

Is There a Generational Gap in Technology Use in Government?

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Local governments are working to **utilize diverse technologies** to serve citizens. Among all types of technologies, those aimed at facilitating communication are increasingly attractive to local governments. In the general public, we see that generational differences shape technology use. For example, only 58% of the Silent generation utilizes Internet, whereas 95% of the Millennials went online in 2010. (Pew Research Center, 2010). We thus ask: **is there a generational gap in technology use among government managers?** After comparing general patterns of technology use among generations of public managers, we present our analysis for each type of technology.

Table 1. Frequency of Respondents by Generation

Generation*	Born	Frequency
Millennial	1977-92	55(9%)
Generation X	1965-76	227(36%)
Younger Baby Boom	1955-64	275(44%)
Older Baby Boom, Silent	1937-54	67(11%)

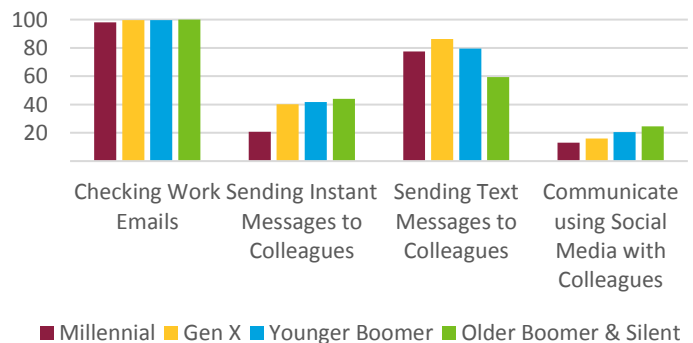
*Source: Pew Research Center, 2010

Table 1 notes the categories by which we define generations. The age of managers in this study ranges from 28 to 75, with an average age of 52. The survey asks respondents how frequently they use four different

technologies: email, instant messaging, text messaging, and social media. Overall, we find there is little generational gap in technology use among managers in local governments.

As shown in **Figure 1**, technology use is similar across the four generations. For example, **local government managers use email most frequently, regardless of generation**. More than 98% of the respondents in each generation check work email at least every few days. Email use is followed by the use of text messages. More than half of managers in each generation send

Figure 1. Percent of Respondents using each Technology at least Every Few Days



text messages to their colleagues at least every few days. **Managers across all generations report social media as the least frequent tool of communication.** Only 30% of the respondents in each generation contact their colleagues via social media more than once a day. Similarly, **respondents are not different in their use of instant messaging.** Approximately 60 to 70% of the government managers in each generation rarely send instant messages to their colleagues, friends, or family. **Technology use by government managers does not conform to technology use stereotypes.** The older generations use a variety of communication technologies while Millennials don't necessarily use all types of technology.

Figure 2. Frequency of Checking Emails, by Purpose and Generation

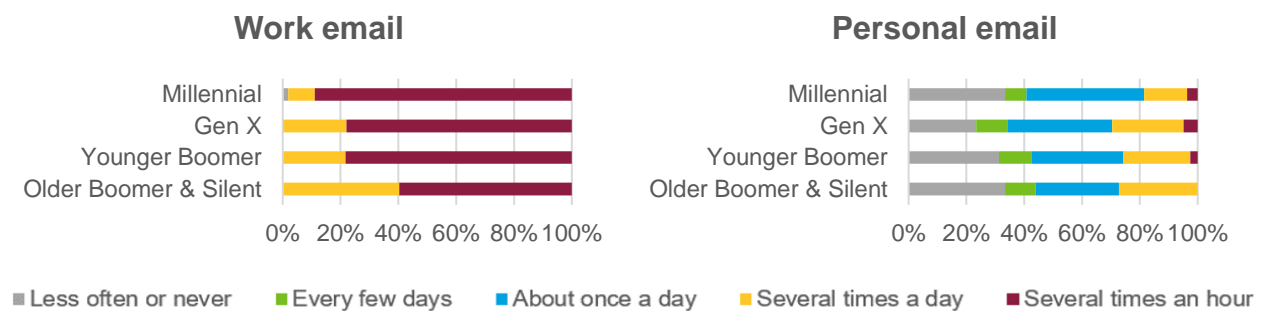
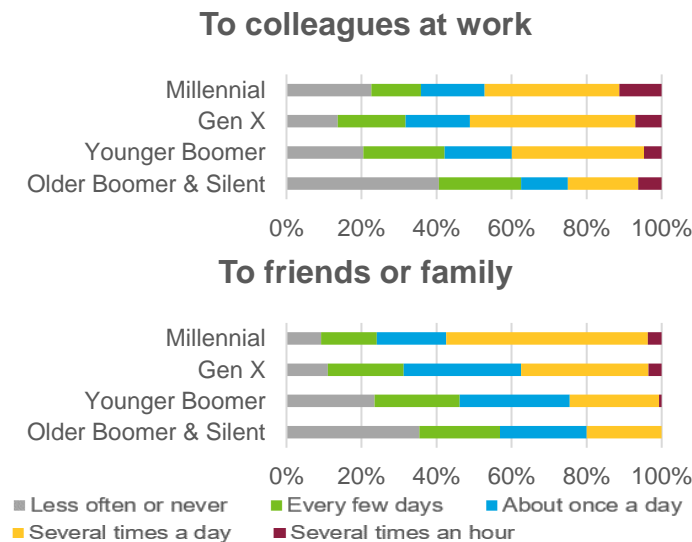


