



Are Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z really that different?

Your guide to help teams move beyond generation stereotypes for better teamwork and leadership

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Are Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z really that different?

Millennials are job hopppers and difficult to work with. Gen Z refuse to come into office and prefer to hide behind their screens. And Baby Boomers can't work with technology and expect everyone to be workaholics. We've all faced a judgement or two about how our personal style might be influenced by our age or generation. But how much of it is true? And what might be just a stereotype?

Let's set the scene by actually defining the generations in the workplace currently. Looking past the stereotypes, there is a reason that we label generations. It helps us make sense of societal shifts, technological advances, and changing attitudes towards work, relationships and culture. Generations like the Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z, are shaped by unique historical, economic, and social circumstances that influence their values, behaviours, and expectations.



Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964, grew up in the post-World War II era, a time of uncertainty but also economic prosperity and huge shifts in society. They saw the rise of new housing developments, the civil rights movement, and the space race.



Generation X, born 1965–1980, grew up during a time of shifting societal norms, economic turbulence, and the rise of personal computers. Many experienced greater independence from a young age due to the increase in dual-income households.



Millennials, born 1981-1996, grew up in a world of rapid technological change including the advent of the internet, social media, and mobile devices. Many millennials came of age during the Great Recession.



Gen Z, born 1997-2012, are the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age, surrounded by smartphones, social media, and instant access to information. They're also the youngest generation currently in the workforce.

The stereotypes

We've all felt the impact of stereotypes against our generation. We did our own research to see what each generation says about generational stereotypes in the workplace and here is what we found, and why those perceptions matter more than you might think.

Gen Z are lazy, entitled, and overly dependent on technology

Often described as the generation that lacks resilience, Gen Z is painted as being disengaged or even lazy, with a strong desire for work-life balance that others misinterpret as a lack of commitment. Their comfort with digital communication fuels the belief that they lack interpersonal skills, and their rapid desire for career progression is seen as entitlement. In our research, Gen Z acknowledge that there are perceptions of younger workers being seen as lazy, inexperienced, or lacking in work ethic. They also mention that they perceive older workers being resistant to change and struggling with technology.



Millennials are entitled, disloyal, and overly sensitive

Millennials often bear the weight of being seen as entitled or demanding, especially with their desire for constant feedback. Their inclination towards career progression and meaningful work is misconstrued as a lack of commitment. Their willingness to change jobs is often interpreted as disloyalty rather than a pursuit of purpose. In our research, millennials emphasise that people should not be judged by their generational stereotypes. Many also feel they are assumed to be lazy, entitled, or less committed, while they say older workers are perceived as resistant to change or inflexible.



Gen X are detached, cynical, and resistant to change

Gen X's preference for independence and strategic thinking is often seen as detachment or even cynicism. They are perceived as resistant to change and technology, with a preference for established processes over the new, which leads to the stereotype that they're "stuck in their ways". In our research, Gen X tended to describe older workers as being perceived as resistant to change and less tech-savvy, while younger workers are sometimes seen as entitled or lacking work ethic. However, many Gen X respondents stress that individual differences are more important than generational trends.



Baby Boomers are resistant to change and technologically challenged



Baby Boomers are stereotyped as rigid, with a preference for traditional structures, which leads to assumptions about their resistance to change. Their approach to communication and processes is often perceived as inflexible, and they're viewed as technologically challenged, relying on younger generations for digital solutions. In our research, Baby Boomers feel that older workers are seen as less capable, particularly with technology, and some believe they have been overlooked for promotions or hiring due to age discrimination. However, a few report that stereotypes are less prevalent in their specific workplaces.

The impact of these stereotypes on career progression reveals some telling generational differences. Baby Boomers and Gen X are more likely to express concerns about being passed over for promotions or job opportunities due to their age, while Millennials and Gen Z tend to focus on the challenge of being underestimated or dismissed because of their perceived lack of experience. Understanding and challenging these assumptions can lead to a more inclusive and collaborative workplace.

Generational stereotypes create barriers to effective working relationships by mislabelling behaviours as generational rather than as individual differences. When we buy into stereotypes, we undermine the very thing that makes teams successful, trust, and collaboration. Misunderstandings rooted in generational assumptions not only damage communication and teamwork but also weaken resilience and engagement, ultimately reducing overall performance.

We asked 200 professionals about the behavioural qualities they tend to express at work and those that they perceive as effective and ineffective from their colleagues and leaders.

They chose from 24 common behavioural qualities seen in millions of professionals who have experienced the Lumina Spark psychometric assessment.

You can see behavioural qualities split across how they appear when used effectively and also when overextended to the point of being unhelpful.

You can see the (marginally) top claimed qualities per generation.

People Focused



Accommodating Strives for harmony and is willing to adjust their stance in a conflict

- Diplomatic
- Forgiving
- Tactful

Collaborative Team player with a win-win mindset

- Supportive team player
- Trusting
- Ensures others are acknowledged

Empathetic Considerate and in touch with other people's feelings

Top claimed ★

- Compassionate
- Wants to understand people
- Altruistic

↑ Highest
↓ Lowest

Gen Z
Gen X

Inspiration Driven



Adaptable Works towards overall vision with emerging goals

Top claimed ★

- Easy-going
- Goal-evolving
- Goes with the flow

↑ Highest

Gen Z

Flexible Easy-going and informal

- Minimises bureaucracy
- Relaxed about order
- Loose planner

Spontaneous Makes gut-feel decisions

- Carefree with commitments
- Needs to be inspired
- Acts on impulse

Big Picture Thinking



Conceptual An abstract thinker comfortable with complexity and ambiguity

- Learns by theory
- Likes complexity
- Sees trends and patterns

Imaginative A source of new ideas

- Creative
- Appreciates aesthetics
- Sees possibilities

Radical Drives change and is willing to challenge tradition

- Seeks variety
- Unconventional
- Non-conformist

Extraverted



Top claimed ★

Sociable Energised by interacting with others

- Outgoing
- Socially confident
- Talkative

↑ Highest Gen Z

Demonstrative Enthusiastic and expresses positive

- High-spirited
- Good verbal skills
- Expressive

Takes Charge Takes the lead in a group and is drawn towards authority positions

- Enjoys influencing groups
- Assertive
- Comfortable with responsibility

Outcome Focused



Tough Comfortable with conflict, and courageous enough to tackle difficult conversations

