

AN EXCERPT FROM
the **ABC** of **XYZ**
BY MARK MCCRINDLE
www.theabcofxyz.com



GENERATIONS DEFINED

*“One generation passes away,
and another generation comes.”*

Ecclesiastes 1:4

1 GENERATIONS DEFINED

'One generation passes away, and another generation comes.'

Ecclesiastes 1:4

With any discussion on the different generations, an important first step is to define the term 'generation'.

Traditionally, a generation has been defined as 'the average interval of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring'.¹ This biological definition has placed a generation for millennia at around 20–25 years in span. While in the past this definition has served sociologists well, it is irrelevant today. Because cohorts are changing so quickly in response to new technologies, changing career and study options and shifting societal values, two decades is far too broad a generational span.

Also, if we apply a biological definition today, a generation would span a larger time than ever as childbirth is pushed back later than ever. On average, the time between birth of parents and birth of their offspring has stretched out from two decades to more than three. In 1982, the median age of a woman having her first baby was 25, while today it is 31.²

So today generations are defined sociologically rather than biologically. A generation refers to a cohort of people born within a similar span of time (15 years at the upper

end) who share a comparable age and life stage and who were shaped by a particular span of time (events, trends and developments).

Generational experts William Strauss and Neil Howe agree that generations are shaped by a particular span of time: 'A generation is a group of people who share a time and space in history that lends them a collective persona.' They also say that the 'span of a generation is roughly the length of a phase of life'. However, with the traditional life stages and their respective responsibilities no longer applicable to today's children and youth, this definition is not entirely helpful. Childhood is increasingly being cut short, while the traditional adult responsibilities typically emerging in the 20s and 30s are being delayed. Thirty is the new 21!

More so now than ever, the commonalities of today's generations cut through global, cultural and socio-economic boundaries. Due to globalisation, largely made possible through the various technologies of today, the youth in Australia, the USA, the UK, Germany and Japan are shaped by the same events, trends and developments: they are avid users of social media and online technologies, are witnessing an unprecedented ageing in their populations, and are more financially endowed and formally educated than any generation preceding them.

Even beyond these developed countries young people are logged on and linked up. From Beijing to Bangalore, from Buenos Aires to Brisbane, we have a generation accessing the same websites, watching the same movies, downloading the same songs and being influenced by the same brands. Today we have the world's first global generation. Therefore we define a generation as a group of people born in the same era, shaped by the same times and influenced by

the same social markers – in other words, a cohort united by age and life stage, conditions and technology, events and experiences.

Generational characteristics: not a passing fad

Some may argue that such attributes as the limited attention span of Gen Y, Australia's current adolescent and young adult population, is a trait of all young people regardless of the time they were born into, or a passing fad and not a generational trait that they will carry through to mid-life and old age. However, generational characteristics are not merely a factor of life stage, or a fad that they will outgrow. While people of various ages are living through the same events, the age at which one is exposed to a political shift, technological change or social marker determines how embedded it becomes in one's psyche and worldview.

National statistics further demonstrate that generational diversity is not just a matter of life stage. For example, the average age at first marriage for Gen Y today is 28 for a female and 30 years for a male.³ In 1982, when the youngest of the Boomers were in their early 20s, the average age at marriage was 22 for females and 24 for males.⁴ Among the factors deemed responsible for Generation Y's unwillingness to commit to binding relationships are relaxed moral codes and high divorce rates. As is evidenced by these statistics, delaying the markers of adulthood (such as marriage, having children, getting a mortgage and a steady career) is characteristic of the Y-ers, just as loyalty – to spouse, boss, brand and country – is characteristic of the Builders. The

old Jesuit saying holds true: ‘Give me a child until he is seven, and I will show you the man.’⁵

