

Generational Diversity

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11/23/09

N20010

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Abstract

The differences between the generational cohorts were examined in the nursing field. The differences between the Matures, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials were substantial but with leadership strategies these differences can be overcome. The different cohorts all bring strengths and weaknesses to the table. Certain traits are common between some cohorts but for the most part they are very different. Certain times and events that happened during the eras also shaped the way these cohorts work and problem solve. With the help of coaching and motivation, communication and conflict resolution these cohorts can learn to work together and help each other with problem solving and show different approaches to problem solve.

Generational Diversity

“Today’s nursing workforce is made up of staff and nursing leaders from four different generational cohorts. Generational diversity, including workforce differences in attitudes, beliefs, work habits, and expectations, has proven challenging for nursing leaders” (Sherman). “Each of these generations has lived through a common set of social and historic events that have helped shape their unique attitudes, ambitions, and world views” (Dominguez). The problems that can become associated with the different generational cohorts are trouble communicating or trouble with approaches to problem solving. For example, the Millennials are more experienced with computers, things such as email, whereas the Matures would have a harder time adjusting to new software for the computer. The Millennials and Matures may have a harder time working together but there would also be major differences between the other two generations as well. Which two cohorts would have the most conflict and why would they be more likely to have problems.

“A generational group, often referred to as a cohort, includes those who share historical or social life experiences, the effects of which are relatively stable over the course of their lives” (Dominguez). The cohorts are the Matures (the veterans) 1920-1945. The Baby Boomers at 1946-1964. Generation X from 1965-1980. And the Millennials from 1981-2000. The Matures sometimes are called the Silent Generation or Traditionalists. And the Millennials are sometimes referred to as Generation Y or Net Generation.

Types of Cohorts

Beginning with the Matures, they are from the World War II and Great Depression Era. These people would value everything they were given and not want to waste. They make up about five percent of the workforce but that is shrinking as many people in this cohort are starting to retire being between the ages of 69-89. When the Matures are faced with new problems they tend to look at past

experiences to draw on what worked and what didn't. Matures also believe in being loyal to the organization, they respect authority and hierarchy, and are highly disciplined. Also with the time period that they grew up they see education as a prize and it's something that shouldn't be taken advantage of. And when it comes to work the Matures do work for job security and money over job pleasure. When in the workforce the Matures feel that seniority should be considered first when proceeding with advancement. And that in the end hard work and dedication will provide rewards in retirement. The good things that Matures bring to the workforce is years of experience and high quality of care. They also place great value on personal sacrifice for the good of their job. The only drawbacks with working with this cohort are they have limited experience with computers and do not agree with twelve hour long shifts because of physical limitations. Also, that they perceive lack of professionalism among younger co-workers.

The next cohort is the Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers are the largest population growth at eighty million people. The events that defined this cohort are the Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy assassinations, the Korean and Vietnam War, and the moon landing. A Baby Boomer can be described as self-absorbed, optimistic, hardworking, but they demand respect and recognition, thrive on personal growth and gratification, and place high value on the benefit of the individual rather than the organization. Baby Boomers make up one third of the workforce and are set to retire at the end of the decade. They are not comfortable or easily adaptive to new technologies but are usually career focused and hardworking. They often prefer to work alone instead of group work. Some traits that Baby Boomers have are they view work and accomplishment as gratifying and they strive to improve and grow in the workplace. They bring years of experience and dedication to their job. However, with this cohort they tend to place more importance on self-accomplishment rather than the growth of the company and they place expect plenty of recognition for their job well done.

Generation X is the smallest generation with forty seven million people. Events related to this cohort are the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, and Civil Rights and the Feminist Movement. Growing up in this era, children believed in diversity, equality, and standing up for what they believed in. However, they rejected authority, prefer an informal working environment and like to have fun at work. This cohort does desire a balance between work and family with flexible schedules and plenty of time off. They also appreciate opportunities to advance through the company but also acquiring new skills. Generation X people can adapt to new situations very quickly and can work independently. The only problems with Generation X is that there is a tendency to disagree with authority and also will consider moving on if an employer does not meet their expectations.

