WHY BOTHER TO COME TOGETHER?

It’s the season for family reunions! Over Chinese New Year and the long weekend that just passed, many families came together from all corners of the country (and the globe) to catch up over great food.

Aren’t the dynamics of family reunions interesting? Just consider the idea of four generations coming together for a meal: each generation with different priorities and in different stages of their lives.

At least in the case of my family, great-grandparents sit back and soak in the atmosphere. Grandparents and parents catch up, discuss current affairs and grandchildren/children, while making sure the youngest participants aren’t stuck on their phones and are making the effort to mingle.

It’s an astonishing combination of age groups when you really stop to think about it, made even more remarkable when you remember the journey to reunions is often inconvenient.

There is the traffic to battle and there is a huge amount of preparation involved. Then when you actually do turn up, you’ll find conversations promise to be enthusiastic. There are new family members to meet, and there can be awkward moments.

But everyone turns up anyway, because reunions are anchored by a shared commitment to being together. Amidst the age diversity, there is a commitment to unity.

The dynamics aren’t that different at work. With the delay in retirement, three to four generations function in our workplaces today. Baby Boomers, champions of discipline and hard work must work alongside ambitious young Gen-Yers, who thrive on growth and speed.

Generational idiosyncrasies become more pronounced since we don’t just see each other a handful of times a year, but almost everyday. “I just don’t understand them!”, “How do they expect work to be done like this?” we say in private conversations, often to others of our own generation.

But just like in families, organisational goals demand unity in diversity, and leaders face this challenge of pulling very different people together around common goals.

If we want to be high-performing teams, generations must learn to work well together, and leaders must know how to harness the strengths of each generation.

To help this happen in your organisations, we committed this week’s pages to the theme of generations. How exactly do the generations in Malaysia differ (pages 6-7)? How can we do the generations in Malaysia differ (pages 6-7)? How can we harness the strengths of each generation.

The best example that we can see is HR competencies for HR professions. There is a big difference between a HR manager in American and non-American firms.

In American firms, if you were to succeed, you would need a variety of knowledge and skills, with strong emphasis on leadership and integrity.

It may not be the same in other organisations, based on my experience, where the emphasis on leadership and integrity.

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By ROSHAN THIRAN

IT's easier to write a long email (which may go unread), but writing a short and impactful one may take hours of editing to perfection. Even the best speeches are brief and impactful. Martin Luther King’s “I have dream” speech lasted 16 minutes and Lincoln’s Gettysburg address had only 10 lines. The same goes for meetings and everything we do. It is easier to let meetings ramble along. To have an effective meeting requires thoughtful preparation, requiring time and effort. But I am sure you will ask me this question: “Excuse me, but most of my meetings are ad-hoc as people just pop into my office unannounced and I just don’t have time to prepare. How do you expect us to be brief and prepared for these sessions?”

TO STAND OR NOT TO STAND

The moment someone comes into my office, I tend to stand up. By doing so, it clearly creates a sense of urgency.

Most folks immediately drop the small chat and jump into the heart of the matter that they came to discuss. If the matter requires thoughtful discussion, I quickly walk with the person to a quieter part of the organisation and discuss it. Sometimes, during the walk, the matter may be resolved. If the matter requires a quick decision, I keep standing throughout the meeting. Standing meetings generally are much more productive that sitting meetings. Blood is flowing quicker and most people are looking to quickly solve the issue.

Hasten the pace

When someone drops into the office and begins a leisurely chat, I quickly stare at my watch and announce that I have a meeting in five minutes (which is usually true anyway). This immediately hastens the pace, getting us faster to the core of the issue at hand. I also love walk-in meetings where I have a meeting while walking over to another appointment.

These meetings are great as they force everyone to be short and the discussions have a very specific time limit.

Schedule multiple short meetings

I try to schedule short 15 minute meetings instead of the customary one hour per meeting. Sure that occasional- ly gets me into a fix when some issues require deeper discussion and thought. However, when people realise they only have 15 minutes, they come much more prepared with options and solutions. Thus, we end up saving huge amounts of “brainstorming” time and get quicker to decision-making and value added activities.

Have lots of standing meetings

Not only is it good exercise, you will also see significant reduction in bored people playing Angry Birds while a long-winded participant goes on and on about a trivial issue. Having everyone standing and meeting forces everyone to pay attention and saves significant time. Standing up is also a sign of active learning. (And research back this up – “Groups that stood-up took 34% less time to make the assigned decision, and there were no significant differences in decision quality between stand-up and sit-down groups.”)

FINAL THOUGHTS

In 1603, Shakespeare wrote, “Brevity is the soul of wit”. Leaders must understand the power of being brief. By managing your time more efficiently, you give yourself more time for the high-value matters that can drive your organisation further. But it starts with mastering brief interactions and encounters. Mastering it may take some time. So focus on making small changes to your meetings and interaction.

Start by standing and implementing the four sentence rule. Soon, you will enjoy the power of brevity. As Thomas Jefferson rightly stated, “The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.”

Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics, a social enterprise with a mission of transforming the nation through leadership development. To follow Roshan on Twitter (and his brief 140 character interactions) follow his handle “leadership” or via Facebook at www.facebook.com/roshanthiran.leaderonomics
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E often hear employers talk about the shortage of bright, employable graduates. Organisations clamour over the cream of the crop. The brightest graduates receive numerous job offers and are highly sought-after resource, while other university leavers struggle to secure jobs.

