LEADERSHIP STYLE AND MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE: THE RIGHT LEADERSHIP AT THE RIGHT TIME

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Abstract

Multigenerational workforce means many generations are active in job market. Here word many generations indicates the employees of different age groups, needs, wants and expectations at one working place. It is challenging for employers and leaders to manage such workforce. Many of the leaders are not sure about which aspects of business they should assess to satisfy their employees.

As per statistics, only 6% organizations are strongly agreed that leaders are powered to lead a multigenerational workforce. Another data says that employers and leaders are responsible for 70% of their manpower happiness and motivation, means they are directly accountable for providing workaholic environment.

Multi-generational workforces are adopted as a norm in India now a days, as the need of developing country. Hence, it is pivotal that organizations also adapt accordingly to bother many important points like risk significant productivity, engagement, and retention issues etc. Every generation rise up with its distinctive set of skills because of historical events, economic conditions, and the popular culture at that particular time¹.

As per data available, 95 % of current workforce is fabricated of three different generations spanning across 50 years. Your unit may have team members moving closer to end of their career means 60 plus, others just beginning the career and many are with some experience. These variations in the age groups and work exposure generate unique challenges for leaders and their stewardship skills. Leaders must understand the direct association of productivity, efficiency, and business results with type of work environment they offer to employees. It indicates that the primary objective of a leader is to evolve a workplace which prop up team players and organisational goals!⁶

Keywords: Leaders, Multigeneration, Organization, Unit, Workforce.

If a leader is unmindful about how to lead across multiple generations, workforce will be displeased, infuriate, and may depart from organization. If they work at such places, they will not be absorbed in their work and goals. So here comes the role of skilful leadership. Effective leadership means:

• Pin point the generational disparities.
• Value the individual diversity focusing on everyone’s common needs.

• Introduce a flexible leadership approach.

• Utilizing the strengths of every generation to build a better team and the organization.

A leader must create a workaholic and engaging environment for all generations. To accomplish this, leaders must understand the differences between the generations that are in, or moving into, the current workplace. A Leader must be approachable, authentic, a good listener and a gear up for his employees.

In the present era, mainly four distinct generations are represented at the workforce: The Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. There are so many factors which shape each of these generations uniquely like Social, relational, economic, political, unique expectations, experiences, lifestyles, values and technological changes. People of different age groups have different expectations and behaviour from their boss. Moreover, always it is not possible to look age groups while making strategic plans in the organization. Generations.

Definitions of the multiple generations in today’s workforce vary slightly, and no one fits neatly into the typical preferences and characteristics of their generation. But typically, the four generations in today’s workforce are defined as:

• Traditionalists (known as Builders or the Great Generation), they were born before 1945.

• Baby Boomers, born in the span of 1946 to 1964.

• Generation X (also known as Busters or the Lost Generation), born from 1965 to 1980

• Millennials (called as Generation Y), born from 1981 to 2001

A fifth generation, Generation Z, is already a formidable force as consumers and are just beginning to join the workforce. Large numbers of Generation Z are still in adolescence, so their characteristics are not fully understood and analysed at this point. Well, we are not examining this group in detail, their current arrival in the workplace suggest that a multigenerational workforce will continue to be the norm even after the Traditionalists have all retired.³

In many companies, we will see Baby Boomers, Generation X employees, Millennials, and a few Generations Z. While Baby Boomers are retiring at a rate of one every seven seconds, still they make a large portion of the workforce. So, Millennials make a major portion today’s workforce.
As a manager or leader, it is quite important to understand how each generation handles communication, work hours, collaboration, benefits, and others. Say for example, Baby Boomers value a steady position that offers a 9 to 5 fix schedule, Millennials prefer flexible working hours where they can take their work home. Another key difference among all generations is with communication. Every generation uses its own style of communication and language. It varies in tone, content, medium and type of communication. The way different generations communicate varies say for instance, Millennials prefer modern communication and technology through text messages and email, while other older generations prefer contact through phone calls primarily. At the cross-section of Millennials and Baby Boomers are Generation X. The scenario is different, they value their time as a top priority and would rather spend it working and getting the work done, than in the meeting room chatting about ideas. As their personal time is most valuable asset.

When organizations look at wider set of attributes, they can understand individuals’ distinct characteristics to bring them together in ways which can promote a sense of belonging among them. Research from MetLife offers a view of how this can happen, MetLife identified five factors which organizations should consider in workforce segmentation:

- Demographics these are like age, gender, income, education etc.
- Firmographics such as job tenure, company size, role, and blue vs. white collar.
- Attitudes toward life such as optimism, future vs. present orientation, orientation toward change, and sources of pleasure/stress.
- Attitudes toward work like work-life balance, attitudes toward retirement, and motivations for staying at the job.
- Needs from employer like career development support, salary, benefits, work culture, and work subject matter.

The Situational Leadership suggest that no leadership style is perfect and it depends on situation, task and nature of group. It is the most practical and applicable on-the-job tool which is based on the relationship between leaders and followers. This leadership helps to analyse each situation based on Performance Readiness Level which a follower shows in performing a specific task or function. Then, based on the leader’s observation, needed relationship and behaviour communicated to employees in order fulfil their needs and advance development. Style of leadership is also impacted by maturity level of people in terms of knowledge and competence. Again, it is very important to match the maturity level of individuals and leadership style.
Here comes the flexibility of leaders or managers to cope with the maturity level and leadership style which is the essence of “Situational Leadership Style.”

