

**SHOULD THE SANTEE FIRE DEPARTMENT
MODIFY ITS FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT POLICY
TO REFLECT GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN
THE APPLICANT POOL?**

Strategic Management of Change

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ABSTRACT

This research project analyzed generational differences in the workplace as a possible modification of the recruitment process and thereby enhancing retention of entry-level firefighters for the Santee Fire Department. The problem considered was that the current recruitment process may not be considering contemporary generational factors in the work environment. Hence, the current process may not be maximizing the probabilities for success by appealing to the most qualified candidates. The purpose was to determine if an enhanced understanding of generational differences could be used to provide a more effective recruitment process.

The research employed both historical and evaluative research to answer several questions: (1) Is the current recruitment process outdated? Does the current process fail to consider the changing workplace cultures and generational differences? (2) What is the attitude and general awareness of the current Department workforce with regard to generational issues in the organization? (3) What does the literature offer to provide guidance to the organization to best utilize generational distinctions? (4) Can an enhanced understanding of generational issues be utilized to improve the current recruitment process? If so, what recommendations can be made to the City of Santee Fire Department regarding modification?

The objective of this research project was to provide sufficient information to guide the City of Santee in the possible modification of recruitment procedures using an understanding of workplace generational differences. Each employee was surveyed via a structured questionnaire designed to obtain the knowledge and opinion of

employees regarding generational considerations. Data from the survey questionnaire was collected, compiled, evaluated and utilized for a recommendation.

The findings indicated that employees do consider generational distinctions to be important in the workplace, both for recruitment and retention. A recommendation was then made to the Department to carefully consider a well-constructed revision of relevant portions of the recruitment process.

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INTRODUCTION

The Santee Fire Department provides fire prevention, fire protection, advanced life support emergency medical services, rescue, and hazardous materials response for the City of Santee. The City, located in San Diego County, California, is a moderately growing community of 65,000 people covering approximately 20 square miles with an economy based on commercial and small industry. The department has 51 full-time paid firefighters, two Division Chiefs, one Deputy Chief (Fire Marshall) and a Fire Chief.

Problem statement: The Santee Fire Department's current recruitment and selection process for entry level firefighters was developed 25+ years ago during a different era when entry-level firefighter applicants were plentiful, came from a different generation and, arguably, were motivated by different cultural values. The recruitment process really has not changed much in the past three decades. As a result, the existing process may be outdated and may not be designed to attract and retain the best applicants. In fact, the process may be failing to adequately consider the motivations and cultural background of the current applicant pool.

Purpose statement: The purpose of this study was to determine if components of the existing recruitment process could and/or should be modified to more adequately reflect the generational attributes and motivations of the current applicant pool. Should a generational component be considered in relation to the applicant testing process to provide a more effective selection of entry-level firefighters for the Department?

Currently, individuals are selected by a written examination, physical ability test, and an oral interview conducted by the Division Chief in charge of personnel, assisted by a member of the Human Resources Department. The system is the traditional way new firefighters have been hired by fire departments in the Southern California area for at least the past 25+ years. While this system has produced some outstanding entry-level firefighters over the years, there is evidence now that the current oral examination process may be poorly suited to the current generation of applicants, primarily due to a failure to understand evolving generational differences. This may be contributing to an increasing problem with the recruitment and retention of applicants.

The labor market which existed in Southern California in the 1970's and 1980's was quite a bit different from what has evolved today. During these two decades, California's population was growing rapidly. Municipal infra-structure was struggling to keep pace and included the increased hiring of entry-level firefighters. These firefighters were recruited from a large labor pool of baby-boomers, generally in their mid-to-late 20's, and often only possessing a high school education. There was virtually a limitless pool of qualified applicants.

The past recruitment climate was one of an employer's market. During the 1970's and 1980's when a fire department did a recruitment, it was not uncommon to receive thousands of applications from qualified individuals, mostly white male, looking for a career. Employers were taxed with finding creative ways to limit the numbers of applicants to reasonable levels to facilitate a manageable evaluation process. Applicants who were selected as probationary firefighters were under tremendous pressure to succeed from the outset or be easily replaced. This was the era where the

phrase, "There are thousands of people lined up who want your job," was coined. This was the prevailing attitude of many supervisors at the time in the fire department semi-military work environment and there is some evidence that this attitude may still be held today by some fire administrators and supervisors.

Gradually, conditions changed and evolved a great amount to a different job market situation. Entry-level standards tend to be higher with employers routinely requiring a basic recruit academy and paramedic certification prior to application. And, conversely, today's firefighter labor pool is smaller and more educated. The average firefighter applicant usually has some college credits, often at least a two-year degree and further specialized training, usually at the paramedic level. Most of the applicants are of a different generation, Generation-X and Generation-Next, with different values and motivated by different principles than their predecessors.

Today, regional population growth has slowed and, in many instances, there are actually more jobs than qualified applicants. Despite continued high competition for firefighter positions, there are increasingly more opportunities for the most qualified candidates. In fact, once candidates have mastered the selection process and obtained fire service employment, they often continue to pursue applications with other employers. They may receive multiple employment offers and have the opportunity to pick and choose among competing employers. With retirements increasing and the fire service gradually transitioning to full advanced life support (paramedic), this is especially true of firefighter/paramedics today.

The recruitment process devised to meet the conditions and demands of the 70's and 80's, developed originally by Veterans to hire Baby-Boomers, is essentially

intact today and, arguably, has not evolved to meet the changed circumstances enumerated above. The Santee Fire Department recruits in this environment and is certainly no exception to this situation. In an effort to improve the circumstances, generational change issues were analyzed as a possible solution, with the goal of making appropriate recommendations to modify the recruitment process.

Historical and evaluative research methods were employed to answer the following four questions:

1. Is the current recruitment process outdated? Does the current recruitment process fail to consider the change in workplace cultures and generational differences?
2. What is the attitude and general awareness of the current Department workforce with regard to generational issues in the organization?
3. What does the literature offer to provide guidance to the organization to best utilize generational distinctions?
4. Can an enhanced understanding of generational issues be utilized to improve the current recruitment process? If so, what recommendations can be made to the City of Santee Fire Department regarding modification?

In the current fire service workplace environment generally, and the Santee Fire Department specifically, new employees are selected partly with questions and corresponding “model” answers developed by senior fire officers. These questions are based on subjective criteria developed over time by trial and error, and necessarily

contain the cultural biases of the current fire administrators. The sought-after “model” responses may be distorted by personal bias and poor past assumptions regarding what contributes to successful firefighter applicants. This may be hampering the task of recruiting and retaining new firefighters.

Under the current pre-employment recruitment process, applicants are judged based on what they know technically about the position (written test) and what they say they know about the position (oral examination). The interview, a somewhat subjective tool, may be based on material that is dated culturally and generationally.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Santee, a moderately growing suburb of San Diego, California, is in a valley approximately 15 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. The City provides fire suppression, rescue, and first responder ALS medical services through a fully paid, professional fire department. The department is comprised of 55 career firefighters including Fire Administration. In 2000, the department responded to 7100 incidents, the highest number of responses in its history. A Fire Chief, Operations/Training Division Chief, Support Services Division Chief, and Deputy Chief Fire Marshall comprise the Fire Administration. The department support staff is a Senior Administrative Analyst, a Code Enforcement Officer, and an Administrative Secretary.

The department operates out of three fire stations but this requires further explanation. The Department participates, along with seven other surrounding departments, in a joint-powers agreement providing full operational consolidation for fire suppression, training, and communications functions. The participating

departments operate as one 24-station fire department but recruitment and staffing is accomplished by each separate department.

The focus of this paper is the possible improvement of the firefighter recruitment process, and subsequent retention, by a better understanding of cultural and generational changes within the workforce. The current recruitment and selection process is a joint mission of the Human Resources Department and the Fire Department. The process includes a validated written examination, a validated physical ability test, and an oral examination board made up of Fire Administration and Human Resources personnel. The oral board examination questions have been developed over time with the assumption that past behavior is a predictor of future performance.

The current oral examination questions were developed by fire administrators who are primarily from the baby-boomer generation. Therefore the questions and resulting “model” almost certainly contain the values and cultural biases of that generation. However, the applicants are primarily from Generation-X and are starting to be from Generation-Next. Some applicants have been hired recently only to leave a short time later for other fire departments. This has resulted in a tremendous waste of department time and effort, especially in training hours expended.

