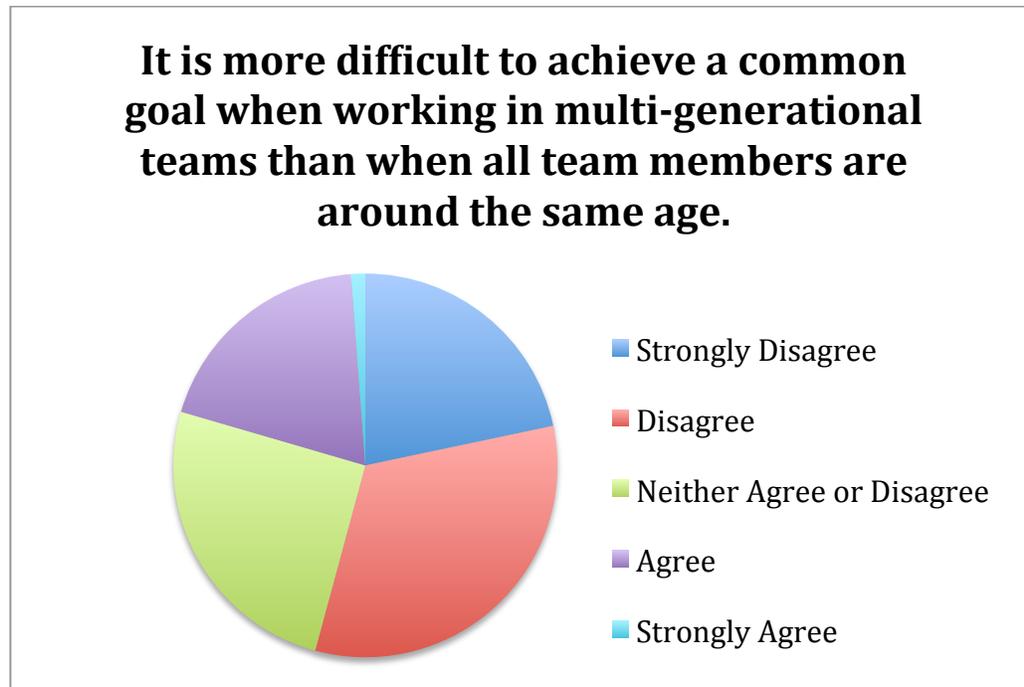
When asked if they sometimes struggle communicating with others in their workplace, zero employees replied strongly agree. Most replied with strongly disagree (15) and disagree (42), showing that communication is not usually a problem. To assess their preference of reporting to an individual who is older or younger than themselves, the employed respondents were asked if they would be okay reporting to a supervisor who is younger than themselves and also if they prefer reporting to someone who is older than themselves. The majority (31) responded with agree to being okay reporting to someone younger than them, but less responded with strongly agree (22) depicting a slight preference. A total of 14 individuals said disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would be okay with reporting to a younger employee. Regarding reporting to a boss that is older than themselves, the most neutral results were recorded out of every question asked (36). A total of 34 individuals agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer an older boss, while only 14 disagreed or strongly disagreed.

I am/would be okay reporting to a supervisor who is younger than me

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
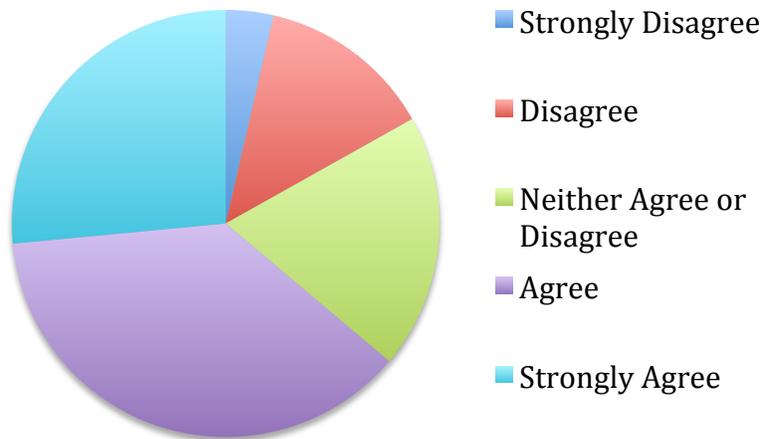
Regarding group work challenging their leadership abilities, employees had a variety of opinions. Only 3 strongly agreed, 33 agreed, and 24 remained neutral. A total of 15 respondents disagreed and 7 strongly disagreed, display a large gamut of responses. By contrast, many concluded that it is *not* more difficult to achieve a common goal when working in multi-generational teams than when all team members are around the same age. A majority of 45 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that it would be more difficult, and 16 individuals agreed that it would be more difficult. Only one respondent strongly agreed that the multigenerational team would make the task more difficult. The majority (50) disagreed and strongly disagreed that having large age spans within the workplace makes communication more difficult. A large amount remained neutral (15) while 16 agreed that the age range could complicate communication. Regarding the question as to whether they prefer working in teams that are composed of individuals in their age range, many stayed neutral (25). Thirty respondents disagreed and 11 strongly disagreed. As to whether the teams in their workplace contained members who were around the same age, the majority disagreed (33) but a significant number

