

Generational Theory and Home Economics¹: Future Proofing the Profession

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Generational theory has much to offer the home economics profession. This article explains sociocultural generational theory, traces the evolution of home economics informed by generational theory, and considers the implications of generational theory as a mechanism to “future proof” the home economics profession. In particular, insights into the unique traits, strengths, and abilities for the key baby boomer, Generation X, and the millennial generation cohorts are investigated. It is argued that the profession must adapt strategically to harness the potentialities of each generation. Several clear imperatives emerge from the application of generational theory to the home economics profession at this moment in time—the need for (a) harnessing and retaining the professional experience of baby boomers, (b) retaining Generation X and facilitating their shift to the leadership of the profession, and (c) attracting and retaining Generation Y. Strategic initiatives to achieve these imperatives are recommended and examples provided.

Keywords: generational theory; home economics; member retention; leadership; professional development

Home economics is a profession with more than a hundred years of global history. Celebrations for the centennial of the establishment of the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) peaked at the World Congress in 2008, and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences celebrates its centenary in 2009. Given these milestones, which trumpet the longevity of the profession, it is timely to reflect on what could be regarded as one of the defining and enduring influences on the establishment, continued development, and the future of the field—the place and importance of generational theory.

Elsewhere, current or today’s home economics is described as being at a “convergent moment” (Pendergast, 2006), a time of opportunity where several key societal factors are occurring simultaneously. It is argued that these factors serve to provide a moment of alignment of potentially facilitating factors that, when taken together, provide an unprecedented opportunity to re-vision our profession. These convergent factors can be seen as a catalyst for major reform, and include (a) the past century of invention, development, and changes in roles for men and women; (b) consumption and globalization patterns; (c) generational characteristics and the emergence of the millennial generation (MilGen); (d) features of “New Times”; and (e) significant changes in individual and family structures.

Table 1 provides a brief explanation of the key factors. Detailed explanations of these factors can be found in Pendergast (2006).

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to explore all of these elements, *generational theory* has much to offer at this significant moment in the profession

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TABLE 1: Convergent Factors in the Home Economics Profession

<i>Convergent Factor</i>	<i>Brief Explanation</i>
100-Year history of the profession	The past century since the inception of home economics has been one of invention, development, and changes in roles for men and women generally in society. This current decade is unlike any of the 10 before, as it signifies a major shift in society, with the effects of globalization, information and communications technologies, and the loss of enclosure making this decade unlike any previously experienced. It represents a societal paradigm shift.
Consumption and globalization	The global pattern of a divide between the developed and developing countries where around 20% of the world's population consumes 80% of the products and services and the remaining 80% consumes the remaining 20% has created problems for both groups, with the effects of abundance sometimes being described as "affluenza," where the effects of underprovision leads to poverty, poor nutrition, lack of educational opportunity, and more. There is a lack of parity between the globalizers and the globalized.
Generational theory	The sociocultural construction of society based on generations provides a valuable insight into the current issues confronting the home economics profession. The future of the profession lies in the hands of the Y and Z generations, the characteristics of which must be contended with and embraced by the profession if it is to pave its preferred future.
Societal context of the "new times"	The idea of a societal paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity is played out in workplaces, schooling, new literacies, new families, and communities. Given that home economics engages and operates among these contexts, it must embrace and lead the fundamental dimensions of "new times." The Age of Terrorism and the Information Age are facets of the new times.
Family changes	Major changes occurring in individual and family characteristics around the globe. The United Nations identifies four trends that affect families around the globe: changes in family structures, demographic ageing, the rise of migration, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Given that this is the unit around which home economics revolves, it is critical that an understanding of this site as an opportunity to stimulate reform is understood.
The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)	In a recently released document titled "Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability," the importance of the world's 59,000,000 teachers to educate for developing understandings about sustainable development is articulated and strategies for action outlined. It is argued that "the core themes of education for sustainability include lifelong learning, interdisciplinary education, partnerships, multicultural education and empowerment" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 15). The approach urges a multidisciplinary approach, noting that "no one discipline can or should claim ownership of Education for Sustainable Development" (UNESCO, 2005, n.p.). The societal goals of sustainability as presented by UNESCO are environmental stewardship; social equity, justice, and tolerance; and quality of life for all people in this generation and the next—all of which, but particularly the latter, resonate with home economics in the context of both education and as a profession. It seems that there is growing alignment with the intentions of home economics, and this is being recognized at a global level.

and will be the focus of this article. In particular, this article aims to (a) explain generational theory, (b) trace the evolution of home economics informed by generational theory, and (c) consider the implications of generational theory as a mechanism to “future proof” the home economics profession.

The consideration of the profession using the novel generational theory paradigm offers a range of new possibilities for those in the field of home economics to reconfigure their future and that of the profession. This aligns with the profound changes of the present era marked by events of a global scale, the magnitude never before encountered by the human race, including widespread effects of information and communications technologies, climate change, demographic ageing, globalization, economic instability, and terrorism. Therefore, it is valuable to reflect on human patterns over time and to use these insights to predict and to strategically plan for what is currently believed that the future will hold.

