

Xennials: a microgeneration in the workplace

Melissa Kempf Taylor

Melissa Kempf Taylor is based at the Division of Student Affairs, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the microgeneration between Generation X and the Millennial generation. The research question addressed was “What makes the Xennial generation unique and how might the knowledge of these differences be beneficial to organizations?”*

Design/methodology/approach – *The research question was analyzed by a review of literature through the lens of generational theory. This study reviewed current literature on generational theory, years encompassing specific generations, and differences between recent generations in the workplace.*

Findings – *It was discovered the exact years distinguishing generations were unclear because generations fade into one another without a distinct starting and stopping point. This overlap creates a cusp generation or microgeneration. The presented findings suggest microgeneration employees could aid in reducing workplace generational tensions.*

Practical implications – *Organizations can benefit from creating flexible workplaces accommodating the desires of multi-generational employees while still meeting the goals of the organization as a whole. It is important managers approach generational differences with a clear perspective of what information is valid and what may simply be popular. It is crucial to remember employees are individuals who never completely fit a stereotype, generational, or otherwise.*

Originality/value – *Very few academic articles on generational differences mention cusp generations and none address their unique opportunities for organizations in the workplace. Members of microgenerations between major generational cohorts may be a key to reducing workplace friction between employees of different generations.*

Keywords *Millennial, Generation X, Generational Theory, Microgeneration, Xennial*

Paper type *Literature review*

There is a great deal of literature available discussing the characteristics unique to each generation and how they affect relationships in the workplace. There are groups of individuals born at the very end or beginning of a generation who are essentially stuck between generations. The current microgeneration in the workforce is the Xennial generation, caught between the end of Generation X and the beginning of the Millennial generation. Members of microgenerations do not fit the mold of the larger generations and form their own collective personality. Organizational leaders who understand the unique requirements of different generations in the workplace may be able to use the strengths of these outliers to bridge the generation gap and reduce workplace tensions.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the microgeneration between Generation X and the Millennial generation. A history of tension in the workplace between major generations has been well documented. A detailed look at employees in the overlap between these major generations may uncover options for organizations to ease these tensions. While generational tension does not account for all employee conflicts in the workplace, creating a more harmonious environment can enhance employee communication and allow individuals to focus on productivity and innovation.

RQ1. What makes the Xennial generation unique and how might the knowledge of these differences be beneficial to organizations?

This research question was analyzed by a review of literature through the lens of generational theory. Characteristics of this cusp generation are presented so organizations may better leverage the unique qualifications of Xennials to assist in reducing generational tension in the workplace. The findings may be helpful for HRD practitioners working to recruit and retain individuals from multiple generational cohorts.

Search strategies

Online library searches for relevant literature were completed using WorldCat and Google Scholar. Key phrases searched to build the foundation of the paper included cusp generation, microgeneration, Xennials, Generation Catalano, Generation X, Millennials, generational theory, generational subculture theory, and generations in the workplace. A snowball approach was used to obtain additional articles from those discovered in the online searches. Finding specific information on the Xennial microgeneration in academic literature proved difficult. Much of the currently available information on this microgeneration is in the form of blogs and is not evidence based. To obtain additional sources of information on this topic, general web searches using Google were completed. These searches uncovered articles on Xennials not based on empirical research. The idea of a cusp generation is often overlooked in the academic literature and these non-empirical pieces provide a background on the idea of microgenerations emphasizing a gap in past studies. Theory specific to microgenerations in generational research is not currently available. This literature review is an exploration of the concept of microgenerations in the workplace. References found include journal articles, reports, and blogposts. Most works cited range in age from 2000 to 2017 with three older articles from 1974, 1992, and 1998 included.

Organization

This paper is organized into five major sections. The first section discusses the literature available on the definition of a generation. The second section presents theory related to generations and provides a brief history of generational research. The next section illustrates the difficulty in precisely identifying the individual generations and provides an in-depth background on the two generations surrounding the microgeneration of interest – Generation X and the Millennial generation. The fourth section summarizes the available literature on the issue of generational tensions in the workplace, and the final section paints a picture of the Xennial microgeneration.

Generations defined

The most commonly found definition of a generation in literature is a group sharing birth years and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Dries *et al.*, 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Macky *et al.*, 2008; Noble and Schewe, 2003; Parry and Urwin, 2011; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Kupperschmidt (1998) defines the term as a cohort bound together by their times while Drago and Cunningham (2006) refer to it as an aggregate of people who share a collective persona. A simple definition is a generation is made up of individuals born in the same general time span who experience historical events at roughly the same point in life (Giancola, 2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Weston, 2001). A generation is a type of national subculture (Egri and Ralston, 2004) responsible for historical evolution (Bengtson *et al.*, 1974).

Generations are a social bond (Mannheim, 1998) forged through common experience (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Members have a common frame of reference providing a division from those in the past (Hazlett, 1992). Each generation is molded by distinctive experiences which occur during their critical developmental years (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). These experiences can be historical events such as war, famine, and economic crises (Hazlett, 1992) or day-to-day bits of nostalgia and pop culture (Parry and Urwin, 2011). A common value system is shared among people growing up at a particular time differentiating them from other generations (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). These values created during formative years influence behavior throughout life (Codrington, 2008).

