GENERATION BASED DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ELK GROVE VILLAGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

BY: Michael W. Lackman
Elk Grove Village Fire Department
Elk Grove Village, Illinois

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

January 2000

ABSTRACT

For years, sociologists and the media have reported that significant attitudinal differences exist between members of the Baby Boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1984). Management experts warn that it is important for managers to know and understand the differences to avoid the conflict and problems that may result.

The problem prompting this research is that the Elk Grove Village Fire Department has fifty-five (55) personnel from the Baby Boom generation and thirty (30) from Generation X and there is a possibility that generation based conflict may be present. Therefore, the purpose for the research was to determine if the differences exist and, if so, how the differences may affecting the department.

The research used evaluative research methods to answer the following questions:

1) Do generation based differences exist within the department?

2) If generation-based differences exist, are problems or conflict the result?

3) What role would leadership play in addressing generation-based differences?

4) If necessary, what can the current department's leaders do to address the issue?

The first action was to collect and review the literature to comprehend and understand the basis for generation-based differences and the type of conflicts that can develop. The second was to issue a questionnaire to the department's members to assess their opinion and how it impacts them and the fire department.

The major finding was that generation-based differences exist within the department and minor conflict is the result. Further, the reported differences follow the typical generation based

lines discovered in the research literature. A secondary finding was that it is the department's Baby Boomers who complained the most about generation based issues.

As a result, it is recommended that the fire department's leaders consider: a) enhanced sensitivity and conflict resolution training for all personnel; b) additional officer/leadership development training specifically designed for overcoming generation based conflict issues; c) initiating the strategic planning process, and d) strengthening its probationary firefighter acceptance program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

For the several years, there has been a considerable amount of media attention about the differences that exist been the generation born between 1946 and 1964 known as the Baby Boom generation and the next which was born between 1965 and 1985 and known as Generation X.

The purpose of this research was to study the history of each generation to discover the basis of generation based differences to understand why personal or organizational problems develop from them. The research was intended to emphasize the workplace, the fire service and the Elk Grove Village Fire Department. The research method employed evaluative methods to answer the following questions:

1) Do generation-based differences exist within the department?

2) If generation based differences exist, are problems or conflict the result?

3) What role does leadership skills play in addressing generation based differences?

4) If necessary, what can the current department's leaders do to address the issue?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Since 1966, the Elk Grove Village Fire Department has grown to become one of Illinois' largest career fire departments with ninety-four (94) uniform personnel. Between the years 1966 and 1980, most of the career positions were created and filled by people born between 1946 and 1964. And these firefighters, due to the newness of the department and their youth and number, were largely responsible for establishing the department's culture, operations and performance levels.

This research is especially relevant to the Elk Grove Village Fire Department because the department is a heavily Baby Boomer based organization. However, since 1990, many of the

Baby Boomers have left, or are leaving the department for many reasons and their positions are being filled by members of Generation X.

Given the problems that reportedly can develop between the generations, there is a chance the department is experiencing generation based conflict that management should respond to. This research effort relates to the National Fire Academy's course Executive Leadership in that when personnel conflict issues become an organizational problem, it is up to the organization's leaders to recognize the problem and provide relief. The relevant course content to this research is in Unit 7-Assessing Organizational Culture, Unit 9-Labor Relations, Unit 10-Being in Transition and Unit 11-Managing Change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generations are usually grouped into 20-25 year periods (Codrington, 1997). Grouping and classifying people into specific generations and then naming the generations is useful because generations develop certain, and sometimes significant, attitudes and actions that impact the country's economics, politics, society and culture (Codrington, 1997).

Life Stages

To understand a generation's attitudinal makeup, it helps to realize that most people evolve through identifiable life stages based on age. Codrington (1997) identifies those stages as being the Youth, Rising Adulthood, Midlife and Elderhood. These stages and their characteristics are illustrated in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1

Youth Age 0-21	Young people attempting to find and demonstrate their independence from their parents	The primary activity is Dependence
Rising Adulthood Age 22-42	Between 22-40, most are career ladder climbing, but at 40, many people begin to evaluate their lives and experience considerable career advancements	The primary life activity is Activity
Midlife Age 43-65	Those in the work force are at the upper end and often are forced retirement stage.	The primary activity is Leadership
Elderhood	Approximately 80 and at the end of life expectancy.	