At the outset of this project, it was felt the current recruitment process and subsequent employee retention opportunities may lack an understanding of cultural and generational differences between fire administration, first line supervisors and the pre-employment firefighter applicant pool. Implementation of a revised system which teaches and takes advantage of a multi-generational awareness, without lowering

essential standards, was proposed as a possible modification to the recruitment and retention of qualified applicants. This approach was borrowed from some progressive employers in the private sector which have used generational awareness training and techniques quite successfully for a number of years.

This applied research project will utilize some of the concepts from the Strategic Management of Change Class of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy which the author attended in July and August of 2000. The need to evaluate organizational conditions and strategically implement change when necessary was discussed generally throughout the scope of the Strategic Management of Change curriculum. And, the course instructor suggested the generational topic as a possible area ripe for study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was primarily conducted by a review of fire service journals, employment journals, research papers, periodicals, and textbooks on the subject matter. The internet was also utilized as a source of information on generational studies and to gather additional information on recruitment and retention methodology. Numerous searches were conducted through online internet search engines to identify published documents relevant to the subject matter.

The literature review's objectives were to survey and collect information regarding generational differences in the workplace. This included defining and describing the attributes of each identified generation, identifying whether such attributes were quantifiable and of value to the topic, and balancing the benefits and

drawbacks of using the results to modify the process. However, the primary reason for this research project was to provide the City of Santee with information about generational differences in the work environment as they might be of use in the recruitment and retention of firefighters. The research has yielded information which provides possibilities to help achieve this goal.

The literature review for this project began by examining reference material and documents cataloged in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland. Only three Applied Research Documents were listed in the LRC Card Catalogue on the subject of generational differences in the fire service workplace and none were published. A further search revealed other reference materials and documents cataloged in the Research Libraries at San Diego State University, the University of California, San Diego, and Thomas Jefferson School of Law, San Diego.

Books and articles related to workplace generational attributes were abundant in the general personnel reference literature. Most of the documented experience came from the private sector where some progressive employers understand and have been using the generational concept successfully for the greater part of ten years. There was little information found on the use of such data by the Fire Service or other public sector employers. The public sector is apparently slow to embrace the concept or at least to document their experiences with it.

Defining the Generations

In addition to being born in the same historical range, a generation is also defined by its common tastes, attitudes, and experiences. Its members, in a general way, share a sense of common times, tastes, values, beliefs, behavior, background and experiences. Those experiences include a host of circumstances including economic, social, sociological, and, demographic. A generation's "defining moments" are particularly important in molding the attributes of the generation. These defining moments are the major events which capture the attention and emotions of individuals at a formative stage in their lives. An old adage holds that "People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents," and it certainly appears to apply here. And, cultural and group tendencies are dynamic and change over time. They are not the same for all members of the group (Blank & Slipp, 1994).

The music which they hear, the heroes that they share, the passions which they agree or disagree about, the headlines they read and their common history shape and define the generation. And because generations share a common history and time, and have events, images, and experiences in common, they develop their own unique personalities. However, not every individual fits that generation's personality profile. Some embody it while some spend a lifetime trying to distance themselves from it. Either way, all members of a generation are significantly influenced by the personality of their time. And, generational commonalities cut across racial, ethnic, and economic differences (Zemke et al., 2000).

When demographers, the people who study population trends, talk about a generation, they typically refer to a period of roughly twenty-five years, which is the

time required for a newborn child to grow up, mature, and begin to produce offspring. Social scientists generally define the length of a generation in terms of the critical events that mark its beginning and end. Because the periodicity of such events is not altogether predictable, some generations may be longer or shorter than others. Complicating matters further is the lack of scholarly consensus concerning which critical events have been powerful enough to shape the identity of a group (Craig & Bennett, 1997).

Contemporary commentary on the subject tends to divide American society into four basic generations: Veterans, Baby-Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Nexters (sometimes referred to as Generation-Y or the twentysomethings). There is necessarily a certain amount of arbitrariness to such a classification. The definitions are generalizations and the demarcation time lines overlap and are drawn subjectively at best and must be viewed from that prospective. Demographers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, historians, and political scientists rarely agree when it comes to defining and labeling a generation. Considering that each of these disciplines emphasizes a different part of the human experience, one can more readily understand the inconsistency in labeling (Bagby, 1998).

There is, however, universal agreement that there are fundamental differences between the generations and fundamental similarities among a significant number of the members within each generation. Again, these observations and classifications are somewhat subjective and exceptions to them can always be found. For purposes of this analysis, we are interested in the generally observed similarities rather than the differences (Thau & Heflin, 1997).

The Veterans: 1922 – 1943 This generation is often also referred to as Seniors or Matures. It is the generation which molded the United States as we know it today. President Franklin D. Roosevelt described this group as having “a rendezvous with destiny.” They lived through and survived the Great Depression while rejuvenating a failed economy. They won World War II and changed world politics for generations to come. They built a durable national infrastructure of interstate highways, bridges, and dams. They raised the largest generation of American children, the Boomers (Brokaw, 1998).

Members of this generation internalized the values of hard work, thriftiness, and an emphasis on traditional mores. They also created the space program and landed an American on the moon. They developed miracle pharmaceuticals and virtually wiped out polio, tetanus, and a host of other diseases which had plagued mankind before them. Their mind-set has become such an inherent part of our culture that all other values are compared to theirs. When people argue that we need a return to “family values,” they mean we need to go back to the morality of the Veterans. When managers say young employees today lack a work ethic, they mean they do not have the work ethic of the Veterans. When we say, “Parents aren’t teaching values in the home anymore,” what we really mean is they are not teaching Veteran values. They are responsible for the “great American value system,” a perspective on the world so pervasive that a large percentage of all generations continue to embrace or rebel against it today (Zemke et al., 2000).

The Veteran's view of the world was clear. Rules and regulations told them where they stood. The environment was safe, government was a friend, employers were loyal to workers and workers to them, and ethical structures were clearly defined. Men made up the majority of the workforce. Work was proof of mastery, competence, and moral character. A job was central to one's life. Conscientiousness and respect for work and the workplace were a given (Blank & Slipp, 1994).

The core values of the Veterans include dedication, sacrifice, hard work, conformity, law and order, respect for authority, patience, delayed reward, duty before pleasure, adherence to rules, and honor. The seminal events of the generation include Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic, the Great Depression, FDR and the New Deal, the Dust Bowl era, inception of the Social Security System, Pearl Harbor, World War II, Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear age, and the Korean War (Carnevale & Stone, 1995).

The Baby-Boomers: 1943 -- 1960 The name of this generation comes from the tremendous number of babies born after the end of World War II. Their parents gave these new babies a good world to prosper in, and right from the start they were raised to view prosperity as their birthright. This generation grew up in positive, optimistic times with the country on a tremendous growth curve. The country's infrastructure had to undergo tremendous growth to accommodate the numbers. Schools and health care facilities could not be expanded fast enough and Boomers became proficient at sharing everything (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

They lived, for the most part, in a nuclear family with a working father and a stay-at-home mother; an “Ozzie and Harriet” and “Beaver Cleaver” type of perfect family. They watched a lot of television, danced the twist, read about a sport called surfing, and drove cars with fins. Any domestic problems were either ignored, unreported, or covered up. Unhappiness was denied, racial and sexist jokes were common, the handicapped were barely tolerated, and the retarded were often warehoused. There was certainly no recognition or tolerance for alternative lifestyles such as gays (Littwin, 1986).

The core values of the Baby-Boomers include optimism, team orientation, personal gratification, health and wellness, personal growth, youth, work, and involvement. Their seminal events are many and include the polio vaccine, television, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the birth control pill, JFK elected, the Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK assassinated, Martin Luther King assassinated, the Space Program and Lunar Landing, Vietnam, the Anti-War Movement, Woodstock, the National Organization for Women founded (Zemke et al., 2000).

The Vietnam War was the generation’s principal seminal event and had a profound and divisive effect on the generation and its resulting values. In fact, the war caused a major division between the Veterans and Boomers. Thirty years ago, the battle cry, “Don’t trust anyone over thirty!”, became one of the symbols of a generation gap that pitted the values and interests of post-World War II Boomers against those of their parents and grandparents (Craig & Bennett, 1997).

Additionally, the U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia caused a generation gap of another kind within the Boomer generation. Many young Americans began to openly

question the integrity of Veteran government leaders. Feelings about the war divided many a family, even close siblings. It caused a division that may never be bridged and, to this day, is still not openly discussed.

