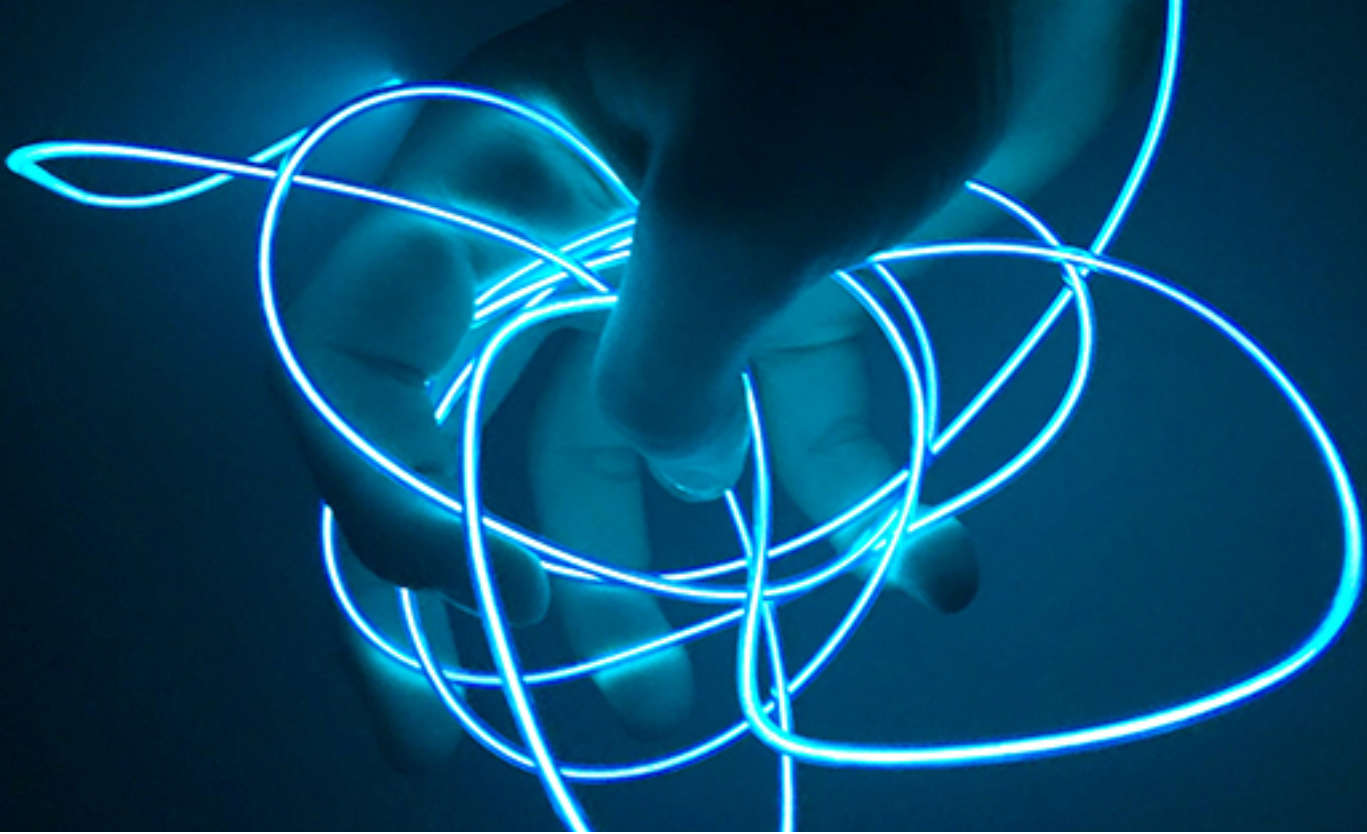


# Understanding the Misunderstanding Intergenerational Insight Report 2022

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# Understanding the Misunderstanding.

Previously attacked by their older cohorts for being work shy

## “snowflakes”

Millennials now find themselves being fired at from above and below, as Generation Z take aim at their older colleagues for being aesthetic fakes.

## “OK Boomer”

which is a phrase designed to mock anyone older than a Millennial for being conservative, out of touch and technologically inept, has been hurled at Baby Boomers and Generation X's for the last two years. Meanwhile, Generation Z are accused of not yet finding a problem for which there isn't an app.

