

THE Guide⁶

FACING THE RECRUITMENT & HR CHALLENGES OF A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE



Specialists in office recruitment



With the growing financial pressure on university students entering the workforce at one end of the age scale and increased retirement ages at the other, many HR professionals are facing new challenges on how to get the best from and manage the different needs of a multi-generational workforce.

Generational views of work have shifted multiple times throughout the years, and each generation brings fresh ideas and perspectives to the mix.

Traditionally, younger employees have been treated as subordinates to older, more experienced workers who held positions in a company for an extended period of time. Today, younger employees challenge these roles by using diverse employment experiences – such as volunteer work, internships and entrepreneurial endeavours – as a springboard toward more prominent positions earlier in their careers.

“Each generation has their own characteristics that can impact on recruitment techniques and the workplace environment.”

From Baby Boomers to Millennials, descriptions for the different generations vary however, what is clear is that each has their own characteristics that can impact on recruitment techniques and the work environment. For HR professionals this new, widening demographic spread poses challenges for ongoing employee engagement.

In this Guide, we will look at the characteristics of each generation, the key issues faced by HR professionals and offer hints and tips on how to best integrate all ages into a happy and productive workforce.

BABY BOOMERS

Born during the baby boom of the Second World War (1945 – 1964), this group has the largest population of any generation. In their youth, they were open-minded and rebellious but became more conservative in their 30s and 40s. The Baby Boomers were born between 1945 and 1964 and are a generation that tends to be optimistic, ambitious and loyal and believe that employment is for life. They created the concepts of 'workaholic' and 'superwoman'.

Job status and social standing are important to this generation of wealthy, educated people that has embraced the changes of the late twentieth century. Now in their late 40s, 50s to early 60s, Baby Boomers expect to have a job for life and, at the end of their career, to enjoy an affluent, early retirement. However, changes to life expectancy, working practices, pensions and working age legislation has meant that many are now expected to work longer – and often want to do so!

In fact, Britain has one of the highest employment rates for older workers in Europe ¹ and the number of older people in work has increased by 1.5 million since 1962. According to the TUC, in 2006 more than a third of the 2.6 million people aged between 50 and 65 who are unemployed or economically inactive would prefer to be working. Some 250,000 said they were looking for a job, while another 750,000 said they would like to have one.

Baby Boomers:

- Born between 1945 & 1964
- Optimistic, ambitious and loyal
- Created concepts of 'workaholic' and 'superwoman'

“Now in their late 40s, 50s to early 60s, Baby Boomers expect to have a job for life and, at the end of their career, to enjoy an affluent, early retirement.”

1. TUC, *Ready, Willing and Able*.

GENERATION X

Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1979. Broadly speaking, Generation Xers are characterised as a well-educated generation with many having tertiary qualifications. They are resourceful, individualistic, self-reliant and sceptical of authority.

Unlike the Baby Boomers they are not interested in long-term careers, corporate loyalty or status symbols. In the workplace they focus on relationships with colleagues, outcomes, their rights, interesting work and their skillset.² They tend to change employment, and even careers frequently, and will leave a job if they are unhappy.

Generation X:

- Born between 1965 & 1979
- Well educated, tertiary qualifications
- Self-reliant and sceptical of authority

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2. CNN Money, 2006.

GENERATION Y (OR MILLENNIALS)

People described as Generation Y were born between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. The children of the original Baby Boomers, this generation have had constant access to technology e.g. computers and mobile phones in their youth, and have required many employers to update their hiring strategy in order to incorporate new forms of technology.

Generation Y has seen a rise in instant communication technologies, made possible through use of the internet. Examples include email, texting, IM and new media used through websites like YouTube and social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. This may explain the Millennials' reputation for being peer-orientated. Expression and acceptance are highly important to this generation, both inside and outside of the workplace.

This generation is also much less accepting of traditional organisational practices and management hierarchies. They often look for their employers to fit with their own value set as they have high expectations of what their career should offer them. Studies also predict that Generation Y will switch jobs more frequently than Generation X, due to their higher aspirations. This means they are less inclined to stick at jobs that don't offer them everything they want.

Generation Y:

- Born between late 1970s & early 1990s
- Constant access to technology
- Children of the Baby Boomers

“This generation is also much less accepting of traditional organisational practices and management hierarchies.”

GENERATION Z

People born in the 1990s and 2000s will soon be entering the workforce. They too pose a different challenge to HR professionals looking to attract the broadest possible candidate pool for recruitment whilst encouraging a productive working environment.

Generation Z candidates have grown up amidst technology and can't remember a time before the internet and mobile phones. They are sometimes described as self-directed, impatient and have low attention spans. They are also characterised by above average intelligence and are equally as ambitious as the generations before them.