Some Boomers enlisted, went to Southeast Asia, and became proud soldiers like their Veteran fathers in World War II. Others were drafted and served as unwilling participants. Many fought and died or were wounded and returned home without ever understanding how their actions contributed to the long-term goal, or even what that goal was. Many witnessed unspeakable horrors which will haunt them for a lifetime. Yet, when they returned from the war, it was not to a hero's welcome like their fathers before them. Often wounded both physically and psychologically, when they got off the airplane returning them to their hometowns, many were greeted by anti-war peers who spat at them and shouted epithets. Many returned bitter and skeptical of governmental authority and became silent about the war and their experiences in it. Some joined the generation's counterculture of "tuning in", "turning on", "dropping out" and using drugs.

Those who stayed home and never participated in the war had difficult times as well. Some actively protested while others sympathized in silence. Many became confused with issues of patriotism and loyalty. A significant number of Boomers dodged the war, either by joining the National Guard or through educational deferments. Some filed as conscientious objectors and were able to serve in non-military capacities. Some fled to Canada, Sweden, and other "safe" places. Some starved themselves to get below the acceptable weight for military service. Time does not, in fact, heal all wounds. The shadow of Vietnam and how it was viewed will likely

always haunt this generation and continue to affect its fundamental beliefs (Zemke et al., 2000).

Generation X: 1960 – 1980 Boomer administrators and managers today find themselves in the ironic position of being challenged by a new generation, many of whose members seem determined to implement change on behalf of their own world view. Various labels “post-boomers”, “thirtysomethings”, “baby-busters”, or “Generation X”, the roughly 50 million Americans born between 1960 and 1980 have attracted the attention of demographers, journalists, marketing experts, and novelists trying to figure out what makes them tick. Whether Generation X is the source of these personnel challenges is a matter of debate, but there is growing evidence that traditional organization values and corresponding human resource mechanisms are becoming less and less effective with today’s workforce (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

This generation is often defined more by what it is not than what it is. Any number of generalizations, not always very flattering, have sought to characterize this group. Media accounts, for example, have noted their alleged “whining” about the lack of career and job opportunities, poor academic performance, and withdrawal from society in general and public affairs in particular. Political scientists are only now beginning to explore patterns of attitude and behavior among this generational group (Craig & Bennett, 1997).

Their Boomer parents were a hard act to follow and the generation learned early that conditions would force them to be self-sufficient. They watched as America seemed to fail militarily, politically, diplomatically and economically. They grew up

watching their country repeatedly lose face with the world. The young, impressionable Xers were forced to make the best of their situation and learn how to survive in a world where happy endings were few and the American dream was really beginning to fade (Zemke et al., 2000).

Generation X formed its view of the world in the 1970's when it was not particularly fashionable to be a child. They were the first generation of first babies whose mothers took pills to prevent them. They came of age in an era of fallen heroes, a struggling economy, soaring divorce rates, and the new phenomenon of the "latchkey child". They were the most attention-deprived, neglected group of children in a long time.

As they were growing up, their parents tended to be absent for two significant reasons:

First, nearly half of their parents' marriages ended in divorce. Generation X grew up in an environment of joint custody, visitation rights, and weekend fathers. In contrast to the stable nuclear family unit that nurtured most Boomers, their families were often characterized by new or unusual family compositions, evolving roles, conflict, broad swings of affluence, and a never-ending stream of new babysitters. As a result, they have developed a unique perspective on marriage and family. Their point of view is more flexible and less idealistic than the perspective of earlier generations. They are much more inclusive and less rigid in their definition of "family" than even the liberal Boomers (Ritchie, 1995).

Second, this was the first generation raised with the two-income family. Women were entering the workforce in increasing numbers, and the economy was making it

more and more difficult for a family to sustain a reasonable standard of living with only one wage earner. As their generation comes of age, the two income household has solidified as an economic necessity, and the responsibility to provide for oneself and one's children is no longer assumed to be the sole providence of men. Generation X women seem resigned to work and most Generation X men expect them to (Ritchie, 1995). While their parents' unstable relationships troubled them, their strongest assets, self-reliance and independence, developed as a result (Craig & Bennett, 1997).

These latchkey kids became accustomed to being alone and quite self-reliant. They had independence at a younger age. They wanted more attention from their parents and, at the same time, they became comfortable with their freedom. They tend to work well alone and enjoy challenges, but may not be adept at teamwork early on (Martin, 2000).

They yearned for real attention while their parents came home late and exhausted from work. Dinner was a fast, freezer-to-microwave affair of "quality" time "networking" with them. In the absence of parents, this generation has learned to create its own surrogate families by assembling a group of close friends. The popular TV sit-com "Friends" illustrates this premise. They can be seen attending movies in small groups in sharp contrast with the one-on-one dating standard just a decade earlier. It has become common for them to attend a homecoming dance or prom with a small group rather than with a traditional date. In the workplace, they often form social groups who socialize both during and after work. Raised in the absence of tight-knit and supportive families, this generation still yearns for a sense of family and they will look for it on the job if they have not found it elsewhere.

In the eyes of Generation X, their parents devoted their lives to the religion of work: spending evenings and weekends at the office, bringing projects home and expending all their energy and attention on work issues. It looked like “workaholism” to their children, who could not help but notice that most adults decided their self-worth based on their success on the job. Adult dinner conversations with company always centered around a discussion of their jobs. Phone calls focused on problems with the boss, and children regularly spent an extra hour or two in day care because a work deadline intervened.

It has been observed that Boomers “lived to work” while Xers “work to live.” Members of this group are distressed by the high prices their parents paid for success: stress and health problems, divorce, drug and alcohol abuse. And it did not look as if the companies to whom they had devoted all their time and energy appreciated their efforts. Downsizing and layoffs illustrated this and motivated Generation Xers to seek more balanced lives (Martin, 2000).

They reject the theory that one can be a super-employee and, at the same time, have plenty of quality personal or family time. They understand that unrealistic expectations of parent, employee, and spouse roles require compromise and something has to give. On the job, they expect to leave at 5:00 P.M., they don’t intend to give up their weekends, and they will rarely volunteer to work over-time. They choose to have a life outside of work and feel life was meant to be enjoyed with people they value. Today, applicants are voicing this more and more and organizations that want to attract and retain talented employees cannot afford to ignore these needs (Cherney, 1996).

Generation X also has a nontraditional orientation about work schedules. They tend to be comfortable with the philosophy that, as long as the work gets done, it does not matter how and when. They can work at home at odd hours, in the car on the cell phone, or while telecommuting. They show up late, leave early, and appear to be “slackers” because they are oriented to the task and not the clock. Many Boomer supervisors fail to understand this at all.

Where Boomers saw their careers as great melodramas and heroic endeavors that could consume their lives, to Xers, the job is “just a job.” Culturally, they are more conservative than their parents. And, they have grown up and are used to openness and diversity which is certainly a different way to view the workplace (Cooper, 1993). Xers are no longer likely to accept organizational decisions, policies, and practices without questioning the why, when, and how of things. They believe in individualism and oppose conformity. They do not believe in one “right” style of management, but in many different styles of management as long as that style is based on openness, honesty, respect, and humanness. They also expect their individual life-styles to be accepted as long as these do not interfere with actual job performance (Fernandez, 1991).

Generation X tends to like informality, having grown up in a serious world with a bunch of serious Boomers for parents and bosses, they want to see things “lighten up.” They take casual days very seriously. Being able to work in jeans and a T-shirt on Friday, many assert, isn’t a perk. They say it actually makes them work harder and get more done. Anything that makes work less “corporate” resonates well with a generation who feels betrayed by corporate interests, and some organizations are

beginning to recognize that the nature of the work doesn't really require the formality in dress or structure (Zemke et al., 2000).

Their approach to authority is also casual and skeptical. Formal hierarchical relationships are lost on Generation Xers who are not as much against authority as unimpressed by it. They saw authority figures such as President Richard Nixon denounced as not credible. They grew up with lip service from parents, advertisers, corporations and national leadership that often did not seem to be supported by action. They have learned not to place their faith in others, to be very careful with their loyalty and commitments, for fear of getting burned. One Nike ad says it this way, "Don't insult our intelligence. Tell us what it is. Tell us what it does. And don't play the national anthem while you do it." This generation was never afforded the luxury of innocence and their values reflect it (Bagby, 1998).

Not surprisingly these new values have created interesting conflicts, particularly in organizations that have been traditionally run in military style, where orders were given and followed without question, where the organization came first and the individual was second (or last), and in which the tried and proven way of doing things was greatly favored over taking risks and moving in new directions. Does this sound like the traditional fire service? (Fernandez, 1991).

