

# Generational Mindsets Affect the Workforce

Employees around the world may approach issues in different ways, depending on which generation they were born into: Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial or Generation Z. Their relationships with organizations and authority, as well as their work styles, can vary tremendously, according to Giselle Kovary, president and co-founder of n-gen People Performance Inc. and a managing partner of Global Training Transformation in Toronto.

Compounding the differences, "everything has changed since COVID," said Susan Armstrong, a managing partner with Global Training Transformation in London. Kovary and Armstrong spoke at the SHRM Annual Conference & Expo 2021 on Sept. 10 during a concurrent session called "Global Generational Trends, Challenges and Opportunities Impacting Your Human Capital Strategy."

## Five generations are in the workforce:

Traditionalist (76 to 99 years old).

Baby Boomer (57 to 75 years old).

Generation X (41 to 56 years old).

Millennial (26 to 40 years old).

Generation Z (25 years old and younger).

## Relationships with Organizations

"I'm not promoting labeling someone just on age," Kovary said, adding that using data at a macro level doesn't replace the need to understand workers individually.

But from that macro level, Traditionalists tend to be loyal to the organization, Kovary said. They often have long-term commitment and tenures and see a career as equaling opportunity. She noted, however, that anyone of any age might have this mindset.

Baby Boomers tend to be loyal to the team, adding value by going the extra mile, and see career as translating into self-worth.

Members of Generation X often are loyal to their manager and may exceed expectations and deliver results but perceive career as just one part of who they are, according to Kovary.

Millennials tend to be loyal to colleagues. Kovary asked the audience if any of them had had co-workers quit on the same day, suggesting that Millennials sometimes do this. Millennials expect equitable treatment and see their careers as an opportunity to add value and contribute.

Members of Generation Z tend to be loyal to the experience and are invested in their careers, which they see as a way to grow.

## **Relationships with Authority**

Different generations may have different relationships with authority, Kovary added.

Traditionalists tend to have respect for authority and the hierarchical system, where seniority and job titles are valued. They have the attitude of "tell me what I should do for you."

Baby Boomers challenge authority and desire flat organizations that are democratic. They tend to have the mindset of "let me show you what I can do for you," according to Kovary.

Members of Generation X may be unimpressed by authority and expect their competence and skills to be respected. Their approach may be "tell me what you can do for me."

Millennials respect authority figures who demonstrate competence. Their attitude tends to be "show me what you can do for me right now," Kovary said.

Members of Generation Z respect the process and follow direction but want to be engaged. Management shouldn't have a one-way conversation with them. Some leaders struggle with this, she said.

## **Work Styles**

Traditionalists tend to be linear and follow the rules, thinking that change is necessary mainly when something is broken, Kovary said.

Baby Boomers like a structured organization but challenge the rules and yet are cautious about change.

Members of Generation X tend to be flexible, want to change the rules and see change as opportunity, according to Kovary.

Millennials have more fluid work styles and expect to create the rules with change equaling improvement, she said.

Finally, members of Generation Z are agile and seek balanced rules, seeing change as simply reality.

## **What Are Some Changes Following the Pandemic?**

Following the pandemic, 25 percent of Millennials and 22 percent of members of Generation Z would like to work in the office "a little to a lot less often" than they did before, according to a survey.

Less than half of Millennials (47 percent) and less than half of members of Generation Z (48 percent) think businesses are having a positive impact on society.

The Great Resignation is likely to continue, with 36 percent of Millennials and 53 percent of those from Generation Z saying they will leave their current employers within two years.

Due to the pandemic, respondents also have felt immense stress. The survey showed that 41 percent of Millennials and 46 percent of those from Generation Z feel stressed all or most of the time.

## Action Steps

Kovary suggested several tips to enhance global generational engagement, including:

- Focus on the adaptability of policies. Don't assume what works in the U.S. will work elsewhere.
- Increase social responsibility.
- Provide a purposeful direction toward a corporate vision.
- Close the gap between formal education and competencies for the job.
- Support employee wellness and resilience.
- "HR is curating organizational culture more than ever before," she said.