It’s not just about academic performance. A survey in September 2013 found that employers are increasingly looking beyond academic results when hiring fresh graduates. Key criteria that employers look for include good interpersonal and communication skills; a good command of English and the right salary expectation.

Sixty-four per cent of employers who participated in the survey indicated they don’t have a strong preference when it comes to hiring a graduate from a public university, private university or foreign university.

Leading organisations, including the Big Four, even source for graduates beyond Malaysian shores and run programmes to facilitate early identification of strong graduates. They run initiatives such as insight days, competitions and boot camps to engage and identify students early on in their student life.

Graduate recruiters know the characteristics they are after, such as client facing skills, high levels of numeracy and drive. When they spot individuals with these traits, either at an event or during internships, they put them on “watch lists” or extend conditional offers before they complete their degree.

The aim is to stay in touch with these undergraduates, so that they will have the organisation at the top of their minds as a preferred employer. According to the survey, 85% of employers in Malaysia are looking to hire fresh graduates.

The other 14% are of the view that fresh graduates lack the necessary experience, maturity and communication skills required for the job. Results indicate that fresh graduates are not offered jobs mainly because of their bad attitudes or poor communication skills during interviews or at work, rather than their academic qualifications.

Fresh graduates are unsuccessful in securing job offers due to these key reasons:

1. Asking for unrealistic salary/benefits (67%)
2. Poor character, attitude or personality (60%)
3. Poor communication skills (55%)
4. Poor command of English language (55%)
5. Lack of required skills (42%)

There is a mismatch between the traits, skills and the needs of employers today.

Both educational institutions and companies recognise this misalignment, and TalentCorp is actively partnering with employers and universities to help bridge this gap.

In collaboration with companies in key sectors, TalentCorp runs various graduate employability programmes in order to raise career awareness and the enhance school-to-work transition.

The aim is to help employers build a strong pipeline of Malaysian graduates that can address the shortage of young talents in key sectors.

C-Talks cater to young professionals and undergraduates, providing the opportunity to be up close and personal with inspiring personalities.

In these sessions, graduates get to meet with CEOs, senior HR representatives, successful businessmen and prominent corporate leaders.

What’s in store for 2014?
1. More exciting and informative talks
2. In-campus talks – alternate Wednesdays
3. Off-campus talks – Final Friday of every month

To get involved in C-Talks, email cor@talentcorp.com.my or check SFCF’s Facebook page for updates.

The Upskilling Programme was introduced to increase the availability of local talent and to provide the opportunity for employment of high skilled jobs among local fresh graduates.

Graduates undertaking the Upskilling Programme are selected based on their strong academic performance and are put through technical training for a period of nine to 12 months, covering niche areas in the key sectors of Electronics & Engineering (B&E), Oil and Gas, Telco, IT and Accounting.

Industry recruiters play an active role in ensuring that all training modules are developed based on the requirements of the industry.

Graduates participating in the programme have the opportunity to be placed with an employer within the sector to gain relevant experience.

This programme accelerates the development of graduates for high value added jobs and makes them industry ready.

Benefits to companies include:
1. Access to world class workforce in Malaysia
2. Enable demand-driven skill deployment
3. Training cost partially funded by the Government

2. INDUSTRY TALKS (C-TALKS)

3. UPSKILLING PROGRAMME

TALENTCORP GRADUATE PROGRAMMES AT A GLANCE

TalentCorp’s initiatives in the area of graduate employability aim to achieve three main objectives: increase awareness, provide exposure, and increase the employability of graduates. These programmes work hand-in-hand with employers and universities, ultimately with the aim of equipping students to prepare them for work.

1. SECTOR FOCUSED CAREER FAIR (SFCF)

Sector Focused Career Fair (SFCF) aims to raise awareness of exciting career opportunities in key sectors of the Economic Transformation Programme.

These key sectors are:

- Oil and gas
- Electronics and electrical
- Information technology
- Telecommunication
- Biotechnology
- Finance and accounting
- Healthcare
- Tourism
- Fast moving consumer goods
- Education

For participating employers, the benefits include:
1. A platform to source for potential interns and graduate talent
2. Access to a qualified talent pool in specific sectors
3. Cost and time savings – companies can connect with a large pool of potential employees without having to advertise
4. Enhancement of employer branding

1st – 4th year university students

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Competition opportunities are open in collaboration with employers to provide internship or young talents to engage with prominent industry leaders and to demonstrate their creative and technical ability.

For companies, competition provides access to a highly driven and creative talent pool.

Among the competitions which have been supported by TalentCorp are:

(i) CIMB ASEAN Stock Challenge
— A cross border simulated stock trading competition aimed at developing the next wave of investment minds.

Students have the opportunity to trade virtual stock from real life companies that are listed on Bursa Malaysia, Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX), Singapore Stock Exchange (SGX) and Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET).

(ii) Maybank Go Ahead Challenge
— An international business case competition to discover young individuals across the region who aspire to embark on an exciting career with one of the leading financial services providers in the region.

The Graduate Employability Management Scheme (GEMS), which began in 2009, has now been revised to be more sector-focused and demand-driven.