Individuals are most aware of their generation during the coming-of-age years (Hazlett, 1992) and elder generations have always wondered about the effects of the emerging generation on history

(Bengtson *et al.*, 1974). Unique characteristics define each generation (Pekala, 2001) and the issue of these generational differences is important (Mannheim, 1998). Generational cohorts behave in identifiable and predictable ways unique to the generation (Hershtatter and Epstein, 2010). The shared history of a generation produces unique values and behaviors (Noble and Schewe, 2003) and generational cohorts must develop a mutual understanding of one another (Adams, 2000).

Generational labeling is accepted by those who would never allow other kinds of stereotyping (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). Generational cohorts are similar to social class or culture in nature (Codrington, 2008), but statements made about generational cohorts would never be used to describe racial minorities, genders, or those with disabilities (Adams, 2000). It is important to note generational cohort differences are generalizations (Lamm and Meeks, 2009); the traits and preferences are descriptive of the generation as a whole and obscure individual differences within the group (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). All members of a generation do not necessarily experience events in the same way (Giancola, 2006).

Generational theories and research

There has been a great deal of generational research in the USA (Egri and Ralston, 2004) with mixed results (Parry and Urwin, 2011; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Some research has treated generation as a psychological variable (Twenge and Campbell, 2008), while other researchers feel it better falls under the realm of sociology (Codrington, 2008; Mannheim, 1998). Some authors view generational research as popular culture rather than social science (Macky *et al.*, 2008). Critics consider differences between generations as more myth than reality (Giancola, 2006) and believe a generation exists mostly in the minds of the people who belong to it (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Some scholars dismiss generational differences in the workplace as simply a popular practitioner idea (Parry and Urwin, 2011).

Karl Mannheim was the first modern scholar to discuss generational differences in the 1920s (Codrington, 2008). Scholarly research from the 1950s discussed generational differences (Parry and Urwin, 2011), and researchers began to apply empirical techniques to the study of generational differences in the 1970s (Bengtson *et al.*, 1974). Historians have also shown interest in generational differences as a basis for predicting social change (Hazlett, 1992).

Generational theory states individuals born into a particular moment will develop unique values, beliefs, and personalities (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). This theory labels four turnings of generations: the prophet (Baby Boomers), the nomad (Gen Xers), the hero (Millennials) and the artist (Homelanders) generations repeating in a cycle (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). The generational theory is based on the idea the era in which a person is born affects the lens through which he/she views the world (Codrington, 2008). Similarly, generational subculture theory is based on the idea significant events occurring during impressionable years shape a group identity with a distinct set of values, beliefs, and behaviors (Robertson *et al.*, 2012) which remain fairly stable throughout a lifetime (Egri and Ralston, 2004). Giancola (2006) criticizes the theories behind generational differences because evidence and empirical research on generational difference is lacking in academic journals (Macky *et al.*, 2008).

The biggest challenge when studying the differences between generations is the lack of a time machine (Twenge, 2010). Generational research must weed out the effects of age, maturation, and life cycle stage on generational cohorts studied (Macky *et al.*, 2008). Some researchers believe it is impossible to separate generation and age in generational research (Twenge, 2010) and have questioned whether individual work values change over time as one ages or are influenced by generational experiences (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Time-lag studies with the ability to separate work values from generation and age are rare due to their complexity (Twenge, 2010).

Differentiating generations

There is no clear consensus on the time definition for generations (Bengtson *et al.*, 1974) which creates problems for determining the exact point at which to separate them (Macky *et al.*, 2008).

Timespans used to define individual generations are inconsistent, and there is little agreement among authors of the years encompassing individual generations (Bengtson *et al.*, 1974; Cordeniz, 2002; Dries *et al.*, 2008; Giancola, 2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Hart, 2006; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). There is not a precise moment when one generation ends and another begins (Codrington, 2008) because one generation fades into the next (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Slightly different birth years are often attributed to each generation (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013).

The Baby Boomer generation – whose end date determines the start of Generation X – is said to span the years between 1940 and 1960 (Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Weston, 2001), 1941 and 1960 (Lamm and Meeks, 2009), 1943 and 1960 (Cordeniz, 2002; Drago and Cunningham, 2006; Giancola, 2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Parry and Urwin, 2011), 1945 and 1964 (“Great expectations,” 2016; Hart, 2006), or 1946 and 1964 (Dries *et al.*, 2008; Egri and Ralston, 2004; Johnston, 2006; Pekala, 2001; Twenge, 2010).

