



# Technology & Vocational Assessments:

A generational perspective

By: Nicole Koss, BA, CVP, RRP, RVP

## CAVEWAS Corner

*Dear fellow colleagues and readers, here is our most recent contribution to CAVEWAS Corner.*

*As many of you know, CAVEWAS (Canadian Assessment, Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Society) is a member society of VRA Canada, serving in large part to represent and support the professional and developmental needs of vocational evaluators as well as professional rehab personnel specializing in work adjustment of injured workers and the like. In this section, you will find current and candid articles authored by CAVEWAS members, non-members (and future members alike) that will share, discuss, and communicate with you developments and changes affecting our membership; amongst them issues of best practice, professional development and designation, as well as industry trends.*

*We hope you continue to find the content in this section stimulating, motivating, and informative and we encourage your ongoing participation and contributions.*

*Enjoy!*

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*If you are a CAVEWAS member and have any ideas, opinions or thoughts relevant to this section and you would like to share, discuss, and communicate them in the next issue, please contact: Jeff Cohen at [jcohen@vocationalalternatives.com](mailto:jcohen@vocationalalternatives.com) We also encourage you to join our group on LinkedIn.*

Technology is a part of our everyday lives. As vocational evaluators, it is important to think about when it is appropriate to use technology with our clients and consider the impact of doing so.

*"We need to understand our client before choosing the assessment tools. There are generational influences that can significantly affect a client's comfort with technology."*

For the first time ever, we are faced with four generations working together in the same environments. Each generation is equipped with completely different skill-sets and expectations of the working world. Regardless of which generational cohort a person belongs to, one thing cannot be denied: technology plays an integral role in today's job market. Workers need to be technologically literate in order to succeed. Finding the right job fit is no easy task, which is why vocational rehabilitation counsellors and professionals alike often turn to a vocational evaluator

for assistance. A vocational assessment will identify potentially suitable job options and identify the steps for reintegration into the workforce. Using the trait-factor theory (Parsons, 1909; Williamson, 1939), the vocational evaluator will examine a person's academic skills, aptitudes, intellectual functioning, interests, work experience, and transferable skills and match the results to specific jobs. When doing so, it is critical that the evaluator recognize what drives the client—from a generational as well as a vocational perspective—in order to obtain a true assessment. Let us take a look at the generations in more depth.

### Traditionalists:

First, we have the Traditionalists (born between 1900 and 1945). They are defined by their core values, which include adhering to rules as well as confirming and contributing to the group at large. They are dedicated, disciplined, and they do not question authority. As such, they value duty more than pleasure and believe in hard work and loyalty. They are conservative by nature and their preferred work environment is one that is hierarchal, with a clear chain-of-command and top-down management. When this generation entered the workforce, technology was not an integral part of doing business and workers only adapted to its presence as necessary (Generational Differences Chart, 2011).

### **Baby Boomers:**

The Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are defined by their anti-government and anything-is-possible attitudes. They believe in equal rights and opportunities, personal growth and gratification. This generation is team oriented and works hard to make a difference. They are the generation of workaholics who believe in working their way to the top. Attitudes toward work include a “shake it up” management style (Smith, 2011). This generation acquired technology and recognized its usefulness and presence in the workplace (Generational Differences Chart, 2011).

### **Generation X:**

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) are known as those who value diversity. They are entrepreneurial, fun and highly educated. They have high job expectations, are independent, and value informality. They may show a lack of organizational skills and loyalty, but think globally and seek life balance. Their work slogan is: “Show me the money.” They are inventors and entrepreneurs; and they want to create their own career path (Smith, 2011). Gen X-ers are also skeptical and suspicious of their predecessors and are technoliterate. This generation assimilated technology into their work-world and everyday lives (Generational Differences Chart, 2011).

*“For the first time ever, we are faced with four generations working together in the same environments.”*

### **Generation Y:**

The youngest generation to enter the working world as we know it today is the Millennials or Generation

Y, born between 1981 and 2002.

They are focused on achievement, are avid consumers, and they feel a responsibility to make the world a better place. They are confident, respect diversity, and want to have fun above all. They have high morals, want personal attention, and are members of a global community. Their attitude toward work is “Don’t command, collaborate” and they believe that the power of each individual can make a difference (Smith, 2011). Gen Y-ers are extremely techno-savvy as well as street smart. To them, technology is innate and integral.

When it comes to vocational assessments, it is the evaluators’ responsibility to gather comprehensive information about their clients. Not only do we need to learn about their education, training, and work experience, but also decipher which set of generational characteristics best describes them. This is not to pigeon-hole clients but to better understand what motivates them. Understanding their comfort and knowledge of technology is important. Are they from a generation where technology has always been relevant? Do they use it in their everyday lives at work or at home? Is it like a foreign language to them? The only way to find out is to bring technology into the assessment, for example, by way of an online test. As with any assessment tool, there are benefits and drawbacks to online testing.

### **The Pros of Using Online Testing:**

1. Using online assessment tools may get the “buy-in” from younger generations who use technology in their everyday lives. Based on their above described characteristics, almost everything a member of the Gen Y cohort does has to do with technology; they expect it and want instant results. Therefore, the use of online assessments may put this person at ease and therefore reduce test-anxiety and/or other distractions, which may

produce more accurate results.

2. Online assessments are less time-consuming for the evaluator to administer and score, since they produce instant computer-generated reports, also reducing the risk of human error. Evaluators can be limited by time and fiscal restraint yet must provide comprehensive assessments with accurate and relevant results. Up-to-date standardized assessments that require less time for set-up, less administration, and less scoring-time allow more time for information gathering, interpreting results, and writing reports.

3. Using technology is a way of integrating a situational assessment into the evaluation. For instance, administering an online interest-test allows the evaluator to observe an individual’s comfort and skill level using a computer and following instructions. Thus, an evaluator can make solid recommendations based on first-hand knowledge.

*“Understanding [the client’s] comfort and knowledge of technology is important.”*

### **The Cons of Using Online Testing:**

1. Older generations or uneducated clients who do not use technology in their everyday lives may feel overwhelmed or not “buy-in.” They may not understand how a computer generated report could possibly tell them anything about themselves. Moreover, they may feel the assessment is impersonal in nature and this could affect how they respond to questions. They may feel more test anxiety, which could skew results.

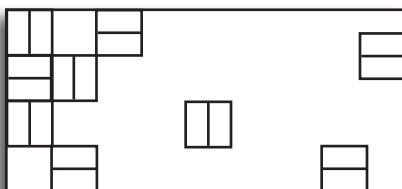
2. Technology could never replace the value of the evaluator gathering information through discussion, paper-pencil testing, and observation.

3. Integrating technology into an assessment can be expensive as the evaluator will have to continuously purchase renewal licenses for software.

4. Technology does not always work the way we want it to. Back-up testing materials are required.

From this analysis comes clarity. We need to understand our client before choosing the assessment tools. There are generational influences that can significantly affect a client's comfort with technology. Although the benefits may outweigh the drawbacks when it comes to integrating technology into vocational testing, evaluators cannot rely solely on online assessment tools or scoring software. A major component of a vocational assessment is the face-to-face interaction and observation. There needs to be a mix of situational, paper-pencil, and online assessments in order to develop a comprehensive profile of a client's current functioning. ☺

References for this article available at [vraCanada.com/media.php](http://vraCanada.com/media.php)



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