Managing Generational Differences

This toolkit will help you consider how management styles can be adjusted in terms of the differing expectations and requirements of the diverse generations found within workplaces today.

The Generations

One approach businesses have taken in understanding intergenerational issues in their workplaces looks at generational cohorts and the difference between them such as their expectations, behaviours and values. Understanding these factors and identifying how generations do things differently is useful in making the most of your people.

There are four generations currently working alongside each other with a fifth soon to be joining the workforce. There are specific characteristics and values associated with each generation that distinguishes them from one another. These differences are based on each generations lived experiences of social, cultural, economic and political shifts which have happened during a lifetime – it is these experiences that unites and distinguish generations from each other.

The most commonly accepted boundaries for generation are:

- **World War II** or **Builders** (1929 to 1945)

- **Baby Boomers (**1946 to 1964)

- **Generation X** (1965 to 1979)

- **Generation Y** or **Millennials** (1980 to 1999)

- There will also be a new generation entering the workforce in the next few years **Generation Z (2000 – Present).**

Employer & Commerical Impacts

An increased understanding of generational difference can have a positive impact on your business as well as your employees. Your workforce will benefit from having a broader understanding of the needs of people across different generations inside and outside of the workplace. Your business can benefit from having a more engaged workforce who value and understand marketplace diversity including client trends and habits.

WORLD WAR II GENERATION

Respectful of organisational hierarchy

Loyal to the company

Hard working

Feedback seen as criticism

BABY BOOMERS

Driven by results

Excellent learners

Likely to stay with a company for the longer term

Slight discomfort towards authority figures

GENERATION X

Technologically literate

Quick to learn

Value and embrace diversity

Distinguishes between work & life

GENERATION Y

Most highly educated generation

Inherent understanding of technology

Needs more supervision

Expects regular and frequent feedback

Career

The way in which each generation views their career varies significantly. World War II and Baby Boomers tend to see a job as being for life whereas Generation X and Generation Y change jobs more regularly - according to research conducted by Adecco Group UK 54% of Generation Y have had three or more jobs already[1].

Salary

Research from the CIPD found that all four generations value rewards and salary differently – Generation X and Generation Y place a stronger emphasis on the 'whole package' of their job. Pew Research Centre found that Generation Y is more motivated by making a difference than their salary - 21% prioritise community investment opportunities whereas only 15% were motivated by the prospect of a high-paying career[2].

Baby Boomers and World War II Generation employees are more focused on savings and pensions provisions for later life[3].

Feedback

Wanting instant and frequent feedback is a characteristic associated with Generation Y and to a lesser extent Generation X also. Their desire to develop through regular feedback can be linked to growing up in environments where information has always been instantly accessible. Baby Boomers and World War II Generation workers prefer traditional methods of feedback – i.e. appraisals and performance reviews.

[2] Pew Research Centre (2010)

[3] CIPD (2015)

How to Avoid Generational Conflict

Differences between generations can lead to miscommunication in the workplace. Raising awareness and harnessing people's individuality can have a huge impact on the way your colleagues work together. Conflict among different generational cohorts is likely to occur due to misunderstandings and perception issues.

A practical solution to bridging the gap in generational differences can come from establishing a common ground of communication styles. Placing a greater emphasis on how all employees should interact from a professional perspective is a useful step in removing tension.

Encourage tolerance and open-mindedness to different ways of doing things. Tolerance of different behaviours and styles is essential for creating a harmonious and productive workplace.

Provide opportunities for different generations to learn from one another. For example, introduce reciprocal mentoring schemes. Encourage intergenerational collaboration as much as possible. You can achieve this by encouraging volunteering or creating an intergenerational network.

Case Study:

Sodexo (2015 Championing an Ageing Workforce Award Finalist) launched its GenERAtions employee network using GenMatch, a specially-designed board game. The purpose of the game was to help employees appreciate the diverse workforce that makes up the organisation and the opportunities and challenges this can present. Players had to match statements about work motivation and style, technology and lifestyle to the relevant generations.

The game helped to create a broader understanding of the needs of people of different generations inside and outside of the workplace and provided employees with opportunities to interact and learn from peers.

For More Advice

Supporting an Intergenerational Employee Network Toolkit

This toolkit will help build an understanding as to how an intergenerational employee network can benefit your business, and your people. It includes practical advice on how to establish one.

References

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