The truth of course is that colleagues behave differently and experience contrasting perspectives for a whole variety of reasons, not just the era in which they were born. The pace of organisational and technological change in the last twenty years has both bridged and exacerbated variances in outlook held by people of different age cohorts. Intergenerational analysis can, however, help us to understand the norms for each generation and improve acquisition, retention, engagement and support the resolution of potential conflict.

In this study, 1,151 participants shared their views collectively and individually on what they see as the differences between the four generations under review. We asked their opinions on each of the generations, including their own and looked at the factors that

would attract them to a firm or turn them away. The research participation can be broken down as follows:

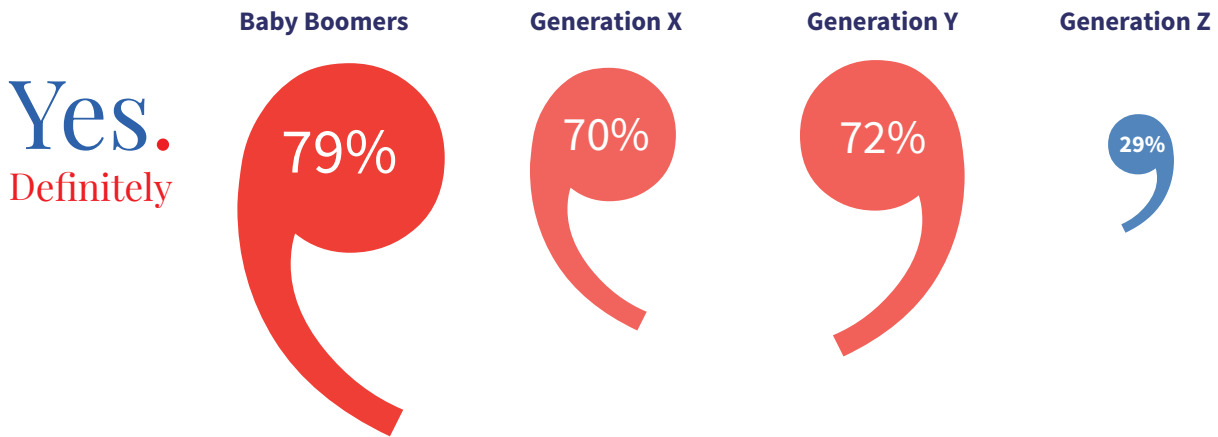
<b>Baby Boomers</b> (Born 1946 - 1964)	<b>Generation X</b> (Born 1965 - 1981)	<b>Millennials/ Generation Y</b> (Born 1982 - 1997)	<b>Generation Z</b> (Born after 1997)
<b>191</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>74</b>

When undertaking studies our Research Team draws upon their networks for survey participation. As an executive search firm, it is rare for us to interact with people in the first stages of their careers. So we acknowledge the disparity here between the numbers of survey participants from the older three generations compared with those from Generation Z.

On a final note, when discussing the data prepublication with some client organisations to bench test the results, some themes arose. All of the firms involved said the majority of the challenges that arose, did so out of misunderstanding. That the key to maintaining good intergenerational relationships was to recognise differences and to talk about them. That no one size fits all management terms and while everyone should be treated equally and fairly, it did not mean using the same approach to all.

Some companies admitted that in the early days of intergenerational culture management, they had allowed misconceptions to go unchallenged and often responded with their own bias in how they tasked people, believing that because of their generations, certain employees were better suited to perform these. It was noted also, and perhaps the survey bears this out, that employees sometimes confirmed this bias through their own lack of understanding of others.

**Q1.** Do teams or groups made of different generations work better than those made up of single generations?



Generation Z see themselves as very different to their older colleagues. Perhaps they have limited workplace experience from which to form an opinion.

When asked “Have perspectives held by different generations caused difficulties at work?”, a third of Generation Z participants say “Yes, regularly”. By comparison, Generation Y and the Baby boomers report this at 1 in 10 with Generation X at 1 in 5

**Q2.** What do you see as the main areas of difference between the generations?

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
<b>Top Difference</b>	Expectations of Promotion / Career Advancement	Expectations of Promotion / Career Advancement	Expectations Of Flexibility in the workplace	Views on Work Life balance
<b>Second Difference</b>	Expectations Of Flexibility in the workplace	Expectations Of Flexibility in the workplace	Views on Work Life balance	Preferred Communication Style
<b>Third Difference</b>	Views on Work Life balance	Preferred Communication Style	Preferred Communication Style	Decision Making Process

Participants selected their top 3 main areas of difference from a list of seven, which also included “Speed of Work”.

