Multiple Generations in Today's Workplace

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> Nicole's assignment was to research, analyze, and explain her position on an ethical leadership topic, including her own experiences and observations and how to apply this knowledge.

Multiple generations in today's workplace are something that I find very intriguing. For the first time, four generations may be working together in the workplace. This includes Traditionalists, Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. This is an interesting topic for me because it proposes a lot of questions, such as Does each generation lead differently? What do different generations value in the workplace? Is one generation more effective than the other? Knowing the differences between each generation and learning how to communicate effectively among the gap can give you an advantage in the work place.

DIFFERENCES AMONG GENERATIONS

I believe each generation does lead differently. The difference comes from the upbringing and background of each generation. A study was done in 2011 by the Ethics Resource Center called the National Business Ethics Survey. They found very distinct differences between generations when it comes to ethics and values (Ethics Resource Center, 2011).

Traditionalists

Traditionalists were born from 1925-1945. They are not as prepared to work with ethical dilemmas in the office as Millennials. They are also not as likely to utilize the resources of the ethical programs. This could be because they evolved professionally in a time where ethics offices were not well established. Traditionalists are resistant to change and are conformers (which are bad leadership traits), but they are also hard working, loyal, and respect authority. Traditionalists ensure that their work and family life will never meet. They believe that work should stay at work, and family should stay at home. They also look for stability in their career and assume that people will stay at their jobs for a long time with high commitment. Traditionalists dress formally and insist on staying in their office only. Self-worth is their motivator, and they do not require mentoring. Their career goal is to build a legacy and a lifetime career with one company.

Baby Boomers

Boomers were born from 1946-1964. This generation is very similar to Traditionalists. They are also not as prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas. They are self-centered and have a sense of entitlement (which are bad leadership traits), but they are hardworking and committed to harmony. Boomers believe that hard work means long hours. Similar to Traditionalists, they have long-term commitments to their organizations. They are self-motivated and do not appreciate feedback. High-end business casual is their attire. Salary is their motivator, and they do not enjoy mentoring because they do not handle negative feedback well. Boomers' career goals are to build perfect careers and excel.

Generation X'ers

Generation X (or Gen X'ers) were born between 1965 and 1980. This generation has a combination of Millennial and Baby Boomer characteristics. They are less likely to utilize ethical offices and programs than Millennials, but more than Boomers. Overall, they resemble Millennials because they are more likely to participate in compliance and ethical programs. Gen X'ers are lazy and skeptical (which are bad leadership traits), but they are also flexible, entrepreneurial, and comfortable with technology. Gen X'ers have a desire for a flexible work schedule where they can have a good balance of work and other life activities. They also prefer flexibility with their work structure and less hierarchy. Gen X'ers have multiple employers and careers. They dress in low-end business casual attire. This generation can work at the office or from home. It is not necessary to mentor or give feedback to Gen X'ers. They are motivated by security and have a career goal to build a transferable career where they can carry over their experiences and skills.

Millennials

The Millennial generation (Gen Y) is the newest working generation. They were born between 1981 and 2000. This generation is more open and transparent. Because of this, they are more likely to discuss work activities with a wider range of people. They are more likely to

engage in or tolerate unacceptable or unethical behavior. They are also more likely to utilize ethics and compliance programs. Millennials have very short attention spans, and they are not loyal to an organization (which are bad leadership traits), but they are also teach savvy, skilled multitaskers, and appreciative of diversity. They have many employers and multiple careers. Millennials are accustomed to rules and expect them to be enforced. They dress in whatever feels comfortable to them. Like the Gen X'ers, Millennials can work from the office or from home. They are motivated by maintaining a personal life and require constant feedback and a mentor. Millennials have a career goal to build several parallel careers and have several jobs simultaneously.

GENERAL DIFFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

Overall, I have come to conclusions among different generations. I am aware that these are generalized descriptions, but overall accurate. The older an employee is, the more loyal they are to their companies. They believe in working long hours and over-time to ensure that the job gets done. They are also less concerned about their personal lives and making friends at work. Hierarchy and structure are a concern. The younger the employee, the more they need social interactions. Their perception on ethics also relates to their social life.

APPLICATIONS

I can apply these concepts and conclusions in my future career. Knowing what is important to each generation can help me to know how to approach and handle certain coworkers. It can also help if I am in a leadership role. As a leader, I would not want to redesign my code of ethics or my ethics programs, but I would want to change the message and make it personal so they are communicated effectively to each generation. I will go into detail on how to execute this.

Traditionalists/Baby Boomers

As a Millennial, it may be more difficult to communicate with fellow coworkers who are Traditionalists or Baby Boomers. I now understand that most of the time they are not interested in sharing their personal life with me or becoming a close friend. This is good to know because I have a tendency to ask personal questions, and I would not want to offend anyone. If I were in a leadership position, I would get the commitment of ethics across by changing the message. I would emphasize that trusted leaders who are higher in the company lead the programs. I would make sure to praise them when they do report ethical issues. It seems as though they may be hesitant to report misconduct because of the fear of retaliation. Therefore, I would let them know that everything they do is confidential, and they are protected from harm.

Generation X'ers

Communicating with Gen X'ers may not be as difficult because they are more similar to my generation. As their coworker, I would engage with conversation. I would also try to become their friend as well as coworker. As a leader, I would make our code of ethics and guidelines as clear and straightforward as possible. I would also make sure that they are aware that advice is always available.

Millennials

Millennials could perhaps be the easiest generation to communicate with. I am in this generation and very similar in some aspects. When I first started my research, I was under the impression that I was not very similar to other Millennials. After researching and comparing other generations, I discovered otherwise. I also took a short online quiz to determine how Millennial I am. This was a quiz composed of 15 questions. The participant receives a score out of 100 points. I received a 91. Although this was a broad quiz, it still opened my eyes to how similar I am to other Millennials (Pew Research).

In the article discussed in Management 3110, it was stated that Millennials are constantly on their phone, always late, and cannot pass a drug test. I am not similar in these aspects. Although some may have this predetermined conception, this gives me the ability to prove them wrong. By accomplishing all of these things, I will hopefully stand out from other Millennials.

To communicate with other Millennials as a leader, it is necessary to ensure open communication. Allowing them to have open discussion and give suggestions would be effective. Also, an ethical message might be received better if it comes from a fellow coworker or immediate supervisor. A leader would also want to emphasize that being ethical is not just beneficial for the company but for coworkers as well. This is because Millennials value relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

As I am starting my new career, I find it important to be aware of the generation gap in the workplace. Researching the different generations was valuable for me. I now understand the possible way to approach different generations in the workplace. I also understand how to send the message of ethics to different generations. Attempting to bridge the gap is crucial.

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References

Ethics Resource Center. (2011). *Generational Difference in Workplace Ethics: A Supplemental Report of the 2011 National Business Ethics Survey.*

Pew Research. (n.d.). *How Millennial Are You?* Retrieved 11 18, 2013, from Pew Research Center: http://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/how-millennial-are-you/results/.