

Challenge of managing workforce age gaps

Employers must take note of strengths across the generations

THE CHALLENGE facing the leaders of today is to recognise that workforce diversity is not just about different cultures and gender, but is as much about the differences between themselves and the next generations.

They need to identify the drivers motivating these divergent groups so they can put in place appropriate flexible acquisition, retention and reward strategies.

"A one-size-fits-all approach to leadership is no longer the way to manage talent – if ever it was," says Sandra Burmeister, CEO of the Landelahni Recruitment Group.

"Today's employers face a workplace that spans three, if not four, generations, creating a complex mix of approaches to work, and generating cultural clashes that demand skilled leadership and a non-traditional approach, with the accent on flexibility.

"To get everyone working together, leaders – from the CEO to middle management – have to understand the unique strengths and weaknesses of each generation."



SANDRA BURMEISTER: smart leaders are structuring the mobility of the younger generations into their strategic planning.

Today's corporate leaders, the Baby Boomers – now in their early 40s to early 60s – are committed to personal growth and personal gratification but also have a team orientation based on similarity of belief, and they have a strong work ethic.

However, the new workforce – Generation X and Generation Y (between 18 and 40) – is demonstrating new values and traits.

The new band of leaders, Generation X – now in their late 20s to early 40s – value individualism and self-reliance. They are global citizens and are techno-literate. At work they take risks and value independence over corporate collectivism and red tape.

Generation Y or the "millennial

generation" include those in their 20s now entering the workforce. They are socially conscious and want to make a difference in the world.

They are street-smart, wedded to technology, with media and entertainment overload and, above all, they are networkers. Gen Y's are ambitious, but they don't have the same commitment to work as their parents and they have limited loyalty to any one particular employer.

"While Boomers work long hours and see work as an extension of their life, Gen Y's want to do a good job for their employers, but work isn't all they want to do," says Burmeister.

"Remuneration and reward

schemes are most often designed by Boomers with the focus on long-term incentives and share schemes.

But instant gratification is the order of the day for Gen X-ers and Gen Ys. Gen X-ers are most likely to be motivated by short-term cash incentives whereas, for Gen Y's, time is more important than money.

They want more flexibility in their workday and a better work and life balance and respond well to cyclical work and job sharing.

"The new workplace demands a high-octane mix of talent to deliver the innovations needed to keep the business competitive. The potential for high-performance is something that both Gen X-ers and Gen Y's possess in abundance, but they are high-maintenance employees.

"Boomers and Gen X-ers need to acknowledge their bias when it comes to Gen Y's and ensure that these do not get in the way of managing an incoming generation that requires strong, focused leadership from them both."

Research by the Sloane Foundation shows that, in the US, 60 percent of Boomers would like more responsibility in the workplace, as against 39 percent of Gen X-ers and only 23 percent of Gen Y's. Conversely, 23 percent of male Boomers would like more flexible working arrangements, compared to 69 per-

cent of male Gen X-ers and 75 percent of male Gen Y's. In the case of women, there is less divergence: 65 percent of Boomers would like more flexibility, compared to 83 percent of Gen X-ers and 85 percent of Gen Y's.

Even more startling, 92 percent of Gen Y's (men and women) would leave their jobs for greater flexibility, compared with 59 percent of Gen X-ers and a mere 2 percent of Boomers.

"Today, young people expect to change jobs many times in their careers, or even change careers more than once and, in certain sectors, they know there are more jobs than people to do them.

"Generational differences are not new. What is new is the extent of the gap between generations. As a result, leaders need to adapt constantly to new workplace attitudes on the role of work and to use them to the benefit of the organisation.

"Smart companies today offer a range of flexible benefits and reward schemes to match this diverse workforce. Smart leaders are structuring mobility into their succession plans, and using project-based roles as a means both to build skills and hold the attention of highly talented individuals."

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