

Employee engagement for a multigenerational workforce



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Abstract:

The 21st Century global workforce consists of multi-generations of employees from a multitude of backgrounds, values, work ethics, goals, education, and expectations. The current multigenerational workforce consists of employees mainly from 3 generations; Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Through this research paper, I will attempt to understand the difference and dynamics of the different generations and see if there are similarities or differences that can help foster enhanced employee engagement for all the generations in the workforce. As the population is living longer due to healthier lifestyles and medical innovation, and for those who for personal or economic reasons are staying in the business world, businesses are faced with new challenges of how to create a solid corporate structure and culture for profitability and how to best leverage the skills, knowledge, and talents of all generations for overall business success, profitability and a happy, engaged workforce. The findings from this research proposal suggest that while employee engagement tended to be higher among older workers than their younger colleagues, the key predictors of enhanced engagement were similar but varied in terms of weight and significance among the different generations.

Keywords

Employee engagement, multigenerational workforce

Introduction

In the current 21st Century global workforce there are predominately 3 generations working together and to ensure businesses recruit, train and retain the best talent businesses must stay current in all HR practices including employee engagement. The current full-time workforce contains employees from generations including Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y (Millennials) and in the next decade, Generation Z. The results of a Gallup (2013) poll from 2013, revealed that only 13% of employees are engaged worldwide at work. The concept of keeping employees engaged and the need to keep top talent within the corporation is not new but has introduced new challenges for HR professionals. This multi-generational change in the global workplace has evolved over the more current decades due to the current population having a longer life expectancy and the need to continue working for personal and/or economic reasons beyond the standard retirement age. This new global, multigenerational workforce has introduced a new paradigm to the HR spectrum with the need to possibly adapt or change the current corporate structure or corporate culture to optimize the workforce and ensure overall corporate success, profitability, and an engaged workforce.

Employee engagement has been described as employees need to have the desire to feel like they are an integral part of the business, feel that they are valued and are making a contribution to the success of the business which results in contributing to the overall success and the business' bottom line (Berens, 2013). The 21st-century workforce is made of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials and in the future Generation Z. The dynamics between generations can bring both challenges and benefits for both the

employee and the corporation. In a research study at the Center on Aging & Work by Pitt-Catsouphes & Smyer (2007) state that according to the Department of Labor Statistics over the next 15 years, the 21st-century workforce will consist largely of employees over the age of 55. This new multigenerational, diverse workforce can help guide and train future generations of employees. Engaged employees benefit both the employee and their organization. Research has shown that engaged employees tend to be less stressed, more satisfied with their personal lives and take fewer sick days than those who are disengaged. There is clear evidence that employee engagement has a direct impact on performance and productivity levels for individuals, team and for all levels of employees within the organization.

Corporations can create a highly engaged, well rounded corporate structure and culture by incorporating the best of each generation for a mutually beneficial work environment (Blattner and Walter, 2015). Human resource professional must work with leaders to create and develop a work environment that promotes and fosters this new dynamic by understanding the values and expectations of each generation (Markos and Sridevi, 2010; Jain, 2016). Businesses who can adjust their culture as needed and embrace the dynamics of the new multigenerational workforce can ensure a profitable future (Jenkins, 2008). There are a multitude of resources and programs that can be incorporated into the corporate culture and if needed, adapted for specific generations based on need and/or desire. One such program that has been identified as an element to enhance employee engagement is organizational learning and development. This program

could be either internally and offered in person on-site or online and alternatively externally such as via tuition remission or sponsorship of a course related to their career path or for career advancement. There are many other corporate-sponsored programs such as corporate social responsibility initiatives, mentoring and advancement programs, creativity and innovation programs that foster thinking outside the box for a new method or even device to help simplify or improve current processes. It is hypothesized that organizations with a good corporate structure and strong corporate culture can successfully integrate and leverage the new multigenerational workforce by implementing strategic resources and programs to enhance employee engagement for the benefit of both the corporation and the employee.

Literature Review

History of Employee Engagement

In the published literature, there is no definitive definition of employee engagement. It is also sometimes mentioned as employee satisfaction or even organizational citizenship behavior (Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Jain, 2016; Macey & Schneider, 2008). For many years businesses and HR professionals have been evaluating their current practices and worked together to formulate the optimal model for engaging and motivating employees (Anitha, 2014; Bates, 2004; Berens, 2013; Jenkins, 2008). Berens (2013) identifies one element of engagement to be employees wanting to be part of something bigger than they could ever have accomplished on their own. They want to feel like they are involved and are

a part of something they feel they have an investment in, have confidence in their ability to contribute and the feeling that it makes them happy to be part of the bigger picture.

The traditional workforce of past generations has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Previously, most corporations practiced a patriarchal approach to the workforce, with the promise of long-term employment for knowledgeable workers, the provision of expected long-term benefits package and enhancement of skills for workers who proved loyalty and were afforded the opportunity to advance in the business. The 21st-century workforce has a completely different viewpoint on working than those of past generations such as traditionalist and baby boomers. One thing that does differ for employees from Generation X and Generation Y is that they routinely do not plan to stay in a position for the long term in contrast to those from the Baby Boomer generation and those before them such as the Traditionalists. Newer generations of workers want to have the ability to control the direction of their careers with the option to leave a dead-end position without consequence and be able to use their prior experiences as a means to secure a better position in the same or a different business. The mindset of the more current generations has an impact on the triple bottom line of business. The ability to change positions every few years as opposed to older generations who tended to stay with a business long term comes at a cost to businesses resulting in increased expenses to recruit, onboard and train new staff. Additionally, employees who are not happy and are looking to change are disengaged, are usually underachievers and don't give 100% to their job causing lost revenue (Bates, 2004).

