

Cross-Cultural Leadership:

Navigating Generational Dynamics in the Modern Workplace

Part I

Building Strong Workplace Teams

CBMI- University of Kentucky
Course #HED 2224



Today's Focus

By the end of today's session, you will be able to:

- Recognize how generational experiences shape workplace expectations
- Identify management practices that reduce frustration and improve communication
- Apply proactive strategies to strengthen multigenerational teams
- Leverage generational differences to improve engagement and performance



Engagement 1

Let's Start with Your Experience

What frustrations have you experienced when working with others on your team?

Managing today's workforce isn't easy

- Different communication styles
- Different expectations around feedback
- Different views on commitment, work-life balance, and advancement

Same Team • Same Goals
Very Different Perspectives



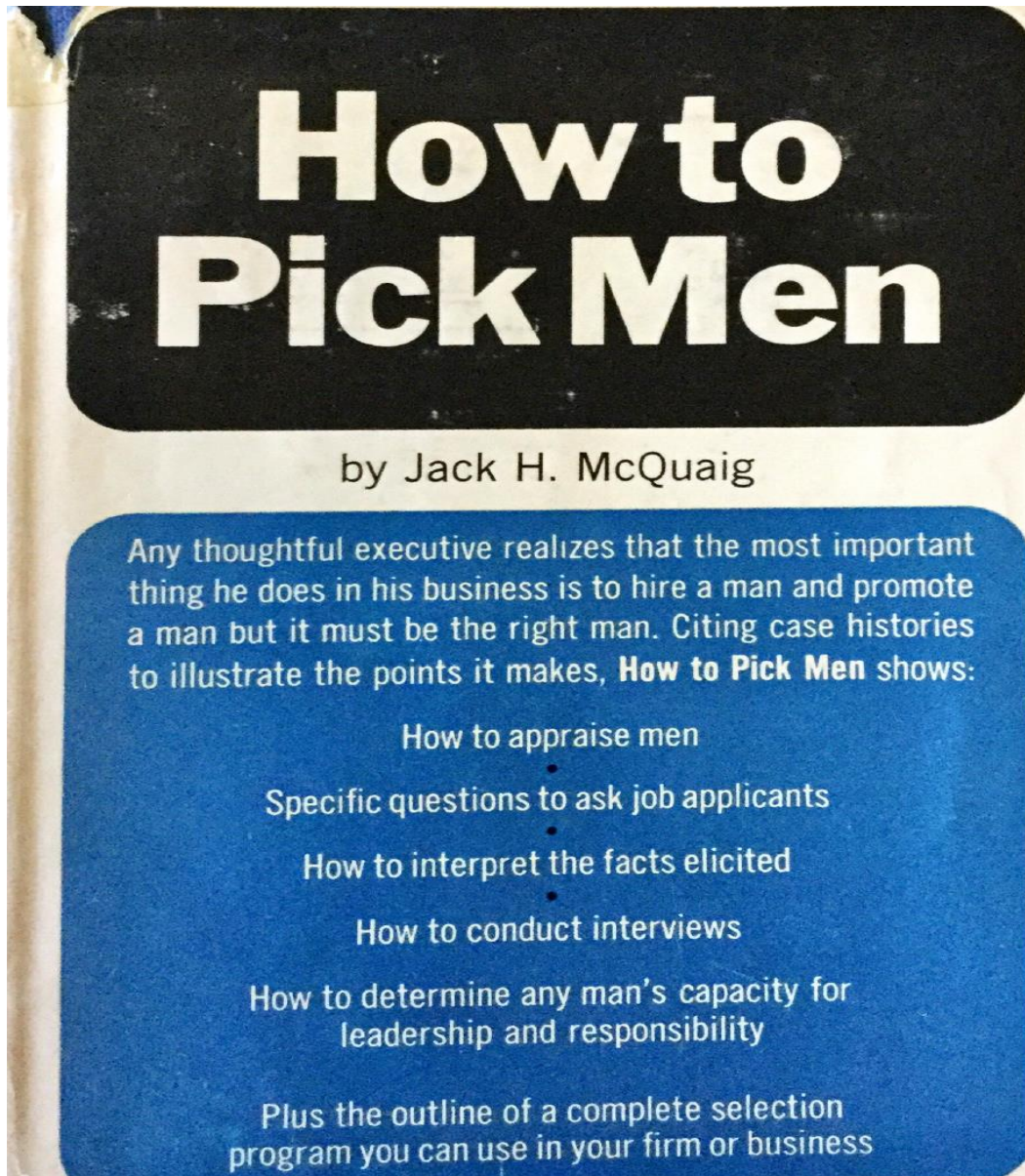
It Wasn't Always This Complex

Workplaces used to be:

- More uniform
- More structured
- More predictable
- More aligned in expectations



1963 Management Guidelines



What Changed and Why?

- **We moved from one shared set of expectations**
- **to a workplace with multiple generations—**
- **each shaped by different influences and experiences**



The Advantage of a Multigenerational Team

- **Broader perspectives and ideas**
- **Stronger learning across experience levels**
- **Increased employee engagement**
- **Better decision-making**
- **More effective problem-solving**
- **Improved communication**





What is a Generation?

A generation is a group of people who:

- Grew up during a similar time period
- Were influenced by similar events and conditions
- Share common experiences that shape how they see the world



