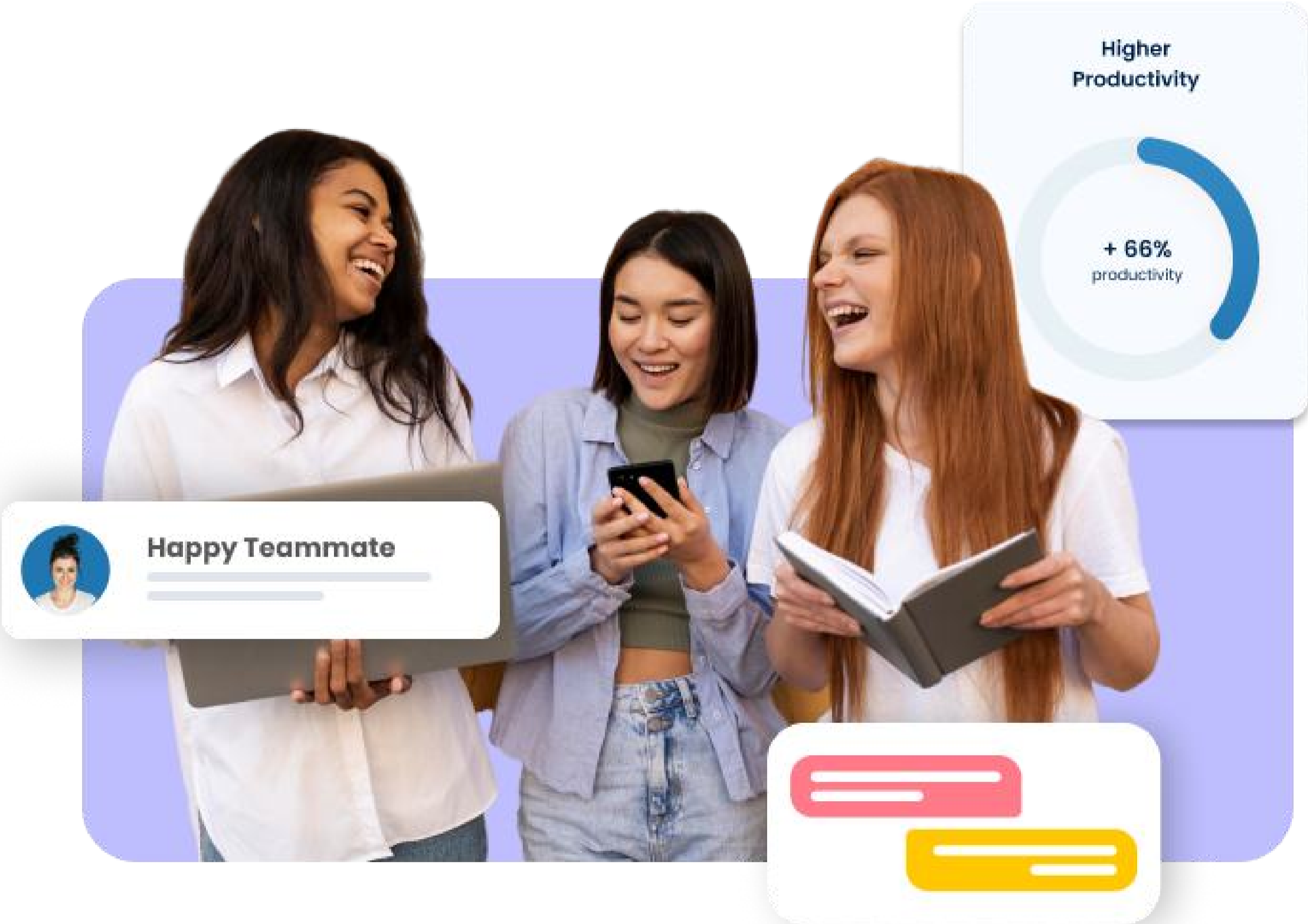


LESSON SCRIPT
Module 1

1.3 Challenges in Cross-generational Collaboration



Picture this: a 56-year-old team manager, let's call him John, asks his 25-year-old colleague what he notices in the company after his first three weeks. The younger colleague, let's call him Andrew, expresses his satisfaction with the company but also offers some suggestions. He believes the outdated website could use improvement, and he questions the necessity of printing out all information for meetings, citing concerns for both time and the environment. John, however, feels defensive and perceives Andrew's suggestions as an attack, particularly emphasizing the importance of printed materials. As a compromise, John suggests that Andrew document his website ideas and present them at an official meeting in a few weeks.

A typical conversation between two generations where they both might feel a lack of connection. Andrew will complain to his friends about the slowness of his new employer and John might be fed up with these millennials and their criticism after only 3 weeks. Working with people from different generations can bring a wealth of knowledge and fresh perspectives to any workplace. But, it also comes with its own set of challenges. In this lesson, we will explore the challenges that may arise when working with a multigenerational workforce.

