Technology in Workplace Communication by Generation

Student, Hannah Meadows School of Business Administration   *Faculty Member: Dr. Christy Trent*

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to determine the generational differences in the use of communication technology in the workplace. Most employees feel a deeper sense of connection to those in their own generational group. This survey looks at ideologies across four generations, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, to help give employers some insight into why employees feel this way and encourage better communication in the workforce.

Methodology

The survey consisted of 48 questions collected via a self-reported survey questionnaire provided insight into the perspectives of Baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z working in the education, banking, manufacturing, and retail industries. Surveys were sent to currently employed Kentucky residents. Questions in the survey examined the types and preferences of technologies used, time spent on technology, ideologies, and preferred communication methods. There were 49 respondents to the survey. Data was extracted from Google Forms and put into Excel where the data was then converted into charts.

Formative Events of Generations

Baby Boomers

1946-1964

Civil Rights, Vietnam War, Sexual Revolution, Cold War/Russia, Space Travel (WMFC)

Technologies: television, radio (Reed, Bernhard, Park, 2012)

Generation X

1965-1980

Watergate, Energy Crisis, First Generation of Latchkey Kids,Y2K, Activism, Corp. Downsizing, End of Cold War (WMFC)

Technologies: Personal computer, internet (Reed, Bernhard, Park, 2012)

Millennials

1981-1995

Digital Media, school shootings, terrorist attacks, AIDS, 9/11(WMFC)

Technologies: Personal phone (Reed, Bernhard, Park, 2012)

Generation Z

1996-2019

Ramifications of 9/11, mass shootings, first black president, first female vice president, legalization of same sex marriage, LGBTQ+ movement, legalization of marijuana, pandemic, great recession. (Moscrip, 2019)

Technologies: Smart phones, tablets, Bluetooth (Reed, Bernhard, Park, 2012)

Communication Theories

Cultivation Analysis
Proposes that those who are more exposed to media, likely develop their sense of reality from it (Perera, 2021).

Communication Accommodation Theory
Suggests there are two communication styles: convergence and divergence. Those with a strong background will communicate through divergence to highlight their identity. Those who seek social acceptance communicate through convergence (Giles & Ogay, 2007).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory
Indicates that people have uncertainties when they meet and communicate to reduce those uncertainties (Wernecke, 2017).

Organizational Information Theory
Proposes that people's behavior and productivity are affected by the communication within their organization. (Weiner, 2009)

Literature Review

This undergraduate research project relied on previous research by Conant, et al. (2020). The survey was adapted from their communication device survey of 335 Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomer registered nurses. This research was expanded to include multiple industries, add Generation Z, and collect information on communication outside of technology.

Research by Stark and McElfresh (2020) examined perceptions of generational communication differences among 150 health science librarians. [Insert their results here.] We predicted that our survey participants would perceive a generational divide in the workforce based on these results.

Huffman (2011) analyzed previously published research and found technological advances have increased communication in the workplace.

Lim (2010) conducted a case study about information and communication technology. The findings suggest that technology usage during formative years may affect individuals generationally.
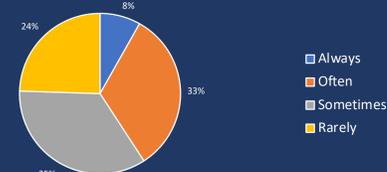
Results

Time Spent on Technology

Review of Personal Electronics at Work (daily)

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely

(8%, 33%, 35%, 24%)

Frequency of Communication with Coworkers Digitally (Times Daily)

- 0-10 (49%)
- 11-21 (27%)
- 21-30 (14%)
- 31-40
- 41-50 (2%)
- 51-60 (2%)
- 61-70 (2%)
- 71-80 (2%)

Use of Technology During Normal Duties (at least 1 hour)

- Yes (49%)
- No (45%)
- Maybe (6%)

Communication Ideology

81.6% of participants believed generation has an impact on communication in the workplace. However, 55.1% of participants were not interested in learning more about how to best communicate among generations.

Use of Communication Method by Generation

- Gen Z
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Baby Boomers

Legend: Text, Phone, In-person, Email
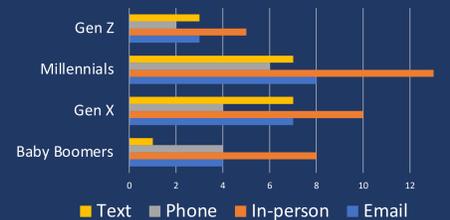
Technology Use

Most Common Methods Used to Learn New Technologies Since COVID-19 Began

- Practice and Experiment on my own
- Online training sessions
- Coworkers

# of users

Top Three Technologies Used in the Workplace

- Printers
- Phone
- Email

# of users

Technology Ideology

46.9% of participants believed the use of personal electronics at work is good for break periods only.

62.5% felt their perception of things in the workplace had been altered by the media very often, often, or sometimes.

Views on Personal Device use in the Workplace

- Allows me to stay on the unit while attending to personal issues
- Staying up to date
- Faster communication
- Challenges associated with multitasking
- Breaks in concentration

# of surveyers

Communication Theories

47.9% of participants only sometimes and 8.3% rarely conform to the communication styles of those around them.

27.2% of participants believe their immediate supervisor communicates inefficiently in their organization

62.5% of participants feel the need to suppress opinions when meeting someone new either sometimes, often, or very often.

27.2% of participants feel that their immediate supervisor communicates efficiently in their organization either sometimes, rarely, or almost never.

Conclusion

The technology used in the workplace does not prohibit or create problems for workplace communication. Instead, the world events during the formative years shaped the perception of values, norms, attitudes, behaviors, and skills (WMFC). In addition, as cultivation analysis suggests, exposure to different types of media has made intergenerational communication more difficult (Perera, 2021).

According to uncertainty reduction theory, these differences during the formative years create uncertainties between generations Wernecke, 2017. Those with divergent communication styles will struggle with connecting (Giles & Ogay, 2007).

Unaddressed, these differences will negatively impact the communications within these organizations, making for inefficient processes and decreased productivity.

Effective communication is essential in planning and controlling an organization's resources to accomplish the company's objectives. In addition, effective communication increases productivity and output, which leads to the success of the business or organization.

Employers need to focus on creating an environment with strong communication within the organization to improve behavior and productivity.

The information presented will allow employers to make more thoughtful and efficient decisions regarding technology and its uses in the workplace. Commonalities and differences should be shared, and examples provided of how to adapt communication styles to create a style everyone understands and is comfortable with while at work. Putting forth such efforts will support the achievement of increased productivity and performance desired by every organization.

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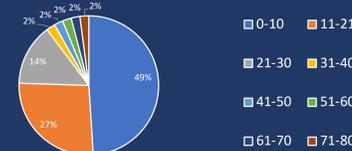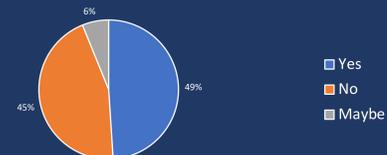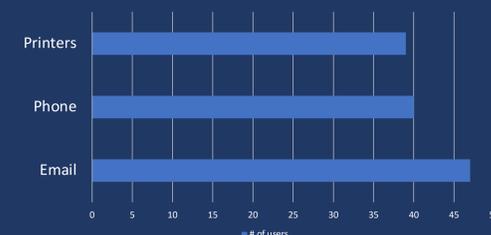WMFC. (2021). Generational Differences Chart. Retrieved from WMFC: http://www.wmfc.org/uploads/GenerationalDifferencesChart.pdf