The main thrust of GEMS 2.0 is to enhance graduate employability with the aim to reduce talent short-ages in the key areas of economy by 2020.

It trains, exposes and prepares unemployed graduates for future career opportunities with the intention to contribute to the economy by reducing the country’s unemploy-ment rate.

For more information on the GEMS programme, visit www.mygemsportal.com.my

# This article is brought to you by TalentCorp.
LEADING MALAYSIAN GENERATIONS
MANAGING BABY BOOMERS, GEN-X AND GEN-Y AT WORK

BY LILY LAU
mystarjob@leaderonomics.com

This page was a time when emerging technology became evident in the 1980s with the launch of microprocessors. The US was the world leader in computers. But then there was a shift towards information technology. The world started understanding that technology was part of their lifestyle. It was this period that Gen-X came into being.

These were the Gen-Y, also known as Millennials, or the Digital Generation. What makes them different from other generations is their use of technology in almost every aspect of their lives. They are also a “high-maintenance” generation, stating solutions instead of problems from the preceding generations. Their generation mission is to be connected.

During this period, Malaysia was undergoing tremendous turbulence. Malaysia was on the verge of industrialisation. Many new companies were in order to manufacture high-value-added products for the world. They were adopting technology at a huge scale and the country had a workforce. This workforce was born in 1990 and 1991.

In the early 1990s, Malaysia was growing and became one of the tigers of South East Asia. Gen-Y has never known the world without technology. They are the “Internet Babies.” They have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

Based on US data, individuals who belong to Gen-X were born after 1980. They are also known as the Internet Babies. They know how to use an iPod at the age of two without much instruction, and have grown up without the Internet and smart phones. Gen-Z will pose a challenge to Gen-Y. Gen-Z will demand autonomy in every skill they learn. They want high salary and work positions that are in line with their experiences and education.

Every generation has its liabilities and the key is how to capitalise on each other's strengths and take maximum talent utilisation.

BABY BOOMERS: Give appreciation, respect, recognition and reward, encourage contribution, and be part of the team.

Easier said than done, because the following are some of the challenges:

2. If it is long and difficult, it is not clear that there is no instant success and many things will take years to learn.

Every generation has its assets and liabilities. The key is how to capitalise on each other's strengths for maximum talent utilisation.

The use of different communication styles and routes with different generations.

In the 1950s, there was a period when the workforce increased and it became the leading capita in the world. It was a period of workers in the small and big businesses.

The children of Gen-X are brought up by both parents, as both parents were required to work. Since it was a time when they were growing up, Malaysia was undergoing tremendous change. Malaysia had just become an independent country. This generation experienced independence and have grown up in a different way of learning.

In the United States vis-à-vis Malaysia:

- In Malaysia, not Baby Boomers are the World Babies. They are the ones who have never seen Malaysia pre-independence, because they were born after independence. Malaysia has observed the development of Malaysia.
- They are a generation formed due to the aging of the baby-boomers. Gen-X is a generation formed due to the aging of the baby-boomers.
- The British rule and war were respected. Malaysia’s generation mission is to learn the basic rules of Gen-X.

In the United States:

- Baby Boomers (1946-1960)
- Gen-X (1961-1980)
- Gen-Z (2000 onwards)

Every generation has its assets and liabilities. The key is how to capitalise on each other’s strengths for maximum talent utilisation.

The use of different communication styles and routes with different generations.

In the United States:

- The workforce is a mixture of Boomers, X’s and Y’s.
- Baby Boomers are in the age close to retirement.
- Gen-X is the generation leader replacing Boomers and Gen-Y in the workforce segment with potential emerging leaders.
- This article strives to answer the differences, dominant prejudices and sharpened sensitivities between the generations.

We focus on the Malaysian workforce where the demographic, cultural and socio-economic realities are different from other countries. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of research available on Malaysian generations, and data from the United States are recommended to be used only as a reference point.

Here is an overview of three generations in the United States vis-à-vis Malaysia:

- Gen-Z were born after 1990. They have never known the world without technology. They have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

- Generation Y in Malaysia came in during the late 1990s. In a different way of learning.

- Gen-Z will pose a challenge to Gen-X. They have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

- Malaysian Gen-Y only know as the Internet Babies. They have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

- Gen-Z is a grouping of individuals born between 2000 and 2009, and they have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

- Malaysian Gen-Z will pose a challenge to Gen-X. They have access, connectivity and reliability on technology.

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GETTING THE BEST OUT OF GEN-Y

They are the people who don’t seek a predictable and steady work life. Hence, many organisations face retention issues with Gen-Y employees. Jason Dorsey, a best-selling Gen-Y author, says “Gen-Y is the only generation in the workforce that has never expected to work for one company their entire lives”.

They believe that everything can be achieved in a short time. They have the tendency to switch roles, department or employers when they feel that they are unable to develop further in that environment.

At work, they also look for passion, purpose, flexibility, transparency as well as an interesting and fast-paced work lifestyle. They believe in balance and need to know the purpose behind their contribution.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MOTIVATES GEN-Y

On the one hand, they may be your thought leaders. The problem is that many employers agree on is that Gen-Y graduates are “not workplace ready”. Some would go so far as to say that Gen-Y is the toughest generation to deal with, be it at home or at work. Yet each generation has its own unique, often misunderstood, characteristic. So it’s all about understanding what motivates and what makes them tick.

