The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Merging the Generations:
Understanding and Managing the New Generations of Police Officers

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ABSTRACT

The study of different generational work ethics and how to manage them is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because although there is a difference in attitude and upbringing between newer generations and the older generations, the understanding of these differences will allow the generations to merge into a more cohesive unit.

The purpose of this research is to discover what influences the newer generation's officer and what steps need to be taken to merge the different generations. Then, examine why they are so different and propose what supervisors need to do in order to motivate them for ultimate productivity and success.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to twenty law enforcement officers from the state of Texas, and three personal interviews with law enforcement officers from North Texas

The researcher discovered that there are significant differences between generations and that this generation has a lot to offer if supervisors understand the motivation and reasoning behind their actions.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past, a person was identified by their profession. Employees usually stayed with the same company for their entire career often moving up through the ranks and climbing the corporate ladder. It was seen as a failure to have several jobs or switch careers many times. People "lived to work" and gave little thought to the way a company treated their employees. The employer was seen as the all mighty and the employee just dealt with the cards they were given never questioning authority.

Today's generation "works to live". Changing careers and jobs within a field is commonplace. Employees leave one job for another in the promise of something better: better pay, better benefits, better hours, or better location. Loyalty is reserved to oneself and one's family rather than to an employer. This in no way negates the quality of employee or their value to their employers. It merely makes relationships between new and older generations more complex when one doesn't understand the ethics, standards, and values of the other. The younger generation doesn't understand how someone can care that much for their job and see it as a "means to an end". The older generation doesn't understand how the youngsters can't see the importance of the company and see their success in their jobs as "the end" of a long corporate struggle.

The problem to be examined by this research considers whether or not managers and supervisors fully understand the differences in today's generation of police officers as compared to past generations of police officers. And because this new generation of police officers seems so much less motivated and career driven than those of previous generations, how do administrators best manage them in order to motivate them to be as productive as possible?

The relevance of understanding and managing the newer generation is that regardless of whether or not older generations agree with their ethics and standards, this new generation of police officers are here to stay. To be wholly successful, those who supervise this generation must know why this generation maintains the focus on "me" rather than "we" and what it is motivates these officers to be more successful. This new generation of police officers will someday be our future administrators and leaders. By encouraging success and cultivating relationships within this new generation, administrators can create a law enforcement force that is more diverse and representative of today's society and can, therefore, better serve their communities

The purpose of this research is to discover what influences the newer generation's officer and what steps need to be taken to merge the different generations. Then, examine why they are so different and propose what supervisors need to do to motivate them for ultimate productivity and success. These officers may vary quite a bit from previous generations, however; when understood, and properly managed, can bring valuable insight to an ever-changing field.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not the new generation of officer can be supervised the same way as previous generations. Supervisors may need to adapt to this new generation in order to fully benefit from what the newer generation has to offer law enforcement as a whole. The research will also examine how both generations are as different as they are similar and can offer a great deal of diversity that is representative of today's society.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, periodicals, and journals from a variety of law enforcement and human resource publications. In

addition, a survey will be distributed to 50 survey participants. These participants will be law enforcement employees from Texas agencies. The research will also include three personal interviews. These interviews will be conducted with law enforcement supervisors from North Texas that would be considered in the previous generations.

The intended outcome, or anticipated findings, of the research should show that this generation of police officers were raised with the "me" mentality and focus on instant gratification rather than achieving long-term goals. Further, administrators become frustrated with this seemingly disinterested attitude because they are either unaware or do not recognize the differences in their work ethic. The intended outcome of the research should show that although both groups have different ethics, values, styles, and beliefs, they both offer value and diversity that is representative of today's society. The ultimate findings should show that the newer generation of officers is an asset to law enforcement and, if embraced, has a lot to offer to the profession.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because they are currently being faced with a workforce of officers like none other. Administrators need to understand how to manage and motivated these officers in order to make them as successful as possible. This new generation is the future administrators. By encouraging success and cultivating relationships within this new generation, administrators can create a law enforcement force that is more diverse and representative of today's society and can, therefore, better serve their communities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In understanding the new generation, it's important to realize from where they came. This generation has been raised in an environment like none before. Divorce

rates were the highest in history (Foley & LeFevre, 2000, p. 58), many fathers were absent, and in families that were lucky enough to have both parents, they both often worked out of the home. "Xers were the latchkey kids in an increasingly dangerous world…" (Messer, 2001, p.14). Instability in the home life created independence and confidence. Children were forced to grow up quickly and accept more responsibility for themselves. "Generation Xers tend to have a more independent, entrepreneurial spirit than did their predecessors. It's easy to mistake this spirit for an inability to conform to procedures, when in fact it can be the source of tremendous productivity." (Anthony, Sr., 1995, p. 22). Because of this early independence, they are good at finding creative problems to solutions and thrive in environments where they are allowed to set their own goals, deadlines, and work hours (Jurkiewicz, 2000, p. 57).

