

Multigenerational workforce and how to lead it

Author: Fadzai Danha . January 2021

Multigenerational workforce

Today's workforce is more complex than ever. More generations are working under the same roof than ever before as the workplace spans up to five generational categories. This has created a multigenerational workforce whereby there are multiple generations active and available on the labour market. This has led to workplace challenges where leaders have inadequate knowledge regarding the unique skill sets of each generational group. Without an understanding of these unique skill sets, leaders cannot adapt their leadership style to create greater production in a multigenerational workplace. Leaders are faced with the entitled Millennial who needs constant praise, the cranky Boomer who hates change, and the Gen Xer who hates everyone and everything. With these multiple generations working together, leaders can only stimulate harmony by embracing the diversity provided by having five generations in the workplace (Clark, 2017).

To better understand each of the generations we need to understand what they are and their characteristics:

1. **The Silent Generation (Born before 1945)** - Current employees from this generation grew up in the wake of a worldwide economic depression. They tend to be conservative in dress and language. They see work as a privilege. Their strong work ethic, discipline, stability, and experience make them invaluable employees.
2. **The Baby Boomers (Born between 1946 and 1964)** - Because boomers are postponing retirement, they still make up a significant portion of the workforce today. They are hardworking and willing to sacrifice personal time for work. Boomers are loyal employees who value security, comfort, and familiar environments.
3. **Generation X (Born between 1965 and 1976)** - Generation X is more highly educated than previous generations. Gen Xers are responsible, diligent, competent, and fiercely independent. They dislike being micromanaged. They'll tolerate rules as long as they're allowed their own space. They are the first generation to become computer literate.
4. **Millennials (Born between 1977 and 1995)** - The fastest-growing generation range in age from teen to mid-thirties. They are the most tech-savvy generation and spearheaded the digital revolution. They prefer a flextime, part-time, or remote working model. They are optimistic, ferocious achievers, team-oriented, and global-centric.
5. **Generation Z (Born after 1996)** - Generation Z is now entering the workplace with the first of them completing their 4-year degrees in 2019. Because of their high-tech and hyper-connected upbringing, they will bring their own new set of behaviours, expectations, and preferences into the workplace.

How to lead a multigenerational workforce

With baby boomers retiring later in life and the fast-growing millennial generation flooding the job market, and Generation Z just beginning to creep into the workforce, the way of approaching work is different and a little complicated. Failure to adapt leadership style in a multigenerational workforce can cause workplace conflict, retention issues, and decreased productivity (Allen, Allen, Karl, & White, 2015; Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012).

In order to effectively lead a multigenerational workforce, leaders must take advantage of the following:

1. **Initiating conversations about generations** - This helps individuals understand why there are differences between them and their younger and older workmates. This goes a long way in reducing tension for doing things differently.
2. **Ask people about their needs and preferences** -The only way to definitely know is to ask.
3. **Offer options** -Working successfully with a mix of generations means offering as many choices as possible to suit each of them.
4. **Be flexible** - Understanding the characteristics that define each generation will allow employers to better tailor policies and procedures to meet their needs.
5. **Build on strengths** - The best mixed-generation work teams recognize the unique strengths of each individual. Urge people who are different to become more of who they already are, rather than trying to fit in
6. **Pursue different perspectives** - Choose people with varied backgrounds and perspectives to work on projects together
7. **Identify Preferred Management Styles** - Employees from different generations may have different views on leadership. Knowing what your team members prefer will help you know how to approach each of them individually, as well as the team as a whole
8. **Use Coaching to Help Employees Grow** - Learn what employees see as the next level for their career, then identifying what it will take for them to reach that point.
9. **Set Stretch Goals** - Managers can personalize how they support and encourage a multigenerational workforce by working with each employee to set goals.
10. **Focus on career desires and life stages instead -Focusing on what your employees need and expect out of you as their employer—at this particular time in their life—will help you craft better benefits offerings to satisfy and retain them in the long run.**
11. **Avoid stereotypes.** Be aware of any stereotypes that may exist about certain generations and seek to overcome them. For example, some believe younger workers have little loyalty to their companies and rarely work within established guidelines.