GENERATIONAL THEORY: LOCATION, ACTUALITY, AND UNITS

X, Y, and Z. Three letters of the alphabet, in succession. But these letters, when used in the context of generational theory, hold great significance for the sociocultural construction and hence the “mechanics” of contemporary society. As has been so in all previous time, Generation X, Generation Y, and the current birth Generation Z collectively hold the future of the home economics profession, with their impact being felt from the next 5 to 10 years to the subsequent 80 to 100 years. They are and will be the teachers, the academics, the home economists, the leaders, the policy makers, the presidents, and the association members who daily practice their profession. As those currently dominating² members of the profession predominantly of the baby boomer generation gradually retire over the next decade or two, a period of comparable stability—reflecting a relatively stable though progressive era in society—is coming to an end (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Pendergast, 2008). The importance of understanding generations and their effects on the home economics profession is a key concern and must now be critically analyzed and modifiable alternatives prioritized if the profession is to proactively create its destiny.

Several decades ago, Mannheim (1952) developed the core tenets of generational theory that remain relevant even today. These include the concepts of generational location, generation as actuality, and generation units. Generational location is a passive category based on the chronological span of time for the birth years of a cohort of individuals. This location will affect the potential of the generation. As Mannheim explains

belonging to the same generations or age group endows the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. (p. 291)

Generational actuality moves from the passive location designation to consider the way a generation responds to “social changes and how these responses form the persona of the generation” (Donnison, 2007, p. 4). The basic principle is that a

TABLE 2: Generation Units of Generation Y

<i>Generation Unit</i>	<i>Birth Year Range</i>	<i>Age in 2009</i>
Generation Why	1982-1985	24-29
Millennials	1985-1999	11-23
iGeneration	1999-2002	7-10

cohort sharing generational location also shares a set of experiences during their formative years, including a particular set of social and economic conditions. These shared experiences and conditions influence the generation collectively in particular ways that in turn shapes their thinking, values, and beliefs, forming the generational persona. Extending this concept further, the members of the same generation experience events while at similar life stages, with those events occurring during the formative years having a particularly profound impact on the enduring characteristics—traits, values, and beliefs—of the generation.

Generation units are the subgroups within the generation time span, which acknowledges variation within the typically 20- to 22-year generation location span. For example, Generation Y, the most recent generation completing its birth cycle, is made up of three generation units: Generation Why (born 1982-1985), Millennials (born 1985-1999), and iGeneration (born 1999-2002), as presented in Table 2.

Members of the Generation Why unit are on the cusp of Generation X, so share some common traits with that generation; whereas members of the iGeneration are on the cusp of the Z generation, so are likely to exhibit some of the traits typical of that generation.

Generational location, actuality, and units that are integral components of the theory of generations point to the idea of intergenerational differences, exemplified by the traits, values, and belief systems of the various generations. Traits of generations are used to construct common patterns such as attitudes toward work, political behaviors, consumer patterns, qualities in the workplace, and family orientation. These traits, values, and beliefs are defined by demographers, the press and media, popular culture, market researchers, sociologists, and by members of the generation themselves. Demographers and market researchers in particular have used it as a tool for segmentation of the population, with consumer, economic, and political trends often reported using generational strata. Business and organizational publications are sprinkled with generational research findings. It is a sociocultural, broad brush stroke approach rather than an individual focus (Pendergast, 2007). It does not replace or contest psychological, medical, or other paradigms for understanding individuals and groups but sits alongside and complements these frameworks for understanding.

The idea of generations has been popularized in America, and it is widely and increasingly applicable to Anglophones worldwide, that is, those who speak English natively or by adoption and have a cultural background associated with the English language, regardless of ethnic or geographical differences. This spread has been rapidly facilitated by globalization, information and communications technologies, and other features of contemporary society. Recent 20th-century generations still active in the workforce on a massive scale include baby boomers and Generation X, with Generation Y new entrants into the paid work domain. In

this article, the term *millennial* has been chosen as the terminology to represent the cohort because it is the largest and the mainstream subgroup of the generation. As in other reports (see Pendergast, in press), millennial generation has been abbreviated to MilGen, which is a concession consistent with the tendency for the generation to cleverly devise short versions of text as a convenience for short messaging service (SMS) and other technologies, creating new forms of literacy that parallel the emerging communications technologies tools, along the way (Pendergast, 2007).

Generations follow a repeating cycle, with four generational types typically in the following order: prophet, nomad, hero, and artist. In the current cycle, the MilGen is a hero generation. The prophet generation is regarded as a “driven” generation, with clear agendas and purpose. Baby boomers are members of the current prophet generation. The civil rights movement is an example of the type of energy and direction a prophet generation typically exhibits. This is always followed by a nomad generation, which is typified as extremely cynical and often depressed, and a generation whose lack of energy and enthusiasm is a response to the previous prophet generation. Generation X is the current nomad generation, and it is regarded as a pessimistic and depressed generation. The next in the cycle is the hero generation, conventional and committed, usually with respect for authority and with civic pride. The hero generation usually produces some key influential international leaders. The generation following the hero generation is the artists, a generation that is regarded as emotional and indecisive and at the opposite end of the continuum to the hero generation in terms of leadership and initiative.

If Howe and Strauss (2000) are accurate in their cyclic prediction, the millennials are a hero generation, and the full social attention and potential of the generation will start to have an effect from around 2010, as the first of the generation find their way into positions of influence.

