



Five Generations at Work: Higher Ed Success Stories and Innovation

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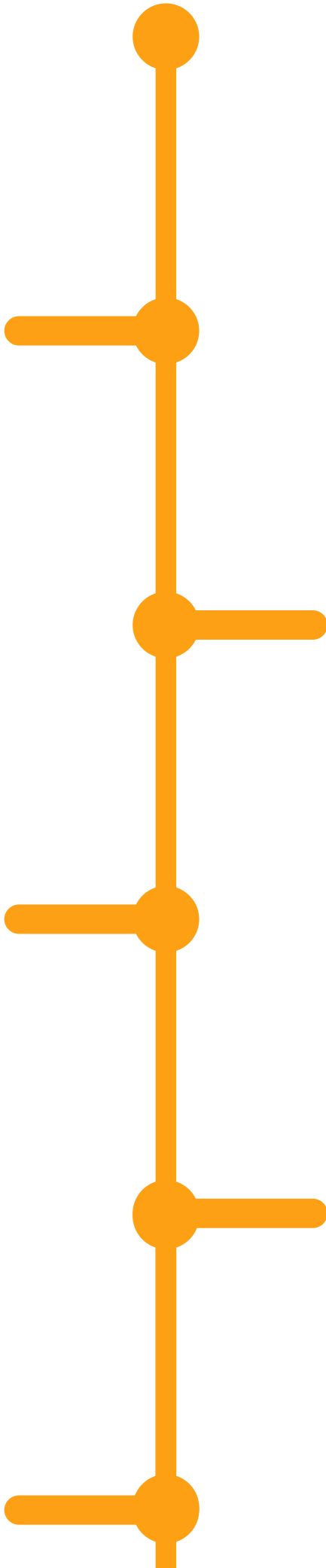
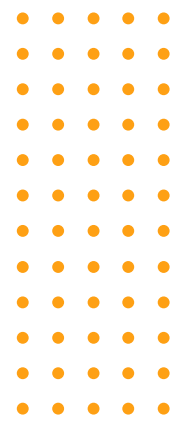


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Executive Summary

Higher education has traditionally been a landscape where the shifting values of incoming generations of students have contrasted with the staid traditions of older administration officials and faculty. Today, with five living generations in the American workforce for the first time in our history, those generational clashes aren't reserved for faculty and students. The differences between generations are being felt within the ranks of higher ed workplaces.

For some higher ed leaders, this shift may feel like more of an explanation for some of the turmoil in their departments rather than a revelation of a new development. Many leaders are already feeling the effects of multi-generational staffs where clashes are becoming more common over technology tools, communication, continuity planning, social preferences, salaries, benefits, promotions, and job training.

While Generational diversity may be viewed as a challenge, there are success stories and data-driven methodologies for higher education officials to use as guideposts to enhance innovation, build more successful teams, and hedge against the demographic cliff and other coming challenges. With the current U.S. workforce gap, employers must strategize around opportunities to upskill and retain workers as well as improve workplace culture to build trust, or face even more uphill battles.



Alongside these challenges comes an unprecedented opportunity to ignite innovation through embracing generational diversity. "With six living generations in the U.S. and five in the workplace, the need to embrace change is now," states Marcie Glenn, CEO of Another Source.

In this document, we'll look at what the data shows about the composition and driving motivations of the five generations that comprise America's higher ed workforce. We'll speak directly to higher ed leaders who have identified rising challenges in their own multi-generational workforce and learn what they're doing to address attrition and budget shortfalls while driving engagement and strengthening their unique cultures.

In particular, we'll look at an in-depth case study of a pilot program that may provide a template for higher ed leaders facing their own cross-generational challenges. Finally, we'll close with road-tested recommendations for higher ed executives looking to bridge the multi-generational gaps in pursuit of innovation and ensuring their institution is prepared to meet the coming demographic cliff and other challenges the future holds.

Trust in America's higher ed institutions of learning is also facing its own cliff. According to a 2022 survey, only 41% of Generation Z adults (those born between 1997 to 2012) said they would put trust in American colleges. That's a 14-point drop when compared to Baby Boomers, who rated trust in higher ed more highly.¹

41%

of Gen Z Adults put trust in American colleges.

For higher-ed teams grappling with this generational drop in trust, opening a conversation with younger members of the workforce may be the opportune place to start. Looking for answers from team members of younger generations may unlock innovative solutions to addressing the trust gap, particularly through social media. Millennials and Gen Z speak the language of social media fluently. They understand many of these issues firsthand and how to communicate with their generational cohort.

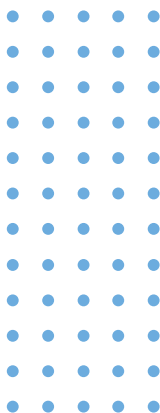
Seeking out these kinds of strengths inherent in different generations — instead of looking at their perceived differences as weaknesses and problems to be solved — may be the key differentiator between institutions on the path to future-proofing their success and those who fall behind.

