

# Economic Downturn Rattles Younger Workers While Older Employees Tough It Out Boston College Study Finds

## The "Generation Gap" May be a Resource as Companies Struggle to Survive

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass., June 8 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Younger workers are bearing the brunt of the current economic crisis, while older employees show greater resiliency in a recession-battered workplace where employers seek to do more with less, according to a new study by Boston College's Sloan Center on Aging & Work.

The onset of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression has negatively altered perceptions about job security, supervisor support, job quality, inclusion and overall employee engagement in the workplace, according to the new report, "*The Difference a Downturn Can Make*," part of the Center's far-reaching Age & Generations Study. And as businesses strive to cut costs and increase productivity, American workers are reporting they are overloaded.

Drawing on a national survey of workers taken on the eve of the downturn and again after the onset of the crisis, **Boston College researchers have produced one of the most comprehensive pictures available about how the recession has changed the way men and women look at their jobs.**

Looking across different generations of workers, researchers found employees of all ages reporting a drop in employee engagement, a measure of how invested and enthusiastic employees are in their work. While employees overall report declining engagement, older workers in this study appear to be weathering the economic storm better than their younger peers.

Workers among "Generation Y" -- ages 26 and younger -- report the greatest decrease in engagement. Those slightly older workers in "Generation X" -- ages 27 to 42 -- reported less of a decrease, while Baby Boomers and older "Traditionalists" -- ages 43 or older -- reported that their levels of engagement hardly changed at all.

America's older workers show all the signs of being more resilient in the face of threatening economic conditions, drawing on hard-earned experiences from the downturns of the past and a battle-tested perspective on the peaks and valleys of the market.

"Some older workers have seen it all, and that gives them experiential resilience," says Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, director of Boston College's Sloan Center on Aging & Work. "Younger workers just don't have the depth of experience, which leaves them feeling less engaged in their jobs. But younger workers bring energy, enthusiasm, and idealism. In a workplace where older and younger employees work side-by-side, the give and take between young and old is a valuable resource employers should leverage to survive the downturn."

Researchers at Boston College's Sloan Center on Aging & Work report other findings from the Age & Generations study that suggest:

- Perceptions of engagement, supervisor support, inclusion, and job quality declined after the onset of the economic downturn for employees who felt that their job security had decreased, but it stayed the same or only slightly declined for those whose job security had stayed the same or increased.
- Those whose job security decreased or stayed the same experienced a slight increase in work overload after the onset of the economic downturn, whereas those whose job security increased experienced a slight decrease in work overload.
- Those whose job security decreased perceived a slight decrease in team effectiveness after the onset of the economic downturn, whereas those whose job security increased experienced a slight increase in their perceptions of team effectiveness.

- While younger workers felt the effectiveness of their work team as a whole dropped as their job security declined, older workers felt the effectiveness of their team held steady even though they too reported a decreased sense of job security.

In tough economic times, the multi-generational American workplace requires employers to take cost-effective steps to support their workers. It isn't enough for employees to be grateful for their jobs; according to one researcher, employers need to show they are grateful to the employees that keep them in business.

"Employee engagement can be greatly enhanced by simple and cost-efficient efforts," adds Christina Matz-Costa, research associate at the Sloan Center and one of the study's authors. "Providing strong training and development opportunities, encouraging work team inclusion, and promoting a culture of workplace flexibility and supervisor supportiveness are all effective strategies that can maintain or boost engagement."

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*SOURCE Boston College Sloan Center on Aging & Work*