



# Mind the Gap: Bridging the Generational Divide



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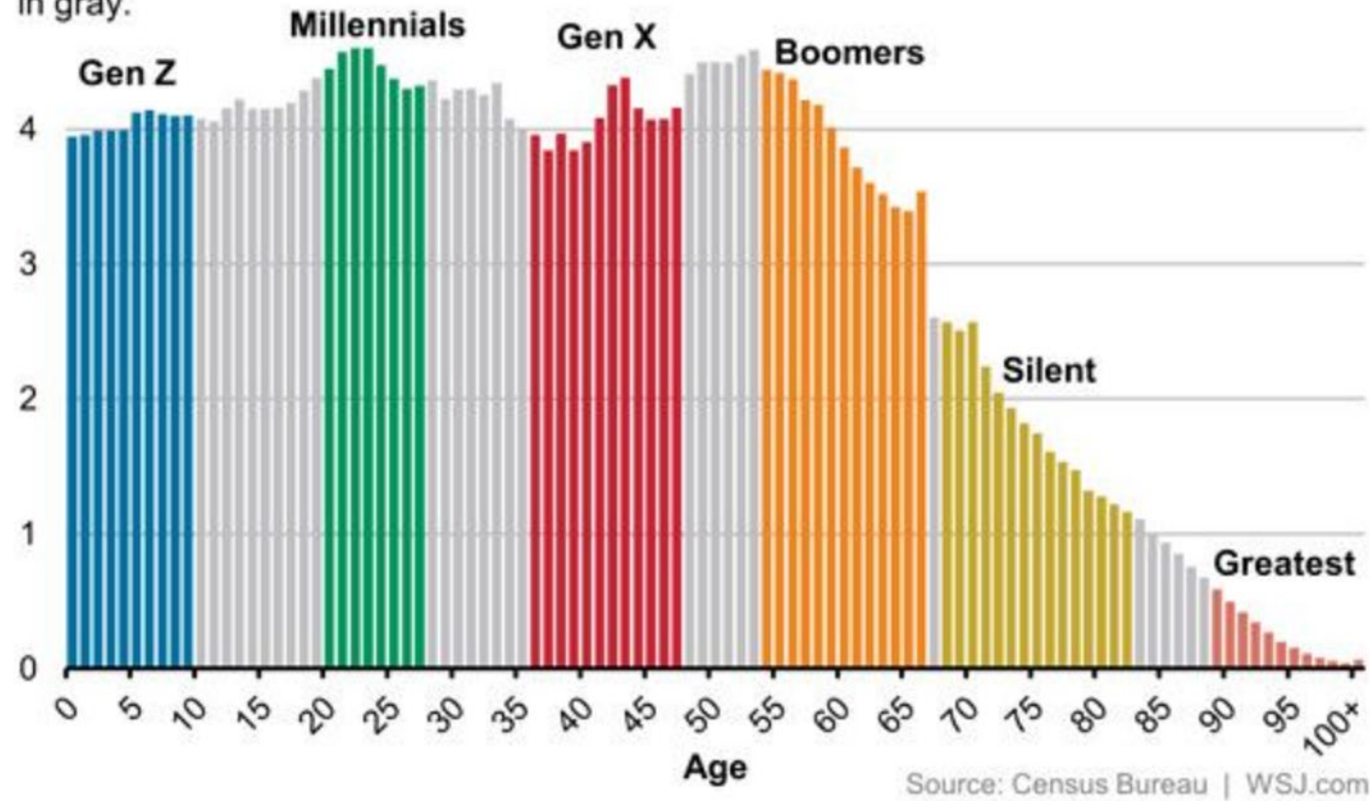
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## Background – Generation Ranges

### Muddled Generations

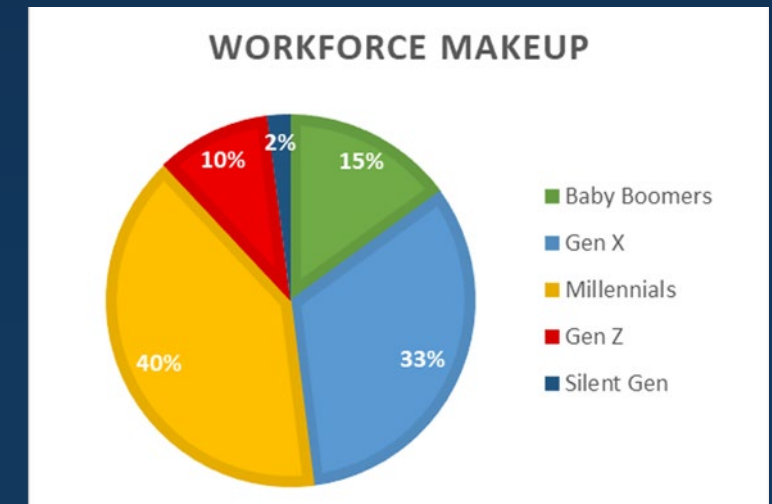
Number of people (in millions) by age in 2013. Ages with unclear generational definitions in gray.



"Between every generation there are gaps where researchers use different dates. All told, about **110 million Americans were born in years that are not consistently assigned to one generation or another** – or about 35%"  
– Wall Street Journal

## Background – What is a multigenerational workplace?

- **A workplace in which employees span different generations**
- **5 generations in our workforce today, this is a first in modern history!**
  - **The Silent Generation** (born 1928 to 1945; loyal but traditional)
  - **Baby Boomers** (1946 to 1964; collaborative but averse to change)
  - **Generation X** (1965 to 1980; independent but bleak)
  - **Millennials** (1981 to 1996; driven but entitled)
  - **Generation Z** (1997 to 2012; progressive but disloyal)
- **Benefits:**
  - Some generations hold years of industry experience and are resilient, others are more adaptable or digital natives
  - Increases diversity
  - Creates opportunities for growth
- **Conflicts:**
  - Differences in values, technology adoption, communication styles, general work practices, collaboration, expectations from employer



\*Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

## Background – Why Do We Care?

- Studies show diversity in the workplace is a critical factor in **improving productivity and teamwork, decision making, creativity, recruiting, job satisfaction, and employee tenure**
- **Multigenerational workforces offer significant benefits to employers and employees alike:**
  - **Increased productivity** – increasing the share of older workers by 10% can lead to approx. a year of growth in gains
  - **Enhanced skill diversity** – mixed age teams foster mentorship and training opportunities in both directions
  - **Improved stability** – age-diverse teams tend to have lower employee turnover rates
- Properly managed diversity can **enable better relationships with co-workers and IPT members**
  - Leads to better estimate inputs and methodology selection enabling more accurate cost estimates
- **Unfortunately, many workers of all ages have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace**

**“More than 8 in 10 global leaders recognized that multigenerational workforces are key to growth, yet less than half of companies include age diversity in their DEI initiatives” – Harvard Business Review, 2023**

## Why Do We Care? – Ageism

- **Ageism:** stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age
  - Among U.S. workers age 50 and older, 1 in 10 say in the past six months they have often felt less valuable at work compared to younger workers – Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 2023
  - Employers admit that they're looking for younger talent - ZipRecruiter, 2019
    - 47% say they're worried about older workers' tech skills and 25% say they'd pick a 30-year-old over a 60-year-old if both candidates were equally qualified
- **Ageism towards older workers is a federally recognized issue**
  - The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) forbids age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older

### Examples of Ageism:

- Being asked to provide birth dates/graduation dates/GPAs for job application or interview
- Promotions, career growth opportunities, and trainings geared towards younger workers
- "There's this new tool, you probably haven't heard about it." or "We might not want to ask them for information. They probably don't understand the system."



