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When Millennials and Baby Boomers Collide
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Jessica Iselt Ballew

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the Texas Department of Public Safety (TXDPS) established an Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) to ensure that necessary resources were in place throughout the agency and that they were being applied to the actual priorities. The Executive Director asked one of his trusted advisors to help create and implement this office. Knowing the position would be fast-paced and challenging, the Director of the EPMO needed to staff the office with the resources that could get the job done.

The initial team ended up being comprised entirely of females. The team also mainly consisted of females in their thirties or younger. Despite what the typical assumption might be, this team worked very well together. The challenge came in having this team of millennials be the face and voice of change across an agency whose upper management team consisted predominately of male baby boomers and a large, diverse, and multi-generational workforce from various backgrounds. How did they work with them successfully in order to achieve the mission of the EPMO?

This paper will provide insight into the opportunities and pain points that were faced when creating the EPMO, the Enterprise Project Roadmap and revamping the agency's Administration Division as a whole. The paper will focus on lessons learned along the way, providing the reader with tips and tools on how to effectively communicate with and lead diverse groups of people.

DEVELOPING THE TEAM

In 2011, the Executive Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety (the Department) identified the need to establish an Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) in order to improve results by increasing visibility and improving planning and alignment towards true priorities.

The Executive Director appointed one of his high performing and trusted advisors to establish

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[1] *Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. Original publication acknowledged; authors retain copyright. This paper was originally presented at the 9th Annual University of Texas at Dallas Project Management Symposium in August 2015. It is republished here with permission of the authors and conference organizers.*

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and oversee this office. This advisor happened to be a millennial and a female. The newly appointed Director of the EPMO knew that she had to build a team that had both the technical and business knowledge to effectively establish and operate this new organization, so she began seeking out the best individuals to fit those needs. By happenstance, the initial team ended up being comprised entirely of females. These females ranged in age from approximately 25-55 but the majority of the staff were in their late twenties or early thirties.

Millennials are described by the Pew Research Center as "confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change". They are also described as the "always connected" generation, being available by email, phone, text message or social media at all hours of the day and night. This type of energy made the EPMO active and interested in standing up this new program as soon as possible. The common characteristics, values, and viewpoints shared by the team members led to collaboration and understanding and enabled the team to work swiftly and efficiently to establish the standard operating policies and procedures for the EPMO.

Though a majority of the EPMO were millennials, there was still enough diversity in the team to leverage differing ideas and viewpoints in order to achieve more creative solutions. While the group did face the typical challenges of forming a team, the end result was a common objective and mutual respect for each other's experience, expertise, and contributions.
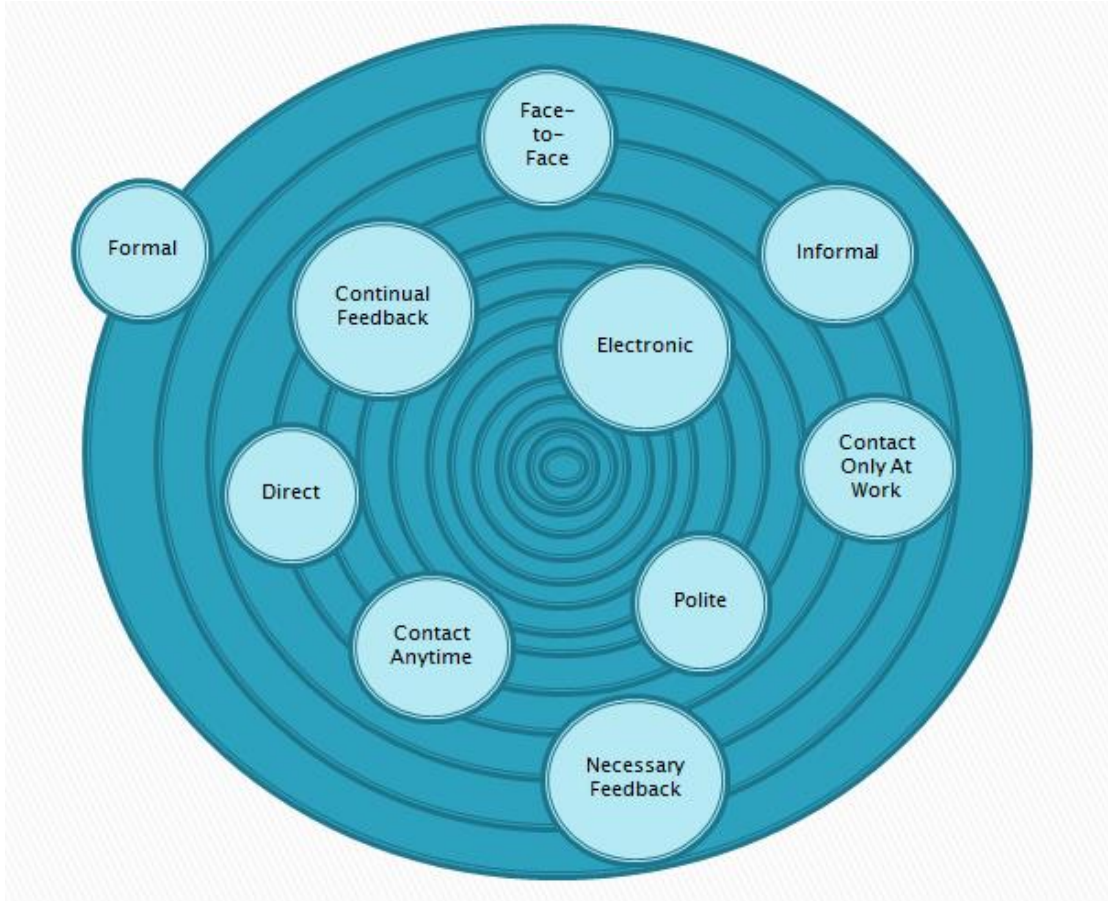
CHALLENGE