Of course, youth of all eras demonstrate some similar characteristics such as an experimental lifestyle, questioning the status quo, idealism and pushing the boundaries. However, you would not say that those growing up in the 1970s were the same as those who came of age in the 1990s and those who are coming of age today. While age influences behaviour and attitudes, greater impacts are made by the culture in which one lives out one’s youth, as well as social markers – significant events during one’s formative years. There is an ancient saying that bears much truth: ‘People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents.’⁶

The technology, mass marketing, politics and pop culture in which today’s youth have grown up have ensured a significant difference to previous youth cultures. And because of the different times, conditions and social markers, these generations have different aspirations and worldviews. The younger generations – Y and Z – are environmentally and politically conscious. Recent Australian elections revealed increased youth voting for the Greens political party, as well as an increasing concern and demand for the creation of new and positive environmental policies. This is especially reflected in the younger generations’ support of popular cultural events such as WaveAid, Make Poverty History and Live Earth, which demonstrate awareness of the need for charity and environmental lobbying. Such attitudes are further reinforced by the music artists they support, with performers like Sandi Thom and John Butler writing songs about how they were ‘born too late into a world that doesn’t care’ and how we should treat our planet with respect.

Strauss and Howe theorise that just as history moulds

generations, generations mould history. In their books *Generations* and *The Fourth Turning*, they divide Anglo-American history into seasonal cycles and label the generations according to which cycle they were born into. The four cycles can be compared to a swinging pendulum. The pendulum sways from one side to the other, always succumbing to gravity and stopping at its lowest, central point. Similarly, Strauss and Howe’s cycles of history are repeated in the following manner: a crisis period (one extreme), a high period (the other extreme) and the awakening and unravelling periods (the quieter periods).

The pendulum-like cycles of history are poetically summed up by famous novelist DH Lawrence in *Classical American Literature*: ‘Men fight for liberty and win it with hard knocks. Their children, brought up easy, let it slip away again, poor fools. And their grandchildren are once more slaves.’

Hugh Mackay and Phil Ruthven, well-known Australian social researchers, draw on the work of Strauss and Howe for Australia’s generations – from the Federation Generation to the young Zeds. A valid criticism of the cyclical models of generations is that they give an impression of generations as seasons, neatly rotating through the eras. Most social analysts find the symmetry too compliant for a real-world situation with infinite variables and influences. However, the broader point holds true – each generation is a factor of its times and a reaction to the generation that went before it.

Prophet/Idealist – the Baby Boomers

Born during a high, spend young adult years in an awakening, midlife during an unravelling and old age in a crisis. This generation was born into the high of the postwar boom. The

civil rights movement, which characterised the Boomers as young adults, is the most recent example of an awakening.

Nomad/Reactive – Generation X

Born during an awakening, spend young adult years during an unravelling, midlife during a crisis and old age in a new high. The X-ers lived out their young adult years in the pre-September 11 world of relative peace and prosperity.

Hero/Civic – Generation Y and the Federation Generation

Born during an unravelling, spend young adult years during a crisis, midlife during a high and old age in an awakening. Gen Y-ers, as young adults, are now living through the crisis period of post-September 11. The Federation Generation – the parents of the Builders – are also of this generation type. Born during a time of peace when Australia finally secured

nationhood, the Federation Generation entered adulthood at a crisis point marked by World War I and the Great Depression. They fought in both World Wars and experienced the high of the postwar boom as they entered their 40s. A very small percentage of this generation is still living.

Artist/Adaptive – The Builders and the Zeds

Born during a crisis, spend young adult years in a new high, midlife in an awakening and old age in an unravelling. The Builders were born into the crisis period of the Great Depression and World War II, and started their families as young adults during the postwar boom. They were in their 40s and 50s when their children, the Boomers, led the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The Zeds have been born into the crisis period of terrorism, the global recession and climate change. They are predicted to spend their young adult years in a time of economic and social renewal.