- Candid
- Likes to challenge
- Doesn't need to be popular

Competitive Strong-willed and wants to win

- Winning focused
- Proud
- Self-promoting

Logical Objective and rigorously applies reason

Top claimed ★

- Critical thinker
- Values reasoning
- Shrewd

↑ Highest

Gen Z

↓ Lowest

Baby Boomers

Discipline Driven



Purposeful Sets ambitious goals and then works diligently towards them

- Sets clear goals
- Determined
- Focused

Structured An organised planner

- Methodical
- Orderly
- Follows processes

Reliable Disciplined and meets commitments

Top claimed ★

- Diligent
- Punctual
- Honours commitments

↑ Highest

Baby Boomers

↓ Lowest

Gen Z

Down to Earth



Top claimed ★

Practical Adopts a realistic and common-sense approach

- Learns by doing
- Keeps it simple
- Realistic

↑ Highest Millennials

Evidence-Based Focused on observable facts and attentive to details

- Needs information
- Values precision
- Fact-finder

Cautious Prefers to stick with tried-and-tested methods

- Risk averse
- Plays it safe
- Reluctant to change

Introverted



Top claimed ★

Observing Private and likes to think before they speak

- Prefers small groups
- Takes time making connections
- Reserved

↑ Highest Gen Z
↓ Lowest Millennials

Measured Serious-minded and contains positive emotions

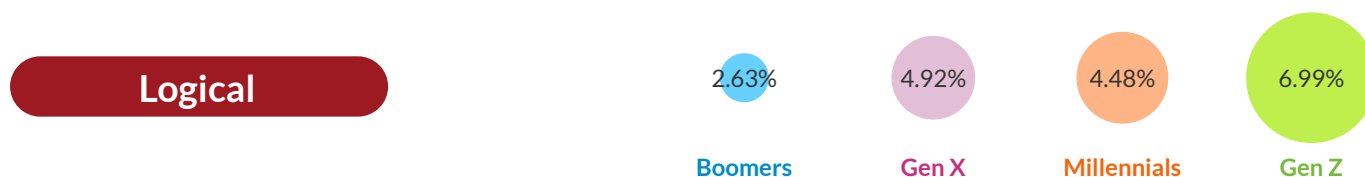
- Serious
- Prefers written communication
- Controls emotions

Intimate Listens first and gravitates towards one-on-one conversations

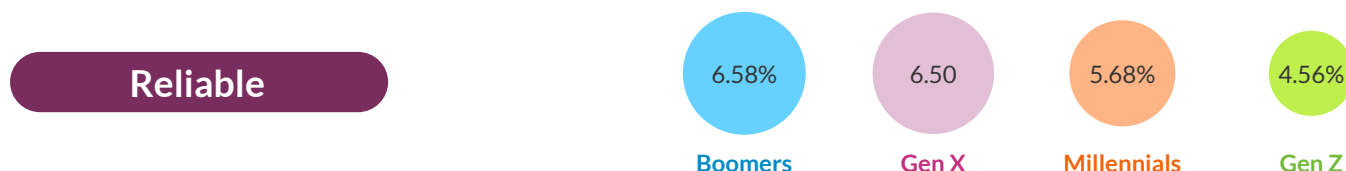
- Good listener
- Prefers one-to-one
- Low-key

Small differences, big misconceptions

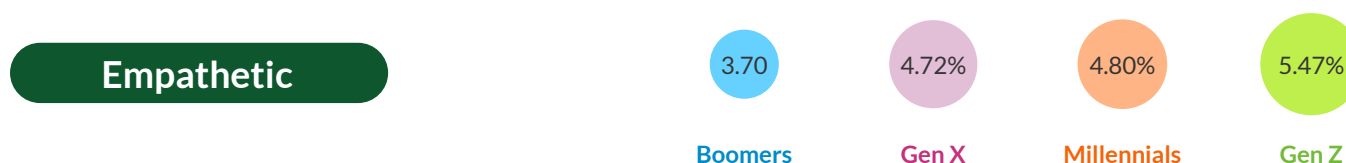
When we take a closer look at the actual behaviours across generations, the research reveals that the gap between the generational stereotypes and the reality of workplace behaviours is much narrower than we might believe. The data paints a more complex and shared story. While generational differences do exist, our findings suggest that they are often overegged. Are the differences really as dramatic as people tend to think?



Despite stereotypes of younger generations as overly emotional or entitled, both Gen Z (6.99%) and Millennials (4.48%) emphasise logical thinking as one of their top qualities. They value clear, strategic approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. Interestingly, Gen X (4.92%) and Boomers (2.63%) also score logically, albeit to a lesser extent. While Gen Z and Millennials prioritise it more, all generations show that logical thinking remains a highly valued trait across age groups.

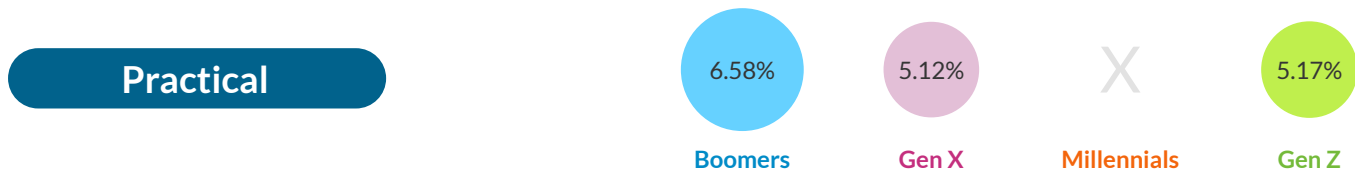


Reliability is another universal trait that transcends age. Baby Boomers (6.58%) and Gen X (6.50%) lead in this category, but Millennials (5.68%) and Gen Z (4.56%) also rank highly, underscoring the shared importance of dependability in the workplace. Regardless of generation, employees want to be known as consistent, committed, and trustworthy.



Empathy, often associated with younger generations, is highly regarded by both Gen Z (5.47%) and Millennials (4.80%). While Boomers score lower on this trait (3.70%), Gen X (4.72%) also places

significant importance on empathy. This shows that while younger generations may be more emotionally expressive, empathy itself is valued across all groups, just expressed differently.