also agreed (22). Very few strongly disagreed (8) or strongly agreed (6). Overall, this indicates that group work within a multigenerational team is enforced within the workforce and most believe that it does not cause difficulty. Communication may be made more difficult to the age range, but most do not prefer to have teams composed of individuals who are all around the same age.

It is more difficult to achieve a common goal when working in multi-generational teams than when all team members are around the same age.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

The majority (29) agreed with the statement that, "We achieve better results when working in teams composed of multi-generational members than when all team members are around the same age". A total of 19 additional respondents strongly agreed. Many stayed neutral (27), but a small portion disagreed (6) and strongly disagreed (2). An overwhelming majority (38) strongly agreed that older and younger team members in their workplace often benefit from each other's knowledge and skills, showing a strong idea. Another 35 respondents agreed. Very few remained neutral or disagreed. Most disagreed (32) that younger workers in their workplace don't offer enough respect for the experience of older workers, which shows an overall mindfulness of the multigenerational workforce. A total of 18 individuals agreed or strongly agreed that mature

workers do not receive enough respect showing room for improvement. Forty-six employees agreed and 11 strongly agreed that older individuals tend to mentor younger employees in the work environment, which may be because our society is taught to "respect your elders". Consequently, the majority (58) disagreed and strongly disagreed that mentorship is based more upon age rather than experience which somewhat clashes with the previous question. Although mentorship is based upon experience, older individuals are mainly doing the mentoring, which may be due to status or their impression of wisdom.

Mentorship is based more upon age rather than experience.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
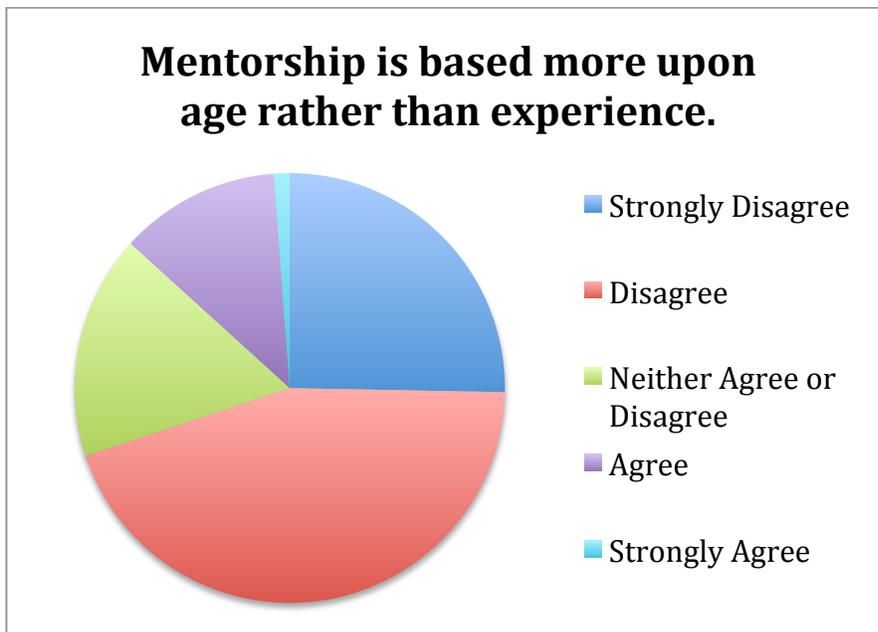
In conclusion, of the questions ranked on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, most agree that they are satisfied in their workplace and enjoy their coworkers in addition to having teamwork within their companies. Reporting to an older versus a younger boss makes a difference for some, but most feel that age is not an issue when it comes to hierarchical structure or working in teams. Many believe that working in teams composed of individuals from a diverse age range may benefit the outcome but may also make communication slightly more difficult. Mentorship is weighted heavily on mature workers, but many would feel comfortable if

younger individuals with more experience also mentored fellow employees because experience is more essential to mentoring than age.

