MANAGING THE CHALLENGE OF GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract:

Purpose: Today workforce is diverse, regardless of the gender, culture, working style, ethnicity, background, origin. But also with respect to age. Now workplace demographics span four different generations for the first time in modern history. These four generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, are heavily influenced by the events of their time; this raises new challenges for their employers. However, companies need to be made the workplace adjustments in order to create a productive environment for all employees, irrespective of their generation.

Design/Methodology: This study was interested about in generational diversification, work place communication, qualities, attitudes and conflicts in work place in creation of this piece.

Originality: This literature considers the findings of the researchers who have studied the characteristics of four generations and applications of those characteristics in the work place.

Keywords: Diversity, Generations.

Paper Type: General Review

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity is defined as all the ways in which people differ. Decades ago, many companies defined diversity in terms of race, gender, age, lifestyle and disability. That focus helped create awareness, mind-sets, and create new opportunities for many. Now a days companies are embracing a more inclusive definition of diversity that recognize a spectrum of differences that that influence how employees approach work, interact with each other, derive satisfaction from their work and then define who they are as people in the work place.

However, today generationally, diverse workforce in the workplace, managers must strive to foster an inclusive corporate culture and take personal role in supporting diversity initiatives. Now the managers are discovering the importance of supporting and managing diversity initiatives due to vast demographic shifts in the marketplace and the impact of globalization. Indeed, by 2015, roughly one in every five employees will be over the age of 55 (US General Accounting Office, 2001). With these revolution in the employee generational diverse, the workplace now comprises of four generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. So as to, diverse organizations reap numerous surpluses as well as minuses.

This mix of generations in the workforce can be attributed primarily to labor shortages experienced in many industries and the rising average age of retirement. In recent years, employers have revised their recruitment strategy to include retaining employees past retirement age and hiring retirees back into the workforce. For financial reasons, many Boomers are finding they need to wait longer to retire, perhaps into their seventies. These developments have shifted workplace demographic proportions. The percentage of Baby Boomers in the workforce is expected to drop while Millennial Generation workers will grow in numbers. These shifts impact corporate culture since priorities, attitudes, and work styles differ with each generation.

The oldest members of baby boomers generations are nearing traditional retirement age. However, these generations expect to work at least part time in their so-called retirement years. To take advantage of this rich pool of talent, employers need to adopt policies and practices that appeal to this generation.

Millennials are the fastest growing regiment, therefore, organizations will need to understand and appeal to their perspectives, communication styles, and work ethic to recruit and retain them.

Companies need engaged employees those who are willing and able to contribute to organizational success. Engaged employees can only thrive in inclusive work environments - those that value, reward, and develop employees from all generations and needs to be given them opportunities to contribute. Also, Generational differences can lead to frustration, conflict, and poor morale. However, those very differences can also lead to increased creativity and productivity and ultimately to business success.

LITRETURE REVIEW

Generational Diversification

In today's workplace, four distinct demographic generations work side-by-side with interesting, challenging, and often very creative results. In their broadest definition, these four groups encompass employees born as early as 1925 and as recently as 1990. Shaped by differing political, cultural, and economic environments, members of each of these four groups share significant characteristics, seem to share many priorities and personal values, and appear to bring reasonably consistent, distinct perspectives to the workplace. The names and birth years for the generations vary from one model to another. All are somewhat arbitrary; a generation or an era—doesn't end one day while another begins the next.

The term "generation" to refer to people born in the same general time span who share key historical or social life experiences (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). The effects of those key life experiences tend to be relatively stable over the course of their lives (Smola and Sutton,

2002). Due to these distinct key life experiences, each generation develops a unique personality that determines its feelings toward authority and organization (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). For example, members of generations who come of age in lean times or war years tend to think and act differently than those born and raised in peace and abundance. The generational personality is also likely to determine what individuals want from work, what kind of workplace environment they desire and how they plan to satisfy those wants and desires. Due to generational differences, these wants and desires tend to vary from generation to generation. Therefore, people from different generations may have problems understanding others' perspectives of the work, which can be stressful, confusing, and frustrating in a demanding workplace like the hospitality industry (Zvikaite-Rotting, 2007).

