

Good strategies to cope motivational problems in a multi-generational workplace e...

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The dynamics of a workplace continuously changes over time. As old employees eventually retire, new employees are hired. Thus, leaders are constantly being challenged in managing and creating a harmonious environment for a diverse array of workforce. Adjustments have to be made for new employees especially when coming from a different generation group. To date, numerous literatures focus on how different generation employees—Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers—should be handled. Key differences in work values, beliefs and ideas among generation employees when failed to be addressed may result into unavoidable conflicts within the working environment (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013). It has been agreed upon among Himes (1980), Katz (1964) and Rothman (1997) in Chrobot-Mason et al. (2013) that intergroup conflict is a by-product of either competition over limited resources or a response to a potential threat by a perceived “evil entity.” These conflicts which are usually well-defined can be resolved by means of a compromise. But when conflicts are left ignored, it can result to lower outputs from employees and employees may not adhere to organizational citizenship behavior (Wong et al., 2008).

Generation according to Kupperschmidt (2002 in Wong et al., 2008) is “an identifiable group sharing years of birth and significant life events during the critical stages of their development.” In most literatures generations of employees are classified into four categories according to age brackets. These are: (1) Veterans (i. e. born on 1925-1944); (2) Baby Boomers (1945-1964); (3) Generation X (1965-1981); and (4) Generation Y (1982-2000) (Wong, 2008).

Veterans share historical moments with fellow veterans during the periods of

Great Depression, and World War II. They are also known as Traditionalists or Pre-boomers. This group of generation is loyal to their employers and is also consistent to their performance. Veterans have a strong work ethic values and a conservative perspective on finance. They are also committed to the best interest of the organization setting aside their personal goals (Deyoe and Fox, 2011).

Baby Boomers as opposed to Veterans are idealistic. The life experience they share together is marked by the Vietnam War, The Civil Rights Movement and the like. This generation is traditionally raised in a work environment that reveres authority and hierarchy. Those who belong to this generation are also very loyal and they wait for their turn to be promoted and they value seniority over merit. Aside from job security, technology can also be a very big issue for this group since those who are in this group demonstrates resistance to change. Such resistance to change is given by the propensity to feel comfortable on how they manage to perform their task in their own ways. Further, they do not have multi-tasking skills. Because this group is generally idealistic, they support ideas that fit to their vision. However, when such a project fails under their supervision, they are quick to find other people to lay their blame upon (Gursoy, Maier and Chi, 2008).

Meanwhile, Generation X-ers are commonly associated to the advent of MTV (Music Television) and AIDS Crisis. While economic prosperity has a great influence on Baby Boomers, technology is a major part of a Generation X-er's daily living. Generation X-ers are considered as pragmatist and cynical to authority. Sometimes this group also tends to feel alienated. They lack networking skills and prefer to change jobs so as to improve their skills in

preparation to ace the next opportunity that would come along their way. They have the predilection to be impatient, thus they expect the company to immediately reward them every time they perform well. They try to balance their work with their personal life. Thus, working environments which require overtime or changing shifts do not suit them well since they prefer to avoid long hours and work on steady shifts. The Generation X-ers are self-reliant and they choose to be perceived as self-sufficient. They are at their best when they are isolated and are seldom known as a team player. Unlike Baby Boomers and Veterans, Generation X group lacks loyalty and presume that every job is temporary. They can also be very demanding and can have very high expectations from their companies that they will quit when their demands are not given to them (Deyoe and Fox, 2011; Gursoy, Maier and Chi, 2008).

Generation Y or Millennials, the youngest of the four general employee generation, share the same life experience such as the 9/11 terrorist attack, Facebook and other forms of social networking. They are also referred as the most confident generation to date (Deyoe and Fox, 2011). Twenge and Campell (2008) noted that Millennials exhibit a high degree of self-esteem, narcissism, anxiety, and depression. Further Millennials do not need social approval since they believed that they can do anything. Some managers observed that this generation lacks communication and problem solving skills. They sometimes tend to forget the notion of authority because they do not fear to tell their opinion to anyone regardless of position in the company. Yet this group trust a centralized authority unlike the Generation X. Millennials believe in collectivism and they work best with a team. They challenge the

workplace norms and tend to break the conventional rules. Millennials are not very loyal because they prefer to keep their options open until they land into a career that they find suitable for them. Work is not a priority for a Millennial. Like the Generation X, Millennials also prefer to leave their work at work and focus on their families and friends. One of the biggest problems of Millennials in their workplace is the feeling of being unappreciated by their supervisors and managers. Because Millennials tend to seek for an instant feedback they are remarkable upset when they don't feel that their work is not being recognized. But they work very well when they sense a strong leadership (Gursoy, Maier and Chi, 2008).

Several strategies have been proposed to address motivational problems and bridging generation gaps in a multi-generation workplace.

References

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