## Why Do We Care? – Youngism

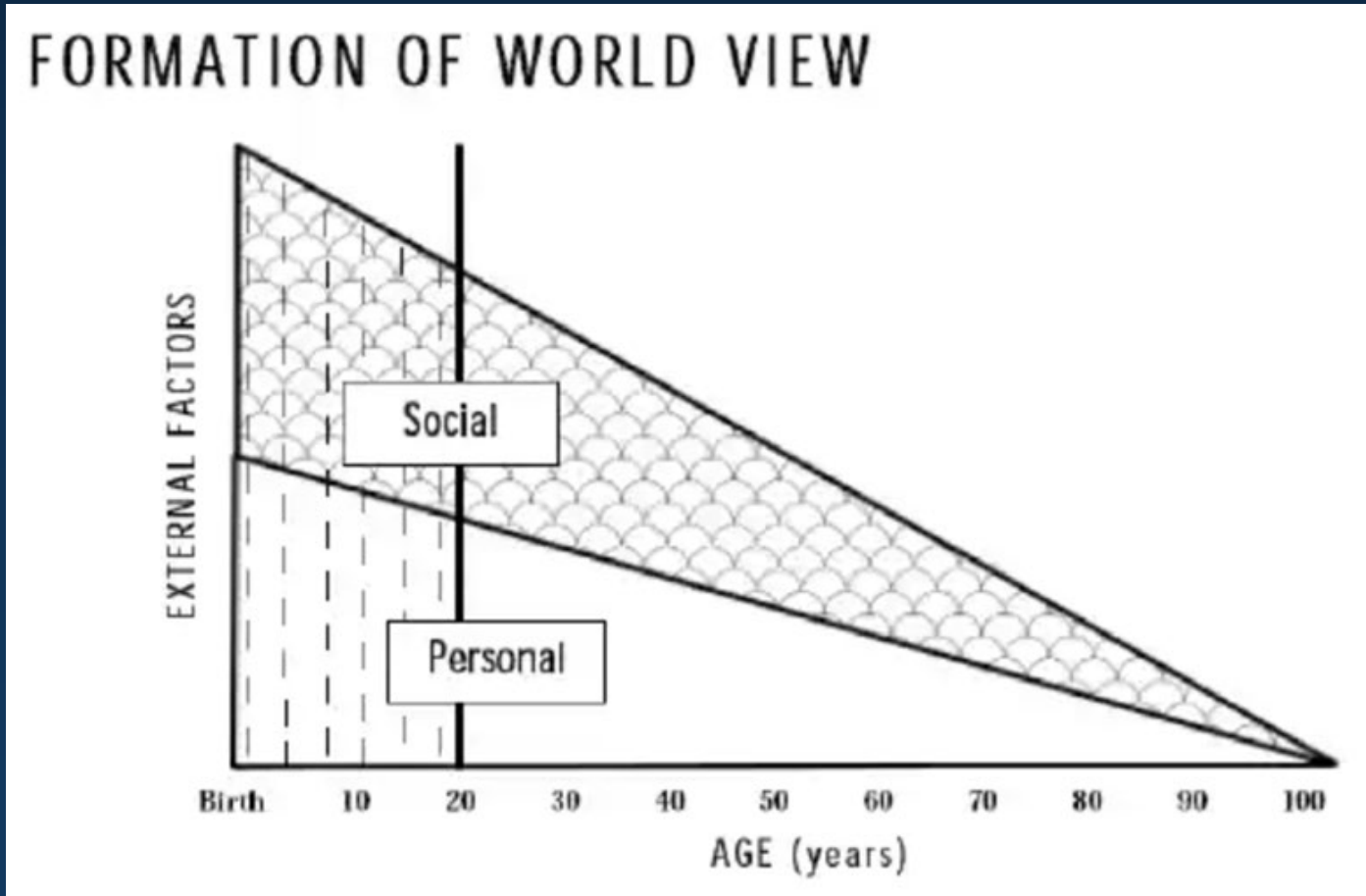


- **Youngism:** stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination towards younger people
  - ~36% of Gen Z or younger Millennial workers (under the age of 32) “report experiencing age-based discrimination at work — which may be tied to perceived deficits in experience.” – The Harris Poll, 2021
- Gen Z / Millennial employees (52% of ages 18-34) are more likely than other employees (39% of ages 55+) to have witnessed or experienced ageism at work - Glassdoor, 2019
  - **However, the ADEA only covers workers aged 40 years or older**

### Examples of Youngism:

- Not respecting opinions or ideas of younger employees
- Addressing younger employees as “girls” or “boys”
- “There's no way you are old enough to be a [insert respected job title here...].” or “You don't look older than 18, are you sure you are old enough to have this job?”

## Background – Factors Shaping World View



\*Source: University of California, Santa Cruz

- Generations share **similar characteristics due to shared life experiences** and sociological influences
- Social influence only accounts for part of our world view, **personal influences account for the rest**
- When someone is very different from those in their generation, it's due to those personal influences
- **Note:** people from other countries or cultures don't track to American generational characteristics





	Gryffindor	Ravenclaw	Hufflepuff	Slytherin
Warm	Loud, boisterous, spontaneous, reckless, rebellious, comedic, stubborn, proud	Eccentric, openly inquisitive, witty, idealistic, loquacious, seemingly absent-minded, creative	Loving, kind, tenacious, knows how to have fun, open-minded, friendly to all, trusting	Confident, natural leader, successful, charming, shrewd, follows their own path, big on cost/benefit analysis
	Passionate, playful,	Wise, observer,	Well-rounded,	Resilient, self-