While the Boomers were told, "You can be anything you want—even President of the United States," Generation X was told, "Be careful out there. It's a dangerous world." And so they are careful and guarded in their personal and professional relationships, withholding their optimism and excitement for fear that things won't work out quite as planned. In fact, in one of the early commentaries about this generation,

Susan Littwin observes in *The Postponed Generation* that Generation X adolescents require an extra decade to grow up. “Having had an expensive education and more advantages than any generation on earth,” she writes, “today’s young adults seem confused, unfocused, and dependant. They have a “high sense of entitlement and not so high sense of reality” and are on a prolonged search to find themselves, while assiduously avoiding commitment, rejection, the risk of failure, even reality itself (Littwin, 1986).

They are risk takers and their sense of risk and adventure is very much expressed outside the workplace. It’s not uncommon for a Generation Xer to come to work on Monday morning and relate stories of rock climbing, mountain biking, and parachute jumping exploits done with friends traveling in packs. After all, the X-Games were named in their honor and exemplify their spirit of eccentricity and adventure (Zemke et al., 2000).

They are technologically savvy. Xers learned to operate the microwave, program the VCR, and play video games when they were little tikes. Computer skills were every bit as fundamental in their elementary education as the three R's were to generations before them. They have an inherent comfort with technology. Older generations may learn computer skills and become quite adept, but they will never have the natural affinity for technology that Generation Xers simply have “in their bones” (Raines, 1997).

The core values of Generation X include diversity, global thinking, balance, techno-literacy, fun, informality, self-reliance, and pragmatism. Seminal events include women’s liberation, Watergate, 1973 Arab oil embargo and energy crisis, invention of

the personal computer, Three Mile Island nuclear accident, Iran hostage crisis, John Lennon assassinated, Ronald Reagan inauguration, Challenger disaster, Pan Am 103 terrorism act, Exxon Valdez disaster, fall of the Berlin Wall, Operation Desert Storm, and the Rodney King beating (Zemke et al., 2000).

Generation Next: 1980 – Present This emerging generation has been referred to by many names including “Generation Y”, the “Internet Generation”, “Millennials”, “Echo-Boomers”, and “Generation 2001.” As a group, this generation is unlike any other youth generation in living memory. This is the “Babies on Board” of the early Reagan years, the “Have You Hugged Your Child Today?” of the early Clinton years, and the teens of Columbine.

This generation is more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. And they are starting to exhibit a whole host of positive social habits that older Americans have long ago ceased to associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. Over the next decade, this generation may just radically change the image of youth from negative and alienated to positive and involved (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

There is a marked difference in the way they view life. Whereas Generation Xers are distrustful of, and perhaps even uncomfortable with, older generations, Millennials admire their elders and embrace their values. “[For the Millennials], there is an emphasis on achieving, which requires a certain degree of conformity,” says Neil Murray, director of career services, University of California – San Diego. “It’s no surprise then that the only people Millennials admire more than their parents are their

grandparents.” Having enjoyed their formative years as the center of their families’ existence, they tend to be self-confident and good communicators (Collins, 2000).

This generation has just started to enter the workforce. They have as corporate models Microsoft and the dot-com’s. The impact of the digital age is, and will continue to be, great on them. For the first time in history, kids are the authority on something really significant. They know far more than their parents about one of the basics; the Internet and digital technology. They have grown up with it and take it for granted. (Hagevik, 1999).

They are optimists. Surveys show that, compared to Xer teens a decade ago, today’s teens are more upbeat about the world in which they are growing up. Nine out of ten describe themselves as “happy,” “confident,” and “positive.” A rapidly decreasing share worry about violence, sex, and drugs. And a rapidly increasing share say that growing up is easier for them than it was for their parents. Teen suicide rates are now falling for the first time in decades (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

When recently surveyed, primarily as undergraduates preparing to enter the workforce, they indicated “steady employment” as one of their leading motivators. It was ranked higher than traditional motivators, such as “freedom on the job,” often suggested as a motivator within their age group. Given that employee turnover is predicted to increase and employees expect to continue to change employers many times during their careers, there is an apparent disconnect. If younger workers view steady employment as important and organizations remain reluctant to assure this, perhaps high turnover could be explained by a failure of need satisfaction rather than a need for freedom (Montana & Lenaghan, 1999).

Core values of this generation include optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, sociability, morality, street smarts, and diversity. Seminal events (still unfolding) are the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton Presidency, Monica Lewinsky, schoolyard shootings in general and Columbine in specific, and Tiger Woods (Zemke et al., 2000).

How Generational Differences Impact the Workplace

The U.S. workforce is growing faster than the population. A higher percentage of the population is in the labor force now than in the past. Since 1950, the labor force has grown from 62 million to over 132 million. The majority of adult Americans earn their livelihood by being in the labor force, not through government entitlement programs (such as Social Security), the accumulation of capital, being dependant on other adults, or living off the land (e.g., subsistence farming). Therefore, it is important that people have access to stable, interesting and well paying jobs (Tusi & Gutek, 1999).

Today's general American workforce is quite diverse in many ways. The mix of race, gender, ethnicity, and generations in today's workplace is far more diverse than in past decades. The generational diversity and the tension, challenge, opportunity, and promise which it presents are a focus of this paper. There is a growing realization that, in many cases, there may be misunderstandings between workforce generations. And, these misunderstandings and misconceptions may be growing and becoming more problematic. The problems are based in the economics, demographics, and world

views of the different generations and must be confronted to be understood (Zemke et al., 2000).

When people from different cultures work together, their ethnocentrism can result in misunderstandings and poor teamwork. The greater the distance between two cultures, the lower the rewards experienced from work together. If the behavior of the other people in the workplace does not make sense because individuals do not make sufficiently similar contributions, this can lead to disharmony. Such disharmony often results in unhappiness, stress, and a dislike for the other culture's members (Chemers et al., 1995).

Traditional human resources recruiting methods minimize diversity among employees in a number of ways. Recruiting practices emphasize finding candidates from sources that have proven to be "reliable" in the past. Selection processes emphasize filling positions with candidates who are similar to those who have succeeded in the past and screen out entry-level applicants and promotional candidates who appear to not "fit" the organization's style. Socialization and training programs produce uniform ways of thinking and behaving, including standardized and inflexible scheduling policies. And by relying on a centralized, bureaucratic approach to managing the workforce, the traditional model intentionally limits the discretionary latitude given to supervisors and managers for handling the special needs of individual employees.

Presumably, human resources management practices such as these evolved over time because they fit the needs of many organizations. Before embarking on new initiatives to support greater diversity, the system currently needs to be fully

understood. Otherwise, it will be difficult to accurately foresee all the consequences likely to follow changes in that system. As a precursor to considering new initiatives, therefore, would-be change agents should analyze the organization's current practices for the purpose of (1) evaluating whether they encourage or limit diversity, (2) understanding the forces that support use of the organization's present system of management, and (3) assessing which aspects of the current system are consistent with the organization's current needs. In other words, any consideration of change should include analyzing why things are the way they are, and which things should stay the way they are (Jackson, 1992).

The conflict between the needs and the aspirations of individuals and the goals and requirements of the organization has always been a factor. This is the organizational culture theory. It asserts that, within any organization, there are always unseen and unobservable forces behind the behaviors that can be seen and observed. An organization's culture is comprised of many intangibles including values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, behavioral norms and behavior patterns. Normally, the organization socializes the member into accepting its goals. If the members' personal goals are out of step with the organization, creativity and individuality can be suppressed (Cook, 1990).

Today, in large part, because of the increasing diversity of the workforce, many of the employees are trying to make the organization more human by changing the organizational culture to better reflect their personal cultures. They are gaining an increased sense of identity and power that reduces the odds against them. They are beginning to recognize that although bureaucracies have brought about some

efficiency in the delivery of services, they are, by their very nature, insensitive and inflexible structures. Bureaucracies employ people in the service of their own needs. They are inherently unfair. Despite their claim to equally reward all those who are deserving, bureaucracies have too few advancement opportunities, limited resources, and out-of-date and inflexible reward systems to keep this promise to all employees. This problem of rewarding employees will increase greatly in the next two decades as millions of Boomers compete with a large influx of Generation Xers for limited opportunities and the work force becomes increasingly diverse (Fernandez, 1991).

