

Recently Released Survey Results

Women on Work: Is there a generational divide?

OUR STUDY

Each year, HP and the Simmons School of Management partner at our Leadership Conference to administer a computer-based survey to examine leading-edge issues relevant to women in leadership and management.

In 2003, we examined generational differences among women in terms of their career goals, the values that drive their work and personal life decisions, and their perceptions of opportunities in the workplace.¹

WHY GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES?

Age — like gender, race, ethnicity, or class — is a key aspect of identity that shapes individuals' experiences, worldviews, values, and life goals. Age reflects the social climate, cultural values, and economic conditions in which individuals grow up and formulate their core values.

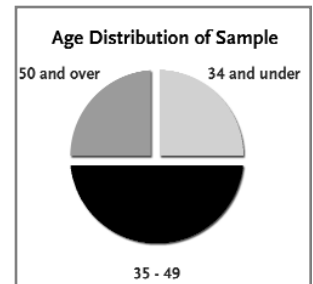
Generations whose experiences have been shaped by critical moments or trends in history — such as the Vietnam War or the Internet Boom — are named in our popular culture and characterized by specific attributes. In the 1980s, for example, the media christened “Baby Boomers” as “yuppies” — a self-centered and self-righteous group who are insatiable consumers, uninterested in “giving back,” and reckless about the future. More recently, the “Generation Xers” have been portrayed as the “new traditionalists.” Indeed, recent articles in the national media have characterized Generation X women as abandoning promising careers to return to homemaking and childrearing (*NY Times Magazine*, 10/26/03).

With the media's vivid portrayals of differences in values and goals across generations, attention has focused on generational differences in the workplace. “Generations have always warred with each other in the workplace. But it is doubtful whether the organizations of 1940, 1960, or even 1980 had to contend with today's generational diversity” (*Boston Globe*, 8/10/03).

Given 30 years of dramatic change in women's roles in our society, generational differences among women have received particular attention. Conventional wisdom suggests that differences in values, goals, and expectations among women of different generations creates a “generational divide” that undermines women's ability to support and mentor one another or build coalitions for workplace change.

In our survey of businesswomen, we wanted to test this conventional wisdom. Surprisingly, we found many more similarities than differences in the values, aspirations, and perspectives

among the 571 women of different age groups (see chart) who responded to the survey.



TOP-LINE FINDINGS

1 Values Driving Women's Career Choices Endure Across Generations

Qualities that women value in choosing jobs are strikingly consistent across generations. Interestingly, important qualities cited by our sample of adult women of different generations are aligned with those reported by teen girls in our 2003 study, *Teen Girls on Business: Are they being empowered?*

- **Women across generations place highest value on jobs that are satisfying and intellectually stimulating.** 90% of women of all generations give the most importance to “enjoying what I do” as a desired attribute for choosing their next job. 88% of respondents also give importance to having an intellectually stimulating job.
- **Women across generations consistently view work-personal life balance as important.** 87% of all women report that “having enough time to spend with my family or friends” is important in choosing a job and 85% cite the importance of workplace flexibility. Women 34 years and younger place somewhat higher importance on this quality.
- **Women across generations consistently value jobs that allow them to “give back.”** 73% of all women (and 80% of women 50 years and older) report that having a job in which they “help others” is important to them. 69% of the women report that it is important to them to have a job in which they can “make the world a better place” and 74% say it is important to contribute to their communities.
- **Women across generations place lower importance on “making lots of money” as an attribute in choosing jobs.** Only 51% cite “making a great deal of money” as an important value driving their careers. Not surprisingly given their stage in their life cycle, this goal is significantly more important (64%) to the women 34 years and under.