As Table 1-1 illustrates, people develop their characters usually by the life stage they happen to be within a given point of their lives (Codrington, 1997). Likely, the most important emotional development stage is a person's Youth Stage, where a person begins to develop independence, but depends on older individuals for help establishing their independence and the opportunities to develop increasing independence. In Rising Adulthood, individuals evolve into greater activity and increasing responsibility situations, but are still largely influenced by older individuals in their decision making. And, the third stage, Midlife is where a person applies decades of personal and world experiences to provide the leadership and direction that younger people need. As Table 1-1 illustrates, each stage is roughly divided into 20-25 year segments, and during each stage, the groups have significant interaction between them (Codrington, 1997).

Generations and Social Events

According to Codrington (1997) a person witnesses significant personal and world events that can significantly influence the forming of their views and attitudes toward themselves, their peers, other generations and the world in general when they are in their Youth Stage. And, because the young are particularly sensitive to what happens to not only them, but to others of the same age, these events become the shared experiences of the entire generation.

Every generation experiences significant life events during their youth. When two or more generations are alive at a time and when an event is hurtful or harmful to young people, they may become angry or fearful because they trusted their leaders to do the right thing to prevent it. The older generations will generally react differently than the young, but in either case, each generation is affected and may or will react as a collective entity to the event.

To understand why an entire cohort acts as an entity, it is necessary to review some events and specific generations. The best living example is the generation that survived the Great Depression and fought World War II that's presently in its Elder Stage (Table 1-1). This generation is called the "Silent Generation" (born between 1920-1942) because its Youth Stage was during the Depression and as a generation they did little to rebel against or change the country's society and culture.

The second living example is the Silent Generation's 78 million children who were born between 1946 and 1964 and known as the "Baby Boom" generation. This cohort is credited with being the cause of the country's turbulent 1960's decade when they were in their Youth Stage (Table 1-1). The third example is Generation X who were born to the Baby Boomers between 1965 and 1985. Their Youth Stage was the 1970's when significant economic and cultural changes occurred within the country and the world which were unlike the previous two generations.

Codrington (1997) charts (Appendix A) and defines the more significant generalized events he believes characterized each generation and points out that historical events overlap to influence more than one generation group. But, according to Cheung (1999), there is controversy over which generation uses the living of these experiences as a springboard for

action which makes it possible for more than one generation to be responsible for changing the country's culture or society in response.

The Silent Generation

While the Silent Generation has been an important generation to the country and was largely responsible for giving birth to the Baby Boomer generation, its role is not significant to this research project and therefore receives little attention in this applied research project.

The Baby Boom Generation

The Baby Boom generation was the nation's largest population expansion by birth alone. It grew up in a strong post-war economy that allowed fathers to work a single job and mothers to stay at home to be full-time mothers. This form of home life was a circumstance many sociologists believe to be a significant developmental factor for them during their Youth Stage (Table 1-1). Because of the economy and their strong collective values and attitudes towards family and children, the Silent Generation has been accused by many of raising the Baby Boomers "as the country's most pampered generation"(Friedman, 1999).

According to Friedman (1999), the Baby Boomer generation was heavily influenced during its Youth stage (Table 1-1) by mostly positive circumstances, and in particular the television set. Viewing the same television shows with strong family-based values likely had the most influence because they reinforced their personal world and the world in general (Friedman, 1999). However, the Baby Boomers were also exposed to negative experiences as well. Examples were the cold war and the fear of atomic war; President Kennedy and Martin Luther King's assassinations; and the war in Vietnam (see Appendix A). These gave the Baby Boomers much to be concerned about and personally fear.

Because of society's total response to them and their ideal growth and developmental environment, the cohort took both their positive and negative experiences and massively entered their Young Adult Stage (Table 1-1) questioning and criticizing their parents' culture, society, ethics and values. Not liking a lot of what they saw or the way things were, they collectively acted to redefine and restructure the American culture and society (Friedman, 1999) during the 1960's – sometimes through violent actions.