Figure 2 summarizes the frequency with which managers use email for work or personal purposes. **Most managers check their work email several times a day, regardless of generation.** Generation X shows the highest percent of checking emails for personal purposes at work at least every few days (77%).

Figure 3. Frequency of Sending Text Messages, by Purpose and Generation

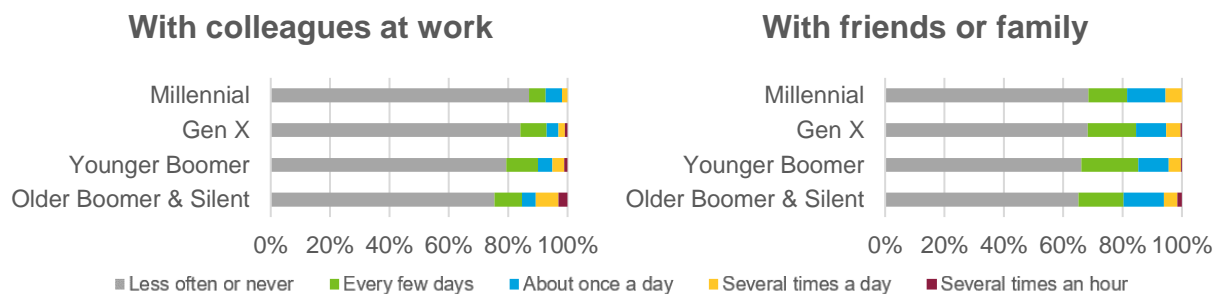


There are differences, by generation, in sending text messages. As shown in the **Figure 3**, 59% of the Older Boomers and the Silent generation send text messages to colleagues at work, whereas more than 77% of managers in younger generations send text messages to colleagues at least every few days. The **two younger generations send private text messages at work more frequently than the two older generations.** More than half of Millennials and 20% of Older

Boomers and the Silent generation send text messages for private purposes several times a day.

Use of social media at work does not vary by generation. **Figure 4** shows that **the four different generations share similar patterns regarding their communications via social media**. One unexpected result is that **the oldest generation has the highest ratio of using social media with friends or family**. It shows again that the traditional idea of a generational gap does not appear among the local government managers. High education level of the respondents (95% of them have a Bachelor's degree) or emphasis on communications in their work environments are possible reasons for this generational similarity.

Figure 4. Frequency of Communication Using Social Media, by Purpose and Generation



Summary

1. While there are some differences in the patterns of checking work email and sending text messages, technology use among local government managers is similar across the four generations.
2. Four generations use technologies for communication purposes in similar manners. In particular, the patterns of their use of instant message and social media are identical.
3. The older generations use a variety of communication technologies compared to Millennials.

Technology in US Local Governments

Survey of **2,500 city government managers in 500 US cities** with a population from 25,000 to 250,000 inhabitants.

5 departments: Mayor's Office, Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Police, and Finance.

30% response rate

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