The Effects of Prior Experience on Generational Training Preferences

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Due to the shortage of younger workers that organizations will face in years to come, it is important that organizations begin to examine ways to attract and retain them. One potential value that employers can provide to employees is programmatic career development and training that is tailored to their needs. One such way to tailor training is to acknowledge that different generations have different training needs, and hence alter training programs based on the generational needs of the participants. This paper explores the link between past generational experience and current learning preference. As a result, I suggest that companies tailor their training programs to the typical learning preference of each generation to better improve training delivery.

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The Effects of Prior Experience on Generational Training Preferences

By

Amy L. Baliva

A final project submitted to

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The Graduate School of Human Resource Development

Of St. John Fisher College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the

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Abstract

Due to the shortage of younger workers that organizations will face in years to come, it is important that organizations begin to examine ways to attract and retain them. One potential value that employers can provide to employees is programmatic career development and training that is tailored to their needs. One such way to tailor training is to acknowledge that different generations have different training needs, and hence alter training programs based on the generational needs of the participants. This paper explores the link between past generational experience and current learning preference. As a result, I suggest that companies tailor their training programs to the typical learning preference of each generation to better improve training delivery.
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The Effects of Prior Experience on Generational Training Preferences

Chapter 1

Overview of the problem

It is clear that there will soon be shortage of workers resulting from the retirement of Baby Boomers. For example, Ruch (2000) indicates that by 2010 there will be a 15% decrease in workers who are between the ages of 25 to 44. As a result, it will become harder for organizations to recruit young talent. As Ruch indicated, the “lack of attention to generational differences will make any company less attractive to young recruits, resulting in higher recruiting costs and greater difficult in finding the right employees” (p. 41). Lancaster and Stillman (2002) go so far as to call the upcoming labor shortage a talent war, indicating that there are eighty million Baby Boomers while there will be only forty-six million Generation Xers to fill the job vacancies as these Baby Boomers retire. Raines indicates that not only is it harder for employers to recruit replacements, but it can cost $2,900 to $10,000 per employee. Therefore, she indicates the service industries have placed employee retention at the top of the list of cost containment measures (Raines, 1997).

Due to the shortage of younger workers that organizations will face in years to come, it is important that organizations begin to examine ways to attract and retain them. In a “what’s in it for me” culture, where younger employees are looking for more than just a paycheck, organizations will need to find news ways to create value for the employee. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) use the term ‘value proposition’ to describe what one organization might advertise to a particular generation as a incentive to work for that organization- in other words, a value add.
One potential value that employers can provide to employees is programmatic career development and training. Tulgan and Martin (2001) state that “training departments are the ace in the hole for retaining and motivating today’s workforce” (p.23). Thomas Mahon, VP of Saratoga Institute, surveyed 60,000 employees regarding reasons for leaving employment. Mahon found that there will still be an attrition rate of 12 percent, even when employees receive training and are satisfied with it. However, if the employees do not receiving training that they perceive as satisfactory, the attrition rate jumps up to 41 percent as cited by Olesen (1999).

Organizations cannot afford to offer training that is perceived as unsatisfactory. According to Kaye and Jordan-Evan (2000), the Hay Group conducted a 1999 study that surveyed more than 500,000 employees in various companies regarding what made people stay in an organization. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that the primary reason was either career growth and training, challenging work, or meaningful work. According to O’Reilly (1994) some companies are going so far as to vocalize what he calls a ‘new deal’, where companies outright indicate that there is only job security for as long as the employee adds value to the company. In return for the value that the employee adds to the company, the employee receives value from the organization in the form of, “experience and training needed to be employable here or elsewhere” (p. 44). O’Reilly concedes that “companies must work harder than ever to make themselves attractive places to work” (p. 44).

Many companies offer various training courses, offered either internally or externally, so simply providing training may not be enough to differentiate one organization from another. Instead, something that will add value to the employee is
tailoring training to meet the needs of the trainee. One such way to tailor training is to acknowledge that different generations have different training needs, and hence alter training programs based on the generational needs of the participants.

Problem Statement

Though the importance of generational training preferences has been documented anecdotally (e.g., Hay, 2000; Cannon, 1991; Wagschal, 1997; Corley, 1999; Rapp, 1999), there is little literature that illustrates how past generational experience, either by upbringing or educational experience, ties into the learning preferences of the learner. Thus, this literature review will make that connection.

Purpose

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate the link between past generational experience and current learning preference. As a result, I suggest that companies tailor their training programs to the learning preference of each generation.

Research Questions

1) Does the upbringing of a generation influence learning preferences?
2) Does the elementary and secondary education of a generation influence learning preferences?

Significance of the Study

The benefits of this study will be realized by organizations that are trying to attract and retain employees. As said by Kerr and Gascogne (1996), “The key to
understanding and appreciating people different from ourselves is getting to know them as individuals and taking the time to learn about their culture” (p. 271). Yet another author indicates, “an essential component of facilitating learning is understanding learner.” (Oblinger, 2003, p. 37). If organizations can gain insight into what increases training satisfaction, they can increase the perception of quality of training provided by the organization, hence increasing the attractiveness of the organization to future employees. This study will also benefit trainees. This is because if the effectiveness of generational training is established, then in the future organizations will be more likely to adopt this method of training.

Conceptual Framework

Strauss and Howe indicate that there are four generations in the workplace. They describe a generational constellation that exists in the workforce, whereby its members move into another life phase every 22 years, but the overall personality of the generation remains the same due to the peer personality created during childhood (1991). They go on to say that a peer personality, defined as a common sets of beliefs and behaviors, is determined by the age location in history, defined as a common set of national events, trends, and societal beliefs that each person is that generation has experienced. Also in order to be considered a generation, its members must have a perception of membership, which according to Strauss and Howe takes place in early adult hood (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), there are currently four generations in the workplace, including Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Next. Strauss and Howe define a generation as, “a special cohort group whose
length approximately matches that of a basic phase of life” (p. 34). Light, author of a book researching Baby Boomers indicates, “Generations are based on much more than shared birthdates; they reflect a shared sense of time, a shared feeling for an era. German Sociologist Karl Mannheim called such a shared feeling a zeitgeist – spirit of the times.” (Light, 1988)

The oldest generation in the workplace is a group called the Veterans generation by most authors (Brown, LeMaster & Swisher, 2001; Zemke, Raines, & Filipeczak, 1999; Zust, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000), although they have also been referred to as the Silent generation (Martin, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Cambiano, 1999; Wagschal, 1995, Anonymous 1, 1951) and Traditionalists (Stillman, 2002). The start date of the veteran generation is unclear, varying from 1922 (Brown, Lemaster, & Swisher, 2001) until 1925 (Corley, 1999; Strauss & Howe, 1991). By all accounts, the veteran generation ended with those born on or before 1942 (Brown, LeMaster, & Swisher, 2001; Corley, 1999; Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The second generation that exists in the workplace is widely known as the baby boom generation. This generation was given this name based on the sheer number of children born within this generation, though the reasons behind the birthrate increase also contributed to this generation's identity. There are two schools of thought regarding the start date of this generation. Some authors indicate that the beginning of this generation was 1943 (Wagschal, 1997; Corley, 1999; Brown, Lemaster & Swisher, 2001; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Holtz, 1995) while others argue that it was 1946 (Dohn, 2000; Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, & Mckay, 2000; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Flynn, 1996; Kennedy, 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; El-Shamy, 2004; Light, 1988; Martin, 2002; Tulgan &
Martin, 2001; Raines, 1997). Though the increase in births had been steadily increasing through the 1930s and 1940s, there was a substantial increase in births in 1946, immediately following the veterans returning from the war (Jones, 1980). The exact year that the Baby Boom generation began is unclear, but the underlying determinant of the start of this generation was either the beginning of the war in 1943 or the end of the war in 1946.

Unlike the Veterans, the end of this generation is less clear than the beginning. Most literature indicates the end of the baby boomer generation ending between 1959 and 1964 (Wagschal, 1997; Corley, 1999; Brown, Lemaster & Swisher, 2001; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Holtz, 1995; Dohn, 2000; Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, & Mckay, 2000; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Flynn, 1996; Kennedy, 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; El-Shamy, 2004; Light, 1988; Martin, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2001; Raines, 1997). This author feels that the end date should be the year preceding the beginning of the next generation, Generation X, making the end of the baby boomer generation as 1961.