However, the expanding economy during the Boomer's Young Adult Stage (Table 1-1) permitted the Boomers to continue with their basic behavior patterns and expectations of self-fulfillment (Friedman, 1999). Many Baby Boomers went on to become the upscale and wealthy YUPies (Young Urban Professionals) of the 1980's. However, Howe and Strauss (1997) point out that many Baby Boomers didn't achieve their expectations in Rising Adulthood and early Midlife stages (Table 1-1). A prime example is while the media speaks of the Boomer generation's wealth (Howe and Strauss, 1997), where in fact only 16 per cent have incomes over $50,000 and many are not doing as well as their parents at a comparable age - even in the presence of increasing household incomes. Steadily falling real wages since the early 1970's has meant the average income for men born between 1950 and 1959 is 86 per cent of what their fathers earned at a comparable age (Howe and Strauss, 1997).

Baby Boomers, having established a reputation of questioning, changing and restructuring society during their youth, are now in their early or middle Mid-Life Stage (Table 1-1) and have again come to question their lives, careers and society (Codrington, 1997).

The Generation X Generation

In a novel by Douglas Coupland (Coupland, 1999) entitled "Generation X", a group of "twenty-something's pulled back from society, worked at dreary jobs at the bottom of the food chain and

spent time trying to relocate their individual identities (Coupland, 1999)." Although Coupland (1999) states he did not intend to name his (or any) generation, his book coupled with the movie entitled "Slackers" and a form of rock music from Seattle all acted to create the country's view of the generation born between 1965 and 1985 now called "Generation X."

Generation X's Youth Stage (Table 1-1) was during the 1970's when significant technological, societal and cultural changes occurred unlike any other generation before. Examples are that they were the first generation to grow up in a world that didn't want most of them (birth control and abortion) or, when they were wanted, placed in day-care (career-oriented mothers and fathers). Many became "latchkey" kids (working single parents) where television and friends (rather than family) became the most important focus of their lives. They were also the one generation to experience drive by shootings, sex as a death sentence (HIV/AIDS), and higher teen suicide rates (see Appendix A). Although according to Bernardi (1994), many from the Gen X cohort didn't suffer personal trauma but each "must learn to deal daily with those who have." As a result, they begin to see through a distorted prism as well.

Despite these growing up conditions and factors, much of Generation X wants to stand for something and initiate social change (Slatterly, 1999). But, according to Wilson (1999), many Xer's believe they don't have the opportunity because they are living in the shadow of the Boomers. In fact, many Gen Xer's (Wilson, 1999) are jealous of the Baby Boomers and fantasize at living in the late 1960's as they "long for the freedom and space to be lost and confused, to question life, and to express themselves."

They see such freedom lacking today, but their notions of the 1960s as a decade when it was okay to drift, to be confused, to question one's purpose" (Wilson, 1999). Wilson's (1999) own personal view is that "In the 60's, the young generation did something; stood for something;

and the society had to listen and respond. The Baby Busters (another term for Gen Xers), on the other hand, hardly have a distinct identity, nor an active social and political agenda".

While many view Generation X with a less than flattering view, Solomon (1997) approaches the cohort with an understanding and sympathetic view. He points to the conditions in which the generation was raised and concludes that much of theGen Xers formative years were spent in a culture that was enmeshed in dramatic changes that are responsible for producing certain generational characteristics where some are positive and others negative (Solomon, 1997).

As a result of too many negative experiences, Mahedy and Bernardi (1994) report Gen Xers have come to be very serious about the quality of life. In fact, they view the quality of life as being so important to them that they will consider themselves, family and friends first over their career. This seriousness has been attributed to being stressed out over the personal pressure that come from school, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, crime and even political correctness (Mahedy and Bernardi, 1994) which is something that generations before them didn't experience.

Other characteristics of Gen Xers are that they are self-reliant and they can and must make it alone. They are skeptical which is a defense against disappointment. They are not necessarily religious, but believe spirituality is necessary in every day life. They are survivors and share a different world-view concerning progress and motivation. They are not as driven as much as their predecessors. In sum, they are realistic and not idealistic (Solomon, 1997).

Similarities Rather than Differences

Much of the controversy over the differences between the generations comes from the Baby Boomer dominated society's portrayal of Generation X as "whiners, slackers and grunge"

and that they lack the proper values and ethics of previous generations such as the Silent and Baby Boomers (Howe and Strauss, 1997). Howe and Strauss (1997) are so concerned they advise that the effects of the difference between the generations "isn't yet at a sixties boil, but the emerging conflict between forty-something's and twenty-something's will help to define this decade (1990's)."

