MULTIGENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IN THE ACADEMIC WORPLACE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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Have you peeked lately at the age range of your faculty? There may be "senior" faculty over 65 and some even into their 70s and older. At the other end of the range, there may be junior faculty instructors and assistant professors in their 20s, fresh out of the academic womb. You could have a span of more than 50 years between two or more faculty members. If you continue peeking, you might find an even wider age range between administrators, such as deans, provosts, and human resource directors, and administrative assistants, research or teaching assistants, and students. This variability in ages changes the interpersonal dynamics in the academic work environment. The corporate sector has already experienced these changes.

Four Generations

These ranges and everyone in between suggest four possible distinct generations. This is the first time in history that this many generations have attempted to work together. This multigenerational mix gives new meaning to "diversity" (Arsenault, 2004; Crampton & Hodge, 2007; Kuron, 2012). Age can be labeled as another demographic source of differences among us, tossed into the workplace profile with gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

How many generations are currently represented by your administrators, faculty, and staff? The nonacademic workplace in businesses and corporations has already witnessed this mix and the impact of the generational differences. In fact, hundreds of articles and more than 20 books (e.g., Burmeister, 2008; Deal, 2007; Delcampo, Haggerty, Haney, & Knippel, 2010; Dorsey, 2009; Elliott, 2009; Espinoza, Ukleja, & Husch, 2010; Gravett, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Lipkin & Perrymore, 2009; Lower, 2006; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008; Martin & Tulgan, 2006; Meister, 2010; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000) have been published on this topic. But almost nothing has appeared in the higher education literature.

Differences among Generations

When 20-somethings are working in an environment with WWII, Korean, and Vietnam veteran 70-somethings, along with the generations in between those "somethings," there are bound to be some differences in communication, work style, and job/career ambition (Dries, Pepermans, & DeKerpel, 2008). They bring different experiences, expectations, and perspectives to the workplace. There can be clashes in values, beliefs, and attitudes rooted in those differences. Further, the use or nonuse of the ever burgeoning technology has magnified the differences.

So, what's the problem? There have always been employees who can't get along with one another. This is not the same as personality conflicts, workplace jealousies, and professional competition. *Negative encounters of the multigenerational kind* are attributable to systematic differences in perspectives between members of different generations and the problems that can result (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010). These differences will add to the interpersonal conflicts already occurring in the workplace with incivility, bullying, and microaggressions metastasizing throughout higher education for more than a decade (Chapell et al., 2004; Forni, 2002; Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Twale & DeLuca 2008). Many of those behaviors have been manifested in communications on the Internet in the forms of cyber-bullying and cyber-harassment (Gupta, 2008).

The purposes of this article are (1) to summarize the defining characteristics of the four generations in academia, (2) to pinpoint the differences with the greatest conflict potential, (3) to examine the prevalence of generational bullying in higher education, and (4) to consider the practical implications of these generational issues for faculty and staff training and development. It seems appropriate to address these issues before the sources of conflict and hand-to-hand combat erupt.

The college/university work environment and its inhabitants are very different from that of businesses and corporations. Although many of the problems may be the same, they will manifest themselves differently, thereby requiring different solutions. This article addresses the first critical steps in order to diagnose the root causes for misunderstandings and bullying and, eventually, to leverage the assets of each generation to attain the outcomes of higher education.

Identification of Generations

Definition of Generation. The literature on the multigenerational workplace has defined "age cohorts" that share unique, collective life experiences, values, attitudes, behaviors, and memories that are different from one another (Dencker, Joshi, & Matocchio, 2008; Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Schuman & Scott, 2004). Each generation has a set of characteristics circumscribed by specific birth years and significant life events (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Although there isn't perfect agreement on these years and events, there is consensus and sufficient evidence among most published sources on the characteristics presented in this article.