Respondents answering the short answer questions deemed experience and maturity more important than age. This was mainly consistent, but the problem was that each generation grouped older and younger individuals into categories of maturity and experience based upon their age. If they negatively evaluated individuals' perceived lack of dedication to work, they were grouped into the "younger" category. If individuals were critiqued that they stuck in their ways, they were automatically placed in the "older" category because they assume through their additional years of work experience, they have developed a set regimen. The common thread between the answers to the short answer question, "Can you describe a time when age differences among team members impacted success, either positively or negatively?" was that the younger generations were praised for creativity but were criticized for their reliance on technology and lack of work ethic, while mature workers were praised for their diligence in the workplace and their communication skills, but were critiqued on their overly traditional work styles and resistance to technological change. This is exemplified in anonymous quotes:

"Some in the younger generation are attached to their cell phones and it seems to interrupt them throughout the day even though it is not supposed to be on their desk. Although there are times when we have new employees that teach the older employees better computer skills to make their jobs easier."

"We have a bunch of young staff members who have new ideas, and a bunch of old "traditionalists" who are resistant to change."

"Older team members tend to have more seniority, but that doesn't always mean better results. They are very valuable, but they aren't always right. It's good for younger members to

confront/challenge older members (although it's awkward) because the end results are

better."

These specific quotes contribute to the idea of each end of the spectrum criticizing the other side

for differences, but many respondents agreed that if members attempted to work together and

build upon each other's capacities, then the goal would be achieved with better results. One

respondent summed up the conclusion in a simple manner, "Diversity in all categories improves

the output". On a note relating back to benefits specifically paid time off, one respondent

claimed, "Age difference surface most frequently in use of PTO- Younger ones are sick more

often- use more PTO for health- older ones tough it out". This is interesting because it often

perceived that mature workers use more paid time off for sick leave and health issues because

health declines in later years.

For the short answer question, "How does the generational gap within your workplace affect the

community of your company?" the results were more positive towards the outcomes provided by

the generation gap within their company, if it all present. Many respondents did not believe their

company had an age gap or believed the gap was more based upon experience and/or level of

education. Some addressed the challenges such as communication and different working styles

among the generations, but find that their outcome is improved from the variety of backgrounds

and ways of thinking. Specific organizations used specialization tactics where younger

generations who are focused on technology helped mostly with younger customers or aided

mature workers with integrating technology into their work, while the company used mature

workers to maintain the culture within the company and ensure the realistic nature of projects

and goals. This is seen in the following anonymous quotes:

"I don't really think about the generation gap as much as I think about how far a person is in their career. Most often, these two things correlate, but where I work, we tend to look to experience rather than age. It is advantageous for us to have people of all different experience levels offering suggestions/advice. Most people work together at my workplace to solve problems regardless of age."

"While it can be more challenging to communicate across generations, we are richer for the diversity and have the capacity to come to a better more well rounded answer."

"We have embraced the age differences and have started a 'club' for younger employees as a way to expose them to older workers, leadership opportunities, and to reverse mentor other generations."

Overall, the survey presented the conclusion that most employees within their respective work force may be frustrated with challenges induced by the generation gap, but are more pleased with the results of working in teams composed of different ages and backgrounds because the outcome is noticeably superior.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

My previous assumptions that generations have differing preferences for communication styles, work/life balance, and use of technology were confirmed through literature review. Extensive information was discovered regarding the mature worker and their response to changing organizational structures and the challenges and advantages of working with other generations. The importance of knowledge transfer between generations was emphasized as a tool to keep companies performing at their highest level, now and in the future, through retention of intangible assets. New findings include insight into the reasons Baby Boomers are delaying retirement and staying in the workforce. It was expected that some individuals wanted to delay

retirement, but it was surprising that up to 50% of retired individuals did not leave the workforce in their optimal circumstance. This subset of individuals may be comprised of those who were forced to leave because of health or personal-related issues, but many may have retired because their organization did not offer adaptable retirement options. Phased retirement was a newfound solution that addressed the problem of wanting to delay retirement but still desiring flexibility within the workplace.