Before these future officers even had a chance to think about their futures, their work ethic was being shaped by the experiences of their families. "Generation X watched its parents' jobs as they were downsized, restructured, or eliminated. This has sent a clear message that there is very limited job security in the work environment" (Messer, 2001, p. 14). This, in addition to the divorce rates and political scandals created a generation of skeptics and realists: people that are not afraid to stand up for themselves, question authority, and walk away from a situation that they do not view as favorable. They prefer to "invest in themselves, creating security from within" (Tulgan, 1997, p. 10) rather than relying on a company to make them feel secure. `

Technology also plays a crucial role in understanding the new generation. "With Instant Messaging, TheFacebook.com, myspace.com, and craigslist.org: we are one of the most technologically-savvy generations ever…" (Viray, n.d.) This generation has

been shaped by computers, television, and video games, not schools and company training.   Instead of employees having to quickly learn the ropes of a new job, now the employer is the one trying to catch up to the new hires (Ruch, 2000, p. 40). They prefer visual images over the written word (Foley & LeFevre, 2000, p. 59). This is the first generation to grow up computer literate and prefer opportunities to learn through multimedia. "The workplace is accelerated. People are living turbo-charges lives" (Hays, 1999, p. 46).   In fact, this generation thrives in chaos and has a "natural inclination to multiple focus and selective information" (Tulgan, 1997, p. 9). The view that they have short attention spans is not exactly true. "What may look to managers like a short attention span is instead, a rapid-fire style of information consumption which makes Xers uniquely suited to the workplace of the future" (Flynn, 1996, p. 88). This generation of workers is "voracious learners that are able to digest massive quantities of information at a quick pace" (Flynn, 1996, p. 88).   They have grown up in an environment where everything is at your fingertips and where anything is obtainable almost instantly. Google is the first place most Generation Xers turn when needing information (Viray, n.d.) and the Internet provides everything from restaurant menus to up to the second news at the touch of a button.

In the law enforcement field, change is ever present, and the new generation thrives on change. "Since the beginning of this generation, the world has changed at a phenomenal pace, and Generation Xers have simply responded to the world as they have seen it" (Messer, 2001, p. 14). They are, therefore, more comfortable with change and uncertainty. "What Xers do posses is the ability to learn and adapt quickly to new situations" (Smith, 2000, p. 33). They prefer to be told what needs to be done, but

allowed some flexibility and creativity when it comes to how it is to be done. (Hays, 1999, p. 46). This generation relies on immediate feedback to figure out what needs to be changed in order to make improvements (Tulgan, 1997, p. 10).

They are also more comfortable with the diversity of the society. "Generation Xers accept racial and sexual diversity as facts of life, having not lived in a world with overt racism and sexism" (Foley & LeFevre, 2000, p. 60). Because of the diversity in this generation, they may be able to relieve racial tensions more than any previous generation (O'Bannon, 2001, p. 101). "One of the proudest accomplishments of Generation X is their part in the 'diversity' movement of the last decade" (Smith, 2000, p. 33). They are committed to valuing differences rather than preferring conformity. They see differences as an asset rather than a liability and seek to make the world a more tolerant well-rounded place.

Feeling like a valued asset is important to this generation. They are usually well educated and feel that they should be a respected member of their company or department. No longer can the hierarchal "these people you cannot interact with" workforce exist (Tulgan, 1997, p. 20). They want to feel that they are "in the loop" and thrive on timely feedback (O'Bannon, 2001, p. 103).   "If you want to motivate us, get us more involved in the decision-making process," says John D. Willard, executive of the Generation X Coalition Inc. (Hays, 1999, p. 46). Old managerial styles no longer work with this generation. "Managers can't manage by fear anymore" (Hays, 1999, p. 48). This generation desires autonomy and the freedom to prove themselves. Micromanagers constrict the employee and if you micromanage this generation, "you will send them out the door as fast as they can find another job" (Tulgan, 1997, p. 38).

