Leading Multi-Generational Teams

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A diverse workforce is needed to bring about better performance and business outcomes. Good intergenerational management at individual and team levels can foster greater communication and trust.

While diverse teams collectively present a greater wealth of experience and ideas, they often have a greater variety of communication styles, motivations, working approaches, and norms. If not well-managed at the individual or team levels, communication and trust can break down. Succession planning is becoming challenging for organisations and leaders too. In particular, the millennials (Generation Y), who are the lifeblood of the growth and future of organisations, are difficult to retain. They are seen to provide energy, enthusiasm, and fresh ideas to innovate and take organisations to greater heights.

**Characteristics and Expectations**
Each generation has desired security and variety in their careers, the opportunity to be stretched and challenged, and the ability to be proud of the company they work for.

Employee performance and retention rely heavily upon the quality of their relationship with their leader. With the baby boomers retiring and with millennials entering the workforce, the massive demographic shift is creating the need for organisations and leaders to re-evaluate the internal system. Providing career opportunities and challenging, meaningful assignments are perceived to be more important to millennials than life-long employment.

So, in managing and engaging them, leaders must keep this in mind and come up with a development track that recognises that ambition. They must examine the factors that contribute to employee retention, supportive leadership, positive work environment, and growth opportunity.

**Employee Development and Retention**
The differing ages are still active in seeking upward mobility and rewards as they look to fulfil their career and personal goals. The mid-careers are expressing interest in stepping back from their current scope of work while the younger workers are increasingly expecting fast-track progression into management and leadership roles. The idea that employees should be in charge of their professional development is relatively new. In the past, people are expected to choose a career early in life, find an employer, and then stay with the company for the rest of their working lives. In return for their loyalty and longevity at the company, they received all sorts of protections—including job security, steady rise up the “corporate ladder” with corresponding increases in income, and a retirement pension. In today’s business environment, that “contract” between employer and employee no longer exists in many companies. A flow of radical changes has rewritten the rules of the workplace. These changes include globalisation of the economy, a shift from the industrial age to the information age and new advances in technology such as the Internet. These changes mean that the skills required for any company to stay competitive—whether large or small, new or mature—keep shifting at an ever-increasing rate. How is this going to
impact the organisation as they design their talent management framework and how would an employee from the younger workforce, like the millennials view their career development or career path? All three generations value comfort, security, and professional growth. Some research suggests the potential in retaining millennials by providing opportunities to make contributions quickly with challenging career development opportunities.  

**Leadership Involvement and Shared Values**

As workplace expectations become more demanding, effective leadership plays a key role in efforts to attract, influence, and retain talents.  

Millennials enter the workforce and have high expectations of recognition, approval, and being rewarded by their employers. For similar reasons, they also have a strong desire to be led with clear directions and be well supported by their managers. In general, younger workers expect and feel entitled to consistent, balanced, high-quality feedback and older bosses tend to be un-comfortable, unqualified, or uninterested in delivering feedback. Such behaviours create a significant disconnect and feeling of unmet expectations.  

Dominant values and work attitudes differ for each of the generations in today’s workforce. Both baby-boomers and millennials were found to be drawn to opportunities that allow time out to explore passions, hobbies, and good works.  

Organisations with multigenerational work environments may provide organisational-wide learning opportunities to close intergenerational gaps and prevent employees from viewing others in terms of generational stereotypes. Communication that reveals shared values and reflects common commitments to organisational goals enables co-workers to forge and sustain productive relationships.  

**Put On a Coaching Hat**

Leaders should exist to support the energetic efforts of millennials—enabling and coaching rather than deciding and directing. They should provide greater access to knowledge and collaborative networks; make it easy for employees to build horizontal networks that span organisational boundaries and tap diverse areas of expertise; enable employees to temporarily step out of formal lines of management and join forces to fluidly respond to market opportunities.

**References**


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