

Managing Multigenerational Workforce: Motivation and Leadership for the Multigenerational Workforce

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ABSTRACT

Given the changing workforce of today, it is vital for managers to acquire the necessary skills to maximize employee job performance. With the current influx of Generation Y members into the workforce, changes in leadership style are questionable. Managers are challenged with the task of successfully blending a diverse age group of employees and increasing productivity. There are many different motivational strategies supervisors utilize to accomplish acceptable job performance from their employees; however, these methods may garner differing results when applied to a multigenerational workforce. As managers seek to understand the motivators, expectations, values, and beliefs of individual employees they may be confronted with changes necessary for successful management. Consequently, similarities and differences are seen in the multigenerational workforce and the groups often complement one another.

Keywords: Multigenerational, Baby Boomers, Motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

A study conducted by Jenkins (2008) suggests that companies manage four different generations of workers. The current workforce consists of Silents (born between 1925 and 1945), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation-Xers (born between 1965 and 1980), and Generation Y (born after 1980). According to Baldonado and Spangenburg(2009), as Generation Y employees enter the new economy, it proves to be a great challenge for managers to lead this new generation of workers. Effective management, along with correct motivational techniques, is an imperative for success; however, there is no set of guidelines to accomplish this feat. Success is a matter of finding what is most effective for each individual and putting the strategy into place (Baldonado & Spangenburg, 2009).

Jenkins (2008) believes that it is imperative that companies today learn to understand and embrace the unique qualities that each generation brings into the workforce and to work diligently to recruit, retain, and motivate each group; consequently, if managers will adjust their current styles and reject negative stereotypes, they can create employees who are very productive and have great values.

2. THE GENERATIONS AND THEIR DIFFERENCES VALUES AND BELIEFS

With many different ages in the workforce, it is important to understand the values and beliefs of each generation and their similarities and differences. Jenkins (2008) presents the Silents as the most loyal and dedicated employees, the most highly committed to teamwork. The Great Depression and World War II shaped their values (Jenkins, 2008). Silents grew up as witnesses to the struggle of their parents and view work as a method of survival (Saunderson, 2009).

Baby Boomers, were the first group to place work over their personal lives and had their values shaped by Vietnam and inflation (Jenkins, 2008). Saunderson(2009) describes Boomers as falling in love with their work and making the necessary sacrifices to work their way to the top. Generation Xers, also known as Millennials, are more independent than their predecessors and are not afraid to question authority (Jenkins, 2008). They are reported to be the first group in the workforce to try to balance work and family life, placing a greater emphasis on family than work (Saunderson, 2009).

In research conducted by Jenkins (2008), Generation Y, also referred to as Millennials, is known as the most educated and techno savvy generation; this group is characterized as the most team-oriented and diverse since the Silents. Other studies report the influence of technology and of political and economic chaos has unfortunately stereotyped Generation Y into one of disloyal, needy, and entitled individuals (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Generation Y demonstrates a high level of social responsibility, expecting strong ethical standards of their employers (Saunderson, 2009).

Characteristics

Managers should attempt to ensure that each generation understands the characteristics of one another in order to work together and be productive; realizing that each generation brings different types of experience to the table can strengthen an organization and be instrumental to successful management (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). A study was conducted addressing the issues of different generations in the workforce and the need for adjustments in the workplace to create a productive work environment; the findings supported the need for managers to attempt to create a harmonious work atmosphere for all generations (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Another research study conducted by Schultz and Schwegler Jr. (2012), attempted to compare how Baby Boomers and Generation Y differ in the corporate world of sales, hoping to discover expectations from each generation and to share information to aid sales managers leading this diverse generation. The research concluded that each had his own set of expectations, and the greatest differences were "face time" (p.33) in the sales field, recognition in the workplace, and expectations from managers. Baby Boomers were found to want more individual attention from managers, more face-to-face meetings, whereas younger employees wanted less interaction with their supervisors (Schultz & Schwegler Jr., 2012).