Traditionalist or Matures, also known as silent generation, these workers were born before 1946 and Shaped by the great depression and world war, these people tend to be conservative with an approach that work and duty come before play and pleasure. Although most of those from this generation who are still working are not old enough to have fought in World War II. They have a tremendous respect for authority, following rules without questioning the reasons behind them. Loyalty and patriotism run deeply in this group. Although   most of part of the Traditionalists have not embraced new technology, those who have among the fastest-growing group of internet users (Dahlroth, 2008).

The Baby Boom Generation is the largest cohort in the workplace. Those born between 1946 and 1964 comprise the Baby Boom Generation, corresponding to the post-World War II. Boomers continue to hold most of the power and control. Due to these people were born during or after World War II and raised in an era of extreme optimism, opportunity and progress. Boomers, for the most part, grew up in two-parent households, safe schools, job security and post-war prosperity. Although baby boomers are seen as "highly competitive micro managers, who disdain laziness", they are generally excellent at networking and seeking consensus with others."(Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007, p.353; Artley and Macon, 2009, p.90).

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People born between 1965 and 1980 are referred to as Generation X, they were born after the Boomers into a rapidly changing social climate and economic recession. They grew up in two-career families with rising divorce rates, downsizing, the dawning of the high-tech age and the information age. As a result, Gen Xers tend to be self-reliant, independent and somewhat skeptical of authority (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007). They place a high level of importance on maintaining a work-life balance and are unlikely to scarify their personal life for the company (Gursoy *et al*, 2008).

Those born between 1980 and 2000 are called the Millennial Generation. Millennials also named as Generation Y, they were born of Boomer parents and early X-ers into the current high-tech, neo optimistic times. Although the youngest workers, they represent the most technologically adept. They are fast learners and tend to be impatient (Zemke et al., 2000). They embrace technology because they were bought up around it, and as a result, are very comfortable with change. Millenials are "more affluent, more technologically savvy, better educated and more ethnically diverse than any other previous generation" (Spiro, 2006, p.17.)

Workplace Communication

When communicating with an associate from another generation, it is critical to remember that he or she likely has different preferences and interests. It's a matter of adapting to the other person's preferences instead of sticking with one's own personal style.

Traditionalists tend to believe in institutions and rarely question authority, being respectful of law (Simons, 2009; Spiro, 2006). They tend to be loyal to companies, generally working for one or two employers in their life time (Simons, 2009). They are comfortable with "a top down style of management that disseminates information on a need to know basis" (Spiro, 2006, p. 10). Traditionalists more prefer face to face communication and formal typed or hand written letters.

Baby boomers tends to also be loyal employees, but tend to be more goal oriented and competitive, seeking promotions by working long

hours(Brazeel,2009: Spiro, 2006). They define their self-worth in part based on their jobs and are well suited to companies with hierarchical structures (Brazeel, 2009). They like more with hierarchical communication style and tend to see relationship and business results as intertwined and ask about mutual interests to make the conversation participative by getting the other's input, and link the message to the team or individual vision, mission, and values.

Generation Xers are not willing to waste the person's time. Be direct and straightforward. Avoid corporate-speak. Send an email or leave a voicemail that states clearly what they want, how it will serve the Generation Xers, and when they want it. Southard and Lewis (2004, p.9) states that Gen Xers "see the ability to control their schedules as being synonymous with their independence". Xers are positive, and tend to send a text message or meet face-to-face.

Millennials have a positive reputation for their energy, drive and skills and reluctant to perform simple tasks that lacked depth (Spiro, 2006). They are connected globally via mail, text massages, instant massages and social media websites. Also they like to tie the message to the Millennial's personal goals or to the goals the whole team is working toward.

While communication challenges are not uncommon at work, misunderstandings can become especially salient when individuals have different communication styles and expectations about work place interactions. In terms of cross -generational communication the most frequently cited issues include: knowledge transfers, giving and receiving feedback, and the ability to express different careers, work life priorities.

