Learning and Development

in the 5-generation Workforce

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The Shifting Demographics of the Workplace

For the first time in history, we have five generations in the workforce — and each has a very different connection to the overall concept of learning and work.

The changing demographics are shifting how learning and development is both conceptualized and delivered. It's among the most challenging times ever to be in L&D, because one-size-fits-all, which was a pervasive model for years, has no place anymore. The focus now is on using tech and personalization to reach each employee where they're at, but they're in vastly different places relative to generational cohort. While challenging, it's also incredibly exciting.

This e-book looks at who exactly is in the workforce today, the different ways they like to learn, the challenges of bringing them together, and emergent trends in how enterprise L&D is delivered.

Defining the 5 Generations and Their Learning Styles

Here's a snapshot of each generation in the workforce from oldest to youngest.

THE SILENT GENERATION

- Born before World War II

- Came of age in the early 1960s

- Have seen revolutionary changes in how we work

It's important for this generation to be recognized for their expertise and qualifications. They are also less invested in broader career development; their careers are winding down.

BABY BOOMERS

- Born after World War II (1946–1964)

- Reached working age post-Vietnam War

- Have defined much of how work is currently constructed

They prefer to work face to face and are still comfortable with traditional classroom-type learning. They often tie much of their self-worth to work; framing L&D around "what's in it for them" is valuable.

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Defining the 5 Generations and Their Learning Styles (Cont.)

GENERATION X

- Born 1965–1980
- Started their careers in the early digital era
- Currently taking on increased responsibility

They prefer on-the-job learning. They're hungry for knowledge, because work is changing around them while they have a sizable amount of their career ahead of them. They can be skeptical, but they're often comfortable with technology.

MILLENNIALS

- Born 1981–1998
- Grew up and entered the workforce in a mobile/digital era
- Expected to outnumber boomers as largest workforce cohort in early 2019

They are more comfortable with technology than most generational cohorts. They want more-frequent L&D opportunities, especially around managerial and soft skills. Millennials tend to be comfortable with multiple learning modalities. But having grown up in a digital and mobile world, they prefer microlearning and bite-size opportunities.

GENERATION Z

- Born 1999–now
- Entering a workforce completely immersed in technology
- Still in junior roles

They are just entering the workforce and hungry for knowledge. This cohort is typically more open to approaches like gamification. It's a sign of how they are the first cohort to have blurred the lines between work and social media. They're open to app-based learning and other approaches that may not appeal to other generational cohorts.

Learning and Development Challenges Across Multiple Generations

The presence of these five generations in the workplace creates four notable challenges.

FOUR NOTABLE CHALLENGES

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GENERATIONAL TENSION

"It's important to be aware of generational tension — loosely defined as a lack of respect for someone who's of a different generation from you — among colleagues," says Jeanne C. Meister, a founding partner of Future Workplace, a human resources consultancy.

This has been backed up by research: In one study of organizations with more than 500 employees, 58 percent of managers **reported generational conflict.**

Ideally, learning takes place across generational cohorts, so younger workers learn from older and vice versa. Generational tension prevents that.
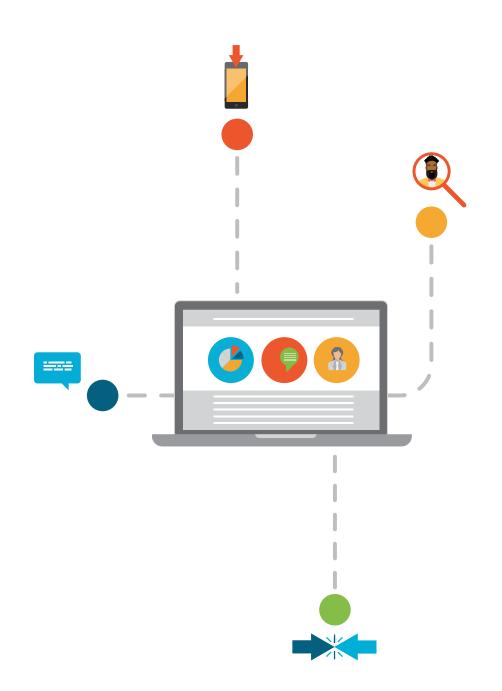
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COMMUNICATION

Admittedly, communication has been a problem in organizations since the dawn of organizations. For L&D, communication challenges tend to fall into two buckets:

• How to communicate the relevance of learning opportunities

• How to make sure internal communication about learning resonates with different generations

The first challenge is about people thinking learning opportunities are "another thing they need to do" at a time when they're already busy. The second challenge is about realizing that an intranet document about the need for L&D might land differently with a boomer and a Z'er.