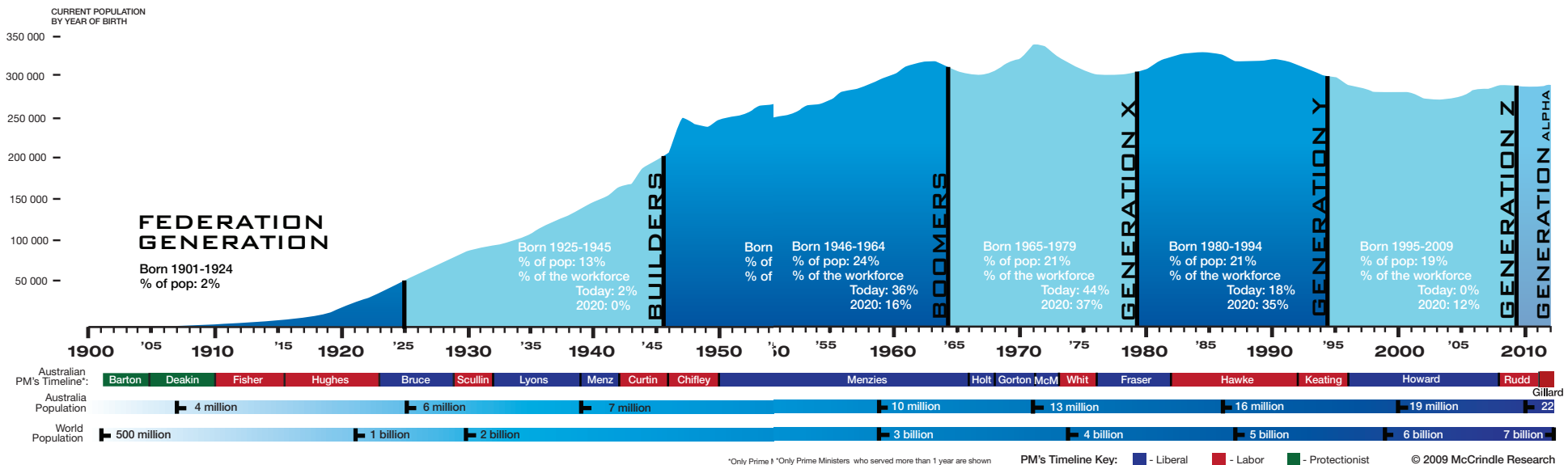


Figure 1.1 | Australian generations

Understanding your generation

While most of us have heard of the Builders, Boomers, Gen X-ers, Y-ers and Zeds, not many would be aware that another, older generation is still living, the youngest in their 90s, which means there are seven living generations in Australia (including Generation Alpha – more on this generation in the final chapter). This generation is called the Federation Generation.

Federation Generation

The Feds, Australia's oldest living generation, and the first to be labelled and profiled, started in the year Australia became a nation (1901), hence their name. The last of this generation were born in 1924. They were young men and women during the Depression and the World Wars, fighting in both wars. The Builders are often mistakenly seen as the generation that fought in World War II and while many older Builders did, it was the Federation Generation men who made up the bulk of World War II soldiers.

The Federation Generation witnessed some of the most iconic events and have seen unprecedented change. They were alive when the *Titanic* sank and when Australian women were given the right to vote. They are the parents of the Builders and the great-grandparents of the Zeds!

Feds in the spotlight

Louis Armstrong
Marlene Dietrich
Adolf Hitler

Builders

The Builders, Australia's current senior generation, were born between 1925 and 1945, during the Depression and the war years.⁷ They were commonly referred to as the 'greatest' generation and Hugh Mackay, in his book *Generations*, labels them the 'lucky' generation because of the years of relative comfort that followed World War II.⁸

The JAZZ age

Billie Holiday, 'God bless the child'
Louis Armstrong, 'When the saints go marching in'
Ella Fitzgerald, 'My funny valentine'

Since the early 1920s, with the exception of the baby boom years, the child population as a proportion of the general population has steadily declined – from 32 per cent to under 20 per cent today. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Australia's total fertility rate (TFR) reached its lowest point, up to that time, of only 2.1 babies per woman, compared to 3.1 less than a decade earlier.⁹ Obvious contributors to this decline in TFR in the 1930s were great poverty and joblessness – effects of the Depression experienced throughout the western world.¹⁰

