COXSWAINING FIVE GENERATIONS AT WORKPLACE: PRODIGIOUS TASK FOR HR MANAGER

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Abstract

The challenge in front of Human Resource Manager is to handle multigenerational workforce without compromising the quality of product and services. So, HR Manager need to have a matured, richer and comprehensive understanding about all the generation. This will enable the HR Manager to have a mixed generation team at workplace with optimum output and minimum conflicts.

Key words: Multigeneration Human Resource, Skills and competence Workplace

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Backdrop:

Multigenerational people at workplace has become a new diversity challenge, which Indian Human Resource (HR) Managers are encountering. They are fronting new set of questions like - What should be new talent acquisition practices, how diverse minds need to be oriented, what kind of refresher courses needs to be planned, what sort of collaboration among five generational workforce would be practical and fruitful, how to distribute work among these different generation players when organizations are traversing unchartered boundaries, what career path will satiate each generation, how to uphold rhythm between talent retention and business outcome etc.

For answering the conundrum, the HR managers need to have a fuller understanding about traits, qualities and characteristics of each generation. Which will allow them to make prudent HR strategies for the organization. Generation in social sciences means a cohort of people born in an era have similar types of thinking, problems, attitude, and decision-making styles. Which is largely affected by the historical, cultural and environmental circumstances around them. The catch is that none of the generation realize the fact that such similarities exist among them. Thus, HR manager's duty is, first make them realize and then strategize for achieving better efficiency in the organization.

Broadly we can see the multigenerational people as Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Gen – X, Millennials / Gen – Y and i-Gen/Post Millennials. It is no great surprise that within organizations the leadership and management of both an increasingly ageing workforce, and an increasingly age-diverseworkforce is posing significant challenges across organizational structures, processes, culture and expectations[1]. Designing and implementing a benefits strategy that meets the needs of both a multi-generational workforce and those of an employer managing such a diverse employee base has become a complex task[2]. There is a requirement for these organizations to revise and retool recruitment, retention, and development strategies with respect to the integration of various generations into the workforce environment[3]. For this the basic characteristics of all generations and their source of motivation need to be understood by HR managers.

Generations and their characteristics:

Generation Z – i-Gen/Net Gen/ Digital Natives/Post Millennial – Born since 1996 – These have graduated recently and are of children of X-Gen and grandchildren of Baby Boomers, and great grandchildren of Silent generation. The characteristics of post millennials is that they want to achieve fast results, think globally, ready to work anywhere in the world, confident, competitive, connected, ready to experiment, and open to new ideas and change. They are driven by pay packet/cash in hand, workplace diversity and flexibility, prefer recognition by boss, and want an opportunity to work overseas.

Generation Y/Millennials – born between 1981 – 1995 – They grew up in the age when technological advancement was brewing. That is why they are called as digital natives. They know that information is only a click away through P.C, tablet, internet, etc. They use social media to their advantage by leveraging opportunities. Millennials are defined by their immersive use of technology[4]. These technological dependent generation think globally and quite expressive but is not a team player. They also give lesser importance to the interpersonal communication over digital exchange of information. They are interested to know about their progress through feedback. They are motivated with flexible schedule and continued opportunities of learning, stocks option as monetary reward.

Generation X – born between 1965 -1980 – They were grown under the shadow of Baby boomers and were overpowered by them. It was very difficult for this generation to carve out a niche for them in the organization. Hence most of them have the entrepreneurial mind. To prove their wits, they embraced new technology from west and tried hard to become more independent. They believed in autonomy and flexible work time/place. Generation Xers viewed technology asa fact of life and placed more of an emphasis on balancingone's work and social life[5].Generation X was sandwiched between Baby boomers and Millennials eventually get an inferiority complex. They prefer to work with autonomy, approves of competence-based promotions. Generation X finds the recognition by peers and Boss quite encouraging.

Baby Boomers – born between 1946- 64 – These are the set of people who never feel tired that is why they don't want to retire. They are competitive, workaholics and futuristic. They are not

adaptive of new styles of functioning at workplace. Hence, they do not support the concepts like flexible work hours, work from home, and firmly believe that there cannot be a substitute of regular office. In their time most of them compromised their family life with work. They advocated and argued for pension plans, economic security and retirement benefits. Still, the things that inspires them is both monetary and non-monetary reward, acute yearning for authority, others should acknowledge and value their expertise.