Generation Z:

- Born between 1990s & 2000s
- Grown up amidst technology
- Self-directed, impatient and low attention span
- Intelligent and ambitious

RECRUITING

It's all very well knowing what the broad characteristics of each generation might be, but how does this impact on the role of HR professionals in the real world, and how can differences be minimised to ensure the smooth integration of a multi-generational workforce?

Here we look at a few key areas:

Prime working age in the UK is often described as between 20 - 59³ but, as this age span increases, it is essential that HR professionals do everything they can to attract and recruit candidates of any working age with the right skill set and stay on the right side of anti-discrimination legislation. Since 2006, it has been unlawful for employers and others to discriminate against a person on the basis of their age – old or young – under The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and now under the Equality Act 2010.

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There are a few areas to be aware of when recruiting for the new British workplace.

- *Watch the wording of recruitment advertisements and avoid any statements such as ‘10 years’ experience required’, ‘energetic graduate’ or ‘young dynamic company’ in job advertisements to avoid possible discrimination claims*
- *Don’t set a standard retirement age of 60 or below – this could be perceived as discrimination and is being phased out in many companies*
- *Ensure that when hiring managers are recruiting they have access to the anti-discrimination knowledge of HR professionals. This will help to ensure they stay on the right side of the law. Over 80% of HR professionals are very aware of the risks of not tackling age discrimination but senior managers and employees themselves are not so⁴*
- *Compile a document for all hiring members involved in recruitment or inform staff via ongoing appraisals to ensure they know what they can and can’t do or say throughout the process*

3. *Management Today, Agequake by Paul Wallace, 1999.*

4. <http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2005/11/08/32429/hr-needs-to-get-serious-about-age-discrimination-laws.html>

RECRUITING

Continued

- *Help and encourage a culture of recruitment and promotion on merit rather than time served, which will help to attract younger employees and weed out any discrimination*
- *Separate personal details from the rest of application forms to ensure that those involved in the recruitment process are not influenced by age and judge it on merit alone*
- *Ensure that questions during interviews relate to a person's ability to do the work and not whether they fit in with aspects of the business*
- *Use online job boards and social media as part of your recruitment strategy – this will appeal to both Generation X and Generation Y*
- *Create a high impact recruiting message. Generation X and Y are used to being marketed to and need a very distinctive message to grab their attention. Be careful not to go overboard though, a genuine, straightforward approach usually works best*
- *Avoid asking for qualifications not available to older generations e.g. GCSEs*



TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Older workers are just as likely to successfully complete training courses as younger members of staff, so training should be equally provided to all generations.⁵ In fact, training and development of older workers can help to build on existing experience and knowledge, making them an even more valuable asset to the business.

The use of technology is one of the greatest differences between the generations. While Generation Y sees the use of technology as integral to their lives, this is an area that older generations may need support with. Other useful hints and tips which you can use to bridge the gaps between the generations are:

- *Offer training and development – through internal and external providers – on the use of technology in the workplace. Where as Generation Y may assume technology, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers only use it and may need additional training*
- *Use the valuable knowledge and experience of older workers to implement internal training workshops or bootcamps to impart their expertise to the wider workforce*
- *Offering opportunities for learning is key to engaging with Generation Yers throughout their career, so be creative and ask for people to suggest additional training or development for themselves*
- *Assign Generation X mentors to Generation Yers as they're shown to enjoy the intense levels of attention / praise they receive*
- *Provide good feedback on training or at appraisals and deliver it as quickly as possible – for Generation Y, feedback has to be constant and immediate, and often technology can be used to deliver this*
- *Conduct training programmes for managers and use role play to portray how different generations may seek feedback, responsibility and involvement within the team. This will allow you to plan for how best to deal with differences in communication style between generations and can be used as a discussion point within the business*

“While Generation Y sees the use of technology as integral to their lives, this is an area that older generations may need support with.”

5. *Business Link UK.*
(www.businesslink.co.uk/employingolderworkers)

THE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

A central, defining shift which is characteristic in shaping all generations, is the changing nature of work and the workplace. Muscle power has been replaced by brain power and management practices have moved on from autocratic to collaborative forms. In the new economy, knowledge is fundamental and seen as creating value.

This in turn, has had an impact on the physical workplace environment. Generation Y is unlikely to be satisfied with shared 'hotel-style' desk assignments, drab cubicles or windowless spaces. The highly educated, mobile and tech-savvy generation that falls within the demographic band known as Generation Y wants a workplace that's like them: urban, flexible, collaborative, environmentally sensitive and unconventional. So how can HR professionals take this on board and improve the overall working environment to be benefit of all?