The third generation that exists in the workplace is generation x. This generation was given their name originally through a book written by Douglas Coupland in 1991, as he referred to a group of people that wanted to be different and avoid conforming to societal norms (Coupland, 1991). The start of this generation was marked by a decrease in birth rates, after almost two decades of steady incline. Existing literature places the beginning of generation x between 1961 and 1969 (Filipczak, 1994; Wagschal, 1997; Corley, 1999; Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, & Mckay, 2000; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Hessen, Lewis, & Asce, 2001; Surette, 1996; Flynn, 1996; Rapp, 1999; Bova & Kroth, 2001; Macalister, 1994; Kennedy, 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; El-Shamy, 2004; Strauss
& Howe, 1991; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Based on the decline in birth rates according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Generation X began in 1962 (US Bureau of Census, 1964). This date correlates with GD Searle Drug Company introducing the first FDA approved oral contraceptive, Enovid 10 at the end of 1960 (Holtz, 1995). The introduction of this form of birth control made it easier for women to avoid unwanted pregnancies, and therefore resulted in a decrease in birth rates.

If not using the decline in birthrate as an indicator of the generational divide, there is substantial variation in the start date of this generation, leading some individuals on the cusp to be unable to identify with either generation. Strauss and Howe indicate the best way to determine which generation one is a part of that is unsure is to use the we/they test. If a person were to say the words Generation X, if the person who is unsure automatically thinks “they” in terms of beliefs and behaviors, then they should consider themselves part of the Baby Boom generation. In contrast, if the person who is unsure automatically thinks “we” in terms of beliefs and behaviors, then they should consider themselves part of Generation X (Strauss & Howe, 1993).

The end of Generation X and the beginning of the next generation was once again marked by a change in the increasing birth rate in 1977 (US. Department of Commerce, 1984; El-Shamy, 2004). Other authors place the beginning of the next generation between 1978 and 1982 (Oblinger, 2003; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2001; Chester, 2002). While most authors term this generation the Millenial generation (Oblinger, 2003; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2001), some call in the Net Generation (Hay, 2000), Generation Y (Zust,
2005), or the Game Generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991) due to the tremendous influence that technology has played on this generation.
Chapter 2

Based on the writings of Strauss and Howe (1991), a generational personality is an overarching personality tendency that all members of a generation possess, influenced by societal events and common experiences. In addition, numerous authors have cited that there exists generational preferences in training (El-Shamy, 2004; Fritz & Brown, 1995, Oblinger, 2003; Hay, 2000; Caudron, 1998; Surette, 1996; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999). There is a multi-dimensional parallel between the experiences of childhood, both through the educational system and society, and the generational personality transmitted through training preference. Kennedy, using similar logic, attributes differences in Baby Boomers and Generation Xers to the nature of their upbringing (Kennedy, 1996). Supporting the influence of upbringing on core values, Chester (2002) indicates that many psychologists have indicated that core values are established by around age sixteen and are based on influences of family, education, religion, peers, and culture. In Chester’s words, “The question here isn’t how old are you, but rather when were you young.” (2002, p. 13)

Connecting Veteran’s Training Expectations to their Upbringing

The Veteran generation is the oldest generation found in the workplace, born approximately between 1922 and 1942. There are many veterans remaining in the workforce, thus demanding that their training preferences be attended to. Stemming from Veterans’ upbringing, they require structure, stability, teamwork, experienced-based knowledge, and the ability to exercise caution when learning.
The need for structure in the classroom. According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak, Veterans like a training atmosphere that is structured and stable. They prefer trainers who set the ground rules early and then stick to them. In addition, Veterans appreciate consistency and logic (1999). Brown and Fritz describe Veterans as responding well to the traditional classroom that emphasizes the use of overheads and the black board. Surette (1996) rationalizes why most training classes are structured in this way; because Veterans are the ones who designed them.

The need for structure in the Veteran training class can be tied back to childhood educational experiences. The typical classroom in the 1920s and 1930s was very rigid and structured. In these classrooms there was little two-way interaction, as the teacher or professor was considered the subject expert and it was assumed that the students were fresh minds just waiting to be filled (Surette, 1996). A member of school leadership in one district, while laying the foundation of how a child should perform “oral work”, indicated that students should speak clearly so that all students could hear, and standing tall with their head up (Cuban, 1993). Even the way that classrooms were arranged was rigid and structured. According to Cuban, author of Behind the Classroom, there was a standard classroom structure with 48 desks lined in a row, facing the blackboard, bolted to the floor (Cuban, 1993).

During the years in which Veterans children were in the educational system, 1927 to 1960, there was a movement towards progressivism education, stimulated partly by the writing of John Dewey. Dewey believed that education is a social experience and that educating children should involve not introducing children to new experiences in the form of isolated subjects, but helping them to understand experiences that they have
already had in a holistic sense (Dewey, 1943). Dewey felt that isolating subjects artificialized the learning experience. According to Cuban (1993), indicators or progressive practices include group practice, nontraditional classroom arrangement, student activities and student participation. Cuban found that although teachers adapted slightly to the progressive approach, most teachers only employed one or two teaching techniques that were considered progressive, but did not change their overall style of teaching. Cuban explained these types of “hybrid” classrooms by saying that is was because of the pressures that existed from educational reform and the expectations of teachers imposed by society. Teachers had the best interests in mind, and wanted to embrace the progressive teaching movement, but they also knew that they were responsible for teaching children basic skills and to respect authority. John Dewey also recognized this hybrid form that progressive education had taken in the classrooms. He indicated that, “there is a great deal of talk about education being a cooperative enterprise in which the teachers and students participate democratically, but there is far more talk about it than doing of it” (Canon, 1993, p. 116). Cannon’s observation supports the thought that although there exists literature contraindicative to the evidence that Veterans only experienced a very rigid and structured classroom, the occurrence and effect of the less structured classroom was not far reaching.

The need for stability. Veterans who were born in the early 1920’s were strongly affected by the great depression that occurred in 1929. According to Mecoy (1973), the United States was in excellent economic shape in the 1920s, right up until the stock market crash of 1929. In 1929, the average number of hours worked per week was 44, which had dropped significantly from 47 hours in 1920. In addition, wages increased by
13 percent between 1922 and 1929. The average unemployment rate between 1923 and 1929 was only 3.7 percent. Young children of the 1920s had a solid sense of security and benefited from their parents financial stability. After the stock market crashed and the United States fell into a depression, children suddenly saw the reality of instability in the American economy (McCoy, 1973). In the words of West:

Children growing up through these years experience, in the most dramatic way imaginable, both the glittering promises of American life and the frightening possibility that such wondrous expectations might disappear almost overnight. (West, 1996, p. 216)

After 1929, the family life of children in the Veteran generation changed drastically. Instead of a family flourishing, they were hiding from the landlords to avoid paying the rent and moving in with other families to reduce the cost of living (McCoy, 1973). Mintz (2004) describes the life of a child named Russell during the depression where his mother gave up their ten month old baby to family because they could not afford to feed her and how Russell had to go to work at the age of eight. Mintz reflects that during the depression, many children incurred feelings of stress and insecurity (2004). According to McCoy, “the result was the creation of a generation of disillusionment, one suspicious of individual worth and responsibility. When that generation commenced picking up the pieces, it would strive above all to gain security” (p. 178). Time Magazine indicated, “perhaps more than any of its predecessors, this generation wants a good secure job” (Anonymous 1, 1951, p. 46).

Veterans' desire for security has influenced their behavior in the workplace. In exchange for security, they pledged that they would be loyal to the organization that took
them (Light, 1988). El-Shamy joked that the Veterans, or as she called them traditionalists, were the ones that, “invented the one page resume” (El-Shamy, 2004, p. 242). El-Shamy also noted that when a veteran left a job, society viewed it as a sign of failure on the employee’s part (2004). The reflection of this need for security transcends into the training arena. Veterans value training because they see it as a way to become more effective in their job and greater perceived value to the organization, thus leading to a greater sense of job security (Marin, 2002). According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), Veterans are motivated to learn when it is in line with the business direction of the organization and is for the good of the organization. This stands to reason, considering that a strong company is less likely to have to lay off workers.

This value for training should not be taken lightly. According to the results of a study conducted by Lancaster and Stillman (2002), 48 percent of Veterans responded that training opportunities played a part in them staying in their job. Based on the assessment that there will be a shortage of skilled workers in the upcoming decades, organizations would be wise to not downplay the importance of training to the Veteran generation.

*The need for teamwork.* Veterans saw how teamwork could be instrumental in achieving success in large scale efforts, such as the new deal and World War II, and therefore still value teamwork today in the workplace (Strauss & Howe, 1991). A 1949 college graduate report indicated that this generation was “interested in the system rather than individual enterprise” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 279). One author framed Veteran’s sense of teamwork in saying that they realized that when they set aside their own needs, and work together as a team, they could do great things (El-Shamy, 2004). Time Magazine quoted a random Minneapolis woman referring to the Veteran generation,
“they think of themselves as individuals, but they really are not. They are parts of a
group. They are unhappy outside of a group. When they are alone, the are bored with
themselves. They have to be a crowd” (Anonymous 1, 1951, p. 47). Veteran’s value of
teamwork can be seen in the training arena, in that they enjoy class discussions (Brown
and Fritz, 1995), which is a form of team learning.