Because of the viewed instability in the work environment, emphasis on the personal is a top priority for this generation. Money does not motivate as much as self building opportunities, flexibility, and the ability to build relationships that will lead to networking opportunities (Tulgan, 1997, p. 47). Because they have seen their parents dedicate their lives for the good of the company only to be laid off, downsized, or relocated while receiving nothing in return, this new generation want a better balance between personal and work life (Messer, 2001, p. 17). "To xers, personal and family time outweigh working for the prosperity of the agency" (Messer, 2001, p. 16)

METHODOLGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not administrators and supervisors must manage newer generations differently than those in the past. Further, whether or not these changes will make a more cohesive department and more fulfilled employees.

The researcher hypothesizes that because of the new generation's upbringing and work ethic, they require completely different managerial styles than generations of the past. Without this change in managerial styles, today's generation will not reach their potential in law enforcement.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, journals, periodicals for the law enforcement and human resource industry. It will also include a survey distributed to law enforcement officers from the state of Texas. This survey will be administered to twenty participants. The last method of inquiry will be three personal interviews conducted by the researcher with three law enforcement administrators.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of the future of managerial styles within law enforcement for the new generation will include a survey and personal interviews. The size of the survey will consist of ten questions, distributed to twenty survey participants from municipal and county law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas. The personal interviews will be conducted with three law enforcement supervisors from North Texas.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in a 90% compliance. Survey participants came from all areas of the state of Texas. Out of these respondents, sixty percent are considered Generation X and forty percent are from the Baby Boomer Generation. The personal interviews were conducted with a law enforcement officer from the Baby Boomer Generation, one from Generation X, and one law enforcement administrator from the Baby Boomer generation. The information obtained from the survey and personal interviews will be analyzed by the researcher.

FINDINGS

The newer generation of officers do not think the same, have not been raised the same, are better educated, have experienced societal changes much different than previous generations and been faced with being given more and working for less than any other generation. This has produced a mentality that is substantially different from past generations. These differences, however, offer a unique opportunity to move forward with views that may be much more understood and accepted by much of today's society. The current generation's officer is a direct reflection of current culture. Because they have never lived in a society rife with political, sexual, and racial tensions, they are a much more tolerant generation and accept differences and change much

more readily than previous generations. This generation's officers can offer a better and much more diverse understanding of today's population.

The new generation had a childhood of instability and independence. Rather than turning these children into dysfunctional adults, this generation became well educated, highly tolerant, self motivated and flexible adults. By recognizing these qualities, supervisors can take advantage of their talents rather than lamenting their differences. Managers should respond to this independence by providing opportunities for officers to experience some autonomy and flexibility. They should embrace this new generation's tolerance by seeing it as a way to promote positive relationships between today's diverse population and the law enforcement agencies put in place to protect them. Because of their thirst for learning and short attention span, administrators should seek out opportunities for this generation's officers to learn, train, and increase their knowledge in order to keep them motivated and stimulated. An officer that feels stagnant and de-valued will likely leave at the first opportunity. It is important that this generation feels that they are vital to the department and that their opinions and ideas are heard.

Computers, video games, cell phones, the Internet and other forms of technology have taught this generation that whatever you want is at your fingers and can be obtained almost instantly. Because these officers have been raised in an age where immediacy is the norm, they are used to a fast paced and a seemingly chaotic environment. They want to experience daily successes in their current job in order to feel that they are making accomplishments. They do not see the value of annual reviews since these reviews often reflect long term goals and look back on long periods

of time. This generation does not see the value of long-term goals within a company since they do not feel loyalty to any company or department. Their primary focus is on increasing their knowledge base and making themselves more marketable for the next opportunity. Because of this, managers should provide fast and timely feedback so that these officers can adjust accordingly in order to experience daily successes. This generation wants to feel that each day they did something important that made a contribution to the world. Without constant feedback, they do not know if what they are doing is correct and therefore get discouraged by the feeling that they are working for nothing and that no one recognizes what they are accomplishing.

Managers can no longer take the approach towards employees that because they are the boss, everything will be done their way. This generation does not feel that anyone in a company or department is unapproachable, but rather everyone is working towards a common goal together. They want to be involved in the decision making process. They want to be up on all of the current information and secrecy within a company or department will drive them away.

