

Generations in Project Management

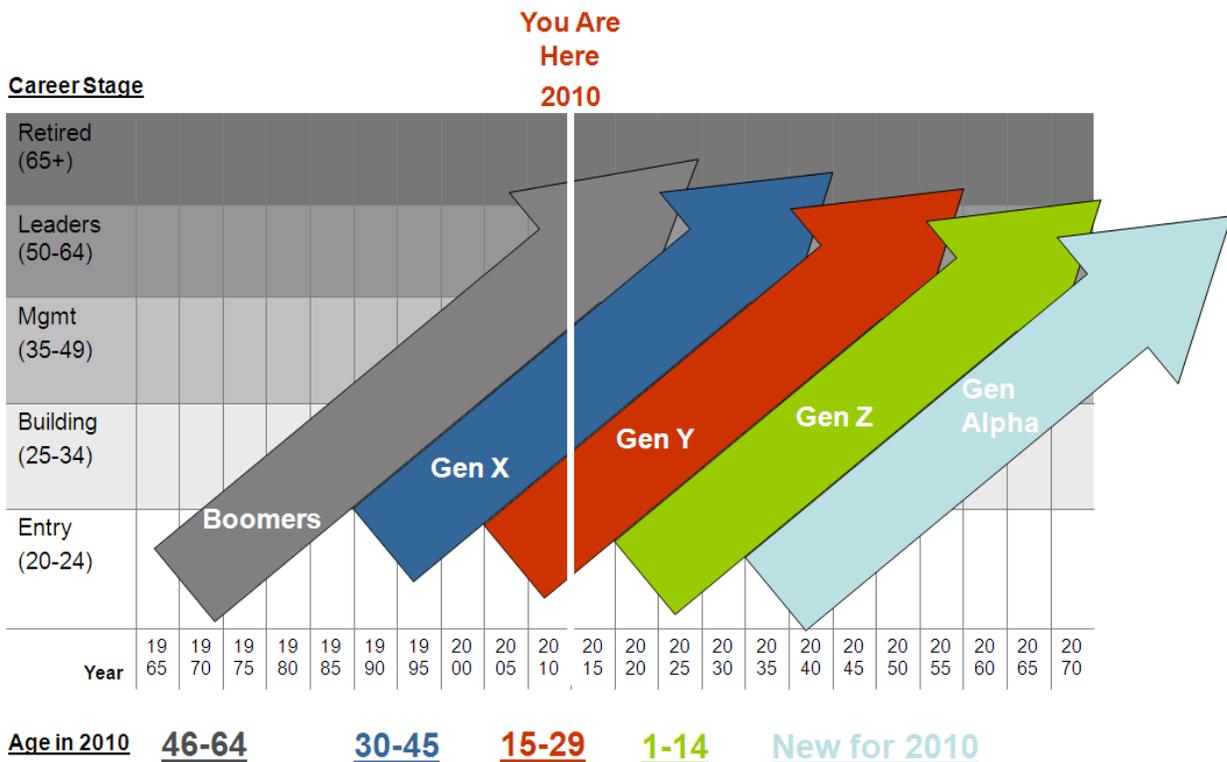
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(CFES appreciates PMI's permission to make this report available to the Canadian Earth Science community)

Introduction

In 2011 the oldest of the Baby Boomer generation will turn 65 and presumably begin to leave the workforce. An uncertain economy and the fact that many people now work well beyond the age of 65 will likely slow the impact of the loss of this significant generation from the workforce; nonetheless in the not-too distant future Boomers will retire en masse. This will give way to a new generation of business leaders with a style of their own. Generation X and Y are by and large more consensus-oriented and global-minded in nature. Their leadership style and expectations are different than previous generations.

