12<sup>th</sup> ICCRTS
"Adapting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

My Teenager is a Future Warfighter? - Facing the Generational Challenges of a Net-centric Future
Track 1: C2 Concepts, Theory, and Policy
Track 2: Networks and Networking
Track 4: Cognitive and Social Issues

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# Abstract

A generation is a group of people who share a range of birth years and therefore life stages. People in these groups are influenced by their collective experiences, especially during their formative years, including cultural events, social changes, fads, styles of music and economic challenges. Consequently, persons of a given generation share similar attitudes, perceptions and values which they bring with them into the workplace where they reinforce or sometimes bias their daily activities, interactions and decisions. In this paper we use the research results reported in the literature on these generational effects as the basis for making observations about the attitudes and behaviors of the age groups presently in the U.S. military workforce, and conjectures regarding what we can expect about those who might be serving in the military in the future.

It is our premise that plans for evolving the U.S. Department of Defense's physical and logical information infrastructure into a web-enabled information sharing space to leverage the latest internet technologies (often called the net-centric Vision) have been established by members of generational groups called the Baby Boomers and Generation X. These groups, while technologically savvy, are immigrants to digital culture. Present-day children from the generational groups called Gen Y and the emerging group Gen Z will grow up to comprise the pool of potential military personnel in the year 2020 – the nominal target date for accomplishing the net-centric vision. These children are digital natives who cannot even remember a time before the internet and ubiquitous access to media of all kinds. The unsettling question we feel compelled to ask is: *Have we set the bar of the net-centric vision high enough to meet the expectations and needs of these future warfighters*?

Based on generational characteristics that establish a context for its members' levels of comfort with and adaptability to automation and information handling approaches, in this paper we explore the areas where we believe the net-centric vision is on track, and where it may miss the mark, for future warfighters. We recommend some course corrections, including but not limited to policies, practices and initiatives, that could help DoD poise itself to better leverage the unique capabilities of the next warfighting generation.