Limitations of Generational Categories. Any time a researcher attempts to lump people into categories, there are going to be limitations and lumps. My disclaimer for these generational categories is as follows*: Each generation is infinitely more complex than any single profile can reveal. The members of each generation comprise a fluid, messy, and diverse group, where a one-size-fits-all mold ignores their variability in skills, abilities, personalities, experience, socio-economic levels, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class. It is appropriate to acknowledge these limitations in any description of generations. However, it is also legitimate to suggest a set of characteristics and cultural trends derived from sound scientific research that can provide insight on values and expectations and guide the workplace practices for administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education*.

Multigenerational Workplace: Characteristics of Four Generations

Most likely you have three and, probably, four generations on board with the following age ranges:

1. Traditionalists (67–∞ years)
2. Baby Boomers (48–66 years)
3. Generation X (32–47 years)
4. Net Generation (17–31 years)

The major characteristics and life-shaping events of these four generations (adapted from Delcampo et al., 2010; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008; Patota, Schwartz, & Schwartz, 2007) are listed in Table 1 (Berk, in press). A description of the salient characteristics of those generations and their differences follow.

Traditionalists (Silent Generation)

The Traditionalists (born 1922–1945) have been partitioned into two groups by Magnuson and Alexander (2008): Civic/GI (1922–1931) and Adaptive (1932–1945).

Civic/GI: This group is what Tom Brokaw profiled as the "Greatest Generation" (2004). They are the children of the Depression and many are World War II veterans, dying at an estimated rate of 1000 a day. They are also called the "Silent Generation" because they bottled up their emotions and kept silent, even about their war experiences. Now, some are contributing to blogs, such as "Geezer Planet: Life in the Slow Lane" (http://seniorcitizenhumor.blogspot.com); others are creating bumper stickers such as "CONTINGENCY DOCTORS: If you don't live…You don't pay;" "I'm speeding because I have to get there before I forget where I'm going;" "Florida: God's waiting room;" and "Over What Hill? Where? When? I don't remember any hill" (Berk, in press). Yet others are still working beyond their retirement years in academia and elsewhere; celebrity examples include Barbara Walters, Warren Buffet, Betty White, Angela Lansbury, Henry Kissinger, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Among the 20 million Civic/GIs, 8% are in the workforce.

Table 1 – Characteristics and Life-Shaping Events of Four Generations

Traditionalists Born 1922–1945	Baby Boomers Born 1946–1964	Generation X Born 1965–1981	Net Generation Born 1982–2003
Characteristics	***Characteristics***	***Characteristics***	***Characteristics***
Patriotic	Reject Authority	Independent	Tech Savvy
Conservative	Individualistic	Latchkey Kids	Team-Oriented
Respect Authority	Competitive	Skeptical	"Twitch Speed"
Loyal	Workaholics	"Me" Gen	Multitask
Conformity	Politically Correct	Shun Tradition	Connected
Disciplined	Social Causes	Distrust Authority	Instant Gratification
Collaborative	Optimistic	Reactive	Pressure to Succeed
Civic Pride	Idealistic	Work-Life Balance	Nomadic
Personal Sacrifice	Questioned	Team-Oriented	Racially/Ethnically
	Core Values	Tech Savvy	Diverse
		Entrepreneurial	Respect Authority
			Traditional Values
Life-Shaping Events	***Life-Shaping Events***	***Life-Shaping Events***	***Life-Shaping Events***
WWII	Vietnam War	Persian Gulf War	Iraq & Afghan. Wars
Korean War	Watergate	Cable TV/VCRs	9/11
Vietnam War	Civil Rights	Computers	Columbine
Great Depression	Women's Rights	Video Games	OK Bombing
New Deal	Gas Crisis	High Divorce Rate	PCs & Internet
Radio	Man on the Moon	Women at Work	Video Games
	Woodstock	Single Parent Homes	iPods/iPhones/iPads
	Ralph Nader	Microwave	HIV/AIDS
	Television	ATMs	Reality TV/FiOS
	Kennedy/Nixon	Cell Phones	Terrorism
	Kennedy Assass.	Challenger	2nd Bush/Clinton
		Reagan/1st Bush	Clinton Impeach.
			Obama

Adaptive: This companion group shares a lot in common with the Civic/GI, except the Depression and WWII. Instead, many are veterans of the Korean War and some served in the Vietnam War. They experienced major social changes, moving between the "old world" of the hardworking Civic/GIs and the "new world" of civil rights, feminism, and Vietnam War protests. Among the 30 million in this group, the 12% still in the workforce are well past the traditional retirement age. Many were 1960s cultural pioneers (now in their 70s), like Gloria Steinem, Colin Powell, Ralph Nader, Bill Cosby, Neil Diamond, and Tina Turner. Combined with the Civic/GIs, there are 50 million Traditionalists, 67 or older.