Lopez (1995) explains her generation's behavior is based upon their situation and condition that is based upon an economy in which they are forced to struggle. As a prime example, she cites that her cohorts have college degrees, yet are unable to find meaningful work that pays a living wage. Lopez (1995) also recognizes that many Gen Xers do succeed in the business world, but in her view those who have do so by taking on the work practices of the Baby Boomer. Gen Xers feel that only when they are numerically, or economically based in society will they be able to initiate the changes they believe society needs and bemoan the Baby Boomers power and their holding of it longer than any other generation has.

On the other hand there are many similarities between the two. Baby Boomers are the country's most educated generation but Gen Xers are enrolling in college more than any other (Zill and Robinson, 1995). They also reportedly watch more television, but only as much as the Baby Boomers and the same mainstream popular shows (Zill and Robinson, 1995).

Other similarities suggested by Morin (1994) are they aren't more or less optimistic than any other generation about their personal condition or the future of the country and, despite what some say, they don't feel they've been given the short end of the stick. In fact, Morin (1994) suggests that Gen Xers attitudes aren't really much different from Baby Boomers, that they aren't dissatisfied or disinterested and that there is no significant national or personal mood differences separating the young and old.

Morin (1997) in an overall statement reports that in his view "Twenty-something's are, in key ways, very much like everyone else-except, of course, they're younger. Claims of sharp generational differences and conflict may make good copy, but they are rarely justified" (Morin, 1997).

While many like to disparage the generation gap between the Baby Boomers and Generation X, others think they are normal and natural divisions and not ones that are as striking as they are made out to be. For example, Zill and Robinson (1995) cite a Newsweek cover story entitled "<u>The Myth of Generation X: Seven Great Lies About Twenty Something's</u>" that concluded "There are only two generalizations we can make about them with any degree of certainty: they are Americans, and they are in their 20s."

The Generations in the Workplace

When it comes to managing generation based differences, expert's point to certain attributes that each generation brings to the workplace. For example, Berner (1997) fears that Baby Boomers will be left behind for the top jobs because they aren't as willing to work the long hours or make the sacrifices the Gen Xers do. On the other hand, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will be a growing trend in the growth rate of the U.S. work force making Boomers the most important segment of the labor force (Murphy, 1991).

Murphy (1991) points out that work place life used to be predictable but, today with so many changes in both society and business, the mixing of age groups can be problematic because "nobody seems to understand each other" (Murphy, 1991). Bernardi (Maherdy and Bernardi, 1994) claims that Gen Xers are confused in the workplace because the Baby Boomers criticize them for not defining success by a person's salary, car, home and where they vacation although that is not entirely true to some as many have provided advice on how to manage Generation X.

For example, Losyk (1997) believes that Gen Xers are energetic, creative, and ready to contribute and have much to offer. His advice is to:

1. Accept them and work with them, rather than fight them.

2. Use love and caring, as they need to be shown they are valued as people.

3. Support them outside of work by supporting their difficult personal situations.

4. Don't baby them but guide them, as they want to be independent and self-starters.

5. Hands off, but be there has they want their managers there but allowed to make decisions

6. Ask questions and implement solutions based on the answers.

7. Discuss your methods of managing and evaluating them.

8. Train and orient as it is a key motivator that allows them to acquire new skills.

9. Set specific standards of behavior, responsibility and policies.

10. Make work fun.

Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Fire Service

Bruegman (1993) advises that the fire service has undergone dramatic change starting with it no longer a white male dominated industry. It is becoming more diverse with women and minorities entering the ranks and that the fire service must adjust to not only this change, but to the change that is predicted to occur in the future workforce. Bruegman (1993) continues citing that within the decade the average age of U.S. workers will be 39 and one-third will be at least 65 years of age.