TIME Person of the Year

1927 Walter P Chrysler, founder of the Chrysler Corporation
1930 Mohandas K Gandhi, political and spiritual leader of India
1938 Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany 1934–45

Boomers

The end of World War II was the key event to shape the generations in the western world. Rarely in history is there

an event that so impacts a culture as this one did. The years after the war were the mirror opposite of the war years, with the Depression and war replaced by economic growth and full employment. Austerity was overtaken by technological advancement and increasing freedom. Yet even more significantly, in the years after World War II, there was an unparalleled baby boom and immigration program. This 19-year population boom literally birthed a generation.¹¹ The Boomers came close to doubling Australia's population between 1946 and 1964 – from 7 to 12 million.

The ROCK 'N' ROLL age

Elvis Presley, 'Blue suede shoes'
The Beatles, 'Let it be'
Simon & Garfunkel, 'Mrs Robinson'

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines the Baby Boomers as 'those who were born in Australia or overseas during the years 1946 to 1964'.¹² The fertility rate began its rapid rise in 1946, peaking in 1961, and by 1965 it had dropped again to just below the 1946 level.¹³

TIME Person of the Year

1949 Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
1940–45
1952 Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom 1952–current
1961 John F Kennedy, President of the United States 1961–63

Generation X

The Gen X-ers are also clearly demographically defined as those born between 1965 and 1979 inclusive. In 1965 the number of births began to increase from the post-Baby

Boomer low, peaking in the early 1970s before dropping back to another low in 1979. Just to show how solid this definition of Generation X is in Australia, in 1965 there were 223 000 births and after a rise and fall there were, in 1979, again 223 000 births. The peak year was 1972 when there were 268 711 births – a record number of births that stood for more than three decades. By comparison, only in 2007 did Australia set a new birth record of 276 361 even though the population was 60 per cent larger than it was in 1972.¹⁴

The DISCO/PSCHEDELIC/SOUL age

Bee Gees, 'Stayin' alive'
Bob Dylan, 'The times they are a-changin''
James Brown, 'Papa's got a brand new bag'

Originally labelled Baby Busters, Post Boomers or Slackers, only the label Generation X (or X-er) has stuck.

TIME Person of the Year

1971 Richard M Nixon, President of the United States 1969–74
1975 American Women
1979 Ruhollah Khomeini, political leader of the 1979 Iranian
Revolution

Generation Y

The Y-ers are those born between 1980 and 1994 inclusive. Again the definition is demographically reliable. In 1980 the number of births once more began to gradually increase, hitting a peak of 264 151 births in 1992 – at the time the highest number of births since 1972. The births then dropped away through the rest of the 1990s, hitting

the lowest birth rate ever in 2001 (1.7 babies per woman) before beginning a recovery which has lasted the rest of the decade.

The POP/INDIE age

Spice Girls, 'Wannabe'
Madonna, 'Secret'
Nirvana, 'Smells like teen spirit'

Many attempts have been made to give alternative labels to Generation Y, from the trendy 'Millennials' and 'Dot.com Generation', to the more disparaging acronym KIPPERS (Kids In Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings). But the alphabetised theme in naming the generations remains, and so the global label that has stuck is Generation Y.

TIME Person of the Year

1982 The computer
1987 Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, Head of State of the former USSR
1994 John Paul II, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church
1978–2005

Generation Z

As birth rates picked up in 1995, we had the beginnings of Generation Z. Marketers are tempted to begin a generation at a key year like, say, 2000, but there is no demographic or sociological justification for such date picking. The birth rates, in addition to the social changes and trends, give a solid basis to generational definitions.

