

BRIDGING THE GAP

Working Across

Generations

Four Generations. Different Experiences. One Team.



Learning Objectives:

- Understand the characteristics and motivations of different generations in today's workforce.
- Identify common challenges and opportunities when multiple generations work together in manufacturing.
- Learn practical strategies to improve communication, collaboration, and knowledge transfer across age groups.
- Explore leadership techniques that foster respect, inclusivity, and productivity in multi-generational teams.

Why This Matters

Manufacturing is experiencing a workforce transition



Retirements



Loss of experience



New employees entering the workforce



Different expectations & experiences



Need for intentional knowledge transfer

Three questions:

1. How do we retain the knowledge?
2. How do we develop the next generation?
3. How do we get them working together?



The goal isn't to
eliminate the gap.

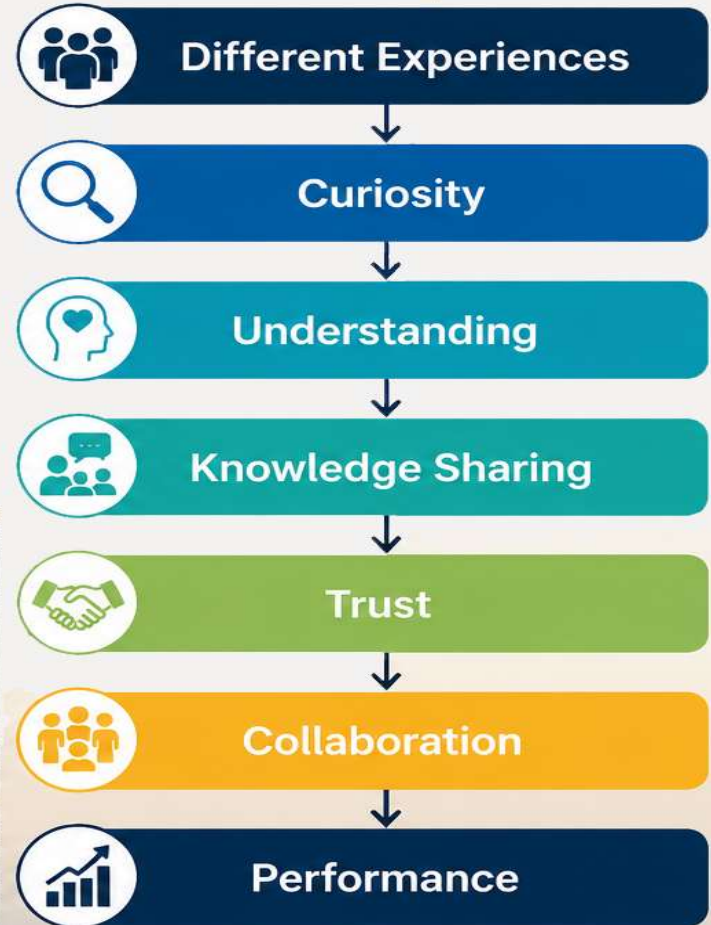
The goal is to
build the bridge.



We don't need to be the same.

We need to connect.

For example:



The Generations in Today's Workplace

Four Generations. Four Different Experiences.



Important:

A generation is a lens not a label.



Generation	Approx. Birth Years	Shaped By
 Baby Boomers	 1946–1964	 Long-term careers, hierarchy, organizational loyalty
 Gen X	 1965–1980	 Independence, technological transition, change
 Millennials	 1981–1996	 Collaboration, technology, rapid workplace change
 Gen Z	 1997–2012	 Digital environment, information access, flexibility

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES ARE ONLY ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE



Don't manage the generation. *Lead the individual.*

What Each Generation Can Bring

Different Experiences = Different Strengths



What Shaped Their Workplace Experience

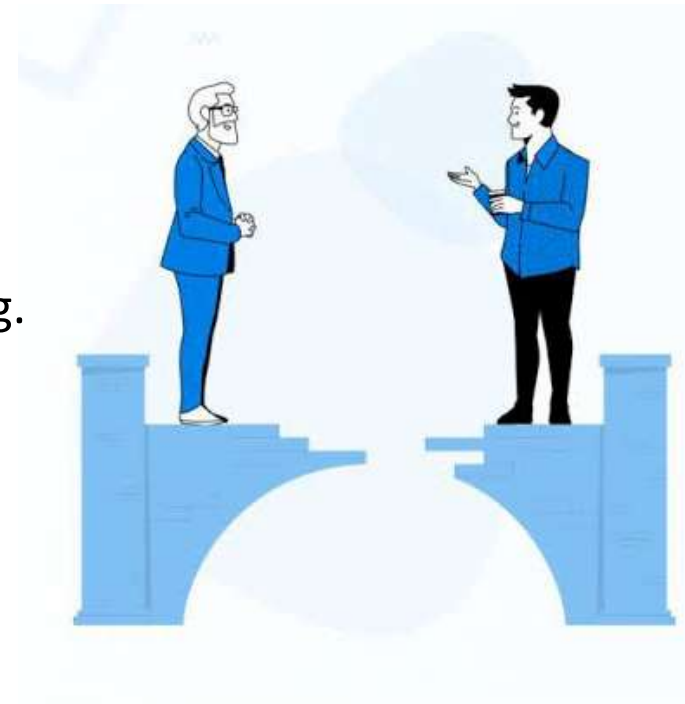
Generation	Workplace Experiences That May Influence Expectations
Baby Boomers	Long careers, organizational loyalty, hierarchy, face-to-face communication
Gen X	Independence, restructuring, technology transition, adaptability
Millennials	Rapid technology growth, collaboration, changing career paths
Gen Z	Digital-first environment, rapid information access, changing expectations