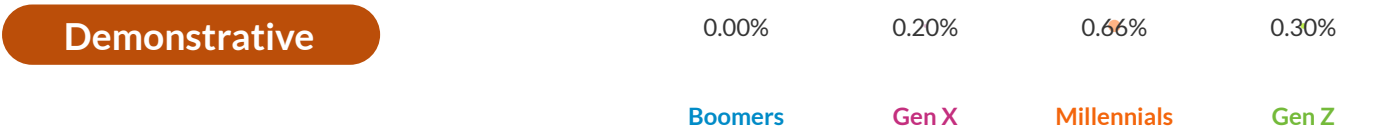
Baby Boomers score high in practical, grounded traits (6.58%), which mirrors the stereotype that they prefer traditional, proven methods of working. However, Gen X (5.12%) and Gen Z (5.17%) also value practicality, demonstrating that across generations, there’s a strong desire to balance innovative thinking with grounded execution.

Let’s map those top claimed behavioural Qualities

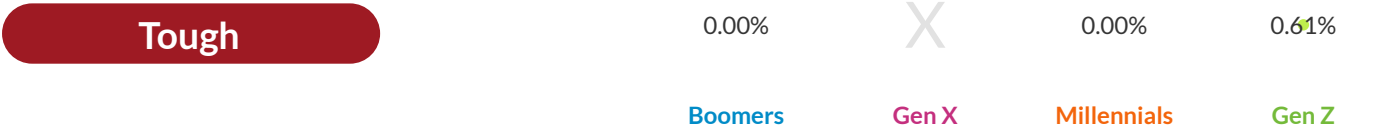
Each generation has certain traits that are most frequently mentioned, revealing patterns in how different age groups see themselves. Interestingly, it’s worth noting that there aren’t any behavioural qualities claimed so highly that you would observe a particular generation act on them consistently as a group.

Trait	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Logical	6.99%	4.48%	4.92%	2.63%
Observing	5.17%	3.71%	5.12%	X
Empathetic	5.47%	4.80%	4.72%	X
Reliable	4.56%	5.68%	6.50%	6.58%
Sociable	3.95%	X	X	X
Adaptable	3.95%	X	X	X
Practical	X	4.80%	X	X

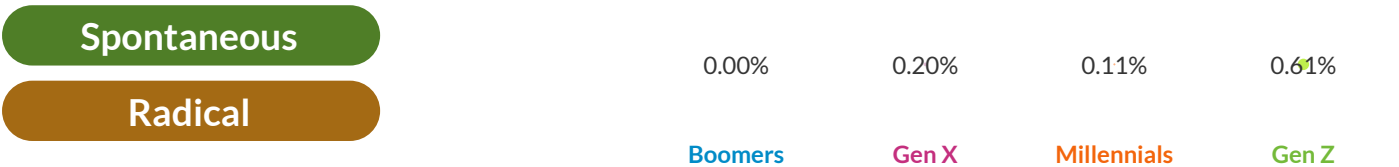
Okay, so what about the least claimed Qualities?



Older generations, particularly Baby Boomers, score extremely low on being Demonstrative (0.00%), reinforcing the stereotype that they are emotionally distant. However, Millennials (0.66%) and Gen Z (0.30%) aren't much more emotionally expressive than their older counterparts, which dispels the myth that younger generations are all about emotion over logic.



Both Gen Z and Millennials score lower on being Tough (0.61% for Gen Z, 0.00% for Millennials), reflecting a broader shift in workplace culture towards emotional intelligence and resilience rather than traditional toughness or competitiveness. However, this does not mean that younger generations are lacking in resilience—just that they define it in different terms, such as adaptability and emotional understanding.



The idea of younger generations being Radical or Spontaneous is also somewhat exaggerated. Millennials (0.11%) and Gen Z (0.61%) have very low scores on these traits, suggesting that the perception of them as rebellious or unpredictable is overblown. Both generations prioritise stability, structure, and efficiency, though they approach these goals with a modern lens.

Trait	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Demonstrative	0.30%	0.66%	0.20%	0.00%
Radical	0.61%	0.11%	0.20%	0.00%

Tough	0.61%	X	X	0.00%
Conceptual	0.61%	X	X	X
Intimate	X	0.33%	0.20%	X
Adaptable	X	0.87%	0.39%	X

We're more alike than we think

The data clearly shows that generational differences in behaviour are far less pronounced than the stereotypes would have us believe. Here's what this all means...

Being Logical is important across generations. While Gen Z and Millennials may emphasise it more, Gen X and Boomers still value it, suggesting that reasoning, critical thinking, and shrewdness are universally appreciated traits.

Empathy is not just a Millennial or Gen Z trait, Gen X also values it highly. The key takeaway is that empathy exists across generations, just expressed in different ways. The stereotype that older generations may not express empathy isn't true, they value connection and understanding just as much.

Reliability is the thread that connects all generations. It's the foundational trait that drives workplace productivity, regardless of age. Whether you're a Gen Z worker in your first job or a Baby Boomer nearing retirement, being dependable is crucial.

Being Practical and Grounded are traits shared across generations. While Baby Boomers may be more focused on proven methods, younger generations also value practicality, just in the context of a fast-evolving work environment.

Yes, generational trends exist but they are overshadowed by broader consistencies in effective workplace behaviours. We all have more in common than we might think.

The bottom line: There's no such thing as a "generational behaviour type". Work ethic, problem-solving, and communication styles are more about personality and environment than age.

The narrative should not be about how generations differ, but rather about how much they share. Behaviours such as reliability, empathy, and logical thinking are valued across all generations, highlighting a collective alignment in workplace values.

And the stereotypes are costly

It's essential to understand the real world consequences of the generational stereotypes. When it comes to communication, collaboration, and resilience, these generational assumptions can cause a lot of harm, resulting in misunderstandings, disengagement, and lost potential. In today's fast-paced and evolving work environment, it's crucial to challenge these assumptions and focus on the common ground that can bring teams together.

Misunderstanding the true motivations of younger employees can lead to disengagement and increased turnover. The "Great Detachment," a term describing the significant disengagement among young workers, has been linked to factors such as lack of trust in leadership and insufficient development opportunities.

\$8,800,000,000,000

This disengagement is costly, with Gallup estimating that it leads to \$8.8 trillion in lost productivity globally.

New York Post

Organisations that fail to address these issues may experience higher turnover rates and decreased morale, ultimately impacting their bottom line.