The SINGER-SONGWRITER age

Guy Sebastian, 'Angels brought me here'
Good Charlotte, 'I don't wanna be in love'
Amy Winehouse, 'Rehab'

Generation Z demographics show the full results of Australia's declining fertility rates of the last few decades. However, the total fertility rate bottomed out at 1.77 (children per woman) in 2001 and the total births have increased every year since then, hitting new all-time records from 2006 with the TFR rising to 1.81. This mini-baby boom followed Peter Costello's urging of Australian couples to 'have one for mum, one for dad and one for the country' – and the promise of a \$3000 baby bonus in 2004!¹⁵ Prior to the mini-baby boom, the government actually increased the baby bonus from \$3000 to \$4000¹⁶ and today it stands at \$5000. Australia's TFR now stands at a relatively high 2.0 babies per woman (nearly back to replacement rates!).¹⁷

TIME Person of the Year

2000 George W Bush, President of the United States 2000–09
2006 You
2008 Barack Obama, President of the United States 2009–
current

Notwithstanding an increase in births in Australia, the Zeds have been born into a time when the TFR is at or below the replacement level of 2.1 on an unprecedented, global scale. In fact 104 countries are either at or below the replacement level.¹⁸

Table 1.1 | Total fertility rate (TFR) in 2000 and today

Country	TFR (2000)	TFR (Today)
Mali	6.89	7.29
Nigeria	5.66	4.91
Sudan	5.47	4.48
Pakistan	4.56	3.60
India	3.11	2.72
Mexico	2.67	2.34
Sri Lanka	1.98	1.99
United States	2.06	2.05
Iceland	2.08	1.90
New Zealand	1.80	2.10
Australia	1.79	2.00
China	1.70	1.79
United Kingdom	1.63	1.66
Germany	1.38	1.41
Italy	1.29	1.31
Russia	1.25	1.41
Japan	1.29	1.21
Singapore	1.16	1.09
Hong Kong	1.27	1.02

Central Intelligence Agency (2009), *The world factbook*, <www.cia.gov/index.html>, accessed 12 February 2009.

In response to declining child populations, governments around the world are offering incentives to encourage couples to have children. The last time governments offered incentives on such a similar scale was just after World War II.

Given the new definition of a generational span (15 years), 2009 marked the end of Generation Z and 2010 the start of the next generation.

Generational labels

Prior to the Baby Boomers, the practice of labelling a generation did not exist. Labels, where they did exist, were limited to a particular span of age, such as ‘this generation of young people’. However, because of the clear demographic impacts of the post-WWII generation, the term ‘Baby Boomer’ entered the vernacular. Sixty years on, this label remains the default term describing the cohort born in the birth-boom years of 1946–64. With the emergence of the Boomer label came the beginnings of a generational nomenclature.

It was inevitable, therefore, that commentators would look for terms to describe subsequent generations. And in the case of the generation following the Boomers perhaps Canadian author Douglas Coupland presented the solution they were looking for. Then just exiting his twenties, Coupland published his first novel, *Generation X: Tales for an accelerated culture*, in 1991. This fictional work explored his generation and – intentionally or otherwise – created a label that stuck. Ironically, the book was about a generation that defied labels – ‘just call us X’, he said. Yet the label remained, spawning the labels for Generations Y and Z also.¹⁹

It is amazing how many labels emerge for each generation, some repeating themselves again and again. The Builders, who lived through the Great Depression and World War II, share many of their generational labels with their parents, the Federation Generation, as they share characteristics: the Veterans, the Pre-War Generation, the GI Generation, the Seniors, the War Generation, Hero Generation and the Golden Oldies.

