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## **Baby Boomers and the Lost Generation: On the discursive legitimacy of generations at work**

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We present a critical examination of generations within conversations about age at work, focusing on Baby Boomers and the Lost Generation. Whilst not pre-defining these groups, Baby Boomers are broadly seen as a group in mid / later life, the oldest of whom might be expected to be nearing retirement; the Lost Generation are seen as a group of young people unable to secure jobs during the economic downturn. We utilise an empirically innovative e-research approach to untangle ways in which understandings of generations are discursively legitimated via Web 2.0 media. Applying Vaara et al's (2006) notion of strategies of discursive legitimation, we unpack the legitimation of generations overall and these two generations in detail. We analyze how generational categories are constructed and deployed in debates regarding work entitlement and responsibility, found to be major tensions within the battle for discursive legitimacy of these groups.

We explore the discursive strategies deployed as different voices seek to establish work entitlement whilst also assigning responsibility within conversations about age at work. For example, while moral justifications are used regarding both groups, the outcomes proposed are rather different. For Baby Boomers, the focus is on personal economic struggle with increased reliance on governmental support postulated. For the Lost Generation, broader societal damage (including social unrest) is forecast if the claim to entitlement is not satisfied. Similarly, responsibility for the issues associated with each generation is variously allocated. Baby Boomers are more vigorously assigned responsibility for their own, and others', problems. In contrast, the Lost Generation sometimes appear to have also lost any possibility of taking responsibility through, for example, being compared to children or disobedient dogs.

Given the widely protected legal status of age, the implications of debates surrounding generations and generational differences are significant in shaping understandings of age in employment and unemployment contexts.

### Reference

Vaara, E., Tienari, J., and Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789-810.

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