Table 3 provides a summary of 20th-century generations. It includes some of the notable occurrences that have influenced the development of the generational psyche that occurred during the formative years of each generation. Events differentiating the formative years of baby boomers include the moon landing, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the 1960s’ social revolution. Events demarcating the formative years of Generation X include the widespread introduction of the contraceptive pill (baby bust), the end of the Cold War, the Thatcher/Reagan/Gorbachev political era, and the rise of media and consumerism.

It is not relevant to use generational theory to compare generations to identify which is “better” than another; rather, this theory highlights the fact that each has its own unique set of influences and generalities and hence qualities and attributes. Salt (2006), an Australian commentator and advisor on consumer, cultural, and demographic trends, agrees that there are pluses and minuses to being born in any generation—what is important is recognizing trends and developing awareness so that as an individual you will not be victim to groups playing on the weaknesses of this group, or as a social or political group you can use this knowledge for powerful purposes. This article advocates the use of generational theory to better understand the home economics profession, its origins, and its future potential and to make informed decisions from this way of knowing as a vehicle to chart a preferred future for the profession. Using generational theory to understand a

TABLE 3: Summary of 20th-Century Generations and Notable Occurrences Experienced During the Birth Period of the Generation

<i>Birth Years</i>	<i>Generation Name</i>	<i>Generation Cycle</i>	<i>Notable Occurrences During Birth Period of the Generation</i>
1901-1924	GI	Hero	World War I
1925-1942	Silent	Artist	Great Depression, World War II
1943-1960	Baby boomer	Prophet	Civil rights movement
1961-1981	Generation X	Nomad	Rise of mass media and consumerism, end of Cold War
1982-2002	Generation Y	Hero	Globalization, information/digital age, age of terrorism

cohort and/or to influence them or to get their endorsement is not new, though using it is a new way to view and to design the future of the home economics profession.

HOME ECONOMICS AND GENERATIONAL PATTERNS

For many people, it is in the school context that they first experience home economics, so this section begins with some insights into those students currently engaged in the schooling context and related generational theory.

The Schooling Sector

Millennials started inhabiting classrooms in around 1988, and the last born of the generation will leave classrooms around 2020. At this very moment, with the exception of schooling systems that commence before age 6, students in schools around the world almost exclusively contain MilGen students (Pendergast, 2005). Beginning around 2008-2010, millennials will share schools with the youngest of the next generation, and the first of this millennium, tentatively named Generation Z, will bring their own generational trends and characteristics to the classroom. The teacher workforce is currently dominated by baby boomers, many of whom are single-career educators with expertise refined over a long and steady period in the profession. This includes many home economists in the paid workforce around the world, as home economics teaching remains the largest single-employment outcome for home economics higher education graduates.

Alongside teacher baby boomers are the Generation Xers, who, by contrast, have typically undertaken a less than linear, singular pathway as a teacher, with many leaving the profession prematurely or conversely entering it after other workforce experiences (Mayer, 2006). It is widely accepted in the teaching profession that the challenge for the teacher workforce in general is to make it appealing to retain Generation X and to attract the MilGen, particularly as the baby boomer generation is approaching retirement (Mayer, 2006). This message resonates with the home economics profession as many young people gain their first taste of home economics when they encounter it in the school curriculum, so it is paramount to recognize the importance of the current generation of home economics teachers and their role in stimulating the interest of their students and of attracting these people to the profession.

TABLE 4: Home Economics Evolution Charted Against Generations

<i>Birth Years</i>	<i>Generation Name</i>	<i>Home Economics Evolution^a</i>	<i>Key Generation Influencing Home Economics Evolution</i>
1901-1924	GI elders	Home economics founded; technical practice with a social mission—sanitation/public health; management and family with a scientific base; highly progressive and revolutionary; complied with first wave of feminism, legitimized and scientized women's work	Progressive
1925-1942	Silent	Shift to greater focus on management and thriftiness as a result of decline in world economy as a result of wars and depression; retained scientific legitimacy	Missionary
1943-1960	Baby Boomer	Loss of social mission as affluence emerged, particularly at the end of this era; focus on personal; consumer explosion in later years	GI, silent
1961-1981	Generation X	Consumerism expanding, feminism (radical) highly critical of home economics—"wife ed 101"; decline in status; heightened attempts at legitimacy typically accepting patriarchal power models	Silent, baby boomer
1982-2002	MilGen	Globalization, postmodernity, lost academic wars such as failed or unconvincing attempts at equalitarianism and transformative practice evident, for instance, in name changes (e.g., human ecology, family, and consumer sciences); department and institutional closures	Baby boomer, Generation X
2002-2024	Generation Z	Reconfiguring profession—"Neo" ^b home economics; re-visioning family forms; ethics and morality; information and communication technology; sustainability	Generation X, MilGen

SOURCE: Modified from Pendergast (2008).

a. Although the home economics evolution presented in this table might be highly contestable by region, it is intended to provide a global trend for home economics.

b. "Neo" has been added to stake the claim that a new direction for home economics is required.