Boomer supervisors must recognize that their effectiveness will sometimes depend on their ability to adjust to an emerging labor pool whose members do not identify with their jobs like the bosses do, or with their life careers as their parents do. The advice to many Boomer employers with respect to younger employees is “be more flexible with your employees, or you will lose them” (Hagevik, 1999).

The fire service is a very tradition-bound organization and usually resistant to change. Sometimes change will be forced by employees. Obviously, managing change is desirable to reacting to forced change. In addition to providing customer service to the community, a fire department, like all viable organizations, must provide internal customer service to its members. The whole organization suffers when the organization resists cultural change when conditions mandate it (Cook, 1988).

Visionary fire service managers should be able to recognize that the organization is out of step with the majority of its workers and that a change is necessary if it is to continue to recruit and retain good people. Managers must adapt to this idea and become change agents. This may be a difficult challenge where the

manager is of one generation and the workforce is predominately of another. A progressive manager will view this challenge as an opportunity for both personal and organizational growth (Cook, 1989).

While generalizations based on age are not infallible guides to values and behavior, they provide a framework for effective management based on life experiences and verifiable details. For example, if a Boomer employee reveals tastes or values more commonly found among members of the Veteran generation, he or she may respond better to that generation's typical motivators. This includes being rewarded for what one knows or has done, rather than appreciated for being oneself (Jennings, 2000).

The generational impact on the fire service can also be documented and mirrors the rest of society. It is not uncommon to hear fire administrators characterize younger firefighters in terms of lower levels of mechanical aptitude, less familiarity with tools and machines, and little knowledge of building construction. Supervisors are more and more having to give basic lessons on tools, infrastructure, and life skills (schedules and map reading). And, few Xers have any military experience. They may have trouble following the chain of command, not out of a conscious disrespect, but because it is a foreign concept and they are used to effecting change more directly.

It has also been observed that, in today's fire service labor market, there are more jobs than qualified applicants. Despite continued high competition, there is often still more opportunities for top candidates. Indeed, once these candidates have excelled in their abilities to sell themselves and obtain employment, they may remain in the job market. They may have the ability to pick and choose among better offers.

This seems especially true among the firefighter/paramedic ranks presently. Such behavior is often viewed as disloyal or ungrateful by Boomer supervisors. They ask, “Whatever happened to loyalty?” (Martin, 2000).

Literature Review Summary

The literature contained much information about generational attributes including how a generation defines itself by its common tastes, attitudes, experiences, common times, values, beliefs, behavior, and background. These attributes are viewed in a context of economic, social, sociological, and, demographic perspectives. It also talked about a generation’s “core values” and “defining moments.” And, these attributes are general in nature and not always the same for all members of a group.

Contemporary commentary on the subject tends to divide American society into four basic generations: Veterans, Baby-Boomers, Generation-Xers, and Generation-Nexters. There is necessarily a certain amount of arbitrariness to such a classification. The definitions are generalizations and the demarcation time lines overlap and are drawn subjectively at best and must be viewed from that prospective. Demographers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, historians, and political scientists rarely agree when it comes to defining and labeling a generation.

And the literature also revealed an American workforce quite diverse in race, gender, ethnicity, and generation. Consequently, this can lead to problematic workforce misunderstandings and over-simplifications when not fully understood. The impact on the fire service has also been documented and recognized by fire

administrators who may be in need of greater training and guidance to adequately deal with the future.

PROCEDURES

This project was selected to examine the recruitment process of the City of Santee Fire Department to determine if the process could be improved if it incorporated an understanding of generational differences within the work environment. And, assuming an affirmative answer to the above, the resulting recommendation would attempt to identify how best to implement the concept of generational differences into a redesign of selected parts of the recruitment process.

Recruitment is currently accomplished as a joint venture of the City's Human Resources Department and the Fire Department. When the generational component issue was first suggested as a possible area of study, the Fire Division Chief in charge of personnel, along with the Human Resources Director, agreed initially that the firefighter recruitment process and subsequent employee retention might be improved with a better understanding of the generational issues and the changing labor pool. This project sought to evaluate the current process and possibly recommend changes. At the outset, the Department identified one major goal as hiring and retaining the best qualified people for the job of entry-level firefighter/paramedic. Additional goals included treating applicants and probationary selections fairly, internal customer service, and maintaining the integrity of the process. These objectives resulted from a consensus of Santee's Fire Administrative Staff. They agreed that exploration of

methods to improve firefighter selection could be a worthwhile undertaking and could potentially yield an overall improved process.

A brief review of current recruitment methods suggested that a generational component should be examined more fully to determine if such additional considerations would improve the system. Areas to be examined were formulated into questions to be answered by the research.

The primary reason for this research project was to provide the City of Santee with information about workplace generational considerations as they might be of use in the recruitment and retention of firefighters. Historical and evaluative research methods were employed to conduct this project. A review of the pertinent literature was conducted at the outset (fire service journals, personnel journals, human resource literature, research papers, periodicals, and textbooks on the subject) to gain a basic insight into and understanding of the broad field.

A questionnaire was then developed to assess the current generational factors and their perceived relative importance to the organization (Appendix A). This would also evaluate the effectiveness of the current recruitment process and its correlation to the actual retention of employees. The intent was to measure how effective the recruitment process is by comparing retention data and asking employees how they perceive they are being treated by the organization. The questionnaire was administered to all 50 Department members, including Fire Administration.

Question 1: Department members were asked to indicate which major generational group they belonged to and identified with based on the chosen definitions: (1) Veterans, (2) Baby-Boomers, (3) Generation-X, or (4) Generation-Next.

This question was asked in an effort to obtain an overall accurate view of the workforce's generational make-up and to be able to correlate responses to the generation classification.

Question 2: Department members were asked to indicate their position within the organization. This question was asked essentially to classify supervisors and non-supervisors for later analysis of the other responses.

Question 3: Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their impact on the current work environment. They were asked to indicate their response on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of importance, with 1 being "Not Important" and 5 being "Very Important."

Question 4: Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their effect on the workplace environment. They were asked to indicate their response on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of importance, with 1 being "Not Important" and 5 being "Very Important."

Question 5: Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their effects on the current recruitment practices. They were asked to indicate their response on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of importance, with 1 being "Not Important" and 5 being "Very Important."

Question 6: Department members were asked their opinion on how employees within the organization are treated, with an emphasis on respect and internal customer service. They were asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "Strongly Disagree" and 5 meaning "Strongly Agree."

Question 7: Department members were asked their opinion on how employees within the organization are treated, with an emphasis on fundamental organizational assumptions about employees, specifically in relation to differential treatment of new vs. seasoned employees. In short, is there a perceived generational bias, or a perceived generational unawareness? They were again asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.”

Question 8: Department members were asked their opinion on work assignments, and how they affect employee development. They were asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.”

Question 9: Department members were asked their opinion on the internal “selling” of the organization to employees, with an emphasis on retention. They were asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.”

Question 10: Department members were asked, in an open-ended question, to carefully consider any other related ideas regarding workplace generational issues which they felt were important. These additional responses were also recorded and considered for analysis.

It should be noted that, among the Department members surveyed, there were varying degrees of understanding of the overall concept of generational differences. Even though effort was made in the survey instructions to define what was being asked, many members expressed a general poor awareness of the generational

concepts. Some verbally stated they had not considered the concept before while others indicated they were aware of the concept but had little or no idea of its impact to the work environment. If anything, this further motivated the author to explore the possibility of further generational awareness education.

Definition of Terms

Baby-Boomers: 1943-1960 (73 million people). Those born during or after World War II and raised in the era of extreme optimism, opportunity, and progress.

Cohort: Refers to members of a generation who are linked through shared life experiences in their formative years, usually the first 10 years of life.

Core Values: Those basic values which a generation holds sacred and which tend to define the generation. Examples: Dedication/sacrifice, conformity, respect for authority, optimism, diversity, self-reliance, morality.

Culture: Is to society what memory is to individuals. It consists of ways of perceiving, thinking, and deciding that have become institutionalized. Culture consists of subjective elements: concepts, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values. Members of a culture must have had a common language so as to communicate shared ideas, lived during the same time period in areas that were geographically close to make communication possible. Thus, language, time, and place are three criteria that can be used to identify a culture.

Generation Xers: The generation of about 70 million people, born between 1960 and 1980. This generation followed and came of age deep in the shadow of the Baby Boomers.

Generation Next: The generation of about 70 million people and growing, born between 1980 and the present. They were born of Baby Boomer parents and early Generation-Xer parents and into the current high-tech time.

Halo effect: The tendency of the person surveyed to rate all responses high or low based on one trait or response.