The EPMO was tasked with implementing a major change to the way the Department of Public Safety was used to doing business. Fortunately, the EMPO had the interest and skill set to lead that change.

The Department of Public Safety leadership team is highly skilled, effective, and committed to the mission and goals of the Department. More than that, the Department is a para military organization, with a top-down leadership mentality. However, the environment and commitment of the leadership team alone did not lend itself to a challenge-free process.

As the EPMO engaged key stakeholders, they found themselves facing communication challenges where either the process or the message was not completely or correctly understood. They found that there were different expectations from different stakeholders as well as communication gaps.

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Vortex of Conflict

There were multiple challenges to the communication. The communication challenge was generational, with eager millennials trying to quickly implement a new process for Baby Boomers. The communication challenge was based on the language of our internal business units. The EMPO speaks frankly and plainly, but doesn't necessarily speak in IT or commissioned officer language. And the communication challenge was about change in general, trying to "sell" a traditionally private sector concept to an organization that looks to history for their guidance, frequently saying "we have always done it this way".
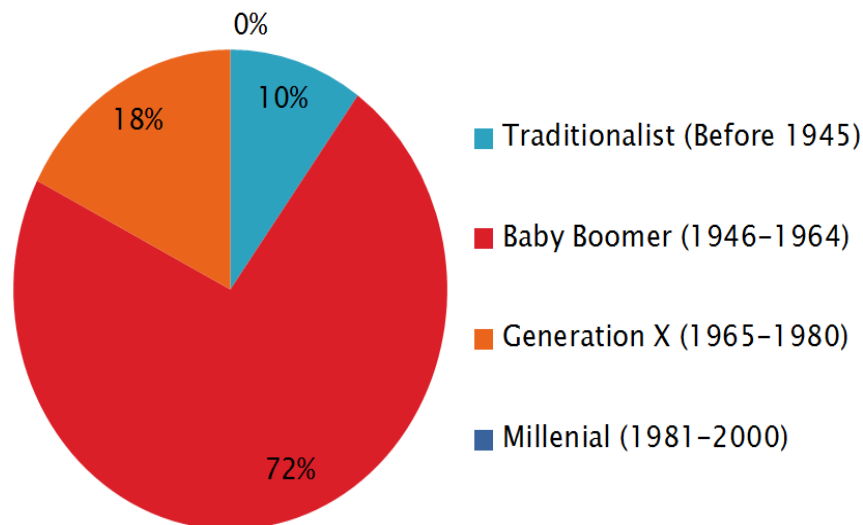
These challenges began to impact the morale of the EPMO and the morale of the project teams it was seeking to build and support as well. EPMO leadership needed to mitigate the challenges faced by the team in order to achieve successful results and realize the vision of the Executive Director. In order to do this they had to analyze the challenges so they could develop a plan to address the situation. They ultimately decided to tackle this challenge as if it were a project. The EMPO re-visited the overall goals and objectives of the organization and then conducted a

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key stakeholder analysis. This assessment resulted in finding that there were multiple preferences and diverse methods of operating as well as common values and goals.