The shift in today’s workforce demographics requires management to appreciate Gen-Y in order to maximise their full potential.

The best managers will try to have a different perspective. They believe in a non-hierarchical working environment where they feel they can talk to the CEO on their first day about what’s on their mind. They would also be the ones who challenge and question senior leaders in the organisation on things they don’t personally believe in.

In order to get the best out of Gen-Y, there is a need to firstly understand that the Gen-Yers are different to other generations.

Getting back to basics, Gen-Yers are simply a bunch of young people who love freedom and entertainment. They need the flexibility to be able to work in a non-structured environment. They’re not lazy and they will put in the hours when needed, but they also need to have time off from their desk to sip a cup of coffee before resuming work.

An engaging and an interactive work environment motivates them. Being silent at work and just getting the job done isn’t work for Gen-Y.

They appreciate a fun workplace, and they enjoy a creative and innovative working environment. In terms of authority, they have a different perspective. They believe in a non-hierarchical working environment where they feel they can talk to the CEO on their first day about what’s on their mind.

THE WORLD SHOULD NOT BEND TO THE PREFERENCES OF GEN-Y. HOWEVER, THE BEST MANAGERS WILL TRY TO FIND WAYS TO DEFINE AND DIRECT GEN-Y’S TALENTS AND PECULIARITIES TO HELP THEM GROW INTO EFFECTIVE LEADERS WHO CAN ADD VALUE TO THEIR ORGANISATIONS.

WHAT DOES THE MILENNIAL GENERATION WANT TO BE WHEN IT GROWS UP?

A new survey of Millennials conducted globally by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Ltd provides some fascinating insights on what Gen-Y wants from business, government, and the future workplace:

1. **Millenials Expect Businesses to Care**

While most Millennials believe business is having a positive impact on society by generating jobs (48%) and increasing prosperity (71%), they think business can do much more to address society’s challenges in the areas of most concern: resource scarcity (68%), climate change (65%) and income inequality (64%).

2. **Millenials Want to be Innovative**

Millenials want to work for organisations that support innovation. In fact, 78% of Millennials were influenced by how innovative a company was when deciding if they wanted to work there, but most say their current employer does not do enough to encourage them to think creatively.

They believe the biggest barriers to innovation are management attitude (63%), operational structures and procedures (61%), and employee skills, attitudes and lack of diversity (39%).

3. **Millenials Want to Be Leaders**

Almost one in four Millennials are “asking for a chance” to show their leadership skills. Additionally, 75% believe their organisations could do more to develop future leaders.

4. **Millenials Want to Make a Difference**

Millenials believe the success of a business should be measured in terms of more than just its financial performance, with a focus on improving society among the most important things it should seek to achieve.

Millenials are also charitably interested and interested in participating in “public life”. 63% of Millennials gave to charities, 43% actively volunteered or were a member of a community organisation and 52% signed petitions.

5. **Millenials Are Ready to Go**

Businesses that fail to address these concerns may find they will lose skilled professionals in the years ahead, as many of the most talented members of the Millenial generation decide to leave large organisations and instead work for themselves.

Roughly 70% of Millennials see themselves working independently at some point, rather than being employed within a traditional organisational structure.
EMBRACING DIVERSITY, EMPOWERING AFFINITY

BY EVELYN TEH
evelyn.teh@leaderonomics.com

DIVERSITY, CAN ROLL-OUT THE AND MANAGERIAL REMAINS AS SOPs OF EMPATHY, THE PRACTICES, BUT INSTRUCTIONS.

OR the first time ever, we are seeing four generations of employees working side by side in organisations.” How many times have we heard this or similar incantations discussed at human resources roundtables or talent management seminars? Whether your reply is in the form of a cheer, a groan or a shrug, it is undeniable that this concern exists and we are still finding a comfortable stance in resolving it.

With a multitude of resources available at our fingertips, it is not difficult to obtain good, practical tips on dealing with the different values, communication styles and behaviors of each generation.

One example of best practice in leading diversity is IBM, who created their Generational Diversity Programme based on 3As (Accessibility, Accommodation, Attitude).

These criteria are used to ensure that there is a fit between the employee’s life cycle and their needs. Having this programme embedded in IBM’s talent management strategy became one of the key reasons for its success. Other examples include P&G’s online talent management system that allows key stakeholders in an employee’s career (including the employees themselves) to build a talent profile and plot pathways to their destination career.

Thus, this gives an opportunity for a more holistic voice to all those who are involved in developing an individual’s successful career.

Try googling keywords such as “leading multigenerational organisations” and the great examples are endless.

Yet, this leads to another question begging to be answered – Is such tailoring necessary for our organisations?

How can we ensure optimal tailoring for organisational thriving and avoid issues such as organisational fairness? Tailoring and customising can require tremendous effort. Depending on the characteristics of your organisation, these efforts can sometimes be the bane of cost-benefit analyses. While tailoring talent management efforts is no longer a question of necessity, deciding the amount of tailoring needed for success is a constant challenge.

There have been studies that show that generational stereotypes can be blown out of proportion and can be an extrapolation of our own self-perception.

So, it is possible to have Gen-Xs who much prefer face-to-face communication and Baby Boomers who enjoy using social media to network. Try handing a new iPad to your parents who may be Baby Boomers or Gen-Xers and you might find that they actually enjoy it and are more engaged than you are.