## Intro to Generations: The Sorting Hat

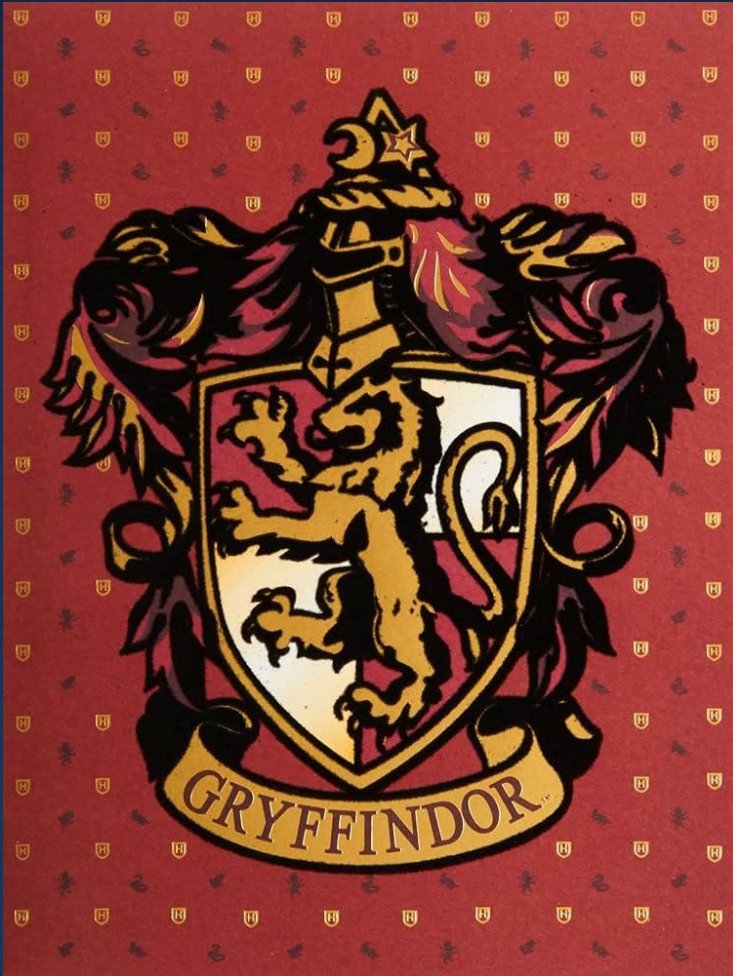
Cool	Chivalrous, just to a fault, only breaks rules when necessary, merciless, practical, not easily forgiving	Intelligent, analytical, rational, cynical, meticulous, observational, condescending	Eye-for-an-eye, silent workaholic, tolerant, brutally honest, selectively but undyingly loyal, determined	Calculating, apathetic, authoritative, mysterious, realistic, traditional, manipulative
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## Baby Boomers – Overview & Communication Strategies

- **Also known as:** “Boomers”
- **Born:** 1946-1964
- **Characteristics:** Optimistic – competitive – workaholic – team-oriented
- **Shaped by:** Vietnam War and Watergate
- **Communication style:** Formal and Direct
  - Balance between email (can be seen as too impersonal), voicemail, and face-to-face meetings
  - Most prefer phone as primary communication method
  - Tip: have background information and details to support requests
- **Value:** Expertise
  - Seek their help with workplace politics. Use them to navigate politically charged environments
  - Use as a sounding board to test ideas - what has or hasn't worked in the past?
- **Sorted into:** Hufflepuff



# Generation X – Overview & Communication Strategies



- **Also known as:** “Latchkey kids”
- **Born:** 1965-1980
- **Characteristics:** Flexible – informal – skeptical – independent
- **Shaped by:** the AIDS epidemic and the fall of the Berlin Wall
- **Communication style:** Informal and Flexible
  - Clear and direct in language (Avoid corporate jargon, buzzwords, and cliches)
  - Tend to choose email when they can, not opposed to phone or text
  - Value professional etiquette when communicating
  - Tip: Save in-person meetings for issues that really require face-to-face communication
- **Value:** Flexibility
  - Honor work-life-balance boundaries
  - Allow autonomy in work style and process
  - Strive for a friendly and open informal work environment
- **Sorted into:** **Gryffindor**

## Millennial – Overview & Communication Strategies

- **Also known as:** “Echo boomers”
- **Born:** 1981-1996
- **Characteristics:** Competitive – open-minded – achievement-oriented – entitled
- **Shaped by:** Columbine, 9/11, and the internet
- **Communication style:** Authentic and Fast
  - Encourage and embrace technology
  - Direct communication (avoid long-winded explanations)
  - Prefer written communication, generally dislike phone calls
  - Tip: Match words with actions, give frequent and timely feedback
- **Value:** Purpose
  - Foster a fast-paced work environment
  - Create opportunities to involve in projects of significance
  - Ask for opinions and help
- **Sorted into:** Slytherin



## Gen Z – Overview & Communication Strategies



- **Also known as:** "Zoomer"/"iPad kids"/"Tide PODS kids"
- **Born:** 1997-2012
- **Characteristics:** Global – entrepreneurial – progressive – less focused
- **Shaped by:** life after 9/11, the Great Recession, access to technology from a young age
- **Communication Style:** Transparent and Visual
  - Keep communication short and direct (IM preferred over email)
  - Like written communication, but expect a fast response
  - Slight preference for voice/in-person communications when possible
  - Tip: Communicate and provide feedback frequently
- **Value:** Making a Difference
  - Focus on how their work supports the bigger picture
  - Enjoy taking on multiple tasks and training opportunities
- **Sorted into:** Ravenclaw

## Communication Across Generations

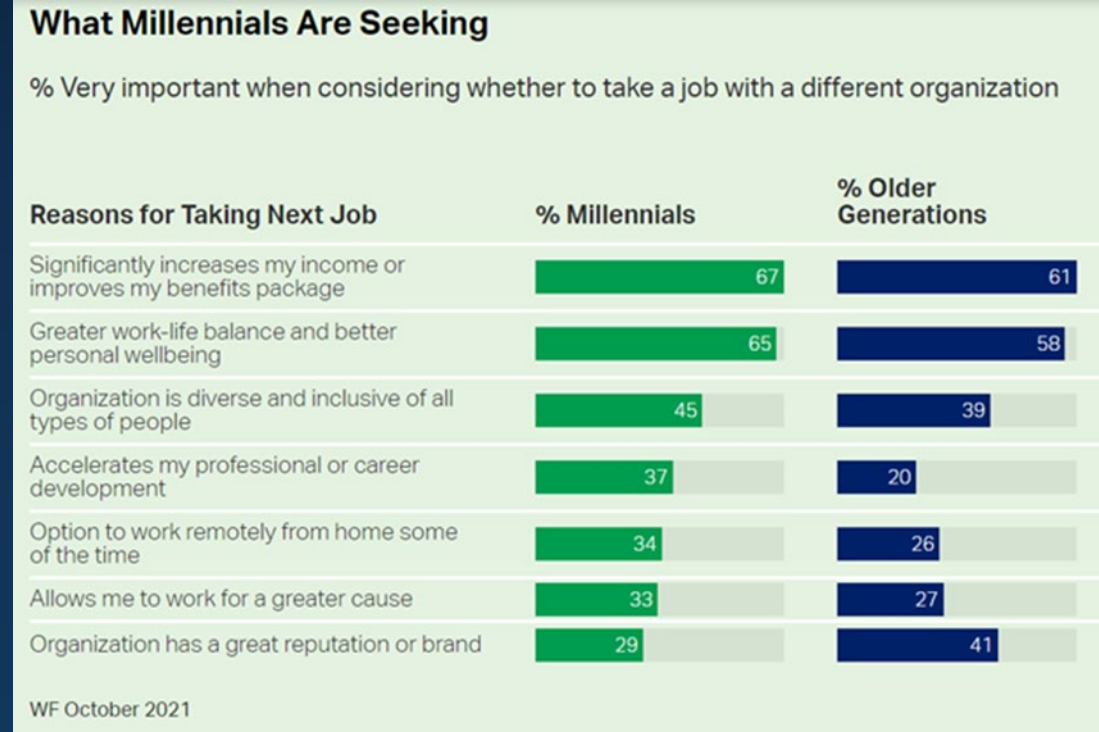
- Everyone values acknowledgement of experience, expertise, and perspective
- Avoid age related comments (whether meant positively or negatively)
- Seek cross-mentorship opportunities where each generation can learn from each other
- Gear messages toward generational (and individual) preferences