A research review of data from personality, attitude, and psychopathy and behavioral scales from 1930 to present, driven by Twenge and Campbell (2008), was conducted to determine how differences might impact the present workplace. The research revealed that Generation Y demonstrated a higher need for self esteem, anxiety and depression, and lesser needs for social approval, concluding that differences in

generations can be psychological as well as technological and can be directly related to the behavior in the workplace (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

3. MANAGEMENT THEORIES AND STYLES THEORIES

The basic principles of management theories and styles have been around for many years; however, many question their stability when faced with such a diverse generational workforce. Van Der Linden, Beckers, and Taris (2007) conducted a study using Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory to investigate how this theory might relate to stress on the job. Their theory consisted of two components: sensitivity to reward (which has a positive aspect) and sensitivity to punishment (which has a negative aspect). The research that sensitivity to punishment led to stress on the job; therefore, the study did favor sensitivity to reward for a multigenerational workforce (Van Der Linden, et al., 2007).

Managers are believed to have two different beliefs about their employees, commonly known as McGregor's Theory. Theory X managers believe that employees are naturally lazy and lack motivation and control whereas Theory Y managers believe employees want to do what is right, value their job, and make decisions based on the benefit of everyone involved (Neuliep, 1996). A study was conducted to examine how McGregor's Theory X and Y concepts relate to organizations ethical beliefs, measuring how managers opinions differ when confronted with unethical situations. He discovered that there was very little difference in how the two types of managers' view ethics in an organization, but Theory X managers believe that unethical behavior is a more effective way to deal with their employees (Neuliep, 1996). This stresses the importance of how the style of management can affect the multigenerational workforce, even though there was no evidence directly linking any specific age group of the employees to a particular theory.

According to Saunderson (2009), the management strategy for effectively managing an employee lies in communication and social reinforcement. Recognition is a universal principle for showing appreciation to others; therefore, managers should seek the type of recognition that works for each individual (Saunderson, 2009). Finding the most effective mode of communication and putting it to work is a plausible method for managers to adopt. Thompson (2012) contends that, if managers adopt a "transformational leadership" (p. 243), bond with employees by determining their individual needs, they will attract, motivate, and retain employees. Strong leadership is directly related to areas of change in connection to employee job satisfaction; less disruption in the work environment is seen in organizational structure if a strong support system is visible (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Levine (2004) considers that many managers have worked their way into management positions without any formal training in professional management skills, consequently causing employee productivity to suffer due to lack of understanding of how to effectively stimulate their employees. Managers who take advantage of team members' strengths and talents can use them to make their business more productive (McDonald, 2008). This diverse generation of employees has caused managers to closely examine current management strategies to determine if there is a need to adjust. If adjustments are necessary, a judicious evaluation of individual employees and their contribution to workplace goals could prove beneficial.

Workplace Expectations

To effectively manage a multigenerational workforce, awareness of the expectations that the multigenerational workforce seeks in the workplace is important to managers. According to Schultz and Schwepker Jr. (2012), Baby Boomers currently hold the majority of the manager positions, and they think employees should earn their right to management positions. On the contrary, Generation Y believes the amount of time put in on the job should not directly affect their place in the hierarchy; for that reason, they wish to be hired to fill upper management positions because of their education and ability to do the job regardless of qualifications (Schultz & Schwepker Jr., 2012).

Rawlins, Indvik, and Johnson (2008) conducted a study that was prompted by faculty who began to notice a difference in the newer generation of their students, to determine the different values and expectations of these future employees. The faculty recognized a difference in the wants, needs, and motivators of current students compared to past students. When the students were surveyed and asked, "What is most important in making career choices?" the following results were revealed: opportunities for health and retirement benefits, additional education and advancement within the organization, starting

salaries at a minimum of \$50,000, and a company that maintains strong ethical standards (Rawlins, et al., 2008). If managers become aware of the different expectations that this multigenerational workforce holds, they can determine if there is a need for adjusting their current management strategies.