**Q3.** What is your preferred cycle of structured feedback; either from or as a manager?

	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Generation Z</b>
<b>Annually</b>	0%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Half-yearly</b>	5%	12%	7%	0%
<b>Quarterly</b>	31%	<b>28%</b>	17%	29%
<b>Bi-monthly</b>	0%	2%	7%	0%
<b>Monthly</b>	<b>32%</b>	18%	<b>34%</b>	14%
<b>Fortnightly</b>	11%	12%	14%	0%
<b>Weekly</b>	21%	23%	14%	<b>43%</b>
<b>Daily</b>	0%	3%	7%	14%

The table above might suggest that more experienced managers are responding to the higher frequency feedback needs of their younger cohorts. Notwithstanding that, Monthly and Quarterly feedback cycles remain the most popular across the collective participant group. It will be of no surprise to line managers and HR Teams that the days of the annual appraisal are well behind us, but even half yearly formal review events are not considered to be of a sufficient frequency.

**Q4.** What characteristics do you most admire in and would attract you to an employer?

	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Generation Z</b>
<b>The firm ensures employees can work autonomously and independently</b>	5%	20%	11%	13%
<b>The firm has a collaborate culture</b>	15%	20%	31%	<b>30%</b>
<b>The firm has a justified reputation for being highly innovative</b>	5%	8%	10%	15%
<b>The firm has a leadership group that is respectful to all employees</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>41%</b>	28%
<b>The firm has and works towards a clear mission</b>	17%	9%	7%	14%

As with every study we produce, the respect an organisation’s leadership team shows its employees is the overall top ranking engagement factor. Interestingly, and it might be down to Generation Z’s flat structure expectation, a collaborative culture is that cohort’s number one factor. Anecdotally, we know that firms with rigid hierarchical structures are those most likely to struggle in their adaptation of Generation Z’s workplace needs.

Drivers of attraction engagement for employees formed the main agenda of our research throughout 2021. In this report, we looked further at these key elements by Generation. The first table below sets out factors that would enhance the engagement of employees by generation while the second reviews those organisation characteristics that would cause an employee to look elsewhere.

**Q5.** Which of these features are of most importance to you in your relationship with an employer?

	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Generation Z</b>
<b>An ethical organisation</b>	11%	15%	10%	0%
<b>Clear support for employee wellbeing</b>	12%	15%	15%	<b>43%</b>
<b>Commitment to your learning and development</b>	5%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Flexibility in the workplace</b>	14%	<b>25%</b>	<b>24%</b>	16%
<b>Monetary benefits (pension, health insurance etc)</b>	21%	15%	17%	14%
<b>Open and transparent leadership</b>	<b>26%</b>	13%	7%	13%
<b>Opportunity for career advancement and promotion</b>	0%	3%	14%	14%
<b>Strong sense of organisation purpose</b>	11%	12%	13%	0%

While “Flexibility in the workplace” is important to all Generations it is the most important factor for X and Y. Baby Boomers highlight “Open and transparent leadership” as their key engagement factor while “Clear support for wellbeing” is almost three times more important to Generation Z than any of the other generations.

**Q6.** Which of the following would you be most concerned to realise about your employer?

	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Generation X</b>	<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Generation Z</b>
<b>The firm has a poor record in the area of discrimination and racism</b>	21%	<b>30%</b>	<b>45%</b>	29%
<b>The firm has challenging financial circumstances which threaten its future</b>	<b>42%</b>	27%	21%	0%
<b>The firm has little regard for climate change generally and actions it should take specifically</b>	16%	8%	10%	14%
<b>The firm pays no attention to equality</b>	5%	10%	14%	0%
<b>The firm plays no active role in ensuring the mental and physical wellbeing of its employees</b>	16%	25%	10%	<b>57%</b>

Again, we can see the importance of wellbeing to the youngest working generation, while Generation Y’s social conscience also stands out clearly. Perhaps surprisingly, Equality ranks beneath Climate Change.

Generation Z see their careers as a collection of short stays at various employers, which may explain why they have no real concern about future organisational finance challenges. We know from other studies, that while equality is very important to Generation Z, many simply refuse to acknowledge its absence.