Catalyst, an NGO that focuses on diversity and inclusion as its mission cautions against over-generalising and encourages organisations to address its stereotypes lest we end up perpetuating negative stereotypes which can impact organisational performance. Ultimately, we have our differences and we need to manage these differences. But how much do we focus on these differences, and how do we make these differences work?

Perhaps it is in finding the right balance between leveraging differences and similarities. Can we embrace diversity and empower affinity? A study by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) titled Leading a Multigenerational Workforce shows that while we come from diverse generations, we still share similarities in some organisational needs:

1. We all seek fulfilment and a sense of purpose from our jobs; accompanied by a side of worthy paycheck.
2. We want to have job satisfaction and this is often a result of a good workplace culture.
3. We like to be recognised and appreciated in our role.
4. Career development is a high priority for most of us.
5. Flexibility and autonomy of time are important regardless of generations.

The same study also provides questions and a checklist that can guide talent leaders in assessing the management of generational diversity in their respective organisations.

This can be useful for any organisation to begin in leveraging the strengths of their diversity and affinity.

However, if today we were to start ensuring that our strategies in managing generational diversity result in success, where would we start?

A good starting point could lie in building an affinity through our organisation’s culture.

An organisation’s culture is a landscape that defines the strength of the produce it plants; this “produce” can comprise the vision, talent strategies, operational procedures etc.

In the words of Dr Brene Brown, author of best-selling book Daring Greatly, “Leaders place importance on strategy without acknowledging where there are standing to begin with.” Imagine planting on infertile soil – it doesn’t matter how much you water, provide sunlight, or even increase the quantity of plants, it will be a matter of time before these plants die a natural death.

What are some ways then to ensure a strong culture that can embrace diversity?

AFFINITY IN ACCOUNTABILITY

By living the same stance of being responsible for our own actions, we afford space for diversity management.

In a culture where everyone embraces the fact that they are responsible for the collective consequence at varying degrees, people are less likely to blame each other for bad consequences.

Often in multi-generational organisations, the blame attacks people as human – “These Baby Boomers are too old-fashioned” or “These Millennials just want things too quickly.”

We fail to realise that we as individuals have the responsibility to question how fast or slow we want to move as a team and encourage a democratic conclusion to that.

A common strategy to manage generational diversity is encouraging multigenerational projects.

To empower affinity in diversity projects, talent leaders can build in “accountability sessions” which focus on clarifying challenges, strengths and areas to improve throughout the project’s timeline. The leader’s role is then to follow up on each of these sessions and align before moving along the timeline. This creates a platform for open feedback and accountability, whilst allowing the leader to consistently model accountability.

AFFINITY IN EMPATHY

Diversity cannot exist in selfishness; it is just not the right soil. An affinity in being empathetic complements the accountability principle.

In managing diversity, it is important to be clear of your own responsibility and perspectives, but to also understand why people have different perspectives.

Talent leaders can roll-out the best diversity practices, but without a culture of empathy, the knowledge remains as SOPs and managerial-imposed instructions.

A key way to empower this affinity is to build processes that support the growth of empathy.

For example, Leaderonomics’ induction requires newbies to personally meet people from different teams in their first two weeks. These personal and simplified sessions induce a culture of curiosity and asking questions to promote growth of empathy.

The continuous process of curiosity in observing and obtaining answers allow understanding of different viewpoints which ultimately fosters empathy.

Empathy also reduces blaming and help people to realise that differences may not be as pronounced as what they have in common.

Consistent behaviours are building blocks of a pervasive culture. Without a common landscape, differences in perceptions and other unique behaviours are challenged in growth and often are uprooted.

In essence, it becomes difficult to understand differences much less to further the organisation through leveraging these differences.

No one can deny that the one-box-talent-management-model is no longer effective, but before we start a wild goose chase on trying to implement tailored strategies, it is probably wiser to find a common core to grow our differences.

Thus, regardless of how many generations come to the same workplace, with these values bounded as culture, we have a superordinate landscape that ties us together in affinity.

This affinity then ensures engagement particularly in aspects where we are different from one another. So for today, ask yourselves, where in your organisation exists diversity and is there an affinity beyond this variety that you can empower?

Evelyn Teh is part of Leaderonomics’ Talent Acceleration team. For more information, email people@leaderonomics.com
THE END OF GEN-X IN THE WORKPLACE?

By SU-ANN CHENG
myStarjob@leaderonomics.com

NOW in their mid-30s to 40s, Gen-Xers find themselves preparing to take on the next wave of leadership from their predecessors; but are they ready, willing and able? Relatively small in number, Gen-Xers are sandwiched between the large group of Baby Boomers (in their mid-40s to 60s) and the huge influx of young Gen-Y or Millennials (those under 30) entering the workforce. Indeed, the multi-generational workplace is becoming increasingly distinct. But will these Gen-Xers find more challenges and obstacles compared with Baby Boomers or their progenies, the Millennials?

THE DARK HORSE DEMOGRAPHIC

Named by Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland, Gen-X refers to those born after the post-World War II boom, roughly between the early 1960s and 1970s. Gen-Xers struggled throughout their youth to establish an identity that was separate from the preceding Baby Boomer generation.

