

## EXECUTIVE MONOGRAPH

# THOUGHTS AND PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE AT THE US CAPITOL POLICE

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There is little question that the newest diversity issue in today's workplace is age diversity. According to the IBM Center for the Business of Government, there are three major shifts in the American workplace that are presenting unprecedented challenges to organizational leaders. First, the American workforce now spans four generations as illustrated in this table:

GENERATIONAL COHORT	CURRENT AGE	YEARS BORN
Traditionalists (also known as Greatest Generation; the Silent Generation)	66+	1922 - 1945
Boomers	47 - 65	1946 - 1964
Gen X'ers	31 - 46	1965 - 1980
Millennials (also known as Gen Y; the Net Generation)	21 - 30	1981 - 1990

There is other research that models the generational cohorts in this fashion:

GENERATIONAL COHORT	YEARS BORN
Gen Y / Millennials	After 1980
Younger Gen X'ers	1972 - 1980
Older Gen X'ers	1965 - 1971
Younger Boomers	1955 - 1964
Older Boomers / Traditionalists	Before 1955

Demographically, Millennials are the largest group to enter the workforce in U.S. history. Secondly, there is increasing dissatisfaction amongst the American workforce, with over half of those surveyed now reporting being

unsatisfied with their job. Although the youngest workers are the least satisfied, older workers have the lowest satisfaction rates in two decades. Third, rapid technology change and innovation makes things possible that simply were not possible before in the workplace. Take for example, the ability to connect with anyone, anywhere, at anytime. Never has a generation entered the workplace using technologies so far ahead of those adopted by their employer. As a result of these three major shifts, the homogenous human capital model of the past simply will not work with such diverse cohorts in the workforce today. The Human Capital Institute points to evidence supporting the claim that now is the time to change from the one-size-fits-all model of talent management and embrace a more flexible model.

While many have finally figured out the best methods for recruiting new, young talent to their organizations, they also end up watching them travel a collision course with seasoned employees over issues like work ethic, respect for authority, management style, dress code and every work condition imaginable and but perhaps most significantly, most are unsure what to do about it. While it is more or less intuitive that job satisfaction and organizational commitment would be correlated with employee engagement – the question is what needs to be done to move employees – from all generations – to becoming employees who are willing to “go above and beyond” to get work done. Let’s consider these definitions:

Engaged employees – committed to the success of their organization, and bring discretionary energy and passion to their work; go above and beyond what is expected; drive innovation and move the organization forward.

Partially engaged employees – do their jobs, but don’t necessarily go above and beyond what is expected of them, or do so on an inconsistent basis.

Disengaged employees – include both the passively disengaged, who show up but do only the bare minimum to keep their job (effectively retired on the job), and the actively disengaged, who sow seeds of discontent thereby undermining their peers, supervisors, and the department.

Of particular interest to department officials and supervisors may be the results of the Federal Government Workforce (2008) research conducted by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (Washington, DC) that reports these federal employee engagement rates: 33% Engaged – 50% Partially Engaged – 17% Disengaged. A more recent study found that while factors such as competitive pay might affect decisions that employees make about working for a particular organization, factors such as opportunities for learning and development are more related to employees’ expressing a willingness to “go the extra mile” at work. There is one conclusion that spans virtually all the research – enhancing employee engagement requires a long-term commitment on the part of the employer. The quick fix approach is rarely sufficient or sustainable.

Practical advice for communicating with team members from throughout the generational cohorts includes building and fostering awareness that each of the four generations bring different ideas, challenges, and opportunities to the workplace. There is strength in diversity and the goal should be to effectively communicate differences that promote creativity and innovation. Officials and managers should facilitate open dialogue on how to leverage the unique skills and abilities of each generation to unlock hidden potential. Second, speak and communicate in ways most conducive to each generation. Boomers tend to value the structured network with the importance of personal relationships and “business” being intertwined. The Gen X'er tends to prefer a direct and straightforward, get to the point approach. Email and voicemail is a very acceptable communication channel while Boomers tend to prefer a formal memorandum.