Where the Gap Shows Up

The Gap Usually Isn't About Age

It often shows up as differences in:

- **Communication** - Just tell me what I need to know.
VERSUS Let's talk it through.
- **Technology** - Why change something that works?
VERSUS Why aren't we using technology?
- **Feedback** - Tell me when I'm doing something wrong.
VERSUS Give me regular feedback.
- **Work Expectations** - Work comes first.
VERSUS Work is one part of life.
- **Learning** - Watch me do it.
VERSUS Show me and let me try.



Manufacturing Case Study

Case Study: The Digital Checklist

Experienced Operator - I've been doing this for 25 years. The paper checklist works.

New Employee - Why are we writing everything down when we could use a tablet?

The supervisor has three choices:

1. Pick a side
2. Tell them to work it out
3. Get curious and solve the problem together

What would you do?

Build Bridges! Don't Pick Sides!



Three Ways to Bridge the Gap

- 1. Learn From Each Other**
 - Two-way mentoring
- 2. Solve Problems Together**
 - Cross-generational teams
- 3. Create Shared Experiences**
 - Job rotation
 - Shadowing
 - Cross-training

Communicate for Understanding

Instead of: I told you what to do.

Try: Let me make sure we're on the same page.

Instead of: Why don't you understand?

Try: What would help make this clearer?

Instead of: That's not how we do it.

Try: Let me explain why we've traditionally done it this way.

Instead of: That's the old way.

Try: What are you proposing, and what problem would it solve?



Different communication preferences. Same need for clarity.



LEADERSHIP:

Adapt Without Stereotyping

FOUR LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

1.



ASK BEFORE ASSUMING

What works best for you?



2.



ADAPT COMMUNICATION

Different people may need different approaches.



3.



CONNECT TO THE COMMON GOAL

✓ Safety • ⚙️ Quality • ⌚ Delivery • 💰 Cost • 👥 People

4.



HOLD EVERYONE TO THE SAME STANDARD

*Different approaches.
Same expectations.*



BE FLEXIBLE

BE CURIOUS

BE FAIR

BE CONSISTENT



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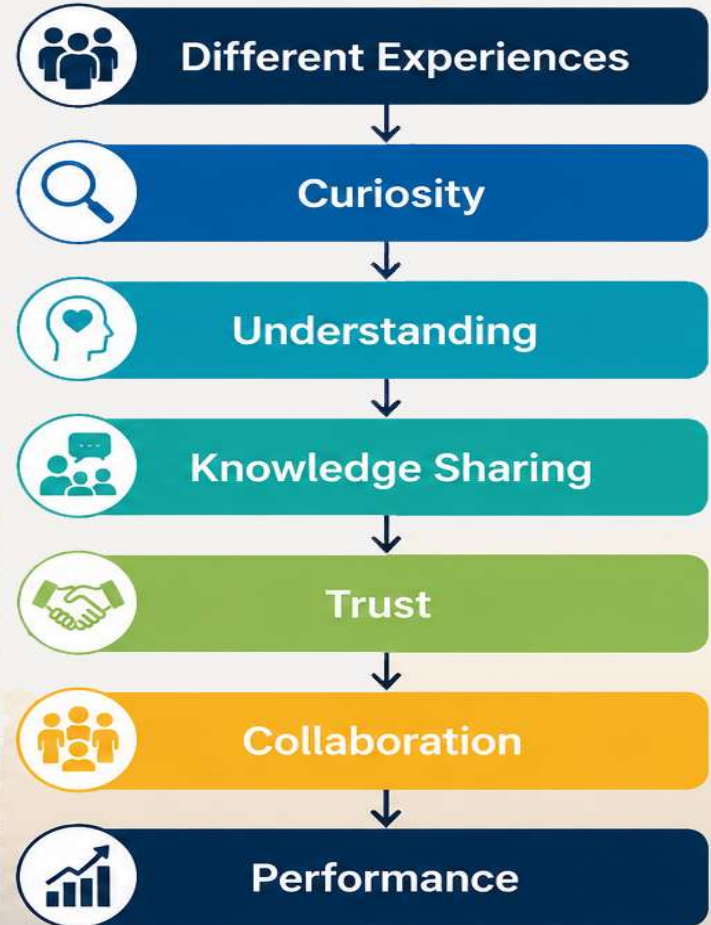
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For example:



? REPLACE ASSUMPTIONS *for* CURIOSITY



Instead of thinking...