Members of Generation X (Gen Xers) have cited birth dates between 1960 and 1980 (Kupperschmidt, 2000a), 1961 and 1975 (Adams, 2000), 1961 and 1981 (Giancola, 2006; Kupperschmidt, 1998; Parry and Urwin, 2011; Twenge and Campbell, 2008), 1961 and 1980 (Drago and Cunningham, 2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Lamm and Meeks, 2009), 1963 and 1977 (Cordeniz, 2002), 1964 and 1980 (Johnston, 2006), 1965 and 1976 (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), 1965 and 1978 (Pekala, 2001), 1965 and 1979 (“Great expectations,” 2016; Egri and Ralston, 2004; Binion, 2015), 1965 and 1980 (Bristow *et al.*, 2011; Dries *et al.*, 2008), 1965 and 1981 (Hart, 2006; Twenge, 2010), or 1968 and 1989 (Codrington, 2008).

Millennials were reportedly born between 1977 and 1992 (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), 1978 and 1999 (Byrne, 2007), 1979 and 1994 (Smola and Sutton, 2002), 1980 and 2000 (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), 1981 and 1992 (Binion, 2015), 1981 and 2000 (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Lamm and Meeks, 2009), 1981 and 2001 (Dries *et al.*, 2008), 1982 and 2000 (Hart, 2006), or 1989 and 2000 (Codrington, 2008). Some authors still leave the Millennial generation without end dates stating they were simply born after 1980 (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), 1981 (Parry and Urwin, 2011), or 1982 (Twenge, 2010).

The Homeland generation (Homelanders) is the upcoming generation following the Millennials who have yet to enter the workforce (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). This new generational label applies to those born after 2001 (Codrington, 2008).

Generation X

Until Millennials entered the workforce, Gen Xers were the most discussed and criticized generation in literature (Pekala, 2001), and they are often misunderstood by earlier generations (Adams, 2000). While this is the first generation to have less members than the previous generations (Cordeniz, 2002), its members are more diverse than their predecessors (Kupperschmidt, 1998). Unique factors helped shape Gen Xers to which other generations cannot easily relate (Adams, 2000). Many Gen Xers grew up coming home from school to an empty house (Kupperschmidt, 1998) or spent a great deal of time in daycare (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Their parents were often divorced (Kupperschmidt, 1998) or both worked outside the home (Hart, 2006; Cordeniz, 2002). Gen Xers grew up with a great deal of insecurity (Smola and Sutton, 2002) and instability (Pekala, 2001) which forced them to become adults at a young age (Kupperschmidt, 1998). They learned to be self-reliant (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), making their own after school snacks and entertaining themselves (Cordeniz, 2002). Gen Xers are described as overlooked (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), under protected (Kupperschmidt, 1998), and neglected (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). They witnessed more crime during childhood than any previous generation due to the availability of televisions in the home (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Generation X children were the most impoverished of American generations (Cordeniz, 2002; Kupperschmidt, 1998), growing up in fluctuating times of economic prosperity and distress (Egri and Ralston, 2004).

Gen Xers' work values are vastly different from those of previous generations (Kupperschmidt, 1998). In contrast to workaholic Baby Boomers, Gen Xers crave a work/life balance (Codrington, 2008; Drago and Cunningham, 2006; Johnston, 2006; Lamm and Meeks, 2009; Noble and Schewe, 2003) and do not place high importance on job titles (Bristow *et al.*, 2011). They prefer to leave work at work

at the end of the day (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008) and view work as something to be endured rather than enjoyed (Kupperschmidt, 1998). Gen Xers are not focused on attaining power over others (Egri and Ralston, 2004) but seek fulfillment both at work and in their personal lives (Kupperschmidt, 2000b). They work to have money for leisure activities (Kupperschmidt, 2000a) and prefer flexible schedules (Kupperschmidt, 2000b). Gen Xers came of age using technology (Hart, 2006) and are innately technologically savvy (Johnston, 2006; Cordeniz, 2002; Pekala, 2001; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). They were the first kids to use technology in school and at home (Kupperschmidt, 1998) and are very comfortable with computers (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Gen Xers combine technology with a drive to succeed (Kupperschmidt, 1998) and require up-to-date technology in the workplace (Kupperschmidt, 2000a).

Gen Xers view jobs as temporary stepping stones (Parry and Urwin, 2011) and change them frequently (Bristow *et al.*, 2011), which can lead to them being viewed as uncommitted to work (Adams, 2000). Their loyalty lies with the people in the organization (Pekala, 2001), not with the organization itself (Bristow *et al.*, 2011). Gen Xers desire job security (Kupperschmidt, 2000b) and believe their value is created in what they know how to do (Pekala, 2001). They seek opportunities to gain new skills and knowledge (Johnston, 2006; Kupperschmidt, 2000b) and believe keeping skills current leads to greater job security (Bristow *et al.*, 2011; Pekala, 2001). Gen Xers place high value on formal education (Kupperschmidt, 2000a), but prefer to work in a less formal setting (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). They want to know they are valued and prefer timely, honest, and direct communication (Kupperschmidt, 2000b; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008).