- Match the channel with the information:
  - Phone call - detailed, long, difficult, or emotional conversations
  - Email - brief, informative, and/or instructional information
  - Chat - General Announcements, news, informal messages, team collaborating, and socializing
  - Video - long, feedback rich, focused, difficult, or emotional conversations
- Respond to communication using the method with which it was received

# Values Across Generations

- **Core values are largely shared across generations in the workplace**
  - Flexibility, independence, job prestige & security, and ethical & effective leadership
- **Research indicates subtle shifts in how values rank by generation**
  - **Baby Boomers / Gen X workers:**
    - Hard work and dedication
    - Sense of duty/responsibility, loyalty, and financial stability
  - **Millennials / Gen Z workers:**
    - Meaningful work with career growth opportunities
    - Authenticity and employer interest in employee wellbeing



\*Source: Gallop Workforce Poll - 2021

Understanding of multigenerational values, beliefs, and worldviews

Better communication and reduced workplace conflict



# COST COMMUNITY RESULTS



## What have we seen in the cost community?

- Anonymous survey conducted across 52 individuals working across various DoD cost communities
- Survey respondents include a variety of contracting organizations and civilians
- **Results were conducted amongst our peers/colleagues and is not reflective of a true random sample**

### What generation do you identify as belonging to? \*

Date ranges for each generation vary by source so please identify which generation you primarily identify as. If you are on the cusp of multiple generations, please identify the one you feel you best fit into.

### What is your preferred communication method? \*

In reality, we all use a variety of communication methods based on the people we are talking to or the information to be relayed. This question is looking for in general, what form of communication do you prefer using the most for general communication needs.

### Which DISC communication category best describes you? \*

If you feel you know which option best suits you, please select from the list below. If you are unsure, please take this 3 minute quiz and select your result.

<https://www.atlassian.com/blog/quiz/quiz-workplace-communication-style>

Other factors considered apart from generation influences include job title/category and years of experience

## What have we seen in the cost community? - Survey Results

### DISC Communication Style

#### *Direct Styles:*

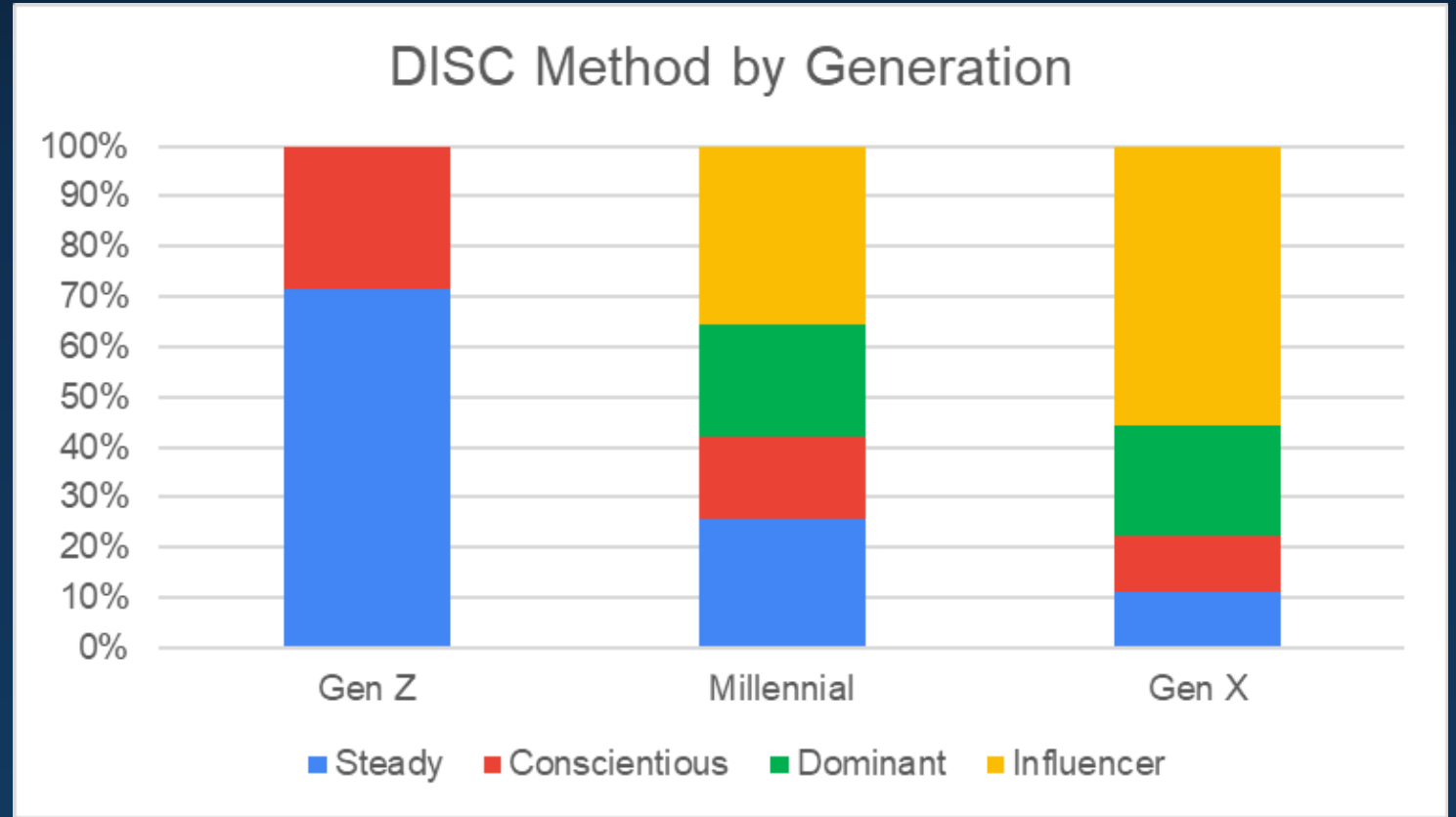
**Dominant:** Direct and Guarded

**Influencer:** Direct and Open

#### *Indirect Styles:*

**Steady:** Indirect and Open

**Conscientious:** Indirect and Guarded

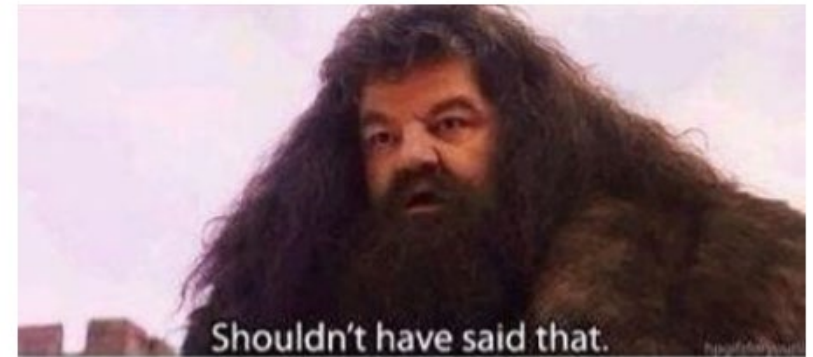


Gen Z leans towards indirect communication styles whereas Gen X leans towards direct communication styles