The Generational Evolution of Home Economics

Although the broader teaching profession, including home economics, is known to have this generational challenge, it is also important to reflect on how generations are affecting specifically on the wider home economics profession. One way to commence this process is to consider the evolution of home economics over the last century. Table 4 provides a summary of some of the major shifts in the evolution of home economics aligned with the generational periods. The last column identifies the generation to which the then policy leaders, academics, and decisions makers having the greatest impact on the evolution of the field predominantly belonged. The last row includes predictions related to Generation Z.

Home economics was founded on the basis of public health interests, with a strong technical orientation. This was during the GI birth generation. In the United States, for example, Ellen Swallow Richards (1842-1911) pioneered the field and was elected to the role of first president of the American Home Economics Association in 1909 (Rossiter, 1995). At that time she was in her 66th year, and she sits precisely on the cusp

of the “Gilded” and “Progressive” birth generations. The Gilded generation is so named after the gold rush era, whereas the Progressive is self-explanatory and connects with what has become known as the Progressive Era in U.S. history. This was an era of rapid development, particularly in areas of public good such as public health. Similarly, the International Federation of Home Economics, established in 1908, was founded to bring together international colleagues who had etched out fields of study that contributed to the public health and family agenda. Like the American Home Economics Association, influential leaders were members of the Gilded and Progressive generations. The first president of IFHE was M. Georges Python (Switzerland), who was also the founder of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1889. He served for four Congresses, from 1908 to 1927 (IFHE, 2008a).

As the century progressed, home economics gradually lost the public health initiative, shifting to individual management performance, and a general loss of social mission. This reflected a decline in the world economy as a result of World War I and depression, so thriftiness and economics were favored, while still retaining the legitimacy of the scientific base. Skills were highly valued. During the baby boomer period, affluence precipitated a shift from the previously valued social mission to consumerism, and hence a lessening of priority on the traditional skill base of the profession. As the century continued and progress typical of the modernist world led to innovations, technology, mass production, and globalization, the general consumer force made the traditional skills base of the profession barely relevant. Home economics was heavily criticized during the 1960s and 1970s (Pendergast, 2001), particularly by radical feminists who argued that the field was limiting women to traditional and conservative life roles. One particularly caustic critic was Attar (1990), who condemned home economics as trivializing and devaluing the education of girls. In her book *Wasting Girl's Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics*, she captured the general criticism leveled at the field. This was a time when women's rights, equal opportunity, and the newly available birth control pill (in Western cultures) influenced roles, rights, relationships, and responsibilities. On reflection, this era has turned out to be a time of unprecedented demise for the profession, and this continued into the 1980s and 1990s as the field struggled to find a niche in this challenging environment. This is evident in measures such as a decline in tertiary entrance scores for students interested in studying in the field, closure of tertiary programs along with entire departments and faculties, and removal of the home economics curriculum from public and private middle and secondary schools. Responses from the profession have included shifts to design, technology, and/or ecological approaches, revisiting management as the core, arguing that well-being is really the focus, and, recently, a concerted effort to align even more closely with consumerism and the needs of the family in a world where family values are not privileged over those of economic rationalism. Renaming the subject has been endeavored repeatedly across the century with undocumented benefit. von Schweitzer (2006) suggested that such changes will in all likelihood in time be proven to be of temporal value and “just a concession to the spirit of the times” (p. 85).

Contemporary Home Economics

In the home economics profession around the world, there are some silent, many baby boomer and X generations, and a few MilGen members. There will probably be some GI generation members as well. The paid workforce currently

TABLE 5: Characteristics of Baby Boomer and Generation X

	<i>Baby Boomer (1943-1960)</i>	<i>Generation X (1961-1981)</i>
Major influences	Family and education	Media, AIDS, nuclear disaster
Entertainment	Television	Multiple TV channels, VCR, Nintendo
Communication	Touch-tone phones, calculators	Mobile phones, beepers, laptops
Spending styles	Buy now pay later—with plastic	More cautious—pessimistic
Value	Regularity, predictability	Security
Work ethic	“It pays to work hard”—workaholics	Fun, want challenges
Connections	Like to work alone, long hours	Satisfying teamwork
Authority	Rebellious	Negative attitude to authority
Social	Little tolerance for social differences	More tolerance for social differences

has four distinct generations, each with its own values, work and communications styles, leadership expectations, and much more (Allen, 2004). Most of those in the paid workforce will be from two generations, baby boomer and Generation X, with baby boomers dominating the professional leadership positions (Rodriguez, Green, & Ree, 2003). Table 5 provides a summary of some of the key characteristics of the baby boomer and X generations.

These characteristics, although not universally so, highlight the generational pattern with regard to work, family, authority, and society between the baby boomer and Generation X members. Differences in comfort levels working in teams, for instance, have an effect on operational aspects of any profession and the ways in which the profession has developed.

As previously noted, the baby boomer generation is currently dominating the modus operandi of the profession. This reflects the general pattern for professional association groups across a wide range of interest areas (Brooks, 2006). That is, the leadership roles are dominated by people aged in their late-40s or older. These leaders value regularity and predictability; they prefer to work alone, to draw on other experts, and to develop expert knowledge in their field. Their work ethic is one of high commitment and hard work, with a preparedness to invest long hours, often at night and on weekends. They are likely to be career home economists who have gradually risen to positions of authority over a career focused primarily in the same field. The first-born of this generation are entering their retirement years, and for a profession such as home economics that relies on volunteerism as the basis for much of its professional leadership, there exists a common pattern of sliding from the paid to the unpaid workforce and retaining leadership roles. This is often compounded by a lack of willing or indeed available replacements from subsequent generations. This lengthens the potential impact of this generation on the field.