Members of Generation X question authority and do not follow leaders blindly (Johnston, 2006; Adams, 2000; Drago and Cunningham, 2006). They expect authentic and ethical leaders (Twenge and Campbell, 2008) who walk the talk and lead by example (Kupperschmidt, 2000b). Gen Xers prefer leadership based on competence rather than seniority (Hart, 2006) and want to be mentored (Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Smola and Sutton, 2002) rather than micromanaged (Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Drago and Cunningham, 2006; Codrington, 2008). They are self-sufficient (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), independent (Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Pekala, 2001; Drago and Cunningham, 2006), and resourceful (Kupperschmidt, 1998). Although they are flexible employees (Kupperschmidt, 1998), Gen Xers desire autonomy and trust (Kupperschmidt, 2000b), prefer not to work in teams (Hart, 2006), and want to do things their own way (Pekala, 2001). Gen Xers are described as lacking in people skills (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; Lamm and Meeks, 2009) but crave a sense of family (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). They are reluctant to network (Bristow *et al.*, 2011) so it is important to make them feel welcome (Drago and Cunningham, 2006).

Researchers have many positive things to say about Gen Xers. They work hard and embrace risks (Codrington, 2008), are highly task oriented, and meet deadlines (Pekala, 2001). Gen Xers have been described as realistic (Kupperschmidt, 2000a), practical (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), and embracers of change (Codrington, 2008). They hold more conservative values than the previous generation (Egri and Ralston, 2004), but are more tolerant of alternative lifestyles (Cordeniz, 2002). Gen Xers are highly educated (Pekala, 2001) multitaskers (Kupperschmidt, 2000a) who value fun and enjoy competition (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). Literature also reveals negative traits associated with this generation. Gen Xers have been described as materialistic (Adams, 2000), impatient (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), skeptical (Codrington, 2008; Hart, 2006), arrogant (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), cynical (Kupperschmidt, 2000a), lacking in empathy (Twenge and Campbell, 2008), self-absorbed (Kupperschmidt, 1998), and disloyal (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). They often display a higher level of depression and anxiety than their predecessors and tend to alienate themselves (Macky *et al.*, 2008; Twenge and Campbell, 2008).

Millennial generation

Millennials are the largest (Binion, 2015; Byrne, 2007), most diverse (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013), and most studied generation (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). In contrast to the Gen Xers before them, Millennials had very involved parents (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). They were nurtured (Hart, 2006), coddled (Byrne, 2007), and highly protected children (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). While many Millennials were raised in single-parent homes or homes where both parents worked like the generation before them (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), rather than being left to fend for

themselves, they led highly structured lives (Bristow *et al.*, 2011) and became the most protected children in history (Codrington, 2008).

Millennials have been told from a young age they are destined to accomplish great things (Lamm and Meeks, 2009); therefore, they want to change the world (Codrington, 2008). They are multitaskers who like to stay busy (Byrne, 2007). Millennials are optimistic (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), ambitious (Lamm and Meeks, 2009), opinionated (Bristow *et al.*, 2011), loyal (Drago and Cunningham, 2006), and confident (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013; Bristow *et al.*, 2011) to the point of arrogance (Lamm and Meeks, 2009; Codrington, 2008). They believe they are not respected because they are young (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), but often have unrealistic expectations of the real world (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013).

Millennials gravitate toward group activities (Hart, 2006; Twenge and Campbell, 2008) and want to include everyone (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). They prefer working in teams to complete structured tasks (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013) and do not mind sharing rewards (Byrne, 2007). Millennials are dutiful and less individualistic than the previous generation (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). They are civic minded (Byrne, 2007) and have a strong sense of community (Drago and Cunningham, 2006). Millennials were the first generation to be born into a wired world (Smola and Sutton, 2002). They grew up with cell phones and social networks (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010) and take for granted the technology they have used their entire lives (Hart, 2006). Millennials have had more access to higher education ("Great expectations," 2016) and are very technologically savvy (Byrne, 2007; Drago and Cunningham, 2006; Yahr and Schimmel, 2013).

Organizations are realizing Millennials in the workplace are different than other employees (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). They seek interesting and meaningful work (Byrne, 2007) and desire jobs which align with a higher purpose (Binion, 2015). Like Gen Xers, Millennials value leisure time and see work as less central to their lives (Twenge, 2010). They prefer a flexible workplace (Twenge, 2010) where they can also have fun (Byrne, 2007). Millennials are not afraid to spend money (Bristow *et al.*, 2011; Drago and Cunningham, 2006) and want more than just a paycheck from work (Byrne, 2007). They are more likely to change careers rather than just jobs to find fulfillment (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008; "Great expectations," 2016).

Millennials want to be coached by role models in the workplace and believe supervisors should get to know them personally (Byrne, 2007; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). They are confident, but seek more direction than previous generations (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008) and are often viewed as incapable of handling mundane tasks without guidance (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). Millennials ask a lot of questions to understand their role (Byrne, 2007) and feel overwhelmed in unstructured environments (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). They are less likely to take responsibility when things go wrong (Twenge and Campbell, 2008) and their work ethic has been described as weaker than that of Gen Xers (Yahr and Schimmel, 2013). Millennials are flexible, fun, and team oriented (Lamm and Meeks, 2009) and gravitate toward a more informal workplace like the Gen Xers before them (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). They do not expect loyalty from organizations (Byrne, 2007) viewing them as career stores where they are the customers (Bristow *et al.*, 2011).