Traditionalist/Silent generation/Mature generation – born between 1922-45 – We can call them by any name, commonly known as silent generation and born between 1922-45. Most of them are now formally retired (In India generally retirement age is 60 years) but with the increase in life expectancy many of them are still working in one way or the other in different organizations. They have faith and commitment towards Nation. They are the once who strictly follow values, ethics, hierarchy, structures, and rules. They observe formal dressing and like a stable work environment. These are very loyal. In their service they never thought of changing organization. Only negligible percentage of women from among silent generation were working earlier and still could be found associated with some organization. Traditionalist have no idea of power of new technology. They generally ignore the use of technology. The things that motivates them is personalized recognition, respect monetary reward and pension provisions.

Through above discussion we can say that each generation has its own unique capacity and capability. They may require a coxswaining from the HR manager so that everyone can complement the skill set of the other without any clash in their team because of their skill, knowledge, attitude and aptitude.

Hence in today's context the HR manager need to mull over the issues viz. micro management, how to provide breathing space, smooth communication, understanding about different working styles, and culture.

Issues of rumination for HR Manager –
Micro Management: There is a need of micro managementat every step of human resource management by HR manager in a multi generation organization. In recruitment process the HR

Manager must investigate into the differences as well as levels of competence, among the available set of candidates belonging to different generations. There should be alignment in the knowledge, skill, aptitude & attitude of recruits.Integrating technology into the hiring process may allow for increased efficiency in finalizing hiring decisions[6]. If HR managers want smooth sailing in the organization, then they should go for non-traditional ways of recruitment and base their final selection on compatibility and adaptability of individuals from various generations in the team for which they are hired.Different schedules for formal and informal orientations and trainings with various set of people need to be customized. Monitoring differently for different set of people by the managers is must to keep the performance to a T. Feedforward, concurrent and feedback control need to be exercised at various point of time by managers from case to case basis in different contexts. This will help managers to constantly improve efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. In most of the cases 360° evaluation of employees is a better option than other way of appraisalto measure their performance.Still participatory appraisal exercises can be carried out if some set of people don't agree to this kind of appraisal. One of the thing which is missing in most of the organizations is career development. In the absence of which organizations find difficult to retain talent. Career development exercise should be undertaken with every employee to ensure their progression in a transparent manner. This is going to help in retainingproductive employees in the organization.

Reversal of roles: It sounds stroppy, but the reality is that every generation has acquired some unique set of skills because of the environment in which they were born and brought up. A skill/competence which is very easy for one generation, may be a distant dream for the other generation. Like silent generation has aversion with technology whereas Gen- y and i-Gen can easily perform the tasks using software on different gadgets. Hence HR Manager must establish during capacity building sessions that in some tasks traditionalist are better thus they would take lead and for other the Millennials … and so on … for other generations. Many a times the age hierarchy will affect the process but gradually everybody will learn to share his/her in-competencies and understand how others can do it effortlessly. Hence competence-based leadership will propel the organization.

Mavericks: Cutting across the generations there is omnipresence of mavericks in organizations across the globe. There is a need to identify them and provide a breathing space so that they can give spanking dimension to the organizational growth. Many a times when the teams carry out the routine non-complicated tasks the mavericks cannot perform and feel asphyxiated. They will bloom when they will get a free hand to handle crisis situations in the organization. Mavericks are best when there are challenging situations and risks. HR Manager should see that the teams should have a Maverick who can steer clear the difficulties faced by the group.

Communication comfort: Most of the traditionalists prefer face to face communication without using any electronic gadget. They think that this is the best way to communicate efficiently and effectively. Baby Boomers want to maintain a hierarchy in communication and passing orders in black and white. They prefer using fixed line telephone so that there should not be any mis-communication. Generation X started the use of e-mails and mobile phone calls and saw the ease to send and receive the messages. Comfort level of Generation Y is quite high with text messagesand instant messages. Each generation has its own level of ease with various means of communication. HR Manager need to work on the capacity building of the teams that has multiple generation to understand this reality through some management games. This is going to facilitate the team members to have a better understanding about each other's communication ability and will reduce conflict that may arise due to different styles of communication.

Opening pigeonholes: One generation may think that the other generation is difficult to handle but the reality is that both have different definitions of 'right way' of accomplishing the task. Thus, it is important to break the cubbyholes and admit the fact that there is not one but multiple ways of doing the things. Each way may lead to success for the organization.HR Manager need to intervene when there is some misunderstanding because of differences in values, beliefs and philosophy among generation. This is just possible that Millennials may have better wisdom and learned set of skills than Gen -X because of their exposure to different organizations of the world. But how many will absorb this fact; is a quest.