ANALYSIS

EPMO leadership thought these differences might impact how the EPMO and stakeholders worked together so they sought to understand more about generational differences. The EPMO discovered that the communication preferences and work styles of the various stakeholders might not always be in-sync with the preferences and styles of the members of the EPMO. The EPMO needed to find a way to adapt and adjust so that they could effectively communicate and build and maintain effective relationships with its key stakeholders. This paved the way towards developing a communication plan that was tailored to the individual stakeholders. Generational differences and the understanding of those differences played an integral role in identifying how to communicate and work effectively with varying stakeholders, but it was not the only factor.

Key Stakeholder Population

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Generation Specific Strategies for the Workplace

	Recruitment	Salary	Benefits	Type of Work	Work Environment	Other Key Points
Traditionalist	• Use a combination of high-tech & traditional methods (i.e., newspaper classifieds, trade journals, executive search firms, face-to-face networking). • Communicate message that "We want, need and value your knowledge and years of experience."	• Provide a competitive salary, but remember that being productive and staying active in the workforce is often even more important to this group.	• Utilize benefit tiers to allow choices suited to this group (e.g., long-term care insurance, grief counseling services, etc.). • Consider reduction in work hours or short layoffs (instead of firing) during tough economic times.	• Offer new challenges and opportunities that capitalize on their vast experience (e.g., task forces, focus groups, problem solving teams, mentoring of other employees).	• Demonstrate work flexibility (e.g., options that allow for telecommuting or working part-time).	• This is a group that can adapt well to change. • Many Veterans may not really want to retire if provided with the right opportunities.
Baby Boomer	• As above.	• Provide a very competitive salary to this group, especially since Boomers often have extra child/elder care expenses.	• Utilize benefit tiers to allow choices suited to this group (e.g., child/elder care referral services, provision of paid days off work to care for sick children and/or elderly dependents).	• Offer work that allows them to advance in their careers and keep work interesting (e.g., promotions, mentoring to more senior roles, job rotation opportunities, etc.).	• Offer policies to help this group better manage work-life balance and stress levels (e.g., job sharing options, voluntary demotions, telecommuting).	• Many Boomers may be thinking of retiring soon, so organizations would do well to look at ways to keep them on board for as long as possible.
Generation X	• Use multiple technological and online methods (e.g., Web sites like Workopolis, Monster, social media sites; online job applications, etc.). • Keep your Web information current and allow for regular online feedback if necessary. • Keep job descriptions short and concise.	• Provide a competitive salary to this group, but note they are inclined to look more at the salary and benefits package as a whole, since family happiness and work-life balance are top priorities.	• Utilize benefit tiers to allow choices suited to this group (e.g., time off, on-site child care and/or sick child care, flexibility in core work hours).	• Help Gen Xers to expand their knowledge, skills and abilities at work. • Also see "Type of Work" in the Baby Boomers section above.	• Try not to micro-manage Gen Xers; they respond best to managers who are more like mentors. • Provide regular feedback on performance beyond the annual review. • Create a fun and "family like" work environment. • Make sure that your organization uses current technology.	• Gen Xers may also be "sandwiched" employees.
Millennial	• Similar to Gen X.	• Understand that expectations for good salaries and signing bonuses will be high for this group (and explain why expectations may not be met right away).	• Offer choice and flexibility in salary/benefit options for this group.	• Create work that is more meaningful by providing frequent and constructive feedback on performance and outline how they contribute to organizational success. • Offer a variety of highly interactive/creative learning opportunities. • Start with small projects they can take ownership of, and build from there, provided performance expectations are met.	• Provide opportunities for Gen Yers to be social, make friends and make a difference through work (e.g., sports teams, volunteer programs). • Demonstrate serious measures to protect personal safety of employees. • Provide state-of-the-art technology.	• Gen Yers are very compelled to stay with an organization if they feel their ideas are valued and respected by others in the workplace – especially by older generations.

http://www.psychologyfoundation.org/pdf/publications/GenerationsAtWork.pdf

Influences over the environment also included organizational cultural and sub-cultures. As a law enforcement agency, the Department operates as a para-military organization. This culture is key to understanding that having Executive, or command support is critical in ensuring that EPMO processes and procedures were acknowledged and followed.

The public service oriented goal of the organization also has a strong influence on the culture of the Department. If the Department understands how a change influences the good of the public, they will be more open to accepting that change.

The EPMO found that each individual business division also has an underlying sub-culture that varied based on the line of business, and the EPMO had to tailor communication to match the culture.

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For example, the information technology personnel wanted to be certain they were communicating with someone that can speak their language. So the EPMO used words like "Gantt Chart" and "governance". With Highway Patrol, the EPMO discussed how transparency and efficiency would increase public safety.