The need for experienced-based knowledge. According to Malcolm Knowles, one
characteristic of an adult learner is that they tie learning to past experience (1998). The
influence of upbringing on this adult learning characteristic is the quantity of experience
in itself. According to Ruch (2000), Veterans prefer trainers that value the experience that
Veteran’s have to offer. Ruch recommends tapping into that experience, which in turn not
only makes them feel valued, but also helps to pass on knowledge that might otherwise
be lost once they leave the organization. Adding to what Ruch stated, Zemke, Raines,
and Filipczak (1999) indicate that Veterans “prefer content to be anchored in precedent or
related to a tried and true practice” (p. 50). This preference for tried and true information
demonstrates that Veterans would rather learn information based from experience than
information not based from experience.

The value that Veterans place on experience influences their interaction with
real life examples that are hands on, as Veterans like to learn things that they can apply to
their job. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) also point of that some Veterans may feel
uncomfortable being training by a person in their twenties because the Veteran may
perceive the trainer as inexperienced. The authors indicate that it is important that young
trainers build a rapport with Veterans by acknowledging the wealth of experience that the Veteran may have.

Related to the need for an experienced trainer, Veterans also need a trainer that is cognizant of Veterans' preferred coaching style. Lancaster and Stillman (1980) indicate that the people of this generation either did not receive feedback or received it in a very harsh way when they first entered the workforce, and so they are not accustomed to it. Because they valued authority, the “top down boot camp style of coaching made sense” (p. 255). If a Veteran needs to be coached, it should be done with care (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999).

The need for conformity and cautiousness. As young adults, Veterans were questioned for their surprising amount of conformity. According to Time magazine, “youth today are waiting for the hand of fate to fall on its shoulders, meanwhile working fairly hard and saying almost nothing. The most startling fact about the younger generation is its silence” (Anonymous 1, 1951, p. 46). Later in the article the author writes, “today’s generation, either through fear, passivity or conviction, is ready to conform” (p. 46). Said one Veteran in response to an article written about her generation, We were shaped by a number of revolutions and maybe that's why we are so cautious. Remember, we were born at the beginning of the atomic age, and antibiotics; and the first group to use the pill; and the first to be acquainted with computers; and rock 'n' roll. (New York Times, 2000, p. 3.11).

Ruth Batson, and educational reformist commented on the 50’s in saying, “you didn't talk about things. If you did, you stood out” (McCabe, 1992, p. 25).
The cautiousness and conformity demonstrated by the Veteran generation remains consistent in the training room. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) state that this generation is least likely of all generations to object when they do not agree with something that you are training. In fact, the authors indicate, you will not even be able to tell that there was cognitive dissonance until the training evaluations come along, at which point the Veterans might then give you negative feedback. They recommend a way to get feedback before it is too late to make modifications by pulling a Veteran trainee aside on a break and asking them for feedback at that point. As long as they are not put on the spot they will give you feedback openly.

In addition to Veterans’ display of conformity, they also display cautiousness when volunteering information (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). To avoid complete silence from this generation, Lancaster and Stillman recommend getting the Veterans involved early, so that they feel comfortable early on and will then be more open for the duration of the training session. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999) recommend creating a training environment that is risk free and as free from stress as possible. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak take into account Veterans’ cautiousness by suggested creating opportunities for Veterans to build skills privately. According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002), this generation does not prefer playing games over traditional learning. Part of this might be because there is usually a clear winner and loser when playing a game, and Veterans do not like taking the risk of losing.

The need for safety and patience when teaching technology. Technology had the least impact on the Veteran generation’s upbringing when compared to the other three generations existing in the workplace. The main source of media for the silent generation
during childhood was news print and radio. The television was not introduced into an average income home until the 1950s. Prior to then, televisions were too expensive to afford. Most who did have a television could only watch three channels; ABC, NBC, and CBS (Castleman & Podrazik, 1982). It was not until 1972, when Service Electric offered the first pay-television station, that most Americans had more than three choices for television stations (Kansas State University, 2005). Beyond the television, Veterans did not experience a lot of technological innovation that affected their lifestyle.

Veterans’ limited exposure to technology is significant in understanding how this generation interacts with technology today. According to Tapscott (1999), traditional approaches to learning have been through books and sometimes television. Both of these methods of learning are considered linear, in that in using these methods one usually starts at the beginning and ends at the end. Because of this past learning experience, Veterans are comfortable learning in a linear fashion. Veterans were not raised with 300 television choices and a remote control to switch back and forth between channels. They were also not raised with the Internet, which allows for information to be obtained as needed. Because of this, Veterans prefer to obtain training materials that are in a logical sequence and in executive format. (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999).

In addition for Veterans’ need for linear training, they also need patience when being taught new technologies. Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak (1999) recommend that when training computer skills to Veterans, do not assume that they are unwilling and unable to learn anything related to the computer. Martin (2002) indicates that those trainers that teach Veterans in a safe environment where they do not feel embarrassed will be very successful in helping the Veterans to learn.
Connecting Baby Boomers Training Expectations to their Upbringing

Baby Boomers are the second oldest generation in the workplace, born approximately between 1946 and 1961. The Baby Boom generation is the most abundant generation existing in the workplace. The vast amount of Baby Boomers creates a need to understand their training preferences and the root of these training preferences.

The need for self-development. Baby Boomers received the message that they were a special generation, not only by their parents, but by society as well (Jones, 1980). Jones said, “children were the whole point. This generation of Americans enshrined them” (Jones, 1980, p. 47). In the early forties, there was concern over the low birth rate in many countries in the western hemisphere, including the United States. However, nine months after the world celebrated the victory of Japan there was a jump in births from 206, 387 births to 233, 452 births (Jones, 1980). The increase in births did not stop there. The birth rate continued to increase until 1962 when it finally leveled off (US Bureau of Census, 1964). Suddenly, “pregnancy was patriotic” (Jones, 1980, p. 11). As sociologist William Simon argues, “those who didn’t want children were an embarrassed and embattled minority. It was almost evidence of a physical or mental deficiency” (Light, 1988, p. 24). According to Russell (1982), the reason that the population boom continued for such an extensive period of time was because more women were getting married and those did get married had more children and had them earlier. Whether the reason for the Baby Boom was societal pressure, the influence of the depression and the war, or a combination of both, it is clear based on the literature that America cherished this generation.
Over the next two decades America coddled the Baby Boom generation. During this time the Boomer generation became known as the ‘me’ generation because of the attention they received due to their large numbers (Beck & Wade, 2004). According to Strauss and Howe,

Whatever age bracket boomers have occupied has been the cultural and spiritual focal point for American society as a whole. Through their childhood, America was child obsessed. In their youth, youth obsessed. In their yuppie phase, yuppie obsessed.

(Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 301)

The Baby Boomer generation was the first generation where marketing targeted children (Jones, 1980). Child toys such as skateboards and Hula Hoops were appearing as fast as they could be created (Jones, 1980). There were so many children and not enough schools or homes to accommodate them. Because of this shortage there was considerable growth and building. Thus, a majority of the Baby Boom generation had new textbooks, new schools, and new homes (Jones 1980). Americans went so far as to create entire child-friendly neighborhoods that are now known as suburbs (Jones, 1980). In fact, 27 percent of the population in these suburbs was under 14 years of age, versus the rest of the population in which only 21.6 percent was under 14 years of age (Fortune, 1953).

The fact that Baby Boomers were the center of attention during the formative years has affected their value on training and development. According to Jones (1980), “instead of improving society, the Baby Boomers were improving themselves.” (p. 259) In a study described by Jurkiewicz (2000), Baby Boomers ranked learning opportunities as a motivator higher than did Generation X. El-Shamy (2004) writes that many Baby
Boomers view training as, “a growth experience as much as a training experience” (p. 12).

The influence of a competitive upbringing. Competition has always been part of the Baby Boomers life. There was competition to get into private schools in urban settings (Brewer, 1959), to get into extracurricular activities (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), and to get into a good college. According to Holt (1966) this led those who did not succeed at getting into the best schools to the perception of not being good enough. The realization of the breadth of their generation and the resulting competitiveness hit hardest when the Baby Boomers started applying for colleges. There were only so many acceptances that colleges were issuing, which placed Baby Boomers in a high-stakes competition (Jones, 1980). One author reflected that getting into college was the most competitive as it has even been, and described the time before acceptance as winter ‘winter agony’ (Devree, 1957). Devree attributes this competitiveness to the population expansion and colleges lack of expansion to meet the demand. This sort of competition trickled down to children in elementary and high school as well. Holt (1966) asserted that, “long before they reach college, many children are putting in a 70-hour week or more” (p. 52).