Benefits of Situational Leadership

- Leading to multi-directional influence
- Helps leaders to modify the behaviour.
- Helps in manpower development
- Teaches leaders to analyse the situation effectively and then react.
- Enhances employee motivation and productivity.

Four Core Competencies

Situational Leaders learn four core, common and critical leadership competencies:

- Identification and analysis of employee’s readiness and pace to accomplish a task.
- Adaptation in leaders’ behaviour based on interpretation.
- Communicate an influence in behaviour that followers can understand and accept.
- Skilled by managing the movement toward higher performance.²

Leadership in multigenerational workforce

Be Flexible in Your Leadership Style

Turning a multi-generational services department into a mutually reinforcing team is no easy task. The leaders must follow flexible approach to enhance the efficiency and productivity of employees and to build a team that thrive. A one-size-fits-all approach no longer exist. This may motivate some but be a real turn-off to others. People working in your organization come to workstation with different levels of motivation, expectations, assumptions, priorities and approaches. You cannot ignore these differences, if it happens, leaders will face the situation of misunderstanding and conflicts. If leaders are able to manage appropriately, they can create opportunities for collaboration and synergy among workers of different generations, giving the organization a competitive edge.
An empathetic and flexible leadership approach is the key to success in leading and motivating a multi-generational department which will work as a bridge between employees of all generations. Here we will consider some points of effective leadership:

- Adapt your attitudes of rewards, work styles, communication preferences and motivation to match with generational expectations—one should be open about different generations in the work place and make an effort to start conversations about it.
- Learn what impacts each generation—A leader must offer multiple options to best meet the needs of a multi-generational work place.
- Leverage the strengths of each generation—Pursue and encourage the innovative perspectives, ideas and opinions of workforce.
- Make bridges between generations—it plays a major role to connect with each generation.
- Communicate uniquely with each generation—As we have discussed about different modes and preferences of communication about each generation, so it becomes mandatory for leader to understand and apply the various communication styles for his workforce.
- Support and respect values of each generation—Employers should support each generation’s values, morals and beliefs to pay respect and maintain harmony the organisation.

Although there are variations in age groups of different generations still one thing which is common to all is that when people are happy at workplace, they are more productive and engaged about in well-being of organization. In other words, work should be relevant, although what is relevant may be different for each group. It is leader’s job to understand the differences.

How all generation work together and have communication on day-to-day basis as a cohesive and creative team is a key component to any organization’s overall success and growth. The best leaders are those who can create a blend of all generations and meet the needs and demands of each one of them. In such manner, organisation can raise the performance expectations from employees and in turn receive greater performance from more engaged workforce who are participating to help you succeed in achieving organization’s objectives.

When multi-generations come closer to work as a cohesive team, additional intangible assets can be achieved:

- A good team lead by a good leader a more flexible to work.
- People will bring up with creative and innovative ideas.
- A broad range of ideas results in good decisions.
- Employees internal dissention decreases and morale goes up.
Look for Potential Conflicts

The major challenge for managers and leaders at workplace is to resolve their internal conflicts and there are always high chances for generational conflict that can decrease the potential of employees to work together as a team and accomplish tasks. These conflicts can range from little misunderstandings to allegations and more of bias in a variety of areas. It is not always easy to prevent these disputes, but by developing perception of each group's motivational buttons you can minimize the disruptions.

You minimize conflict by:

Taking in consideration the strength and interest of each generation.

Giving small rewards may be in terms of appreciation or monetary makes a great impact.

To make them feel their presence in the organisational growth.

Example: Generation X often excel at helping to enhance the efficiency. Boomers may use their ability to explore all aspects of a situation to complete thorough research. This should be communicated to your entire team that generational differences are not necessarily either good or bad.

Example: Employees need to stop making judgments when they encounter work styles and values the differences than their own.

- It should be educated to your managers to embrace team differences.

Example: As a Boomer manager who does not understand that new generations have a different view of where and when work gets done will experience disputes with these employees.

Well, while there is no one-size-fits-all solution to manage a multi-generational workforce. Managers can build the teams by taking full advantage of what each generation brings to the table, this increases employee engagement and achieve organization’s goals⁶.
Figure 1 Showing Percentage of different generations in today’s era.
DOMINANT PERSONALITY TRAITS ACROSS GENERATIONS

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<th></th>
<th>Gen Z</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Greatest Generation</th>
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<td>Leads by (%)</td>
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<td>Liking for Stress</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Risk-taking, 11.2</td>
<td>Competitiveness, 10.0</td>
<td>Idealism, 18.30</td>
<td>Flexibility, 8.36</td>
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<td>Emotional Stability, 10.97</td>
<td>Social Adaptability, 9.4</td>
<td>Democratisation, 7.64</td>
<td>Empathy, 5.04</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>Intellectual Curiosity, 7.2</td>
<td>Collaboration, 8</td>
<td>Social Confidenc, 7.54</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 2, showing dominant personality traits in various generations.

Figure 3, Situational Leadership
Figure 4, Workforce by 2030

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