Generations in the workplace

There are a broad range of attitudes and needs in every workplace (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). For the first time in the history, four distinct generations – Silents, Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials can be found in the workplace (Giancola, 2006; Hart, 2006; Pekala, 2001), with three – Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials – accounting for the majority of today's workforce (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). The generational cohort to which an employee belongs influences his/her perception of work (Weston, 2001). Employees from different generations hold different value systems (Dries *et al.*, 2008), and workplace wants and desires vary from generation to generation (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Generational differences in the workplace are a popular topic (Twenge, 2010) and have gained both academic and popular media attention (Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Differences between generational cohorts influence workplace attitudes (Kupperschmidt, 2000a) and values (Smola and Sutton, 2002). The level of this difference in depends on the specific value in question (Twenge, 2010). Altruistic work values

tend to be consistent among generations (Dries *et al.*, 2008; Twenge, 2010), while members of different generations have their own ways of talking, dressing, and thinking in the workplace (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). There are only minimal differences in the fundamental beliefs across all four generations and there are more similarities between generations than differences (Giancola, 2006).

In the past, the mixing of generations in the workplace was rare because older employees with more seniority held the higher-level positions (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Managers now work with teams including many different ages (Codrington, 2008), and organizations are able to benefit from the diversity of representation from multiple generations (Giancola, 2006). Mixing employees of different generations in the workplace has both positive and negative impacts (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Knowing how to coach employees from different generational cohorts is essential (Weston, 2001). Managers who understand and respond to unique generational values and goals are better able to meet organizational objectives (Robertson *et al.*, 2012) because they are able to best place employees in an organization (Hart, 2006). Successful managers find ways for members of each generation to contribute their strengths to the organization (Kupperschmidt, 2000a).

Cross-generational tensions in the workplace are not new (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010) and present more of a challenge for organizations than differences in race or sex (Kupperschmidt, 2000a). Organizations cannot be truly successful with underlying generational tensions in the workplace (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Many individuals are unable to see work through the perspective of other generations and assume the viewpoints of others are like their own (Kupperschmidt, 2000a). Generational differences can be seen as a frustration for organizational leaders (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), but those who do not address them set themselves up for misunderstandings and conflict (Byrne, 2007). When generational differences are not acknowledged, it leads to increased tension and decreased productivity and job satisfaction (Kupperschmidt, 2000a).

Not all problems in the workplace can be attributed to generational differences (Kupperschmidt, 2000a); however, organizational leaders can increase productivity, morale and retention by understanding them (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Managers need to learn how employees of different generations approach work to properly coach them (Pekala, 2001). Successful leaders will use generational differences to meet organization objectives (Kupperschmidt, 2000a) by creating flexible workplace policies to accommodate each generation's differing values (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Employees of different generations need to understand and respect the unique perspectives of one another and view these differences as strengths (Kupperschmidt, 2000a). Communication is a key to bridging the gap between generational cohorts (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008) and helps relieve generational tension in the workplace (Kupperschmidt, 2000a). It is important for organizations employing multiple generations to embrace change but continue to respect the past (Byrne, 2007).

Some authors argue there are no significant differences between generations in the workplace (Dries *et al.*, 2008). Researchers have found workplace similarities between generations (Bristow *et al.*, 2011; Dries *et al.*, 2008; Lamagna, 2015; Macky *et al.*, 2008; Twenge, 2010), and other studies have focused on workplace differences (Adams, 2000; Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Many generational problems in the workplace come from simple differing expectations on topics such as work hours and dress code (Giancola, 2006). Workplace choices should help ease tensions among employees (Kupperschmidt, 2000a). Fostering collaboration, communication, and respect is important in multi-generational workplaces (Hart, 2006). Employees from different generations are resources for one another (Kupperschmidt, 2000a), and the most important benefit of blending generations in the workplace is creativity (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008).

The microgeneration

Within each generation, there is a core group as well as a first and last wave comprising five to seven years on each end of the generation (Dries *et al.*, 2008; Kupperschmidt, 2000a; Smola and Sutton, 2002). In generational theory, a cusp is the group of individuals who fall into the overlap

between two generations (Codrington, 2008), straddling two worlds (Fluck and Dowden, 2011). Persons born a single year apart, though in technically different generations, cannot be expected to behave completely differently (Lamm and Meeks, 2009). There is often an overlap between two generations (Codrington, 2008), and individuals born at the beginning or end of a generation do not closely resemble those in the middle of the generation (Giancola, 2006). This overlap creates a cusp generation which some consider to be imagined or non-existent (Lamagna, 2015). For the members of this microgeneration, the desire to define it stems from a yearning for a collective memory (Shafir, 2011). The members of a cusp generation are influenced by eras before and after them (Codrington, 2008), and many identify with characteristics of both generations (Giancola, 2006).