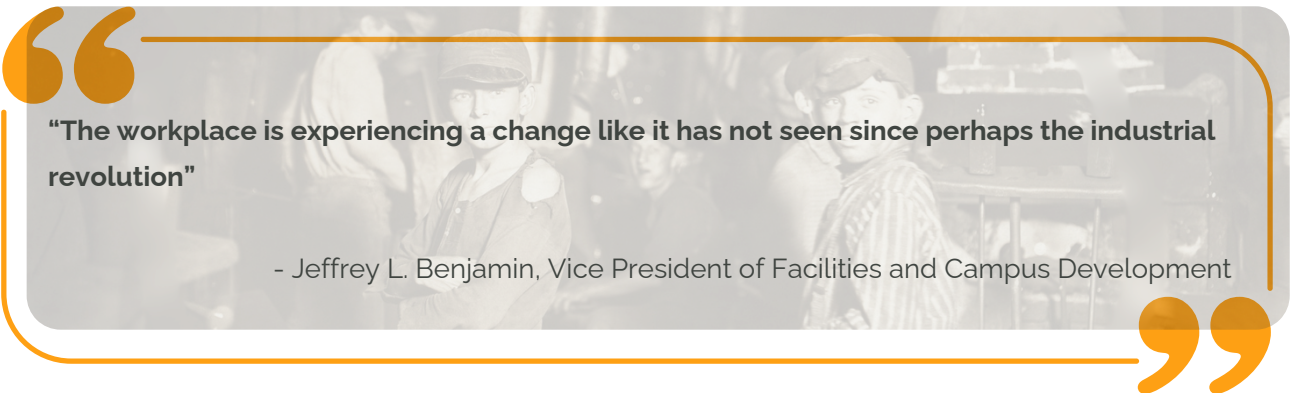
Intro

The Five Generation Workplace Is a Perfect Storm of Events

For the first time in history, five generations are working together in America's institutions of higher education. A once-in-a-lifetime set of circumstances is aligning to create unprecedented change in the generational composition of America's higher ed faculties and administrations, and there's no end in sight. Researchers are already looking to the coming Generation Alpha (born 2010-2024) entering the workforce in four to eight years, which would bring the total to six generations. At the same time, a larger number of older Americans are continuing to age with a new vitality and fresh expectations for their later years.

Understanding the evolving behaviors of these generations is the key to attracting and engaging a multi-generational workforce.





“The workplace is experiencing a change like it has not seen since perhaps the industrial revolution”

- Jeffrey L. Benjamin, Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development

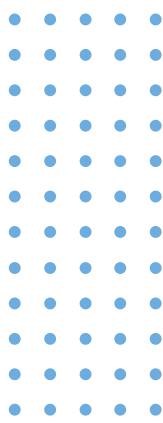
The workplace is experiencing a change like it has not seen since perhaps the industrial revolution,” says Jeffrey L. Benjamin, PE, CEFP, Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development, University of Georgia. Faced with this dramatic pace of change, Benjamin has viewed the challenge as a rare opportunity to take a creative approach to rebuilding UGA teams stronger than before Covid, and more able to take on future challenges. “We were able to revamp hiring processes and practices that we would most certainly not been able to do five years ago,” explains Benjamin.

The U.S. Faces A Major Talent Gap

Conflicts between intergenerational teams may be due to a number of factors, such as communication styles, perceived benefits, and technology. Disagreements among coworkers reliably leads to lower engagement at work, and lower engagement leads to resignations. The potential increase in conflict among higher-ed workforces may be on the rise without interventions, and the resulting loss of employees could not come at a more inopportune time. According to the May 2024 report form the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, there are some 8 million open jobs waiting to be filled.² Yet only 6 million unemployed workers searching for jobs.³

People Are Living Longer

The U.S. has an aging population. By 2034, the number of people over the age of 65 will outnumber young people under the age of 18 for the first time in American history.⁴ Generational differences may take on heightened significance considering executives staying in their corner offices longer, which younger employees may see as hampering potential opportunities in their current workplace. Meanwhile the questions surrounding mandatory retirement ages rankle older generations who may not be ready to hang up their spurs.





People Who Live Longer Need More Retirement Money

The good news is global life expectancy continues to increase. The question for many is, how do we pay for it? Organizations and individuals around the globe are struggling with traditional retirement mandates that may no longer work in relation to an individual's life expectancy. And some people are unprepared for retirement at any age. For Generation X, the retirement squeeze may be exacerbated by simultaneous responsibilities of raising children and caring for elder parents. According to a 2023 survey, nearly two-thirds of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers have no retirement date in sight and would consider working indefinitely.⁵

Redefining Whether Golden Years Include an RV and Porch Swing

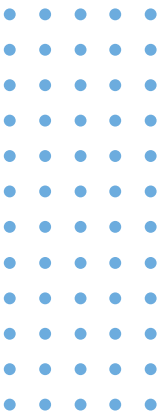
Not everyone wants to spend their later years curled up on a porch swing. Many accomplished professionals prefer feeling valued over feeling comfortable. There's also evidence to suggest that easing into retirement is mentally healthier. "A longer, more gradual path to retirement is good for 65-year-olds' mental health," explains psychologist Mary Alvord. "As opposed to 20 years ago, when retirement was a hard stop."⁶ Leading to an increase of Boomerang employees; those employees that were once retired and now make themselves available for consulting and project work.