## What have we seen in the cost community? - Trends

- **Roughly 25-33% of each generation experiences difficulties understanding other generations at work** – Preply Trends Report, 2023
  - 46% of Millennials and Gen-Zers confess that not understanding jargon has caused them to make a mistake at work – LinkedIn Study, 2023
  - 32% of Gen X-ers and Baby Boomers admit to changing the way they speak to fit in – LinkedIn Study, 2023
- **Preference for casual vs. formal conversational style can cause miscommunication**
  - 89% of Americans ultimately think slang at work is unprofessional – Preply Trends Report, 2023
  - Formal punctuation (“.” vs. “!”), ellipses) or the use of emojis can have negative connotations for younger and older generations, respectively

Me after using a generational slang term at work that sends the meeting spiraling

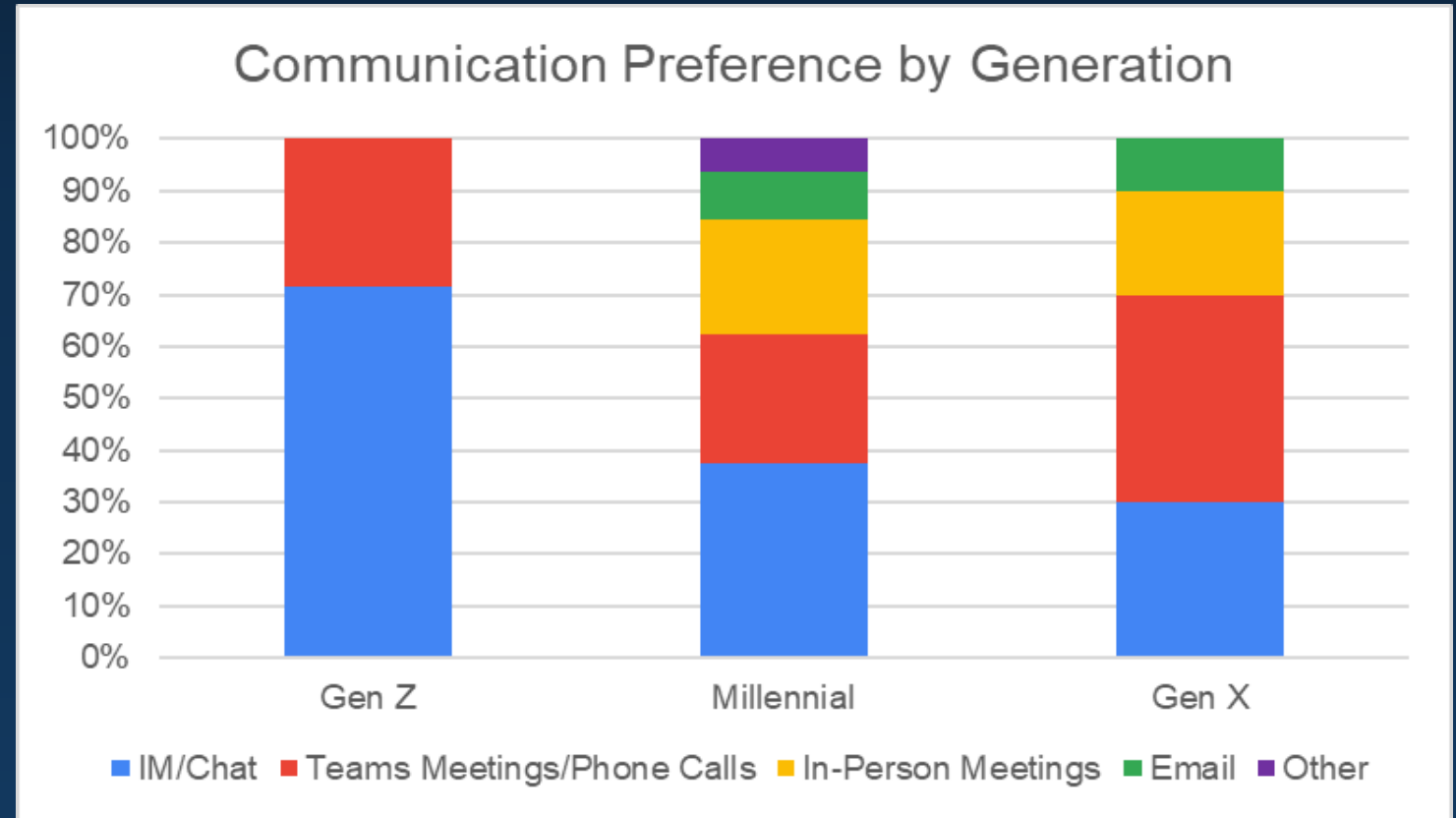


**Try and set personal perceptions aside - don't assume, just ask!**

## What have we seen in the cost community? - Survey Results

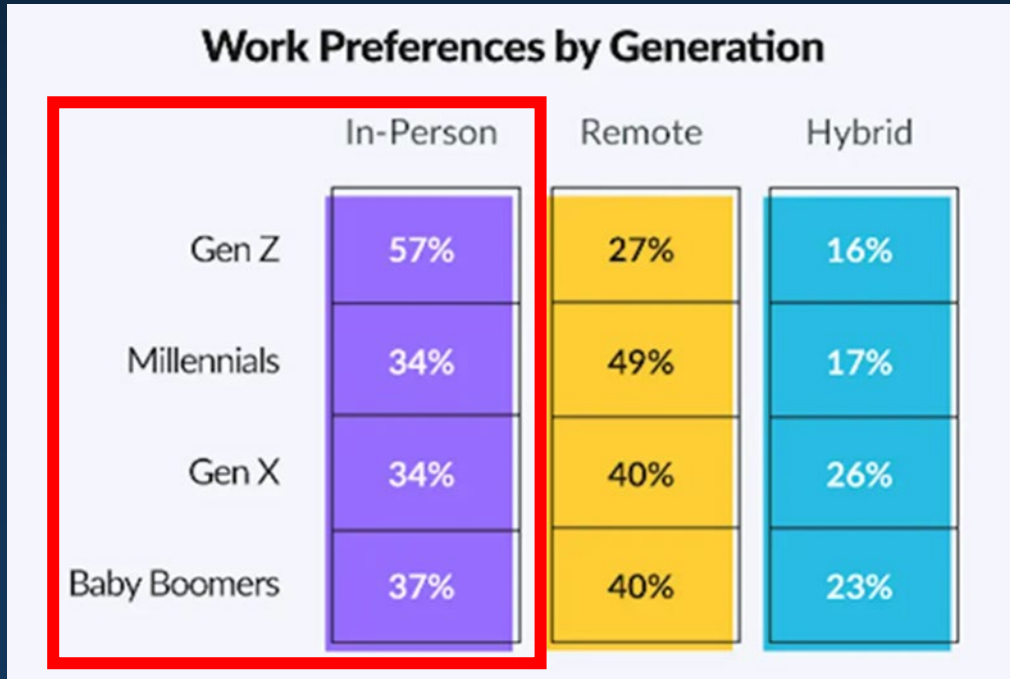