The topic of work-life balance remains of interest for much of the Federal workforce; considered a viable driver of engagement. Issues of work schedule and workplace flexibilities have recently become codified with the signing of the Executive Branch's Telework Enhancement Act of 2010.

One area where intergenerational collaboration can benefit is during the development of new measures of accountability and productivity. Boomers can usually contribute a deep knowledge of traditional measures, while Gen X'er and Millennials can infuse these with fresh approaches. This cross-generational sharing can lead to newer robust measures of performance and expectations. The engagement of younger workers in meaningful projects that validate their desire to be involved in important work cannot be understated. Most Millennials want to make a difference and will simply leave if they don't feel valued. This group tends to be supremely confident about the value they can offer and organizations are encouraged to foster this driver of engagement rather than thwart it.

Closely related to intergenerational collaboration is a formal mentoring program. There is growing consensus among employers that Millennials – like all younger employees – will need mentoring. This cohort has proven to be exceptional team players, collaborative, respectful of authority figures, and very eager to learn. This craving for learning through direct contact with senior employees, officials, or managers feed that desire to be taught. These mentoring relationships will not only be important to the development of leaders from the Millennials but will also become critical element to any generational succession plan. One caution regarding the selection of mentors is the existence of blind adherence to tradition in policing agencies, linear thinking, and cynicism. The upcoming generations thrive in entrepreneurial and adaptive careers and law enforcement will miss out on the next best leaders if unable to attract and retain those potentials with the right workplace.

Along the lines of soft-skill development, Millennials and younger Gen X'ers will likely need mentoring on how to accept feedback having grown up without much exposure to criticism and need help in understanding the important role of feedback to their professional development. Reverse mentoring is a growing trend amongst progressive organizations. Younger works sometimes have a lot to offer their older counterparts. Millennials' interest and skill in cutting edge technology can help transform organizations. And organizations who don't take advantage risk falling behind. Examples include intelligence analysts needing to understand how tweets with

hashtags, and blogs work in order to sustain effective situational awareness; and organizations recognizing that pod and webcasting can be more effective than memorandums depending upon the age of the target audience.

Employee recognition can take many forms. Organizations that offer a “menu” of rewards and recognition that is diversified will likely reflect the differing priorities and motivating factors of top employees from differing age cohorts. There is some commonly valued recognition that can come in the form of (1) A sincere verbal “thank you” (2) A handwritten thank-you note that surprisingly, the younger the generation the more they valued a handwritten note over an email and lastly, (3) A gift certificate offering choice to select a gift or service that mattered them personally whether music or movie downloads, tickets to sporting events, movie passes, etc.

Generational reward preferences:

GENERATIONAL COHORT	REWARD PREFERENCES
Traditionalists	Tangible symbols of loyalty, commitment, and service including plaques and certificates
Boomers	Personal attention, promotion, and recognition
Gen X'ers	Free time, upgraded resources, opportunity for development, certificates to add to their resumes
Millennials	Awards, certificates, monetary rewards

Research on the topic of the multi-generational workforce has provided ample ideas, methods, and practical approaches for engaging all employees in the organization’s workforce. Perhaps most predominate is the recommendation to retain engaged employees. Because engaged employees are already performing well, some supervisors assume they should just leave them alone. Outstanding supervisors and managers however, do the opposite; spending most of their time with their most productive and talented employees. A supervisor who successfully develops a below-average employee into an average performer is still left with just an average performing employee. Coaching a good performer into a great performer is the goal. That engaged employee will likely inspire others and further the effort for positive change within the work unit.

With about half of the average workforce reporting being “partially engaged” it is crucial for officials and supervisors to fully engage as many employees as possible. Developing engagement as the prevailing attitude should be the goal for every official and every supervisor at every level throughout the department. Those employees where the evidence points to disengagement should be focused upon last. However, that said, those engage in disruptive conduct unwilling to change despite training and supervisory support, should be effectively terminated. Sometimes you need to just cut out the infection.