Learning and Development Challenges Across Multiple Generations (Cont.)

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DELIVERY OF LEARNING PROGRAMS

Digital learning is cost-effective and easier to deliver to a large audience than classroom learning. It also resonates more with younger workers. But older generations **significantly prefer face-to-face delivery.** They're still in crucial roles in your business and need to be trained. You can't afford to think of L&D in a "one size fits all" context.

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CAREER-FOCUSED TRAINING

A "silent" generally cares less about training relative to their career arc. They instead want to know how to keep pace with new skills and programs. A Gen Z, though, often wants to have a deeper career context embedded in training. You need to deliver multiple forms of learning — some aimed at skill and task development, and some aimed at soft skills, managerial skills, data analysis skills, and more focused on broader career development.

Emergent L&D Trends within the Multi-generation Workforce

For decades, L&D focused on in-person, classroom-style learning. The rise of technology and the expansion of the workforce to five cohorts has rapidly shifted that conventional approach. Here are the trends emerging as a result.

MICROLEARNING

Microlearning helps overcome problems associated with decreased attention span and **often produces immediate results.** It aligns well with ever-shifting business needs, because crafting quick, tight lessons doesn't require a long runway.

For example, if the sales force needs to learn a new skill because of how the market is shifting, you can deploy microlearning relatively quickly. That helps ensure that your employee skill sets aren't lagging for long periods of time. **Production costs are lower** than for major course creation.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Defined as learning through programs and peer connection, collaborative learning offers offline and online possibility. That's great for mixing generational needs.

Mutual ideas, skills, and experiences can be combined for greater context. This leads to deeper connection with the material, which is ultimately crucial for knowledge retention.

Also consider this, from **"Collaboration Is the New Competitive Advantage"**:

"The most critical 21st-century skill is empathy and calls for a shift in emphasis from "knowledge workers" to "relationship workers." In a world of exponentially increasing complexity … those that can work well with others have a distinct advantage."

In essence: Collaboration is key, **especially to innovation.** And successful L&D is often driven by that same collaboration.

Emergent L&D Trends within the Multi-generation Workforce (Cont.)

VIDEO-BASED LEARNING

Video-based learning overcomes the single greatest challenge of passive learning environments: someone speaking at you for an entire day.

Video-based learning can also be very beneficial in manufacturing where, for example, someone needs to learn how to repair an elevator and can watch a video to learn how a seasoned expert does it. Video is also a great alternative to training manuals, which tend to be dry. And while you do need internal production expertise to ensure quality, video-based learning is relatively easy to scale.

GAMIFICATION

Gamification has been an evolving trend in learning for a few years now. The younger generations grew up with a huge video game industry, and many apps are tied to the principles of gamification as well.

Gamification can motivate employees to learn and helps with knowledge retention. An added benefit is that gamification fosters healthy competition across teams, which can help drive increased productivity.

PERSONALIZATION

By attuning learning to the individual, and meeting them where they're at, personalization transcends generational differences. Think of self-directed course maps and nonlinear coursework.

Personalization also sends the message that each employees is unique. That's great for employee engagement.

MOBILE LEARNING

Mobile learning is about making sure L&D programs are mobile-friendly and can be accessed on the go. Legacy organizations have periodically struggled with this, although increasingly, programs are being designed with a mobile-first mindset.

To Deal with Five Generations, HR Must Be Flexible

> This is the first time in human history we've had five generations in the workplace at once. That creates a lot of challenges, but it has also shifted how L&D leaders think about delivery.

The key is HR flexibility. For example: You might offer a classroom learning on a new process. This typically might appeal to older generations who have learned that way at work for decades. Instead of stopping there, you might stream it and record it. Now younger generations can watch the video on mobile at a later date. Provide multiple options to reach each of the generations. Be flexible.

Managing how multiple generations learn isn't easy, and many companies are struggling with it. But with a trusted LMS, meeting the different needs of all five generations becomes much easier.

Why Brainier?

Brainier is a new kind of learning and development company. Brainier was conceived from being able to identify the trends in enterprise learning and designing technology and services to help enterprise-level organizations keep pace with them.

The Brainier Knowledge Solution helps your business achieve breakthrough results through better enterprise e-learning that will educate, engage, and empower your employees.

![brainier — educate. engage. empower.]

We believe Brainier is the most advanced, cohesive, and versatile knowledge solution on the market. But wait until you get to know the people who make it all possible. Our deep personal commitment to every client creates a true sense of connection and trust between us and them.

Brainier. Educate. Engage. Empower.

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