Generation X professionals are occasionally in leadership roles in the home economics profession at this time. Faber (2001) has identified six characteristic values of Generation X in terms of orientations to work and life:

- An orientation toward individual rather than group identification
- Little loyalty to organizations and institutions
- A preference for leisure over work
- Negative attitudes toward authority and hierarchy
- Pessimistic views toward both individual and financial prospects for the future
- More tolerance for social differences than older generations

This is not entirely consistent with Tulgan (2000), who indicates that with regard to work, Generation X value and are motivated by

- A sense of belonging and teamwork versus an orientation toward individual
- The ability to learn new things versus a preference for leisure
- Autonomy and work entrepreneurship
- Security
- Flexibility
- Feedback
- Short-term rewards

Generational preferences for leadership style constitute a very important comparison to make between the baby boomers and Generation X. Rodriguez et al. (2003) found in a comparative study of 805 baby boomer and Generation X members that on a range of work-related leadership preferences there were considerable differences. With respect to fulfillment, Generation X respondents seek challenging tasks accomplished within short time frames, such as a workday, whereas baby boomers seek challenging tasks accomplished over a longer period, such as several days. With respect to the use of technology, Generation X prefer surfing and buying using the internet, whereas baby boomers use the telephone to compare prices. Generation X respondents prefer to work alone with flexible hours, whereas baby boomers prefer to work alone with regular, scheduled hours. Generation X prefer a portable lump sum on retirement, whereas baby boomers desire a retirement plan with benefits. Importantly, transformational leadership that has been regarded as something of a panacea for home economics reform is regarded as being best suited to baby boomers and not an appropriate model to motivate Generation X (Rodriguez et al., 2003). Instead, innovative, flexible, and inspirational leadership is respected by Generation X.

Members of Generation X are much more affected by the transition to communications technologies that is a dominant force currently shaping the MilGen than are baby boomers, many of whom see information and communications technologies as peripheral rather than mainstream to their psyche. Generation X members need to be retained and nurtured by the profession—they are, after all, the emerging leaders. This is a challenge to the home economics profession as this group is less single minded about their career aspirations than baby boomers, and hence many will not persevere with slow-moving promotional opportunities or lack of recognition in a field that is devalued generally in society. Succession planning to engage Generation X in leadership roles is essential, as is a shift from the “waiting in line” mentality that assigns leadership to those who have “earned” the status of such roles by waiting in queues through step-by-step promotions and other linear mechanisms. There is a risk that in this profession, as in others where leadership through volunteerism and long-earned experience dominates, the baby boomer generation will continue to remain in leadership and policy development roles long after Generation X are ready for these challenges. What is needed is a balanced approach, where proactive strategies to appeal to younger generations while retaining older generations is prioritized (Brooks, 2006). This is a relatively typical pattern across many professions, particularly those reliant on a model of volunteerism (Brooks, 2006). For home economists working in the teaching workforce there is a much larger cohort of baby boomers, with Generation X leaving the profession prematurely. This is a global pattern, making the challenge for the teacher workforce generally to make it appealing to retain Generation X and to attract the MilGen (Mayer, 2006).

The differences between the characteristics of the baby boomer and the Generation X are regarded as relatively slight when both are compared with the

MilGen, which represents a vast generational shift. Because of this difference, the MilGen is regarded as being “unlike any other youth generation in living memory” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4). The reality is that the long-term future of the home economics profession lies in the hands—and at the click—of the MilGen. In the short term, Generation X professionals need to be retained and moved into leadership positions, and MilGen professionals need to be attracted and retained. The nature of the leadership needs to change to be increasingly consultative, participative, and ideally move toward a coaching style, which is relationship based rather than positional. These imperatives are fundamental to the future of most professions and are generally more thoroughly understood and acted on than in the home economics profession. For instance, the emergency management field with a heavy reliance on volunteerism has identified the need to change generational work practices, noting that “adaptation will be required both in the practice of emergency management and also in the professional development of the sector to align with these shifting values” (Wajs-Chaczko, 2008, p. 61). The tourism industry similarly has demonstrated a commitment to better understand generational differences to ensure both a strong workforce and a strong tourism market. A recent study by the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation of more than 8,500 Generation Y travelers, for example, revealed the following key features about Generation Y travelers. They are traveling more often, exploring more destinations, spending more on travel, booking more over the Internet, experience hungry, information hungry, intrepid travelers, and getting a lot out of their travel (Richards, 2007). As the World Tourism Organization (WTO) notes, “the unique motivations of young travellers makes this niche market extremely important to the key objectives of the global tourism agenda” (WTO, 2008, p. i). Generation Y travelers generate an estimated 109 billion euros annually (Richards, 2007), providing a strong impetus for baby boomer and Generation X tourism owners and operators to understand the unique characteristics of these customers and potential members of the workforce and to adapt practices and culture appropriately.