They are often labelled as cynical, largely because they matured in the wake of the stock market crash, entering the job market amid an era of economic turmoil as well as an arduous housing market in many nations (Beyond the baby boomers: the rise of Generation Y by PKM, 2007). Gen-Xers have survived latchkey childhoods, significant alternatives to traditional marriages and families, widespread political corruption, recessions, environmental disasters, an AIDS epidemic and a technological revolution, among others.

Nevertheless, it is also because of such exposure that Gen-Xers developed radical entrepreneurial spirit, giving birth to the dot.com boom.

Gen-Xers are also arguably the best-educated generation with at least a bachelor’s degree (socialmarketing.org).

So, although often criticised as being aimless, slackers, sceptical or simply lost, Gen-Xers may have more ammo than they think in confronting the inevitable generational shift in the workplace.

GEN-X IN A MILLENNIAL WORLD

Often termed as the “forgotten generation”, Gen-Xers feel frustrated by Baby Boomers blocking their way to the top as older employees delay retirement. This grip is intensified with over-ambitious Millennials trying to jump ahead of them. With longer life spans and a changing attitude towards work, Baby Boomers are prolonging their professional tenures.

Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes, director of the Sloan Centre on Ageing and Work at Boston College asserts that “the meaning of work has dramatically evolved to include more than just the things you get paid to do (but) work now means being proactive for as long as they can (as people) want to be recognised as contributing human beings.”

At the same time, there are also Baby Boomers who are continuing to work past the retirement age simply because they need to. Living standards will fall while poverty rates will rise for the elderly in wealthy countries and as for developing countries, many governments are not ready in providing retirement systems to replace the tradition of children caring for aging parents (US Baby Boomers & rest of world brace for retirement crisis, Detroit County Daily Times, Dec 2013). The report also highlighted a different retirement worry in Asia that is a by-product of its own economic growth.

For example, traditionally the Chinese and South Koreans could expect to be cared for by their grown children but more newly prosperous young people are living on their own and are also more likely to move to distant cities to take jobs, leaving parents behind.

As for the Millennials, this group is now making a beeline into the workforce armed with ambition, energy and gusto.

According to Asian Institute of Finance CEO Dr Raymond Madden, they now “make up about 40% of the current workforce in Malaysia and many ASEAN countries (and is expected to comprise about) 75% within a relatively short span of time”.

Hence, it is not surprising that many companies are channelising their resources to target the Millennials in terms of recruitment, talent development and career progression.

There is an increasing trend of companies offering internships to tertiary students, tailor-made apprentices programmes for graduates as well as a variety of employee engagement and retention approaches designed to connect with the younger generation.

Having said that, Millennials are also often described as impatient as they aspire to climb the career ladder as quickly as possible and are very likely to move on to another organisation given the opportunity. The South China Morning Post (Aug 2012) reported on a Tamy McCullough Consultants International survey in Hong Kong, which found that Millennials are impatient, self-centred, likely to prioritise monetary gain as well as expect close monitoring and instantaneous feedback from colleagues or bosses.

So, on one hand, Gen-Xers find themselves stuck behind Baby Boomer bosses with their often conservative methods and approaches.

On the other hand, there is the Millennials who are not only finding shortcuts to get ahead, but are also getting more attention from upper management.

STAYING RELEVANT AMIDST THE DEMOGRAPHICAL SHIFT

Regardless, Gen-Xers do bring value to the workplace as they are a technology-savvy, self-reliant group that does not require constant guidance or feedback that many attention-seeking Millennials tend to demand.

Here are some ways in which Gen-Xers can stay relevant and meaningful in their careers:

• Capitalising on demographic shift

Gen-Xers are in the best position to facilitate the transition with Baby Boomers (slowly but surely) leaving the workplace while making room for newbies Millennials.

Gen-Xers have, for a long time, worked with Baby Boomers and are familiar with how things work despite recognising some challenges of the more traditional practices.

With a few tweaks to their own preferences, Gen-Xers (who are generally less concerned with hierarchy) can set a less constrained working environment, which would naturally work well with the younger generation.

Gen-Xers can also make the best of both worlds by applying what has worked with Baby Boomer bosses and what will work with the Millennials.

There is a need to find ways to transfer as much knowledge and experience as possible to the next generation so that an effective succession planning is in place.

A study revealed that companies are far from ready as 68% agree that their Gen-Xers feel frustrated by Baby Boomers blocking their way to the top as older employees delay retirement. This grip is intensified with over-ambitious Millennials trying to jump ahead of them.

 organisations are over dependent on Baby Boomer CEOs (and therefore, there must be) a company-wide, inter-generational transfer of institutional knowledge” (After the Baby Boomers survey by Odgers Berndtson, 2012).

• Champions of technology

Gen-Xers grew up with technology when it took a much more rudimentary form, making them develop the need to learn and understand the logic or structure to use it effectively. This sets them apart from Baby Boomers, who more often than not, tend to shy away from technology and perhaps impeded its implementation.

Gen-Xers are the perfect advocates of technology; an asset Baby Boomers acknowledge and one that Millennials will appreciate.

• Gen-Xers’ more liberal attitude is a plus

Unlike conservative Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers strive towards a work-life balance and also tend to be more at ease with two-way communication. Gen-X leaders who understand the value of such evolving aspects in the workplace – and perhaps even strive towards it themselves – will change the dynamics as Millennials who also share this view will find it easier to relate to them.