Rapidly Aging Workforce

Even with people wanting to stay in the workforce longer, there will be physical limits for many workers. This is especially true of people in the trades, who perform more physically demanding work. According to the National Center for Construction Education and Research, approximately 40% of current building industry workers are expected to retire by 2030.⁷

Covid Accelerated the Changes Already In Motion

Covid didn't just change the way we lived for a period of time under lockdowns. Covid has upended many of the conventional ways Americans have approached life and work for the last 50 years. With the pause away from daily routines, many Americans have moved away from the traditional life stages expected of them. Workplaces have been turned upside down. Retirement is no longer an automatic option for many Americans feel obligated to exercise at a certain age.



The Five Generations at Work

With all of these factors coming to a head, let's look at what the generations are like at work. While entire generations are often broadly generalized, it's a leap to look at an entire generation of people as one homogeneous group that shares specific traits. Each generation is more precisely understood when viewed as a demographic cohort of individuals who have experienced many of the same landmark events, technological changes, and social movements. Because their shared experiences often affect them in similar ways, they're seen to have certain defining characteristics.

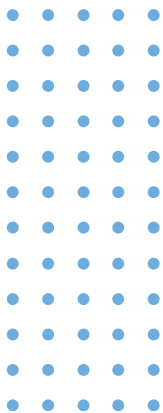
There's also a distinction to make between age differences and generational differences. Certain preferences in a generational group may have more to do with their life stage than whether two people were both alive at the same time to watch the moon landing. For instance, people who are closer to retirement may value their pension more than a younger employee who may prioritize a higher salary to pay down student load debt.

For the purposes of this discussion, it's worth noting that these characteristics are meant to enlarge our understanding of potential differences among different generations, not to assume these generalizations are true in every case.

How Different Generations Work

Let's take a closer look now at each of the five generations and some of their differences, starting with the years that define each generation or cohort. According to Statista, American generations are defined by being born in the following years. ⁸

1. The Silent Generation (born between 1928 and 1945)
2. Baby Boomer Generation (born between 1946 to 1964)
3. Generation X (born between 1965 to 1980)
4. Millennials (born between 1981 to 1996)
5. Generation Z (born between 1997 to 2012)



The Silent Generation | Born between 1928 and 1945

Members of the Silent Generation were born between the Great Depression and World War II. This generation may have been young adults who participated in World War II or been born in the shadow of the war's end. They're characterized as the "Silent Generation" due to their predilection for conforming and working within the system. Born into adversity, they're the kind of people who put their head down and work without complaint under even the most difficult circumstances. According to the same Statista report, there were some 16 million Silent Generation members in the US in 2023. Not to be underestimated due to their age, many members of this generation are currently at the apex of their careers, such as the current leader of the free world President Joe Biden.

The Baby Boomers | Born between 1946 to 1964

The Baby Boomer generation takes their name from being born during the post-WWII baby boom. Raised amid scarce resources as America rebuilt from the ravages of the war, they may have faced limited opportunities for education which they were forced to compete for. As a generation, they faced the devastation and cultural turmoil of the Vietnam War and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Boomers are often seen as competitive at work. They're known for bringing a mindset to work that emphasizes career-focused activities, sometimes to the point of being called workaholics. With work their life's focus, they may fear loss of their professional identity as retirement approaches. Boomers may also show disdain for changes that cause them to be displaced at work or lose relevance, which may be due to the importance they placed on work throughout their life.⁹

Gen X | Born between 1965 to 1980

Gen Xers born in the 1960s to 1980s are often called the forgotten generation, which may be due to being raised with minimal parental supervision or their ability to blend. Their adaptable, independent, skeptical, and pragmatic qualities developed in relation to cataclysmic world events like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rapid shift toward globalization.¹⁰

They're also called the "Sandwich Generation" because they've been stuck in the middle between taking care of children and aging parents at the same time. With so many responsibilities, Generation Xers may experience the fear of not having enough time for their family and personal life. They may also feel a lack of support from their Boomer and Millennial colleagues, as well as pressure over turnover in junior roles they oversee. In times of generational conflict, they're often seen as the flexible "middle child" able to bridge gaps between older Boomers and younger Millennials.

Gen Y or Millennials | Born between 1981 to 1996

Millennials represent the largest single generation of Americans in history. Often referred to as the first generation of "digital natives,"¹¹ they grew up with technology and never had to adapt to it later in life the way older generations have. Their fluidity with technology points to their warm embrace of new technologies, AI, social media, and multi-tasking. See Mark Zuckerberg (born 1984).

They may have grown up considering their parents to be their friends; consequently, they may see managers as an equal rather than authority figure. Millennials may also place a high value on feedback and may feel challenged by not understanding expectations that older colleagues have of them. This may relate back to deep friendships with their Boomer parents. There's potential for Millennials to tap into this kindred spirit with Boomers who resemble their parents; however, there's also the possibility for this relationship to become overly fraught with parental overtones.¹²

Gen Z | Born between 1997 to 2012

Referred to as "The Anxious Generation" by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt in his best-selling book,¹³ Gen Z came of age in a time where social media was still largely unchecked, and smartphones were just coming into use in the mainstream. Their exposure to unrealistic ideals via curated social media streams is seen as factors in leading Gen Z to experience a level of distorted reality and social isolation unlike what previous generations had known.

