

The Internet Generation and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Our next generation of workers, the iGeneration (iGen,) has started arriving in the workplace, both in person and virtually, and with them come some new management issues. In depth interviews, conducted over 12 months, established that this group of technophiles agrees both cognitive and emotional competencies are important in the workplace. These findings were established by exploring the construct of successful leadership as defined by both Baby Boomers and iGens. If EI continues to be an important part of the human capital model, then a more social approach will be vital to successfully leading the iGens in this new model of digital Darwinism. In other words being emotionally intelligent and intelligently emotional should continue to be the mantra. But as work and personal time merge, leaders of the iGens may have to lead a workforce they rarely see. The personal connection will be more challenging, more taxing, but even more important. The simple act of being born during the internet era does not replace other cultural influences such as your country of birth, profession or organization. However, the generational filter may also be important and should be considered in conjunction with the other cultural filters in the Emotional Process Model (Druskat & Wolff 2001; Herkenhoff 2004). iGens demonstrate a low power index, short term time orientation, a high risk tolerance, low gender role differentiation, and a high individualism index. This information may help leaders better predict emotional outcomes and interpret emotional responses within their iGen workforce. This paper is not an etiological study, but instead strives to present intriguing reflections about this curious new workforce, the iGens.

The Internet Generation and Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

If we understand the unharnessed power of emotions, perhaps we as managers should invest more time in not only developing our emotional intelligence (EI) but also culturally tuning our EI to widen its effectiveness as a contemporary management tool. In earlier research (Herkenhoff 2004) the emotional process model included cultural filters based on national, organizational and professional affiliations. In this paper the generational filter will be discussed as another potentially important filter.

The references for this paper include several newspaper and magazine articles along side of more scholarly articles. These more public items provide insights into the social and cultural aspects of the iGeneration which are too recent to be found in academic journals. Direct observation of people and personal interviews also provided much of the data. As John Locke (1998, p.15) suggests “Ordinary life if we treat it as such is an Institute for the Study of Human Communications. The labs are the street corners, university campuses, airplanes, dinner tables, commuter trains...”

The current literature includes a variety of temporal definitions and qualitative labels for this group. One of the most common neologisms is *Echo Boomers*, in recognition that this group is the echo after the Baby Boomers. We also find labels such as Millennials (Howe & Strauss 2000, MSNBC 2006), Generation M (Suetens 2002), MySpace Generation (Hempel 2005), Net Generation (Tapscott 1998) and Loli-boomers (Loliboom 2006). Even the term iGeneration (Hermida 2003) gets used in different ways: ipodGeneration, I-Generation (as in the pronoun I), and Individualistic Generation.

From a temporal perspective Wikipedia (2006) defines them quantitatively as being born between 1986 and 1999. Quinion (1999) defines them as anyone born between the late 1970s and early 1990s. According to the US Census Bureau (2000), these are the children born between 1982 and 1995 with a peak around 1990. They approximate 80 million in the US, making them the largest group of young people since the 1960s. This paper will use a combination of qualitative and quantitative information to define them as the group who has no nostalgia for a pre-Internet history; they have had no adaptation to this new technology because the internet is taken for granted as a natural part of who they are. They are the first generation to claim the computer as their birthright (Quinion, 1999).

They are technophiles who have not only grown up with the internet but also with cell phones, instant messenger, email, ATMs, DVDs, and blogs. One of those characteristics is that they don't prefer hard copy instruction manuals, but prefer to download instructions from online when needed. They tend to learn new video games

almost by osmosis. Those thick binders filled with policies and procedures are now on the endangered species list.

One of their most important characteristics is that they are master information sorters. When Baby Boomers studied for exams, typically anything outside of the primary task of reading the textbook, was considered a distraction. Not so with the iGens. They seem to take in parallel flows of information and sort the input data by importance. A typical scenario includes: ipod in the ear, cell phone turned on to receive both regular phones calls as well a text messages, instant messenger on their laptop, and a vodcast playing on their portable DVD player. Despite these multiple information inputs, these iGen students still manage to get A's on their exams. So while Baby Boomers take information in one channel at a time, the iGens use multiple channels simultaneously. They are always plugged in with a world of information and communication tools at their fingertips (Irvine 2004). Internet access feeds their insatiable appetite for information.

The iGen concept of time seems to be in the nanosecond world. Instant gratification is the name of the game. One of the best examples of an iGen real time tool is instant messaging (IM). This is communication between two or more people based on typed text conveyed via computers connected over a network such as the internet. Other developments by several small companies like MXIT Lifestyle (Pty) in South Africa include downloadable applications in an attempt to create their own version of IM that can run on most mobile phones worldwide.

The iGens are inherently multi-cultural with the internet playing a pivotal role in their global cultural ecosystem along with related CNN type services and products. The iGens are among the most diverse generations. In the United States 35% are non-white and 27% are from one-parent households (Layman 2004). Characteristically iGens are generally more tolerant towards multiculturalism and internationalism. It has become more common for iGens to grow up dating people outside their own race or ethnic group. Many iGens themselves are multiracial in background, which is a considerable change from previous generations (All Experts 2006). According to Howe and Strauss (2000)

In the Millennial world, race is less a cutting edge issue than a game of political nostalgia in which the language of oppression has become pop culture play.

They are sophisticated social net workers. They can efficiently build teams of people, whom they never meet, to play online games that may last for months. They negotiate sales of almost anything over the internet. An online rebellion swept over university campuses in the United States during the week of September 18 2006, and as the San Francisco Chronicle pointed out, if you were over the age of 25 you never knew it happened (Nevius 2006). A social networking service called Facebook was designed in 2004 to allow members to get to know other students on a college campus and to make them aware of possible groups to join. The service requires that members have a college campus email account. On September 19 they decided to add a feature called "Newsfeed" which automatically sent information to members about their registered friends whenever those friends changed anything on their personal profiles. This

became a privacy train wreck as members quickly become incensed that their personal information was being distributed without their permission. Ironically the Newsfeed feature helped encourage members to join groups that were bashing the new concept. By 2:15 pm on the Tuesday release date the “Students against Facebook Newsfeeds” numbered more than 100,000 and by Friday the members numbered over 700,000. The iGens have no problem in the art of technology-aided social networking. <MySpace.com> is one of the most popular iGen social-networking sites. This site has more than 100 million profiles with an estimated 230,000 new members joining daily (Andrews 2006; Hempel 2005).

Throughout this paper the definition of emotional intelligence (EI) is provided by Goleman (1995) as the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in others and ourselves. Why be concerned about tuning EI using both cultural and generational filters? Understanding that there are filters can help us to be more robust in our predictive behavioral models within the workplace. A baby boomer’s response to an emotion-eliciting event may be different from how an iGen responds. However responses within a given culture or generation may have some commonality. Through better understanding of these filters and resulting emotional responses, a manager may have increased success in regulating and predicting negative emotions in the workplace.

So, will this group respond positively to the same type of leaders and managers who were successful with the Baby Boomers? Most likely, like their immediate predecessors, they will join companies but leave managers. How do you prevent your investment from walking out the door, or more importantly how do you prevent them from migrating through cyberspace to your competitors? According to Bennis (2001), EI accounts for 85-90% of the success of organizational leaders. Successful leaders require both the intellectual abilities to meet cognitive challenges and the emotional capabilities to inspire and empathize with others. This research explored whether this assertion was still valid for the iGens.

Research Methodology

To better understand the generational definition of “Good Leadership” a survey was conducted that combined both a random sample and a convenience sample. The sample includes 167 Baby Boomers and 72 iGens with 100% response rate. The data were collected globally via personal interviews by the author, over a 12 month period during the 2006. The research question was “What are the top three qualities of a leader who you were willing to follow or would be willing to follow?” The samples included a diverse representation within both generational groups from the three cultural subsets: national, organizational and professional. Detailed descriptions of the sample compositions are presented in Table 1. The national data was collected in situ for Thailand, Japan, USA, Canada, Aruba, Australia, and New Zealand. The other country data was collected by interviewing those nationalities outside of their home country. For example the India data was collected while a group of executive MBAs from Mumbai were visiting our college.

**Table1
Sample Descriptions**

		Total number of participants N= 239	
Generations N_g=2	National N_n=12	Organizational N_o= 19	Professional N_p= 58
Baby Boomers, iGens	Thailand, Japan,USA, Aruba, Australia, Canada, Iraq, India, New Zealand, Spain, Argentina, Ethiopia	food manufacturing, legal, science government, academic, religious, biotech, energy, security, military, supply chain, transportation, financial, research, sports, education, medicine, consulting, IT	Travel agent, accountant, geophysicist, taxi driver, hotel manager, professional football player, COO, pilot, doctor, priest, chancellor, deep-sea diver, taxi diver, football coach, gold medal Olympian, US Men’s Olympic water polo team coach, nuclear submarine commander, former US Assistant Secretary of Defense, FBI agent, navy officers, army officers, marine officers, provost, CFO, CEO, airline attendant, secretary, corporate trainer, power plant worker, tourist guide, mail courier, police officer, professor, nurse, fire fighter, financial investor, auditor, lawyer, dentist, geologist, nuclear physicist, human resources officer, probation officer, customs officer, consultant, salesperson, high school students, college students, waitress, lifeguard, reporter, healthcare worker, coffee shop worker, swim instructor, architect, journalist, professional musician, psychologist

Research Findings

The three most frequent responses from both generational samples aggregated across all cultures are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2
Leadership Survey Results**

Response Frequency	Baby Boomers	Response Frequency	iGens
77%	High IQ and competent	69%	Knowledgeable

65%	Treat people with respect		59%	High level of integrity
48%	High level of integrity(ethics)		50%	Being passionate

Both of the generational data sets in Table 2 include representation from the cognitive and emotional sides of intelligence. In the Baby Boomer data the cognitive side is encompassed in “High IQ and competent”. The iGen data includes the cognitive side under the “Knowledgeable” characteristic.

The emotional perspective is represented in the Baby Boomer data “Treating people with respect” and “High level of integrity”. In the iGen sample the emotional side is represented by the “Passionate” and “High level of integrity” characteristics.

So although the top three leadership characteristics may have changed somewhat, both cognitive and emotional aspects are still represented in both generational samples.

Discussion

The cold tentacles of technology do not appear to have diminished the role of EI for the iGens, but rather have made it visible as an important part of the formula for successful leadership. Perhaps EI, not IQ, will be the key differentiator in those who successfully manage and lead the iGens.

Starting with email, we know this is a low context form of communication, but the iGens have found a way to remedy the problem. They have added an emotional message by way of an intricate and creative system of emoticons derived from the smiley face. iGens often add these emoticons to both conventional email and instant messenger communications.

Current technology is linked with stress (Weil & Rosen 1997, Mueller 2001, Palmer 2006). There is an inherent promise that technology will give you more freedom and a higher quality of leisure time. But in reality we know voicemail, email, and instant messenger make iGens more accessible, creating even less real leisure time for them. The iGens have to perform many of the day to day tasks that were once done by others, such as pumping petrol for their cars and checking tire pressures. The advent of the ATM and online banking means they handle their own financial reconciliations and transactions, tasks which were once done for you by a bank teller. The friendly travel agent has been replaced with such online services as <Expedia.com> and <Kayak.com>. In many countries, grocery stores now allow shoppers to scan their own groceries, rather than waiting in line to have a checker do this for you.

Technology loads more and more onto the iGens, potentially building a platform for stress. In a recent BBC broadcast, Goleman suggested that children are losing stress and anger management skills (September 2006). So although iGens may be good social net workers, their skills in building healthy, human relationships may be weaker.

We know that increased stress can lead to workplace violence. A recent workplace study of Scottish 16-24 year olds, sanctioned by the Scottish Executive Campaign, revealed that 31% had been verbally or physically attacked, threatened, sworn or spat at by a member of the public in the last 12 months (BBC News, 2005). iGens will need even more management of maladaptive emotions in the workplace than their predecessors.

More and more of the work will be done at home. For example, in one large IT firm in the Silicon Valley, 80% of their employees work some part of the time at home (personal communication 2006). I interviewed an iGen at Sun Microsystems who explained to me his working model of flexing. He had an electronic pass that he wore around his neck that gave him access to workstations throughout the building. The computers were only portals which allowed him to access his files on the central server. He had no office, no cubicle, no chair, and no personal physical space. When I asked him where he kept his personal things like his family photos, he replied those could be found on his webpage. I tried to make my point about physical space by asking where he kept his coffee cup. His reply was that his Starbuck's coffee came in a disposable cup. Finally I asked what he would put in his cardboard box if Sun laid him off and he was permanently leaving the office. After thinking about it for a nanosecond, he decided that he would have to hand in his electronic pass but would not have anything to put in the cardboard box.

So as work and personal time merge, leaders of the iGens may have to lead a workforce they rarely see. The personal connection will be more challenging, more taxing, but even more important.

Workplace Implications

When the workplace situation is congruent with employee values and beliefs, the outcome is neutral to positive (adaptive) employee emotions. However, when the situation is incongruent with employee values and beliefs, we create negative to destructive (maladaptive) emotional responses.

To determine congruency the following 5 dimensions are used: power, time, gender, risk and individualism. These are derived from Hofstede/ Bond national culture dimensions (Hofstede 1980; Bond 1988).

The power dimension recognizes that varying degrees of power exist in groups. High power indices reflect a high degree of hierarchy and well-defined rules. The iGens perceive leadership as a behavior rather than as a position. They are more into collaboration than authority. They are less reliant on hierarchical approvals for decision making than their predecessors. Low power index workplace situations are most likely congruent with the iGen culture.

Time orientations can vary from short term to long term focused. Short term, or a high time index, focuses on the here and now and long term focuses on future outcomes. We know that iGens are very short term focused and they live in a turbulent

nanosecond world with instant gratification. They have access to one hour dry cleaning, one hour photo shops, 30 minute pizza delivery. High time index workplace situations are most likely congruent with the iGen culture.

Tolerance for risk varies across groups. Control over outcomes and predictability are more important to some groups than others. High risk indices indicate a high tolerance for risk and a comfort with uncertainty. In terms of risk, the iGens have been provided with a low risk, low accountability culture courtesy of the internet. There is no punishment for bad behavior online. However we are now seeing potential employers visiting the blogs of candidates. One recruiter explained to me that his company frowns upon potential candidates who have included photos of themselves in an inebriated state on their blogs (personal communication 2006). High risk index workplace situations are most likely congruent with the iGen culture.

The gender index refers to the degree of role differentiation based on gender. Matriarchical groups place women in the key roles while patriarchal cultures place men in the key roles. Both of these groups have a high degree of gender differentiation. High gender indices indicate a high degree of differentiation by gender. In the gaming world of the internet, gender roles are not well defined. In many online games, the real gender of your teammates is irrelevant. Low gender index workplace situations are most likely congruent with the iGen culture.

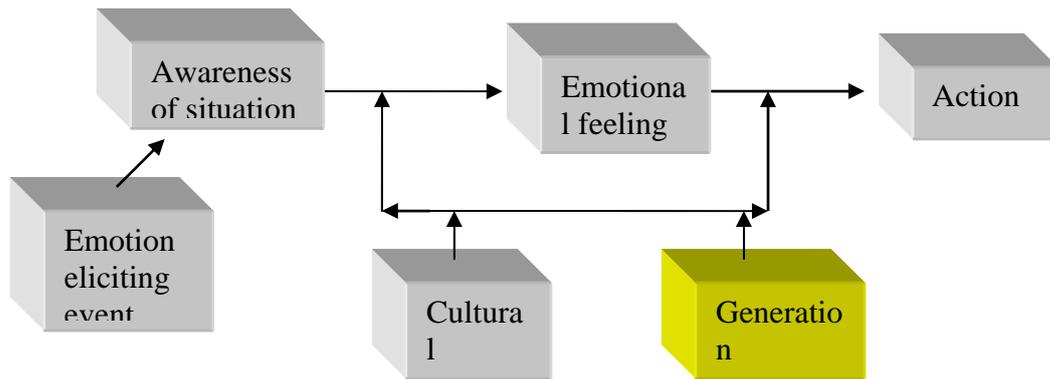
Individualism captures the degree to which the individual is put ahead of the group. Those groups that put the individual ahead of the group have a high degree of individualism. Whereas those that value the collective ahead of the group have low individualism indices. The collective becomes harder to find when more and more of the work is being done at home. The iGens seem to be more individualistic than their predecessors. High individualism index workplace situations are most likely congruent with the iGen culture.

The simple act of being born during the internet era does not replace other cultural influences such as your country of birth, profession or organization. However the generational filter may also be important and should be considered in conjunction with the other cultural filters. The emotional process model (Druskatt & Wolff 2001) has been modified to include the generational filter which may also influence emotional outcomes (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Influences in the Emotional Process Model

Interpretati

Respon



iGens demonstrate a low power index, short term time orientation, a high risk tolerance, low gender role differentiation, and a high individualism index. This information may help leaders better predict emotional outcomes and interpret emotional responses within their iGen workforce. If iGens really are arriving at the workplace with diminished skills in anger and stress management, then perhaps EI is not only important but critical for those who wish to lead this next generation successfully.

Conclusions

No one knows what the future will bring but some aspects are highly probable. According to Grandossey and Efron (2004) leaders will be faced with an environment in which:

1. speed and uncertainty will prevail
2. technology will continue to disrupt and enable
3. the iGens will dictate much of what happens in business

A more social approach will be vital to successfully lead the iGens. In other words being emotionally intelligent and intelligently emotional should be the mantra.

There is a huge difference between what is visible and what is actually seen. We need to have a good hard look now at the future workforce because they have started arriving. We need to leverage that knowledge to provide insightful research and workplace practices to build effective leaders for the iGeneration.

It took 35 years to get telephones into 25% of US homes, 26 years for television, 22 years for radio, 16 years for personal computers and only 7 years for the internet to get into 25% of US homes (Grandossey & Efron 2004, p 163). We don't have much time to learn how to effectively manage these new workers who have been "bathed in bits since birth" (Tapscott, 1998), so perhaps we should get started now.

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