The cusp generation bridges a divide between major generations (Codrington, 2008). This concept of a microgeneration is not new. Researchers have questioned the existence of subcultures within a generation whose values are more aligned to those of another generation before (Robertson *et al.*, 2012). Studies of the Silent Generation found its younger members tended to share more attributes with the following Baby Boomers (Hart, 2006). Many members of the Silent/Boomer cusp generation choose the characteristics of one generation or the other rather than displaying those of both (Codrington, 2008). The cusp generation between the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation X has been called Generation Jones (Giancola, 2006). The members of the Generation Jones microgeneration were born between 1964 and 1969 (Codrington, 2008). The most recent microgeneration between Generation X and the Millennial generation has most commonly been referred to as the Xennial generation (Lamagna, 2015). Other names for Xennials include Generation Catalano (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014; Shafir, 2011) and the Lucky Ones (Garvey, 2015). Like with the major generation labels, the dates encompassing the microgeneration are not clear. Xennials have been said to have been born between 1978 and 1984 (Lamagna, 2015), or 1977 and 1981 (Shafir, 2011).

Xennials were born in a quiet break between two distinct generations (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), wedged between Generation X and the Millennials (Dhami, 2014). They form a link between Gen Xers and Millennials (Lamagna, 2015) though they sometimes feel like generational misfits because they do not identify with either label (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). Some researchers push this microgeneration on to Millennials (Garvey, 2015), while most place Xennials at the end of Generation X (Shafir, 2011). No one really knows where the members of the microgeneration belong (Garvey, 2015). They want to identify with a major generational cohort (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), but are never fully comfortable with how they fit into the world (Shafir, 2011). Xennials survived their toughest growing up years without the intrusion of social media and for the children born just after them, the entire world changed (Garvey, 2015). Shared experiences help Xennials determine more of who they are, which is a trait they have in common with Gen Xers (Shafir, 2011). Examples of the Xennial microgeneration are portrayed in television shows such as *My So Called Life*, *Dawson's Creek* (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), and *Saved by the Bell* (Shafir, 2011) and in movies like *Empire Records* (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). Some shows geared toward Xennials failed to make it past one season because they resonated with such a small audience (Shafir, 2011).

The microgeneration between Generation X and the Millennials merge the ballpoint pen and computer mouse (Fluck and Dowden, 2011). The opportunity for an Xennial to use a computer growing up was special and the internet was not a part of their childhood (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). Xennials are unlikely to have used new technologies extensively in their schooling, but have always experienced it in the workplace (Fluck and Dowden, 2011). They were able to ease into the use of technology as it developed (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014) rather than feeling alienated by it like Generation X or taking it for granted like Millennials (Garvey, 2015). Xennials grew up with Nintendo, Sega Genesis, and pagers (Binion, 2015) and set up their first e-mail addresses in college (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). They bought cassettes and CDs, but also built impressive MP3 libraries (Garvey, 2015). The members of this microgeneration obtained their first cell phones in their late teens or early 20s (Binion, 2015; Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), and though they are now dependent upon them, they clearly remember using pay phones and dial-up internet connections (Garvey, 2015). Xennials became adults before texting, Facebook, or instant messaging (Shafir, 2011). Today they have a strong

presence on social media, but remember life without it (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). Xennials were the first kids to grow up with computers in the home, are still awed by new technology (Garvey, 2015), and adapt to it easily (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014).

Discussion

Collaboration between generations prevents the loss of valuable knowledge (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). Members of a cusp generation are an asset for organizations with a multi-generational workforce (Codrington, 2008). Microgeneration employees can be equipped to bridge generational tensions (Fluck and Dowden, 2011). They often do not feel the discomfort true members of a major generational cohort experience with one another (Codrington, 2008). Xennials identify with characteristics of both Gen Xers and Millennials (Giancola, 2006). Though they may feel out of place at times (Shafir, 2011; Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), Xennials actually form a link between the major generations (Lamagna, 2015).

Generational tension is centered on a lack of effective communication (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). Results of generational tensions in the workplace include distrust and misunderstandings due to poor communication (Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Members of a cusp generation appreciate both the new and traditional ways doing things (Garvey, 2015). Xennials prefer to work with authentic people (Dhami, 2014) and can relate to the members of both the generation before and after them (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014). They are comfortable communicating via e-mail (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014), using cell phones (Binion, 2015), and navigating social media but are able to function without them (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014).

A major reason for differences in communication styles between Gen Xers and Millennials is their experience with technology (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). Xennials are impressed with technology advances (Garvey, 2015). They are comfortable with computers in the workplace, but remember school days without them and are therefore able to appreciate the perspectives of both Gen X and Millennial employees (Fluck and Dowden, 2011). Xennials adapt easily to technological changes and can assist Gen Xers with transitions (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014).