According to a 2023 American Psychological Association (APA) survey, 74% of those ages 18 to 34 said it's harder to make connections with people than it was in the past.¹⁴ This generation is also largely associated with fears of terrorism, loss of privacy, climate change, and global economic instability having witnessed September 11 and the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis at a tender age. But those cataclysmic events don't seem to have molded Gen Z into a generation seeking quiet stability, as their Silent Generation counterparts did in the aftermath of WWII. Gen Z are seen as changemakers and revolutionaries at work who prioritize meaningful work and champion mental health, sustainability, diversity, and reshaping corporate culture.

What Do Generations Clash Over?

With more of an understanding of the touchpoints that shape each generation, it's possible to see some of the unique ways each of these cohorts may behave. While there's common ground to be found among people of different generations; the differences that separate them may often lie in the way they approach their career, societal, and family goals. This may be observed in the way team members of different generations approach working in person or collaborating with colleagues. For instance, Gen Z value flexibility in the way they work far more than other generations. According to a McKinsey report, Gen Z are 59% more willing than their older coworkers to quit a job that doesn't offer flexible work arrangement.¹⁵

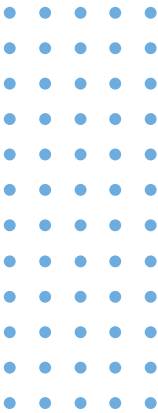
Other ways we see variations in how generational cohorts tend to behave can be seen in ways they prefer to socialize, their approaches to tools and technology, and their styles of communication. By realizing each generation may have their own approach to reaching the same goal, we can better understand our own lens for viewing the world and better understand others.

Preferred Styles of Socializing

When colleagues of different generations gather for events, differences in how they choose to socialize may arise. What older generations find enjoyable, younger generations may find uncomfortably formal. For some workplaces, the issue of whether to hold more formal plated dinners has been called into question by younger generations who chafe at the formality. Higher ed executives have observed a difference between the way Millennials and younger generations approach traditional social events. "We decided to move to a more informal structure, more mixing over heavy hors d'oeuvres rather than dignified plated dinners," reports Barbara Altmann, president of Franklin & Marshall College. She responded to the Millennials' preferences for a more informal style rather than forcing them to sit at a table with senior colleagues they didn't know, which some found anxiety-inducing.¹⁶

Continuity Versus Change

Not wanting to lose the knowledge of older workers versus new ideas is a frequent theme among higher ed teams. While continuity may be highly valued in the rich traditions of America's university system, younger generations often value new ideas. Without finding a balance, there may be a struggle between what lies ahead versus staying connected to the history that led to the present moment. This kind of disagreement can be particularly detrimental to facilities management teams, which rely on significant institutional knowledge that may take years to acquire.



Tools & Tech Are Divisive Among Teams

An issue that often leads to misalignment among multi-generational teams is their preferred use of tools and technology. Although everyone wants to get the job done, teams may diverge in the way they use tools to complete tasks.

According to a survey of more than 4,000 knowledge workers in the US, Canada, Australia and Europe, 90% teams argue over tech tools. With 61% surveyed reporting that their generational conflict over tech tools affected productivity.¹⁷ This generational survey reported that nearly 65% of Gen Z employees feel like their older generation colleagues struggled with tech. Yet the complaints go both ways. Half of employees over 50 complained about their younger coworkers' failure to use traditional tools, such as pens. The missed opportunities and miscommunication go both ways in how generations prefer to approach using technology and tools of the trade to get the job done.

33%

of the time, confusion in communication comes from emojis.

Miscommunication due to digital communication was also cited in the same study, with 43% of respondents saying the tone or context of a message was misunderstood. The culprit cited 33% of the time for causing confusion in communication. Emojis. While the tools and communication preferences vary, there were instances of different generations admiring qualities others had that they knew themselves to be lacking in. According to the survey, 53% of Millennials and Gen Z generations reported envying the phone confidence of their older colleagues.



Talent Attraction and Retention: What's Working

With five generations in the workforce, each with their own differences, forward-thinking higher-ed leaders are putting multiple approaches to work to attract and retain talent before it's too late. According to a 2023 Compass Group study of higher ed leaders, 70% of public or large university staff would consider changing jobs.¹⁸ Felicia Linstrot Johnson, CFP, Associate Vice President of Facilities Management at Sacramento State, is one of the higher ed leaders meeting these challenges and opportunities emerging in the multi-generational workforce. "I have a multi-pronged approach to retaining talent that includes creating a positive work environment, in engagement opportunities, and with professional development," states Johnson. Beginning with the hiring process, Johnson incorporates generational diversity into hiring committees.

Bringing A Generational Mix to Hiring Committees

At Sacramento State, Johnson's team fosters ownership in the hiring process by enlisting seasoned staff to sit on interview panels selecting new candidates. Johnson gives the experienced staff members opportunities to offer their insights and a process for scoring the candidates. The process promotes accountability among seasoned staff and encourages them to help new hires succeed. "Being a part of the hiring and selection process and being a 'buddy' to new employees enables a unique synergy and facilitates knowledge sharing," shares Johnson. She credits this approach with fostering a renewed sense of responsibility and pride with seasoned staff, as they contribute to developing new and future facilities talent.