Seminal Events: Historical events which a generation identifies with and which helps to define the generation. Examples are: the great depression, World War II, JFK assassination, Martin Luther King assassination, the Civil Rights Act, lunar landing, Woodstock, Watergate, Three Mile Island, John Lennon assassination, Challenger disaster, fall of the Berlin Wall, Operation Desert Storm, Oklahoma City bombing, Columbine High School massacre.

Veterans: 1922-1943 (52 million people). Those born prior to World War II and those whose earliest memories and influences are associated with that world-engulfing event. They are also sometimes referred to as "Seniors."

This study also had its limitations. First, the questionnaire sampling is relatively small. The Department only has 51 members, including four Chief Officers (including the author). Second, there was a large amount of detailed material available on the subject matter that had to be reviewed, compiled, interpreted and incorporated into the questionnaire and resulting recommendations. As was stated at the outset, no attempt was made to actually recommend specific recruitment design or modification. This would come later should the Department decide to incorporate the data into a modification of the process. The intent was simply to inform Human Resources and

Fire Administration of the existence of workplace generational considerations and provide a basis upon which an evaluation of their use could be intelligently made to modify the recruitment process.

RESULTS

1. Is the current recruitment process outdated? Does the current recruitment process fail to consider the change in workplace cultures and generational differences?

The Santee Fire Department, much like most Southern California fire departments, is currently adapting to a changing workplace and recruiting from a changing applicant pool. As was stated at the outset, several other major factors are intervening including the retirement of many older employees and a transition to a completely Advanced Life Support (Paramedic) type of service delivery.

While administering the questionnaire, there was an opportunity to explain some of the generational concepts as discovered in the literature review. After the basics of generational component considerations were fully explained, the general opinion of the members regarding fostering and increased awareness of generational issues was favorable and optimistic. During the survey, the main idea of generational differences in the workforce was informally discussed with the members and supervisors in relation to possible improvement of the existing firefighter recruitment process and workplace environment. The questionnaire and the reasons for it were well received with mostly positive comments regarding its use as a potential change agent.

The information obtained from the survey indicated that the organization is doing

reasonably well in recruiting and retaining employees. However, there is a suggestion that the organization is starting to lag with regard an understanding of emerging generational differences in the workforce, especially among some supervisors. Based on some of the responses obtained from the questionnaire, it was determined that the organization's recruitment efforts, and even its basic organizational culture, are outdated in some areas. It was concluded that an appropriately designed generational awareness component could be incorporated into the process with little opposition from employees and has the potential to significantly enhance recruitment and retention efforts.

2. What is the attitude and general awareness of the current Department workforce with regard to generational issues in the organization?

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was personally administered to the 50 Department members including three Chief Officers (excluding the author). Using the questionnaire results, the research questions were systematically addressed. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made about the workforce's understanding of generational considerations and their relevance to organizational efficiency. The responses were recorded and tabulated in the following tables:

Table #1: (Generational Identity)

Generational Group	Number	Percent
Veterans	0	0%
Boomers	22	44%
Generation X	28	56%
Generation Next.	0	0%
Totals	50	100%

In analyzing the above tabulation, out of the 50 Department members surveyed, 0 (0%) consider themselves Veterans, 22 (44%) consider themselves Boomers, 28 (56%) consider themselves Generation X, and 0 (0%) considered themselves Generation Next. It should be pointed out here that the survey instructions asked Department members to use the stated generational criteria guidelines and to also use their subjective opinion about which generation they identify with.

From the survey responses, it became apparent that the organization is comprised of only two generations, Boomers and Generation Xers (about equally split). There are no Veterans or Generation Nexters currently in the workplace.

Table #2: (Organizational Rank)

Rank	Boomers	%	Gen. X	%
Firefighter	1	2%	5	10%
Firefighter/Paramedic	6	12%	12	24%
Engineer	3	6%	8	16%
Captain	9	18%	3	6%
Chief Officer	3	6%	0	0%
Totals	22	44%	28	56%

Department members were asked to list their rank within the Department. In analyzing the above tabulation, this shows the numerical rank breakdown within the Department. This question was asked essentially to classify supervisors and non-supervisors for later analysis of the other responses. Results are summed up as follows:

- 6 Firefighters, 1 Boomer and 5 Gen. X
- 19 Firefighter/Paramedics, 7 Boomers, 12 Gen. X
- 11 Engineers, 3 Boomers, 8 Gen. X
- 12 Captains, 9 Boomers, 3 Gen. X
- 3 Chief Officers, 3 Boomers
- 80% of the supervisors are Boomers
- 50% of subordinates are Gen. X

Table #3: (Understanding Generational Differences)

Not Important

Very Important

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	5	10%	4	8%	10	20%	3	6%
G-X	0	0%	2	4%	10	20%	12	24%	4	8%
Total	0	0%	7	14%	14	28%	22	44%	7	14%

Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their effects on the current work environment. They were asked to indicate their response on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of importance, with 1 being “Not Important” and 5 being “Very Important.” In analyzing the above tabulation, it is apparent that a significant portion of the workforce, 86% overall is of the opinion that generational understanding is “Important” or “Very Important.” Slightly more Generation Xers than Boomers were of this opinion but both groups registered a strong opinion on the “Important” side of the matrix. Apparently both groups have a reasonably strong feeling about this.

Table #4: (Generational Differences and Work Environment)

Not Important

Very Important

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	6	12%	5	10%	11	22%	0	0%
G-X	0	0%	6	12%	11	22%	8	16%	3	6%
Total	0	0%	12	24%	16	32%	19	38%	3	6%

Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their effect on the workplace environment. In analyzing the above tabulation, it is also apparent that a significant portion of the workforce, 76% overall, is of the opinion that generational factors have an “Important” or “Very Important” impact on the work environment. More Generation Xers recognized the importance of work environment considerations, but again, the difference between the groups was not significant.

Table 5: (Generational Differences and Recruitment)

Not Important

Very Important

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	1	2%	5	10%	3	6%	11	22%	2	4%
G-X	0	0%	4	8%	12	24%	8	16%	4	8%
Total	1	2%	9	18%	15	30%	19	38%	6	12%

Department members were asked their opinion regarding generational differences and their effects on the current recruitment practices. They were asked to indicate their response on a scale of 1 to 5 in order of importance, with 1 being “Not Important” and 5 being “Very Important.” In analyzing the above tabulation, it is also apparent that a significant portion of the workforce, 80% overall, is of the opinion that generational factors have an “Important” or “Very Important” impact on recruitment. More Generation Xers than Boomers thought recruitment issues were important, but again, the difference was not significant.

Table 6: (Employees Treated with Respect)

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	2	4%	9	18%	8	16%	3	6%
G-X	0	0%	6	12%	5	10%	10	20%	7	14%
Total	0	0%	8	16%	14	28%	18	36%	10	20%

Department members were asked their opinion on how employees within the organization are treated, with an emphasis on respect and internal customer service. They were asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.” Rather than a recruitment related question, this was a retention related question. In analyzing the responses, it is apparent that a significant portion of the workforce, 84% overall, feels that the organization is treating its employees with respect. Again it appears the Generation Xers find the respect issue slightly more important than the Boomers.

Table 7: (Organization Getting the Best from Employees)

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	3	6%	9	18%	6	12%	4	8%
G-X	1	2%	7	14%	6	12%	10	20%	4	8%
Total	1	2%	10	20%	15	30%	16	32%	8	16%

Department members were asked their opinion on how employees within the organization are treated, with an emphasis on fundamental organizational assumptions about employees, specifically in relation to differential treatment of new versus longer-term employees. This question was asked with the knowledge that a preponderance of the new employees are Generation X while a preponderance of the longer-term employees are Boomers. Employees were again asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.” This was also a retention related question.

In analyzing the responses, it is apparent that a significant portion of the workforce, 78% overall, feels that the organization is treating all its employees equally. This is a reflection on how well the organization brings out the best in employees and motivates employees to excel. Again, Generation Xers led Boomers in feeling the surveyed concept was important but the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 8: (Work Assignments Challenging)

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	2	4%	6	12%	12	24%	2	4%
G-X	0	0%	3	6%	5	10%	12	24%	8	16%
Total	0	0%	5	10%	11	22%	24	48%	10	20%

Department members were asked their opinion on the challenging nature of work assignments, and how employee development is effected as a result. They were again asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.” This was also a retention related question. In analyzing the responses, it is apparent that most of the workforce, 90% overall, feels that the organization is providing a positive, challenging workplace.