There are many positive aspects to come out of this generation that the field of law enforcement in particular can benefit from. The fact that these officers can handle multiple stimuli makes them well suited for work out on the streets when there are several people or situations that all need their attention at once. Law enforcement can definitely quench their thirst to feel daily accomplishments and that they are making the world a better place. And no where is change more readily available than in law enforcement. The laws change, the people change, and the technology changes on a daily basis. This new generation is built to not only go with the flow but to thrive in

controlled chaos that is often the law enforcement environment. Administrators and supervisors need to see the value that these officers bring to their departments rather than fighting the differences between them.

Survey results indicated that there is a significant difference between generational views regarding work ethic and expectations. The respondents agreed across the board that free time and family are more important to the younger generation than previous generations. Many felt that there should be some mentoring or team building exercises initiated within their departments to strengthen the understanding between generations. Somewhat predictably, all of the Generation X employees felt that their generation was more loyal to the self and the Baby Boomers felt that their generation was more loyal to the company.

Boomers' complaints about younger workers were that they don't seem task oriented, that they ask too many questions and want to know what the department can do for them. Perhaps the best thought on these relations, came from a Victoria Police Department officer who stated, "My generation's motto was 'Do what must be done'. The younger generation's is 'do what we can until we no longer feel like it'".

Younger respondents all stated training and continuing education as valuable ways to bridge the gap. Also mentioned often was that the older generations are more resistant to change and that earning potential should not be based on seniority rather it should be based on performance. Several respondents felt that their generation is more aggressive in finding activity while the older generation was on the "road to retirement" and spent too much time avoiding activity.

Technology was also an important topic. The Baby Boomers felt that technology was not important when they entered law enforcement, but it is now. Alternately, Generation Xers felt that technology was important then and it is important now.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether there is a difference in work ethic and standards within the new generations and whether or not administrators and supervisors need to change managerial styles to promote success in today's officers. Based on survey results, law enforcement employees obviously see generational theory as an important aspect of their careers.

The purpose of this research was to discover a reason for the difference in generational attitudes towards the workplace and ways to benefit from these differences. Research showed that societal differences, political changes, and changes to the family unit all played major parts in the shift in work ethics and expectations of employers and employees.

The research question that was examined focused on the new generation's work ethic, standards, and expectations and how these things affect the way in which managers must view their employees and how they must manage these employees for maximum success for both employer and employee.

The researcher hypothesized that by understanding the new generation's views, manager's can make the workplace more pleasant, employees happier, and maximize the success that both feel with their jobs. It could also encourage more positive relationships between different generations within their departments.

The researcher concluded from the findings that although they are different, both generations contribute to the fluidity with which a department or company runs. By understanding each other's views, manager's can understand the ways in which employees can be motivated to perform. The field of law enforcement is usually a rigid environment, and by seeing the benefit of flexibility to this new generation, supervisors can experience more success and compliance with their officers. Further, a greater understanding of why the younger generation feels the way they do could make for greater communication between the generations.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason(s) why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to the fact that there are clear differences in generational views towards work and its place in an employee's life. Supervisors need information on managing the new generation and a clearer understanding of their views in order to benefit from their differences.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because there is very little research about Generation X. This is still a new phenomenon and there has not been a large enough amount of time in order to fully gauge the impact of this generation's work ethic on the work force. In addition, there seem to be few law enforcement personnel willing to discuss what they may see as derogatorily against their department or fellow officers.

Law enforcement personnel in general stand to be benefited by the results of this research. Only by recognizing and understanding the differences among the generations can they truly learn to appreciate one another. This understanding leads to

greater communication and greater productivity which in turn leads to a more safe

community.

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Appendix

Generational Survey

Please answer the following questions that best describes your position and/or opinion. This information is being gathered for statistical purposes only. All information gathered is anonymous and will only be used as part of the Administrative Research Paper required by the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT).
Please state the year in which you were born: _____

Please indicate the Law Enforcement organization in which you are

employed:

Do you believe that your generation is more loyal to the company or to the self?

Company / Self

Do you feel your employer allows for flexibility?   Yes / No

Did you believe that technology was an important and vital part of law enforcement when you entered you career? Yes / No

Do you believe that technology is important in law enforcement today?

Yes / No

Do you believe that your employer values your opinions and ideas? Yes /

No

Do you believe that your employer values education? Yes / No

Do you believe that law enforcement readily accepts diversity? Yes / No

Do you feel that there is a difference in the work ethics of older and younger generations?

Yes/No   Please Explain

In what ways do you feel that we could bridge the gap between older and younger generations in the workplace?