Overall business objectives also seemed to influence the differences between stakeholders. The EPMO found that at higher levels of leadership there was a greater understanding of overall Department goals and objectives, but as we engaged with stakeholders embedded at lower levels of the organizational chart the focus and understanding was geared more towards the individual unit goals and objectives.

Individual experiences and preferences also factored into how an individual prefers to operate and develop their perspectives. Therefore, the EPMO knew that it could not expect to achieve optimal results by simply categorizing stakeholders based on their group characteristics. They had to gain insight into the stakeholder as an independent individual. In order to accomplish this the EPMO built upon the insight gained through understanding the group factors and dynamics to ask questions to better understand the individual needs and expectations of their stakeholders. They were also able to look to the advisors and individuals within the organization that had already established effective relationships with those stakeholders. They used these advisors to help gain more insight by enlisting their aid. The advisors were able to provide more insight into how they effectively communicate, work with, and meet the expectations of the key stakeholders. Establishing these relationships also helped establish trust and confidence with the key stakeholders as they valued the opinions and input of their advisors.

The EMPO also conducted stakeholder meetings as a two person team, with the two team members having varied backgrounds. This enabled them to tailor their communication on the fly based on the discussion that was occurring. Understanding these different influences and objectives enabled the EPMO to identify the common ground and individual needs and develop a stakeholder management plan. This plan enabled the EPMO to more effectively reach their partners and enable them to see how the EPMO would help them operate more cohesively across the Department and meet their individual unit goals and objectives while aligning and supporting the overall long-term goals and objectives of the Department.

Essentially, the disciplines of stakeholder, change, and communication management needed to be applied. The EPMO used these disciplines to effectively campaign for the EPMO. The EPMO customized their interaction with each Key stakeholder in order to establish and maintain effective and productive relationships.

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RESULTS

Utilizing the concepts of stakeholder, change, and communication management enabled the EPMO to improve performance and organizational dynamic. Understanding the differing needs and perspectives also enabled the team to be more productive and efficient.

The morale of the EPMO and project team members was positively impacted as a result of conducting a stakeholder analysis and tailoring communications based upon the stakeholder needs. Improved understanding of a shared vision and goals, along with improved communication directly correlated to the morale of the team members. A subset of information obtained from an internal survey of employees demonstrates the positive impact that was realized by the team.

Sub-set of Internal Administration Employee Survey
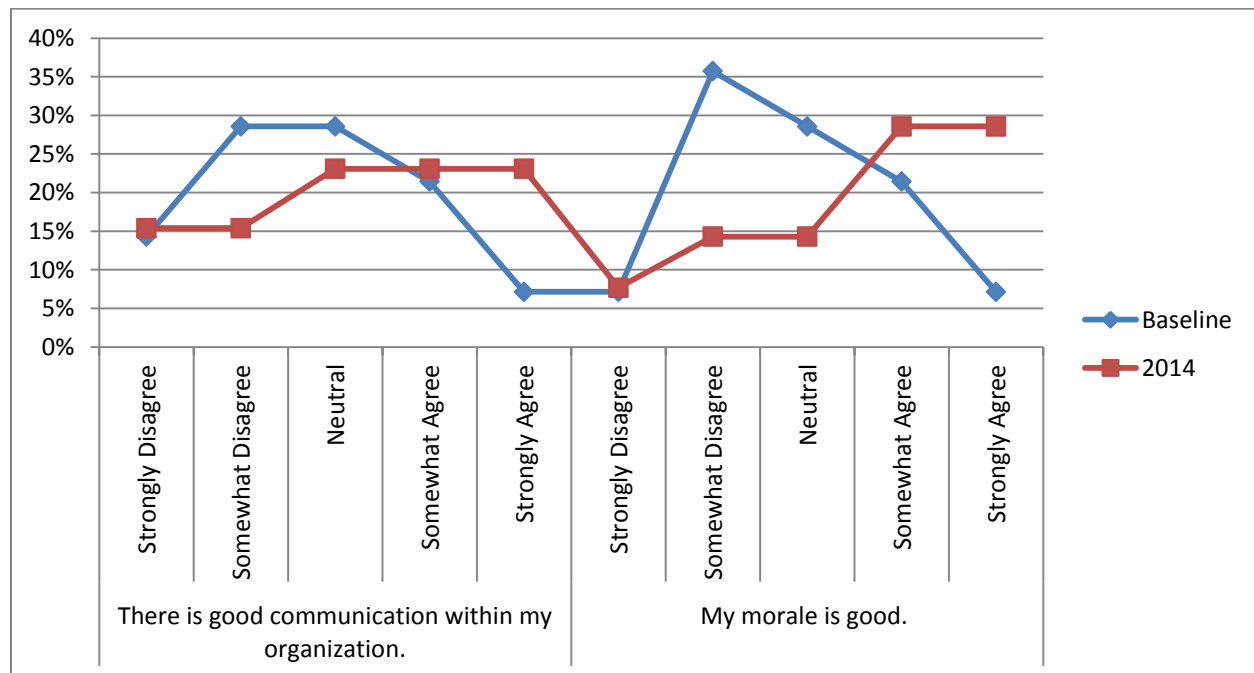
They were also able to use the knowledge gained on generational, cultural, and individual preferences and influences to improve internal team building and performance by encouraging team members to seek understanding of cultural and organizational differences and influences through employee development course offerings and by holding team-building sessions to learn how to use diversity in order to achieve the best outcomes.