**Q7.1** How do you see your own Generation and how do the others see you?  
 What % agree fully with these statements?

## Baby Boomers

	What you say about your own generation	What the others collectively say about you	Worst (highest or lowest) rating on this	Who said it?
<b>Are extremely hard working</b>	79%	39%	29%	Generation Z
<b>Are extremely independent</b>	53%	33%	28%	Generation Z
<b>Are resistant to change and set in their ways</b>	16%	37%	43%	Generation Z
<b>Are more committed to their roles than the other generations</b>	47%	38%	24%	Generation Y
<b>Are technophobes and will not engage</b>	0%	10%	14%	Generation Z
<b>Just want to retire</b>	5%	7%	10%	Generation Y

Clearly Generation Z have a number of perspective gaps with Baby Boomers. It is interesting too, that generally as the generations furthest apart in a workplace, they are least likely to have an opportunity to sit down and talk about their intergenerational divergence. Boomers, so called due to the post WWII spike in birth rates, began retiring ten years ago.





## Q7.2 Generation X

	What you say about your own generation	What the others collectively say about you	Worst (highest or lowest) rating on this	Who said it?
<b>Value Diversity</b>	57%	35%	14%	Generation Z
<b>Embrace technology in all forms and display agility towards it</b>	48%	45%	34%	Generation Y
<b>Less likely to disagree with management on something they feel strongly about</b>	22%	17%	29%	Generation Y
<b>Have difficulty juggling multiple priorities</b>	5%	22%	32%	Baby Boomers
<b>More concerned over speed than quality of work</b>	0%	27%	43%	Generation Z
<b>Value financial security</b>	80%	66%	57%	Generation Z

The divergence between Generation X and the other three cohorts seems to be greatest. They perhaps have the least in common with others and are sometimes regarded as being the most cynical of the cohorts, though others describe this as critical thinking. Generation X are also known as the latchday generation, being the first to have both parents working outside of the home and of course they grew up through momentous times in history, from the cold war to the collapse of the Berlin wall and the first man on the moon to the beginning of personal computing.



## Q7.3 Generation Y

	What you say about your own generation	What the others collectively say about you	Worst (highest or lowest) rating on this	Who said it?
Place importance on relationships with superiors	62%	58%	36%	Baby Boomers Generation X
Have an intuitive knowledge of technology	76%	62%	43%	Generation Z
Have a passion for learning	55%	34%	28%	Generation X
They will challenge their superiors / hierarchy status quo	31%	38%	29%	Generation Z
Expect to move up the ladder quickly	66%	61%	84%	Baby Boomers
Are unmotivated and lazy	0%	1%	3%	Generation X

The table above might suggest that while Generation Y believe they develop good relationships with their managers, their managers may not agree. Equally, the factor above “Expect to move up the ladder quickly” may well be a positive trait, however here Baby Boomers felt it might be a little too high an expectation.



## Q7.4 Generation Z

	What you say about your own generation	What the others collectively say about you	Worst (highest or lowest) rating on this	Who said it?
<b>Are motivated to discover how to work smarter using technology</b>	86%	74%	70%	Generation X
<b>Have career impatience and frequently job hop</b>	57%	68%	78%	Generation X
<b>Prefer to work independently than form part of a team</b>	29%	16%	7%	Generation Y
<b>Are naturally competitive</b>	43%	14%	10%	Generation X
<b>Are always on social media</b>	71%	58%	62%	Generation Y
<b>Demand transparency in the workplace</b>	72%	44%	32%	Baby Boomers

In building the survey, the trait “Are always on social media” was not intended as a positive feature but rather an observation that this generation could be doing better things with its time. In a fine example of divergence from the Generation X writer of the survey, Generation Z have taken it as a positive and along with “Are motivated to discover how to work smarter using technology” see it as progressive.





With improvements in medical technology and retirement ages extending, we will inevitably see a greater number of generations working in our organisations. For various reasons, many people of different ages have different needs, behave in different ways and see things through different lenses. These must all be met, aligned and understood.

Traditional hierarchial structures and incremental career growth based on tenure are now ancient concepts. Firms who remain embedded in that style of thinking will ultimately cease to be able to attract new talent over the next ten years.

Collaborative work cultures provide a more agile, fluid and innovative organisation. Crucially however, they provide a great platform for intergenerational work teams to discuss and align where gaps exist. The future for intergenerational success is about having continuous communication, a shared purpose and common goals amongst all colleagues.

**A shared purpose  
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provide a real  
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