The last cohort is the Millennials or Generation Y. The youngest and more racially diverse of the generations accounts for thirty percent of the population. The events that shaped this cohort are the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the tragic shootings at Columbine High School. With these events came the realization that few individuals can cause great destruction and terror. Millennials have probable the widest variety of traits. Millennials are very comfortable with new technologies, are goal-oriented, adapt very quickly to change, are excellent at multi-tasking and are confident, optimistic and ambitious. With this generation, they tend to communicate through cell phones with texting or computers with email which allows them to be constantly connected to their environment. There is also a continuing desire to learn and with this generation they like working with people they like, are comfortable with and enjoy being friends with co-workers. Millennials have a many different traits that will make them strong participants in research. They acknowledge positions and titles and are good at offering their opinion and asking questions. This cohort is full of energy and is just out of college so they have the newest skills and knowledge of technologies. However, this cohort is afraid of making mistakes and will not make bold choices or daring choices. Will stay in a comfort zone because of their lack of

experience and would rather just go with the flow than make mistakes for standing out. This cohort also does not like to work alone.

Importance in Nursing

When it comes to nursing all these cohorts have different views of the career. When it comes to the traditionalists or matures even though they have begun their transition to retirement, nurses tend to continue working in all the levels of the nursing organization. The Baby Boomers are the largest group of nurses in the workforce and are occupying many leadership roles. With the retirement of this cohort set to be underway in 2010 there will be a very large shortage of nurses and unless something is done to retain this cohort in the workforce it will become true. When it comes to Generation X at first this cohort did not see nursing as a chance to expand their job careers and availability in other jobs. However, as of now people in this cohort are entering nursing as a second career option after seeing the benefits and job security. Lastly, the Millennials make up the smallest group in the nursing workforce but with most of the nursing students making up this cohort set to graduate within the next three years this cohort will grow drastically.

Leadership Strategies

There are several ways that Nurses can deal with the problems that are faced when it comes to the generation gaps. Nursing leaders need to be able to promote an atmosphere where everything supports the values and beliefs of each person in each different cohort. "Current nurse leaders' work demands and compensation, which have been acceptable to Veterans and Baby Boomers, may not be conducive to attracting future generations to leadership positions in nursing" (Sherman). When it comes to leadership strategies nursing leaders need to hold each employee to the same work expectations and procedures but also understand that each cohort would have a different way of

completing each and different needs. Three areas that need special attention are coaching and motivation, communication and conflict resolution.

With coaching and motivation, when it comes to each cohort they each have preferences on how they would want to be coached and motivated. When it comes to the veteran nurses they prefer one on one traditional coaching style and formal instructions on how to improve their performance. Seniority and expertise are essential with coaching. When it comes to motivation hand written notes, plaques, and pictures that recognize a job well done is what these nurses strive for. Baby Boomers however prefer the peer-to-peer coaching and value lifelong learning as a way to improve their performance. However they prefer public recognition such as parking spaces and award nominations. Generation X prefers a chance to demonstrate their expertise in the learning environment. Generation X believes that recognition and advancement should be based on merit and rewards would rather be time off or cash rewards unlike traditional rewards. When it comes to millennial nurses they expect way more coaching and motivation than any of the other cohorts. They may be optimistic and goal-oriented but also like structure, guidance and extensive orientation.

Communication has to be the biggest problem between the cohorts because not only of ways to communicate but also the style in which the cohorts communicate. Veterans prefer face to face communication or written communication, something that builds trust is important to them. Baby Boomers prefer face to face as well and also talking on the phone but will use email if they are comfortable with the technology. Generation X tends to use technologies since it appeals to them. When it comes to communicating, they like the bottom line. Millennials have grown up in the age of cell phones and texting. Emails and chat rooms are very effective with this group.

Conflict resolution is important when dealing with the four different cohorts in the nursing workforce. Two major sources of conflict are the work ethics that are perceived and also the use of technology. When it comes to veteran nurses they should be valued for their wisdom and when

technology fails veteran nurses are more likely to assist the unit back to traditional ways of assessing and treating patients. Baby boomers should be valued for their clinical and organizational expertise. They will mentor the younger less experienced nurses. They will use it as a way of passing down knowledge since this cohort is set to retire. Generation X should be valued for their ideas and creative approach to how it can be used in practice. Millennials should be valued for their understanding of technology. They are able to help with new technologies and also assist in coaching older generations about technology.

Conclusion

The differences between the cohorts cause problems but there is plenty of ways the cohorts can work together to function well in the nursing workforce. With the help of nurse leaders, these problems can be resolved with a number of strategies. With the help of these strategies, nurse leaders would be more able to persuade other nurses to complete care effectively and with the best care possible for the client. These cohorts could work effectively and efficient and run smoothly. The nursing field would seek to understand and corporate with each and every individual in each and every cohort. Without the leadership strategies the nursing workforce would be a jumbled mess of people thinking that their way is the only way and only attempting something the way they know. The purpose is to learn from each cohort and understand what each one brings to the workforce.

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