

Feature

Welcome to the New Neighbourhood

Managing the multi-generational workplace

Members
Quarterly
Staff Writer

Your workplace is likely the most generationally diverse it has ever been- five generations operating under the same roof. How do you get these different generations, each with their own unique attitudes about life, living and work, to get along and work together? Let's look at how to facilitate cooperation and maximize productivity.

Traditionalists

Traditionalists, the veterans, grew up during the Great Depression and their focus is on security and maintaining what they have. They are some of the most loyal and dedicated workers. Many have been with the same employer throughout their entire career. This mentality can stand in pretty stark contrast to the younger generations brought into the workforce as freelancers or contractors. Nevertheless, great things can happen when employees with vastly different perspectives are brought together. Encourage younger workers to tap into their traditionalist colleagues' wisdom and appreciate what they can learn from their experiences. The technological gap may be hard to bridge with traditionalists, so it is essential that every team member has a good handle on any software or communication app being used.

Baby Boomers

Baby boomers place a high value on promotions, raises, awards and achievements. They also tend to be more reserved and inclined to work more independently than their younger colleagues who were taught to think in a collaborative framework. Managers must take a targeted approach to foster healthy communication between baby boomers and the rest of the team. This is a large and diverse group who won't take well to being stereotyped, especially if it's coming from a younger co-worker or manager. Management must stay engaged and appreciate that though baby boomers as a whole may prefer autonomy, some want a more hands-on approach. They may also be less comfortable airing some of the grievances that younger generations won't tolerate. You must pay attention to spot their hidden gripes and address them individually.

Generation X

Generation X is likely to try to outperform the previous generation as this group wants to move up in the organization quickly. They often need some career path or progression to be happy at work. They perform best when their education is recognized and rewarded and when there is regular and moderate change. Holding reviews regularly will help keep this group engaged and feeling appreciated. Brief sessions to touch base or surveys can also be a great way to understand this group. They are typically keen to demonstrate their grasp on technology and are open to embracing new software. That being said, they likely retain a preference for independent work and appreciate projects in which the various responsibilities and expectations are delineated for each member.

Millennials

This generation grew up with both parents working outside of the home. They are used to spending time alone which has helped them develop independence and self-sufficiency as significant character traits. This group is entirely comfortable with technology and has great adaptability for change. They also place a high value on a work-life balance and expect more flexibility and trust from an employer. The use of time tracking and job scheduling software here allows all team members to appreciate each other's contributions, even if they have different work habits.

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2022 Edition

Feature continued

Generation Z

This group has now arrived into the workplace. They value their social network and are looking to have experiences at work that will allow them to develop and grow. They are most diverse and have been given the broader parameters to imagine what work can be like. When tapping into the unique skillsets and technological prowess of Gen Z, remember that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Gen Z will expect that their managers and co-workers will get to know their motivations and learning styles to find out what works and what doesn't. They need to be reminded of the different habits of other generations. Managers should pair them with colleagues who have strong communication skills and with whom they'll feel comfortable asking questions and learning workplace etiquette.

How Does All This Work?

Managers have a responsibility to be interpreters and translators between the generations. They must develop solid communication systems to hear all complaints and to smooth out the rough spots. Organizations will have to find a balance that respects the generational diversity of these times. This means building on each generation's strengths and showing flexibility in how they reward and recognize employees at various stages of their working lives.

The best thing that managers can do is learn about the individuals working for them and stay engaged with the changing needs and workplace dynamics. The more you know about your team, the more effectively you can monitor, engage, motivate and challenge them. This allows you to create trust and build a bond so that your employees can perform at their best without disrupting the rest of the team.

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