Getting to Know the MilGen

The oldest of the millennial generation are now around 27 years of age, the youngest about 6 years old. MilGens are characterized as computer and Internet competent and multitaskers, with a global perspective. They respond best to visual language and are heavily influenced by the multiple forms of media. They love the thrill of interactive games, and for them time is measured in seconds. They have a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. They live in a world where globalization and fast capitalism are the norm. According to theorists predicting the impact of the MilGen, it is regarded as a generation with enormous potential—a youth generation that will “quit talking and start doing” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 5).

A key feature of the millennial generation is that they have grown up in a time where computer technology is embedded into all aspects of their lives (The World Bank, 2007). They are what Prensky (2005/2006) describes as “digital natives.” This contrasts dramatically to their parents’ generation (often baby boomers who have delayed childbirth to first establish a career) and those before them, who experience computers as a “new” form of technology rather than the norm. Donnison

(2004) concurs that there is no doubt that information and communications technology has had a huge impact on the development of millennial character, suggesting that they are

technosavvy, image driven, develop graphics skills before literacy skills, do not think in a linear fashion but rather think non-linear, loopy, in hyperlink hopscotch fashion. Time, for them, is measured in microseconds and survival is of the fastest, not the fittest. They have a strong sense of immediacy, a desire for instant gratification, and a low boredom threshold. They learn by interaction and doing rather than sitting and listening and prefer to experience and feel rather than think and analyse. (p. 23)

Social and economic conditions, dominated by technological innovation, particularly in the information and communication domain, along with globalization, changes in household formation, and a shift to portfolio careers based on knowledge economies have shaped the nature of the young people who inhabit the schools and workplaces around the world today and into the future (The World Bank, 2007).

Although the key events and conditions shaping millennials are yet to be confirmed, it is likely to include the following factors: the digital revolution (information and communications technologies such as the Internet, WWW, e-mail, chat lines, blogs, SMS texting), globalization and fast consumerism, school violence (ranging from bullying to mass slayings), the age of terrorism (including the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, Bali bombings, War on Terrorism), climate change and sustainability challenges, demographic ageing of the world population, and membership of the most education-minded generation in history.

According to Howe (2006), who along with Strauss literally “wrote the book” on the millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000), there are seven core traits that mark the MilGen as different from the two preceding generations. Millennials consider themselves to be special, are sheltered, are confident, are team oriented, have conventional hopes and dreams, are pressured, and are achieving (Howe, 2006).

What is interesting about millennials is that unlike the two generations (Generation X and baby boomers) preceding them that have typically been defined with negative youth trends, they have the potential to be an optimistic and positive generation. This represents a swing in values and attitudes that is unlike any generational shift of those groups alive today (Salt, 2006).

There is a growing corpus of theory on the work practices, values, and motivators of the MilGen. Boomer (2007) regards one of the priorities for attracting and retaining MilGen employees to be embracing a “training and learning culture” within the profession. Signs of the need for such a culture have emerged in the later years of the Generation X entering into the workforce, but now are clearly required for MilGen. According to Boomer (2007), such a culture has seven key requirements: (a) a champion—a leader with vision who values education; (b) a director of learning—a designated role responsible for developing and implementing specific educational activities; (c) fostering relationships—throughout the profession, to ensure knowledge transfer and intellectual capital is maintained; (d) accountability—delegating roles and responsibilities, based on merit not seniority; (e) facilities—educational facilities that encourage and motivate learning; (f) learning management systems—computerized and accessible to the learner;

and (g) budget resources—allocating necessary resources to develop a learning culture.

For the MilGens this training and learning culture is paramount, and furthermore, they prefer that it is delivered with the best technology and “do not want to work overtime” (Boomer, 2007, p. 22). MilGen professional employees are reluctant to spend countless hours in structured routine scheduled work and then participate in after work hours and weekends to “get ahead.” They are demanding a balance between work and family and achieve this through flexible work practices such as telecommuting and hours that suit family. They are resentful and unwilling to comply with expectations imposed on them to sacrifice weekend time to attend conferences and work-related events. This is a direct product of witnessing the negative consequences of such behaviors of their baby boomer and Generation X parents and family members, who have carried dual shifts for little benefit (Huntley, 2006).

USING GENERATIONAL THEORY TO FUTURE PROOF THE HOME ECONOMICS PROFESSION

It is clear that there will be three main generations overlapping for a considerable period into the foreseeable future, as home economics professionals and potentially as members of associations and professional bodies. Baby boomer, Generation X, and the MilGen each offer unique strengths and abilities, but the profession must adapt strategically to harness these potentialities. A blend is required.

It is imperative that the professional experience of the baby boomer generation is harnessed and retained. According to researchers, they are likely to continue to contribute and to participate in the profession, as long as they remain continuously involved in association communities. Ways this might happen are through mentoring programs, special interest groups, and other yet to be devised opportunities (Brooks, 2006). It is timely to be reminded that the generational differences between the baby boomer generation and Generation X are far less than between these generational traits and values and those of Generation Y. Hence, there are two clear imperatives that emerge from the application of generational theory to the home economics profession at this moment in time: the need for (a) retaining Generation X and facilitating their shift to the leadership of the profession and (b) attracting and retaining Generation Y.

