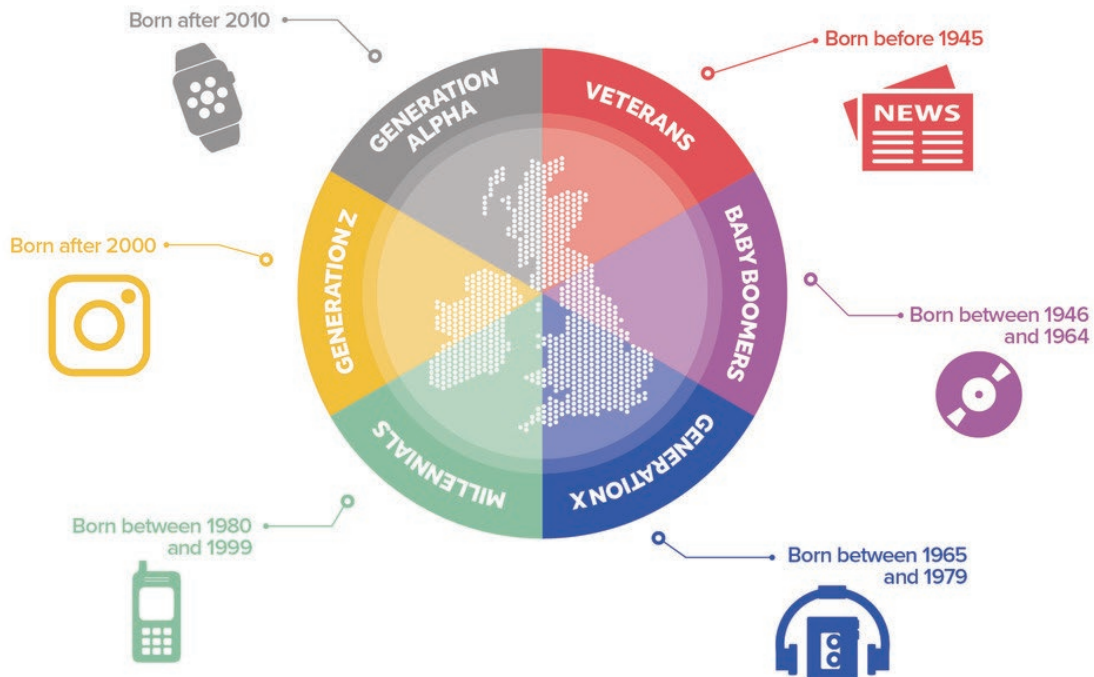


INTER-GENERATION COMMUNICATION

THE SIX GENERATIONS LIVING IN THE UK



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Lucy Burton, Employment Editor at The Telegraph, writes the following pertinent and timely article via [Baby Boomers and Gen Z struggle to communicate amid work culture clash \(telegraph.co.uk\)](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2022/05/11/baby-boomers-and-gen-z-struggle-to-communicate-amid-work-culture-clash/)

The men who once wrote the rules of office life now find themselves trying to navigate an alien landscape. A fifty-something City executive admits he felt blindsided after junior staff complained that they felt triggered by his use of the term “financial self-harm” in an economic update.

The HR chief of a FTSE 100 firm says she is currently teaching older male board members how to speak the language of a twenty-something, including how to use gender pronouns and how not to assume anything about someone’s romantic relationship (don’t ask a married woman about her ‘husband’ in case her partner is a woman, she tells them). Her colleagues seem disorientated by this new rulebook and they are far from alone. Male managers across Britain are so terrified of getting “cancelled” that some are avoiding conversations with their young colleagues all together.

The communication barrier has left managers in a tangle. For the first time, five generations are working together and leaders don’t know what to do about it. While older men are being given lessons on how to have a conversation with their younger peers, those at the start of their careers are pushing back on what they perceive to be a bizarre and claustrophobic corporate world. A TikTok video went viral last month after a tearful Gen Z’er described how hard it was working nine-to-five. One tech boss revealed earlier this year that he has resorted to contacting his young colleagues on Instagram because they don’t look at their emails.

The sensibilities of old and young workers are so stark that businesses are turning to so-called generational consultants for advice. The real problem is that nobody is listening to each other. The

concerns of younger workers are often grouped under the catch-all term “woke” and dismissed out of hand. Elon Musk typifies that attitude with his habit of dismissing anything he doesn’t particularly like the sound of as being part of what he calls a “woke mind virus”.

But wokery is a convenient fictional enemy for those who feel their power is at threat. Fallen hedge fund manager Crispin Odey, who has admitted to grabbing one employee’s breasts, this year blamed the “woke brigade” for his downfall rather than the 20 sexual misconduct claims made against him. Odey has denied the allegations. The Financial Conduct Authority is investigating.

Woke is a meaningless buzzword which has gained so much power that men like Odey seriously think they can use it as a way of looking like a victim themselves. Those who dismiss every workplace diversity initiative as wokery also look ridiculous and out of touch. But the open mindedness needs to go both ways. Change takes time and there could perhaps be more understanding and patience if a well-meaning boss makes an innocent mistake.

Those refusing to use email or who complain about working until 5pm are unlikely to get very far if they blindly chase their theory that work is little more than a burden.

The first chapter of working life should involve learning from those who are older and more experienced, rather than searching for faults and showing zero curiosity. There’s no question that generational diversity is a great strength to any business, but too much is currently being lost in translation. It is a challenge that should hardly be complicated to fix. A consultant who advises companies on how to train staff says sensible businesses know to just “avoid vocabulary associated with specific ideologies” adding that “older generations have always needed to learn new idioms to communicate with younger ones”.

Those who listen will find they have much in common with the new cohort of workers after all and that many differences are exaggerated. A study published by the University of Oxford in September highlighted how younger and older workers actually have very similar views on economic policy. Even those who don’t share the same views will discover that a bit more empathy could do wonders for workplace relations.

Young workers should remember that ageism in the workplace is a very real concern for many older staff, a cohort that is growing as Britons work for longer. Older workers might want to consider the lasting effect of the pandemic on their young peers, with Gen Z often dubbed the loneliest generation. The bosses who are so terrified of saying the wrong thing that they are avoiding young workers, particularly young female ones, need to pull themselves together.

Changing tone reflects changing attitudes and changing views of what is acceptable. Office life is a much better place for many people as a result of this shift, but the corporate world is still rife with scandal and future generations simply won’t put up with it. MPs involved in a sexism in the City inquiry last week said they were shocked by the evidence of harassment against women in finance. Businesses cannot stamp out toxic behaviour and thrive if leaders are tiptoeing around staff or dismissing every forward-thinking policy as being too woke.

UK Plc has spent too long tying itself in knots trying to speak Gen Z’s language and it’s been a bit of a mess. Forget about generational consultants and boardroom language lessons. When the stereotypes are no longer weaponised, employees across all ages will find that they can understand each other after all.