Though there are documented differences, major generations share many characteristics and are not as different as they may seem (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). Like the Gen Xers and Millennials, Xennials also appreciate having a positive work/life balance, will go the extra mile to succeed, want to be appreciated, and desire clear feedback (Dhami, 2014). While Xennials may form a bridge between two major generational cohorts, they do possess unique characteristics of their own (Giancola, 2006). Xennial employees exhibit a mix of Generation X cynicism (Shafir, 2011) and Millennial optimism (Garvey, 2015). While they do not yearn for the conformity Millennials crave (Shafir, 2011), they similarly desire coworkers who live the core values of the organization (Dhami, 2014). Xennials landed in a short span of history before the recession without many investments to lose like members of Generation X or the inability to find jobs like many Millennials upon graduation (Stankorb and Oelbaum, 2014).

Conclusions

As new generations enter the workforce, it is important to continuously update the body of knowledge on generational differences (Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Whether supported by evidence-based research or not, the differences between generational cohorts and related tensions in the workplace are a popular topic in academic, social, and media platforms. Each new generation gains attention when entering the workforce (Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2017), and there are real differences between individuals of different generations (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). New discussions on these differences and related tensions are likely to emerge as Homelanders begin entering the workforce.

Organizations are typically not designed to accommodate a multi-generational workforce (Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2017), but those proactively addressing generational tensions will be more successful than those who view them as simply unavoidable (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016).

Organizations can benefit from creating flexible workplaces accommodating the desires of employees at different stages of life while still meeting the goals of the organization as a whole. It is important managers approach generational differences with a clear perspective of what information is valid and what may simply be popular. It is crucial to keep in mind employees are all individuals who never completely fit a mold or stereotype, generational or otherwise.

Members of microgenerations between major generational cohorts may be a key to reducing workplace friction between employees of different generations. Strategically placing these employees in the workforce to ease generational tensions could create a competitive advantage for organizations that are willing to think outside the box. Xennials, who may be yearning for a way to fit into a workplace where generation labels are often used, will appreciate the feeling of being necessary and useful as a member of the microgeneration. Rather than feeling like misfits who have no true place, Xennials can be empowered to assist the organization in ways other employees are not able.

Suggestions for future research

Empirical research is needed in the generational debate. There is evidence of differences between the established generational cohorts, but the significance and importance of these differences is unclear. Most existing studies on generational differences are qualitative leaving room for quantitative researchers to add to the existing body of literature (Twenge, 2010). More research is needed on leveraging the diversity of differing generations (Nwosu *et al.*, 2016). Very few academic articles on generational differences mention cusp generations and none address their unique opportunities for organizations in the workplace. This creates a large gap in the literature generational scholars have the opportunity to fill.

References

- Adams, S.J. (2000), "Generation X: how understanding this population leads to better safety programs", *Professional Safety*, pp. 26-29.
- Bengtson, V.L., Furlong, M.J. and Laufer, R.S. (1974), "Time, aging and the continuity of social structure: themes and issues in generational analysis", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 1-12, doi: doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1974.tb00713.x.
- Binion, L. (2015), "An 'xennial' girl living in a millennial world: what millennials taught me", June 22, available at: [linkedin.com: linkedin.com/pulse/what-xennial-learned-from-millennials-lachelle-binion-mba/](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-xennial-learned-from-millennials-lachelle-binion-mba/) (accessed November 5, 2016).
- Bristow, D., Amyx, D., Castleberry, S.B. and Cochran, J.J. (2011), "A cross-generational comparison of motivational factors in a sales career among gen-X and gen-Y college students", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. XXXI No. 1, pp. 77-85, doi: doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134310105.
- Byrne, P.W. (2007), "Recruiting and retaining the millennials", *Fire Engineering*, Vol. 160, pp. 14-15.
- Codrington, G. (2008), "Detailed introduction to generational theory", *Tomorrow Today*, pp. 1-15.
- Cordeniz, J.A. (2002), "Recruitment, retention and management of generation X: a focus on nursing professionals", *Journal of Healthcare Management*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 237-49.
- Dhami, I. (2014), "Xennials – mind the generation gap", December 6, available at: www.linkedin.com/pulse/20141206001411-5009688-xennials-mind-the-generation-gap/ (accessed November 5, 2016).
- Drago, J.P. and Cunningham, G.K. (2006), *Generational Theory: Implications for Recruiting the Millennials*, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA.
- Dries, N., dPepermans, R. and DeKerpel, E. (2008), "Exploring four generations' beliefs about career", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 8, pp. 907-28.
- Egri, C.P. and Ralston, D.A. (2004), "Generation cohorts and personal values: a comparison of China and the United States", *Organization Science*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 210-20, doi: doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1030.0048.
- Fluck, A. and Dowden, T. (2011), "On the cusp of change: examining pre-service teachers' beliefs about ICT and envisioning the digital classroom of the future", *Journal of Computer Assisted Living*, Vol 29 No. 1, pp. 1-10, doi: doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2011.00464.x.