What Shapes a Generation?

- Technology
- Economic conditions
- Cultural norms
- Major social events

Important to Remember

Not everyone fits neatly into a generation

Generations are patterns – NOT labels

No generation is better or worse

Generational differences are one lens, not the whole explanation

Traditionalists

1928 - 1945

“Silent Majority”

Shaped by:

- Great Depression
- World War II
- Highly structured, hierarchical workplaces

Tend to value:

Stability, loyalty, respect

May expect:

Clear roles and chain of command

May be frustrated by:

Lack of professionalism and formality

Baby Boomers

1946 – 1964

“Boomers”

Shaped by:

- Post-war economic growth
- Civil Rights & social change
- Rise of corporate career paths

Tend to value:

Achievement, recognition, strong work ethic

May expect:

Clear goals and acknowledgment

May be frustrated by:

Feeling overlooked or undervalued

Generation X

1965 – 1980

“Forgotten Generation”

Shaped by:

- Corporate downsizing and layoffs
- Rise of personal computers
- Independent (“latchkey”) upbringing

Tend to value:

Autonomy, efficiency, results

May expect:

Trust and flexibility

May be frustrated by:

Micromanagement

Millennials

1981 – 1996

“Boomerang Generation”

Shaped by:

- 9/11 and a heightened sense of uncertainty
- Growth of the internet and social media
- Great Recession

Tend to value:

Purpose, development, balance

May expect:

Frequent feedback and growth opportunities

May be frustrated by:

Lack of direction or advancement

Generation Z 1997 - 2012

“Zoomers”

Shaped by:

- Always connected world
- Covid-19 and disruption to education/work
- Economic uncertainty early in life

Tend to value:

Learning, clarity, stability

May expect:

Clear direction and frequent feedback

May be frustrated by:

Lack of clarity and lack of support



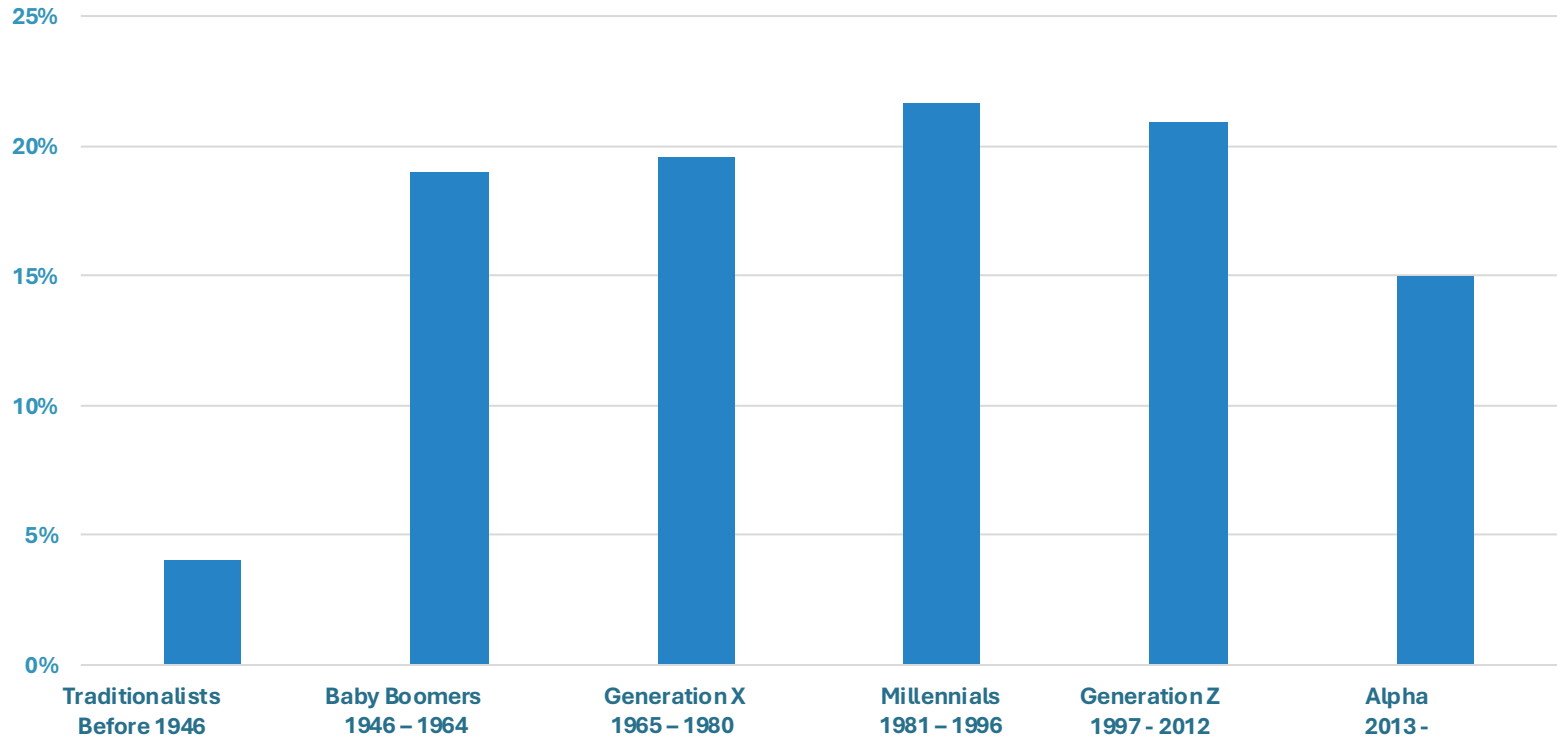
Engagement 2

Recognize these patterns?