As illustrated in Table 1.2, the various labels given to Australia’s living generations – the Federation Generation

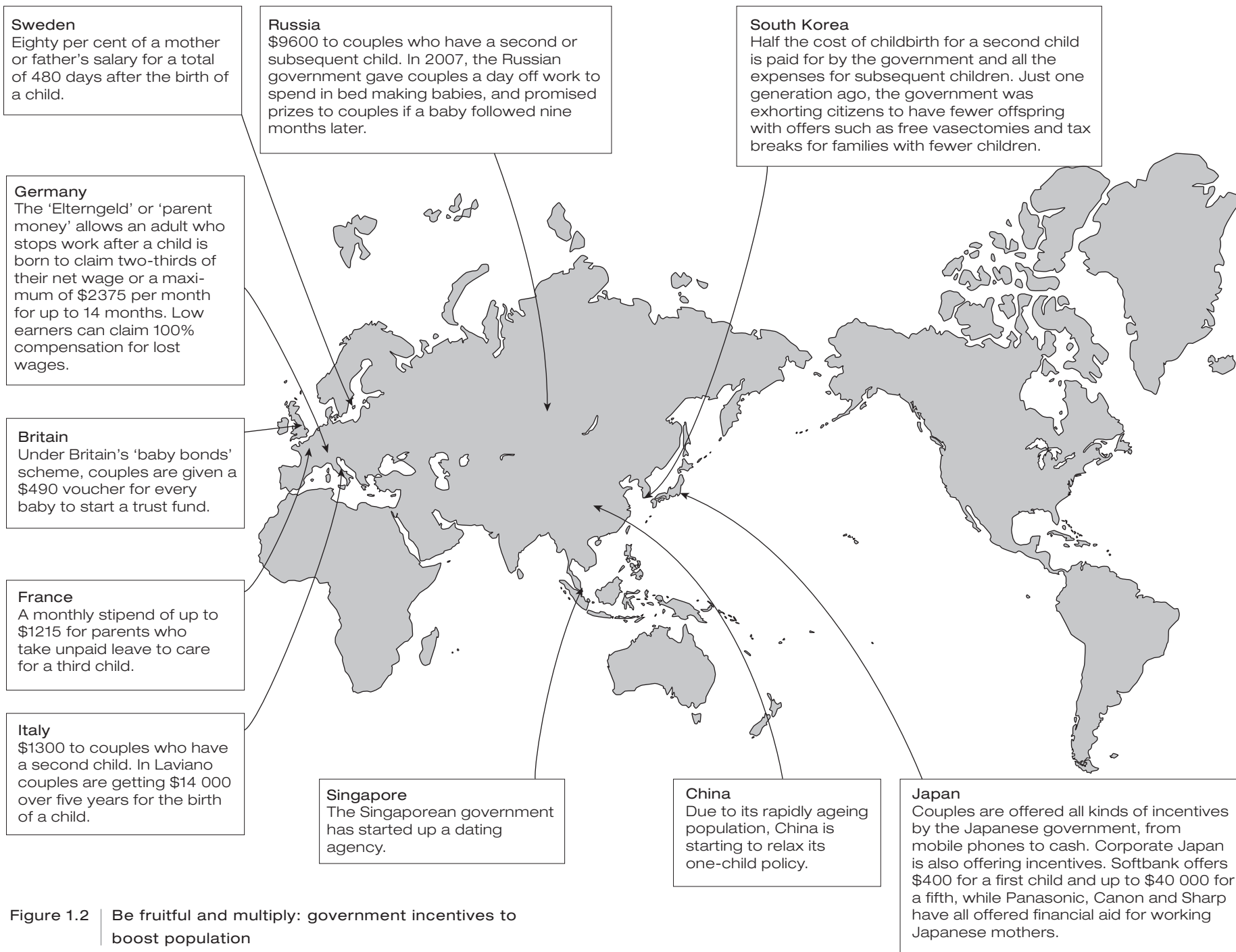


Figure 1.2 | Be fruitful and multiply: government incentives to boost population

Table 1.2 | Labels across the generations

Builders	Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
The lucky generation	The baby boomers	The options generation	The millennials	Zeds (Australian English)
The veterans	Generation Jones (cusp generation)	Post-boomers	Net generation	Zees (American English)
Pre-boomers	The stress generation	Baby busters	Dot.com generation	Also, the millennials
The greatest generation	The sandwich generation	Slackers	Echo boomers	The new millennials
The silent generation (Those who were too young or too old to fight in WWI or WWII)	The new generation	Whiners	iGeneration	Also, iGeneration
The frugal generation	The me generation	MTV generation	Google generation	Also, the Internet generation
The pre-war generation	The love generation	The twenty/thirty-somethings	MySpace generation	Also, the C generation
The Depression generation	The lost generation	The backend boomers	Mypod generation	Also, the code generation
The beat generation	War babies	The doom generation	Nintendo Generation	Also, the content generation
The GI generation	Leading-edge boomers	X-er	The cynical generation	The neo-Disney generation
The seniors	Trailing-edge boomers	The generation after	The connected generation	Generation vista

Builders	Boomers	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z
The war generation	The beatniks	The gap generation	The digital natives	The futuristic generation
Hero generation	The hippies	The generation covered in the stench of hopelessness	Click 'n go kids	The corporations generation
The booster generation	The worst generation ever	Boomerang generation	Generation whY	New silent generation
The conservatives	Now generation	Generation 2000	Generation C	The gamers generation
The golden oldies	TV generation	Generation X men/women	The content generation	Homeland generation
	Spock generation	Also, Generation Jones (cusp generation)	The celebrity generation	The up-ageing generation
	Vietnam generation	The latchkey kids	The code generation	Generation wherefore?
	Disco generation	The 13th generation (America only)	The apathetic generation	Generation comic book movies
	The breakthrough generation	Tweeners	Ygen	Generation Leopard
	Generation gap	The Pepsi generation	Gyen	The aluminium generation
			The houseless generation	The green paper generation

