



Why is Bridging the Capability Gap Across Generations Important to Your Future Success?

By Daniel King, Yasmin Glanville and Fizza Anwar



The capability gap created by the upcoming exodus of knowledgeable retirees is not only widening, but is speeding up. To bridge this gap—and strengthen the future capability readiness of their organizations—leaders and entrepreneurs are investing in attracting and developing right-fit talent as a competitive priority. They are also tapping into the brain-trusts of key executives and experts, before they move on, as part of this capability investment.

To better understand this capability challenge and how forward-thinking organizations can address it as a competitive advantage, Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI), conducted an in-depth research study in 2015. The results are captured in a peer-reviewed white paper, “InterGEN: Developing the Leaders of Tomorrow – Starting Today!” As its core, InterGEN is a dynamic engagement and inter-generational mentoring process, focused on identifying, developing and retaining strategically aligned talent as a competitive asset. The research insights were further tested at RSI’s first InterGEN action learning workshop on September 27th, 2016, at the University of Toronto Faculty Club. Over 70 delegates from different sectors, cultures and generations – Boomers, GenXs and Millennials – shared their experience in presentations and discussions.

This article captures key insights from all of these sources.



It's more complex than a simple knowledge transfer.

Every generation and culture has its own biases, social values, communication and work-styles. Millennials, for instance, tend to be more comfortable working collaboratively with small, empowered teams. They respond to hands-on management with clear goals and continuous learning: Coaching, formation-mentoring and professional development. This makes sense. They grew up in a collaborative and technology-enabled learning environment which included small project team deliverables. Though there are exceptions, Boomers—now in their late 50s and 60s—tend to be more directive and top-down in their leadership and work styles. This is also a reflection of the cultural norms and practices that they grew up.

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“Respect and appreciation for one another goes hand-in-hand with understanding that it's a different world now,” says Leanne Pepper, General Manager of the University of Toronto Faculty Club. “You've got somebody who's happy to have been in the same place for 45 years, while the younger generation says ‘I don't want that!’ At the same time, it's hard for them to find a permanent full-time job with benefits when everything's on contract.” She worries that traditional, higher-education programs don't foster the soft skills necessary to land a younger person's dream job. “His social graces made him shine. That's why they hired him.” Pepper recalled of a previous mentee.

RSI is an exchange for engaging and partnering with thought-leaders, innovators and organizations to advance the sustainability and resiliency of businesses, institutions and communities to thrive into the future. InterGEN speaks to the people capability requirements for delivering value into the future, by investing in developing tomorrow's leaders and optimizing established brain trusts—starting today! We leverage our Intergenerational network of thought-leaders at the forefront of change, innovation and sustainability to accelerate future-ready capabilities in a disruptive era.

The goal is to bridge the talent gaps in a business or organization, so that its continuity of growth and success can be maintained, even in this era.

Bullfrog Power, SVP of Sales and Marketing, Josephine Coombe adds that “Millennials are coming out of university with much stronger social and environmental awareness. They’re leaving school well-educated on sustainability issues, even if they didn’t study in environmental programs. It affects their decisions as job-seekers and as consumers.”

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This heightened social awareness can be leveraged by employers and managers to engage talent and to increase sales. This is something Coombe’s employer, a green energy provider, has benefited from.



These benefits are not limited to the green energy sector. Peter Gabor, Principal of award-winning Gabor Associates: Architecture, Urban Design, and Interiors, recognizes the unmatched enthusiasm and commitment to excel and to do good, from the younger people in his firm.

Gabor taps into this enthusiasm by “fostering their growth and learning with frequent debates in the office.” He recognizes that hiring for diversity of age, ethnicity and capabilities has a mutual benefit to himself, his employees and the future success of his firm.

This requires broadening the lens to understand how each generation communicates, works and learns – in the context of today’s fast-changing business and consumer environment.

In other words: what makes them tick? A common view, for instance, is that Millennials (born 1977 to 1995¹) tend to be more collaborative, inclusive, non-hierarchical and tech-savvy than Boomer’s (1946-1964¹) and GenX’s (1965-1976¹). Millennials are also driven by different life-work priorities and social interests reflective of today’s hyper-connected, sharing economy. Successful organizations, such as Gabor Associates, embrace these differences as a competitive advantage.

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Other Key Discoveries

- ✓ Global disruptions impacting business and consumer markets—exponential growth in technology, lagging policy, climate change, digital and sharing economy, decentralization of power, etc.—are also opportunities for creating value. The way to create that value is through, multi-dimensional learning across different generations, transferring the skills which translate into leadership for the future.
- ✓ Effective learning should enable people to undergo self-discovery. This process has been hindered by the current education system, which is producing graduates with plenty of knowledge but not the skills nor the opportunities to apply that knowledge.
- ✓ Millennials are used to working and learning collaboratively with small, empowered teams. In contrast, executives and experts in their 50s and 60s are more accustomed to a top-down, command-control work environment. To tap into the authentic value of all generations – and help bridge the gaps - progressive employers invest in creating a collaborative work and learning culture as a strategic priority. Inter-generational coaching and capability formation mentoring support this need.
- ✓ Storytelling is a powerful means for connecting people to create and share what’s possible in the future and to celebrate the past. When used as a future-readying process, we need to begin collecting stories that capture the institutional knowledge of the highest capacity people and build new stories around common generational threads. For this to happen, systematic relationships between generations need to exist.
- ✓ Purpose-focused work is essential. Most millennials expect their employers to focus on societal or mission-driven problems; and want to work for companies that walk-the-talk as sustainability champions of one or more positive change commitments – beyond pure bottom-line-metrics. This feeds into their values of doing more with less.
- ✓ Entrepreneurialism is on the rise, especially among the ‘under-40s’. This goes hand-in-hand with investing in meaningful work that fits their talents and interests vs. a command-control, “do as I tell you” approach. Employers who recognize this have a better chance of attracting highly motivated employees.
- ✓ A popular interest of millennials is communication and marketing. “When you manage marketing and communications groups, you often have a number of younger folks in the groups,” Coombe observed. “It tends to be an area that a lot of people move through as they’re moving up into more senior roles.” They also are the biggest users of social media and mobile devices for communicating with friends and colleagues.

Key criteria for being a future-ready business or organization is hiring and developing a diverse and talented workforce, creating a collaborative learning and work environment, and tapping into the brain-trusts of senior executives and experts, to share their experience and insights with the next generation of leaders – starting today!

InterGEN's coaching and formation-mentoring is specifically designed to meet these critical needs. And it starts by identifying the specific capabilities required to realize and sustain your vision of success in a fast emerging future.

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References:

[InterGEN Action Learning Accelerator \(Sept 27, 2016\)](#)

[InterGEN White Paper \(2015\)](#)

[InterGEN Executive Summary \(2016\)](#)

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