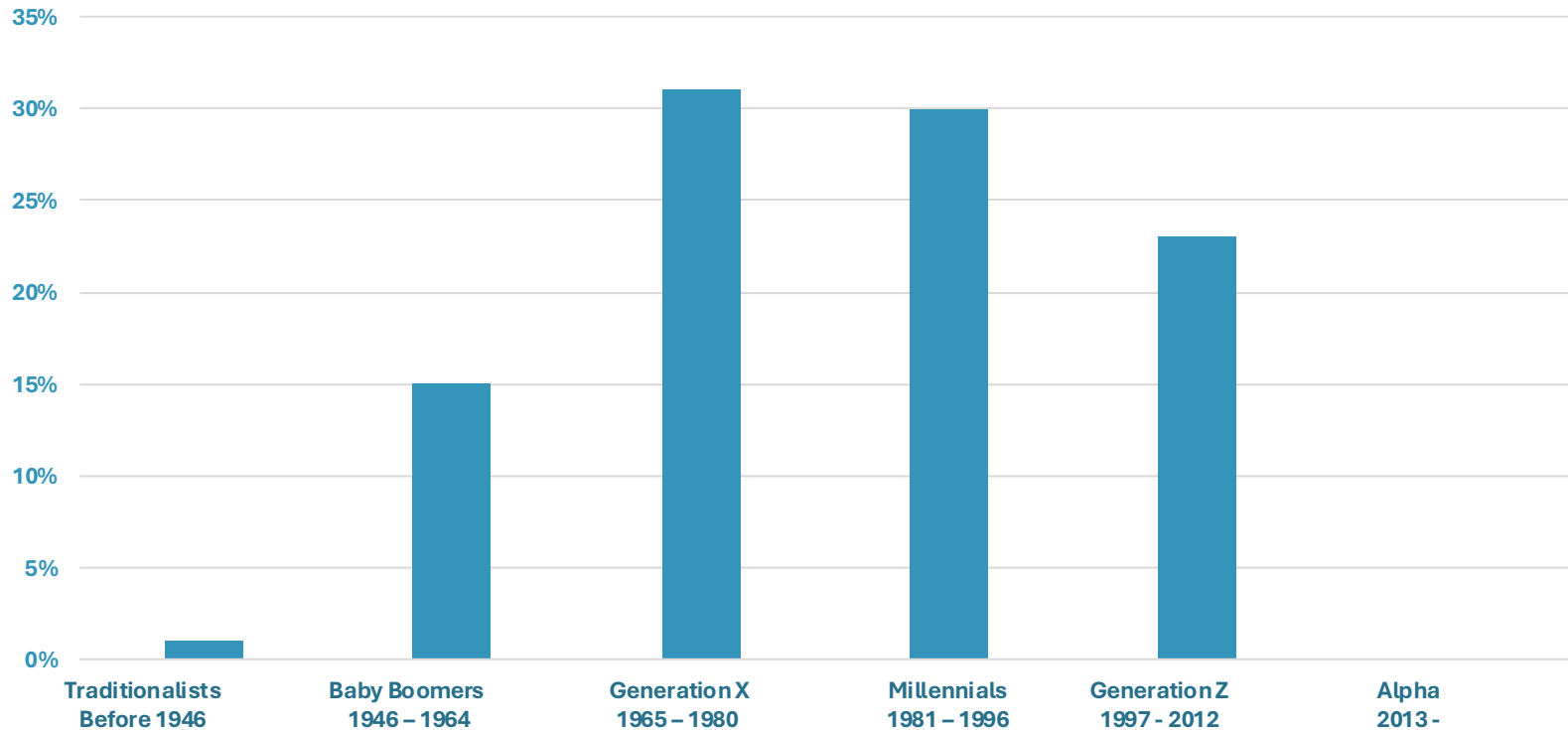
- In yourself
- In your colleagues
- On your team

Which Generation best describes you: by birth/beliefs?

2026 U.S. Population % by Generation



The 2026 Workforce



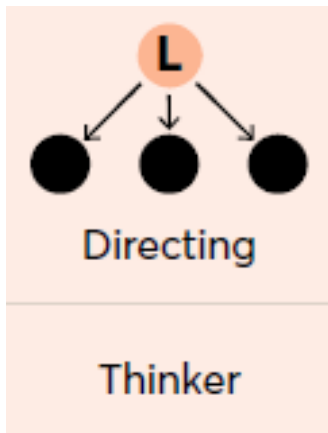
The Reality for Today's Managers

- You are managing different expectations
- You are navigating different communication styles
- You are balancing different values and perspectives

