



Conversations with the Experts

Generation X and Work/Life Values



Paulette Gerkovich, Ph.D.

Bio: An expert on glass ceiling issues, Paulette R. Gerkovich has managed both research and advisory services projects designed to diagnose barriers to women's leadership development and advancement, and to offer strategies and solutions for increasing the number of women in corporate and professional leadership. Dr. Gerkovich has directed numerous studies for Catalyst, including its recent release, *Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?* This study compares the opportunities for and barriers to advancement of women and men executives. She also has directed *Women in Corporate Leadership: 2003*, a follow-up to Catalyst's 1996 groundbreaking study which assesses strategies for women's advancement and diagnoses barriers to their success. She directed Catalyst's study *Women in Financial Services: The Word on the Street* which examines the opportunities for and obstacles to women's and men's advancement

within the securities industry, as well as *The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders*, an analysis of the work experiences of corporate and professional women and men. This latter study is unique in that it seeks to understand the attitudes and experiences of women and men in their late 20s and early 30s in relation to both their work and the balance between their work and personal lives. Dr. Gerkovich is Chair of the Catalyst Award Committee, on which she has served for eight years. In this role, she heads an interdepartmental team through a year-long process of evaluating corporate and professional strategies nominated for the Catalyst Award. Dr. Gerkovich managed Catalyst's 1997 *Census of Corporate Officers and Top Earners*, which provides an accurate statistical picture of the representation of women in the most senior leadership positions within the Fortune 500. She also managed *Closing the Gap: Women's Advancement in Corporate and Professional Canada*, modeled after Catalyst's study of U.S. women and CEOs. Prior to joining Catalyst, Dr. Gerkovich was Vice President of Research and Project Development for Advanced Research Management Consultants, a research and management consulting firm in Philadelphia. At ARMC, Dr. Gerkovich conducted research and wrote extensively on the topic of diversity. She also conducted diversity consulting and training for numerous Fortune 500 corporations. Dr. Gerkovich received her B.A. in Film Studies from Temple University. She received her Masters and Doctorate degrees in Political Science from the University of Maryland.

Editors Note: The following interview with Paulette Gerkovich was conducted by Janet Scanlon and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes.

Paulette Gerkovich directed the research for the 2001 Catalyst study "The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders". This report focuses on Generation X professionals' views and expectations for work and family. The sample consisted of respondents born between the years 1964 -1975 from eight firms in the United States and two international companies headquartered in Canada. The data was collected in three ways:

- 1) A survey was distributed to 4,500 of Generation X employees at 10 organizations (30% response rate). The following industries are represented in this study: manufacturing, professional services (accounting), financial services, consumer goods, retail, hi-tech, electronics, and communications
- 2) Questionnaires were sent to 450 Generation X male and female managers and professionals at the U.S. organizations.
- 3) Telephone interviews were conducted with 39 of the manager/professional respondents



For further information about this study, please visit the Catalyst website at http://www.catalystwomen.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=lead_nextgen_01.

An Interview with Paulette Gerkovich, Catalyst

Pitt-Catsouphes & Scanlon: Why is research about Gen X so important?

Gerkovich: Generation X is the next generation of leaders. Catalyst wanted to gather information about their desires and expectations.

We focused on Generation X because there has not been much rigorous research in this area. In fact, much of the information about Generation X that is available is mostly anecdotal or it is information that has been gleaned from marketing studies. It is surprising that this generation's approach to career and work has hardly been studied. Catalyst conducted this study to examine the many myths and common misperceptions about Generation X. Our study found that many of these are untrue.

Finally, we wanted to communicate our findings to businesses, since these young adults will soon be entering middle and senior management positions. We thought businesses would want to look carefully at the Generation X cohort.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Scanlon: What were some of the major findings of your study?

Gerkovich: The findings of this study are representative of people who will be the next leaders in Fortune 100 companies. And, contrary to widespread impressions about Generation X, we found that this generation is attracted to organizations for traditional reasons - reasons that are not different from previous generations. For instance, they want opportunities to advance, competitive compensation and benefits, an appropriate position, and they want to work for an organization with a positive reputation.

Another common myth is that Generation X'ers are not committed to their organizations. A surprising and interesting finding was that, in fact, they have high levels of commitment. In fact, 85% of the respondents reported that they really care about their organizations and 47% of the sample would be happy to spend their entire careers with their present organizations. These findings stand in contrast to the impression that this generation is "hopping from job-to-job." It is interesting that the reasons stated for leaving their jobs are also traditional - 75% leave for advancement opportunities and 72% leave for increased compensation.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Scanlon: Could you talk a bit about the work/life perspectives of Generation X?