Whilst baby boomers prefer a more structured environment, Generation Xers prefer less supervision and greater autonomy. They want an environment with an emphasis on the individual and Millennials want to be judged not for their hours in the office, but for their results. Knowing how to balance all of their needs will go a long way in ensuring that you have an effective team.

Challenges for managing a multigenerational workforce

Differences in generational values, desires, ambitions, and preferred work styles can lead to job dissatisfaction, low morale, and reduced productivity (Bennett, Pitt, & Price, 2012). Because each of the

generations came of age in a distinct and unique era, each has its own perspective on such critical business issues as leadership, communication, problem-solving, and decision making.

Not so long ago, generations were separated at work by rank and status with the oldest employees filled executive positions, the middle-aged held mid-management jobs, and the youngest worked on the front lines. Now, however, members of the Silent Generation report to Generation Xers while Millennials present ideas to baby boomers. All of these generations have different perspectives on issues like work ethic, leadership, and authority. These differences, though subtle, can cause conflict, frustration, and misunderstanding if not managed well.

Whilst all generations have a strong work ethic they rarely see it in each other simply because each generation has a different approach which causes a lot of tension. A lot of the tension occurs between the boomers and millennials. This creates challenges when working with multigenerational teams.

Multi-generational workforce statistics

- Only 6% of organizations strongly agree that their **leaders are equipped to lead a multigenerational workforce** effectively.
- Millennials are projected to represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025.
- As important as Millennials are to the current and future workforce, only 29% of Millennials are engaged at work. Some 55% are not engaged or are checked out and 16% are actively disengaged.
- An AARP study found that 60% of workers report the presence of generational conflict, with over 70% of older employees dismissing the abilities of their younger colleagues, and nearly 50% of younger colleagues dismissing the abilities of older co-workers.
- 65% of baby boomers plan to work past the age of 65
- 10,000 baby boomers reach retirement age every day in America alone
- 55% of startup founders are Generation X
- By 2028 Generation X will outnumber Baby Boomers
- 15% of millennials still live at home with their parents
- 40% of Generation Z want to interact with their boss daily or several times per day
- 84% of Generation Zers expect their employer to provide formal training
- The world breakdown of the generational workforce is as follows

1. Silent : 2%
2. Baby Boomers: 25%
3. Generation X: 33%
4. Millennials: 35%
5. Generation Z: 5%

- 87% of U.S. workers say a multigenerational workforce increases innovation and problem solving
- Younger workers see the value that a more tenured manager can bring, as 92% of workers aged

25 to 34 agree they'd rather have an older boss.

- 81% of workers agree the primary difference between generations in the workplace is communication styles.
- More than a third of workers (38%) admit they find it difficult to communicate with co-workers who are not in their own age group.

How to train a multigenerational workforce

Knowing how to train a multigenerational workforce is crucial because leveraging on the distinctive skill sets of each generational cohort fosters collaboration, positive organizational culture, and increased productivity (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Fishman, 2016). Without an understanding of how to handle each generation, leaders lack the capacity to develop the most effective strategies to create a productive multigenerational workforce. These strategies are critical to avoiding poor morale, low retention rates, reduced productivity, and general job dissatisfaction (Johnson, 2013).

- **Silent generation**

Take advantage of their experience, enhanced knowledge, dedication, focus, stability, loyalty, emotional maturity, and perseverance. Your training method should have a clear direction with a logical approach. The training methods should not be experimental or seem disorganised and should have individual plans.

- **Baby Boom Generation**

Take advantage of their service orientation, dedication, team perspective, experience, and knowledge. The training approach should be in teams, with everyone being treated equally. The training should also be interactive and they should be assured that they are making a difference. Work with the group to define a mission. Show warmth and caring. Assure them they are making a difference

- **Generation Xers**

Take advantage of their adaptability, techno-literacy, independence, and creativity. The training should be straightforward and without a strict timetable. The trainers should be available for support and results-oriented. They will not thrive under micromanagement and methods which do not show results.

- **Millennial Generation**

Take advantage of their optimism, ability to multi-task, and how they are technologically savvy. The training methods should be structured and educational and the training objectives should match their personal goals. They will require more coaching and motivation.

This article is written as a guide to handling multigenerational workforces. I hope that you will find it useful.

Fadzai Danha is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human

resources consulting firm. Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950 or email: fadzai@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipcconsultants.com

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