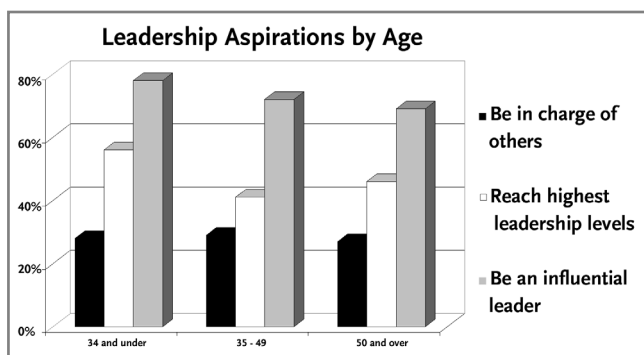
2 Women Across Generations Aspire to be Influential Leaders

Contrary to recent media stories suggesting that women do not aspire to top leadership positions, the majority of businesswomen in our sample — spanning all three generations — want to be influential leaders. Nearly half aspire to the highest leadership positions in their organizations.

¹ Prepared by D. Merrill-Sands, M. Mattis, and N. Matus, Simmons School of Management; G. Herr at HP consulted with data analysis.

² Marlino, D. and Wilson, F. (2003). *Teen Girls on Business: Are they being empowered?* Boston, MA.: Simmons School of Management and The Committee of 200.

- **45% of women cite reaching highest level of leadership in their organizations as an important goal.** Encouragingly, a significantly higher percentage (56%) of the younger generation women (34 and under) view ascending to the highest ranks of leadership as an important goal.
- **75% of women cite being an influential leader as important in their jobs.** A third of all women (and 40% of the 34 and under age group) state that being an influential leader will be a very important criteria in choosing their next job.
- **While many women want to lead and be influential, few accord importance to “being in charge of others.”** Only 27% give importance to “being in charge of others” in their job selection. Indeed, a third say it is not important to them.



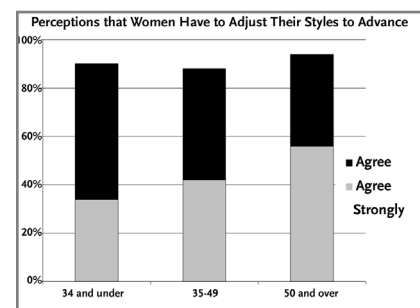
3 Women Across Generations See Opportunities for Advancement as Improving but Still Constrained

Despite the marked changes in women’s participation in managerial and leadership ranks of organizations, women of different generations share similar views on opportunities for women to advance at work.

- **The vast majority of women (88%) perceive that women’s opportunities to advance in the workplace are better than 10 years ago.** 41% of the women see opportunities as “much better” and 47% see them as “a little better.” Yet, women do not believe that gender bias has disappeared. Only 30% of all generations of respondents believe women have the same chances as men for advancing to the highest organizational levels.
- **Only 62% of women across all age groups report that they are satisfied with their individual opportunities to advance in their organizations.** Women 35 to 49 years of age are

discernibly more satisfied, with 23% reporting that they are very satisfied with their opportunities.

- **A significant majority of women (89%) believe that women still have to make adjustments to their style to advance in the workplace.** Likely reflecting their longer tenure in organizations, women 50 and over believe this more strongly than younger women (see chart).



4 Women of Different Generations Hold Divergent Views of Each Other’s Career Experiences and Expectations

Despite a striking alignment in most of their career goals and values, women of different generations differ markedly in their perception of each other’s workplace experiences and expectations. Such differences in assumptions — if left unchallenged — could indeed spark conflict that belies the enduring similarities in values and aspirations that women across generations share.

- **Older women believe more strongly than younger women that women of younger generations have higher expectations for advancement.** 58% of women 50 and over compared to 40% of women 34 years and under believe strongly that women entering the workforce expect to advance further and faster than earlier generations of women.
- **Older women believe more strongly than younger women that their generation had to make sacrifices that younger women are not willing to make.** 83% of women 50 and over, compared to 63% of the younger women, believe that older women made sacrifices to advance in their organizations that younger women are not willing to make.
- **Older women believe more strongly than younger women that younger women expect flexibility in the workplace.** 42% of women 35 and over believe strongly that men and women entering organizations today expect flexibility. Yet, surprisingly, only 30% of the women 34 and under believe this strongly.

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