In summary, this paper has provided a general understanding of the challenges brought to the workplace by a multi-generational workforce. Perhaps the most important concept to highlight is the fact the employee

engagement statistics provided – 33% engaged – 50% partially engaged – 17% disengaged – were based upon research in organizations that offer standardized, federal organization level baselines. Specifically, those organizations, in varying means and methods offer challenging work, good prospective for higher future earnings, rapid promotion, flexible work conditions, and professional training and development leading down a clearly established path for advancement. Here is what needs to be considered in this comparison between the “customary” federal work conditions and the current work conditions at USCP. This analysis is not meant to serve any other purpose than to propose answers to these two questions:

(1) What conditions exist today within the USCP organization that is fostering a workplace where the majority of employees are not going “above and beyond” in the daily work they perform?

(2) What is the estimated rate of “active engagement” by department employees?

This side-by-side comparison lays out a framework for examining the two work conditions:

CUSTOMARY FEDERAL WORK CONDITIONS	USCP WORK CONDITIONS
Workplace Flexibilities (limited telework, alternate work places, alternate work schedule)	While roughly 20% of the department may hold positions conducive to workplace flexibilities, the majority cannot.
Choice of assignment - shift of assignment - days off - flexible start/end times.	Roughly 20% of the department may hold positions conducive to workplace flexibilities; Restrictions prohibit the majority from individual controls over these conditions.
Formalized Training & Development for all grade level commencing at GS-05 and upward.	Beyond the limited graduate/undergraduate educational options via Hopkins at the senior level - there exists no formal T&D programming for 90% of the workforce.
Work outcomes are measured by results - not hours.	Roughly 20% of the department may be holding positions conducive to measuring work outcomes rather than five, 8-hour workdays. Moreover, performance measures are not in place to assess individual differences in capabilities or to ensure consistency with protocols.
Expectation for instant rewards or gratification for work done above and beyond.	No formal, instant rewards programming available.
Active in social networking via technology.	Current state of technology prohibits leveraged, fuller use of Web 2.0
Challenging work.	While the majority of work is critically important, it is more repetitive, not complex in nature, and lacking in performance measurement; Program management attempting to mitigate this issue but not rollout department-wide.

Work environments (Tradition-heavy vs. adaptive).	Differences in early life experiences have meant slow changes in generation gaps historically. Today, the rate of social change has altered the central tendencies in viewing the importance of tradition. USCP is tradition-heavy.
Pay and compensation systems that enable flexibility for individual performance.	Stable but inflexible pay system; Pay system rewards traditional values of work (longevity) vs. higher performance; Closed pension system prohibits portable career development.
Formal Cross-Generational Mentoring programming.	No formal Cross-Generational Mentoring programming.
Robust projects for engagement opportunities, even volunteering opportunities.	Roughly 20% of the department may engage in such projects, the majority cannot due to restrictions in work conditions including workload and the bargaining agreement.
Rewards and recognition system with menu of options.	Rewards and recognition system less robust and no menu of options.
Available on-the-spot rewards for supervisor-to-employee and employee-to-employee use.	No availability of on-the-spot rewards for supervisor-to-employee or employee-to-employee use.
Performance Review tailored to the individual employee with incentives available.	Performance Reviews can be tailored to the individual employee but lack incentivizing options.
Formal organizational audit focused on employment engagement indicators.	Conducted, awaiting results.
Supervisor and Official training on managing a multi-generational workforce.	This topic is addressed in Leadership Training.

In conclusion, some of the work conditions described above can be controlled, some can be better leveraged, some are locked in the status quo by legislation, stakeholder action (or inaction) and some exist due to a lack of will to change. If the assumption can be made that employee engagement and inattention to duty (or complacency) are one in the same in terms of behavioral outcomes, then there is little wonder why the majority of our workforce – perhaps as high as 80% may be in the partially-engaged category – those who do their jobs, but don't necessarily go above and beyond what is expected of them, or do so on an inconsistent basis. The encouraging news is that this dangerous condition is still salvageable. With the right attention to the issue, department leadership can take the time to consider multi-generational differences when dealing with the individual members of their teams. But collectively, a plan of action is needed to address existing programs and thinking long-term about the impacts of the work conditions when being matched against the workforce of the future.

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