### Preferred Method of Communication

- Question recognizes that we all use a variety of communication methods in various circumstances
- Focused on which communication is preferred the most for general communication needs



Preference towards IM/Chat for general communication needs decreases between each generation

## What have we seen in the cost community? - Trends



- **2023 Joblist survey reports majority of Gen Z prefer an in-person workplace**
- **Our study on communication preferences shows Gen-Z prefers email and teams/phone calls over in-person communication**
  - Majority of our respondents work in a primarily remote work environment which may skew results
- **Data can be mixed** – preferred work location is influenced by many factors besides age
  - Stage of life, physical location, financial situation, access to technology, personality type, etc.

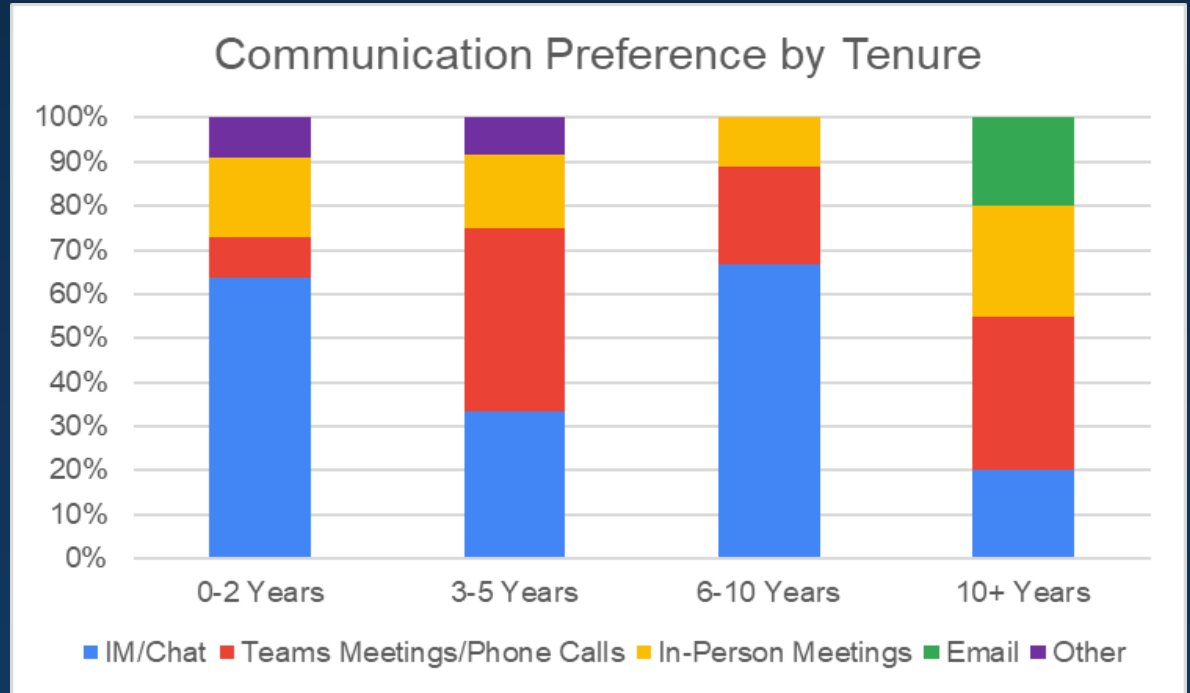
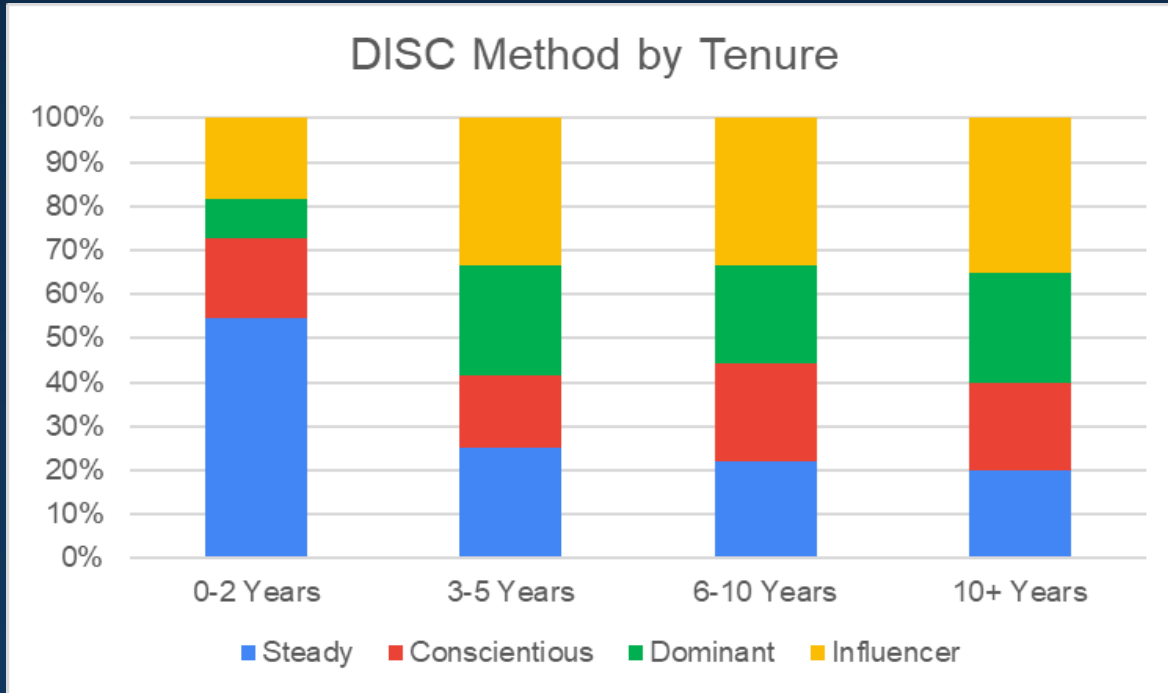
\*Source: Joblist 2023 US Job Market Trends Report