through to Gen Z – reflect the times that have shaped their generational profile. Names given to the Builders conjure images of the war and the Depression; the Boomer labels reflect events such as the population boom following World War II and the shedding of traditional moral codes after the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (the Love Generation and the Lost Generation, for example). For the X Generation it was the material prosperity of the times (the options generation) and the aftermath of the sexual revolution (the Baby Busters), and for Gen Y, the digital age that heralded its birth.

Many of these generational labels can be applied globally – or at least to the developed world and some developing nations – because, as we discussed above, generational commonalities cross global boundaries. Generational labels that have not been adopted globally can often be applied to the generations of other countries. In Finland, the X-ers are derogatorily called ‘Pullamössösukupolvi’ (the Bun Mash Generation) by the Boomers because, according to older generations, they have never experienced any difficulties in their lives, yet complain about their lot. Similarly, the X-ers of Anglophone nations have been called ‘Whiners’, ‘Slackers’ and the ‘Options Generation’, while in France they are referred to as ‘Génération Bof’ because of their fondness for the word ‘bof’ as youth, translated into English to mean ‘whatever’. In Russia they were called ‘a generation of stokers and watchmen’, meaning they took non-challenging jobs in order to have more free time. In reality, the X-ers of Russia, like their Anglo counterparts, entered the workforce at a low point where employment levels were at a high, and so took what jobs they could.

In Finland, the younger generations call the Boomers

‘Kolesterolisukupolvi’ or the ‘Cholesterol Generation’ because of their poor dietary habits. Similarly, the Boomers have been called the ‘Me Generation’ and the ‘Now Generation’ in Anglophone countries.

The Gen Y-ers of Japan are often referred to as ‘freeters’ because so many of them work part-time. In Australia, young people, along with mothers, sustain the part-time workforce, and never before have they been so slow to enter full-time employment. In 1986, eight in ten young people aged between 15 and 24 were engaged in full-time employment compared to only six in ten today.²⁰

Prior to the 20th century, generations and generational labels did not have that global aspect to them. For example, the labels of deceased English generations such as the Arthurian (1433–60) and Elizabethan generations (1541–65) reflect the events and trends of England at the time they were born.