By the end of this lesson, you'll:

- Understand the challenges associated with multigenerational collaboration in teams; and
- Gain insights into strategies to overcome them

Challenges of Managing a Multigenerational Workforce

Given the different generations' distinct preferences and perspectives, it can be difficult to foster a culture that empowers all employees, regardless of age. Nonetheless, if you know what challenges to expect, you can ensure your team uses the benefits of a multigenerational workforce, from the variety of skill sets it'll include to the number of different experiences and perspectives it embraces. Here are common problems faced by multigenerational teams and recommendations for overcoming them.

1. Stereotypes and Discrimination

As with any type of diversity, discrimination around age can occur in the workplace and can be directed toward any generation.

For instance, older generations tend to perceive younger people as entitled and oversensitive, while younger employees might assume that their older colleagues are too close-minded and stubborn. These implicit biases and attitudes are called **stereotypes** and they tend to affect our understanding, decisions and actions in an unconscious manner. Age-related stereotypes in the workplace can affect job efficiency, and job satisfaction of your team members but can also potentially lead to low morale and conflicts to arise within your team.

The Solution: There are several strategies that can help you understand, identify and potentially overcome stereotypes at work and we will mention two of the most commonly used ones. One of them is called **individuating** - and it involves trying to see the person as an individual, rather than a group member and paying attention to the things that separate them from the rest of the group. The second approach is called **perspective-taking**. It involves trying to imagine the viewpoint of someone from a different social group than your own, or in other words, "walking in their shoes." Next time you find yourself associating negative attributes with someone based on their age, try these two strategies!

2. Shifting Needs

As time passes, our priorities, concerns, and qualities change. The **Kaleidoscope Career Model** (KCM) created by Mainiero and Sullivan suggests that there are three different things we care about in our professional careers: **challenge, balance, and authenticity**. As we age, the degree to which we care about each of these factors shifts and evolves. Therefore, ignoring differences that come with different career stages may result in dissatisfaction of your employees, due to misalignment between their needs and opportunities offered in your workplace. For example, junior-level employees tend to value challenge over balance and authenticity, while middle-aged employees tend to value balance over challenge. Authenticity is more highly desired as individuals approach their retirement years, but it is also valued greatly by young entrepreneurs.

The Solution: Understand what motivates your employees and support them at all stages of their professional career. Flexible, age-sensitive policies can also lead to greater retention because individuals will feel supported throughout their career and will not have to leave a company to seek a different job

that will fulfill their needs. There are several ways to accomplish this. We have listed some examples that can help foster and cultivate these three key values in someone's career in this table. For example, to achieve **authenticity**, find ways to incorporate and nurture your company's values through tasks and projects, offer workshops for personal development and higher purpose at work or form employee clubs for different kinds of interests.

To achieve **balance**, offer flexible schedules, generous absenteeism policies or prepared family meals and concierge services. Finally, if you'd like to achieve **challenge**, offer international experiences, opportunities for job rotation or systems of rewards for taking on challenging assignments.

Feel free to download the empty template we have created for you to explore the ways in which you and your teammates can achieve the fulfillment of your employees' most crucial needs and achieve a great work atmosphere and employee satisfaction.

3. Work Ethic Perceptions and Preferences

Different generations have different life experiences and social backgrounds, which leads to variations in their work preferences. For example, Generation X often sees long hours at the office as a sign of dedication, while millennials and Gen Z prioritize work-life balance and flexibility. This can frustrate older workers who don't understand this approach. Additionally, younger generations prefer immediate rewards and positive feedback for their hard work, unlike Gen X, who are less bothered by the lack of these factors and might not feel the need to give as much positive feedback as younger people would prefer to receive.

The Solution: Understanding each of these perspectives and coming up with compromising solutions is key. As a manager, the best strategy is to adopt an **individualized approach**. Schedule one-on-one meetings to learn about each employee's needs and preferences. Remember these details and consider them when interacting with your team members. To help you keep track, we've created a template for noting down tips on how to approach each person within your team effectively.

In wrapping up our exploration of cross-generational collaboration challenges, it's clear that addressing these issues is crucial for creating and maintaining a harmonious workplace.

If we look back at the example of the beginning of the lesson, the example of John and Andrew. Both John and Andrew were stuck in their own perspective. In my experience the key in bridging the gap is self reflection and empathy. What am I doing in this interaction that is causing the misunderstanding? What is my perspective or preference and how might it differ from someone else? John could have been more aware of his own role as a newcomer and could have been more curious to the way it's done in the organization instead of diving right in. And Andrew could have been more curious to the perspective of the newcomer. The closed mindset of both men unfortunately contributed to the misconnection, even though they had their best intentions.

Rather than maintaining an "us versus them" dynamic in the workplace, let's change the narrative going forward. And as we prepare for the upcoming lessons, let's think about this: how can we best use the advantages of each generation to promote innovation and success in procurement?

To summarize everything so far, during this lesson you have learned about the strategies to overcome negative age-related stereotypes, the ways to understand and manage shifts in needs of employees of different generations and finally, about the importance of individualized approach when working with your age-diverse team.

Great job on finishing this lesson! It's time to wrap the module up. See you in Module 2 where we will focus specifically on leading Gen Z within procurement teams.