"Assembling a search or hiring committee with diverse generational representation is key," agrees Marcie Glenn, CEO of Another Source, an expert in innovative recruiting for higher education and non-profit teams. Glenn advocates for including a range of ages and diversity in the number of years of experience each person has within the higher education industry. In this way, diversity can act as a tool to ensure that multiple perspectives are considered in the hiring process.

Glenn also sees a collaborative approach to hiring committees as a force in helping to remove unconscious bias from the process. "It is essential for hiring teams to recognize and mitigate unconscious biases that may influence the recruitment process," says Glenn. Recognizing these biases are present at some level in the hiring process is the first step. For example, broad generalizations about Millennials being prone to job-hopping could unfairly color the evaluation of candidates.

Diversifying Communication Methods for Increased Engagement

Glenn has observed clear generational differences in how candidates and employers approach communication during the hiring process. Millennials often prefer text messaging for scheduling and quick updates throughout the process, and many companies are recognizing this as an effective way to engage them. On the other hand, older generations may prefer formal meetings scheduled via email, which can create longer gaps between communications and risk disengaging candidates. Understanding and diversifying communication methods is key to ensuring effective connections with candidates across generations, enhancing inclusivity, engagement, and expanding your talent pool.

By involving multiple generations in the process, some of these broad characterizations can be managed more inclusively. In the case where teams were judging people by their preferred contact method, a more flexible embrace of multiple communication methods may help head off bias in hiring.

Engaging and Retaining Talent By Meeting Widely Diverse Needs

After rapid shifts in the post-COVID workplace, numerous challenges have arisen for higher ed leaders facing the competing demands of differing generational values. Citing pressures ranging from employees reluctantly returning to the office after teleworking to rapid turnover in frontline staff, the pace of change is unprecedented even for experienced leaders.

At the same time, the stakes for ensuring positive engagement have never been higher due to the rising costs of disengaged employees. According to Gallup, disengaged employees at work lead to the costly side effects of lowered productivity, increased accidents at work, absenteeism, lower quality of work, and higher turnover.¹⁹



“We cannot be aloof but need to be engaged ourselves and regularly solicit feedback from emerging and current employees for improving facilities to best meet the needs of our multi-generational workforce.”

- Felicia Linstrot Johnson, AVP, Facilities Management, Sacramento State

Our goal is to create an environment where emerging talent feels motivated, engaged and committed to staying and growing with our organization," says Felicia Linstrot Johnson, AVP, Facilities Management at Sacramento State. For Johnson and her leadership team that begins with creating a welcoming, captivating, and likable environment where communication is ongoing. "We cannot be aloof but need to be engaged ourselves and regularly solicit feedback from emerging and current employees for improving facilities to best meet the needs of our multi-generational workforce."

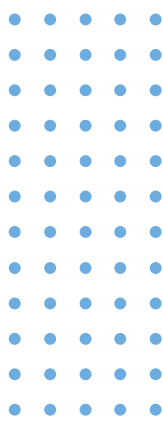
Personalized Benefits

Agile leaders make a point to seek feedback about what candidates in different stages of life are looking for. Because the typical higher ed benefits package is extremely robust, offering strong health insurance, retirement plan, tuition waivers, mental health benefits and paid time off — taking the time to marry the benefits with the candidate will lead to optimal results.

Johnson's team at Sacramento State receives a wide range personalized benefits designed to enhance their lives. There is a fee waiver program, which can be utilized for personal education or for immediate family members. There are insurance benefits with special pricing for auto, home, renters, pet insurance, and more. This wide range of benefits makes it possible to provide a higher level of personalization that will make the candidate feel more valued.

Increased Training and Professional Development Initiatives

Embracing a wide range of initiatives to help mentor and train rising stars, apprenticeship and mentorship programs are another aspect of embracing generational diversity, which pay retention dividends. Disengaged employees are more likely to leave an organization, which leaves a costly trail of consequences. Turnover often involves loss of productivity, recruitment costs, and onboarding resources for the new employees hired to replace them. Lengthy and involved, the process of dealing with employee turnover poses significant financial hurdles for organizations. In some cases, hiring costs are more than the annual salary for a position. The cost to replace senior managers is estimated to be 1.5x to 2x annual salary, according to research from Josh Bersin of Deloitte.²⁰



Johnson has increased professional development opportunities for her team this year, including sending facilities employees to training. "We have significantly increased our participation in professional development initiatives and have successfully identified key employees to coach and help grow for leadership roles within our organization," reports Johnson.

Johnson has sent facilities employees – some for the first time in their careers – to APPA's Supervisor's Toolkit. Another employee attended a bootcamp for their Work Management System. Several analysts were sent to a conference for business officers, and another participated in the APPA's Certified Educational Facilities Professional (CEFP) cohort for completing their certification.

These strategies have strengthened Johnson's team and seen employees flourish in all aspects of her division, from their customer service team to work order management, custodians, grounds team, and to the skilled trades, space management, and sustainability.

Barriers to Implementation

Although the needs may be clearly delineated, institutions still face significant barriers to implementing the types of hiring strategies and professional development programs that will insulate them from further attrition and disengagement. This is often particularly true of cross-generational initiatives that involve integrating emerging talent with seasoned staff, such as mentorship and apprenticeship programs.