Communication breaks down. Generational stereotypes can also have a profound effect on communication, often causing misunderstandings and inefficiencies. These stereotypes lead to assumptions about communication preferences, often resulting in missed connections or frustration when people are unable to effectively relate to one another.



47% of employees believe a generational divide in the workplace leads to miscommunication.

Oak Engage

For instance, the stereotype that younger generations prefer digital communication while older generations favour face-to-face conversations can cause friction in team interactions. If these preferences are assumed without considering individual needs, team members may not get their message across as effectively. Similarly, older generations might assume that younger workers are too sensitive or resistant to feedback, while younger generations may believe that older employees are unwilling to adapt to modern communication methods. These assumptions can stifle open and constructive dialogue, leaving team members feeling misunderstood and disconnected.

Misunderstandings can also arise when feedback is involved. Stereotypes about younger generations being less resilient to criticism or older generations being unwilling to change can create communication roadblocks. If younger workers are afraid of receiving feedback due to perceived criticism, they may miss out on valuable growth opportunities. At the same time, older workers who feel that younger colleagues lack respect for their expertise may avoid providing feedback altogether. These communication failures only serve to prolong tensions and make it harder for teams to thrive.

Stereotypes about communication preferences and resilience can make it harder for teams to effectively share ideas, give feedback, and address issues. The result is often poor communication, decreased engagement, and a lack of clarity. To counteract this, organisations need to foster a culture of open communication, where people feel heard and valued, regardless of generational assumptions.

Collaboration becomes a battle

Generational stereotypes can seriously undermine collaboration in the workplace, often manifesting through hierarchical expectations, misunderstandings of work ethic, and technology divides. When certain generations are stereotyped as “too young” or “too old,” it can create tensions that disrupt teamwork.



For example, younger generations may be stereotyped as less committed or disengaged, leading their older colleagues to dismiss their contributions. This kind of thinking fosters an environment where trust and collaboration suffer, as older workers might not fully appreciate the value, younger workers bring to the table. Similarly, older generations may be viewed as inflexible or resistant to change, creating a divide between those who are seen as embracing innovation and those who are perceived as holding back progress. This type of thinking hampers the collaborative spirit, as teams become fragmented by assumptions rather than strengthened by diversity.

The stereotype that younger workers are less reliable or less experienced can also prevent them from receiving the mentorship and guidance they need. On the flip side, the belief that older employees are too set in their ways can lead younger employees to dismiss their potential contributions. This creates a divide, preventing the effective exchange of ideas and stifling innovation that could benefit the whole team.

When we allow generational stereotypes to guide our thinking, collaboration becomes a battle of assumptions, not an opportunity for synergy. By recognising the value in each person, regardless of age, and focusing on cross-generational learning and structured mentorship, we can break down these barriers and build stronger, more cooperative teams.

Resilience gets lost somewhere along the way

When it comes to resilience, generational stereotypes can distort how we view a colleague's ability to handle stress, adapt to change, and persevere in the face of challenges. These assumptions about different generations' work habits and work-life balance priorities often lead to misjudgements about what it truly means to be resilient.

For example, younger generations are often stereotyped as less resilient or quick to leave when things get tough. However, this stereotype overlooks the fact that Millennials and Gen Z may simply have a different approach to resilience, prioritising work-life balance and adaptability. When older generations assume that resilience means enduring long hours or pushing through difficult situations

at any cost, it can create a disconnect that limits the effectiveness of the team. These assumptions can lead to frustration when younger employees appear to be less “tough” or less willing to “stick it out”.

Similarly, the stereotype that older generations are too set in their ways or unwilling to change can undermine their ability to adapt to new challenges. If these stereotypes hold true, older employees may be unfairly judged as less resilient in the face of change, when in fact, many have become highly adaptable over time. By focusing on the strengths that each generation brings to the table, it becomes easier to see that resilience isn’t about how we endure but about how we adapt and respond to challenges.

Stereotypes about resilience can create a divisive environment where workers are judged based on outdated assumptions rather than their actual capabilities. These false perceptions can limit individuals’ potential, creating unnecessary barriers to both personal and team-wide growth. By shifting the focus from rigid stereotypes to individual strengths, organisations can build a more resilient workforce that thrives on collaboration, adaptability, and mutual respect.

Hierarchy

The issue of hierarchy and respect also plays a part. Younger workers may feel dismissed or undervalued by older colleagues, while older employees may expect more deference due to their experience. These tensions can erode the sense of mutual respect that’s crucial for a healthy team dynamic. At the same time, there’s often a resistance to change, particularly from older generations, who are perceived as being set in their ways. This can frustrate younger workers, who might push for rapid, innovative change. Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, are quick to point out how these generational tensions affect productivity, sharing concrete examples of how clashes between age groups hinder team effectiveness. Meanwhile, Gen X and Baby Boomers tend to be more neutral or dismissive of the impact, seeing the challenges as individual issues rather than a by-product of generational differences. Baby Boomers, especially, are more concerned about retention, noting that younger workers often leave jobs quickly, which impacts team stability and continuity. In the end, these generational divides can seriously hinder a team’s ability to perform at its best, but recognising and addressing these differences could help teams break down silos and work more cohesively.

So, do generational differences affect how people interact at work?

Generational differences in the workplace often play out like an ongoing, subtle tug-of-war, each group pulling for its own way of working, communicating, and contributing. Take technology, for example, Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with digital tools and are quick to adapt to new software, leaving older generations, like Baby Boomers and Gen X, struggling to keep up. This divide often extends to how people prefer to communicate. For the younger crowd, texting, emails, and digital platforms are the norm, while older generations still find face-to-face meetings or phone calls to be the gold standard. And this difference doesn't stop there; people naturally flock to others of their own age group, creating generational silos in the office that can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or even tensions.

But the real contention often comes when respect is on the line. Younger workers, frustrated by being dismissed or overlooked, feel their ideas aren't given the weight they deserve, while older workers believe they aren't given the respect they've earned through years of experience. It's a delicate balance, where age sometimes becomes a barrier rather than a bridge. Then there's the way each generation views work ethic. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers often see younger employees as less committed, as they prioritise boundaries and flexibility, while Millennials and Gen Z look at their older colleagues and feel they're stuck in their ways, resistant to change. Feedback, too, is a source of friction, older workers may shy away from criticism, while younger employees crave regular, constructive input to help them grow.

