

## The Net Generation: Coming to a Workplace Near You

The Net Generation, born since 1980, is now beginning to enter the workforce. What companies can expect from this generation is the subject of many articles and books, including the best seller *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* by Don Tapscott.

According to Tapscott, *Net-Gens* were shaped by a digitally-connected world and a culture of instant gratification. They rely on portable electronic devices, expect immediate results, and make fewer distinctions between learning, playing, and communicating. Technical savvy is a given, but attention spans are short.

Will this generation redefine the workplace? Here is what the current literature suggests.

Many *Net-Gens* do not view climbing the corporate ladder as an attractive option. Instead, self-employment more closely fits their needs for variety, collaboration, and results. Organizations may find that skills they once sought through hiring are more readily available by contract. This may call for a greater amount of business process restructuring, as more and more knowledge work is outsourced to smaller, specialized suppliers.

*Net-Gens* who do opt for corporate employment will seek a different model of work. With less respect for traditional hierarchies, they will be drawn to jobs that are skills-based and deadline-driven, and that make use of the communication and problem-solving skills developed in their digital youth. They will look for opportunities to manage their own time, exchanging “normal working hours” for a commitment to produce on time and be available when needed. But mostly, they’ll look for meaningful work at each level in the corporate hierarchy.

Corporate learning departments will also face new challenges.

- *Net-Gens* recognize that knowledge is power, and technology has made knowledge “cool” through a fusion of fun and learning. Successful learning programs will seek to bring information to life through gaming and simulation, and will provide structures to explore the unknown and conduct independent research.
- *Net-Gens* know that staying connected leads to professional growth. Learning programs will use technology to foster formal and informal relationships over distances for purposes of furthering corporate goals.
- *Net-Gens* have a broader concept of technology that is not restricted to the use of computers and the internet. Look for the use of podcasts and vodcasts in learning to become more widespread.
- *Net-Gens* are sophisticated users of digital media. The concept of blended learning will evolve toward a more judicious use of media, with more emphasis placed on message design and overall communications strategy.

Like previous generations, *Net-Gens* will need to conform to existing business norms and structures. However, we believe their unique experience can be harnessed to yield a more productive and creative workforce in the coming years.