Upon graduating from college, the competition for the Baby Boomers did not stop. As Jones (1980) describes,

There was a generation gap all right. But it was not between the young and old. It was between the many and the few. It was between the large generation of the boom, painfully swollen with its numbers and trying to find its place in the world and the small generation in power which was just as firmly resisting it. (p. 91)
Upon entering the workforce, Baby Boomers found that there were not enough jobs to go around. Jones attributed this shortage to the fact that in the forties and fifties, more babies were being made than jobs (Jones, 1980).

The competitive environment in which Baby Boomers were accustomed to affects the motivation for learning and the way in which they prefer to learn. Baby Boomers, according to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), are motivated to learn if they think that the competencies that they are gaining will help them rise above everyone else. Therefore it is important to highlight the skills and abilities that they will gain from attending the training. In general, according to a study done by Brown & Fritz (1995), “Baby Boomer students are generally more motivated, focused, and prepared than younger students” (p. 59).

The need to excel always influences the training environment when there are leadership figures in the training room. According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002), Baby Boomers are concerned about how they appear to leadership, and so if there are leadership figures present in the training room, Baby Boomers will be on their best behavior. Baby Boomers do not want to look like trouble makers in front of those that have the most influence in the organization in seeing them advance. Because Baby Boomers view disagreeing as misbehaving, Baby Boomers in this situation will not verbally disagree even if the Baby Boomer trainee does not agree with what is being trained. It is the trainer’s responsibility to create an environment where they feel comfortable disagreeing, even in the presence of leadership. Otherwise the Baby Boomer will concentrate so strongly on refraining from disagreeing, that the cognitive dissonance might block the Baby Boomer from learning anything.
Baby Boomers have demonstrated an over-concern for others' perceptions of them not only in terms of the agreeableness, but also in terms of their degree of seriousness. Baby Boomers believed that they were being judged about their effectiveness in their jobs by the seriousness in which they did them (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Of course, the evaluation of effectiveness was important in a competitive work environment. Resulting from their preoccupation with their image, and the equation that seriousness equals profession, Boomers tend to be serious and prefer not to play games in the training room (Juliano, 2004).

The need for socialization. The degree of socialization that Baby Boomers received at home and at school affected their training preferences. Kennedy (1996) writes that Baby Boomers were brought up differently than Generation X in that their parents stressed the importance of getting along well with others. Numerous books were written about how to raise children to become sociable, cooperative, and group conscious adults (Mintz, 2004). Parents began enrolling children in extracurricular activities such as Boy Scouts, whose enrollment increased from 766,635 in 1949 to 2.5 million a decade later (Mintz, 2004).

In addition to parents enforcing the importance of a socializing, children were encouraged to be social in the educational setting, both because of the crowding in schools and due to a trend in education. Crowding in schools was a serious concern for educators and parents during the 1950s. According to Reef (2002), the fifty thousand classrooms that were built in 1952 still did not provide enough room for the children entering kindergarten. Children had to share textbooks and classes were split into morning and afternoon shifts to try to make room for more children. In addition to school
crowding, there was a trend towards an increase in classroom discussion as a way of learning. According to Eaton (1966), classroom discussion as a teaching method was stressed because educators felt that it would get students more actively involved. All of these rearing and educational experiences have fostered Baby Boomers’ perception that getting along with others is important.

Baby Boomer’s social nature has carried over into workplace learning preferences. Baby Boomers enjoy classrooms where there are opportunities to form relationships and prefer to have opportunities for interaction, networking, and teamwork (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999). Boomers prefer traditional training over e-learning because they possess a need for personal contact (Kennedy, 1996).

**Boomers and technology.** Though Baby Boomers have had more exposure to technology than Veterans did, their experience was mainly limited to television. Baby Boomers were exposed to television to a larger extent during childhood than were Veterans. Between 1952 and 1959, the number of televisions in households increased from 15 million to 50 million (Reef, 2002). However, there were still only a few channel choices, thus limiting the amount of “channel surfing” (KSU, 2005). Baby Boomers are linear thinkers for the same reasons that Veterans are. All other forms of media, such as books and movies, also flow in a linear fashion from beginning to end. For this reason, Baby Boomers prefer a linear course flow (Juliano, 2004).

Baby Boomers’ limited exposure to television influenced the way in which they prefer to learn and interact with technology. Baby Boomers are comfortable with electronic communication (Zust, 2005). However, Boomers are not comfortable learning a new technology only by reading about it or experiencing it themselves. As a result, they
would rather have someone show them how to do it (Kennedy, 1996). For this reason, online computer courses are less likely to be effective for this generation.

*The need for openness and flexibility.* From birth, Baby Boomers have been raised to value, reflect, and express their feelings. In the works of Eda Leshan, a parent of a Baby Boomer, “we wanted our children to be inner directed” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 307). Part of the reason for this was because Veteran parents believed that authoritative homes led to communism. Instead of parents taking on the authoritative role, they were more democratic and kind (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The reflective nurturing that Baby Boomers received from this child-rearing style carried over into their adult years and into the training room. In the words of Strauss and Howe (1991), “they retain their taste for introspection and often wonder why bustling senior citizens never had it” (p48). Baby Boomers “learned to value personal growth, to share personal experience, and invite trainees to do the same” (El-Shamy, 2004, p. 12). Due to the nonauthoritative way in which Baby Boomers were raised, they do not like authoritative approaches to training (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999), nor do they like authoritative language (Martin, 2002). Zemke and colleagues indicate that Boomers prefer trainers that come across as equals. According to Zust, Baby Boomers prefer an open direct style of communication where the flexibility for many options is given (Zust, 2005). Martin (2002) indicates that Baby Boomers want flexibility and authority to try new ideas. Baby Boomers will not accept the top-down approach to authority that Veterans prefer, and thus training room management techniques need to be modified based on the age of the audience.
Connecting Generation X’s Training Expectations to their Upbringing

In referring to Generation X, Holtz indicated:

We are, perhaps more than any previous generation, a product of the societal trends of our times and of the times that immediately preceded us. The years in which we were born and raised – the sixties, seventies, and eighties – saw unprecedented changes in the political, social, and economic environment that, for the first time in American History, have made the future of society’s young members uncertain (Holtz, 1995, p. 1).

Generation X’s upbringing was different from previous generations, and it began at birth.

The new perception of children. The population drop that marked the end of the Baby Boom generation and the beginning of Generation X was reflective of the change in perception of the overall value of children. The drop in birth rates can be attributed to many things occurring simultaneously. The cost of raising a child was increasingly more expensive. According to Light (1988), from 1972 to 1987 the cost of diapers quadrupled, and the hospital charge for having a baby increased 233 percent. The actual expense of having children was confounded by the fact that Baby Boomers were having difficulty finding jobs and were also getting paid less relative to the previous generation. This was because of the large number of applicants in the job market (Welch, 1979). As a result, adults were putting off getting married and having kids to increase their relative standard of living prior to starting their family (Easterlin, 1980).

The obvious financial burden that children placed on a family reinforced the need for self-gratification that Baby Boomers possessed. According to Jones (1980), there was a time in the 1970’s that was considered an “orgy of self-gratification” (p.260). Jones
indicates that the reason for this was because Baby Boomers were trying to deal with their unfortunate circumstances. Baby Boomers became unsure about the rewards of becoming parents. Instead of family coming first, as it had in previous generations, family came after both self and marriage (Jones, 1980). Strauss and Howe (1991) emphasize that when surveyed in the 1960s, Americans rated having children as the number one way to gain happiness. This perception of the gateway to happiness changed drastically by the early eighties, when Americans rated owning a car higher more important than having children in terms of obtaining happiness (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Financial burden was not the only explanation for the drop in birth rates during the 1960s. The continuation of the drop in birth rates was influenced by authors such as Paul Ehrlich, who wrote *The Population Bomb* in 1968. In his book, Ehrlich described the potential growth in birth rate. Ehrlich argued that if the population doubled with less increment between each doubling, in 900 years there would be 60,000,000,000,000,000 people on the face of the earth. He then created a visual for that number by indicating that that equaled around 100 people per square unit of the earth’s surface. Ehrlich proposed that luxury taxes be placed on baby products, and parents who go without having children for a certain number of years receive prizes, while those who remain childless go in a lottery (Ehrlich, 1968).

In 1967, Price also wrote about the problems created by overpopulation. In the words of Price:

If people are willing to live in dormitory fashion and to get food from algae and other artificial sources, then the population of the United States can continue to increase for many years; but if people wish to live in single family houses, to eat fresh steak, fresh
vegetables, and apple pie, to go fishing and camping on vacation, to drive their own cars rather than use commercial transportation, and to have parks and open spaces, then the upper limit of the population is approaching rapidly (Price, 1967, p. 3).