Qualities, Attitudes and Conflicts in workplace

Understanding psychological qualities and attitudes generations at work and changing workplace practices is immense important practicing managers. Change in cultures occurs gradually and takes time to appear generational differences in individuals' personality traits and attitudes.

There has also been a growing concern about young adults delaying their entry into the workforce and having a difficult time making career decisions (Feldman, 2003). Rysiew et al. (1999) found that when gifted teenagers possess many vocational interests and abilities, they have a more difficult time choosing one career path to pursue.

The increase in self-esteem and narcissism may be part of the reason why employee expectations are high. Young workers expect a very different workplace than the one where their parents worked. Today's employees expect to be excited by the vision of the company, its management and by the opportunities he/she will have to make contributions. They want to make suggestions right away and expect to be promoted quickly. In their book The Xers and the Boomers, Claire Raines and Jim Hunt relate the story of a young man who met with his manager and declared that he expected to be a vice president at the company within three years. When the manager told him this was not realistic, as most vice presidents were in their 60s, the young man got angry with him and said, "You should encourage me and help me fulfill my expectations."

Authentic leaders are "individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character" (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 802). Instead, the leaders question, they want to be inspired, and they want authenticity and ethical reasoning in their leaders. Thus, today's leaders need to make ethics an explicit part of their leadership program by visibly and intentionally role modeling ethical behavior, and holding followers accountable for ethical conduct (Brown and Trevino, 2006).

Considering the diverse generational characteristics and attitudes towards the works often cause intergenerational conflicts in the work place. Further, Behrens (2009, p.21) originate that "most workplaces quite frankly, are not designed to integrate the needs and preconceptions of successive

generations of employees, each of which acts quite differently from its predecessors", with traditional, rigid vertical hierarchies facing the most difficulties. Another area of potential conflict is how the generations views authority and management. Traditionalists believe in a chain of command concept, which Baby boomers have revised to consensus based model that includes performance reviews (Roy, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

A diverse workforce poses unique challenges. Employees with different backgrounds bring different ideas and opinions. Conflicts, anxiety and misunderstandings may increase. Embracing these differences and using them to improve company performance can be challenging. Managing generational diversity, a key management skill in today's global economy, means creating a climate in which the potential advantages of diversity for organizational or group performance are maximized while potential disadvantages are minimized.

Identifying generational distinctions can provide a useful framework for building awareness and understanding of the different viewpoints, attitudes, needs, and expectations among generations as well as the implications for future changes in the workplace. Understanding these unique generational differences can become a competitive advantage for organizations in terms of higher productivity and human performance. Also, the long-term costs related to loss of talent, higher payroll costs, poor customer service, derailed careers, knowledge transfer, and stress-related issues are enormous. To bridge the generation gap, organizations can provide opportunities for workers to share insights and resolve misunderstandings, "clear the air," and remove age-based prejudgments that hinder their working relationship.

Delegate work in a way that involves the strengths of each group (e.g., on a cross generational team, the team leader could suggest that the Gen Xers do the research and Baby Boomers process the information). Hold fewer and shorter meetings for Gen Xers and Gen Yers. Customize educational

programs (e.g., communicating across generations may mean packaging messages in several ways so that everyone understands).By acknowledging and honoring the differences and strengths of all generations, organizations can leverage and maximize the learning, productivity, and innovation of the entire organization.

Best Practices for Leading & Managing Intergenerational Workforce.

It is important for leaders and managers to be aware of and understand the different attitudes and expectations of an intergenerational workforce and how to manage them effectively and to manage the potential clash points that may arise such as work ethics, managing change, and so forth. Best practices such as good communication and flexible leadership styles will increase the likelihood of successfully managing a productive workforce and meet the expectations and needs of individuals, as well as those of the entire organization. For example: Gen Xers and Gen Yers share similar needs and expectations such as a more innovative workplace, flexible hours, inclusion, and supervisors who care and listen. Younger people are more interested in hearing that organizations want them to have a life, not just a job. Consequently, they desire more choices and freedom to pursue their career development. They may require a different leadership and coaching style with immediate, ongoing feedback. Understanding these unique needs and offering them training opportunities to increase their career growth will enhance their productivity and support retention efforts.

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