Baby Boomers (Me Generation)

The Boomers (born 1946–1964) grew up in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Nearly 50 to 66 in age, they were the largest generation of 80 million (1 in 4 Americans) until the Net Generation (aka Millennials) popped out. Boomers are remembered for rocking the ‘60s with Vietnam War protests on college campuses, Woodstock, experimenting with hallucinogens, and the Broadway musical *Hair*. They demanded that college administrators give them a voice in educational decisions that affected them. They expressed their collective voice by singing social commentary folk songs like “Michael Row the Boat Ashore” and “Puff,” while sitting in the entrances to administration buildings.

In addition to their social and political activism and ubiquitous bell-bottom jeans from Army-Navy surplus stores, Boomers are highly competitive and workaholics. Their commitment to careers coupled with the Women’s and Civil Rights Movements led to dual careers by many parents, struggles to balance careers with family, and married women retaining their last names or hyphenating them with their husbands. These struggles increased divorce rates (36%).

Now they are turning 65 at the rate of more than 10,000 per day (Social Security Administration, 2012), but their ideas about retirement are redefining what it means to age. They comprise a third of the current workforce (5 million) and, for a variety of reasons, including commitment to careers, many are not retiring. In fact, 80% envision working in some form during their retirement years. This may be attributed to the advances in science, technology, and medicine, and improvements in nutrition and education. In other words, with increased life expectancy and a supply of pharmaceuticals, these Boomers may be thriving for quite some time. Consider that Boomers Bill Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, David Letterman, and a large chunk of world-wide faculty and administrators are still producing.

Generation X (MTV Generation)

Gen-Xers are the smallest of the four generations, numbering 46 million, born 1965–1981 (32 to 47 years old), and comprise only 18% of the workforce. However, they have a greater entrepreneurial spirit than any previous generation. They perceive themselves as free agents with the flexibility to change or create their own jobs every few years. This spirit also extends to their preference for flexible work schedules, teamwork, diversity, prompt feedback, casual attire, a “fun” work environment with basketball hoops, and promotion based on ability, not seniority. They are also the first generation to integrate technology into their everyday lives (Delcampo et al., 2011).

Emerging in the shadow of the Boomers during the ‘70s and ‘80s, this “latchkey” generation did not want to repeat the workaholic lifestyles of their parents and have their children experience their high divorce rate. Gen-Xers work to live, not live to work. They wanted a work-life balance rather than status and tenure; they have a greater commitment to their careers than to the institutions for which they work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

Gen-Xers grew up with computer games and social networks. They are media savvy, consumed CDs and music videos with stars like Michael Jackson and Madonna, and watched TV programs such as *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, *The Cosby Show,* and *Family Ties*. Many of their characteristics will be reflected and extended by the Net Generation.

Net Generation (Millennials)

There are nearly 50 books and 10 national and international surveys of this generation who grew up with the Internet. They have been researched, surveyed, and studied more than any generation in history (Berk, 2009a). Born 1982–2003, the Net Geners (aka Millennials, Gen Y, etc.) have emerged as the largest generation or demographic bulge, with nearly 90 million (one-third of U.S. population) 10 to 31 year olds in 5th grade through graduate school and employees 17 to 31 descending on the workplace. They compose 30% of the workforce, comparable to the Boomers, who they are destined to eventually replace.

Net Geners are well-educated and achievement-oriented. They adopted many of the same life and job preferences as the Gen-Xers. However, their job-hopping mentality is slightly different. They know that if they lose a job or decide to quit or simply can't find a job, they can always hop back into their Boomer parents' home, where 34% of those 18–32 years old (22 million) now reside (Fry, 2013). Based on U.S. Census Bureau data, younger Net Geners (56% 18–24) compared to older ones (16% 25–31) and males (40%) compared to females (32%) are likely to be living with their parents.