Research has been conducted by members of the fire service into the Baby Boom/Gen X issue. For example, in an Applied Research Paper submitted by a Battalion Chief Ricard of the Aurora (CO) Fire Department, he raises the issue that retiring firefighters are being replaced by

Generation X firefighters (Ricard, 1999). The concern was also over the differences that appear when the two generations are placed in the working environment of the fire service. Citing the fire services traditions largely promulgated by white males; Ricard (1999) recognizes the changes that have occurred in the fire service in recent years. Predominately citing females and ethnic diversity, Ricard (1999) focuses on the adjustments made for diversity. Likewise, adjustments must be made to accept the Generation X firefighters.

Trevino (2000) describes in great length how the fire service has traditionally existed from generation to generation where new firefighters fall into line with the old ways and learn from the "old salts." He cites that training officers have trouble motivating and understanding Gen Xers. However, Trevino (2000) also cites that with Gen Xers, fire service leaders must learn that old style management is simply inadequate as they compete to attract the best and brightest of the Gen X generation. Trevino (2000) emphasizes that the Gen X firefighter is not the enemy, but is just different from previous eras.

PROCEDURES

The first procedure was to collect data from the from various publications, books and articles posted on the World Wide Web that discussed the various sides of the issue studied. An understanding of the issues between the generations lead to the development of a four-part, forty-one (41) questionnaire (Appendix B) in which the department's members could express their views on the issue.

Over a three-day weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday), sixty-six (66) questionnaires were issued to the three on-duty shifts. On the following Monday morning, seventeen (17) or 26% were returned which may be what would be statistically expected, but the limited number

makes it difficult to answer the research questions with clear conviction. However, the answers were taken as meaningful attempts by the respondents to communicate their feelings and likely offer an overall view of the thoughts and views of the entire fire department.

With the small number of questionnaires that were returned, all have been included with this research paper with the exception of three that offered no significant information. The questionnaires submitted by the Baby Boomers are in Appendix C, and those of Generation X are in Appendix D. The purpose for their inclusion is so that the reader will have a better understanding of each individual's thoughts and feelings by reading their actual comments concerning this issue and to possibly help another researcher develop a better questionnaire.

Appendix C contains the questionnaires of the Baby Boomers and the respondent's range in age from 39 to 52 and each is marked in the upper right-hand corner with reference identification (BB-1 through BB-11). Appendix D contains the Gen Xers questionnaires from two 28-year-old respondents and is marked on the upper right hand corner with reference numbers (GX-1 and GX-2).

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Although much of the information used in this research effort is based upon the views and opinions of authors and limited scientific fact, the information was nevertheless enlightening and helpful in coming to an understanding of the issues and why controversy stems from them.

Likewise, the questionnaire (Appendix B) is not a scientific or statistical instrument as the intent was to develop a sense of the generation based attitudes, differences and personal feelings as opposed to gathering statistical or scientific facts. It is assumed that the respondents answered truthfully and did not intend to mislead or confuse the issue, but to honestly help address the issue and any effect it may have on the fire department.

Unfortunately, of the sixty-six (66) questionnaires distributed to on-duty shifts, only seventeen (17) were returned. Fifteen (15) were from Baby Boomers and two (2) from Generation X. Three (3) Baby Boomers questionnaires were only partially completed and therefore offered no useable information. Therefore, only Fourteen (14) officers or firefighters felt strongly enough about the issue to respond and the amount of information limits the research results. Also limiting this research is that twenty-eight (28) officers and firefighters were off duty the weekend of the questionnaire's distribution and therefore not queried.

Further, limiting the research is that the questionnaire is missing three questions that would have been helpful such as the length of fire department service in years; rank; and sex of the respondents to better gauge the respondent's point of view.

It is not clear what influence the information sheet that accompanied the questionnaire had on the respondents. It is assumed the information helped to clarify the purpose for the research and the issues in question. However, if the information aroused latent feelings and/or acted in some negative way and the results of the research may also be limited.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. Section 3 - Generational Values and Beliefs of the questionnaire (Appendix B) contains eighteen (18) questions that apply to answering this question. Of those eighteen (18) questions 3-2, 3-3, 3-10, 3-11, 3-15 and 3-17/18 are likely the most significant as the answers can illustrate if clear generational based lines exist between the respondents. For example, nine (9) Boomers and both Gen Xers answered question 3-2 that they clearly identified or associated with their respective generation (Appendix C and D).