Work-life balance is another dividing line, with Millennials and Gen Z prioritising personal time and flexibility, even if it means stepping back from career advancement. Meanwhile, Baby Boomers and Gen X often feel more at home in a traditional, work-focused mindset. These differences can lead to clashes, where younger employees feel patronised by the older generation's more rigid expectations, and older colleagues feel disrespected by what they perceive as a lack of commitment from younger workers. However, despite the friction, these generational divides also present a chance for workplaces to evolve. By embracing both the fresh perspectives of younger workers and the wisdom of experience, companies have the opportunity to foster stronger communication, break down silos, and create an environment that values all voices—no matter the generation.

Valuing different ways of being when values are different

If behaviours themselves aren't all that different, then what is? Our research reveals that generational differences aren't necessarily about how people behave, most people, regardless of age, work hard, contribute, and engage in their roles. Instead, the key lies in what values are driving those behaviours. And when those values aren't aligned or understood across generational lines, it can create friction that often gets misinterpreted as behavioural differences.

Work values by generation

Generation	Top Values	Key Takeaway
Gen Z	 Growth 25.23%  Kindness 17.76%	Strong focus on progression and positive work environments
Millennials	 Kindness 18.48%  Growth 16.83%	Balance between career development and supportive culture
Gen X	 Helping Others 20.63%  Security 15.63%	Emphasis on mentorship and stability
Boomers	 Achievement 16.67%  Self-Sufficiency 16.67%	Continued ambition and independence

Workplace values vary widely across generations, shaping team dynamics and influencing company culture. Gen Z and Millennials prioritise growth and kindness, placing strong emphasis on career development and building positive relationships. They value environments where they can learn, advance, and feel supported, highlighting the importance of mentorship, learning opportunities, and a sense of community.

Gen X and Baby Boomers, however, focus more on helping others, aligning with their experience and mentorship roles. Baby Boomers stand out as the most achievement-oriented, with a strong focus on personal success, yet they are the least concerned about job security—unlike younger generations, stability is not a top priority for them. Justice is a key value for Gen X, who place the highest emphasis on fairness, while Baby Boomers rank it much lower. Interestingly, tradition is consistently seen as unimportant across all generations, showing a collective preference for modern approaches and innovation over maintaining the status quo.

The differences in values are simply a reflection of what motivates people. But when these values aren't acknowledged, it can lead to misunderstandings that can make behaviours appear fundamentally different.

The role of meta-stereotypes

Meta-stereotypes are the stereotypes we hold about how other people perceive us. Younger workers often believe older colleagues see them as entitled or lazy, while older workers might assume that younger workers view them as inflexible or outdated. These underlying assumptions create a cycle of misunderstanding and tension, reinforcing the very stereotypes that limit authentic communication and connection.

This creates a dangerous feedback loop, if a younger employee believes they're viewed as entitled, they may unconsciously become defensive or guarded, which only confirms the older colleague's assumption. Similarly, if an older employee feels they are seen as outdated, they may withdraw from contributing ideas altogether. Over time, these unspoken tensions erode trust and limit meaningful collaboration.

This kind of quick judgement may feel efficient, but it creates blind spots in team dynamics and prevents teams from recognising the value that different perspectives bring.

Meta-stereotypes don't just affect how we perceive others, they also shape how we behave. If we expect to be seen a certain way, we may start adapting our behaviour to fit that expectation, even when it's not true to who we are. This defensive behaviour reinforces the stereotype and creates more distance between generations, weakening the potential for mutual learning and shared success.

When we focus too much on what divides us based on generational stereotypes, we risk missing out on the potential for cross-generational collaboration and mutual learning. By assuming that

one generation's way of doing things is "better" than another's, we can prevent ourselves from fully appreciating the value of diverse perspectives.

The innovative power of experience and openness

One of the most powerful opportunities in the workplace lies in the combination of experience and openness. Younger employees tend to bring fresh thinking and adaptability, while older colleagues offer deep experience and strategic thinking. The true potential lies in bringing these together, balancing the energy of new ideas with the steadiness of experience.

Paradoxes. It's a key driver of innovation and resilience. Openness fuels creativity, while experience anchors it in practicality. Teams that successfully balance both qualities are better able to navigate complex challenges, combining creative problem-solving with grounded execution.

For example, younger employees may generate innovative solutions, but without the experience and strategic thinking that comes from seasoned colleagues, those ideas may fail to gain traction. On the other hand, older employees' experience can provide the context needed to shape those ideas into something actionable. This blend of perspectives creates a dynamic problem-solving environment where the best of both worlds drives progress.

Self-awareness is critical here. The more self-aware employees are about their own tendencies and strengths, the easier it becomes to navigate generational differences. When people recognise their own values and overextended behavioural qualities, they become more open to understanding others' perspectives. For instance, a younger worker who values flexibility might approach an older colleague's preference for structure with greater empathy, recognising that it's not about resistance to change but rather about a desire for stability.

How do work styles change as you age?

It's no longer about working harder but about working smarter, a lesson many have learned over time. As career priorities evolve, many Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers find themselves less driven by the pursuit of promotions and more focused on finding satisfaction and balance in their roles.

Yet, while the broad trends are similar, there are clear differences in how each generation approaches their work and personal lives. Take technology, for instance. Gen Z and Millennials have grown up surrounded by constant innovation and are generally confident when it comes to adapting

to new tools. Still, they're beginning to feel the pressure of keeping up with the pace of change. In contrast, Gen X and Baby Boomers might find themselves struggling more with newer technologies, though some make a deliberate effort to stay current. When it comes to job security, Gen Z and Millennials are more willing to leave a job if conditions aren't right or if they feel unfulfilled, reflecting a more flexible and dynamic approach to their careers. On the other hand, Gen X and Baby Boomers are often more anchored to the idea of stability and long-term employment, having grown up in a more traditional work environment. Finally, while Gen Z and Millennials are quick to establish boundaries around work expectations, rejecting the idea of overworking, Gen X and Baby Boomers tend to hold on to a strong work ethic, though some are now easing up on their previously intense commitment. It's clear that while generations share many similarities as they progress in their careers, their approach to work and life continues to be shaped by their own unique experiences.