• Take the reins with positivity

Gen-Xers need to be confident and take charge of the situation. They must step up to the plate and utilise a collaborative approach to stay relevant to the two generations that come before and after them.

As their span of control increases, Gen-X leaders will need such skills to coordinate people and processes, revitalise work mechanisms and ensure that their positive methods trickle down into all levels of the organisation.

A survey by Kelly Services (Understanding and leveraging generational diversity for organisational success) found that almost 50% of employees in the Asia-Pacific acknowledged that inter-generational differences can lead to serious conflicts in the workplace.

Thus, Gen-Xers should not let cultural norms and tired leadership styles linger unnecessarily. Instead, they are the ones in the best position to scrape some of the antiquated practices that still remain and pioneer new ones that will work for the new world.

LEARN FROM THE PAST, INNOVATE FOR THE FUTURE

It is crucial to realise the need to evolve and learn with changing times. It is imperative to have the right people for the right jobs with the right skills at the right time.

Despite seemingly tough obstacles, Gen-Xers possess significant assets in which they can use to influence the shifting generational dynamics in the workplace.

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Gen-Xers have long been groomed by their Baby Boomer predecessors to take over way before the Millennials came into the picture.

Concurrently, there is also a need for employers to manage inter-generational diversity and the impending demographic shift.

After all, there are many significan ces of generational mix in the workplace.

An American nationwide study (by the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority in Virginia, 2012) revealed that a majority of employees believe that each generation is valuable in its own right.

What Gen-Xers must establish is their rightful place in the workplace and to be appreciated for it; reassure Baby Boomers’ confidence in them as the next-in-liners while earning the respect of young Millennials.
LISTEN UP, GEN-Y

A YOUNG MILLENNIAL ON LEARNING FROM OTHERS

BY TARCAYANI PREBAGARAN

s individuals from Gen-Y, we are masters in the art of multitasking and have our own way of doing things. Sometimes, this can be a problem especially at the workplace where our colleagues or bosses may find us rude or disengaged. Some of us prefer working with our headphones on and our bosses, especially if they are older, may find us looking a little distracted.

Quite often, we are also perceived by the older generation as a cluster who are more demanding, in terms of expecting flexible work schedules, benefits and desiring immediate gratifications. We are also deemed as having self-centred work ethics. Of course these characteristics may apply to some of the young people out there but to generalise all young people is certainly a false notion.

There are indeed many young people who are eager to learn, grow and create an impact at their respective workplaces. At work places today, there are four distinct generations, namely the veterans, the Baby Boomers, the Gen-X and the Gen-Y who are working together under one roof.

These four generations are inherently different in terms of the characteristics and the values that they uphold, motivation as well as aspirations and expectations at the workplace.

This can be done when senior employees simply show them that they care and encourage a more personal relationship between employer and employee.

As young people get bored easily and are comfortable with change, consistently challenge them with new, unconventional tasks to stretch their capabilities and skill sets.

Besides that, Gen-Y values continuous feedback, and managers should provide them with an avenue to obtain feedback. Young people also crave to be appreciated and they need to be constantly encouraged. This could be as simple as a pat on the back which could mean a lot.

Older individuals obviously have been around for longer and they have seen and done much more. As the famous saying goes, experience is the best teacher. Newcomers can take many cues from older colleagues and learn from their experiences.

One of the best ways to progress at work is by having a mentor. Having an older and experienced mentor will be beneficial for the younger generation as a wealth of knowledge and experience can be derived from them. Ask questions and listen to them. As both Baby Boomers and Gen-Y value relationships, a mentor-mentee relationship will create a family-like environment with the Boomers capitalising on their experiences and Gen-Y learning and getting feedback from a trusted source.

All in all, different generations working together can be a great way to cultivate innovative solutions at workplace. Respect is the key to effectively bridging the gap and creating a more harmonious work environment.

When there is a conflict due to generational gap in a company, you might win the battle but your company will lose the war. The only way forward is to build a solid bridge that requires both sides to meet each other halfway without too much of a sacrifice on either side.

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A YOUNG MILLENNIAL ON LEARNING FROM OTHERS

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For example, the younger generation thrives in a participative environment, expect immediate feedback, strive to do meaningful work and enjoy work-life balance. On the contrary, older generations prefer formal engagement with more command and control.

For younger employees, here are some ways to improve our relationship with older colleagues:

1. **VALUE AND RESPECT THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES**
   Older individuals obviously have been around for longer and they have seen and done much more. As the famous saying goes, experience is the best teacher. Newcomers can take many cues from older colleagues and learn from their experiences.

2. **LISTEN, LEARN AND GROW**
   The best way for young people to move forward at work place is to listen and understand how the organisation operates.

3. **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM**
   Try creating a bonding relationship with the younger employees so they will feel comfortable in engaging with you for assistance and direction at workplace.

Bridging the gap with younger employees can be better done when they genuinely trust you.

Younger employees will feel much appreciated when they know and believe that their presence is felt in the company.

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In HR Talk, we pick one HR related topic each week, and gather a few experts to share their views.

If you have a question for HR practitioners, send it to us at mystarjob@leaderonomics.com.