Most of the generational labels listed in Table 1.2 do not apply to the developing and undeveloped countries whose citizens have been held back from the developments that have defined their First World contemporaries. Likewise, many labels of Second and Third World generations do not apply to First World generations. For example, in some Latin American countries, the X-ers have been referred to as the ‘Crisis Generation’ because of the political upheaval experienced by their countries when they were young. In Russia, Generation X-ers have been called ‘the last Soviet children’ because they were the youngest generation to witness the downfall of communism in their country, and the ‘Glasnost–Perestroika Generation’ as they were among the first to adopt the ideals of glasnost and perestroika in post-communist Russia. With seven generations now coexisting,

generational conflict is becoming an increasing problem. In a global survey we conducted on workplace conflict involving 12 countries, a minority (23 per cent) identified gender gaps as a cause of issues in the workplace, and only slightly more (35 per cent) blamed cultural differences. The majority (42 per cent) said that generational gaps were the cause of problems. In the next chapter we take a look at generational angst and some of the situations in which it is manifest.

2 | GENERATIONAL WARFARE

'Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.'

George Orwell

Today, up to seven generations coexist in the home, workforce and community. Therefore, a good understanding of each generation is key to better workplaces, businesses, homes, governments and classrooms, especially when considering how diverse the generations have become. Without an understanding of the times and events that characterised each generation – their attitudes, values, priorities and goals – generational conflict can arise. So how do we gain this understanding? One way is through generational segmentation.

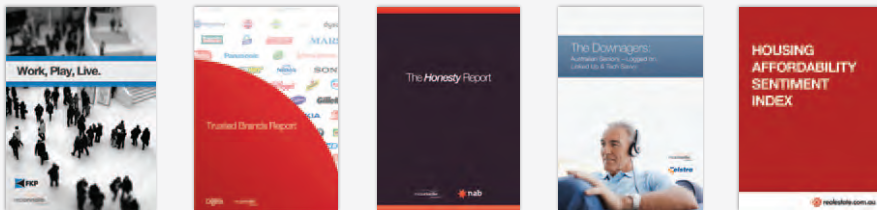
Generational segmentation is the process of analysing the population by its generational cohorts. A generational cohort, as we have seen, is born into and shaped by a particular span of time. Within the Builder, Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y and even Gen Z cohorts, further segments exist. It is in having a good understanding of the generational segments and, where relevant, the sub-segments that exist within these generations that managers, employers, leaders, teachers and marketers can be more effective. Parents, too,

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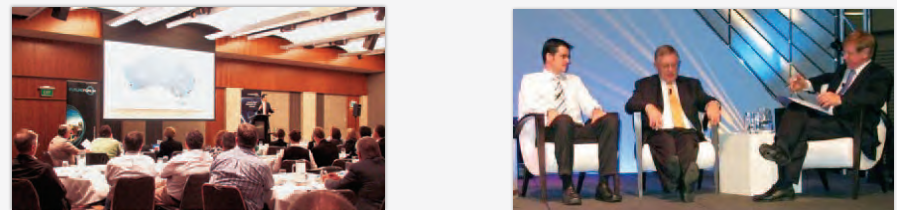
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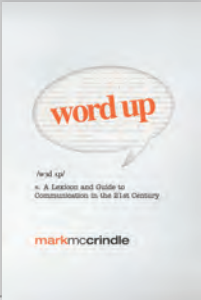
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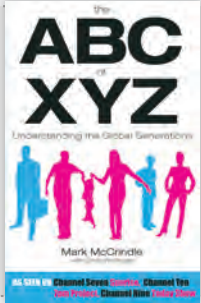


Mark McCrindle deserves a medal. Mapless, he's entered the alien terrains of text-speak, web slang, Gen-Z dialect, among other domains, and returned with a guidebook should we ever lose our way.

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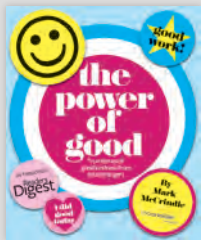


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