The wider the age range, the better the results

A team with a wide age range can produce better results by using the strengths of each generation. Most people, regardless of age, recognise the value of age diversity, acknowledging that different perspectives, experience levels, and problem-solving approaches can lead to more well-rounded outcomes. There's a natural balance that emerges when the experience of older workers is paired with the fresh ideas and adaptability of younger employees. Older generations bring wisdom and industry knowledge, while younger workers inject energy and innovative thinking, creating an ideal mix for success. Collaboration, however, remains the key to success. Teams that foster mutual respect and open-mindedness, rather than focusing on age differences, often find the most success.

That said, attitudes towards age diversity can vary. Gen Z and some Millennials are more sceptical about the focus on age, often emphasising that skills and attitude are far more important than one's generation. They worry that generational differences could spark unnecessary friction, making it harder for teams to work cohesively. On the other hand, Millennials and Gen X are the strongest advocates for age diversity. They highlight how mentorship, shared learning, and the variety of viewpoints that come with different ages help improve problem-solving and creativity in the workplace. Baby Boomers, while also seeing the value in diversity, tend to focus more on the practical side. They stress how age can influence physical ability and workplace stability, and they point out that for age diversity to truly be beneficial, younger employees must actively contribute and not just rely on the experience of others. In the end, when teams recognise and appreciate the different strengths brought by each generation, they can work together to achieve greater results.

If behaviour and values don't explain it all, where do we go?

The key is to approach each interaction on neutral terms. Instead of evaluating behaviour through a generational lens, we need to focus on what individuals bring to the table, their communication style, decision-making approach, and emotional strengths. This requires creating a work environment where people are valued for their individual strengths and professional contributions, not for how they conform to (or challenge) generational expectations.

Overextensions are strengths and behaviours that may play out more when you are under pressure. They can cause tension between generations because it's easy to mistake clashing overextended qualities for generational conflict rather than individual behaviours. When generational stereotypes shape how we interpret behaviours, overextended behaviour can be mislabelled as generational traits e.g. a younger employee's emotional reaction to feedback may be viewed as typical "Millennial fragility" rather than the natural consequence of overextending empathy. An older employee's hesitation around new technology may be perceived as generational resistance rather than a moment of overextended cautiousness.

Resetting assumptions means recognising that these behaviours are not generational—they are human. By understanding the broader behavioural map, we can respond with greater empathy and precision, addressing the real cause of conflict rather than falling back on lazy generational clichés.

So let's map it

So how do we move beyond generational thinking and start focusing on behaviour? The Lumina Spark model provides a practical framework for understanding personality traits and how they play out in the workplace. It identifies 24 Qualities that influence how we communicate, collaborate, adapt, and engage with our work.

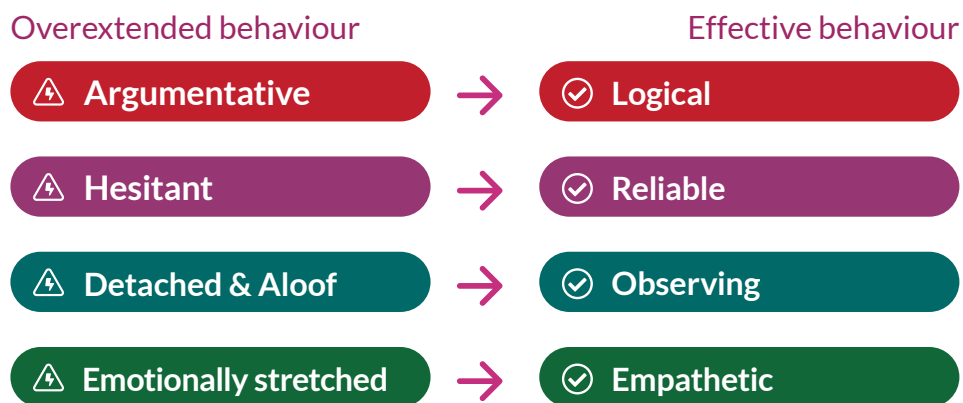
Instead of categorising these qualities by age, looking at it on a behavioural level allows us to map them across the broader context of workplace behaviour, helping us understand how individuals, regardless of generation, approach challenges and opportunities.

Effective vs Overextended behaviour

Assumptions and misunderstandings that form harmful stereotypes are far less likely when organisations have a shared language to interpret their own behaviour and the behaviour of those around them.

