Bridging the Gap
An employers guide to managing and retaining the new generation of employees
Today's young workers: Generation Y, have different characteristics, attitudes, and workplace expectations to older generations. Based on the latest Australian research, this guide provides you with the key information and skills you need to better retain, manage and train this 21st Century worker.

We have also produced an accompanying Employees Guide. You’ll find it and more resources at www.mccrindle.com.au
The future of industry is shaped not just by the economic and technological changes, but also by population and generational changes. The key to ongoing success therefore depends not just on technical excellence but managerial excellence.

Beginning a career in today is a very different experience to those who grew up in the 1960’s, or the 1980’s. In many ways we resemble our times more than we resemble our parents. Therefore understanding these ever-changing times in relation to the very different employee of today is essential for every business owner.

In these times of fast change, every organisation and business is just one generation away from extinction. Unless we can understand and remain relevant to the new generation of employees we will edge towards irrelevancy.
Australia, like most developed nations is experiencing a rapid ageing of the population. The result is that there are fewer young people relative to the population and this is particularly evident in those aged 15–19, the traditional apprentice age group.

This ageing population will continue because longevity rates are rising and the trend to have fewer children later in life is continuing.

Yet the population and the economy are still growing. The result is that the demand for labour is clearly greater than the supply.

THE FACTS on an ageing population

Increasing average age

In 1976 the median age of an Australian was 28 (1) compared to 37 (2) today, and in a decade it will be nearly 40 (3). The average age of full-time workers has also been rising and today it sits at 39 (4). The ageing workforce is even more evident in some industries and occupations. For example, in manufacturing it is 40, in agriculture and bookkeeping it is 43, in education 44, and for a registered nurse it is 45 (5).

Smaller working age population

Australia’s population aged 15–64 years, which encompasses most of the working-age population, is in decline as a proportion of the total population. Currently 66% of the total population is aged 15–64 years but by 2051 it will decline to just 57% (6).

More of the old - less of the young

Australia’s population will continue to age. The proportion of the population aged under 15 years is projected to fall from 20% today to around 14% by 2051 (7).

The war for talent is a global one

The median age for the world’s most developed countries is currently between 30 and 42 (8). As a result, Australians are in great demand overseas. In the 28–39 year age group, there are 20,000 fewer men than women because so many men of this age group are working overseas. The reason for this is that, firstly, men still demonstrate greater vocational mobility and, secondly, this is the peak child-rearing age for Australian women (9).
Next Steps:

- **The power has shifted - it’s an employees market**: With fewer in this age group we have to work harder to attract and retain them. Gone are the days when you could get rid of an employee and replace them from a plentiful pool or workers.

- **This new reality is here to stay**: Even after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, in Australia skills shortages remained. The point is that the skills shortages are caused by demographic changes (ageing and retiring workforce), not just the economic changes (labour demand and supply).

- **Generation Y really do matter**: Some employers, after bad Gen Y experiences are tempted to focus purely on employing more mature workers from whom they get better loyalty and commitment. However, only the Gen Y’s can bring youthful idealism and energy, a fresh view to the industry, new qualifications and a 21st Century perspective to life and technology. Generational diversity is the key to a balanced workforce reflective of the varying ages of customers and society.
Education rates in Australia have been increasing over the last few decades. Even those considering an apprenticeship are often completing Years 11 and 12. Therefore we are dealing with the most formally educated generation ever and this opens more employment opportunities for them.

Combined with this is their technological literacy and the positive perception that they have of the IT, service and business sector which adds to the recruitment challenge for the traditional trades. We are also dealing with a generation that have come of age in an entrepreneurial world with increasing opportunities to start their own business or at least change careers regularly until they find one that suits them.

In an ageing population they know that they are in demand and so they are not as worried about the risks of changing employers — or even careers.

THE FACTS on the increasing options for today’s

**Education options** - There are more education pathways and options available today than ever before. Of all the students beginning high school today, 75% will complete Year 12, compared to only 20% in 1967 (10). The Year 12 retention rate is only set to increase with the Federal Government’s introduction of a national Year 12 retention rate target of 90% by 2015. Also, over half of school leavers now go onto further study. University is the most likely pathway: 30% go onto higher education, while 24% continue their studies at TAFE or other forms of education (11).

**New and emerging career options** - There are more careers on offer today than ever before — which is a challenge to traditional trades. In Australia today there is an estimated skills shortage equivalent to 1% of the labour force. This equates to over 100,000 potential jobs for which there are no willing workers (12).

**More employable than ever** - The unemployment rate is currently hovering around 5%, and even though it has increased slightly because of the economic downturn, it is still very low by historical standards (13).

**Shorter careers- and more of them** - The length of time workers spend per employer has been in freefall for decades. In 1960 employees averaged 15 years per employer. Today the average tenure has dropped to just 4 years (14). Also, today’s school leavers have the opportunity to change careers more than ever. It is predicted that the average school leaver today will have over five careers and 20 employers and be self-employed at least once in their lifetime (15).
Next Steps

• **One size doesn’t fit all:** Greater focus is required to effectively attract and recruit young people, who relative to the total population, are less numerous. A dedicated approach specifically targeting their interests and attitudes, which are very different to older workers, does bring about more effective outcomes.

• **Age is just a number today:** In the workplace it’s not about age or life stage, but one’s mindset and understanding that matters. Diversity is all that this generation has ever known so work hard to provide an atmosphere that values it: whether it is gender, cultural, or generational diversity.

• **Don’t judge them - just understand them:** While derided as fickle, self-focussed, and disloyal, the reality is that they just reflect their times. Jobs aren’t guaranteed and companies come and go so it is not an inherent selfishness but a response to the economic realities. Therefore it is best to avoid value judgements and just implement what we can to best attract and retain them.
redefined work life

While the benefits of achieving a work/life balance are evident to all, the emerging employees expect this balance from the start of their career. They don’t feel the need to earn it - they just demand it. While we can wish for the work ethic, commitment and duty of the good old days, these days are all we have to work with.

The reality is that Generation Y value balance in life, variety in the job, and change in their roles. Therefore to achieve better retention we need to create a work culture which provides flexibility and a management style which communicates respect.

THE FACTS on the increasing options for today’s employees

Casual workers - 30% of the total workforce is employed on a casual basis while for Generation Y it is over 40% (16).

Global workforce - Australia’s cultural diversity — and links to overseas work opportunities stands at an all-time high. Over a quarter of the total population was born overseas (17).

Sea Changers - The relocation trend continues. Around 6 million Australians live in coastal areas outside capital cities with the growth strongest in Queensland and Western Australia (18). Also those relocating are not just retirees, in fact 4 in 5 were aged under 50 (19).

Balancing work and life - Australians work the longest hours of any OECD country, with 20% of employees working more than 50 hours each week (20). Workers today report an increase in role overload, time squeeze and deterioration in Quality of Life when work/life balance is not maintained. 46% of those surveyed state that more flexible hours will best help them achieve the balance (21). Our research showed that the importance of work/life balance ranks high among 4 in 5 Australians. However, the younger one is the more important it is: 79% of Boomers compared to 85% of Gen Y’s consider work/life balance very important. This serves as a reminder to employers of the crucial role of work/life balance in retaining workers, particularly younger ones (22).
Redefining Work Life

**Action Steps**

- **Generation “Why?”**: Assess policies and ground rules and ensure that there are good reasons that underpin them. Keep in mind that by providing a flexible workplace you will meet the needs of not just the Y’s but of all of the generations.

- **Bridging the gaps - from both sides**: Not only must employers seek to understand Gen Y, but the Gen Y’s must be trained to better connect with the older workers and contractors. After all, the new reality is a team where younger supervisors manage teams comprising some older workers.

- **The revolving door of employment**: If they leave to try some travel or a new job — keep in touch as they may later want to return. They don’t view leaving an organisation as an act of disloyalty but a simple life change and so they see no problem with returning should circumstances change.
In recent times the impacts of the generational changes have dawned on many employers. We are reading more about the transitioning generations with Australia’s largest generation — the Baby Boomers now beginning to move into their 60’s and into their post-working life. At the same time many are experiencing for themselves the generation gap as a new and young generation start work with very different views and values to the existing leaders.

While having a mix of generations in the workplace is nothing new, traditionally the different age groups were separated by a clear chain of command with the older workers as supervisors and managers while the younger were the apprentices and juniors. Not so today. The new reality is one of flatter organisational structures where teams of diverse ages work together, and where younger staff are less afraid to argue their point, make a demand, or push back on the older staff.

With all these generations mixing in the workforce, at all organisational levels there is a need to understand the generational differences and get the most out of this generational diversity.

Without an effective understanding of the different values and perspectives that each generation brings, we create a breeding ground for conflict. Indeed of all of the diversity in the modern organisation, it is the generation gaps that are causing most of the angst.
changing generations
## keys to good communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Employers</th>
<th>Today’s Apprentices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>Work/life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank balance</td>
<td>Life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task focus</td>
<td>Team focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them</td>
<td>Involve us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long careers</td>
<td>Many jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn then earn</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A generation is defined by the years and thus, the era of their birth. All those within a generation share not only a similar age and life stage — but also a similar technological and economic period which shaped them. It is these two factors that we must keep in mind when managing Generation Y.