Members of Generation X appear to place a much higher priority on personal and family-related goals than on their career-related goals: 84% of the respondents stated that it was extremely important to them to have a loving family, 72% indicated that it was extremely important to have a relationship with a significant other, while 79% responded that it was extremely important to enjoy life. In terms of work-related goals, 22% rated having "a variety of responsibilities" as extremely important, and just 16% of respondents stated that it is extremely important to become an influential leader.

These findings do *not* indicate that work is not important to Generation X, rather, they place a higher priority on family and personal life. The results of our interviews suggest that they may be less willing to sacrifice, compromise, and make trade-offs than other generations. Of course, it is possible that this generation may not yet be at a point in their careers where they have to put these values to the test.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Scanlon: What are the work/life benefits and supports wanted most by Generation X'ers?

Gerkovich: Generation X is more interested in traditional amenities. Only a low percentage of the respondents would prefer nontraditional amenities, such as a gym membership.

In June 2004, Catalyst released the *Women in Corporate Leadership* study, which examined the attitudes and experiences of executive women and men (all of the respondents were VP level and above and within three reporting levels of the CEO). The sample of the *Women in Corporate Leadership* study consisted of 948 individuals (705 women and 243 men). A very large percentage of these respondents expressed an interest in using flexible work arrangements. Yet, the percentage of these top managers who wanted to use flexible work arrangements was less than the percent of Generation X'ers who indicated an interest.

Pitt-Catsouphes & Scanlon: What are the implications of these findings for workplace policies?

Gerkovich: Generation X'ers are demanding to work flexibly, and they are not willing to sacrifice their

personal and family-related goals for their careers. The implications of this for organizations are huge. In general, Generation X employees do not want to work less hours or have less work, but they do want to control where and when they work.

Organizations need to reconsider and re-work "when," "where," and "how" work gets done. Some organizations have already started this process. An example of this is Ernst & Young. Ernst & Young, an accounting firm, is on the cutting edge. They developed a team-approach for determining the needs and responsibilities of their employees and for setting up new schedules. There are many indications that they have respect for their employees' expectations of work/life balance. This firm won a Catalyst award a few years ago for their efforts to redesign work.

Certainly, it is easier for some workplaces to implement a flexible approach to work, depending on the industry. It can be difficult for some types of businesses, such as manufacturing or professional services that need to remain responsive to client needs. Efforts to change the managerial mindset, such as moving away from face time, can pose challenges. There are not just a couple of solutions to the problems. Yet, there is still room for creativity. Technology can help businesses accommodate these demands. It is important to note that there are business incentives for creating a more flexible workplace; we know, for instance, that productivity and morale increase with flexible work arrangements.

