

# Navigating the multigenerational workplace in a shrinking workforce

In an era marked by unprecedented diversity in the workplace, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z are all sharing office space, each contributing their unique perspectives and talents. However, this generational melting pot is not without its challenges.



Source: Mzuno K/Pexels

Tensions can arise as differing attitudes towards work-life balance, meeting styles, and performance expectations clash. This generational friction is further exacerbated by a dwindling working-age population, a trend that is hitting companies hard, particularly those that have chosen to replace their seasoned employees with a younger, less expensive workforce.

According to the Harvard Business Review, companies are feeling the pinch of this decision. The seasoned employees who were let go possessed a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding of the business. Their younger replacements, while less costly, lack the necessary skills and numbers to fill the void left behind.



## Cross-generational collaboration: Embrace the generation gap for success

Gordon Hooper, Bateleur Brand Planning 4 Apr 2023



Johan Smith, managing executive at Altron Karabina, argues that every generation brings something unique and valuable to the table, and it's crucial for businesses to recognise and leverage these diverse strengths.

## Generational diversity

"The Boomers are loyal employees with a strong work ethic and extensive knowledge and experience," he says. "They are handing their leadership roles over to Generation X, and this generation's qualities are really shining through."

"They are resilient, adaptive and innovative problem solvers. They're happy to get feedback and have also been around since technology emerged and this gives them the ability to learn and adapt to digital very quickly."

Generation X is exactly the right leadership to take companies through turbulent and uncertain times, which is precisely what's happening, globally, today. They are then supported by the millennials who bring with them the deep knowledge and innate understanding of the digital natives and a clearer line around the work-life balance.

Millennials want a seat at the table – they want to be heard, respected and they bring a unique and fresh perspective that makes their contributions invaluable.

"Millennials also value ongoing learning, which is why many have a wide range of skills instead of just a single area of expertise," says Smith. "Generation Z are very new to the workplace. They dealt with online learning, the pandemic and digital isolation so they're very keen to enter a formal, face-to-face environment and really connect with people."

"This generation is laser focused on economic, social and environmental challenges and value collaboration and teamwork. They've grown up with unlimited information on the internet, have a wide range of skills and, despite their young age, are often business saving and intrapreneurial."

## Every generation is important

Every generation is important. The diversity in talent and expectations and skills make it increasingly important to set aside preconceived ideas about age and instead look to how each generation can learn from the others. By listening to each other and working together, it is possible for people to turn their generational weaknesses into learning opportunities, and this will strengthen the organisation.

Where Boomers may be hesitant to ask for help, Generation X will constantly ask for help and give feedback. Millennials and Gen Zs will force companies to remain digitally competitive and aware of the importance of a work-life balance.



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"They all have different ethics and values, but they all share accountability within the organisation," says Smith. "Each succeeding generation fixes a vital weakness or deficit from the one before. For example, Boomers were highly focused on work and had a poor work-life balance. Generation X advocated for a more balanced lifestyle and being more adaptive to change."

"Generation X and Boomers are more likely to remain loyal to one employer whereas millennials continuously seek new jobs to improve their lifestyle. Both millennials and Gen Zs want their jobs to contribute to their wellbeing."

## Differences are not absolute

These differences in goals and purpose add value, but only if the different generations are prepared to listen and to learn. It is critically important that companies create spaces that allow for these differences to be celebrated and respected.

The strengths of each generation will help grow and push people to achieve more and gain a richer understanding of their own strengths and limitations.

It is also important to recognise that the concept of generational differences is not absolute.

"Some people are keen to change, try new technology, do new things, some are entrenched in what they do and who they are, regardless of their generation," concludes Smith. "Older or younger, people are going to either be excited about new things, or not."

"What's key here isn't how to pigeonhole people but rather how to focus on openness that allows for every individual within the business to thrive, regardless of generation or inclination. That is the inflection point."

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