Allen (2004) admonishes employers and leaders to act quickly, arguing that “changes are needed” to ensure this is effectively achieved, as much of the evolution of the current environments of workplaces, professional organizations, expectations of leadership, communication channels, and other features have been established during the baby boomer era and hence are best suited to a generation moving out of the workplace rather than those to be retained and attracted. Brooks (2006), a researcher commissioned to investigate membership of professional associations by the William E. Smith Institute for Association Research, points out that the way to appeal to and retain younger generations is through proactive strategies such as tangible member services, high levels of accountability to members, identifiable career advantages to membership, a sense of professional community, and opportunities to serve within associations.

Employing the insights that generational theory provides is a useful strategy for positioning the profession, thereby making progress toward future-proofing the profession.

The idea of future-proofing is one that has been adopted as a strategic direction by the IFHE, as articulated in the position paper *Home Economics in the 21st Century*, where future-proofing is defined as “anticipating future developments to minimize negative impacts and optimize opportunities” (IFHE, 2008b, p. 5). This is stated as a clear focus for the IFHE for the coming decade. The following sections introduce strategies for achieving these imperatives.

Strategies for Retaining Generation X

As detailed in preceding parts of this article, Generation X differs from the baby boomer generation in several important ways, including a tendency to move between jobs, with little loyalty to organizations and institutions. This has implications for the stability of the home economics profession, particularly when it may be vulnerable and/or devalued by those in positions of power. Retention of Generation X, both in the profession and as members of professional organizations, is a priority. Furthermore, although the transition of leadership may be assumed to occur by some sort of natural order, some in the generational theory community believe that it is likely that baby boomers will retain leadership roles well beyond their retirement from the paid workforce and well after Generation X members are ready for the challenges of leadership. This is partly because baby boomers dominate in terms of sheer number. Being a much larger cohort than Generation X, there are simply many more and they claim seniority based on time and experience, so where this is true, facilitating the leadership shift to Generation X will need to be undertaken strategically and intentionally. Furthermore, the style of the leadership needs to shift from directing and authoritative to be increasingly consultative and participatory. Coaching and mentoring models resonate powerfully with members of Generation Y. Members of Generation X are more likely to have these desirable leadership qualities. Hence, the shift to Generation X leadership is an important part of the renewal and adaptation phase of the profession.

Table 6 lists the Generation X work values and alongside suggestions for effective strategies for the home economics profession.

Strategies for Attracting and Retaining MilGen

Research points out that commitment to professional work is a function of age, and Generation Y members are yet to reach the age at which professional engagement is likely to broadly take effect (Brooks, 2006). Nevertheless, planning is imperative, so that the profession is ready for the change in age and commitment of its members and potential members. There is a growing understanding of what it takes to attract MilGens into a career pathway, profession, or professional organization. The top three motivators for MilGens are meaningful work that makes a difference to the world, working with committed coworkers who share their values, and meeting their personal goals (Allen, 2004).

It is not certain whether these motivators will also serve to retain the MilGen. Certainly, MilGens are known to be loyal to their professions but not necessarily to separate associations, companies, or groups (Turetsky, 2006). What is well known

TABLE 6: Generation X Values and Motivators With Home Economics Strategies

<i>Generation X Work Values and Motivators</i>	<i>Suggested Strategies for the Home Economics Profession to Consider</i>
Sense of belonging and teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the vision of the profession/organization as a basis for shared understanding. There should be clearly articulated plans, teams, and operational approaches. • Generation X must be positioned as the leaders of the profession.
Ability to learn new things	<p>Establish a training and learning culture (Boomer, 2007) with the following characteristics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 A champion—a leader with vision who values education 2 A director of learning—a designated role responsible for developing and implementing specific educational activities 3 Fostering relationships—throughout the profession, to ensure knowledge transfer and intellectual capital is maintained 4 Accountability—delegating roles and responsibilities, based on merit not seniority 5 Facilities—educational facilities that encourage and motivate learning 6 Learning management systems—computerized and accessible to the learner 7 Budget resources—allocating necessary resources to develop a learning culture
Autonomy and work entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow individuals to manage as much time as possible and do not change plans abruptly.
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include opportunities for fun, relaxation, and flexibility. Generation X regard this as better security than financial security.
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish flexible working hours, job sharing, telecommuting capacities. • Do not run meetings, conferences, and events on weekends or at night. Do have daytime events that are short and can be completed flexibly if necessary.
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage mentoring and coaching practices. • Have regular meetings and frequent feedback using available technologies as a preference to face-to-face frequent meetings with limited agendas. • Feedback should focus on the broader picture not minutiae and detail
Short-term rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide specific constructive feedback on performance that is structured around clear outcomes.

at this stage about the MilGen is that they realize that although they are the best-educated generation in human history, they will “either have to wait a long time for promotions or need to move on to get more experience and corporate responsibility” (Turetsky, 2006, p. 24) because there are so many baby boomers remaining in the workforce, and Generation X ahead of them. In Table 7, these three motivators, combined with key generational traits and values, are used to provide a basis for suggested strategies for the home economics profession. This is not an exhaustive list but a sample of the kind of possibilities that must be used to make the profession viable for the MilGen to consider.