They don't want to change.



They don't communicate.



They don't have experience.



They think they know everything.



Ask:



What concerns might they have?



How do they prefer to receive information?



What perspective can they bring?



What can I learn from their experience?

Assumptions create distance.
Curiosity builds bridges.



Building a Strong Team Culture



A Culture Where Everyone Can Contribute



Experience



Knowledge Sharing



Trust



Collaboration



Innovation



Performance

Stronger Together. Better Every Day.

Three Cultural Expectations:



Respect
experience.



Welcome
new ideas.



Learn from
each other.



Knowledge Transfer is a Leadership Responsibility

Don't Just Transfer Tasks. Transfer Knowledge.

Ask experienced employees: What do you know that isn't written down?

Ask newer employees: What questions are you asking that we haven't considered?

Create:

- Standard work
- Job shadowing
- Mentoring
- Cross-training
- Video/process documentation
- Skill matrices
- Peer learning



WHAT LEADERS SHOULD **STOP** DOING



Stop:
Assuming



Start:
Asking



Stop:
Comparing generations



Start:
Leveraging strengths



Stop:
Saying "We've always
done it this way."



Start:
Asking "What can we learn?"



Stop:
Treating everyone
exactly the same



Start:
Holding everyone to the same
standard while adapting your approach



LEADERSHIP ISN'T ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL. *It's people-first.*



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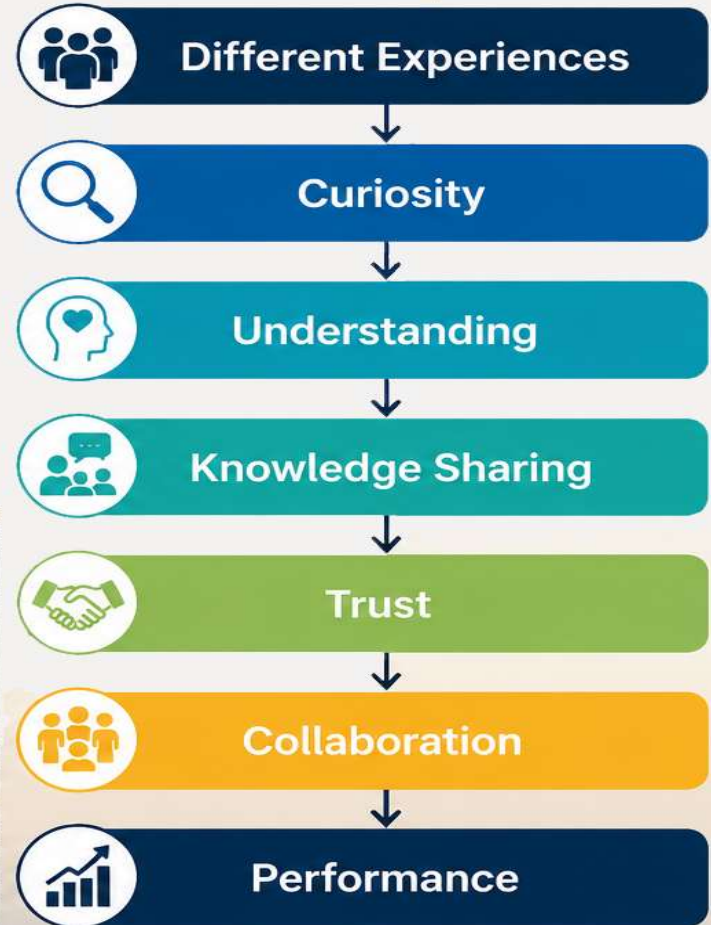
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Your Leadership Challenge



This Week:

1. Identify one person.

Someone whose experience is different from yours.

2. Ask one question.

What is something you think we could do better?

3. Listen without defending.

4. Share one piece of knowledge.

5. Create one opportunity for two-way learning.

One conversation can begin building the bridge.

Key Takeaways

Four Things to Remember

1. Generational differences are real, but individuals are not stereotypes.
2. Every generation brings valuable strengths.
3. Differences become problems when we make assumptions instead of asking questions.
4. Leaders can turn generational diversity into a competitive advantage.

Don't manage the generation. Lead the individual.

Questions



Thank You!

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