ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 206 Wednesday 8 june 2022

Boomers vs Millennials: Closing the Generation Divide

How can an effective training policy be designed to ensure fair intergenerational access to training, which follows the organisational and skills acquisition needs within a company?

In the world of work, it is natural to find colleagues of different ages. An individual's working life spans several decades. This can be a great added value for companies that know how to bridge the Generation Divide, the cultural distance between generations.

4 Generations at stake

Desirée is a young engineer who has **just joined the company**. She has a commendable CV and is very competent. From the few weeks she has started, she has already found ways to improve her work. She studied some processes for her thesis and attended lectures on the latest developments with her lecturer.

Roberta is Laura's supervisor. She is also an engineer, but with a different specialisation. Since she graduated, some things have changed: technology is developing fast, but she has taken some refresher courses. She is no longer involved in programming, but she makes sure that Laura and her colleagues do a good job. He sometimes wonders how they can be so fast.

Marco is Roberta's boss. All control over the product line is his job. He has been with the company for many years, straight out of technical school. He has seen so much that he does not need to lose his head: he already knows whether a solution makes sense or is a waste of time. From his co-workers he wants them to put into practice what the management has decided. They are good, even if they occasionally get bogged down with some unnecessary complications.

Giovanni is the grand old man. He created the company with his own hands, when there was nothing. As a workshop boy he got into it and did everything himself. Then came the customers, but there were many difficulties. Also the quarrels with his co-workers, which he always ticked off: his was the clear vision. Now he meets big customers and hardly ever goes into production. He is proud of his creature and wants it to remain a source of pride for the city, but on development plans he has to think hard: everything is different from the way it used to be.

Each generation its own formation

Desirée, Roberta, Marco and Giovanni are four generations at play. Perhaps they are not there in all enterprises. Or maybe they are there with other names and qualifications. Different generations, **each with their own contribution to make** and their own professional characteristics that HR managers must take into account.

By convention, all persons born in the same period of about 15 years and sharing similar cultural and behavioural traits are considered to be in the same generation. The underlying idea is that **each generation defines itself as opposed to the previous one** and from which the next will be distinguished. This view overlooks other factors, such as geography - the place of birth and where one lives - and lifestyles - which might unite people of different generations. Desirée, Roberta, Marco and Giovanni belong to these generations respectively:

- **Generation Z** (1995-2010), children of Generation X, digital natives, for whom the internet has supplanted traditional media
- **Generation Y** (1980-1994) or Millennials, born at the end of the Cold War, comfortable with social media and entering the workplace in a less favourable market
- **Generation X** (1965-1979), children of the baby boomers, born into smaller families, with a higher level of education and a PC at home
- **Baby Boomers** (1946-1964), born after the war, who experienced the population explosion and economic boom, the hippy movement and protest and TV at home

The generational juxtaposition sometimes has comic overtones, as in the mutual criticism between Millennials and Baby Boomers: where the former criticise the latter for being **unfamiliar with technology**, and the latter reproach the former for fragility of character and lack of vision. In reality, misunderstandings have always existed and today's criticism is yesterday's and will be tomorrow's, perhaps with different arguments.

What matters in a working environment is how to get the best out of each one. And how to ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills to **overcome the Generation Divide**, the gap between opinions, preferences and skills between generations. For any company that wants to remain competitive over the years, this is a very important topic, encompassing all aspects of human resources management, not least training.

In recent years, phenomena such as Great Resignation and Gray Resignation have emerged. Different names for the same concept: people of all generations have started to reconsider their working relationship; work remains important but it must be a way of realising oneself in a broad sense. It is not just a question of economics but of a sense of doing. If this is missing, we might as well change jobs - for the generations that still have to remain active - or retire, for those that can afford it.

Overcoming the Generation Gap

How to integrate the different generations? **Training plays a key role, provided it is transgenerational and inclusive**.

According to the Executive Office of the United Nation Joint Staff Pension Fund, workplace training takes place:

- 10% through fo**rmal training**
- 20% with structured information (websites) and not as **manuals, procedures and embedded methodologies**
- 70% by **learning-by-doing** on the job, through interaction with managers, colleagues and experts

This is the typical form of learning of older generations. The challenge is how to provide Generations X and Y with more learning opportunities with formal and on-demand training via structured web-based modules. In essence, how to foster the **spread of eLearning training**.

Effective training is able to be doubly inclusive: not only can it ensure the **generational handover of skills**, but it can also enable long-standing employees to continue their education.

How to design an effective training policy

The guideline for implementing an effective training programme is to ensure **equitable intergenerational access to training** that follows organisational and overall skill acquisition needs within the company.

Once compulsory training courses have been defined at the level of the entire organisation, it is possible to assess those that are necessary and optimal for each job category. The role of managers is crucial in directing and coordinating the skills enrichment of its employees, as well as in providing Instructional Designers with the right feedback on the planned courses.

A forward-looking company is one that is able to adopt a vision of itself as a Learning Organisation, where continuous training is an established value and a natural practice.

Internal mentoring programmes are an essential mechanism, not only to share skills, but also to bridge the Generation Gap. A training programme should be as interactive as possible, with the different generations being able to follow training experiences adapted to their different **learning styles**. In general, the different generations are characterised by these peculiarities:

- **Baby Boomers**: transformative learning style; traditional learning extended to participation, critical reflection and feedback
- **Generation X**: autonomous in learning; very receptive to eLearning delivery of structured content; require integration of technology and media in learning; need easy access to information and procedures in the field
- **Generations Y and Z**: informal learning; lower attention span; require integration of technology and media in learning (webinars and social networks); prefer personalised learning

Some practical solutions to overcome the Gap

The issue of the Generation Gap is older than people think and will remain relevant for a long time to come. There are numerous measures and solutions to facilitate this generational shift. Some of them can make the difference between a cohesive organisation and one that is faced with the problem of **how to maintain the distinctive skills** that have characterised its success.

Among the solutions we can point to:

- **Reaffirming common goals**, to the team, the division and the entire enterprise. A shared culture and common direction can help overcome the simplest communication difficulties and look for new ways to collaborate.
- **Select and encourage the most collaborative members**. It is not enough to be good, it is necessary to ensure that others can also give their best.
- **Make sure that each employee knows the company's mission** and is clear about the ideal customer, towards whom joint efforts should be directed.
- **Assemble your team with character-compatible people**. Similar characters can bring people of different generations together: sharing values and passions is a great bonding point
- **Promote mutual learning opportunities** as much as possible. Everyone has something to learn and something to teach.
- **Encourage corporate team building** events. Team spirit works wonders.
- **Set clear expectations from collaboration**. All the more true and effective the smaller the team size.
- **Give due weight to corporate values**. Do not select only on the basis of skills, which can always be acquired and deepened, but also on the basis of the value system, which tends to be constant and an essential motivation mechanism.
- **Create heterogeneous teams for the same project**. In this way, different competences can be integrated and different criticalities overcome. The strength of the individual should become being part of a group that he or she can always count on.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator