

How the next generation works



Technology comes naturally to Generation Y. They grew up with it. But can organisations and their leaders cope with the mindset that goes with the tech-savvy, asks Alun Lewis

There's now a group of people in the workplace who are different.

For all the difficulties surrounding comparisons between generations and the stereotyping it creates, there's no doubt that people born after 1980 – variously dubbed 'Generation Y', 'Digital Natives' and 'Millennials' – were part of the first generation to grow up with computers in their homes.

Also, they're completely at one with digital technology and – more recently – social media.

The first always-connected generation

A Pew Research Center report in 2010 described them as "history's first 'always connected' generation". More than eight out of ten told the researchers that they sleep with their mobile next to their bed. Three-quarters have created a profile on a social networking site. And one in five have posted a video of themselves online. Millennials, says the report, are also more likely than older adults to say technology makes life easier and brings family and friends closer together.

Business analysts have drawn lots of conclusions about what this will mean for the workplace – the way this generation works with others, the way they respond to management, their goals and aspirations – and clearly this is an ongoing process. But there are some interesting insights into the directions this could lead.

From Skype to Dropbox to FaceTime in a day

For a start, being good at the technology brings a whole new flexibility to working anytime, anywhere. Erica Dhawan is a

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Generation Y-er and a commentator and consultant on next generation leadership. In a piece for [ForbesWoman](#) earlier this year, she wrote: “Consider my own experience: Last Friday, I had two work-related Skype calls, one to Nassau and another to England, during my Amtrak train ride from Boston to New York. For my work, I use Dropbox for online shared folders, Evernote to store and categorize information, and Skype videoconferencing or iPhone’s FaceTime application to connect with my colleagues across the world.”

That's a change in mindset from the generation who grew up thinking that work only happened under supervision, in an office. Of course there are counter examples. There are plenty of young people who long for a nine-to-five job, which in today's difficult economic climate can be hard to find. But digital technology has made new things possible, and this generation is ready to play with those options.

Then there's the impact of social media. These online communities are a flurry of messages, trends, ideas and proposals. Young people have got used to sharing information and communicating across groups, and this throws up new ideas for collaborative working.

Can your CEO be your peer?

What you need is a company that is receptive to your ideas and that's not always easy, as Tammy Erickson, management thinker and author of [Plugged In: The Generation Y Guide to Thriving at Work](#), describes. “They've grown up in a peer-to-peer world, so they're used to sending information to peers based on their perception of who can use the information, where it would provide the most value, and they come into a corporate environment with that same set of assumptions,” she said in an interview with [Harvard Business Digital](#). “So if they have an idea that they think could benefit you, I don't care who you are – CEO, head of marketing – if they've got an idea, chances are they are going to share it with you.”

That might challenge some of the hierarchical ideas of the way companies are managed, something that Dr Karsten Jonsen, research fellow at the IMD Business School in Geneva and a specialist in team working, has

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also been studying. “Power and respect in the workplace have to be earned in [millennials'] eyes,” he comments. “Interestingly, they're also far more critical of organisations and quickly see through empty mission statements and corporate hype.”

Don't forget conversation

But out there in the business world, there are still ways of doing things that can't be overturned overnight. Dee Gibbs is MD at a leading high-tech PR company Liberty Communications. She is wary of the way computers can breed isolation for young people: “While they're actively engaging with others in real time, they're doing it in front of a screen – and never having to physically communicate in face-to-face conversations at all. To work successfully in a collaborative way, digital youth also need to be able to connect and communicate with others in the well-tried-and-tested art of conversation. As with everything, it's about choosing the most appropriate tool.”

Technology doesn't change everything, but it does provide new opportunities. And overall, given the world of peak oil, peak food and peak population that this generation is going to inherit, they're going to need the best tools available to survive economically, let alone thrive individually.

Meanwhile, there is one other interesting characteristic that has been assigned to Generation Y: “They expect work to be ‘fun’,” adds Dr Karsten Jonsen. “They want instant recognition and they don't want to have to wait for a formal career reward structure.”

Oldies, you have been warned.

Keep on moving

As technology improves, so do ways of keeping security high and costs low, and managing new apps, says **Christine Vincent**, general manager of managed mobility at BT Global Services

In my job, things are changing all the time. People want mobile communications and that's driving massive changes as technology evolves to meet their ever-increasing demands.

It's just five years since Apple's iPhone burst onto the scene and, along with Android smartphone devices, changed the face of mobile communications.

The first iPad came in 2010 – just two years ago – and ushered in tablet computers. Demand for these devices keeps growing. When Apple launched the new iPad in March this year it sold three million iPads in 3 days – that's nearly 700 every minute.

These devices have caught on because they make life easy for people. Easy to check their emails anywhere, easy to access the internet anywhere, easy to do most things anywhere. Just compare looking at your emails or calendar on a smartphone with having to get out your laptop computer, turn it on and wait for it to load up. People just aren't prepared to wait for things to work anymore.

Making a mobile workforce

Managed mobility is about helping organisations to have a mobile workforce. It's about helping them to harness the benefits of mobile technology, like better employee productivity, while at the same time minimising the potential drawbacks such as security breaches and increased costs.

A key trend that we're seeing at the moment is Bring Your Own Device, or BYOD. This is happening because people have embraced the benefits of smartphones and tablets in their personal lives and want the same ease and accessibility for their work. This is particularly relevant for the younger, more tech-savvy generation that's joining the workforce.

Organisations are discovering that the standard corporate-issue phones they'd typically given to all employees aren't seen as up to the job anymore. Employees are simply removing the SIM card and inserting it into their own personal smartphone or tablet so they can benefit from the extra functionality at work. This also means they can carry out their personal activities in work time and benefit from only carrying one device. Even employees who don't have a corporate-issue phone are using their personal devices in their working life, simply because it's easier.

At first, employers tried to stop this happening, largely for security reasons. But now they're accepting that they can't

stop it, and they need to embrace the trend and make it work for them.

Making mobile devices more secure – and keeping costs under control

We've been developing a number of products to help organisations get mobile. The priority is to tackle security issues. We've all heard the stories of laptops going missing and the resulting worries about highly sensitive data being in the public domain. Well, mobile device management, or MDM, lets an organisation remotely lock and wipe a device if it gets lost or stolen. We provide simple access to an internet portal; the employee just needs to log in and type in the details of their device, and then it's registered and can immediately be locked and wiped remotely if necessary.

Once it's registered, employees can load their device with mobile versions of collaboration tools their company uses, like Microsoft Lync or Cisco Jabber (available from BT in your office or the cloud). I love instant messaging because of the immediacy – I've used Microsoft Lync on my iPad to stay in touch with my team through instant messaging while I'm on the train. Having different applications available on my device means there's so much I can do while I'm on the move. I can quickly check my email and my calendar, I can look up train times, I can check if my team are available for calls, have a video call with them, and, for those late train journeys home, I can read my current book, a magazine or even catch up on last night's TV.

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Another concern for organisations is the extra costs these devices bring, particularly around mobile data. Our BT MobileXpress product has an application for smartphones and tablets that lets people connect over BT's Wi-Fi footprint at more than 4.3 million locations around the world, saving on mobile data costs, which is particularly relevant when users are travelling overseas. It also creates a 'secure link' from the device to the corporate network.

Speaking of costs, our BT Managed Mobility Expenses product lets organisations get a firmer grip on their mobile expenditure with invoice audit and management tools, an order portal and a full range of management information and reports. They can track

costs down to an individual level and then target high users with cost management tools. For high mobile data users, the BT MobileXpress smart device app cuts costs. For users who spend a lot on international or roaming voice calls, the BT OneVoice anywhere product routes calls away from the mobile network and over the corporate OneVoice network.

MAM's the word

An emerging trend we're seeing is for organisations to develop their own enterprise applications for use on smart devices. We're developing a service for mobile application management, or MAM, to help them manage these applications. I've just seen an analyst say: "Where MDM is the bread, MAM is the jam." Okay, maybe that's a bit of an in-joke, but there's no doubt that MAM is where it's at.

With MAM we help customers who have developed their own applications to host them on their own enterprise-level 'app store'. MAM builds security round the application as well as providing the ability to target specific groups of users with relevant applications and make sure they have the latest versions.

A good example of an application we've worked on was with a company making high-end fashion accessories. They had problems with their giant paper catalogue: because the products changed so quickly, it quickly became out of date. It had to be reprinted every few weeks, which was costly, inefficient and certainly didn't play to a sustainability agenda. We worked with the company to develop an app to let their salespeople show their product ranges to their customers on iPads – and immediately check stock availability and place orders. A central team within the organisation can make any changes to the product list instantly, and the salespeople just need to update the app to get the latest details.

As well as business process applications like this, we're also seeing organisations develop apps for core activities including time booking and business expenses that employees can complete in their downtime, for example while travelling.

Clearly mobile communications is a fast-moving area, and a large part of my job is keeping up with all the new ideas and technologies that are constantly emerging – and making sure we're at the forefront to support them.