The concern for overpopulation became so great that President Nixon formed the Commission on Population Control in the 70’s. The final commission report indicated that we would be considerably better off socially and economically if there were initiatives undertaken to foster the reduction in our population growth rate. The Commission recommended prevention measures such as funding for the education of effects of population growth, the availability of contraception for minors, liberalizing abortion laws, and removal of restrictions on voluntary sterilizations (United States, 1972).

As a result, society as a whole stopped seeing children as a positive addition to a family. President Nixon set the example in the devaluing of children. In 1971, an act made it through Congress that would provide childcare funding for children, but it was vetoed by Nixon (Morris, 1984). Society was in some ways, rejecting children, especially when it came to housing. According to Louv (1990), between 70 and 90 percent of new apartments did not permit children in the 70s and early 80s. Cities viewed children as menaces, with one economist indicating that children did not belong in the city because they caused an increase in crime and taxes.

Parents were affected by society’s belief that children were burdens. In the words of James Garbarino, president of Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development:
Decisions aren’t made on the basis of what is best for the child, but what can the child tolerate. With infants it is how soon can they go to day care so the parents can go to work. With 8-9 year olds it is how soon can they come home alone (Adler, 1994, p. 42).

As Adler (1994) compared the past view of childhood to the evolving view, “Once, they were the envy of the world...something precious has gone out of American culture, and we don’t know how to get it back” (p. 42).

*The need for autonomy.* The small frequency of parental contact that Generation Xer’s received was affected by their parents decrease in concern. There were more two income families and more parents getting divorced. A result of both trends was the overall need of Generation Xers to learn to take care of them selves. According to Jones (1980), almost fifty percent of mothers who have preschool age children work as compared to only twenty percent fifteen years earlier. According to Sommerville (1982), in 1982 one in four children came home to a house after school where an adult was not present.

Divorce has also contributed to the feeling that Generation X is often responsible for their own care. According to Strauss and Howe (1991), a child in the 80s faced twice the risk of parental divorce as a child in the sixties. As a result, divorced parents have less time and pay less attention to their children, reasoning that the adult response to divorce is to spend more time on themselves (Dafoe-Whitehead, 1993). According to Hall, (1995) parental contact has dropped by almost 50 percent from the sixties to the early eighties. This lack of parental contact and concern for the welfare of children created a generation of individuals who felt that the only person that could be relied upon was themselves.
The overall stress on self-reliance that members of Generation X have experienced has created a generation of independent workers (Caudron, 1998; Rapp, 1999; Murray, 1997). According to Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, and McKay (2000) and Carson (1986), Generation Xers prefer a work environment that allows them to be autonomous. This independence and need for autonomy has carried over into the classroom. Generation X learners want control over their own learning (Bova & Kroth, 2001). According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), Generation Xers prefer self-directed learning over classroom discussions.

*The value of training.* Generation X values training enough to work to modify training methods in order to make the training please them. Much of the reason why training is considered important in light of the upcoming skill labor shortage is because training is one of the only things that affect the retention of generation X employees. In the words of Olesen (1999), “this is probably the first time since World War II that training and human capital competence are the leverage” (p. 49). The view of job security is completely different today than it was twenty years ago. Generation X employees have seen many of their parents laid off, and never actually had the opportunity to experience job security themselves. Because of this, Generation Xers never view a job as permanent, but rather a place to build more skills (Filipczak, 1994). Lancaster and Stillman (2002) compare the perception of security among Baby Boomers and Veterans, and Generation Xers. Generation Xers prescribe to the belief that there is career security, but never job security, which is what Baby Boomers and Veterans believe. The main goal of an individual that prescribed to the belief of career security is to obtain marketable skills and experiences. In the words of Martin, Generation Xer’s anthem is, “jobs may come and
jobs may go, but my career belongs to me” (Martin, 2002, p. 31). Jurkiewicz (2000) comments that the only person that Generation X occupationally commits to is themselves.

Thus, Generation X has been described as a group of “corporate nomads”, staying in an organization only long enough to build the skills necessary to go on to the next job (Ansorian, Good, & Samuelson, 2003). Generation Xers think that moving from job to job is normal and beneficial as long as they keep learning (Bova & Kroth, 2001). In the words of Lancaster and Stillman (2002), “the goal is to get as many skills and experiences on the resume as possible, without looking like a complete flake” (p. 243). According to Nyhof (2000), “Generation X employees hold the belief that self-development, accountability, and marketable skills are the key to advancement. They may develop commitment to organizations supporting these concepts” (p. 8).

Filipczak describes a conversation with an MBA student at the University of Pennsylvania who indicated that “a company that offers new skills and good training will attract the best TwentySomethings and as long as the skills keep coming, may even retain them” (Filipczak, 1994, p. 27). Generation Xers actually seek out jobs that they feel have more learning opportunities (Caudron, 1998; Ruch, 2000; Bova & Kroth, 2001). Corley indicates that organizations that help Generation Xers expand their skills in this way will be likely to retain them longer (Corley, 1999). If companies fail to train Generation Xers, this generation is likely to look for a position in an organization that will (Caudron, 1998; Muchinick, 1996). In a generational survey conducted by Bridgeworks, Inc. 58% of Generation Xers indicated that training opportunity played a part in their decision to stay
with a company. In that same survey, 30% of Generation Xers indicated that they had left a job because of a lack of training opportunities (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

The degree to which Generation Xers value marketable skills has been linked to the income of their parents (Katchadorian & Boli, 1985). The authors examined variables that caused undergraduate college students to choose one academic path over another. They classified some students, those taking classes for the sake of learning, as intellectualists. The other group of students was considered careerists, or those taking classes for the sole purpose of preparing for a job. Katchadorian and Boli found that whether a student chose the careerist path or the intellectualist path was directly correlated to the income of their parents. Those who had parents with a higher income were more likely to chose the intellectualist path, while those that were raised in a low income family were more likely to chose the careerist path (Katchadorian & Boli, 1985). The influence of income on the value of marketable skills might explain why so many Generation Xers value training in the workplace. Considering the frequency of divorce that Generation Xers experienced (Strauss & Howe, 1991), and the fact that experts agree that one cause of poverty among the young is the dramatic rise in the number of single-parent families (Edwards, 1992), it stands to reason that more children were growing up with less money and therefore value building marketable skills more so than previous other generations.

A generation of skeptics. One trait of Generation X’s personality is that most are skeptical (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Rapp, 1999; Murray, 1997) and do not automatically respect people of authority (Molvig, 1993). Stewart (2002) went so far as to declare Generation Xer’s motto as “don’t trust anyone” (p. 23).
Lancaster and Stillman (2002) explain Generation X’s lack of trust as a result of every single major institution being called into question. Chester (2002) blames Generation X’s lack of trust on the influence of Baby Boomers, who also used to say that no one over thirty should be trusted. It is also possible that Generation X’s lack of trust and reverence for authority is due to the feeling that people in authority have generally failed them. As previously indicated, many parents were not in the home as often as children might have needed them to be. This created a feeling for Generation Xers were on their own (Sommerville, 1982).

The United States government is yet another institution of authority that might have caused Generation X to be skeptical of people of authority. The Watergate Scandal, for example has had a large impact on trust in American Government. According to an article in the Chicago Tribune, before the Watergate scandal, 70 percent of American’s expressed trust in the Federal Government. After the scandal unfolded and for decades after, less than 50% expressed that same trust. In the author of the article’s words, “This country will never return to the sunny innocence of the early 1960s. The skepticism, if not outright scorn, of government is now deeply ingrained. That is the main legacy of Richard Nixon and Watergate.” (Chicago Tribune, 2004, p. 8) Generation X children were surrounded by adults that expressed a distrust in government, influencing their own view of this authority figure.

The lack of trust and reverence for authority affects both the expectations of the trainer and the learner in the classroom. Generation Xers will not simply do something because someone of authority, such as a trainer, tells them to (Dunne, 2000). Zemke, Raines, and Filipezak (1999) caution readers that trainers should not expect to receive
immediate respect from Generation Xers simply because of the position that they hold. In order to gain respect, according to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (1999), a trainer should show trainees respect and integrity, which will eventually be returned. Dunne cautions trainers to stand firm to the rules and agenda that are set and model those behaviors that which are desired for Generation X to exhibit. Another indicator of Generation Xs lack of reverence for people in authority is the need to know the reason for every required action. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) recommend spending extra time going over the reasons behind the learning, mainly to demonstrate what is in it for the Generation X learner and how it will contribute to their career.

*Generation X and emotions.* According to Murray (1997), Generation Xers prefer looking for concrete information over looking within to analyze emotions. Filipczak (1994) explains Generation X’s dislike for introspection as a result of the many parents that encouraged them to talk about their feelings and also sent them to psychologists. The result of this emphasis on expressing one’s feelings has actually been the opposite as one might expect; the repression of emotions (Kerr & Gascogne, 1996; Cannon, 1991).