This response was somewhat surprising and appears at first to be a ringing endorsement of the organization. While it is hoped that this is the case, the response may really be reflecting the general attitude of firefighters toward their profession and the general satisfying nature of their work, rather than an opinion about this specific organization. Both generations were fairly even here in their opinions.

Table 9: (Selling Organization to Employees)

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Gen.	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5	%
B	0	0%	6	12%	13	26%	3	6%	0	0%
G-X	0	0%	12	24%	10	20%	6	12%	0	0%
Total	0	0%	18	36%	23	46%	9	18%	0	0%

Department members were asked their opinion on the internal “selling” of the organization to employees, with an emphasis on retention. They were asked to indicate their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.” This was the strongest retention question and responses were fairly

split on this issue. Of the overall workforce, 36% disagreed that the organization was “Strong” in being an employer of choice, while 46% were statistically in the middle on the issue. Only 18% indicated an agreement with the statement, possibly indicating some dissatisfaction with the organization.

In addition to ranking specific criteria on specific questions, Department members were asked, in an open-ended question, to carefully consider any other related ideas regarding workplace generational issues which they felt were important. These additional responses are summarized in Appendix B.

3. What does the literature offer to provide guidance to the organization to best utilize generational distinctions?

Extrapolations from the reviewed literature illustrate that there are distinct beliefs and characteristics that can be attributed to each generation. An understanding of these attributes can be very helpful to the organization in designing and administering an effective recruitment process. However, caution should be exercised so as to not overly generalize about generation member attributes.

The literature review also proved to be very enlightening in understanding the generations and defining the pertinent characteristics of each. Favorable examples were disclosed where generational considerations had been successfully used to enhance recruitment and retention of employees, mostly in the private sector. Many private sector organizations have done well in successfully implementing change where members and supervisors are aware of and sensitive to generational considerations.

Firefighter recruitment employing a generational awareness component, to date, has been very limited, or at least not extensively documented and published. However, there were no reasons found why the fire service should not consider some of the lessons learned by the private sector and successfully modify the current process to better utilize generational concepts. There are a number of positive indications that a modification of the current process should be undertaken.

4. Can an enhanced understanding of generational issues be utilized to improve the current recruitment process? If so, what recommendations can be made to the City of Santee Fire Department regarding modification?

There is every indication that the answer is yes. As stated above, both the survey results and the literature review provided ample evidence that such a change is desirable and doable. Survey results were favorable and the literature was encouraging.

There are many positive aspects regarding the use of generational considerations in the recruitment process. The literature and the survey data collected, along with the general feedback from the members surveyed, resulted in a recommendation that it can be a worthwhile component for the recruitment of firefighters for the City of Santee and strong consideration should be given to trying it. This, of course, assumes some professional training is utilized to redesign the process with the above-mentioned concepts in mind.

Some specific recommendations are provided at the conclusion.

DISCUSSION

The literature search for this research project revealed few past experiences where the Fire Service has employed generational awareness ideas into the pre-employment applicant recruitment process. The intent of the research was to review the state of generational research in the human resources field and see if specific issues could be identified and designed into the Santee Fire Department recruitment process.

Investigation revealed what other employers, almost exclusively private sector, have learned of the advantages and drawbacks of employing generational awareness concepts. Ultimately, the goal of the project was to determine if generational considerations could be recommended as having value for modification of the current Santee Fire Department recruitment process.

Interpretation

The questionnaire was administered to assess generational factors, provide an opinion on the current recruitment process, and measure its effectiveness. In short, is the organization appealing to and satisfying the needs of qualified applicants while maintaining essential performance standards? It was developed using basic generational workplace concepts and administered to all 50 Department members.

The results of the questionnaire were enlightening and encouraging. Responses to the questionnaire showed that the Department is comprised of two generations, Boomers and Generation Xers, in about a 44% - 56% distribution respectively. There are no Veterans or Generation Nexters. The Generation Xers slightly outnumber the Boomers but the Boomers are firmly in charge of the organization in most supervisory roles.

Feedback from the members was encouraging and produced a lot of insight into how employees view the organization. It tended to show that a program employing generational awareness concepts, when properly designed, could possibly improve the firefighter recruitment process. A number of specific things were identified as important to successful modification of the existing process including a fundamental way the organization is viewed by the members.

For example, over 80% of the overall workforce indicated generational awareness was "Important" or "Very Important" in relation to work environment and recruitment issues. (Refer to Tables 3, 4, 5). Although slightly more Generation Xers than Boomers indicated this, both groups felt such considerations were important. This was a somewhat surprising result. Organizations analyzed in the literature tended to have a greater generational difference of opinion, with Boomers generally satisfied with the status quo and not recognizing the generational issue as being that important. Generation Xers generally considered generation issues more important.

Conversely, when asked their opinion on internal selling of the organization to employees, 82% felt mild to neutral disagreement with current organizational effectiveness. Since the organization is 56% Generation Xers in predominately

subordinate roles, this is apparently more in line with the literature findings and conclusions.

However, there was also evidence that the organization's current environment is quite positive. When Department members were asked their opinion on how employees within the organization are treated, with an emphasis on respect and internal customer service, a significant portion of the workforce, 84% overall, felt that the organization is treating its employees with respect. However, on balance, it was concluded the organization could do better. In short, such proposed changes could be implemented, would be welcomed, and could make a difference.

Documented use of generational awareness by private sector employers has become a common practice for applicant recruitment. Zemke et al. (2000) cite numerous instances of success by private sector employers where the process is properly designed and based on an accurate assessment of organizational attributes. Both Jackson (1992) and Cook (1988) confirm this in other case studies where traditional human resources theory (all individuals are molded to fit the organization) were discarded in favor of generational considerations. However, Zemke et al. (2000) also point out that it is difficult to accurately define generational differences and their impact on the organization and warns against over-generalization of results.

A common thread was found throughout the reviewed literature. Certain critical elements must be considered when deciding to use generational awareness techniques in personnel work. The process must be even-handed so as to not favor one generation over another. The process must also be fair and unbiased to minimize successful legal challenges.

Research did identify some shortcomings in the traditional recruitment process. The City of Santee now uses the following selection tools: (a) written tests, (b) oral interviews, (c) training and experience histories, and (d) background investigations. While now producing satisfactory results, the process could be improved. These methods admittedly do not consider a changing generational component. There is every indication that such an awareness has the potential to result in a tremendous positive impact to the organization in terms of employee retention.

Improved selection has resulted for private sector employers through or by the understanding of generational differences. Such an understanding has successfully complemented the traditional methods listed above. Benefits include a happier, stable, more productive workforce. When individuals' values are recognized and employees' needs are aggressively addressed, they are far less likely to seek employment elsewhere.

On balance, there is ample evidence to support the modification of the recruitment process to incorporate a generational awareness component. This became especially apparent when looking at survey results. There is a strong indication that the Fire Department would have an improved recruitment process if it included a generational awareness component. Such a redesign should, of course, ensure that the procedure be fair, unbiased, and legally acceptable.

Implications

It is clear that generational considerations, when properly utilized, can have a positive impact on the organization. To successfully implement this concept into the organization, top management must openly and genuinely support it. The Fire Department will have to modify its approach to applicant selection and evaluation. This need not be a major departure from current methods but will require a new, broader approach. Changes may cause some disruption before getting the process right, but the transition is warranted and the potential benefits are great. All change is not progress but progress invariably requires change.

It must be expected that adding a generational awareness component to the existing recruitment process should be accomplished only with a thorough understanding of workplace dynamics and with the assistance of a Human Resources professional who is trained to facilitate such a change. The existing process must be revised and administered carefully to avoid interjecting too much change too abruptly.

Risk of legal challenge will be reduced if the modifications are carefully designed and professionally implemented. If the process is accepted by all employees, a “buy-in” or acceptance and confidence in the system is established for the whole organization. A generational awareness component necessarily adds some complexity to the recruitment process and will generate some additional costs for development, training, and implementation. The Fire and Human Resource Departments should accept that the assistance of an outside professional will probably be essential. Any change requires patience and can be time intensive at the outset. Notwithstanding these facts, the benefits of providing an enhanced work environment, and subsequent

retention benefits outweighs the time and expense of modifying the process. The decision to make the organization more responsive to the needs of the bulk of its employees will have a direct positive impact on the department. The morale factor is also important because employee satisfaction correlates well with enhanced job performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the recommendation of this paper that the Santee Fire Department seriously consider a modification of the existing recruitment process to incorporate a greater awareness and understanding of workplace generational issues.