Based on a review of pertinent literature, survey results and discussions with a wide variety of workers, I have identified the following additional strategies for an effective multi-generational work team, with emphasis on leveraging and retaining the significant value brought to the workplace by the mature worker:

Diversity Training: Training in the work environment is useful to identify differences, create a mutual understanding between individuals, and provides a method to apply strengths to enhance outcomes and human relationships in the work place. Specifically regarding the mature worker, diversity training allows the many generations to see different point of views, recognize strengths, weaknesses and generational preferences, and provide mentorship opportunities. The first step is to assess the needs of the company (Clements et al. 84). Whether the program needs to focus on ageism, racial issues, or lack of collaboration between departments, the company can tailor the topics to fit the needs of its employees. The next step in implementing a training program that focuses on diversity is determining a budget and the target population for the program (85-89). It is important to evaluate the level at which people are already at so the lessons are not repetitive and that they build on prior knowledge. Benchmarking where the organization is currently is important when designing relevant topics and the target population. It is also important to set standards for the diversity training platform so that it is consistent over

time and can be easily enhanced (92).

Collaborating with the Human Resource personnel within a company creates a specific subset of employees who are responsible for marketing and delivering the program in an effective, efficient, and budget-conscious manner. Lastly, goals and learning objectives should be set and identified to the employees involved in the program. "Learners not only have the right to be informed about what the training is about, they will learn better if they have a 'route map' of where the training is leading" (97). This will allow the company to assess if the program has enhanced the workplace collaboration through qualitative observation as well as quantitative performance valuations. If a company places emphasis on diversity training, mature workers will become more integrated with the many generations present with the labor force and will be able to contribute their skills to a larger pool of people as well as learn and appreciate new proficiencies from younger individuals. This will make older generations feel more valued within the company which will in turn help the company capitalize on their abilities for years to come.
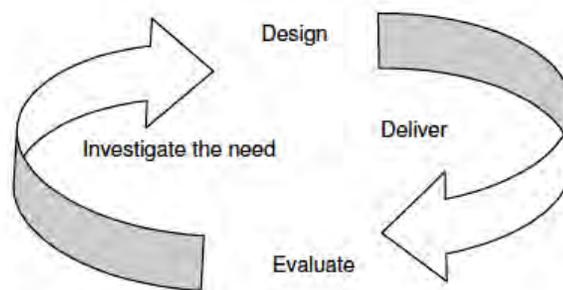
Source: A typical model of training programs provided by: *The diversity training handbook a practical guide to understanding & changing attitudes.*

Knowledge transfer: Mature workers, especially those beginning the road to retirement, need a prescriptive program that ensures the transfer of knowledge from those leaving an organization to those who remain. With the impending absence of the Baby Boomer and Veteran generations

from the workforce, skills and abilities held mainly by those generations will be obsolete unless they are mindfully passed on to future generations. The first step in ensuring knowledge transfer is creating a succession plan. Without knowing who will most likely take over positions when aging leaders leave the business, it is difficult to pass down information regarding a specific role (Succession Planning Roadmap). Through training, personal sessions such as mentoring, and stretch assignments including but not limited to managing a volunteer or intern or turning around a failing project, younger employees will become ready to assume the role of those exiting the company. Although most companies have succession planning documents, it can be debated whether they are operational when the time comes. Having a plan that allows for changes in personnel but still reinforces the mission of the company is vital. Decisions that need more attention include whether to hire from within or outside the company, as well as what to do with the gap areas where there are no successors in a particular department. Creating a succession plan that grooms employees to be outstanding individuals who are ready and capable to takeover executive roles within the organization lays the foundation for knowledge transfer.

Since employers do not schedule time in for colleagues to meet and teach each other skills within their specialty areas, the organization, once succession is determined, should allot time for the outgoing and incoming individuals to meet on a regular basis in order to clarify the position's duties, assess what strengths and opportunities the newcomer might bring to the role, as well as pass any information down from the experienced individual. In addition, an organization may facilitate learning experiences such as training classes that promote the integration between generations through sharing skills and abilities. An example would be technologically savvy Generation X teaching Baby Boomers about the functions of Excel while the Baby Boomers stress the importance of in person communication as well as business etiquette. Sharing

information and proficiencies does not have to happen just in retirement. As young employees climb the ladder of success, they will be often changing roles. If they foster multiple mentor relationships, they will learn additional knowledge from veteran employees. This will benefit the company as well as help the young employee achieve success.