*Connecting Millennial’s Training Expectations to their Upbringing*

Millennials are the youngest generation in the workplace, born beginning in 1978. The Millennial generation has been most influenced by technology and the shift in the view that children were once again something to be cherished. Millennials have a generational advantage, because, like a younger sibling, they have had the influences of a great diversity of generational personalities. According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002) It’s as if the traditionalists have given the Millennials a dose of their loyalty and faith in institutions, boomers have given them the confidence to be optimistic about their
ability to make things happen, and Xers have given them just enough skepticism to be cautious (p. 29).

**Millennial child-rearing.** Strauss and Howe (2000) describe the Millennial generation as, “the most watched over generation in memory” (p. 9). Multiple authors have noted the protective bubble within which the Millennial Generation was raised (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Strauss and Howe (1991) place the start of protectiveness in the 1980s, illustrated by the sheer volume of books written regarding issues relating to children. Such child-rearing books continue to hold a dominant place in the market. Looking on Amazon.Com, some examples of those books include *The Psychological Effects of War and Violence on Children* by Lewis Leavitt, and *Fearless Parenting for the New Millennium Protect your Children from What Parents Fear the Most: Terrorism, School Violence, Sexual Exploitation, Abduction, and Kidnapping* by Helen Boehm.

With the intention of being protective of their children, parents have instead over-supervised and micromanaged their children. This creates two implications when training Millennials. The first is that Millennials have a desire to be autonomous because they have been over-protected their entire lives. However, their desire for autonomy is crippled by their lack of time management skills due to the over-structuring of their childhood (Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Millennial’s acknowledgement that they lack these skills is evidenced in their preference for training to be structured (Oblinger, 2003; Zemke, Raines, & Filipeczak, 1999).

Another Millennial characteristic is that they are a team-oriented generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Zemke, Raines, and Filipeczak, 1999; Tulgan & Martin, 2001;
Oblinger, 2003). Howe and Strauss (2000) found that Millennials would much rather spend time in a group than alone. They attribute Millennials’ desire to be within a group to their schools’ effort in stressing citizenship and group skills. Tulgan and Martin (2001) compared the team dynamic of a group of Generation Xers and Millennials, indicating that Millennials enjoy the synergy of groups, working as equals, whereas Xers like to divide and conquer. To accommodate Millennials’ preference for working in groups, Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak (1999) recommend combining teamwork with individual learning by encouraging a collaborative learning environment where faster learners help slower learners complete tasks.

*Millennials and respect.* Like Generation X, Millennials do not grant automatic respect and trust to leaders (Chester, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2001), but for partially different reasons than Generation X. This lack of automatic respect is glaringly obvious in Millennials’ lack of hesitation to speak bluntly to anyone, regardless of their position (Chester, 2002). Similar to Generation X, Millennials have experienced their share of promises and disappointments that have tainted them (Chester, 2002). According to Chester (2002), “They come into the workplace wary and wise, with a giant B.S detector glued to their foreheads, and they are capable of sniffing out any crapola that comes within a 12 foot radius” (p. 40). Chester blames this on downsizing, false advertising, dishonest government officials, and American idols turned murderers.

The reason behind their lack of veneration does not stop there. The Millennial generation has been the center of attention for parents, educators, and marketers alike for many generations (Chester, 2002). According to Chester (2002), this generation “craves respect and will go to great lengths to get it” (p. 45). Millennials see giving respect and
losing one’s own respect as simultaneous events, so they are hesitant to give it. Millennials feel that in order to give someone respect, they have to become less dominant, therefore compromising their own level of respect (Chester, 2002).

The way that this lack of trust and respect for authority and experience surfaces in the training room is through the extreme need to know why, and the unwillingness to follow advice (Chester, 2002). Eric Chester, an owner of a Generation Why consulting firm, actually named this generation after their incessant need to know why. In Chester’s (2002) words, “it’s as if every person born after 1980 was surgically implanted with a little microchip in their forehead that filters out all information and every command that doesn’t come pre-bundled with an acceptable rational. This is Generation Why” (p. 24). According to Chester, if they are not verbally asking why, they are most certainly thinking it. Different from Chester, Tulgan & Martin (2001) blame Millennial’s need to know why on the fact that technology has provided them so many options for completing a task, that they constantly think that there must be another way of doing something. Millennials do not want to discard the possibility for other viable solutions.

Millennials value training. Millennials value training enough to put the effort into altering training methods (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Chester, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2003). According to Lancaster and Stillman (2001) and Tulgan and Martin (2001), child-rearing has influenced Millennials being cognizant of the value of attractive learning portfolios in securing good jobs. In the words of Lancaster and Stillman (2001), “Millennials are poised to become the first true generation of lifetime learners, and the companies that will succeed with this generation will be the ones who just keep on teaching.” (p. 281) According to Tulgan and Martin (2001), “Organizations that can’t or
won’t customize training, career paths, incentives, and work responsibilities need a wake up call.” (p. 8)

**Impacts of Technology on Generation X and Millennials**

Television, computers, and the internet have played an important role in shaping the way that Generation X and Millennials prefer to receive information.

The effects of television on Generation X and Millennials. Technology has played a large part in the way that Generation Xers and Millennials think and prefer to learn. One such form of technology that has affected them is television. According to Schwarz (1982), the average child between the ages of 10 and 15 watches approximately 23 hours of television per week. According to the U.S. Department of Mental Health, by the age of four, 50% of a child’s time is spent watching television (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1982). Multiple channels on television enabled children of this generation to switch from one channel to another, something so popular that it was given a name: channel surfing (Tapscott, 1999). One author stated, “by the time a child finishes high school, he [sic] will have spent 18,000 hours with the ‘TV Curriculum’ and only 12,000 hours with the school curriculum” (Moody, 1980 p. 5).

Peter Sacks, a professor of journalism described the effects of television stating:

Kids who have grown up with the television as an integral part of their lives are much less tolerant of boredom than children were in my day. The evolution of television in our society changed the way we receive information. Not only did television increase the speed with which we could access information, but it also made the presentation of that information more visual and thus more interesting. That quickly spread to
newspapers and magazines, which became more colorful and graphically (Sacks, 1996 p. 6).

Boredom, in the colorful words of Chester (2002), “is the archenemy of the more than 60 million, type A ++, why-wait, stimulus junkie, multi-tasker” Millennials (p. 119).

One of Sacks’ colleagues at the same university commented that “the T.V. Generation [Generation X and Millennials] expect to be entertained. With an attention span that is equal to the material between commercials, that is not surprising” (Sacks, 1996 p. 74). Sacks (1996) conducted a qualitative survey with 150 students, inquiring about what qualities in the instructor were important to them. Sacks found that 41 percent of respondents indicated that entertaining was the number one quality. Sacks, who used to take offense to the seeming disinterest of his students eventually determined that he was a good teacher. He reconciled their disinterest by indicating that Generation X was used to being entertained while learning, through Sesame Street and other educational programs, and this was the reason that the students appeared disengaged. Other educators also agree that the effects of Sesame Street and similar programs have created a new generation of learners, one where teachers have to ‘compete with high impact sound bites’ (Surette, 1996 p. 19). According to Hay (2000) and Caudron (1997), Generation Xers have come to expect entertaining education.

In addition to television affecting Generation Xer’s definition of education, television has also shortened the attention span of viewers. Filipczak (1994) describes a conversation with Karen Tracy, a management development specialist for Wendy’s. Tracy calls this generation the MTV generation, and suggests that videos be limited to 15 minutes due to their short attention span.
Caudron (1998) recognizes that much of the training created by Baby Boomers fails to hold the attention of Generation Xers because Baby Boomers don’t require the pace to be as quick as Generation Xers do. To assist Baby Boomers in creating faster-paced training session, Dunne (2000) recommends breaking up the training session, moving from one topic to another fairly quickly. Salopek (2000) was interested in relating to Generation Xers, and interviewed Bradley Richardson, the founder of a consulting firm that teaches companies how to relate to Generation Xers. Richardson explained Generation Xers need for a fast paced training environment by saying, “on TV you have a change of scenery every 20 seconds. Trainers need to change their delivery, message, or activity every 8, 10, or 15 minutes maximum” (p. 29).

Cannon (1991) explains Generation X and Millennials need for stimulation as a craving for excitement. In the words of Lancaster and Stillman (2002), “this probably comes as no surprise, but many among the younger generations assume that if the overhead is being plugged in, then the content about to be shown is as old as the machine projecting it” (p. 285). To fight this boring overhead syndrome, students prefer using technology to foster learning (El-Shamy, 2004).

The effects of computers on Generation X and Millennials. The use of computers has revolutionized the way that Generation Xers and Millennials learn. Oblinger (2003) cites a study that found that 96% of students age 12-17 use the web for homework. Taylor (2002) indicates that the according to the finding of a recent study, 41% of respondents x aged 9-17 indicated that the internet was the first place they look for information required for homework, followed by only 19% who refer to the library first. Supporting Taylor’s findings, Tulgan and Martin (2001) recognize that younger
generations are able to gain information quickly, demonstrating proficiency for maneuvering through the Internet at or above their elder generation’s ability to maneuver through a card catalog at a library.

