



A TRULY BESPOKE WORKPLACE FIT FOR FIVE GENERATIONS? - How operational coaching can close the gap between Generation Z and the Traditionalists

In 2017 we will see Generation Z enter the workplace for the first time. They will join their new peers, a group that will also include Traditionalists and Baby Boomers, some with more than 50 years additional experience. Not even the trailblazing millennial will be truly aligned with this new generation of virtually connected, technological linguists.

Merging five generations

With the merging of five generations, the workplace will be more diverse and changeable than ever before. Established organisational structures will become invalid and models of attracting, recruiting, developing, leveraging and retaining talent will strain under the multitude of competing employee needs. Organisations slow to change will falter. Organisations able to evolve, and with the vision to recognise and respond effectively to this new world, will gain a substantial competitive advantage.

Undoubtedly, as issues surface, management consultants will propose revolutionary organisation designs; IT experts will design responsive software solutions; Human Resources will influence leadership teams to overhaul the employment relationship and deliver bespoke employment packages. This is a natural and necessary wave of evolution and when implemented coherently will prove beneficial for employee and organisation alike. However, whilst it is important to be responsive to difference, failing to recognise the similarities between generations may result in unnecessary complexity, confusion and divisiveness.

Are the generations really so different?

What all generations have in common is their five basic human needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self actualisation. Organisations that create working environments which protect these needs are more likely to retain their talent than organisations who simply have demographically relevant processes in place.

An attractive succession planning tool for example, may be effective in promoting multiple career models and pathways

but set in an uncertain environment where status is frequently undermined, people are micromanaged, connections are limited and where there's a feeling of unfairness, it will have no impact whatsoever. In such an environment, the new generations will use their extensive virtual networks to 'jump ship' and older generations will stay and disengage.

Outdated models of management

So, to support the implementation of a new succession planning model, the environments in which the career paths are undertaken also need to change. Traditional styles of management that rely heavily on a 'leaders and followers' model and a 'command and control' style will no longer be relevant. Instead, a more inclusive relationship based on shared thinking will be required to consistently protect status and autonomy and increase feelings of fairness. Managers will need to let go of control and adopt more of a coaching style of leadership. This will enable them to relate effectively and differently with each employee in everyday operational settings, to stimulate and release their inner resourcefulness.

A way forward - together

By taking more of an 'enquiry-led approach', managers will actively demonstrate trust and respect, give credence to new ideas and ways of thinking, generate real connections and stimulate future ownership. Embedding a coaching style of leadership in the organisation engenders a collaborative, self-sufficient environment. Status is protected for all the generations. The experience of Traditionalists and Baby Boomers is valued, respected and utilised; and a highly desirable, intellectually level playing field is established for the newer generations entering the workforce. Visionary leadership in changing organisational cultures is needed now to establish a truly generative work place that can offer the strong foundations for effective, cross-generational team working and career management.

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