In addition, they extended the use of technology to every aspect of their lives. They are a "mobile" tech generation with iPods, iPhones, iPads, and other iGadgets. The iHardware has apps with constantly expanding interactive capabilities from almost anywhere on the planet. Although most Net Geners are super-tech savvy, they value collaborative activities, both face-to-face and virtually with Skype or texting, and contribute to Web 2.0 and 3.0 by blogging, creating their own websites, and engaging in social networking, wikis, and Second Life (Berk, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b). They have no problem posting personal information and, sometimes, revealing photos on their sites, which can endanger their hiring potential by employers.

They multitask and operate at "twitch speed," a term borrowed from their computer game experiences, which means a typical lack of patience with people or equipment that function slower than they do, which is just about everyone and everything. They want instant feedback on their performance and feel pressure to succeed at everything they tackle with high expectations for that success.

In academe, there will be Net Gener instructors, assistant professors, directors and other administrators, teaching/research assistants, plus a variety of support staff. In addition to the academic workforce, there is a massive invasion of students 17–31 years old from undergraduate through graduate levels. In other words, "No Academician Left Behind." Professors can't escape them. Net Geners are everywhere. Flip-flops, texting without vowels and with emoticons, backpacks, and "Bro" or "Dude" are a few signs of the invasion.

Potential Areas of Conflict

The four generations of personnel bumping into one another in higher education represent the most diverse age composition in academe ever. The baggage outlined in Table 1 and described previously that they bring into every department and meeting they attend can affect the emotional intelligence, especially interpersonal relationships, of everyone and, ultimately, their job satisfaction and productivity (Fisher-Bando, 2008).

Among the various generational differences, there seem to be at least a half dozen that bubble to the top as potentially the most common sources of conflict: (1) dress/appearance, (2) work hours/work ethic, (3) technology, (4) expectations for advancement, (5) communication, and (6) respect/professionalism. Differences in values, work styles, and attitudes intensify in a fast-paced, stress-packed academic work environment. The issues defining each of these sources need to be considered to start thinking about the possible solutions.

Prevalence of Bullying in Higher Education

Bullying in academia has been gaining traction over the past decade with women, Blacks, and those in subordinate positions the most frequent targets (Chapell et al., 2004; Twale & DeLuca 2008). Administrators and faculty are the typical bullies. Age can now be added as another demographic reason to humiliate, embarrass, undermine, insult, belittle, put down, shun, taunt, or marginalize the people with whom you work.

Budget cutbacks in recent years, requiring everyone to do more with less, and other factors have heaped more job tasks and responsibilities on most employees, especially those in brick-and-mortar community colleges, liberal arts colleges, research universities, and other institutions of higher education compared to those specializing in distance or online programs. These job add-ons have increased stress and pressures to function effectively in the workplace, which, in some cases, have manifested themselves in the form of bullying. The generational differences of these employees are now part of that mix.

A survey of American workers has already found generational bullying on the rise. Gen-Xers are the most vulnerable (50%), and Net Geners ((27%) and Boomers ((23%) are the least bullied (Workplace Bullying Institute [WBI]-Zogby International, 2010). (Traditionalists were not included in the survey.) In another survey of full-time workers by CareerBuilder (2012), age differences were a significant factor, with 54% of those bullied saying they were bullied by someone older and 29% saying the bully was younger. Bullying occurs in both directions. In academe, we need to stem the tide of bullying and eliminate or, at least, decrease the incidence of age diversity as a major source of workplace jousting.