Mentoring relationships are important, whether mature worker to younger worker or vice versa, because that is where the basic form of knowledge transfer occurs. Mentoring is based upon a relationship that is both professionally and personally satisfying (Golden). Each relationship may have different goals, but they should be based on confidentiality, honesty, and flexibility, in addition to striving for a mutually beneficial partnership. When considering mentoring relationships, age and years of experience are important variables to consider. The partners involved in the relationship benefit most when the others come from a different perspective. Mentoring, especially in the workplace, usually involves a more experienced individual, regardless of age, helping another person groom their career. Another type of relationship may involve two extremely experienced individuals who may help each other seek out opportunities to grow or reach to a new leadership position. A company should foster an atmosphere where mentoring is an important and integrated aspect of the culture. When individuals from different backgrounds and ages get together, they can learn from each other's experiences to increase their skill set and ultimately create better solutions to further improve the state of the organization.

Phased retirement program: Organizations that wish to maximize the presence of mature workers and minimize knowledge loss upon their retirement should implement phased retirement programs. Phased retirement refers to "a broad range of flexible retirement arrangements, both informal practices and formal workplace policies, which allow employees approaching normal retirement age to reduce the hours worked or work for their employers in a different capacity

after retirement transfer" (Phased Retirement and Flexible Retirement Arrangements 3). The Mercy Health System based out of Janesville, Wisconsin, allows employees who are over fifty years old with five or more years of service with the company to work 1,000 hours during the year at their discretion (18). Although working reduced hours, they maintain full part-time benefits for the year. It takes a significant amount of planning to implement an effective phased retirement program within a company. Questions to ask while creating the program involve labor shortages, skill shortages, what are the applicable federal and state laws, what age are employees eligible to participate in the program, which employees are offered the phased retirement process versus an abrupt retirement, in addition to the process of knowledge transfer (6-7). When designing the program, a core group of people should support and work with the human resource professionals in order to ensure its success. It is vital to gain support from individuals who understand the organization's benefit system, legal counsel, succession management, and top leaders within the company. They can oversee employee participation and assess the affect on the company. Identifying program components such as: job-sharing, telecommuting, consulting or contracting, sabbaticals, flex-time, part time, and reduced workdays and work weeks, should reflect and support the company's culture and overall objective (8).

An AARP survey in 2005 of more than 2,1000 Americans ages 50 and older concluded that approximately two in five mature workers were interested in participating in phased retirement and that almost four in five of those who were interested said that the availability of phased retirement would encourage them to stay in the workforce past their planned retirement date (10). The communication of the program to employees is critical for the program to flourish. Marketing in order to increase participation within the first years of implementation help spread awareness of the benefits that the program provides to all employees, not just the ones who are

retiring. This may convince younger employees to stay with the company because of the outstanding retirement plan, increasing retention. Overall, a program that slowly decreases work hours for a retiring individual allows the company to transition more effectively while providing the individual with the opportunity to earn a small salary, retain benefits, and have a more soothing approach to entering the period of full retirement.

Since the state of the mature worker in the workforce is changing daily, with more Baby Boomers leaving and fewer incoming young employees entering the workforce, this topic will continue to evolve. Research should be continued in order to discuss continuing trends of retirement, how a decreasing Baby Boomer and increasing Millennial population affects workforce dynamics, and the status of a worker shortage based upon the large quantity of retiring mature workers. Limitations of the current survey created to understand multigenerational attitudes in the workforce include the lack of workers over 64 years old within the sample population and the large majority of respondents working zero to five years for their respective company. Future research should address all generations present within the employment spectrum and continuously poll attitudes as the demographics of the workforce changes.

The mature worker is currently a vital aspect of the workforce, and will continue to be in the future. Their demographic category has strong preferences for a work-centered lifestyle, personal communication mediums such as face-to-face communication, and managerial feedback reflecting their contribution and value to the organization. Each generation contributes unique perspectives to the work environment, and diversity training and knowledge transfer are key methods that should be implemented in organizations to create a cohesive labor force that understands the importance of diversity. Knowledge transfer ensures that information and knowledge, key assets of every company, do not leave with retiring individuals and diversity

training increases the ability for coworkers to achieve maximal success in teams.

