

# Governing Energy

## Acculturation

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Cross-cultural interaction has been a subject addressed by this author as well as a host of others. Google the term “cross culture” will generate almost 500 million hits. Many see this issue as a problem to solve. A collision between cultures where perhaps one will dominate over the other.

Western societies are faced with the imminent retirement of the so-called Baby Boom generation, those born after the last world war until about 1964.<sup>1</sup> The oil and gas industry refers to this process as the “Big Crew Change.”<sup>2</sup>

The Boomers are to be replaced by the Millennials. Steeped in social media, video games and tablets the conventional view is that this new generation is the polar opposite to those who will train them. Organizations are rightfully concerned at the potential disruptions this transition may drive. Concerns include safety as well as possible negative impacts on shareholder value.

Perhaps these anxieties are overblown. The news often reports that kidnap victims or hostages bond with the abductors over time. Perhaps this is the natural tendency we all have towards self-preservation and attempts to make our daily lives more pleasant. Never having been in this situation, this author cannot comment on the motivations of those who find themselves so challenged.

The point being, humans adapt. We have seen this phenomenon repeatedly throughout history. Individuals and societies often adopt traits from others that they find useful, pleasant or economically valuable.

Hypothesis: the collision of two the cultures, the old and the new will result in the cultural modification of both through the adaption and/or borrowing of traits between the two. Cultures *merge* as a result of prolonged contact. This process is called acculturation.<sup>3</sup>

This is not a new development. Boomers have influenced the previous culture since their inception when they overran the elementary school system, changed the way the culture looks at social issues, etc. Boomers are now having an acculturation type impact on retirement.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://geography.about.com/od/populationgeography/a/babyboom.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://europe.theoil drum.com/node/2369>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acculturation>

Industry can take solace because acculturation should drive a new culture with perhaps the best traits of both the old and the new. This will not happen automatically and acculturation can be managed.

About one hundred and fifty years ago, Alfred Tennyson wrote, "The old order changeth yielding place to new . . ." <sup>4</sup> Mortality is an undeniable part of the human condition.

Is acculturation a biological or physiological trait that assures human survival? Perhaps a question for another forum, but human behavior suggests that transition from one generation to another is a well-established part of our nature.

The collision between the old and the new need not be injurious. It is refreshing and one that can rejuvenate an organization. As with other functions of the organization, if management can channel this energy it may attain a complete advantage.

A new corporate culture will emerge in the near future. Hopefully, it will be a combination of the best of both.

### **How will you organization attain value from the coming cultural collision?**

#### **About the Author**

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the CEO of Knowledge Ops, Inc.; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/404311-the-old-order-changeth-yielding-place-to-new-and-god>