Research suggests that employee engagement can be enhanced where there exists collaborative working environment and teamwork is fostered (Mirvis, 2012), (Anitha, 2014). Organizations must work continuously and collectively to assess the generational differences that exist so they can profit from the many benefits this new multigenerational workforce has to offer and procure the benefits to win the war on talent (Bursch and Kelly, 2014). Employees who are engaged help nurture and foster the corporate mission, help in the fulfillment of the corporate vision, are generally happier and are an essential part of creating significant business results as well as profits. Businesses with a highly engaged workforce will outperform their counterparts across all aspects of the business, especially financially and for overall improved customer satisfaction. To help promote and foster highly engaged employees, there need to be corporate programs in place for continuous learning and development, improvement in as well as the measurement of metrics and actions (Sundaray, 2011). Engaged employees tend to work harder and more efficiently, can effectively take actions to ensure customer needs are fulfilled and continuously contribute to the profitability of the corporation supporting the importance of studying the effect of employee engagement and the resulting economic benefits (Roberts and Davenport, 2002).

Generational Differences

Benson and Brown (2011) studied the relationship between two generations, Baby Boomers and Generation X. They evaluated the generations for overall job satisfaction, perceived organizational commitment and willingness to leave their current position and their connection to the organization they

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currently work for. Baby Boomers were found to have a higher level of commitment and job satisfaction was more inclined to stay the course with their current employer and overall have a stronger alliance to the organization than those from Generation X. The Baby Boomers identified more closely with the organizational culture and work factors than those employees from Generation X. HR professionals must be able to leverage the best of each generation to best serve all employees and have the knowledge and flexibility in the scope of their jobs to establish new standards and policies as needed and circumstances warrant.

The elements identified to enhance employee engagement include having a career or personal development program within the organization, encouraging employees to take part in corporate initiatives, fostering open lines of communication across all levels of the organization via surveys, suggestion boxes, team and town hall meetings, keeping employees informed of changes within the organization regardless of whether or not it has a direct impact on them, fostering a sense of feeling valued and being a part of the bigger picture and making a contribution to the business. In more recent decades, workplace flexibility has become a hot topic in enhancing employee engagement. The ability to work remotely, adjust hours for child or elder care has become an important element for staying or leaving a position. Moreover, employees who are given the flexibility they need and desire to adjust their work responsibilities when appropriate for their position will be more engaged than those who are not afforded the flexibility they need regardless of the age group. It was found that employees over the age of 45 valued work flexibility more and were more engaged than younger

employees under the age of 21. Job flexibility has been shown to be a positive predictor of increased engagement for all employees, especially for the older workers who have responsibilities outside the workplace.

Employees who are more engaged help improve business performance outcomes and work flexibility will have a lasting benefit for all parties with increased outcomes (Pitt-Catsoupes and Matz-Costa, 2008).

Research Sample

The information presented in this paper comes from published research in peer-reviewed journals predominantly from businesses in the United States. There was no specific data to establish rules for a gold standard to evaluate the different parameters to enhance employee engagement.

Research Design

To better understand the relationship and differences in employee engagement for a multigenerational workforce, I propose to survey employees from different generations who currently work full time across different industries and positions within the industries. The dependent variable is employee engagement and the independent variable, strategies to enhance engagement for a multigenerational workforce. With these variables in mind, the following hypotheses were derived:

Null Hypothesis (H0): Employee engagement strategies do not need to be modified or adjusted for the new multigenerational workforce.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): Employee engagement strategies may need to be adjusted for different generations.

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Therefore, in this research paper, we are trying to see if there are indeed factors specific to a generation that can improve employee engagement and if so, do strategies need to be adjusted to accomplish higher employee engagement for all generations.

Metrics and Analytics:

A survey was formulated and consisted of 5 questions which could be easily answered qualitatively. The responses to the questions were framed using a 6 point Likert scale for the response ranging from agree to disagree.

Question 1: Do you understand the strategic goals and agree with the mission statement of your organization?

Response options: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5), No Position (6)

Question 2 : Are you proud to work for the company you are currently employed with?

Response options: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5), No Position (6)

Question 3: You have the appropriate information, resources, and support to complete your work efficiently and effectively?

Response options: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5), No Position (6)

Question 4 : My Company motivates me to go beyond what I would in a similar role elsewhere?

Response options: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5), No Position (6)

Question 5 : I see myself still working for this company two years from now?

Response options: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5), No Position (6)

Given the time constraints of the project, a sample of actual surveys was sent but insufficient responses were received to allow for detailed, comprehensive analysis of the results. It would be interesting to see if the answers varied to the questions by age, gender, position, location, job type, industry or years of service.

Limitations:

Some limitations which would affect the outcome of the survey proposed and possibly construe the results would be the type of work being performed (i. e. office work versus manual labor), the type of industry the work is being performed in (service versus consultatory), if there are options for possible advancement within the business, business size (number of overall employees) and sample size resulted in insufficient responses to formulate meaningful results.

Information Learned from this Project and Online Sessions

I was a little surprised that overall there were no significant differences between the generations that could be pinpointed to help enhance employee engagement. If businesses have a solid corporate structure, foster their corporate culture and make sure employees have the appropriate resources to do their job, receive positive re-enforcement from management, employees from multi-generations can effectively work together and possibly even bridge the gap between generations and create a new set of norms to help foster employee engagement for all. With this information, we would suggest reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. While the strategies don't have to be completely changed or adjusted for the multigenerational workforce, there does need to be a culture that encourages interaction and adaptation of strategies to best fit the demographic and the ability to adjust strategies as the workforce continues to constantly change and advance. Throughout the course, I have learned more about the elements of conducting a research project, methods of creating and analyzing statistical data to prove or disprove a theory and have a better understanding of the value of research carried out in the academic community and potential benefits for all.

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