LEE SOO FERN
Partner, Malaysia talent leader, talent team, Ernst & Young

I agree, as I believe what makes people stay with an employer today has more to do with the people they work for and with, as well as their experiences in the organisation, than the job itself.

Often, it is life at work, not the job itself, which is the issue.

People, particularly bosses, make the difference, and are key to whether life at work is an inspiring or dispiriting experience.

Attractive compensation packages, well-thought out policies or sophisticated facilities will lose their appeal if the employees do not feel engaged with their bosses or other people in the organization.

Employees seek bosses who are committed to investing time and effort to have conversations and bond with them, to understand what motivates them, to give them regular feedback about performance.

They look for bosses who are generous in opening doors to new learning opportunities and enriching experiences, and who will encourage and empower them.

Bosses need to be good leaders, coaches, mentors and role models to their employees.

If employees feel that their bosses do not appreciate them as individuals or support their professional and personal growth and development, they will inevitably leave the organization.

Having said that, I also believe it’s a relationship that needs to work both ways. Employers seek bosses/organisations who will serve their needs, at the same time, employees must be ready to serve the needs of the organisation.

We also heard feedback from employees who were willing to stay in jobs that may not pay as well because they believe in their managers.

Case in point, I have stayed in the same company for 20 years and have had great managers in my 20 years. My managers helped me grow as a person and many helped me to move to my next job for the benefit of my career path.

So yes, I definitely believe that people stay in the job because of their managers.

DATIN BADRUNNISA MOHD YASIN KHAN
Group Chef Talent Officer, Axiata Group Berhad

A large part of a job is WHO the job is done for. More often than not, this is the boss.

The relationship with the boss must work like an oiled machine if the job is going to be meaningful for the employee. Some of the considerations in this relationship are:

- Setting clear directions, goals and target. Direction is the overall compass so that employees know where the organisation is heading and therefore can make the necessary trade-offs.
- Goals and targets define the expectations of deliverables and standards.
- Being empowered by the boss, which means the boss after setting the directions, goals and targets (i.e. the context of the deliverables) leaves the employee to actually deliver in the way he sees fit.
- If a boss starts to micromanage, where every step is under scrutiny, then the employee will not feel empowered and will then feel they just have to follow instructions blindly, hence not contributing to their own growth and development.
- On growth and development, the boss must ensure that the employee has the capability to actually deliver.
- This can come in the form of sending the employee to training programmes, providing on-the-job coaching and giving regular feedback on how the employee is doing in his work.
- This is like the old age saying – teach someone to fish rather than giving him the fish.
- Motivating the employee. People are complex creatures. They are not machines that can just do the work repeatedly without any need for motivating factors except to make sure they don’t run out of fuel or breakdown for lack of maintenance!

For people, there may be other factors that stop them from doing their best. A good boss will know how to pick up the signals, manage the emotions of the employee, and provide a healthy environment for the employee to give his best.

The HR term for this is employee engagement – which is based on a complex set of reasons as to why an employee would want to go the extra mile in doing his job.

KENNETH HO
Location HR Leader – Malaysia & Brunei, human resources, IBM Malaysia

Yes, employees make decision based on emotion and most of the time, this emotional commitment means engaged employees actually wants to be cared by their bosses.

They don’t work just for a paycheck, or just for the next promotion, but work on behalf of the organisation’s goals.

When employees care – when they are engaged – they use discretionary effort.

Engaged employees lead to:

- higher service, quality, and productivity, which leads to...
- higher customer satisfaction, which leads to...
- increased sales (repeat business and referrals), which leads to...
- higher levels of profit, which leads to...
- higher shareholder returns (i.e., stock price).

We believe that high employees engage will link to greater business results.

Therefore, in IBM, people managers play a highly important role and are guided by the following expectations:

- Ensure employees understand how their work contributes to the company.
- Managers to lead by example. Employees tend to follow what you do and not what you say.

Also next week

- The danger of being passive in your career development
- AmBank Group as an employer of choice
- How to teach the people you lead to be curious
- Tips to avoid looking like a casualty on Casual Fridays

CHRIS CHUNG
Partner, Malaysia talent leader, talent team, Ernst & Young

There’s a similar saying which goes, “People join companies but leave their bosses.”

While there may be a lot of truth in the popular saying, we leave our bosses and we hear a lot of horror stories of nasty superiors, we must balance the situation.

The reasons behind a “bad” boss are aplenty. It could be due to the simple fact that the employee is not performing to expectations, the deadlines are too tight or even personality clashes.

While I agree that a boss has to make an effort to keep employees engaged, the effort must be reciprocated with good performance outcomes.

Sometimes, the boss may have done his or her best. However, if the career aspirations of the employee are not aligned with the organization’s overall strategy, the employee may still leave although he or she has an excellent relationship with the boss.

Accenture’s respect for the individual core value is our guiding force for us to foster a trusting, open and inclusive environment at all levels.

Our leaders act as mentors and career counsellors and play an important role in helping our people manage their careers and develop professionally.

They are equipped with the skills to manage culture, performance, teams and transitions.

We ensure new supervisors and managers are ready for their roles and constantly updated through coaching, supervising and teaching programmes.

In essence, not only should leaders be equipped but engaged to ensure employees have a balance between performance outcomes and an experiential career journey.