When you work from home and your boss asks what you plan to do at the weekly staff meeting



# What have we seen in the cost community? - Survey Results

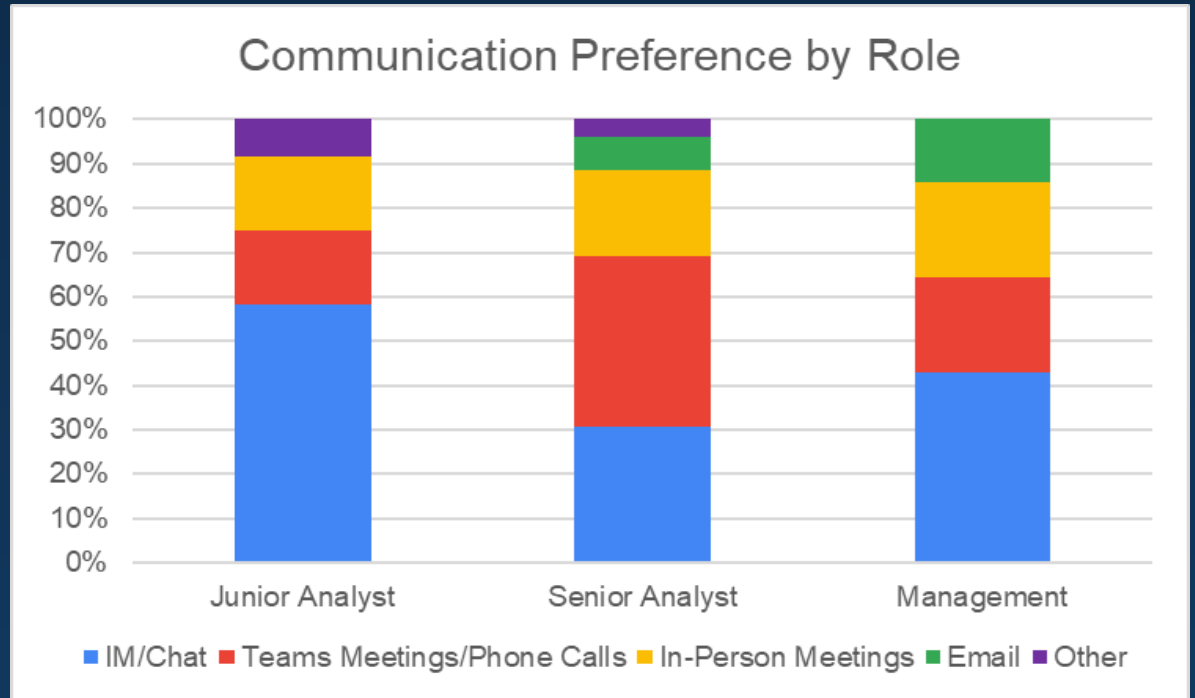
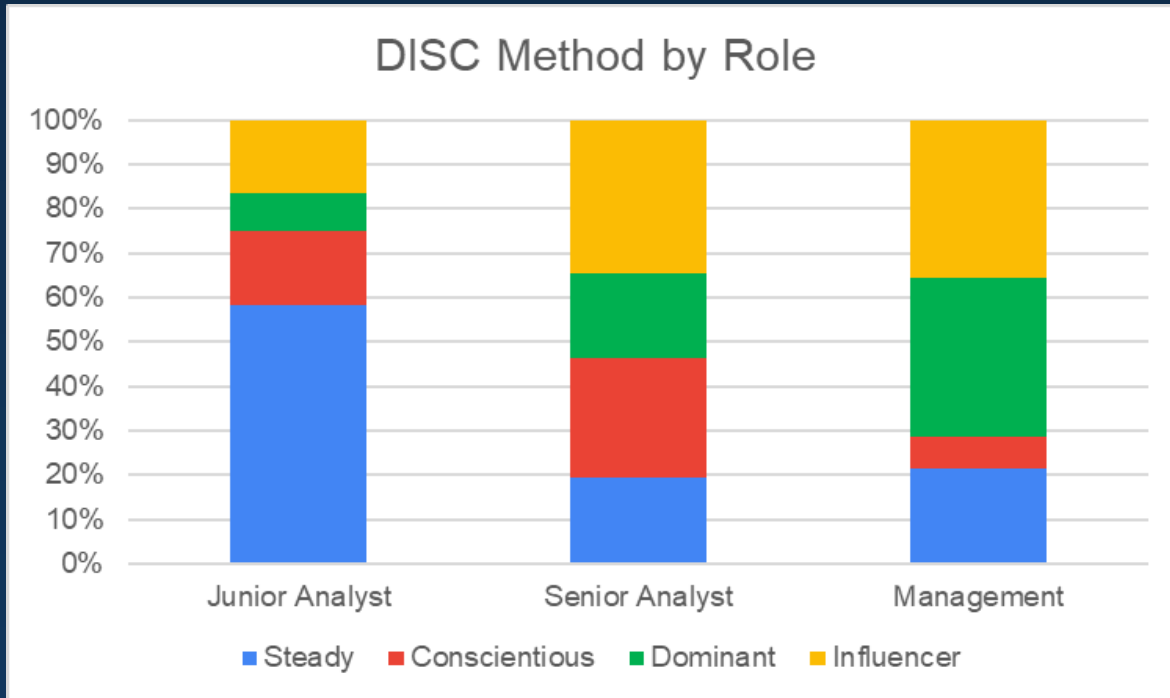
## Are trends generationally related or driven more by tenure/job title?



Strongest trends found amongst generations; tenure had some trends, but less pronounced

## What have we seen in the cost community? - Survey Results

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# FUTURE TRENDS IN WORKFORCE