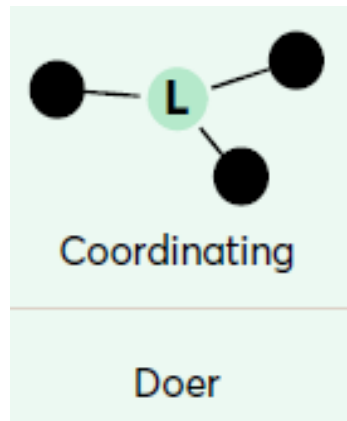


Different Leadership Expectations

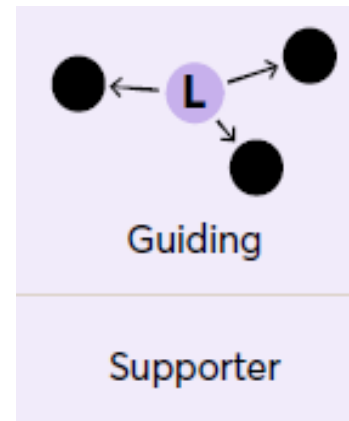
Boomers



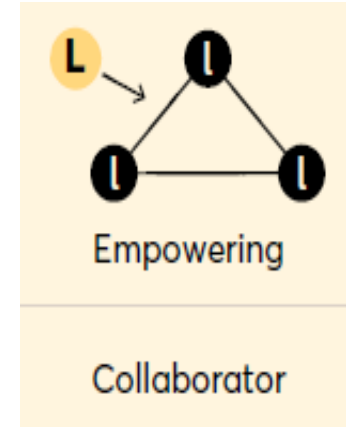
Gen X



Millennial



Gen Z



Different Communication Styles

Baby Boomers

Relationship-focused (prefer face-to-face, phone)

Generation X

Direct and efficient (email, quick conversations)

Millennials

Collaborative (frequent feedback, multiple channels)

Generation Z

Fast and accessible (text/chat)

Different Expectations Around Advancement

Baby Boomers

→ Experience and loyalty

Generation X

→ Performance and results

Millennials

→ Contribution and impact

Generation Z

→ Skills and demonstrated ability

Different Values and Perspectives

Baby Boomers

Optimistic
Competitive
Workaholic
Team-oriented

Generation X

Flexible
Informal
Skeptical
Independent

Millennials

Competitive
Civic Minded
Open-Minded
Achievement-Oriented

Generation Z

Global
Entrepreneurial
Progressive
Less Focused

The “Ideal” Workplace Isn’t the Same for Everyone

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Boomers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Clear goals and defined roles▪ Recognition for contributions▪ Team-oriented environment |
|----------------|---|

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Gen X | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Independence and autonomy▪ Minimal oversight▪ Results-focused environment |
|--------------|---|

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Millennial | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Collaboration and purpose▪ Regular feedback▪ Opportunities for growth |
|-------------------|---|

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Gen Z | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Clear structure and expectations▪ Frequent guidance▪ Stability and skill-building |
|--------------|---|



Engagement 3

Sound Familiar?

Think back to the frustrations you shared earlier

Where do you see these issues showing up?

- **Communication breakdowns**
- **Frustration or tension**
- **Inconsistent performance**
- **Reactive management**

The Reality:

There is No “Perfect” Workplace

There is no single environment that satisfies all expectations at once.

That’s both the challenge and the opportunity for today’s managers.

The goal is not to create a perfect workplace

The goal is to proactively manage expectations

What Is a Proactive Manager?