Due to the widespread use of the Internet and the speed at which users can obtain only the information that is needed, the way in which individuals prefer to receive information is changing. One result of the Internet is the need for immediate information. According to Brown and Fritz (1995), “videotapes and CDs work best for busters because they want to be able to fast forward through anything that they don’t want to listen to” (p. 54). Another result is the amount of information that individuals are willing to take in at once. Brown, Lemaster, and Swisher (2001) indicate that Generation Xers like information that is “chunked into sound and video bites” because of computer technology. Hay (2000) expresses that generations growing up in the computer age are much less likely to be willing to memorize a lot of information because they can just as easily go on the Internet and obtain the information on an as-needed basis.

Another result of the availability of the Internet is that over the last twenty years, schools have moved towards discovery-based instruction (El-Shamy, 2004). Because of this experience, trainees do not want to be told about something, they want to be given the resources to find out for themselves (El-Shamy, 2004). El-Shamy recommends a training design in which a problem is presented and resources of various mediums are provided to assist the trainee in solving that problem. El-Shamy also recommends having extra resources available in the event that the Generation X or Millennial trainee wants to know more. Bova and Kroth (2001) suggest that in order to motivate younger learners, help them to create their own learning environments.
The effects of video games on Generation X and Millennials. The last technology that has affected Generation X and Millennials’ learning preferences is video games. Chester (2002), demonstrating how popular video games have become, wrote in a newsletter that a recent video game release, *Halo 2*, generated $9 million more in revenue than the recent movie release of *Spiderman 2*. Also according to Chester, 92% of kids surveyed by the National Institute of Media and Family have regular access to video games. Video games have had considerable impact in many ways, one being that Generation X and Millennials have become parallel thinkers. Strauss and Howe (2000) indicate that parallel thinking is the ability to do many things at once, and in no particular order. Bova and Kroth (2001) also acknowledge a learner’s ability to think in a parallel fashion. According to Beck and Wade (2004):

Games might have trained a whole generation to multitask a little more easily, or to routinize tasks the rest of us have to actually think about. Certainly they have created a taste for being immersed in data, being forced to perform rapid task switching.

..many games are all about fighting off two or three foes at once (p. 88).

Indeed, many authors describe multitasking as a way of life for the younger generations (Oblinger, 2003; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Chester, 2002; Beck & Wade, 2004; Filipezak, 1994). According to William Winn, head of a learning center at the University of Washington, being exposed to games as children have created adults that think and process information in way that is parallel instead of sequential (Prensky, 2001). This ability to move from task to task and sometimes perform them simultaneously has fostered Generation X and Millennials’ desire for training that is less linear.
El-Shamy (2004) recommends ten ways to make training less linear through giving trainees choices on how to get to the learning destination. Some of El-Shamy’s suggestions conducting simultaneous events in which the learner gets to choose which activities to participate in, offering material in printed and electronic form, allowing presentations to be in any format, acknowledging that some learners can do more than one thing at once and allowing them to do so, designing board games that have different routes that can be taken, and designing physical activities where participants have a variety of options, and creating training modules that can be done in any order so that the participant can choose their own order. Similar to El-Shamy’s thoughts, Caudron (1997; 1998) indicates that Generation Xers do not like to focus on techniques, but instead the end result. They do not want to be told how to do something, but instead what they have to do. Similarly, Zust (2005) recommends allowing Millennials to explore their own paths to get to a particular learning destination.

Another way in which video games have influenced learners of Generation X and Millennial generation is that they prefer interactivity and stimulation (Kerr & Gasciogne, 1996; Caudron, 1998; Cannon, 1991; Bova & Kroth, 2001; Sims & Sims; 1995, Salopek, 2000; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). In the words of a Vice President of training at Pencom, “those people grow up with Sonic the Hedgehog and Atari, so training has to be action grabbing” (Caudron, 1997). Salopek (2000), agreeing with the importance of interactivity, describe the consequence of training that is not interactive by indicating that Generation Xers become “remote”.

Generation Xers and Millennials are cognizant of their need for interactivity in learning situations, demonstrated through multiple surveys distributed to Generation X
and Millennial learners (Mallett, Reinki, & Nich, 2002; El-Shamy, 2004). For example, a study done by NIOSH researchers found that the top two methods of training picked by Generation X and Millennials for coal mining training were hands-on (42.9%) and practice at the worksite (41.7%). When asked about the best method for learning something new, regardless of their learning preference, 61.9% indicated that hands-on was the best method (Mallett, Reinki, & Nich, 2002). In another survey, El-Shamy (2004) asked younger individuals about which educational settings they preferred. One of the most common responses was a training class that was interactive.

Based on the need for interactivity, multiple authors have recommended training approaches that foster such engagement. El-Shamy (2004) recommends the use of games and activities to increase interactivity, including board games, card games, flip chart games, and paper games. Another approach that El-Shamy recommends is giving learners raw data, of which they have to make their own meaning. Similar to El-Shamy, Seffrin (1990) suggests activities such as learning stations, cooperative learning, and peer teaching as ways to make the learner more engaged. According to Chester (2002), the Millennial generation specifically is addicted to sensory stimulation. Chester (2002) also gives recommendations for making training more interactive, stating,

Pure and simple, if they are not involved, they are not learning. Although they may pretend to be learning, they aren’t. They have an innate desire to be actively involved in their learning and they are too multi-sensory to absorb much information from lecture only based education. If they can’t be the pilot, at least let them be the copilot (p. 880).
He cautions trainers not to over-use one approach or to rely too much on lecture based instruction. Chester suggests delivery methods such as interactive CD Roms, web-based learning, PowerPoint presentations, and professionally developed videos (Chester, 2002).

The desire to learn interactively can also be seen in Generation X and Millennial’s preference to learn through trial and error (Beck & Wade, 2004). As described by Oblinger, “learning more closely resembles Nintendo than logic. Nintendo symbolizes a trial and error approach to solving problems. This contrasts with previous generations’ more logical-rule based approach to solving problems” (2003, p. 40). One way to foster a trial and error approach is to focus on the end outcome and not the path taken to get there to (Bova & Kroth, 2001). Another form of trial and error training is action learning, where trainees are charged with solving a real work problem and in the process, learn something. According to Bova and Kroth (2001), action learning is based on the belief that in order to learn something, one must do it. Beaty, Borner, and Frost (1993) explain that Generation Xers like action learning because, among other things, it entails taking action instead of simply setting a plan for action. Another training preference that Generation Xers and Millennials exhibit that may stem from the need for interaction is role play (Dunne, 2000). According to Zemke, Raines, and Filipeczak (1999), Generation Xers are not afraid of role play as some older generations are because they are not afraid of the ramifications of being wrong.

Yet another effect of video games on Generation X and the Millennial generation is the need for immediate feedback, which video games provide. When an individual plays a video game, he/she always knows his/her score, and knows when he/she makes a mistake because the video game character dies. Lancaster and Stillman (2002), through
their Bridgeworks 2001 Generational survey, report that after completing a project, 90 percent of Generation Xers wanted immediate feedback no later than a few days. Caudron (1998) blames the need for immediate feedback on other technologies such as microwave ovens and pagers. Caudron indicates, “similar devices have conditioned them to believe they can have what they want, when they want it” (p. 175).

In the words of Beck and Wade (2004):

Today younger people expect us to spout ‘pearls of wisdom’ but they’re impatient when we try to train them. I have to realize that they’ve gotten it long before I think they have. They don’t want the “story”; they want to know the bottom line: how do you do it (p. 16)?

Not only do videogames provide for immediate feedback, but they are also very fast-paced. A possible consequence of this is that younger learners prefer training that is fast-paced (El-Shamy, 2004; Salopek, 2000; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Speed, not patience, is their virtue (Chester, 2002). Chester frames their need for speed by saying, “their mental diet consists of an endless stream of visual, auditory, and sensory stimulation where everything moves at the speed of light” (Chester, 2002 p. 26). Paul Steinberger, a training and compliance project manager at American Transmission illustrates Generation X and Millennial’s impatient nature indicating, “when you have an older individual working with a younger one, you do notice there’s a frustration on the part of the young person - ‘c’mon, get it moving, get through what you want to say, just tell me what I need to know, I don’t want to hear any of the old stories” (Juliano, 2004, p. 84). El-Shamy (2004), in response to the demand for fast-paced training recommends starting not with the agenda, but by diving right into an activity and getting them moving.
El-Shamy indicates that the agenda and other housekeeping items can either be addressed later, or can be posted in the room for quick reference. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) compare the need for speed of Generation Xers with that of Millennials, indicating that Millennials require an even more fast-paced learning environment because of their extreme multi-tasking ability.