Much of what defines them is simply a product of their age. They are not as mature or experienced as the older generations and so some of their views and values will change as they move through different life stages and levels of responsibility.

However they are also a product of their times, which have been characterised by 15 years of economic growth, political stability, rapid technological change, fast moving careers, changing family structures, massive social shifts. They are the world’s first global generation. We are dealing with the most educated, entertained, materially endowed, entrepreneurial yet supported and protected generation in history. So both their age, and their times have combined to create them and differentiate them from the older generations.
what characterises generation y employees?

The table below gives a snapshot of what each generation was exposed to as they began their working life. It shows the transition of workplace expectations, leadership and communication over the last few decades. It is not a table of how to connect with each generation today, but rather a historical analysis of what previous generations were exposed to in their formative years. Indeed by adopting the characteristics under the Generation Y column, managers are also better able to connect with Generation X and the Baby Boomers today.

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<th>Generation Y (Born 1980-1994, Teens and 20’s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values at work:</strong></td>
<td>Work ethic, Industry-focus</td>
<td>Achievement, Company-centric</td>
<td>Ownership, Individuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivations for work:</strong></td>
<td>Financial security, Responsibility</td>
<td>Career progression, Opportunity</td>
<td>Job variety, Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influences over career choice:</strong></td>
<td>Parents, Authorities</td>
<td>Careers Advisors, Experts</td>
<td>Internet, Peer Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapers of career perception &amp; views:</strong></td>
<td>Tradition, Reputation</td>
<td>Observation, Recommendation</td>
<td>Perception, Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key management tools:</strong></td>
<td>Recruiting, Supervising</td>
<td>Training, Promoting</td>
<td>Innovating, Empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key communication tools:</strong></td>
<td>Technical data, Evidence</td>
<td>Visual examples, Demonstration</td>
<td>Hands-on learning, Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical training style:</strong></td>
<td>Formal, Monologue</td>
<td>Programmed, Dialogue</td>
<td>Interactive, Multi-modal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical leadership style:</strong></td>
<td>Control, Thinkers</td>
<td>Coordination, Doers</td>
<td>Consensus, Feelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influencers and Values:</strong></td>
<td>Local, Long-term needs</td>
<td>Regional, Medium-term goals</td>
<td>Global, Short-term wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management approach</strong></td>
<td>Telling, “Yes boss”</td>
<td>Selling, “What’s in it for me”</td>
<td>Involving, “Here’s what I think”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 4 main issues that employers struggle with when it comes to Generation Y

- **Attraction and retention**: How can I employ them and how can I keep them once they join?
- **Management and leadership**: What management style works best and how can I get the best from them?
- **Training and development**: How can I best communicate with them and what is the most effective training style to get results?
- **Motivation and recognition**: What will inspire them to work more effectively, to keep them engaged, and how can I reward them for a job well done?

Let's look at these four critical areas in detail...
To attract and retain them in this high-turnover era we must meet their top 5 workplace needs. This comes straight from our research and study of thousands of Australian Gen Y workers and in order of importance they look for:

**1. Work/Life Balance:**

For Generation Y their job matters however it is not their life – but rather it provides funds that fuel their life. In addition to their job they may also be juggling study, friends, family, sport, other work and community involvements. So when it comes to their work schedule and overtime think: flexibility. *Remember: if there’s a clash in the work-life balance, life wins!*  

**2. Workplace Culture:**

This has to do with the relationships with others at work. For Generation Y social connection with peers is one of the top retention factors. Not all of them have support from home so they are looking for a place to belong. *Remember: they want community, not a workplace. Friends not just colleagues.*
3. Varied Job role:

Gen Y like change - it’s all they’ve ever known. So offer variety in their job description and combine it with responsibility and promotions where possible.

*Remember: Many quit jobs not because there is a compelling reason to leave, but because there is no compelling reason to stay.*

4. Management Style:

The ideal supervisor is one who values communication not just authority. One who leads by example and involvement and not just by command and control. Gen Y’s are just beginning their careers so offer support, mentoring, positive feedback and public recognition. *As John Maxwell says “If you’re leading, and no one’s following – then you’re just out for a walk”.*

5. Training:

Generation Y know that in the 21st Century it is essential to keep their skills up to date. In fact 90% of Generation Y’s who receive regular training from their employer are motivated to stay with their employer. *So today training is more than a tool for productivity – it is a tool for retention.*
The right leadership style will not only assist with effective work outcomes — it will also help with Gen Y retention. Our analysis of the causes of employee turnover shows the central role that leadership plays in employee retention. Specifically, 42% of Gen Y’s surveyed reported that poor management and leadership was the main reason for leaving their previous role (23).

As shown in the table on page 14, Gen Y’s do not respond well to hierarchical leadership structures. Unlike the Baby Boomers, young workers have been raised in an environment where they have been given leadership opportunities throughout their schooling and encouraged to challenge and independently evaluate other’s decisions. As a result Gen Y has brought new values to the workplace. Gen Y’s expect to be treated as equals, they expect to have choices and input into decision-making processes, and such expectations run counter to hierarchical systems of leadership.

Indeed, 97% of Gen Y’s surveyed valued a leadership style that involved empowerment, consultation and partnership, and would leave if they did not get it (24).

Today’s leaders require more than just IQ (intellectual intelligence) — these days what is also needed is EQ (emotional intelligence). While technical skills are essential for managers in all industries — so too are people skills. Emotional intelligence involves being able to understand and manage one’s own emotions and behaviour, as well as being able to understand and manage those of other people.

The danger of having low EQ leaders is that they may not understand or value the strengths that Gen Y bring to the workplace. Instead of working with Gen Y’s to capitalise on their unique strengths, they are simply likely to butt-heads with them, creating an unhappy, unproductive and continually turning-over workforce.
So what management styles work best?

Authoritarian

Style: The positional leader relying on rank and role.

Verdict: Might be acceptable in the military or in the 1950’s - but not today. No sir!

Directing

Style: Leader points the way from afar and delegates the tasks.

Verdict: They want guidance not gurus. Mentoring not micromanagement.

Consulting

Style: Leader asks the questions and includes the team.

Verdict: A good approach. Gen Y have opinions and want to voice them.

Involving

Style: The participative leader - leading from within and leading by example.

Verdict: This generation loves a leader who empowers the team.

Coaching

Style: Leadership that is not a positional role, but more an influence relationship.

Verdict: This style is made for Gen Y. Two thumbs up!
Next Steps

• Training = retaining: Training is more than just about skills — it is about retention. Our studies show that 90% of Generation Y agreed that if they received regular training from their employer it would motivate them to stay longer with their employer.

• Develop the soft skills not just the hard skills: With this generation not just changing jobs but careers so frequently, equipping them with transferable skills is important. Many technical skills are relevant only for their current role but the people skills will be relevant throughout their working life.

• The manager as mentor: Training is more than a teacher in the classroom. Their preferred method of training was on the job training, which required the supervisor to be more than an expert — it required them to be something of a coach and mentor.
Sometimes it’s not that they’ve failed their training – it’s that their training has failed them

Generation Y have heard the mantra of lifelong education all through school, and they’ve come to accept it. The key therefore to remaining relevant in changing times is ongoing training. This will keep them effective in their current job, but also employable for their future careers which after all may be just a few years away.

Real

Not only must our communication style be credible, but we must be also. They don’t expect us to know all about their lifestyle, nor do they want us to embrace their culture. They are simply seeking understanding, and respect. If our communication has a hidden agenda, or we are less than transparent, it will be seen. This generation can sniff a phoney from a long distance.

Relevant

Obviously what we are communicating has to fall within their area of interest. But the style, as well as the content of our message must be relevant to a generation who are visually educated and entertained. They think in hyperlinks, they multi-task, value speed over accuracy and they absorb information from multiple sources. This way of thinking is little suited to traditional communication methodologies. Yes even us males can today do more than just breathing at once.

Relational

Communicating to this generation requires more than just substance, it needs an effective style, all delivered in an environment of understanding, respect, and genuine interest. While they don’t show loyalty to companies - Gen Y show great loyalty to friends. So build the relationships - in doing so you’ll be building the loyalty.
Next Steps

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- **Develop the soft skills not just the hard skills**: With this generation not just changing jobs but careers so frequently, equipping them with transferable skills is important. Many technical skills are relevant only for their current role but the people skills are will be relevant once they complete their apprenticeship and begin managing others.

- **The manager as mentor**: Training is more than a teacher in the classroom. Their preferred method of training was on the job training, which required the boss to be more than an expert - it required them to be something of a coach and mentor.
While money matters to Gen Y, it is not the strongest motivator. Our research showed that if remuneration was within the average range, it was not the determining factor in keeping the job. In fact it wasn’t even in the top 5.

Gen Y’s yearn for recognition, and they have had longer than previous generations in a supportive education system that has provided this. Our studies show that they have grown up with a safety-net of support at home, in society, and through their education. And they expect that support to continue somewhat, even at work.