In Question 3-10, all eleven (11) Boomers felt there was a definite generation gap between the generations, as did both Gen Xers. The follow-up question, 3-11 which looks for a description of the other generation, all eleven (11) Boomers chose "Slacker, Whiner, Doesn't care about anything except themselves" or added other comments such as "terrible work ethic, lack of commitment selfish, self-centered and doesn't take responsibility." In the companion question 3-13 for Gen Xers, only one (1) chose to answer Other with "Doesn't like change."

It is apparent that all thirteen (13) respondents answered these questions along generation based lines as the answers followed the standard media and literature rhetoric. Additionally, the answer to this question is that there are clear generation based differences within the department, but based upon the number of questionnaires returned, most of the concern over the differences are held by the Baby Boomers.

Research Question 2. Question 4-1 asks if the respondents believe there are problems or conflict between the two generations. All stated they believe there is conflict and that it is based on generation based differences.

The answers from the Gen Xers may be the most revealing. For example, GX-1 (Appendix D) took the time to convey his/her feelings in detail where his/her answer to Question 4-1 describes the Baby Boomers as being "old salts" and that they believe the way things have always been done is still the best way. He/she believes that it is better to be "progressive and at the same time, get back to the basics." He/she also believes that Baby Boomers are more likely to conform to management decisions and policy because they want to get promoted and "agreeing with whatever radical half thought out lame brain idea comes from above." GX-1 used the follow-up section of Question 4-1 to explain that the generations will always have differences

and that is good for both society and the fire service. However, he/she believes that an

understanding is necessary if the fire service is to survive into the next century."

Respondent BB-1 (Appendix C) was the most passionate in his/her response to the

questionnaire and reveals interesting thoughts. In particular BB-1 believes the values, work ethic

and career orientation to the fire service exists in the Baby Boomers and some Gen Xers.

However, he/she believes there are some Gen Xers who are a "sub-group" of the Gen Xers that

are only motivated when they personally benefit. This is supported by BB-2 (Appendix C) who

believes the Gen Xers have a "me first attitude" and they have no respect for seniority. BB-3

states similarly by answering Question 4-1 with "(they) want to know what's in it for them every

time they're asked/told to perform a task." Most of the other Baby Boomers answered with

similar thoughts regarding the Gen Xers inability to work in a "team environment" and having a

"me" attitude.

Given the strength of the answers there is a considerable level of opinion by the Baby

Boomers concerning the Gen Xers work ethic and conformity to the norms of the department and

that these feelings are creating personal conflict between the generations, at least for the Baby

Boomers.

Research Question 3. Other than a few references in the literature, little was found directly

addressing the issue of leadership as a means in which to deal with generation differences. There

is however, advise from the questionnaire (Appendix B) respondents.

Respondent BB-3 (Appendix C) voluntarily offered leadership as a change tool to address

the generation problems by answering Question 4-5 with "Strong leadership with the ability to

communicate the F.D. goals and not individual goals, and to enforce rules and insist on (the)

uniformity and conformity". So too, did BB-6 in answering Questions 4-4 and 4-5 where his/her

concern was based on morale and culture and that for those two things to change and improve it would take a leader to instill the proper values within the department. BB-7 believes that more leadership should come from the top, especially in setting goals. BB-7 believes the department needs direction and establishing common goals, but the "push in this department is coming from within. We just need someone to pick up the reins and say follow me".

BB-4 (Appendix C) touched on leadership concepts by answering Question 4-3 with "There needs to be stricter discipline-starting with the Chief" and that "Each officer needs to be held accountable for his firefighters actions". There is therefore, a belief from within the department that leadership does play an important role in addressing the differences and solving conflict.

Research Question 4. Section Four of the questionnaire (Appendix B) addresses this question as it deals directly with the fire department. Question 4-2, 4-3 and 4-4 directly allowed the respondents to offer what should be done to change the department. Some of the Baby Boomers want to enforce the rules to gain conformity to the norm as was demonstrated by thirty-nine year old BB-1 (Appendix C) who stated, "I believe we need to enforce more of the old "paramilitary" rules in order to control these individuals and hopefully discourage others like them from getting into the fire service. These are not the type of people that are needed for this type of work". This was followed by thirty-nine year old BB-2 who answered question 4-1 by stating "Beat it into them!" Again, BB-4 answers Question 4-3 by stating "There needs to be stricter discipline…"