TABLE 7: MilGen Values and Motivators With Home Economics Strategies

<i>MilGen Work Values and Motivators</i>	<i>Suggested Strategies for the Home Economics Profession to Consider</i>
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating flexible working hours, job sharing, telecommuting. • Opportunity for part-time commitments to individual projects. • Conduct meetings, conferences, and events during work days. • Provide virtual meeting opportunities.
Networking and communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize the latest available communications technologies such as Web-based discussion forums, SMS, iPods. • Introduce an e-journal and other forms of e-communication as the professional “face” of home economics. • Respond to communications quickly.
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish mentoring models that focus on individual development. • Use the time span of 5 years for career planning.
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for individuals to make a difference—real capacity to action dreams. • Have high levels of morality and ethical standards. • Provide self-guided online workshops and the like.
Education—lifelong learner and personal growth	<p>Establish a training and learning culture (Boomer, 2007) with the following characteristics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 A champion—a leader with vision who values education 2 A director of learning—a designated role responsible for developing and implementing specific educational activities 3 Fostering relationships—throughout the profession, to ensure knowledge transfer and intellectual capital is maintained 4 Accountability—delegating roles and responsibilities, based on merit not seniority 5 Facilities—educational facilities that encourage and motivate learning 6 Learning management systems—computerized and accessible to the learner 7 Budget resources—allocating necessary resources to develop a learning culture
Authentic experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect theory with practice and ensure a global perspective. • Provide incentives that align with the real world. • Prioritize personal and family health and well-being.
Collaborative teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use collaborative teaming as a basis for work tasks and structure these into projects. • Provide resources based on collaborative teams. • Facilitate leadership at team level. • Conduct collaborative teaming training programs.
Instant results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from function-based work to project-based work. This might mean restructuring committees and the like away from function to specific tasks. • Provide recognition and increased responsibility for results well received.
Entrepreneurial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for creativity and challenge—roles must be seen as important and as being valued. • Encourage initiatives that have financial benefits for high-performing members, such as royalties, dividends, bonuses. • Encourage members to make their own opportunities for advancement. • Provide a pay-for-performance system. This can mean that those teams that are performing should be resourced, whereas those that are underperforming should receive no support.

TABLE 7: (continued)

<i>MilGen Work Values and Motivators</i>	<i>Suggested Strategies for the Home Economics Profession to Consider</i>
Balance work and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlike baby boomer and Generation X, family comes first, so workplaces need to be family friendly, for example, provision of childcare facilities and a tolerant attitude to children. • Conferences and meetings should include family and provide childcare. • Programs established that are geared toward health of Generation Y and their family.
Multiple pathways—nonlinear thinkers Technologically savvy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be seeking opportunities to diversify. • Looking for opportunities to move in nonlinear pathway • Access to information must be immediate and 24/7. • Internet is a main interface for communication.

To maximize the potential benefits of a multigenerational home economics profession, effective communication is paramount to facilitate the many generational differences that abound (White, 2006). Recently, members and leaders of the IFHE have demonstrated a commitment to rejuvenating the profession for the benefit of all three generations. Examples of positive adaptations to future proof the profession and engage the MilGen include the launch of a new electronic or e-journal (*International Journal of Home Economics*); establishment of the Young Professionals Network with representation on the executive committee of the Federation; meetings, discussions, and decision making using electronic media such as e-mail, Skype, WikiSpaces, and constantly emerging Internet-based interfaces; the refinement and relaunching of the IFHE Web site with instant updates; launch of the IFHE position paper, *Home Economics in the 21st Century* (IFHE, 2008b); launch of the book documenting and celebrating the history of the profession, *100 Years of the International Federation of Home Economics, 1908-2008* (IFHE, 2008a); including a keynote address focusing on generational theory and home economics at the 2008 World Congress (presenter); and featuring generational strata in the Linking the Loop electronic exhibition of home economists defining their profession at the World Congress. Additional planned initiatives include the establishment of a mentoring program, the development of a training and learning culture incorporating the seven core characteristics, and greater visibility and more opportunities to identify meritorious home economists based on factors other than service and time spent, such as public profile and popularity. These initiatives show evidence of the capacity for the profession to adapt and the existence of the capacity for ongoing reform as new generations with new attitudes and values enter the profession.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The home economics profession has now entered its sixth generation. It is characterized by a multigenerational cohort of professionals with the greatest numbers of members and the most leadership roles held by baby boomers. Each generation brings to the field predictable traits, values, and beliefs, along with skills, attributes, capacities, and preferred modus operandi directly reflecting their generational location. If the profession of home economics is to survive and

thrive, there must be a committed effort to adapt the incentives, the motivators, the leadership models, and the overall culture of the profession to better connect with the X and Y generations of young professionals. This article has identified key strategies to retain Generation X members and facilitate their shift to new styles of leadership roles and to attract and retain Generation Y professionals. The profession is responsible for making its own future and can be informed and guided by generational theory, drawing on its insights as a catalyst for major reform.

NOTES

1. *Home economics* is used as an umbrella term to capture all preferred titles and subdisciplines of the field.

2. This refers to the position holders in the profession, such as presidents and executive members which are heavily biased by age towards the baby boomer generation.

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