Improved communication and understanding across the stakeholder population also resulted in more successfully meeting the objectives of the EPMO and the vision of the Executive Director. TXDPS was able to successfully develop and execute against a strategic enterprise roadmap that

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is leveraged for decision making, resource allocation planning, and reporting based on priorities with a diverse and dynamic team.

The Executive Director then requested that the EPMO leadership also address improvements to the administrative functions at the Department. The EPMO was merged with the Adminstrative Division so that the team could address areas such as procurement and contracting. The leadership was able to leverage the lessons learned while establishing the EPMO to succesfully approach, identify, and implement improvements in these administrative areas as well.

CONCLUSION

The authors learned that it is critical for leadership and team members to understand the differences in team members and stakeholders. Spend time assessing the stakeholder population before diving in. It is easier to establish a relationship then to re-establish one, and it is easier to establish an opinion than it is to change it.

Generational differences play a key factor into communication and team dynamics. Conduct research and look for educational opportunities to gain better understanding of the preferences, values, and work-styles of the different generations. Plan interaction with team members and stakeholders to align to their styles.   All generations have a common ground, so find it.   Leverage this common-ground to customize interaction.   For example, some generations prefer face-to-face contact while others prefer electronic communication. Use these preferences to address the individual. Use tools such as meeting agendas to ensure that all team members understand the significance of the need to meet and appreciate that time is used efficiently by having a focus and staying on topic.

Understand and establish expectations.   Generational differences also lead to different expectations about how teams will interact, availability, and level of detail desired. What some might embrace as ability to be autonomous, others might perceive as lack of interest or commitment. Know your stakeholders and understand their expectations of when you will be available. Some generations expect work to occur "around the clock". Others value their off-time or do not correlate time on the clock directly to level of productivity. Make sure you understand and address these differences through expectation management. Develop and distribute communication plans to help get everyone on the same page.

The authors also learned that generational differences are not the only factor.   Organizational culture and individual factors play an integral role. The significance here is that you should not stereo-type an individual based upon a characteristic, such as generation, alone. Assess the culture of the overall organization and how that culture might contribute to stakeholder expectations. Also take into consideration the sub-cultures of the varying units of business. Individual factors must be taken into consideration, so you should identify methods for understanding individual expectations and styles and layer those into your overall engagement planning and execution. You can gain insight into individual styles and perspectives by taking

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the time to get to know your stakeholder or team member as an individual. Developing key insider relationships with trusted advisors or peers to a key stakeholder can serve as the catalyst for gaining trust and confidence. Understand the sphere of influence of your stakeholder.

Sphere of Influence

The authors also learned that, much like a project or organization change, executive support is critical. When the expectation of executive leadership is for teams to operate effectively, efficiently, and professionally, they will find a way to do so. Without the leadership and example set by executive leadership, teams might not take the time to analyze how to most effectively operate together in order to achieve organizational objectives. Another key facet of executive support is ensuring there is a shared vision. When the team is able to recognize and understand the shared vision it is easier to help them draw the roadmap that aligns their individual goals and objectives towards the overall goals and objectives of the organization, which improves buy-in.

Perhaps most importantly, the authors learned that while diversity may appear to be a challenge at first, it ultimately serves as an opportunity. Diversity leads to "out of the box" thinking and better solutions and should be embraced. Educate your team members on how

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brain-storming to take the individual contributor's unique past experiences, expertise, and styles can converge to create the most optimal solutions to a business problem or challenge.

Through stakeholder, communication, and change management, you can successfully create and drive diverse and multi-generational teams to operate successfully and cohesively to achieve desired outcomes.

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