

Successfully Managing Multi-Generational Teams

Diversity is an essential component of high-performing teams. There is a good deal of evidence to prove that leveraging a multi-generational team adds value that far outweighs the challenges.

The Challenges of Managing a Multi-Generational Team

One of the most significant issues in a multi-generational environment is the different work styles and approaches taken by each demographic. The ability to communicate and adapt represents the biggest gap, while technical expertise also ranks high.

Some of the most notable differences include the following:

1) The Way They Communicate

Employees in the Baby Boomer generation (born before 1964) tend to be more reserved and guarded in their communications. Gen Xers, on the other hand, like to have more control over a conversation. Gen Y prefers a collaborative stance, and Gen Z favors face-to-face.

2) The Way They Handle and Process Change

Of the three groups, Boomers might be the least amenable to change. They tend to approach change cautiously, whereas Gen X and Y view change as an opportunity. Gen Z is probably the most adaptable to change and can pivot quickly when required.

3) Technical Abilities

Technical skills and skill upgrades are assumed by all generations to be an employer's responsibility. The generational differences lie in how they prefer to learn. Boomers and Gen X prefer an instructor-led course or self-learning tools they can access on-demand. Gen Y and Z are comfortable with technology-based or collaborative options, such as app-driven tutorials.

Turning the Differences Into Positives

Diverse teams that offer different perspectives, opinions, and insights are a tremendous asset to any company. Think of it this way – if your team consisted of a narrow generational focus, you would only be able to access a single, narrow viewpoint. With multi-generational input, you have innovation that considers the gamut of possibilities, broadening your scope and approach in any given situation.

From a management standpoint, it is essential to know and understand how each generation works so they can develop an approach that works for everyone. One key piece of advice is not to overthink the situation.

Regardless of their age or background, there is at least one commonality, not the least of which is that each employee has a desire to contribute and feel valued for their contribution. Focusing on these core values will unite your teams, rather than dividing them.

Refining Your Approach

The key to effective management for multi-generational teams starts with you. When you deal with employees one-on-one, be sure you are slanting your approach based on the individual's personality and expectations.

For example, your Boomer employees may not need (or want) as much feedback as your Gen X, Y, and Z staff members, but all of them will want to know that you are available to discuss any questions or concerns as they arise.

Breaking Down Generational Barriers

It is natural for people of the same age group or background to gravitate towards each other. However, your teams need to be balanced in terms of skills, both hard and soft. Collaboration and innovation will suffer if you allow these 'silos' to develop.

Beyond building a team that is based on balancing abilities, hosting regular team-building events will help employees to get to know and understand each other on a more personal level.

Successfully managing a multi-generational team is something that can be tricky, but can add a great deal of value to your business, boosting success for years to come.