

Generic Abilities as Rank Ordered by Baby Boomer and Generation X Physical Therapists

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PURPOSE: Recent books and seminars suggest that generational differences can impact the classroom and workplace. This study investigates how two groups of physical therapists (PTs), Baby Boomers (born 1945-1960) and Generation Xers (born 1961-1980), rank order the importance of the generic abilities. The generic abilities have been widely used as an indicator of professional behavior in the classroom and the clinic. **SUBJECTS:** 400 PTs from WI, IA, and IL were identified from the 2003 APTA state membership lists by selecting every 10th name.

METHODS: Each person received a survey asking them to rank order the importance of the 10 generic abilities. Return rate was 48%, with final total of 172 usable surveys; 67 from Baby Boomers and 106 from Generation Xers. A Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS: Significant differences in the median rank scores ($p < 0.05$) were found for three individual generic abilities: responsibility, commitment to learning, and stress management. However, these differences did not result in a difference of the overall rank order of the full list of generic abilities between Baby Boomers and Generation X PTs. Both groups ranked the importance of generic abilities from most to least important as: critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal communication, communication skills, professionalism, responsibility, commitment to learning, effective use of time and resources, use of constructive feedback, and stress management.

CONCLUSIONS: No difference was found between the rank order of the importance of generic abilities by the two generations. However, when this current rank order of generic abilities was compared with the original rank order published in 1995, a notable difference was seen. Critical thinking and problem solving moved to the top of the list.

RELEVANCE: These findings suggest there has been more change in the perceived importance of generic abilities as the PT profession has evolved rather than differences between generations.

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