4. JOB SATISFACTION AND MOTIVATION POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE

Just as important as for management to understand the differences and expectations of the multigenerational workforce is the need to try to identify what motivates workers and offers job satisfaction in order to effectively manage them. There are many different views on motivators for diverse generations as well as different strategies to achieve total job satisfaction. Holt, Marques, and Way (2012) contend that, contrary to common belief Generation Y does not have a stronger drive for social rewards than the Silents, Baby Boomers, or Generation X; within their job, the opportunity for advancement and new innovative tasks rank equally important to all generations. Also, Generation Y loves a challenge, which is a positive motivator. There has been some controversy over whether consequences directly affect behavior. Research conducted by Overskeid (2012) attempted to measure how emotions might play a role in reinforcement. It was concluded that motivating events were needed for reinforcement to have an effect on behavior. In agreement with Skinner's reinforcement theory, having both pleasing and strengthening effects, but just because one is pleased that does not mean the behavior will necessarily be repeated (Overskeid, 2012).

Baldonado and Spangenburg (2009) conducted research on the motivational needs of Generation Y and how they have made a difference in the workplace; the study was based on Herzberg's 2-factor theory of motivation. Herzberg developed this theory in 1968 by assuming that any factors that might lead to job satisfaction such as motivators or intrinsic rewards, are totally different from those factors that might produce dissatisfaction on the job, such as hygiene factors or extrinsic factors (Baldonado & Spangenburg, 2009). Herzberg (2003) realized through his study that the factors that lead to job satisfaction are different than the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction and that motivators primarily caused job satisfaction and hygiene factors caused dissatisfaction.

Stress

Stress is a major motivator for job satisfaction. According to Van Der Linden, et al. (2007), working in an unpleasant environment can have an unhealthy effect on employees' overall health; therefore, if a person is stressed and unhealthy, it is hard for him or her to stay focused and motivated on the job. Levine (2004) declares that, if employees are unhappy at work, they will not be productive; as a result, stimulating organizational morale to maximize productivity through coaching techniques is needed. In addition, Twenge and Campbell (2008) agree that stress is a negative motivator for employees and that management must find ways to cope with it to enhance employees productivity. There are many programs that companies may choose to offer in order to reduce stress and to help employees balance work and personal lives: daycare, flextime, mental health services can all help reduce daily stressors (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

Change

Studies have focused on various motivating techniques, such as change, utilized by management to prompt job satisfaction, and results show similarities and differences in responses from cross generations. Most believe that organizations value employees who are not afraid of change; thus, it is important for management to encourage creativity in the workplace (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Rafferty and Griffin (2006) conducted a research study focusing on the three characteristics of change - frequency, impact, and planning - to determine how these characteristics relate to job satisfaction and turnover. The way that managers choose to implement organizational change when they are unsure about the characteristics that may cause an employee to react in a positive or negative manner was closely observed, and it was concluded that the frequency of change does relate to stress, which in turn relates to job turnover, decrease in job satisfaction, and decrease in retention (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Thus the importance for management to understand what interests will decrease resistance to change for their employees in order to foster productivity within an organization.

5. CONCLUSION

The importance of the issue is evident due to the constant increase of the diverse generation of employees present in the workplace. Stereotypes have become very common, perhaps unjustly labeling certain generations, casting a negative opinion upon some workers. Some research studies focus on the stereotypes that have been placed specifically upon Generation Y while other research tends to disregard the stereotypes. Regardless of how the age groups may be characterized, most researchers agree that each group has unique qualities to contribute in the workplace. These unique qualities create difficulty for management in recognizing which strategies to implement. Due to current economic dynamics, retirement age is projected to increase, forcing an even greater generational diversity in the workforce; therefore, the issue will continue to plague managers. There is a need for management to understand the characteristics of each employee and bring them together to be productive. The task for management is to understand the characteristics of each employee to create a productive workforce, realizing that some employees require more individualized feedback than others do.

There is a direct link between motivation and job satisfaction. Upon management discovering what motivates employees and empowering them with the necessary motivators to prompt job satisfaction, effective management will be evident. Demographics are not believed to make a difference in the desires for advancement and achievements on the job. Yet, emotions do tend to play a major role in how one reacts to reinforcement, both positive and negative. All age groups are motivated more effectively by positive reinforcement and support from their supervisor. Stress is a negative motivator for all employees; so many companies tend to seek out those stressors and attempt to eliminate them. Various management strategies have long been utilized to supervise employees, and there are no set guidelines to follow.

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