The last characteristic of Generation Xers and Millennials that could possibly be attributed to the constant use of video games as children is the desire for training to be fun. Many authors have recognized that the younger generations demand upbeat, fun training (Larson, 2001; Hessen, Lewis, & Asce, 2001; Martin, 2001; Caudron, 1998; Molvig, 1993; Salopek, 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Hessen, Lewis, and Asce (2001) blame Generation Xers and Millennial’s desire for fun on parental influence. Hessen and colleagues illustrate how these generations saw their parents go to work miserable and vowed not to work like that. Chester (2002) provides insight into why members of the Millennial generation check out if learning is not fun. In Chester’s words, “In their modified version of the declaration of independence, it’s not the pursuit of happiness but happiness itself that is their unalienable right” (p. 87).

Chester postulates that the need for fun results from either a deprivation or an overindulgence of fun as children. Chester goes on to note the pointed absence of playing under street lights on summer nights, mainly due to a, “a steady diet of action figures, movie rentals, Nintendo, and computer games” (p. 143). Chester, leaning towards his first inclination of deprivation indicates, “the things that you don’t get in your childhood can become a driving force behind how you live your adult life” (p. 143). Whichever reason
one chooses to attribute Generation X and Millennial’s need for fun, the fact remains that
the training that is exclusively serious will fail to hold their attention.

To inject more fun into the classroom, Chester (2002) recommends the use of
games, which also appeal to the competitiveness of Millennials. In terms of lecturing,
some authors have recommended limiting or eliminating lecturing to hold Generation X’s
and the Millennial’s interest (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; El-Shamy, 2004; Kerr &
instruction, indicating that if you are talking about something for more than ten minutes,
that you need to find a different way of delivering the information. Lancaster and
Stillman (2002) point out, “While lectures are critical for disseminating information, too
much lecturing will only disintegrate it” (p. 288). Dunne (2001) recommends that trainers
should allow learners to joke around in training, just as long as the trainer remains in
control.
Chapter 3

The literature regarding generational training preferences paints a considerably different picture of training needs for each generation. Going forward, the challenge for trainers that see the importance of using training as "value proposition" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) will be meeting the needs of all generations in a multi-generational training class. Designing a training class that employs independent learning would likely make many Veterans uncomfortable. On the other hand, creating a class that gives Veterans the structure that they need would likely leave Generation Xers and Millennials feeling disengaged. The optimum design would be one in which there are options for both independent and guided learning that is both generic at times while tailored to generationally-specific needs at other times.

Strengths of Current Research

The first strength of this project is that a clear connection was identified between past learning and upbringing experience that is specific to different generations and training preferences. This finding not only assists in training the current workforce, but will facilitate predictions of workforce training preferences of future generations.

The second strength of this project is that in light of the fact that there are many differences in training preferences, similarities in training preference across generations have also been established. This is a strength because these similarities provide a foundation that trainers can utilize when training multigenerational classes.

The third strength of this project is that the foundation for an understanding of the reasons behind various training preferences have been established. Although it remains
difficult to relate to a coworker of a different generation, this project assists the reader in identifying with their generational experience and training preferences.

Limitations of Current Research

This literature review was subject to limitations that, if not imposed, might have altered the findings of the analysis. The first limitation is that because the nature of a literature review is to review existing literature, views reflected by the authors may have been biased based on their own membership in a particular generation. In the book *Welcome to the Jungle* for example, a Generation Xers defends his own generation. His rationalizations of Generation X’s behaviors are merely his opinion. These opinions may have biased his writing, which would in turn bias the finding of the literature review.

Another limitation of this study is that it causes the reader to make the assumption that all members of each generation prefer the exact same type of learning, and does not recognize individual learning styles. Though it is true that members of each generation demonstrate similarities, it is not indicative of how every member of each generation will prefer training. However, the focus of this paper was on tendencies that are typical across members of one generation. Regardless, I recognize that there are individual differences as well.

Opportunities for Future Research

Although there is an extensive amount of anecdotal literature regarding training preferences for Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, there is no empirical evidence that suggests that employing one method of training over another actually leads to an increase in training satisfaction or subsequent learning. A possible
study that could be conducted moving forward would be to tailor training delivery to each generation, measure participants training satisfaction, and then compare it to a control training group who did not receive any generationally-individualized training.

An example of the methodology that could be used to empirically measure the effect of altering training methodology based on generational preferences would be five separate training classes, one for each of the four generations and also a control group. The content trained would be identical, but the methodology used to deliver the information would be different. For the Veteran training class, the trainer would deliver traditional classroom training consisting of a lecture, providing little room for interaction. For the Baby Boomer training class, the trainer would deliver lecture-based training, but would allow for group interaction. For the Generation X training class, the trainer would offer computer-based training in replacement of the traditional classroom training. For the Millennial Generation, the trainer would offer both computer-based training and traditional training, and allow them to choose which to complete.

Implications for Future Training

Trainers are faced with a challenge if their desire is to increase training satisfaction by tailoring training to each generation’s preference. Rarely will a trainer have the ease of a unigenerational training class, whereby he/she can address only one generation of preferences. More likely, a trainer will have to remain aware of each generation’s training needs and provide a balance that will appeal to all generations. The following chart (Table 1) displays various training activities, and how one might alter these activities to meet the needs of each generation.
Table 1. Training Characteristics of each Generation and Strategies to Satisfy all Generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
<th>Combined Training Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefer structured,</td>
<td>Prefer lecture, but with the opportunity to interact with each other</td>
<td>Prefer nonstructured, self-directed learning.</td>
<td>Prefer structured training with opportunities for interaction with each other and information.</td>
<td>Modify delivery so that Generation Xers can learn autonomously. In addition, allow for the option of group work, but do not mandate it, so that Generation Xers do not feel as though they have to work in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Combined Training Technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value authority and look for demonstrati on of authority early in training session</td>
<td>Prefer non-authoritative trainers, but need rules to stay on track</td>
<td>Respect authority and see the value of rules</td>
<td></td>
<td>Set the ground rules to make the Veterans feel comfortable. After ground rules are set, find a balance between being authoritative and too easy going. Interactive with Generation Xers and Baby Boomers are peers, but keep your interactions with Veterans more formal. Millennials can adapt to either style of authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfortable asking</td>
<td>Hesitant to questions, especially ask questions when they will lead to self-directive discovery. without question.</td>
<td>Skeptical, and so will question the need to do things.</td>
<td>Open to asking questions, particularly the question “why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Combined Training Technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some are comfortable with using technology, when learning new technologies, comfortable with technology need to be and prefer self directed training delivery as a means for learning technologies.</td>
<td>Offer options for learning with or without technology.</td>
<td>El-Shamy (2004) recommends placing the training program on disc, so that Generation Xers and Millennials can refer to it later. Provide the option for traditional training with little technological involvement for those not as comfortable with technology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use of Technology**

- Not and shown and not need to feel just told how to do it. to be willing to learn how to use it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
<th>Combined Training Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linear learners</td>
<td>Linear learners who prefer to receive multiple pieces of information in order</td>
<td>Nonlinear learners who prefer to receive multiple pieces of information in chucks that are not necessarily in order.</td>
<td>Nonlinear learners who prefer to receive information in chucks that are not necessarily in order.</td>
<td>In addition to traditional training, address non linear learners' needs by offering e-learning courses. Also, offer extra reading materials and various methods to gain the needed information, outline the desired outcome, and allow learners to chose their path. In addition, accept that nonlinear learners have the ability to multitask, and do not become offended when they do so while training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention Span</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Short attention</td>
<td>Shortest attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Combined Training Technique</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to entertain</td>
<td>Do not expect to be entertained</td>
<td>Expect to be entertained</td>
<td>Expect to be entertained</td>
<td>Use humor and games but offer alternate learning activities for those that do not want to participate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

"Is it possible to paint a portrait of an entire generation? Each generation has a million faces and a million voices. What the voices say is not necessarily what the generation believes. Its motives and desires are often hidden. It is a medley of good and evil, promise and threat, hope and despair. Like a straggling army, it has no clear beginning or end. And yet each generation has some features that are more significant than others; each has a quality as distinctive as a man’s accent, each makes a statement to the future, each leaves behind a picture of itself’ (Anonymous 1, 1951, p. 46).

The identification of these generational features can help to identify training preferences, and therefore is important to the perception of training satisfaction. This is because identifying trends in training preference within each generation enables trainers to design training in a way that will satisfy a larger number of participants. The most important thing that a trainer can do is be cognizant of these differences and make an
effort to accommodate them and modify training delivery accordingly.
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Footnotes

1. I recognize that although Peter Sacks explains his student disengagement due to the entertaining nature of educational television, it may also be due to Sacks’ inability to teach.