For Jeffrey L. Benjamin, Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development, University of Georgia, there are two major barriers to implementing success strategies: resources and inertia. With inflation driving rising costs, budgets are effectively shrinking across the board. According to the Higher Education Policy Institute Inflation (HEPI), inflation rates were higher year-over-year in FY2023 in four dimensions: administrative salaries, faculty salaries, miscellaneous services, and fringe benefits. The highest level of increases was seen in faculty and administrative salaries.²¹

Higher learning organizations faced with limited resources may see professional development and training as non-essentials that don't belong in a tight budget, especially when faced with rising inflation from salaries. "It is very easy to justify not funding professional development and training for the work force," explains Benjamin.

Yet Benjamin sees inertia as an even larger challenge to overcome than budgetary constraints. He describes selling professional development and workforce engagement programs to upper management especially challenging due to a certain level of skepticism from older generations. "I am a Gen Xer. My natural inclination is to be skeptical of everything. Since we currently make up the vast majority of senior management along with Boomers, this attitude is hard to change," explains Benjamin.

Recruitment innovation expert Marcie Glenn of Another Source sees the power to overcome inertia in awareness. "Education and awareness initiatives can help team members appreciate the strength that lies in diversity, fostering a more inclusive and welcoming workplace culture," notes Glenn.

In today's environment of labor and trades shortages, building a workforce that spans multiple generations may also help ensure a smoother transition of knowledge and skills, prepare the organization for future challenges, and mitigate risks associated with workforce gaps.

Case Study: Building Multi-Generational Strength Through Apprenticeship

In the spring of 2022, then Associate Vice President of Facilities Management Division Jeffrey L. Benjamin, PE, , CEFP, faced a post-COVID landscape at the University of Georgia where demand for skilled trades technicians had skyrocketed. UGA started losing staff to higher-paying companies, as their skills were in higher demand. Yet the institution could not match the higher pay being offered on the open market as a state-funded entity with budget constraints.

During this time, Benjamin's department could not hire new talent fast enough to keep up with the skilled tradespeople they were losing. "There was almost no one willing to work for what we could offer," says Benjamin. Consequently, the Facilities Management Division faced a cascade of issues related to their department's alarming rate of attrition. There were gaps in work performance without enough staff to keep up. They lacked many of the highly trained staff members needed to address more technically complex problems. Not surprisingly, an observable downturn in overall morale followed.

Benjamin needed a way to stem the tide of attrition, drive positive engagement, and reshape morale. He began to envision a program that brought the more experienced techs of an older generation into collaboration with some of the less experienced techs of younger generations. "Many utility companies and companies that rely heavily on skilled tradesman use these programs to develop their workforce, it only made sense to apply them here," explains Benjamin.

Because the school faced a large number of tradespeople leaving in a short period of time, Benjamin envisioned the program as a way to provide pathways for existing employees in lower paying and lower skilled jobs who possessed a solid work record to grow into more skilled positions with training and development. If successful, the program offered a significant win-win for lowering attrition, filling skilled roles that had been left empty, and increasing cross-generational engagement. With an outline for the program in place, funding became the next hurdle. Benjamin needed to gain support for his innovative program at UGA.

Pushing Through Red Tape to Successful Funding

There was a lot of red tape to push through. The staff scholarship program covered college classes, but not the kind of technical school coursework the program entailed. That meant finding budget to fund the program. Benjamin made the strategic decision to request limited funding for a pilot program. Selecting the right method to demonstrate the value of new initiatives to skeptical senior management can be key to gaining support for new programs. The pilot program offered an effective way to show potential ROI through a smaller-scale initiative that posed less risk.

In Benjamin's case, he narrowed his focus on a pilot program to his HVAC shop. "We had a huge attrition problem of technical trades folks. I knew I would not be able to get approval for a division-wide budget, but I narrowed things down to our HVAC shop," explains Benjamin. He proposed an apprenticeship program along with a partnership with a local technical school, Athens Technical College. At the same time, they incorporated online training, and specific vendor-sponsored training that provided both excellent experience for the trainees and helped ensure UGA facilities would continue to be expertly maintained.

Initially, the budget was approximately \$185,000 in the first year of the apprenticeship program. "We struggled to spend it all as we didn't have a good plan. This year I increased it to \$250,000 and have a plan in place to utilize it all," explains Benjamin. As the program has grown, the budget isn't just for their HVAC program, the fund is also used to pay for training and travel across the division.

Older Techs Experienced Pride in Training Younger Generation

Currently, the program involves older, more experienced techs working alongside their younger colleagues on several critical systems. They have converted pneumatically controlled mechanical systems to DDC (direct digital controlled) systems. They repaired chillers, including tube brushing of condenser barrels, oil changes, and strainer maintenance. The teams of younger and older generations of tradespeople also replaced air handler fans and motors, sheaves and bearings.

For the more experienced generation who participated in developing younger team members, the apprenticeship program helped create a sense of ownership in the next generation of talent. "Seeing the results from their efforts affected them personally as well," shares Benjamin who can point to the increase in cooperation and morale, as well as deepened relationships between multi-generational team members.

Younger Techs Appreciate Learning from Highly Skilled Tradespeople

The younger generation recognized the benefit of being tutored by highly skilled and talented tradespeople. The program also provides them with a glimpse of the knowledge deficits they may be facing. "Witnessing this knowledge deficit could be beneficial, but also discouraging depending on the trainee's mindset. Most see it as an opportunity and a goal to strive for," observes Benjamin.