Mentoring relationships among coworkers is another cornerstone that fosters cooperation among generations within the labor force. Mentoring can be used to groom individuals for higher positions as Baby Boomers exit the workforce in addition to closing the gaps between the varying age groups. As seen in the survey, younger and more mature generations have somewhat dissenting opinions of the other generation, but often see the benefit in working with others from different age groups and backgrounds. Organizations must continually work to see the value of the mature worker while simultaneously creating a hospitable work environment where they can flourish among other generations.

Appendix:

A: Survey

1. Are you employed?
   Yes   No

2. What company do you work for?

   _____

3. How long have you worked there?
   0-1 years   2-5 years   6-10 years   11-15 years   16-20 years   21+ years

4. What is your age range?
    20-24   25-29   30-34   35-39   40-44   45-49   50-54   55-59   60-64   65-69   70+

On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, please rate the following responses.

1. I feel extremely satisfied with my workplace.

2. I generally enjoy the company of my coworkers.

3. I do at least some of my work in teams.

4. I want to have more group collaboration in my workplace.

5. I have a large amount of co-worker interaction everyday.

6. I sometimes struggle communicating with others in my workplace.

7. I am/would be okay reporting to a supervisor who is younger than me.

8. I *prefer* reporting to a boss that is older than me.

9. Group work challenges my leadership abilities.

10. It is more difficult to achieve a common goal when working in multi-generational teams than when all team members are around the same age.

11. Having larger age spans in the workplace makes it more difficult to communicate.

12. I prefer working in teams that are composed of individuals in my age range.

13. The teams in my workplace contain members who are around the same age.

14. We achieve a better result when working in teams composed of multi-generational members than when all team members are around the same age.

15. Older and younger team members in my workplace often benefit from each other's knowledge and skills.

16. Sometimes younger workers in my workplace don't offer enough respect for the experience of older workers.

17. Older individuals tend to mentor younger employees in the work environment.

18. Mentorship is based more upon age rather than experience.

Short Answer Questions:

1. Can you describe a time when age differences among team members impacted success, either positively or negatively?

2. How does the generational gap within your workplace affect the community of your company?

B: Survey Results

Company Employment Duration:

#	Answer		Response	%
1	0-1 year		37	44%
2	2-5 years		23	27%
3	6-10 years		7	8%
4	11-15 years		4	5%
5	16-20 years		8	9%
6	21 + years		6	7%

Age Demographics:

#	Answer		Response	%
1	20-24 years		37	43%
2	25-29 years		8	9%
3	30-34 years		1	1%
4	35-39 years		4	5%
5	40-44 years		5	6%
6	45-49 years		5	6%
7	50-54 years		10	12%
8	55-59 years		7	8%
9	60-64 years		9	10%
10	65-69 years		0	0%
11	70 + years		0	0%

Questionnaire Ratings:

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses
1	I feel satisfied with my workplace.	4	2	5	36	36	83
2	I generally enjoy the company of my coworkers.	1	0	3	32	47	83
3	I do at least some of my work in teams.	3	5	7	25	43	83
4	I want to have more group collaboration in my workplace.	2	12	35	21	13	83
5	I have a large amount of coworker interaction everyday.	0	7	6	25	45	83
6	I sometimes struggle communicating with others in my workplace.	15	42	14	12	0	83
7	I am/would be okay reporting to a supervisor who is younger than me.	3	11	16	31	22	83
8	I prefer reporting to a boss that is older than me.	5	8	36	27	7	83
9	Group work challenges my leadership abilities.	7	15	24	33	3	82
10	It is more difficult to achieve a common goal when working in multi-generational teams than when all team members are around the same age.	18	27	21	16	1	83
11	Having larger age spans in the workplace makes it more difficult to communicate.	12	38	15	16	2	83
12	I prefer working in teams that are composed of individuals in my age range.	11	30	25	15	2	83
13	The teams in my workplace contain members who are around the same age.	8	33	14	22	6	83
14	We achieve better results when working in teams composed of multi-generational members than when all team members are around the same age.	2	6	27	29	19	83
15	Older and younger team members in my workplace often benefit from each other's knowledge and skills.	2	1	6	35	38	82
16	Sometimes younger workers in my workplace don't offer enough respect for the experience of older workers.	8	32	25	13	5	83
17	Older individuals tend to mentor younger employees in the work environment.	1	10	15	46	11	83
18	Mentorship is based more upon age rather than experience.	21	37	14	10	1	83

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