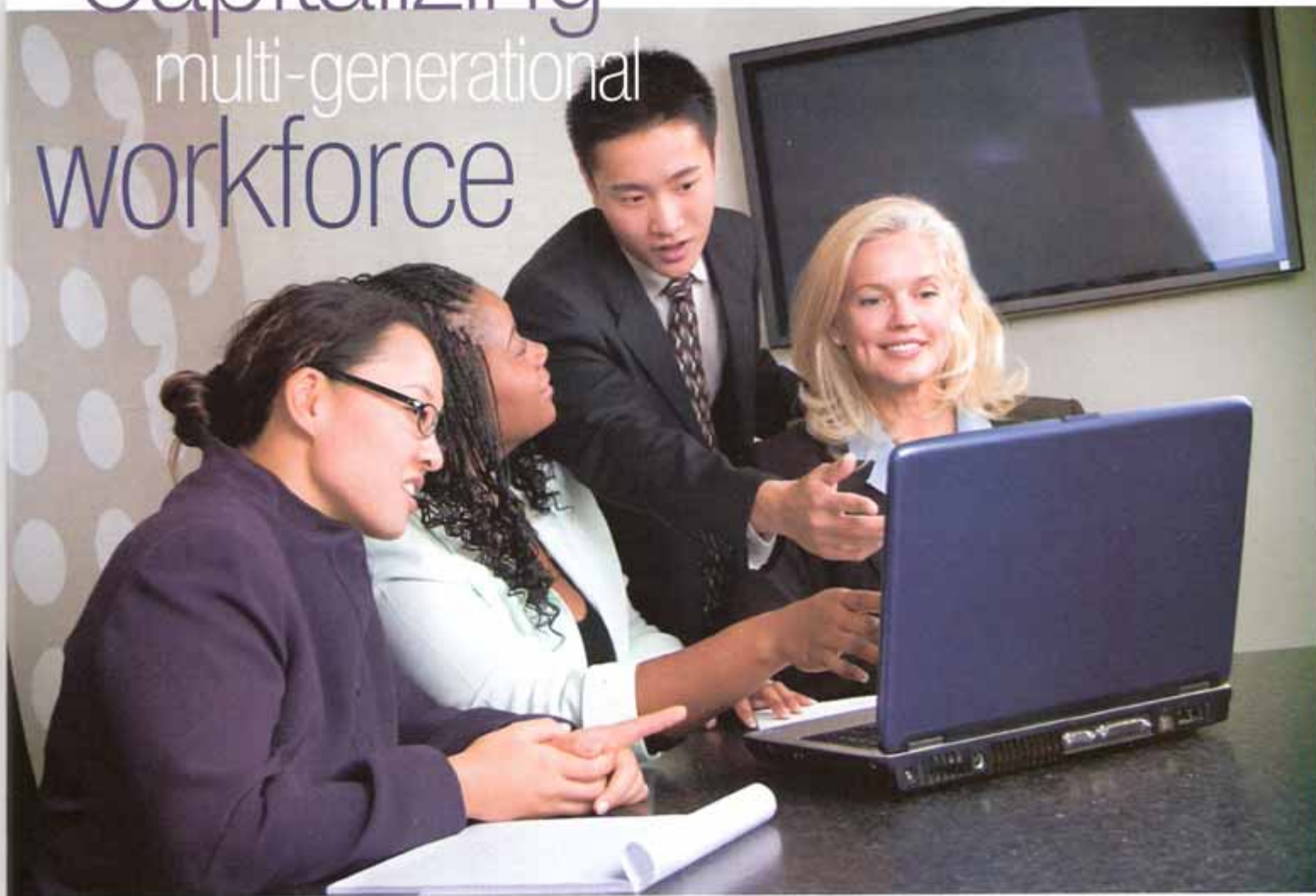


Capitalizing on your multi-generational workforce



By Adwoa K. Buahene and Giselle Kovary

In today's competitive environment, organizations that create the best people strategies will find themselves ahead of their competition. To get, keep and grow the best employees, it is critical to understand your employee markets: your organization, and how they differ from one another. Organizations need to create an engaged relationship with all employee groups.

Today's workplace is comprised of four generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Ys. Generational cohorts possess unique values, characteristics, and skills based on their experiences of life-defining events. The commonality of experiences creates generational identities. The generational identities are the viewpoints that each cohort has on life, love, family, work, politics, and society. With four generations in the workplace, organizations are

faced with four different, and often conflicting, approaches to work. As each generation has its own unique identity, their "generational baggage" travels with them into the workplace, impacting team, departmental, and organizational performance. For example, when a traditionalist's respect for authority and directive management style meets a Gen Xer's relaxed attitude toward authority and informal work style, conflicts can erupt between team members. When generational approaches to work clash, the results are increased turnover, reduced employee engagement, and diminished business results.

To successfully design and execute people strategies that work, there are two key considerations that need to be layered onto all analysis, design, development and implementation. First

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Generational Work Styles

Traditionalists

Linear

Follow the rules

Process focused

Follow the leader

Change = something is broken

Baby Boomers

Structured

Challenge the rules

People focused

Work in teams

Change = caution

Gen Xers

Flexible

Change the rules

Results focused

Work independently with little supervision

Change = opportunity

Gen Ys

Fluid

Create the rules

Technology focused

Work independently with supervision

Change = improvement

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you need to understand how each distinct generational cohort behaves and responds to you as an employer. Second, you must understand what you can do to tap into each cohort in order to drive engagement. While others focus on what engaged employees do to demonstrate commitment and loyalty to an organization, we argue that you won't have engaged employees until your organization demonstrates engagement (transparency, responsiveness, and partnering).

Each cohort's identity translates into behaviours in the workplace. These behaviours can be grouped into five organizational factors: relationship with the organization, relationship with authority, relationship with colleagues, work styles and management styles.

How can this knowledge be used in the workplace? As an example, since managers and leaders play a key role in getting, keeping and growing talent, they must not only understand their own generational identity and how it affects their work style, but also understand those around them. Regardless of age, all employees seek a positive and collaborative relationship with their manager. (Beware though; the grace period that Gen X or Gen Y employees give managers to get the relationship right is much shorter than that of Baby Boomers or Traditionalists.) Many leaders exhibit the management style they experienced. In many cases, that doesn't create the collabora-

tion that is necessary today. Therefore, managers should be trained, supported and skilled in creating a work environment that motivates and engages all generational cohorts.

By understanding your generational employee markets, capitalizing on their strengths and demonstrating organizational engagement, your organization can develop people strategies that ensure success and keep you ahead of the competition. **dtc**



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