One entry level HVAC trainee told Benjamin that they never expected to achieve the level of technical expertise and campus knowledge that they now have after training under a more senior technician. "Being under the tutelage of a senior technician also created and formed relationships that play such an integral part in developing a workforce that consistently provides the level of service we all expect from UGA Operations & Maintenance," recounts Benjamin about their cross-generational program.

"This knowledge was not only technical but institutional knowledge of campus and systems which could be argued is as important as the technical knowledge needed to service and maintain the systems," explains Benjamin.

Expanding On Their Model for Multi-Generational Success

Although Benjamin was looking for ways to solve the immediate needs of attrition when he envisioned the program, the apprenticeship program quickly blossomed into a multi-generational bridge bringing older generations and younger generations of tradespeople together in new, unexpected ways.

The cross-generational apprenticeship has also helped to establish a template Benjamin and his team are exporting to other parts of his department. In the process, Benjamin's program has expanded beyond technical training to other personal and professional development opportunities into a new, more far-reaching Career Ladder system that's still being developed.



"I don't think I expected such a rapid return on the investment. People are excited for what we are doing, and getting a real sense that we are willing to invest in them and therefore want to contribute back"

- Jeffrey L. Benjamin, Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development

Seek Out Resources for What Works In Higher Ed

"As the AVP for this division, I don't think I expected such a rapid return on the investment. People are excited for what we are doing and getting a real sense that we are willing to invest in them and therefore want to contribute back," continues Benjamin.

For Benjamin's part, he hopes other higher ed leaders will use this information as a resource to develop a program that meets the multi-generational goals and needs of their universities. "Reach out to other university leaders and request their programs guidelines. All programs are not one size fits all, so it is important to develop a program that works best for your workforce," advises Benjamin.

He recommends leaders consider how the program will best support employee retention, skill development, and morale. "A skilled, motivated, and dedicated employee should be a primary goal of the program," shares Benjamin.

Starting Small for Big Wins

Starting small with a pilot program for their multi-generational apprenticeship program has made it easier for Benjamin to continue to scale successful programs at UGA. The apprenticeship program didn't start with a lot of formal agreements in place at the time of its small initial launch. "We took a bit of a leap of faith, but it paid off," says Benjamin. "The program involved a relatively small investment with huge dividends in morale, training, and experience across all generations of our workforce," says Benjamin.

Fostering Multi-Generational Communication and Collaboration

With budgets cited as a major barrier to training programs, a smaller-scale pilot such as the HVAC apprenticeship program at UGA may provide key strategies for gaining funding. In other instances, full apprenticeship programs may be out of budgetary range. Even without dedicated budgets, higher ed leaders still have options for enriching their multi-generational teams.

Improving communication is a cost-effective model for higher ed leaders lacking access to program budgets. "Taking a communications approach not only enhances team cohesion and productivity but also ensures that all members feel valued and understood," according to Marcie Glenn, CEO of Another Source, an expert in innovative higher education recruitment.

For leaders, this means developing a deep understanding of the motivators, communication styles, and values of their team members. Especially in the context of generational diversity, these efforts can foster improved communication and better team dynamics. Armed with this knowledge, leaders can begin establishing more inclusive communication norms. For instance, changing how meetings are structured to meet more diverse needs, asking for feedback, and making how recognition is given and received more personalized. Recognizing and adapting to the diverse communication needs and preferences of teams can give leaders the opportunity to create a more motivating and engaging environment.



“We seek input from seasoned staff, as resident experts, on new or especially challenging projects to leverage their experience, acumen and wisdom”

-Felicia Linstrot Johnson, AVP, Facilities Management, Sacramento State


"We seek input from seasoned staff, as resident experts, on new or especially challenging projects to leverage their experience, acumen and wisdom," adds Felicia Linstrot Johnson, AVP, Facilities Management at Sacramento State. The dividends have been multi-fold with keeping their talent engaged and motivated through a collaborative approach. "Involving our team in meaningful and impactful work, makes our team dynamics stronger, where everyone's ideas are welcome and discussed collaboratively, and then implemented with consensus," shares Johnson.

Another positive result has been the breakdown of competitive silos between Sacramento State shops, which is now more collaborative and a much better work atmosphere. "Shop team members have commented to me on how they like the new vibe," recounts Johnson.



Building Lasting Change Through Culture

While implementing these processes and training programs has demonstrated proven results, they can be easily discarded. Too often maintaining innovative programs is dependent on someone in the organization who leaves, and all the positive changes go with them. "What is really required to make real and lasting change is to change the culture of the organization," states Jeffrey L. Benjamin, Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development.



To illustrate his point, Benjamin points to companies like Southwest Airlines, Chick-fil-A, and Moe's Southwest Grill who are known for strong cultures and values. Their cultures didn't appear overnight, they took time and effort to build. "But once you have it, it permeates everything the organization does," suggests Benjamin. "Building a culture around mentorship and apprenticeship works the same way. You create a sense of purpose in those that have been strong performers to help develop the next generation."