- **Anticipates issues before they become problems**
- **Clarifies expectations before confusion builds**
- **Communicates early, clearly, and consistently**
- **Addresses concerns before frustration escalates**

Proactive management is about creating clarity before problems grow

**Being a proactive manager doesn't
mean you'll always get it right . . .**

**It means showing up with
intention, clarity, and consistency**

When Management Isn't Proactive

- **Communication breaks down**
- **Frustration increases**
- **Performance becomes inconsistent**
- **Managers are forced into reactive management**



With Proactive Management

- **Communication is clear and consistent**
- **Expectations are understood and aligned**
- **Performance is more consistent**
- **Managers lead proactively, not reactively**



*When you **proactively manage**
generational differences*

Challenges become strengths

The goal isn't to eliminate differences

*It's to **leverage them***

It Doesn't Happen by Accident

**Strong teams occur when
proactive managers ...**

Set Clear Expectations

- ❑ Are clear about what success looks like
- ❑ Define roles and responsibilities
- ❑ Don't assume—confirm understanding
- ❑ Are perceived to be fair

**Clarity eliminates a lot of conflict
before it even starts**

Communicate with Intention

- ❑ Be specific – avoid vague or general language
- ❑ Present key information through multiple methods
- ❑ Check for understanding and follow-up

**Communication isn't just what you
say . . .**

it's what people believe they hear

Provide Timely Feedback

- ❑ Give feedback early-don't wait for formal reviews
- ❑ Are clear about what's working and what needs to improve
- ❑ Make feedback part of regular conversations

**If you don't address it early,
it grows**

Follow Through Consistently

- ❑ Do what they say they will do
- ❑ Apply expectations consistently across the team
- ❑ Hold people accountable to agreed expectations

**Consistency builds trust—
inconsistency creates confusion**

Clarify Priorities

- ❑ Be clear about what matters most
- ❑ Align priorities when things compete
- ❑ Don't assume urgency is understood

**If everything feels important,
nothing gets prioritized**

Using Workplace Programs to Motivate Gens

- ❑ Structured Onboarding
- ❑ Mentoring and Peer Support
- ❑ Ongoing Development
- ❑ Recognition & Rewards
- ❑ Connection and Team Building

Structured Onboarding

- ❑ Set clear expectations from day one
- ❑ Provide consistent support
- ❑ Create clarity around roles and success

Early clarity prevents long-term confusion

Mentoring & Peer Support

- ❑ Pair employees across experience levels
- ❑ Encourage knowledge sharing
- ❑ Build relationships across generations

Learning flows both ways

Ongoing Development

- ❑ Provide opportunities to build new skills
- ❑ Support career growth and advancement
- ❑ Reinforce learning over time

**Growth keeps team members
engaged**

Recognition & Rewards

- ❑ Acknowledge contributions regularly
- ❑ Recognize in ways that resonate
- ❑ Celebrate both effort and results

Recognition drives engagement

Connection & Team Building

- ❑ Create opportunities to build relationships
- ❑ Encourage collaboration across teams
- ❑ Foster a sense of belonging

Strong relationships build strong teams



What Strong Multi-generational Teams Look Like

- **Expectations are defined and consistently reinforced**
- **Communication is understood across the team**
- **Feedback is part of everyday conversations**
- **Priorities are aligned and understood**
- **Differences are leveraged to drive performance**

Strong Teams Don't Happen Without Strong Managers

- **Set and reinforce expectations early**
- **Adapt communication to meet different needs**
- **Address feedback in the moment**
- **Support development, connection, and growth**
- **Leverage generational differences to strengthen the team**

**Adaptability does not mean lowering standards;
it means choosing the clearest and most effective
way to help people meet them.**



Engagement 4

Final Reflection

What idea from today stood out to you?

- **A management practice?**
- **A program idea?**
- **A generational difference?**

Key Thoughts

- **Managing today's workforce comes with challenges**
- **You can't eliminate generational differences**
- **You can manage expectations clearly and consistently**
- **You can leverage those differences as strengths**
- **How your team is managed is YOUR choice!**

**Strong teams are the result of
proactive management!**



Any
QUESTIONS?

What's Next – Tomorrow Part 2

Elevating Your Leadership Impact

- **Understanding your leadership style**
- **How your style affects your team**
- **Adapting your approach to elevate performance**

Thank you for your time and participation

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