Culture: Hofstede defines culture as collective programming of Human mind7. The work culture in the organizations should be built wisely and the role of HR manager is crucial. It is

easier said than done because 5 generations are working together and to collectively program their mind is like herding cats. A basic mutually acceptable framework needs to be provided by HR manager and then the team members should be allowed to pitch in and define specific objectives and strategies. The right work place environment need to be built for the teams so that it can perform well. Workplace must advance with changing technologies and work trends. One can purchase technology in one go but can build the work culture gradually. Ultimately the technology must be used by five differently abled generations. In current time what matters is output and with advance technology it is possible to work with higher efficiency and effectiveness. Positive efforts and harmonious communication of individuals in organization is like fresh and clean oxygen in blood that provides strength. HR Manager should bring in harmony among different generation and keep on rejuvenating energy levels of the work force by breaking the monotony of work in the organization. Baby boomers sacrificed their life for work but, members of Generation Y values a healthy balance between personal and professional life. Each generation has its own set of priorities. Hence the HR manager need to strike a balance between professional and personal lives of all generation workers as well as convince and motivate themby releasing their stress. As it is rightly said that there is an adult in every child and a child in every adult hence HR manager should organize set of fun activities and games on a regular basis to name a few - puzzle of the day, celebrating national days, foundation day, birthdays, main events, main success achieved, rewarding employee of the month, etc. all these and many more as it brings a smile on the face of employee. At the end of the day a happy and satisfied employee will work more efficiently and eventually beget profit for the organization. Hence HR managers should exercise flexible approach and acknowledge the efforts made by individuals, irrespective of the diversityof approach.

Suggestions:

Demonstrating Integrity and Honesty: The teams will function efficiently only when they see honesty and integrity in leadership. Leader be it from any generation they should preach and practice honesty, they must prove that they are trust worthy. In the absence of honesty and integrity, the team will fall apart. The researchers found numerous correlations between perceived behavioral integrity and employee performance. Leaders with high perceived behavioral integrity lead teams that are significantly more satisfied in their job, less likely to be

absent, less stressed, and report greater overall health and wellbeing and life satisfaction.[8]Thus HR manager should ensure that people at the helm of the affair with these traits needs to be hired and these traits should also be reflected during work to establish its importance.

Pairing expectation and output: Many a times the people working in an organization do not know whether there is a link between expectations and output generated by them. Different generations may have different expectations from their boss and subordinates, and it is quite natural. A prudent approach would be to give a clear-cut understanding that at the end of the day what set of output needs to be generated and delivered. No compromises should be made with mutually accepted output.

Talent retention: Irrespective of generational difference the talented individuals like challenging as well as exciting tasks, and autonomy to accomplish the same. They mustcustomize the duties and responsibilities of talented employeesin a way to make them feel proud that they are contributing significantly for the fulfillment of organizational goals. If this happens, then the known job hoppers i.e. gen Y or i- gen will seldom hop the jobs. In today's environment HR manager must be innovative to retain the best people[9]. There is more of a race fortalent at the moment[10]. One additional thing that HR managers can do is to discuss and prepare career path for employees.HR manager should recognize that for talent retention job security and a progressive career need to be ensured.

Emotional intelligence: Emotional expressions are essential for the survival. Thus, HR manager should understand that individuals belonging to different generation have numerous ways of expressing emotions. HR manager need to have higher emotional intelligence than others. Which means that HR managers need to understand and control their own emotions and emotions of employees and make use of EI in enhancing the productivity of individuals and profitability of the organization.

Employee oriented workplace: It is the HR manager who need to have policies, plans and tools to monitor harmony among various generations at workplace and its implementation. This willensure that employees of different generation feel comfortable without any compromise in

output. A series of innovative initiatives can be practiced with different generations to see what works and what doesn't. This should be based on analysis of regular employee survey and feedback. Open and honest communication on different issues highlighted by employees which will assure that HR manager is serious and concern about the issues.

Conclusion: All organizations in current scenario need to serve ever widening audience because new horizons have been ajar after introduction of e-business. Consumers from around the globe can see and demand products and services at any point of time of any quality and quantity. To optimize productivity of the organization the HR manager has an additional advantage of having a pool of insights, experiences, expertise;an array of competence and skills at hand. Thus, to build a dynamic multi-generational workplace by establishing new-fangled trends & rules, novel systems of communication, creating work life balance, and blending diverse styles of functioning is prodigious task for HR managers.

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