
Bridge the Skills Gap by Connecting Generations: Here's How



According to government reports, the unemployment rate in the U.S. has fallen sharply since the Great Recession and is currently well below the post-war average of 5.8%. Whether that number is accurate or reflects – as some insist – that many Americans are stuck in part-time jobs, or have given up finding work altogether is a topic of lively debate. One thing that is not debatable, however, is that there is compelling evidence of a shrinking talent pool of skilled labor ... resulting in a “war for talent” that is all too real.

Some workforce projections state that more than two million science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (“STEM”) jobs will go unfilled by 2020. What’s more, according to related surveys, 74% of college students feel their education is failing to prepare them for future careers.

Part of the issue is the majors most college students choose. STEM disciplines don’t even make it into the top-10 list of most popular college majors. What does? Business administration is number one, with psychology, nursing, general biology, and teaching rounding out the top five.¹

Adding to the challenge, new employment trends like “gig workers” affect the talent pool even more. The number of gig workers – contingent or temporary employees who move from project to project and company

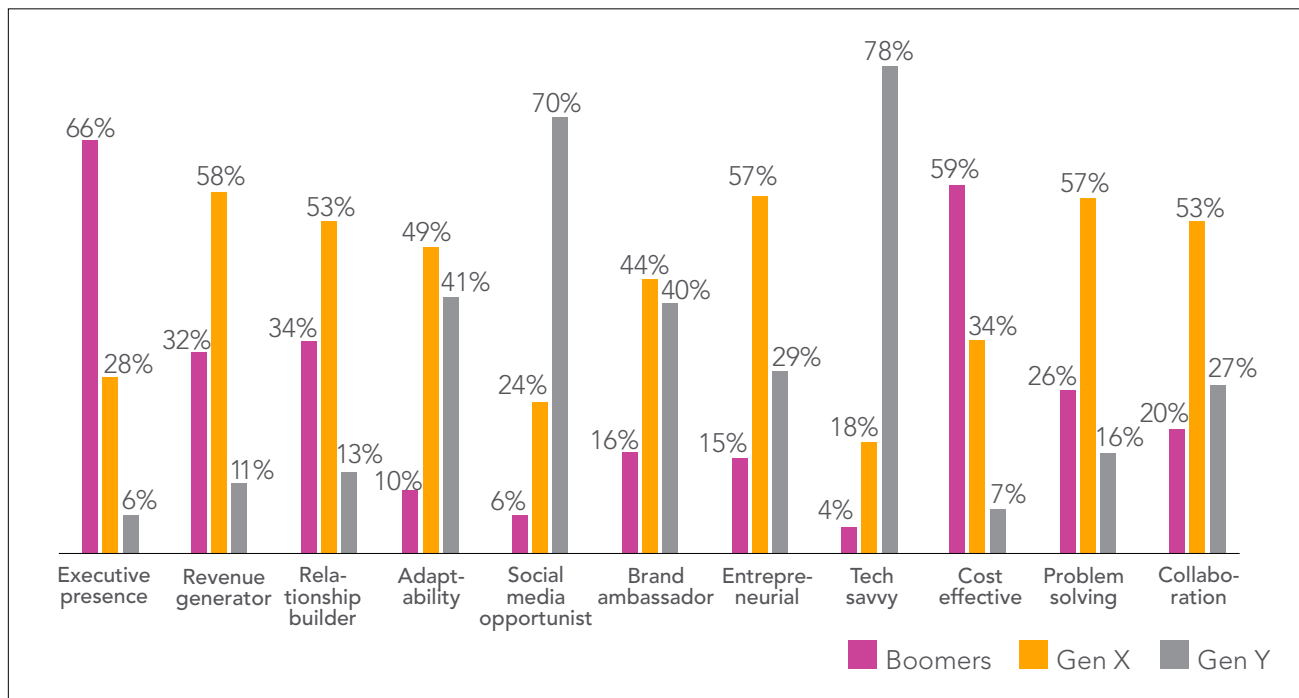
to company – are quickly growing and now comprise a significant portion of the workforce. In fact, the U.S. Government Accounting Office says 58 million workers fall into this category. That’s nearly half of all workers in America. While contingent workers can bring significant and specific skills to the workplace, they also bring risks with a company’s ability to protect intellectual property.²

Multiple generations, multiple opportunities

There is hope for companies that are hungry for talent. For the first time in history, the workplace encompasses four different generations of workers, each with their own unique experiences, skills, motivators, and potential drawbacks.