We’ve met employers who understandably state: “why should I congratulate them for doing their job” or “their pay is their thankyou”. Generation Y, however responds to positive reinforcement and are more likely to continue and further improve their behaviour as a result.

It is true that Gen Y’s are not used to blunt and negative feedback — even at TAFE they didn’t “fail” they were simply deemed “not yet competent”! Yet providing Gen Y’s with feedback about work that could be improved is essential. Keep in mind that they do respond best when feedback is kept “constructive” or “above the line”. Rather than scolding Gen Y’s for less than optimal performance, highlight behaviours that could be improved, and provide them with guidance about how improved performance can be achieved.
Here are 4 keys for effective feedback and communication:

**Interest:**

If they don’t understand the way you communicate, then communicate the way they understand!

Getting their attention and interest is required before offering the feedback. Put your point in terms and concepts that make sense to them or are of interest to them. They’re called Generation Why for a reason!

Remember it’s not about telling it to them — but selling it to them.

**Instruct:**

Essentially it’s not a generation gap — it’s a communication gap.

Keep it concise — we are dealing with shorter attention spans today. And keep it clear — get feedback to clarify that they got your message.

Remember the responsibility for the message rests with the communicator not the listener.

**Involve:**

They are the world’s most interactive generation — wherever they are on the planet they are logged-on, linked-up, and looking around.

A generation ago 70% of students were the structured auditory learners; today they comprise only 30% (25). We are talking about a generation that don’t want to sit and listen — they want to see and do.

**Inspire:**

The old adage is true: they don’t care how much you know — until they know how much you care.

The fact is that we all make decisions not just based on the head — but also on the heart. So when motivating and communicating with an employee ask yourself three questions:

1. What do I want them to know?
2. What do I want them to do?
3. What do I want them to feel?
Next Steps

- **Find out what motivates your staff:** It may not be what most motivates you. This can be simply done by conducting employee surveys or by having a discussion with each Gen Y employee to identify their individual needs and aspirations. Implement a developmental plan for each individual.

- **Exit interviews:** Don’t forget to conduct exit interviews with departing Gen Y employees — this is a great source of learning and can give you ideas for changes and strategies for the future.

- **Think “workmates” not “employees”:** 42% of all Gen Y’s surveyed placed “relationship with peers” as one of the top 3 reasons for getting or keeping their job. An environment where they can interact socially and work collaboratively is highly regarded by Gen Y’s. So adopt strategies to encourage social interaction and relationship building at work to help promote positive interactions among team members and reduce the occurrence of unhealthy conflict.
employers’ checklist:

1. How is the employment market today different to previous decades?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What proportion of your employees fit into each generation?
   • Number of Baby Boomers: ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • Number of Generation X: _______________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • Number of Generation Y: ______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. From your experience, state a distinct characteristic of each generation:
   • Baby Boomers: _______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • Generation X: _____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • Generation Y: _____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. List some strategies which will help you better attract and retain today’s apprentices?
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. How would you describe the preferred leadership style of Gen Y apprentices?
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. How can you better motivate and recognise your younger employees?
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. What are 2 points to keep in mind when training and communicating with Generation Y?
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

8. List 2 steps that you can take this week to better engage with your Gen Y staff?
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   • ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p 126.


11. Ibid., p. 105.


13. Ibid., p. 133.


15. McCrindle Research figures.

16. Ibid.


23. McCrindle Research figures.

24. Ibid.

McCrindle Research exists to conduct world-class research and to communicate the insights in innovative ways. You will find out more about our research agency at www.mccrindle.com.au.

Our national research panel is www.AustraliaSpeaks.com.

You can find out more about our purpose built research facility at www.researchrooms.com. Visit www.theABCofXYZ.com to order a copy of Mark’s book on the global generations. If you want further input with a workshop or keynote presentation just let us know. Call us at 1800 TRENDS.
changing generations
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<td>Opportunity</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Parents</td>
<td>Careers Advisors</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Experts</td>
<td>Peer Groups</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Perception</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key management tools:</td>
<td>Recruiting</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Typical training style:</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Programmed</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monologue</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Multi-modal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical leadership style:</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinkers</td>
<td>Doers</td>
<td>Feelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencers and Values:</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term needs</td>
<td>Medium-term goals</td>
<td>Short-term wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management approach</td>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>Selling</td>
<td>Involving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yes boss”</td>
<td>“What’s in it for me”</td>
<td>“Here’s what I think”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## keys to good communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Employees</th>
<th>21st Century Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>Work/life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank balance</td>
<td>Life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task focus</td>
<td>Team focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them</td>
<td>Involve us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long careers</td>
<td>Many jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn then earn</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>