Others believe that changes (Appendix B, Question 4-3) should come from improved morale and one (BB-8) said: "Develop a plan that includes the input of all employees necessary to implement the plan, then take action and review" which suggests that the department implement

a strategic plan. However, both the department's Baby Boomers and Gen Xers feel the best

response to the problems is to have both sides communicate with the other. There is a realization

that differences exist, but they can be resolved by communicating and compromising. The

lesson to be learned from this information is that some view the problem to be based on

enforcing existing rules and regulations and others seeking a change to the department's

operations such as suggested by GX-1 who wanted more staffing and equipment and more

importantly a mission statement. GX-2 wants to see more training opportunities and more

money (Appendix D).

DISCUSSION

The issue of generation based differences and the conflict that results is easy to see, but

somewhat initially difficult to comprehend. It is simple in the sense that all generations

experience different life experiences that influence their way of viewing the world (Codrington,

1997) and that these differences are to be expected. Comprehension comes from sorting through

the many and varied opinions from both sides to expose the true source of the problem.

Likely a big part of issues from the Baby Boomers name calling (whiners, slackers,

grunge, lost, etc.) (Mahedy and Bernardi, 1994) and from the Gen Xers responding in anger,

defensiveness and frustration is not just from the name calling, but from the social and economic

situation that they believe they're in. It is a situation they struggle with, but have no one to turn

to for assistance (Ameln, 1996) from those they live with on a daily basis and that is the Baby

Boomers. Bellah (1999) agrees with the thought that Gen Xers did not begin with a hopeful

outlook as they grew up in the blatantly anti-children decade of the 1970's by parents who

viewed the decade as the "me" decade and sought fulfillment at the expense of their children.

Fortunately reasonableness and understanding occur on both sides (Bellah, 1999). This is highlighted by the fact that Generation Xers are the future of this country (Trevino, 2000), (Bruegman, 19993), (Bellah, 1999). Many Baby Boomers see great promise in Generation X and accept them for who they are and are willing to adjust based upon the characteristics of Generation X (Bellah, 1999), (Trevino, 2000). Gen Xers agree they hold the promise, but they do not believe they are in a position to live up to the promise because of the Baby Boomers and because there's nothing they can do until they outnumber the Baby Boomers (Ireland, 1996). Bellah (1999) takes what most Baby Boomers see as negatives and turns it to positives by saying that most Gen Xers have and hold positive family and work values, but it is the Baby Boomers who are the most negative about work. Likely the most dramatic reversal is that most see Gen Xers having low expectations, but that is the mentality of a survivor that sacrifices in order to not only survive, but eventually succeed.

In terms of the fire department, the literature of generation based differences was reinforced by the questionnaire answers as they all basically followed along the basic generation divisional lines. What is most illustrating is that the department's Baby Boomers responded to the survey questionnaire in greater numbers making the issue a bigger problem to them than it is to the Gen Xers – again in support of the literature.

In conclusion, the problem appears to be mostly one-sided and it lies mostly with the Baby Boomers. The literature and questionnaire (Appendix B) results support this in that the Baby Boomers mostly accuse the Gen Xers of not being young Baby Boomers (Morin, 1994). The Gen Xers must therefore constantly defend themselves by arguing that they are just like them in many ways, but have their own identity and are asking for the freedom to express that identity the way the Baby Boomers did in their youth. On top of the attacks, Gen Xers don't

understand why the Baby Boomers (their parents) have such a dislike for their young (Mahedy and Bernardi, 1994).

The answer, therefore, appears to lie with the older, and presumably wiser, generation (Baby Boomers) to accept their leadership role and responsibilities as they enter their Midlife Stage (Codrington, 1997) and look to the young as the ones holding the future. This becomes difficult when all one hears are the Baby Boomers complaining and advise on how they may be managed (Maurer, 1999).

Unfortunately, few suggest that the older generation step up and lead the Gen Xers, which is what they desperately need and want (Mahedy and Bernardi, 1994). Solomon (1997) may put it best by saying, "taking the time to have a positive impact [on our youth] is more than just "worth the effort"; it is a vital responsibility of every adult and a contribution to the future of our own existence. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized as we contemplate the sometimes-puzzling segment of our population called Generation X" (Solomon, 1997).