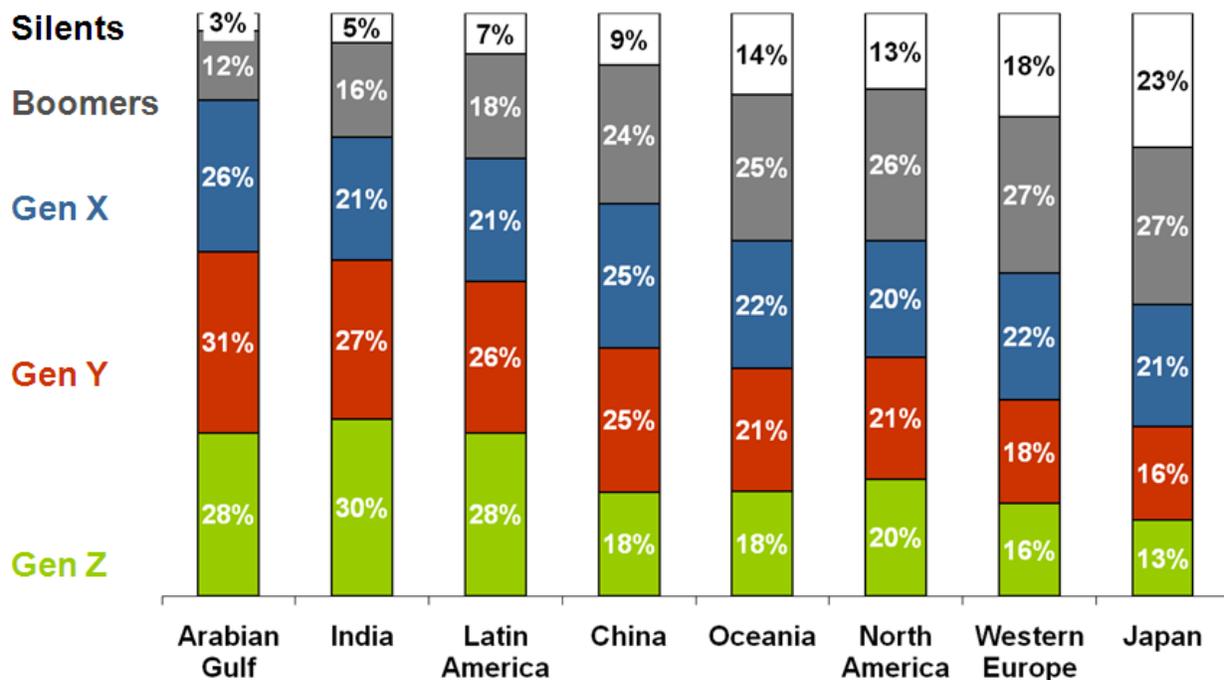
This report reviews information about the characteristics of the various generations, the way they interact with PMI and the potential impact that the coming generational shifts may have on project management and PMI.



Global Populations

Making generalizations about any cohort based on age, culture or any other demographic variable is tricky at best. This is especially the case when trying to generalize a cohort that spans the entire globe. Generational segmentation should be viewed only as a starting point for understanding customer segments as there can be significantly different attitudes and beliefs even within a single generation. However, a recent Harvard Business Review article noted that as globalization brings distant cultures closer together, the experiences of those cultures become increasingly shared⁽¹⁾. As a result younger generations across the globe are starting to have more commonalities in their characteristics than previous generations, especially when it comes to exposure to mass media and the use of technology.

Further, the impact of generational shifts across the globe is important to note. For example, Generations Y and Z (essentially everyone under the age of 30) comprise over 50% of the population in Latin America, India and the Arabian Gulf. These same generations make up only between 30% and 40% of the population in Japan, Western Europe and North America. How the emerging markets deal with the immense influx of youth into the job market and how the western world and Japan deal with the retirement of significant portions of its workforce will be important issues in the coming years.



Generational Characteristics

A study compiled by McCrindle Research of Sydney Australia shows a number of differences across the generations that are currently in the workplace⁽²⁾.

	Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
In the Workplace			
Values at work	Work ethic, industry focus	Achievement, company-centric	Ownership, individuality
Motivations for work	<i>Financial security, responsibility</i>	<i>Career progression, opportunity</i>	Job variety, creativity
Key management tools	<i>Recruiting, supervising</i>	<i>Training, promoting</i>	Innovating, empowering
Leadership style	<i>Control, thinkers</i>	<i>Coordination, doers</i>	Consensus, feelers
Influence and values	<i>Local, long-term needs</i>	<i>Regional, medium-term goals</i>	Global, short-term wants
Management approach	<i>Telling, 'yes boss'</i>	<i>Selling, "what's in it for me"</i>	Involving, 'here's what I think'
Training and Development			
Who	<i>Trainers, the learned</i>	<i>Facilitator, learner</i>	<i>Facilitator, learner</i>
How	<i>Provable, verbal</i>	<i>Observable, visual</i>	<i>Observable, visual</i>
What	<i>Passive, long-term needs</i>	<i>Participative, short-term demands</i>	<i>Participative, short-term demands</i>
Where	<i>Structured, classroom</i>	<i>Spontaneous, café style</i>	<i>Spontaneous, café style</i>
Who	<i>Training, the learned</i>	<i>Facilitator, learner</i>	<i>Facilitator, learner</i>
Marketing to Generations			
Digital usage	<i>Digital Immigrants</i>	<i>Digital Adaptives</i>	<i>Digital Adaptives – Digital Natives</i>
Decision making	<i>Rational decision makers (evidence)</i>	<i>Emotive decision makers (experience)</i>	<i>Emotive decision makers (experience)</i>

Additional research by the Society for Human Resources in the United States provides additional detail about the characteristics of each generation⁽³⁾. These however are clearly skewed towards U.S. culture.

	<i>Technological</i>	<i>Societal</i>	<i>Business</i>
Boomers			
<i>Perspective</i>	Sequential team work, college is needed for a good job.	Women and minorities need rights; children have rights; protest brings change.	Entrepreneurship; plenty for all – jobs, money, entertainment.
<i>Value</i>	Do your part; buy now, pay later; use your imagination; individuals are as important as the group; working hard and nonstop is good.	From responsibilities focus to rights focus; war is unfair; government isn't to be trusted; love valued over hate; make your voice heard; be involved	Self-serving; lifelong learner; competition within teams for top performance; information is power; instant gratification.
<i>Work Paradigms</i>	Blue collar makes as much money as college-educated; workers' rights need to be respected; live to work.	Women have the right to work; children can thrive in child care; strength in numbers.	Get a desk job; work smart and get rich; invest well; innovate to get ahead.
Generation X			
<i>Perspective</i>	Computer is king; college is a birthright; exploration is expansive.	Help the vulnerable; don't rock the boat; share power.	Anyone can succeed through perseverance; must survive uncertainty; think globally.
<i>Value</i>	Do it faster; mobility is desirable.	Care for the elderly; take risks; diversity is valued; speak out against injustice.	Keep it simple; recovery is strengthening; life is unpredictable; stay viable.
<i>Work Paradigms</i>	Technology skills are a must for all; organize and streamline operations; less is more; groups need to function as teams.	Co-workers are as important as bosses; save and conserve everything.	Work your way up the ladder; flatter organizations are better; kill bureaucracy.
Generation Y			
<i>Perspective</i>	The world is at your fingertips; fastest is best; people merge with machines.	Every person for themselves; friends replace families.	Individual excellence is rewarded; uncertainty is a constant; contribute globally.
<i>Value</i>	Information is valued; research brings answers; save the planet; be safe.	Life is fragile; elders share family responsibility; be heard and noticed; be healthy; realism.	Be on the fast track; worker satisfaction is king; consumerism drives the economy.
<i>Work Paradigms</i>	I can do it by myself; I need good technical resources; virtual teams.	No free lunch; telecommute; self-directed work.	Individual achievement; get it done; nothing is impossible; earn to spend.

Implications

REFERENCES

1. Erickson, Tammy. *Generational Differences Between India and the U.S.*, February 28, 2009. http://blogs.hbr.org/erickson/2009/02/global_generations_focus_on_in.html
2. McCrindle, Mark. The ABC of XYZ, Understanding the Global Generations. 2009.
3. *Creating Synergy in a Four Generation Workplace*. 2009 SHRM.