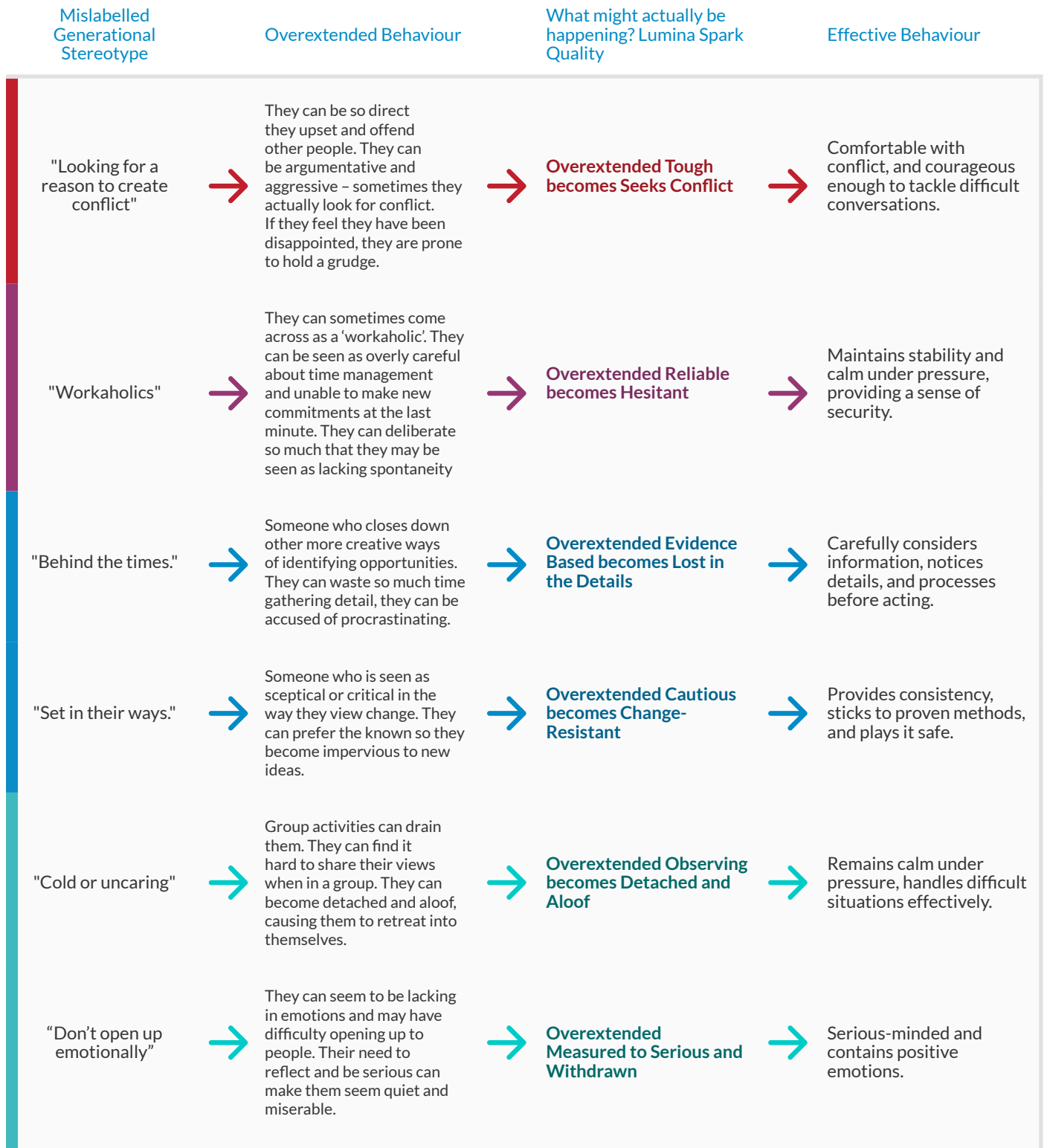
Being able to understand the line between when a behavioural quality is effective compared to when it is overextended, creates a neutral ground for understanding one another. Most importantly, that any behavioural quality can be a strength when used in moderation, and likewise a weakness is overplayed to the extent of being unhelpful.

What happens when teams see the potential in an overextended behavioural quality rather than reducing the quality to a negative stereotype