In terms of the fire department leading both generations respondent BB-1 (Appendix C) pointed out that there are Gen X personnel who are doing their jobs in a satisfactory manner but there is a "sub-group" of Gen Xers who are unacceptable. This comment may be cause for leaders to become managers and devise ways in which new firefighters are selected for the position and a stronger probationary period that does a better job of identifying those who are unacceptable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended the fire department study the issue in greater detail to learn more about generation based differences and how conflict may surface and evolve within the department. Because generation based differences can be an emotional issue it is also recommended that the department consider sensitivity training for all personnel. The intent of this training is to provide adequate background as to how generation based issues surface and how to address them.

The department is clearly within a cultural shift from the Baby Boom generation influence to a Generation X influence. This transition should be recognized and planned for to offset organizational problems that may occur by developing a comprehensive strategic plan.

Likely the most important recommendation is establishing leadership training for all officers so that they have the ability to overcome their own generation based bias and provide the leadership both Baby Boomers and Gen Xers alike need.

Given the strong response from many of the departments Baby Boomers, the department should consider a stronger approach in evaluating probationary firefighters before approving them for permanent positions.

REFERENCES

Codrington, G. (1997). Classification of generations by life stage. Retrieved August 3, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http:..home.pix.zq/gc/gc12/generations.html

Cheung, E. (1994). Baby boomers, generation-x and social cycles. Retrieved July 9, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://web.1-888.com/longwave/bbgxsc.html

Morin, R. (1994). Much ado about twentysomethings. Washington Post National Weekly Edition, p. 27. Retrieved July 30, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://members.aol.com._ht_a/genxcoal/info-29.htm

Solomon, J. (1997). Generation *x*. Retrieved July 30, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://members.aol.com/jodiah/info-68.htm

Lopez, O. (1995). *Thoughts on texts that sur-round, de-construct generation x*. Retrieved July 16, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://www.qual.berkeley.edu/-olopez/present.html

Ireland, J. (1995). Generation x. Retrieved July 9, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http: www.chem.duke.edu/-ireland/writing_html/GenerationX.html

Thomas, W. (1996). X the gen x title. Retrieved July 9, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://relsgi.eng.ohio-state.edu/-thomas.x1.hml

Berner, J. (1997). Reading your fortune after forty. Retrieved August 3, 1999 from the World Wide Web: wysiwyg://107/http:www.thirdage.com/insider.work/berner/920661340.html

Ameln, R. (1996). Managing generation x: are they spoiled brats? *Or talented entrepreneurs?* Retrieved August 3, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://www.sbmin.com/articles/humanres.mar96am2.htm

Howe, N., Strauss, W. (1997, May). The new generation gap. Retrieved on July 30, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://members.aol.com/_ht>a/genxcoal.info_18.htm

Murphy, T. (1991, July). Corporate life has changed. Working Woman, pp. 41, 43, 44, 45.

Zill, N., Robinson, J., (1997). The generation x difference. Retrieved August 8, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://members.aol.com._ht_a/genxcoal/info-50.htm

Losyk, B. (1997, December). Generation x: what they think and what they plan to do. *Public Management*, pp. 1, 5-9.

Bruegman, R., (1993). Fanning the flames of change. *The American City and County*, June. Retrieved May 31, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?TS=9281742...1&Sid=8&Idx=30&Deli=1&RQT=309&Dtp=1

Mahedy, W. and Bernardi, J., (1994). A generation alone-xers making a place in the world. *Intervarsity Press*, Downers Grove, IL.

Slattery, L., (1999). Generation x to generation next. Retrieved November 5, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://members.tripod.com/barneygrant/GenxLS.htm

Bellah, M., (1999). A promising generation. Retrieved September 9, 1999 from the World Wide Web: http://bestyears.com/genx.html

Maurer, R., (1999). Don't' resist generation x: understand and learn to manage them. Retrieved from the World Wide Web August 9, 1999: http://www.TRI-Performance.com/spotlight/generationtion_x/maurer.htm

Friedman, R. (1999). The whole world is watching. Retrieved from the World Wide Web August 3, 1999: http://pathfinder.com/@@msSrrgQAzSbKLvz0/Life/boomers/essay03.html

Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.fema.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.