- Garvey, A. (2015), "The biggest (and best) difference between millennials and my generation", May 25, available at: [huffingtonpost.com: huffingtonpost.com/anna-garvey/the-biggest-and-best-difference-between-millennials-and-my-generation/](http://huffingtonpost.com/anna-garvey/the-biggest-and-best-difference-between-millennials-and-my-generation/) (accessed November 5, 2016).
- Giancola, F. (2006), "The generation gap: more myth than reality", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 32-7.
- Great Expectations (2016), "Great expectations: recruiting and retaining the Millennial generation", *Human Resource Management International Digest*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 32-35, doi: doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-12-2015-0184.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T.A. and Chi, C.G. (2008), "Generational differences: an examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27, pp. 448-58, doi: doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2007.11.002.
- Hart, K.A. (2006), "Generations in the workplace: finding common ground", *Lab Management*, Vol. 38 No. 10, pp. 26-27.
- Hazlett, J.D. (1992), "Generational theory and collective autobiography", *American Literary History*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 77-96, doi: doi.org/10.1093/alh/4.1.77.
- Hershatler, A. and Epstein, M. (2010), "Millennials and the world of work: an organization and management perspective", *Journal of Business Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 211-23, doi: doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9160-y.
- Johnston, K.C. (2006), "Gaining perspective on mentoring Generation X", *Medical Education*, Vol. 40 No. 8, pp. 824-5, doi: doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02523.x.
- Kupperschmidt, B. (1998), "Understanding generation x employees", *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, Vol. 28 No. 12, pp. 36-43, doi: doi.org/10.1097/00005110-199812000-00012.
- Kupperschmidt, B.R. (2000a), "Multigeneration employees: strategies for effective management", *Health Care Manager*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 65-76, doi: doi.org/10.1097/00126450-200019010-00011.
- Kupperschmidt, B.R. (2000b), "Tips to help you recruit, manage and keep Generation X employees", *Nursing Management*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 58-60, doi: doi.org/10.1097/00006247-200003000-00040.
- Lamagna, A. (2015), "The xennials: a micro-generation of in-betweeners", November 7, available at: [beingajile.com: beingajile.com/the-xennials-a-micro-generation/](http://beingajile.com/beingajile.com/the-xennials-a-micro-generation/) (accessed November 5, 2016).
- Lamm, E. and Meeks, M.D. (2009), "Workplace fun: the moderating effects of generational differences", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 613-31.
- Macky, K., Gardner, D. and Forsyth, S. (2008), "Generational differences at work: introduction and overview", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 8, pp. 857-61, doi: doi.org/10.1108/02683940810904358.
- Mannheim, K. (1998), "The sociological problem of generations", in Mannheim, K. (Ed.), *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Taylor and Francis Books, London, pp. 163-95.
- Noble, S.M. and Schewe, C.D. (2003), "Cohort segmentation: an exploration of its validity", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 56 No. 12, pp. 979-87, doi: [doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(02\)00268-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(02)00268-0).
- Nwosu, M.C., Igwe, K.N. and Nnadozie, C.O. (2016), "Managing generational diversity in the workplace: implications for the digital era university library management", *International Journal of Applied Technologies in Library and Information Management*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 1-17.
- Parry, E. and Urwin, P. (2011), "Generational differences in work values: a review of theory and evidence", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 79-96, doi: doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00285.x.
- Pekala, N. (2001), "Conquering the generational divide", *Journal of Property Management*, Vol. 66 No. 6, pp. 30-38.
- Robertson, C.J., Ralston, D.A. and Crittenden, W.F. (2012), "The relationship between cultural values and moral philosophy: a generational subculture theory approach", *Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 2 Nos 2-4, pp. 99-107, doi: doi.org/10.1007/s13162-012-0029-2.
- Sakdiyakorn, M. and Wattanacharoensil, W. (2017), "Generational diversity in the workplace: a systematic review in the hospitality context", *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, pp. 1-25.

Shafir, D. (2011), "Generation Catalano", October 24, available at: slate.com: slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2011/10/generation_catalano_the_generation_stuck_between_gen_x_and_the_millennials/ (accessed November 5, 2016).

Smola, K.W. and Sutton, C.D. (2002), "Generational differences: revisiting generational work values for the new millennium", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 23, pp. 363-82, doi: doi.org/10.1002/job.147.

Stankorb, S. and Oelbaum, J. (2014), "Reasonable people disagree about the post-Gen X, pre-millennial generation", September 25, available at: good.is: good.is/articles/generation-xennials (accessed November 5, 2016).

Twenge, J.M. (2010), "A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes", *Journal of Business Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 201-10, doi: doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9165-6.

Twenge, J.M. and Campbell, S. (2008), "Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 8, pp. 862-77.

Weston, M. (2001), "Coaching generations in the workplace", *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 11-21.

Yahr, M.A. and Schimmel, K. (2013), "Comparing current students to a pre-millennial generation: are they really different?", *Research in Higher Education Journal*, Vol. 20, pp. 1-8, doi: doi.org/10.1097/00006216-200101000-00005.

Corresponding author

Melissa Kempf Taylor can be contacted at: melissa.taylor@louisville.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com