- *Enhance the social environment of the workplace to create a sense of community through shared spaces within the business – this could be areas for break outs or brainstorming*
- *Think about not just being green but also being seen to be green - Generation Yers are more environmentally sensitive so visual cues as to green policies in the physical environment will help*
- *Deliver a work culture with options. Work/life balance is very important to Generation X and Y. These groups want flexibility, learning opportunities, relationships with decision-makers, challenging work projects, responsibility and personalised career development*
- *Adapt coaching and communication styles to reflect different needs. For example, Generation X wants the opportunity to collaborate with others across the organisation where as Generation Y prefers informal communication and a coaching style from managers*

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ONGOING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

While Baby Boomers once expected jobs for life, as generations have gone on, this has become more and more of an alien concept. Recent studies have revealed that more than half of Generation Y employees seek to leave their job within 12 months.⁶ The ability to engage with all generations and ensure the retention of the best talent – whatever the age – is a key responsibility for HR professionals.

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There isn't a one size fits all answer to this challenge but there are some key areas that HR professionals can concentrate on:

- *Younger workers are less inclined to want to work for big corporates and are often found to have preferences for jobs that help others or which are worthwhile to society. Developing a strong and integrated CSR policy is an important part of engaging with this generation in the long term. Why not empower them to develop their own CSR ideas or take part in a CSR forum?*
- *Increase overall communication and offer opportunities for all employees to have input and engage with the business's brand – this will help to encourage long term connections between the firm and its staff*
- *Highlight benefits packages beyond the standard that go towards enhancing the quality of working life e.g. reduced gym membership rates to satisfy Generation Y's needs for a strong work/life balance*
- *Meet the challenge of offering all employees a positive 'experience', early international postings, social-responsibility initiatives, development and learning opportunities and a good work/life balance*

6. Sodexo motivation solutions.

ONGOING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Continued

- *Consider implementing a flexible working policy – whether it is down to a desire to slow down, child care or just a work/life balance, it is important for all generations. This especially benefits older workers who may be revising their retirement plans and it will help to retain their skills at 60 and beyond. However, it also benefits young parents who need to deal with childcare and appeals to Generation Y as a whole, who according to a recent study, would like to spend 30% of their working time working remotely from home*
- *Generation Y puts much more emphasis on salary and status so ensure that reward and recognition is on the top of your agenda across the whole workforce*
- *Blogs, podcasts and informal videos bring senior leaders closer to Generation X and Y. These technologies convey emotion through an authentic human voice and can be more motivational than the traditional company magazines valued by older business builders*



HOW DIFFERENT ARE THE GENERATIONS?

Much has been written about Generation X and Y but there is no universally accepted definition of who belongs to which generation. It is important to examine generational similarities as well as differences because many of the generational differences might be due to life cycles and stages. People of all generations want to be valued at work and want to have their individual differences and needs met.

In spite of their differences, members of various generations share certain values. Finding common ground in inter-generational workplaces is essential to keeping employees connected. While technologies may change, employee needs remain relatively the same, including the need to be respected and feeling that they are essential pieces of the puzzle. This importance is conveyed through opportunities to be heard, as well as the opportunity to receive public recognition.

Communication is the key to creating a positive work experience for all employees. Understanding how members of different generations communicate can help employers create better work environments, while increasing employee job satisfaction and overall productivity. Generation X, due to their higher expectations, are less inclined to stick at jobs that don't offer them everything they want.

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CONCLUSIONS

Age diversity is at the top of the agenda for many HR professionals, and responding to generational changes is a crucial issue for attracting and retaining the best talent.

These generational differences can be difficult for large organisations to accommodate with a general 'one size fits all' approach to motivation. Never before have such different generations worked together, each with specific attributes. It means organisations have to think differently about their internal structures and communications to keep everyone motivated.

Many of the other generational differences may boil down to the fact that people want to be appreciated, valued and empowered at work. Although these factors can be seen as fundamental human needs that span many generations, they are now being voiced more openly and confidently. It might be true that younger generations are less likely to accept, for instance age discrimination, but this is an expression of wanting to feel valued.

In spite of these differences it seems that most employees, regardless of generation, share similar values. With proper guidance from management, mixed-generation workplaces can be both positive and productive employment experiences for everyone.

For HR professionals it is critical to be tuned into what is happening in society and how the differences and similarities between generations manifest themselves. While it is important to notice differences and shifts in what people want to better attract and retain them, it might be equally important to explore how generations are similar:

If you want any more information on how to recruit and retain the best talent in a multi-generational workplace, please contact your local Tate branch on 0845 345 4141 and speak to one of our consultants to find out how we can help you.

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