Let's map that reset behavioural lens

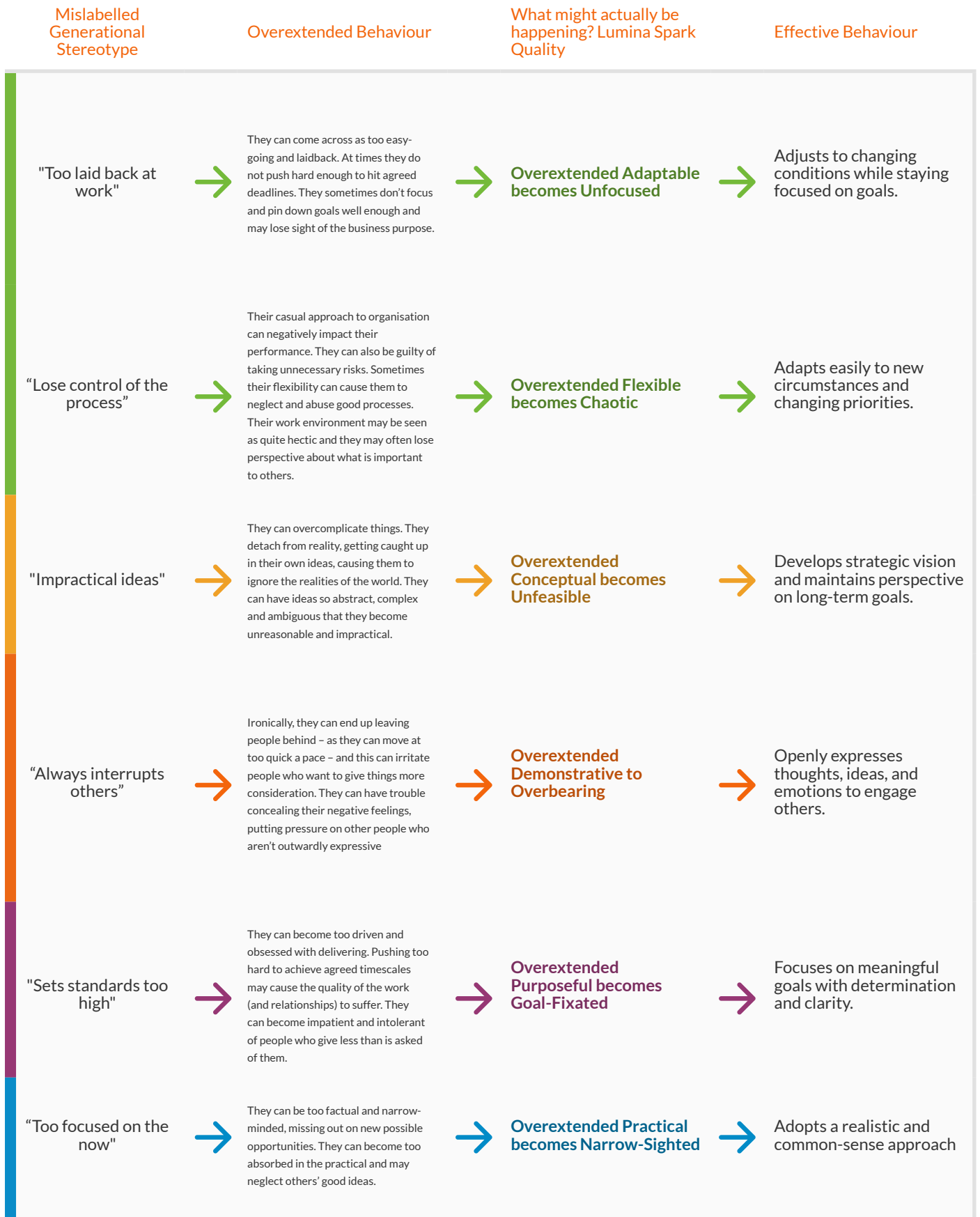
Baby Boomers



Gen X

Mislabelled Generational Stereotype	Overextended Behaviour	What might actually be happening? Lumina Spark Quality	Effective Behaviour
"People pleasers who don't assert themselves"	→ Their diplomatic approach can complicate issues that could easily be resolved with a more direct approach. They can be so conciliatory that they don't voice or promote their own views and opinions. Their judgement may be clouded by a need to be liked.	→ Overextended Accommodating becomes Acquiescing	→ Strives for harmony and is willing to adjust their stance in a conflict
"Avoid confrontation"	→ They can invest so much time supporting the team that they can lose sight of their own needs. They refuse to compete. They can be so modest that they don't get the recognition they deserve.	→ Overextended Collaborative becomes Consensus Obsessed	→ Encourages teamwork, values others' input, and finds shared solutions
"Overly invested in other people's issues"	→ They can be so in touch with other people's feelings it can feel as though it drains them. They can be so compassionate that they lose sight of their own objectives. Their desire to serve and please can make it hard for them to decline requests.	→ Overextended Empathetic becomes Emotionally Stretched	→ Considerate and in touch with other people's feelings.
"Dominate social conversations"	→ They can get distracted from their task by the need to socialise. When they are using too much of this Quality they can be seen by others as intrusive and sometimes they may invade other people's privacy.	→ Overextended Sociable becomes Can't be Alone	→ Outgoing and confident, they energise others with their enthusiasm.
"Constant micromanaging"	→ Sometimes they tell people what to do rather than asking them and this can damage their relationships in the process. They can waste time trying to take control of a group rather than just getting on with the work themselves. They can be seen as domineering and controlling by others.	→ Overextended Takes Charge becomes Controlling	→ Naturally assumes responsibility, influences others, and takes the lead
"Doesn't contribute to group discussions"	→ They can seem withdrawn and quiet in group situations, not exerting enough control. They can listen too much, losing sight of their own notions and opinions.	→ Overextended Intimate becomes Passive	→ Listens first and gravitates towards one-on-one conversations.

Millennials



Gen Z

Mislabelled Generational Stereotype	Overextended Behaviour	What might actually be happening? Lumina Spark Quality	Effective Behaviour
"Leave projects to the last minute and run out of time"	→ They often leave things to the last minute and may run out of time. They can be too spontaneous and lack self-discipline. They can regret acting first and thinking later. They struggle to maintain a creative flow when uninspired and are not as productive when they find they have no drive.	→ Overextended Spontaneous becomes Impulsive	→ Brings creative, quick-thinking solutions to challenges.
"Too many big ideas"	→ Failing to implement creative ideas, constant new ideas that are divorced from reality	→ Overextended Imaginative to Fantasists	→ Thinks creatively and explores abstract solutions.
"Too radical" or "disruptive."	→ They don't always consider the ramifications of changing things. Sometimes they fail to take traditional ideas into consideration.	→ Overextended Radical becomes Change for the Sake of Change	→ Championing change and not restricted by tradition
"Too ambitious"	→ They can look to protect their own interests so much that they push others aside. They can be seen as selfish. Their lack of trust in others can undermine teamwork. They would rather work against people than alongside them.	→ Overextended Competitive becomes Win at All Costs	→ Drives results, focuses on delivering tangible success.
"Overly critical"	→ They can be too logical, seeming to ignore other people's views. They can become so focused on the analytical process they give only a cursory thought to those around them. They can come across as critical, overusing their rational tendencies.	→ Overextended Logical becomes Argumentative	→ Uses reason and objective thinking to solve problems.
"Too focused on the process"	→ They can spend so much time organising their work that they waste time that could have been spent doing it. They can be seen as too compliant and rule bound. They can become obsessive and process driven.	→ Overextended Structured becomes Rigid Planning	→ Creates order and structure to enhance efficiency and consistency.

So what does this behavioural map show us?

- ✓ Overextended behavioural qualities are not generational, they are individual to the person. Resistance to change, for example, is not an inherent quality of older workers; it's an overextension of being Cautious
- ✓ Generational mislabelling creates blind spots. Younger generations may be labelled as unreliable or sensitive when their behaviour is simply a sign of flexibility or empathy taken too far.
- ✓ Context matters. The same behaviour that appears negative in one context may be highly valuable in another. Being spontaneous may seem risky in a finance role but invaluable in a creative role.
- ✓ Adjusting perception is key to effective teamwork. When teams understand that behaviours stem from individual tendencies rather than age, they can engage more effectively and avoid defensive responses.

Moving beyond generational labels

In conversations about workplace dynamics, age is often treated as an afterthought. Organisations focus heavily on gender, race, and sexual orientation, but generational differences remain under-explored.

A multi-generational workforce is not just a challenge to be managed—it's an opportunity to be leveraged. Different ways of working, thinking, and communicating enrich team dynamics, drive creativity, and improve problem-solving. The key is not to erase differences but to align them.

Older employees bring stability, deep expertise, and strategic thinking; younger employees bring fresh ideas, adaptability, and creativity. When these qualities are recognised and integrated, teams become more dynamic, innovative, and resilient.

However, generational dynamics will only work if we dismantle the stereotypes that surround them. If older employees feel dismissed or undervalued, they'll withdraw from contributing. If younger employees feel patronised or underestimated, they'll disengage. The key is to build an environment where differences are valued as strengths, not viewed as obstacles.

When we move beyond stereotypes and focus on individual behaviours, we stop seeing age as a barrier and start recognising it as a strength. That's how we unlock true collaboration, communication, resilience, and engagement.

Our research supports a shift away from categorising people solely by age. Instead, focusing on behaviours and values can lead to a more productive and harmonious work environment. By evaluating people on their individual qualities, organisations can better support personal and professional growth, regardless of generational identity.

Ultimately, it's not about what generation you belong to—it's about how you show up, how you collaborate, and how you harness your unique strengths to create value. When we stop assuming and start listening, we build not just stronger teams—but a stronger, more connected workplace.



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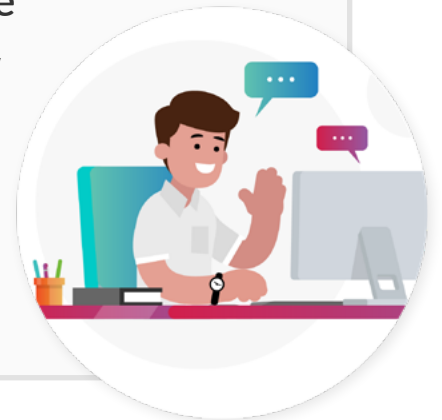
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