Implications for Practice

Administrators who are in the primary leadership positions to create a pre-emptive age diversity initiative to avert potential conflicts could include the provost, vice-provost, director of faculty development, and director of human resources. One of those can be the "air-traffic controller" to coordinate a campus-wide effort to tackle these generational issues. Since all faculty, administrators, and staff are involved, the cooperation of the director of a center for teaching/training and learning or provost/associate provost responsible for faculty development must be obtained. A variety of activities and workshops will be required. Faculty development activities should, at minimum, consider the differences among the generations in planning programs for faculty and retreats for all employees. The programs should be sensitive to their differences in what is presented and, more importantly, in how it is presented. Even better, specific events should be designed to address the six areas of potential conflict mentioned previously. Here are some suggestions of several issues that might be considered in creating workshops and training and development on those topics.

Dress/Appearance

"Why can't I be comfortable and wear jeans and a T-shirt?" Academe isn't Google. What is appropriate dress in academia? It has always been a bone of contention between some faculty and their immediate supervisor, especially department chair. Administrators don traditional business attire; faculty and staff may wear the same, business casual, or picnic casual. Net Geners and Gen-Xers typically lean more toward casual dress. The issues are: (a) Should a dress code be set for faculty, administrators, and staff? (b) Is any casual attire in the office ever appropriate? What about Friday, when nobody is there? (c) What image does type of dress convey about your institution or department? (d) Is dressy traditional or casual the message you want to send to students? (e) Will dress choice really affect anyone's performance?

Work Hours/Work Ethic

"Why do I have to be in the office when I can complete my work at home or at Starbucks®?" At home you can keep an eyeball on your young kids, which will help cut back on daycare expenses, and write your articles; at Starbucks® you can write a grant proposal and just about everything else. That's great for professors, but what about everyone else? Colleges and universities vary considerably in their requirements for office work hours, which may be a function of traditions other than those that are generational. Some insist on a 9–5 workday even with evening and/or weekend classes, especially for administrators and staff; others permit more flexibility in hours. With the preference for the latter by Net Geners and Gen-Xers, the need for "regular hours" is being challenged. Here are a few issues: (a) Can faculty work anywhere, anytime to prepare for class and write grant proposals, articles, and books? (b) Can specific office hours be designated for advising (as it always has been), committee meetings, laboratory and research work, and clinical practice? Can those sessions also be held with mobile devices? (c) Can "traditional" face-to-face meetings with individual or small groups of students or faculty be conducted virtually by Skype, iPhone, iPad, or the latest

electronic equipment? (d) What work can be done by each person outside of the office and what work must be completed on-site?

Technology

"PowerPoint® animation is so easy. Why can't she figure it out?" Perhaps the biggest gap among the four generations is the familiarity and use of the latest tech equipment, gadgets, and software/apps. Net Geners and a large percentage of Gen-Xers grew up with the technology; Boomers and Traditionalists have been learning it on the fly and always seem to be playing catch-up. Those who have retired have a lot more time to catch up. "Reverse-mentoring" might be a possible strategy to assist the older generations catch up (Murphy, 2012). There are several issues: (a) Do all faculty and staff have access to the latest technology for office work and in-class and online class applications? (b) Does everyone have the opportunity for training on the effective use of the equipment and software to level the playing field? (c) Can more tech-proficient faculty members, regardless of generation, mentor less proficient faculty members? , which can reach across generations? (d) Should use of appropriate technology and strategies be encouraged as part of everyone's evaluations and the student and peer rating forms used? (e) Who determines which electronic equipment and apps are required or forbidden in the office and class?

Expectations for Advancement

"Why do I have to wait 3 (or 5) years before I can be reviewed for promotion if I meet all of the other criteria?" Academia has been rather rigid in the faculty time-in-rank requirements for promotion and tenure. Those requirements may vary across institutions, but, within each institution, the criteria are quite explicit. Here is a typical "time" scenario: (a) Instructors are usually given a life term, renewable by semester or annually, or until they complete their doctorate and are eligible for promotion to assistant professor. (b) Assistant professor may have a probationary period of one to three or longer, usually five, before review for associate. (c) Associate professor may be five to seven years or longer until criteria are satisfied to be recommended for review for professor and tenure.