From the research, it was clearly indicated that generational issues clearly have an impact on the fire service work environment in general, and on the Santee Fire Department specifically. It is felt that a carefully constructed and implemented modification of the existing recruitment program can be an effective tool to select and retain firefighter applicants. The experience gained from the past 10+ years by private sector employers is valuable and can be of use to the Fire Service.

Listed below are suggestions which are recommended to complete the implementation of an effective modification:

1. At the outset, the Fire Chief and senior fire administrators must be committed to change the organization if indicated. They must embrace and support the concept of generational awareness, and this support must be communicated to all department members in a positive and sustained message.

2. The overall goal should be to use generational awareness to strengthen the workplace and make it part of the organizational culture.
3. The current recruitment process should be extensively examined from a generational awareness prospective with the goal of making the workplace as desirable as possible without compromising the fundamental standards.
4. At the inception, ask the fundamental question: Is the organization doing all that it can to attract and retain the best candidates? How can it best be modified?
5. As part of the process, all Department members should be given fundamental training in general workplace generational awareness issues. This training should be done by a Human Resources professional who specializes in training in this field.
6. Specific supervisory training should be given to all fire administrators and Fire Captains.
7. Input from all Department members on workplace changes must be solicited, freely encouraged and carefully considered. Specifically, Generation X opinions must be carefully considered by Boomer supervisors.
8. The Interview Board's questions must be critically analyzed to see if they contain a cultural bias. They must adequately consider the generational values of the current applicant pool.

9. Maintaining consistency is important. All applicants must be given an unbiased opportunity to excel in the process.
10. All applicants must be evaluated against clearly defined standards and not against each other. Evaluators must be careful not to judge one candidate against another.
11. There should be a mechanism for periodic review and modification if necessary based on feedback from the organization.
12. All aspects of the recruitment process including any changes must be thoroughly documented in case of a later legal challenge.

In summary, consideration of generational awareness issues, when properly implemented, can be a valuable change agent for the organization. Such a process should only be undertaken with a long-term sustained commitment from the Fire Chief.

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APPENDIX A

Generational Questionnaire

The Santee Fire Department is in the preliminary stage of a study to better understand the generational differences in the workplace with regards to future recruitment. The goal of this study is the evaluation and possible modification to current recruitment practices to more adequately reflect the generational differences in the workplace. Your opinions on this questionnaire will be carefully considered and may contribute significantly to the design of future recruitment question criteria.

Through your responses an accurate assessment can be compiled of the current workplace generational status. This status can then be used to possibly modify the recruitment approach including redesign of pre-employment applicant oral examinations. It is hoped that the resultant modifications will allow the Fire Department to better relate to the current applicant pool. This research is being conducted in conjunction with a report being prepared for the National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program.

Instructions:

This questionnaire seeks your opinion of the various generational factors currently in the workplace. The Questionnaire is based on the author's understanding and definitions of the current generational groups and is being distributed to all Department members.

Below, you will be asked a series of questions based on workplace generational classifications and differences. Your responses will be tabulated for later evaluation and correlation. Your opinions regarding these classifications are important to this research.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, please assume that generations within the workplace are divided as follows:

- Veterans - Those born between 1922 and 1943
- Baby Boomers - Those born between 1943 and 1960
- Generation Xers - Those born between 1960 and 1980
- Generation Nexters - Those born after 1980

1. Based on the above stated criteria AND your opinion about where you belong, to what generational group do you belong?

- | | | |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1. | Veterans | X |
| 2. | Baby-Boomers | X |
| 3. | Gen-Xers | X |
| 4. | Gen-Nexers | X |

2. Please state your rank within the Fire Department:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Firefighter | X |
| Firefighter/Paramedic | X |
| Fire Engineer | X |
| Fire Captain | X |
| Chief Officer | X |

3. How important do you feel an understanding of generations within your workplace is to the overall productivity of the organization?

Not important			Very important	
1	2	3	4	5

4. To what extent do you feel generational differences affect your current workplace environment?

Not important			Very important	
1	2	3	4	5

5. Based on your knowledge of current recruitment practices, how important do you feel an understanding of generational differences is to recruitment success of the Department?

Not important			Very important	
1	2	3	4	5

6. Employees in this organization are treated with respect and like customers.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

7. This organization assumes the best of and from its people: We treat everyone from the newest recruit to the most seasoned employee as if they have great things to offer and are motivated to do their best.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

8. Work assignments here are broad, providing variety and challenge, and allowing each employee to develop a range of skills.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

9. We market internally, "selling" the organization to employees and continually looking for ways to be the employer of choice.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

10. Please take a few minutes to consider your above responses. In your opinion, are there any other issues regarding workplace generational differences that you would like to mention? Please list: (attach an extra sheet if necessary).

APPENDIX B

Question 10 - Open-ended Responses

- “I really don’t feel as though generational differences play a large part in the fire service. If anything, gender, cultural, and racial differences are of much more importance.” - Gen. Xer Engineer

- “Gen. Nexters are a very migrant work force. We need to find ways to keep them here and fulfill their needs. Money is a primary motivator now for them, not loyalty and commitment as was years earlier.” - Gen. Xer Engineer

- Work ethics seem to be different between generations. Understanding or tolerating these differences plays a role in the workplace.” - Boomer Captain

- “I feel that some employees are treated poorly by their supervisors, they are given all the ‘grunt’ work and aren’t always treated with respect.” Gen. Xer Engineer

- “While I feel an understanding of generational differences is important in the F.D., I don’t think it carries as much importance as it may in other occupations because I believe a percentage of Xers and Nexters desire and are drawn to the fire service because of its tradition and discipline established by the veterans.” Boomer Chief Officer

- “I think modern management techniques do not include disrespecting and degrading subordinates in an effort to motivate. Instead, today’s employee thrives on an atmosphere of mutual respect & is in that way anxious to do an excellent job for his supervisor & contribute to the team.” Boomer Firefighter

- “I think, with regards to future recruitment, that money has to be considered. While we may not be able to control our base pay, our fire admin can directly affect our wallets. But deciding when and how many to hire. This is the biggest issue in recruiting & retaining firefighters. A couple of shifts of overtime a month does wonders for morale around here, and retention. This may or may not be a ‘generational issue’, but, listening to talk on the dept and with potential recruits. OT is a huge issue. Talk to some of the ff’s who have left, ask them why...I’m sure lack of OT is a factor.” Gen. Xer Engineer

- “I don’t want to sound negative, but when dealing with some of today’s issues this department ‘Talks but doesn’t walk the walk’. Example: Gordon Graham’s recent training which I loved but wonder how much the administration, especially certain supervisor ‘Capts’ take his training to heart, i.e. – get the example, proper conduct, treat others like you would like to be treated.” Gen. Xer Engineer

- “Along with generational differences, there are social/generational differences i.e. – married, local, children” Boomer Fire Captain

- “Generation Xers work ethic seems to be different than those that are older.”
Boomer Fire Captain

- “There is a great difference between work ethics between generations. I think overall we all adapt and overcome differences and all work very well together.” Gen. Xer Firefighter

- “Generation Xers expect more and deliver less than older generations. Baby Boomers are generally easier to deal with and demand less.” Boomer Chief Officer

- “Work ethics & generational issues go hand & hand. A good understanding of generational differences is a key to our ability to keep employees.”
Boomer Fire Captain

- “In my opinion, for some reason the newer generation does not have the work ethic or values of BB Boomers. No military or war? No hard labor work before they hire in the F.D.?” Boomer Fire Captain

- “No, I’ve noticed on my Division that all the age groups generally get along great and have very similar personalities and characteristics.” Gen. Xer Firefighter

- “Regarding #9 – The Chiefs do a good job of “selling” the organization to the employees, however, many other department leaders do not. Often times encouraging the younger generations to leave.” Gen. Xer Firefighter

- “Sometimes it seems that work ethics differ between generations. Unfortunately, the differences most likely won’t be changed by the workplace.” Gen. Xer Engineer

- With regard to question #6, I believe employees are treated with respect but are supposed to treat the public like customers.” Gen. Xer Firefighter Paramedic

- “Not enough accountability.” Gen. Xer Fire Captain

- “The organization, not just the Fire Dept. but the City as a whole needs to look at ways to attract, and draw people to this City. Example: Benefits of government Vs. Private, long term Health Care after Retirement, Day Care for new families, moving expense, assist in home locations, Comparable Expectations of the Private, and Bonuses.” Boomer Chief Officer