Culture Add Trumps Culture Fit

When institutions lack a strong culture that feels supportive and mission-driven, one of the most predictable results is employee turnover. An MIT Sloan analysis of more than 170 workplace factors affecting attrition found a "toxic culture is 10.4 times more likely to contribute to attrition than compensation."²²

One of the most dynamic ways to build a strong culture is through the process of recruiting and hiring new team members. With the addition of each team member, there is the opportunity for growth and innovation by bringing a new perspective. Yet the opposite approach is often taken where an organization seeks to find candidates who "fit in" — even when those perceived differences do not affect their ability to successfully perform their job. The result for the organization? They may be losing candidates who possess new perspectives capable of bolstering innovation and strengthening the organization in places where they have deficiencies.

Higher ed recruitment expert Marcie Glenn is well versed in the potential damage organizations may suffer by tightly adhering to culture fit. Known in recruitment circles for coining the term "culture add trumps culture fit," Glenn sees the importance of prioritizing individuals who bring new perspectives and experiences, including generational. "Different generations can introduce fresh perspectives, agility in adapting to new challenges, and a broad skill set beneficial for innovative problem-solving," asserts Glenn.

Generationally diverse candidates have the potential to enhance and evolve the company's culture through new communication methods and lived experiences — rather than noiselessly blending into an existing workplace culture. But a potential superstar won't make it past the front gate if culture is restrictively defined to match its existing members, instead of seeking more expansive solutions.

3 Strategic Recommendations to Harness The Power of Generational Diversity

For leaders, navigating the opportunities presented by multiple generations in the workplace is often both complex and rewarding. According to Marcie Glenn, CEO of Another Source, "The key is an adaptive leadership style that recognizes the unique contributions of each generation. This not only enhances team performance and job satisfaction, but also positions the organization to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the future."

Here are Marcie's top three recommendations for higher ed leaders:

1. Incorporate Strategic Questions During Pre-Recruitment

When beginning the interview process, it's vital to engage with the hiring team in dialogues that not only assess what candidates need to thrive, but also explore what they can contribute to the team's diversity and strength. A key question to include as you begin the interview process: "What skills, experiences, and abilities would constitute the strongest candidate? This shifts the focus from merely seeking a checklist of qualifications to recognizing candidates who bring unique perspectives and skills. By broadening the scope of what constitutes a successful candidate, you open the door to individuals that may not follow the conventional path but offer the innovation and adaptability needed to drive your team forward.

2. Personalize Recognition and Value Contributions from Team Members

Make an effort to understand how each individual likes to be recognized and what value they aspire to bring to their role and the organization. This personal approach not only enhances motivation, but also allows employees to see a clear connection between their contributions and the organization's success. By acknowledging and valuing the diverse needs of team members, leaders can foster a sense of belonging and purpose among all generations.

3. Promote Inclusive Problem-Solving

Instead of defaulting to discussions with only your lead or most experienced team members, invite multiple voices into the problem-solving process. Include someone who may benefit from the experience and might offer fresh insights. This leads to both learning opportunities for the entire team and innovative solutions resulting in knowledge built across the team allows individuals to gain experience that can help close a skill gap and prepare them for their next role.

Conclusion

In a *Time* magazine cover story from 2013 writer Joel Stein called Millennials "lazy, entitled narcissists."²³ Yet, he also acknowledged he was doing what older people have been doing to younger people for generations: calling them spoiled and selfish. Before that Boomers were calling Gen Xers lazy, and today's Gen Z is potentially tomorrow's grumpy old guy telling kids to get off his lawn. Generational conflict feels timeless in many ways. Yet, the way generational diversity is playing out with five generations in the workplace is new, as is the opportunity for higher ed institutions looking to the future.

While no one knows what the future holds, the demographic cliff hangs over the head of higher ed like the sword of Damocles. And every day it edges closer. While lower birth rates and other factors driving the situation cannot be changed, there will be winners and losers among institutions facing the demographic cliff, declining trust in institutions of higher learning, and whatever else the future brings. Those who come out strongest in the future will likely be the ones looking for opportunities to embrace change and innovation now.

One of the most fundamental ways to ignite the innovation needed for future success is by addressing generational diversity — and reaping the rich collaboration of talents among the five different generations working in America's higher ed institutions. The good news is it all starts with embracing these changes, and finding the opportunities and strengths each generation brings with its unique viewpoints, experiences, and problem-solving strategies. The even better news is your institution's future will be brighter for it.

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Acknowledgements

The development of this white paper would not have been possible without the insights, expertise, and support of an exceptional group of contributors and reviewers. Their dedication to advancing knowledge and their thoughtful engagement greatly enhanced the quality and depth of this work.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to Jeff Benjamin, P.E., Vice President of Facilities and Campus Development at Tulane University; Felicia Linstrot Johnson, Associate Vice President of Facilities Management at Sacramento State; Marcie Glenn, CEO of Another Source; and Melissa DuShane, Copywriter at Meaningful SEO. Jeff's strategic leadership in facilities management and sustainability, Felicia's commitment to innovative and efficient campus operations, Marcie's expertise in talent acquisition and workforce development, and Melissa's skillful copywriting were instrumental in shaping the ideas and recommendations presented in this work.

Their collective input has been essential to the development of this work, and we are deeply grateful for their time, perspective, and commitment to excellence.