Although there are time requirements corresponding to each rank, usually the time needed to meet the research, publications, teaching, service, and practice requirements is determined by the individual faculty member when he or she feels ready to be considered for promotion. One complaint by some Net Geners is that promotion should be based on merit alone according to the specific criteria, not time in rank, which is similar to seniority in business and industry. They should not have to pay their dues and wait in line. They want an E-ZPass to promotion once they have met the requirements. The issues are: (a) How important is "time in rank" if the candidate's achievements are the foci of the criteria against which he or she is evaluated? (b) What is the reason for "time in rank"? (c) Can the criteria for promotion be streamlined to permit those on the "fast track" to move forward at *their* rate? (*In considering this question, one might be tempted to ask,* "There are accelerated academic programs everywhere; why not an 'accelerated tenure track'?") (d) How might administrative and staff positions be re-evaluated on performance criteria to streamline the pipeline to promotions?

Communication

"Email is sooo slow. Texting is the fastest. That's my preference." Outside of face-to-face contact, there are a wide range of communication options. This has become a point of contention between the generations. Older faculty and staff may dig their heels in and prefer phone and email; most whippersnapper youngins' text and use instant messaging. These communications can also be executed with a variety of mobile devices to permit immediate responses and feedback.

Further, there are differences in the use of social media for professional, instructional, and social communication. The buzz of Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Pinterest, and many other sites can be heard in the office, classroom, student lounge, coffee shop, and just about everywhere else on and off campus. Every generation is online with one or more of these media. Predictably, Boomers and younger Traditionalists in their 70s gravitate toward LinkedIn (Berk, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, Facebook. Gen-Xers and Net Geners are on all sites, but use them differently (Hylmö, 2012). Their potential as teaching tools has yet to be realized. The issues are: (a) Should there be a standard mode and social media site for office communications? (b) Should within-class and blended and online class communications and use of social media be determined by each instructor and group of students? (c) Should everyone communicate by whatever means he or she deems appropriate? (d) What electronic communication equipment and software/apps should be required or forbidden in class?

Lack of Respect/Professionalism

"What is wrong with you? How many times do I have to explain these corrections? Disparaging remarks, put downs, sarcasm, jeering, and ridicule, as well as negative body language, such rolled-eyeballs, ugly facial expressions, and taunting laughter, are the typical disrespectful behaviors. There are even more subtle forms called "microaggressions" that are not intentional, but hurtful nonetheless (Sue, 2010a). The differences in knowledge, style, history, and baggage among the generations, some of which were identified in Table 1, can create conflict easily. Respect fits within the broader context of professional behavior in the workplace. Building an *atmosphere of respect* for all employees and students can be challenging, but it has to begin somewhere. The issues relate to (a) understanding generational differences and viewpoints; (b) creating an open and continuous dialogue on respect; (c) providing a chat room and blog on respect; (d) modeling respect in daily behaviors; (e) recognizing people for respecting generational differences.

Most of the research on professionalism and illustrations in practice has been generated within the medical profession (Stern, 2006). Respect is only one category of professional behaviors for faculty, administrators, and staff. Others include the following: emotional intelligences of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, team working, communication, accessibility, responsibility, altruism, honor, integrity, caring, and compassion. Character dimensions or attributes that may also fit under the domain of professionalism are leadership, excellence, creativity, motivation, values, aspirations, self-confidence, and initiative. Rarely are any of these behaviors discussed, much less, formally measured in higher education for faculty and administrators. Maybe they should be to provide accountability for those behaviors in the workplace (Berk, 2009b).

Conclusions

The current generational composition of faculty, administrators, and staff in colleges and universities is more diverse and complex than at any time in the history of higher education. Just as with other categories of diversity, employees' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the characteristics, differences, and potential sources of conflict are essential. This article was designed to furnish a starting point for that understanding and to suggest systematic methods for a pre-emptive strike at those sources before they become full-blown conflicts.

Provosts, faculty developers, and HR directors must take the leadership to address these issues with custom-tailored workshops and retreats in order to cultivate an academic workplace where four generations of employees and students can thrive and be productive together rather apart. Those leaders know their personnel and campus culture better than anyone. Isn't this approach worth serious consideration now rather than later when the battles begin? The challenge is to be proactive and take action to reduce and, hopefully, eliminate those gestures and words that can destroy the academic work environment.

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