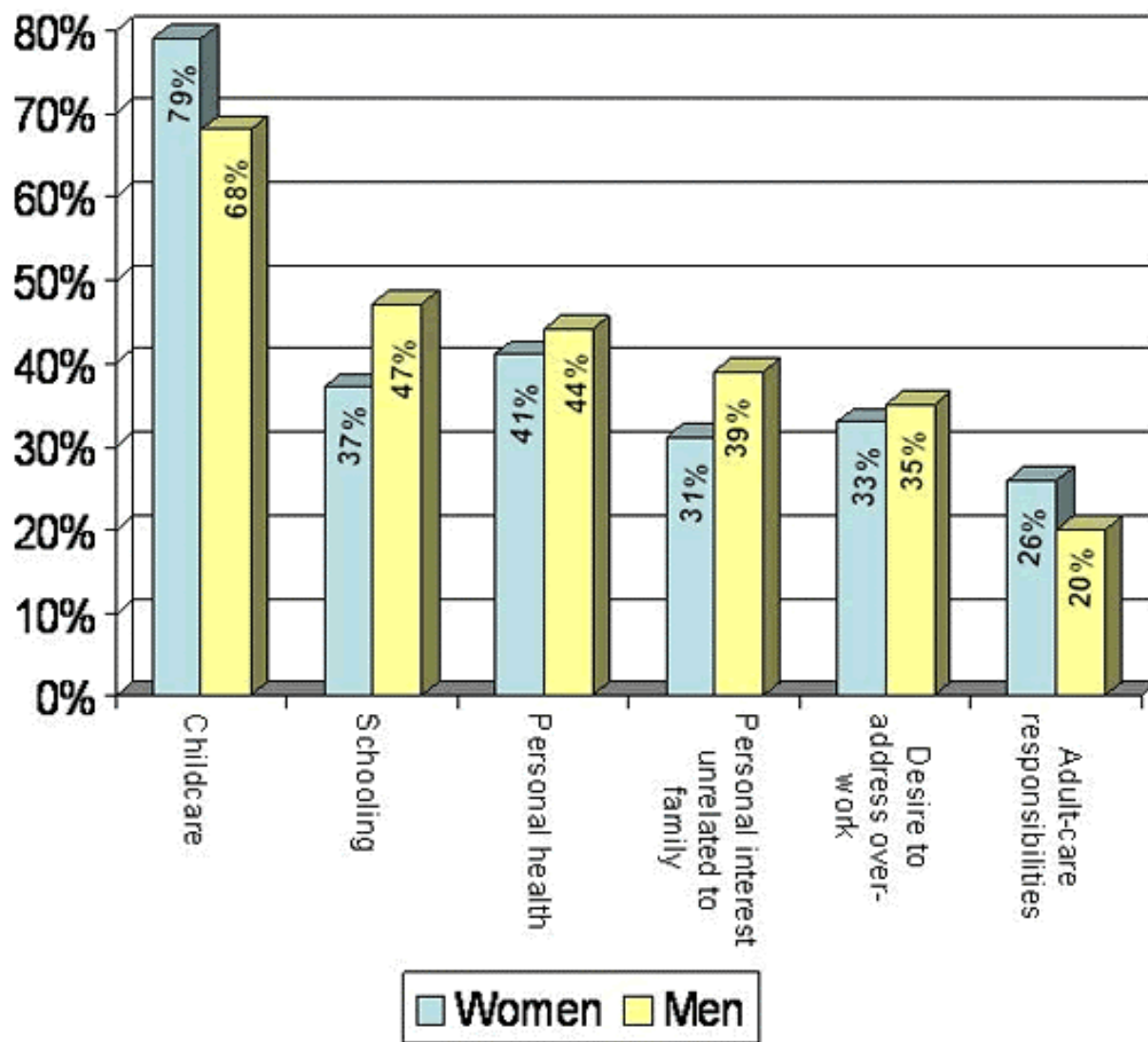
Pitt-Catsoupes & Scanlon: What are the implications of the findings for public policy?

Gerkovich: Flexible work arrangements in the United States are spearheaded by businesses. I think the private sector will have the most impact on progress in this area and it will break ground on this issue. The private sector is in a critical position because employers need to attract and retain the members of each new generation. Businesses can also act more expediently on issues.

The main point from this study is that in light of the research, myths and misperceptions, Generation X is similar to previous generations in some ways, but they are different in the area of work/life balance. Research is needed in this area to continue to understand the perceptions of Generation X, since they will have a huge impact on businesses and the way people work.

Reasons Identified by Generation X Employees For Using Flexible Work Arrangements/Work-Life Programs

Source: This chart has been adapted from Catalyst. (2001). *The next generation: Today's professionals, tomorrow's leaders*. New York: Catalyst. Figure 12: "Motivations for adopting flexible work arrangements and other work/life programs, by gender", p. 19.



Additional Resources: Related to Generation X

Catalyst: "Catalyst is the leading research and advisory organization working with businesses and the professions to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women at work. As an independent, nonprofit membership organization, Catalyst uses a solutions-oriented approach that has earned the confidence of business leaders around the world. Catalyst conducts research on all aspects of women's career advancement and provides strategic and web-based consulting services on a global basis to help companies and firms advance women and build inclusive work environments."

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.catalystwomen.org/>


Families & Work Institute: "Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit center for research that provides data to inform decision-making on the changing workforce, changing family and changing community. Founded

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- Visit the homepage at <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>
- To download the report "Youth & employment: Today's students tomorrow's workforce: Summary and discussion guide" by Ellen Galinsky, Stacy S. Kim, James T. Bond, and Kimberlee Salmond, click here <http://www.familiesandwork.org/summary/yande.pdf>

United States Census Bureau: "The Census Bureau serves as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy."

- Visit the homepage at <http://www.census.gov/>

 **Global Perspectives - Dusseldorp Skills Forum:** "The Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) is an independent, not for profit body with a mission to achieve changes needed to enable all Australians to reach their potential through the acquisition of productive skills. In particular, the Forum seeks to improve the learning and work transitions of young Australians by cooperating with communities, industry, government and non-government organisations to generate ideas, research, tools and information, and to build networks of common interest."

- The homepage is at <http://www.dsf.org.au/index.php>
- Visit the Youth Transitions in Learning and Work page, <http://www.dsf.org.au/themes/11.htm>

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