A Powerful Tool to Engage a Multi-Generational Workforce

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Abstract
This research examines the generational differences in an engagement model. A survey of 539 respondents was carried out where the unit of analysis is Malaysian employee from different organisation in Peninsular Malaysia. This study is backed by well-established theory from social psychology - the social exchange theory. IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 20 was used to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability tests, and preliminary correlation analysis. In addition, IBM SPSS Analysis of Moment Structures (Amos) 18 was used to test the hypotheses of the study. Results also show that each generation reacts differently to the motivators of employee engagement. To engage Boomers, employers should focus on reward and recognition from the immediate supervisor and colleague. For the engagement of Generation X, leaders can consider implementing work-life balance programme as well as reward and recognition from the Management. In order to engage Generation Y, what they want is just reward and recognition from the immediate supervisor and colleague, as well as work-life balance. All these lead to finding new and more harmonious ways of establishing working relationships and engaging the employees for all generations.

Keywords: baby boomer; engagement; generation x; generation y; motivator

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Literature Review

In their quest to gain an edge over their competitors, organisations realise the need to shower attention upon the executors of the organisational strategies - the employees. Employees who exhibit greater heights of engagement contribute to their organisations with higher individual task performance (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010) - which naturally contributes towards improved organisational performance. Fundamentally, engaged workers are said to be more innovative, productive and prepared to put in more effort than expected (Arnold & Evangelia, 2008). Organisational engagement refers to corporate individual members' attachment to their roles (Kahn, 1990). Two years later, Kahn (1992) further describes organisational engagement as behavioural drive into a mental state to be present.

According to May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), engaged employees are often completely engrossed in their job and may not realise the duration and effort they have put in. In a nutshell, work engagement refers to a satisfying working mind-set, distinguished by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour not only refers to dynamism but also to mental resilience while at work. Dedication is about being committed in one's task, with a zeal for working. Absorption in one's work is characterised by determination and concentration at work, where one is unable to detach from work, is unaware of time passing by and their concentration reflect being married to their job (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002). Briefly, engaged employees are active and passionate about their work.

Therefore, it is important to identify the drivers of work engagement to enjoy the benefits of having an engaged workers. Although, many studies have explored variables that may influence the level of work engagement among employees (Arnold & Evangelia, 2008; Arnold B. Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008), most previous studies on work engagement did not address the transforming workforce. This research more deeply into these differences, looks into the varied generational views based on the core values of job characteristics, reward and recognition; and work-life balance. In addition, this research looks into the recently introduced concept of work engagement of different generational cohorts at work. The purpose is to formulate an engagement model based on these generational needs. The drivers considered in this research are reward and recognition, and work-life balance.

Reward and Recognition
Employees are expected to engage themselves at work when rewards and recognition are given to compensate for their role performances. This theory explains that people implicitly or explicitly involved in a cognitive process by asking themselves "What is in for me?" when deciding whether to engage in a certain behaviour. Total rewards are found to be positively related to employee engagement as per (A. B. Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Work-Life Balance
Work-life balance is a common term used at present workplace. Contrary to popular belief, work-life balance is not about having a balance of time spent on both work and life aspects as different individual at different life stage have different priorities. It is about proper prioritising between work and life. Work refers to matters pertaining to career and ambition. Life can be leisure, family or spiritual development. Thus, work-

life balance is defined as one's capability to meet both career's and family's needs / demands, including non-work tasks (Parkes & Langford, 2008).

Baby Boomers
Baby Boomers, the second generation in the workforce, also known as Boomers or Me Generation, were born into the world that was just getting over the two world wars (Elsdon & Lyer, 1999). They were born from year 1946 to 1964 (Jenkins, 2008) and are the workaholics among all (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). They feel that work is an anchor in their lives resulting in high degree of loyalty.

Generation X
Generation X, also known as X-ers or 13th Generation born from year 1965 to 1980, values flexibility and work-life balance. This generation would go for a lower paying job that provides work-life balance (Glass, 2007). They are loyal to themselves rather than their workplace; prefer to do work for themselves as they experienced their parents being layoff, where they learnt that sacrifice does not ensure stable family life and permanent employment (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008).

Generation Y
Generation Y, being the youngest cohort into the working world; also called Millennial, Internet Generation, Generation Next or Net Generation (Glass, 2007), dot.com generation (Yu & Miller, 2005) or the N-Geners by (Tapscott, 1998).

Methods

Sample Treatment
This is a cross-sectional research, as data was gathered at a single point in time. It was carried out in organisations situated in Peninsular Malaysia. This research focuses on Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y.

Questionnaire
A total of 578 set of questionnaires were collected. This number clearly exceeds the required sample size of 300 respondents for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) - giving this study an acceptable sample size. Random sampling was employed.

Findings / Discussion / Conclusion

As far as generation preference is concerned, reward and recognition from the immediate supervisor and colleague seems to be the greatest motivator for the Boomers followed by autonomy. To reiterate, the Boomers feel left out in training opportunities. In fact, some revealed that they have not attended training for years and they feel that they will not be getting any as they are about to retire. As for Generation X, nothing beats work-life balance as they were raised to value work-life balance upon seeing their parents. In addition, Generation X is all for getting reward and recognition from the Management. Gen Y, the youngest of all, values reward and recognition from the immediate supervisor and colleague, followed by work-life balance.

This research proves that employee engagement must be supported and encouraged for all generations in an organisation to bring out the best in them to maximise organisations' success. Employers now need to pay more attention to create an engaged workforce in today's competitive economy.

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