Generations: By the Numbers ³				
	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials (Generation Y)	Centennials (Generation Z)
Age	52–70	38–51	20–37	0–19
Year of Birth	1946–1964	1965–1978	1979–1996	1997–present
Population	77 million	57 million	78 million	73 million

Making the most of this multigenerational talent pool, of course, has its challenges. Just as individuals have strengths and weaknesses, generations have statistical differences. For example, the following chart illustrates how well boomers, Gen X and millennials (Gen Y) perform in various roles within an organization.⁴



To address these strength and competency variables, HR and talent professionals need to promote a collaborative and rewarding environment in the workplace. In doing so, they can better engage employees and build strong, united teams. But can they do that?

The good news is that, despite generational differences, these three generations all share the same top five expectations of their employers:⁵

1. Challenging projects
2. Competitive compensation
3. Advancement opportunities and chances to learn and grow in their jobs
4. Fair treatment
5. Work-life balance

Armed with this knowledge, companies can navigate the war for talent with an increased awareness of the workplace factors that will attract and retain the best candidates over the long term.

Hiring to win

According to the Society for Human Resources Management, companies determined to win the war for talent are focusing on certain behaviors:⁶

Market a strong and compelling employment brand.

Savvy candidates will evaluate company brands before applying for or accepting a job, much in the same way they evaluate consumer brands when shopping. Your organization's hiring managers must be prepared to have honest conversations about every aspect of the job. Otherwise, companies will lose talent.

Use a broader scope of sourcing pools.

In addition to apprenticeships and in-house training programs, many organizations are considering cross-industry hiring with fresh eyes. Employers can maximize quality hires if they take a broader view on where talent comes from. This includes investigating the

contractor – or gig worker – pool in their area. Gig workers can provide a quick infusion of talent for specific projects or current needs the company has.

Increase the use of talent analytics to evaluate the “best and brightest.”

HR and hiring managers will continue to seek better ways to get their arms around data and develop true insights about future and current employees. It is common practice for companies to analyze customer data to help them make better strategic decisions. Candidate information will increasingly get the “big data treatment” so recruiters can quickly and easily locate the best people for the job.

Improve the candidate and hiring experience.

Today’s job seekers know their worth and are aware of the competitive landscape. They see opportunities everywhere and, if one employer takes too long to respond or makes it difficult to apply, job seekers will quickly move on to another job opening. The best companies work to build a positive connection with the candidate from the first contact point. For more insights on this topic, read the “Heads in the Cloud: Mobile and Social Recruiting” article also in this issue.

Creating a winning workplace from day one

Once hired, a positive onboarding experience for the new employee is another key to



retaining top talent. Besides being trained in general diversity and inclusion principles, managers should be trained to be keenly aware of the differences between the generations. Training sessions can help managers and employees:

- Understand each other and work more effectively together.
- Create effective multigenerational teams by publicly identifying each person’s skills in the group. For example, “Richard has 12 years of experience in graphic design which may benefit your group’s presentation.”
- Develop clear goals and expectations for each team.
- Hold all members accountable for their individual group participation. For example, “What role did you play in this project?”
- Offer ongoing formal feedback to modify behavior and performance. Meet with each team individually to monitor its success and challenges.

ADP® can be your partner

It’s time for business leaders and HR professionals to stop fearing the war for talent and start winning it. ADP can help you assess your workforce with our human capital management tools, expand the training available to your people, investigate new sources of talent and untapped worker pools, and provide insight on what unites employees across generations.

¹ Stockwell, Carly, “Same as it ever was: Top 10 most popular college majors,” USA Today, October 26, 2014.

² Beach, Gary, “CIOs, Facing IT Skills Gap, Eye the Gig Economy for Talent,” The Wall Street Journal, May 16, 2016.

³ Parker, Carrie, “Live Spotlight Presentation: The Future of the Workplace – Evolving the Next Generation of Workers,” The Futures Company, October 28, 2015.

⁴ Giang, Vivian, “Here Are the Strengths and Weaknesses of Millennials, Gen X and Boomers,” Business Insider, Sept. 9, 2013.

⁵ White, Marion, Rethinking Generation Gaps in the Workplace, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School, 2011.

⁶ Maurer, Roy, “Five Recruiting Trends for 2016,” Society for Human Resource Management, February 1, 2016.