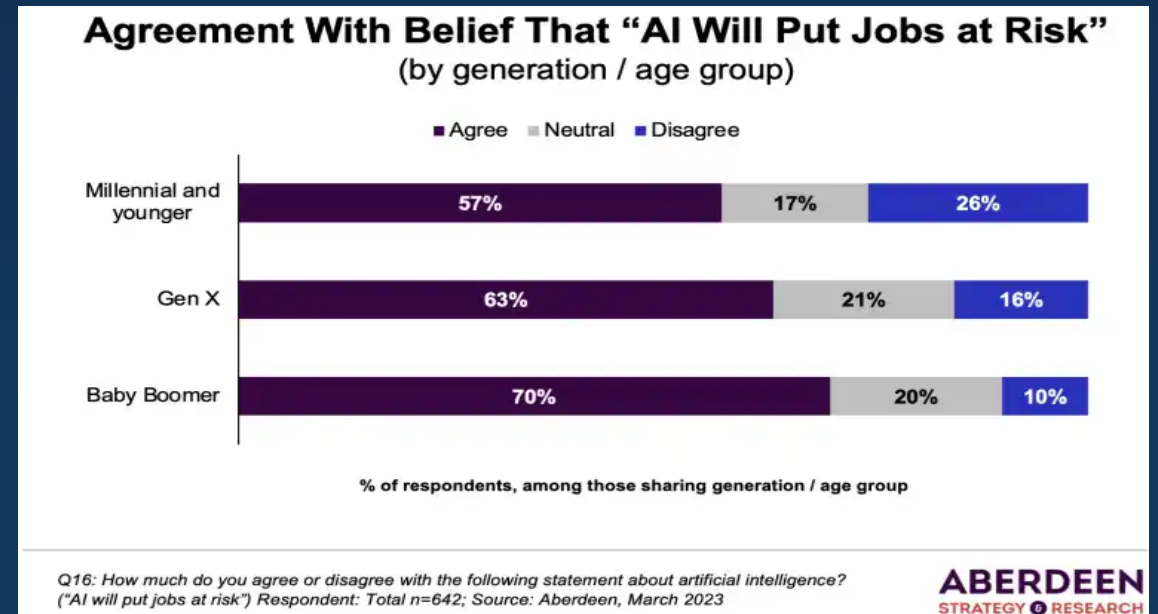
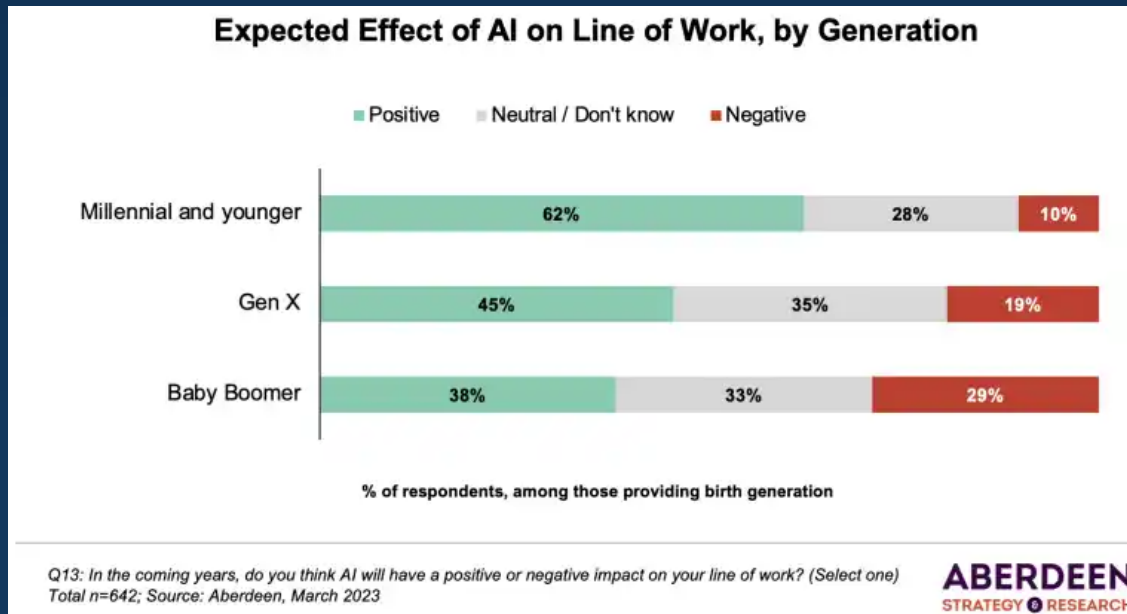
# Future Workforce Trends – Artificial Intelligence

## • Trust gap

- Millennials and Gen Z workers generally have more faith in the technology than Gen Xers or Baby Boomers
- Many Millennial and Gen Z respondents say they are already using AI tools such as ChatGPT at work

## • Job Security

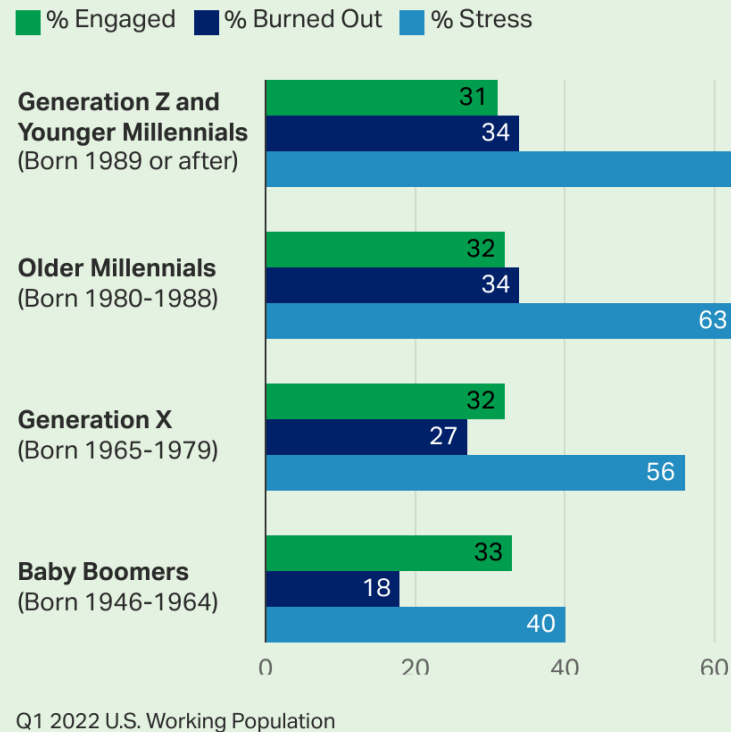
- Across all generations, 64% are concerned about job losses resulting from the development of AI
- Millennials and Gen Z are slightly less worried than Baby Boomers or Gen X



## Future Workforce Trends – Stress and Burnout

- **Gen Z and Millennial employees report more overall stress and work-related burnout than Gen X and Baby Boomers**
  - Burnout and stress often translate to *less engagement at work and shorter job tenure*
  - “Permacrisis” atmosphere and economic/financial uncertainty -> increased reported anxiety for Millennials and Gen-Zers
- **Gen Z / Millennial employees are becoming more open to discussing stress and mental health in the workplace**
  - Stress across the workforce may be underreported
  - Reflects increasing value workers are placing on finding employers that *care for employee wellbeing and growth*

### Engagement, Burnout and Stress, by Generation



mentally feeling like dumbledore when he aged 50 years in 11 years time



\*Sources: BBC, Gallop Polls - Data on Gen Z in the Workplace

## Conclusion

- **Working in a multigenerational environment can lead to many benefits:**
  - Increased Productivity
  - Enhanced Skill Diversity
  - Improved Stability
- **Discrimination can take many forms, including ageism and youngism**
- **Generational similarities do often exist, but make sure not to stereotype based on generation**
- **Each generation has their preferred communication styles and values**
  - Tailor your communication style to match how the recipient will process that information
  - Keep in mind that differences in lingo can cause miscommunication
- **Regardless of generation, everyone values acknowledgement of expertise, experience, and perspective when communicating**

Understanding of multigenerational values,  
beliefs, and worldviews

Better communication and reduced  
workplace conflict



Questions?