

Influence of generational diversity in the workplace

The generational diversity in today's labour market is ever-increasing and can lead to challenges for employers. Baby boomers, Generation X, Y and Z each have their own characteristics, qualities and expertise. How do you prevent them from getting in each other's way and take advantage of their differences instead? How do you remain an attractive employer to employees from different generations? The Gezond Ondernemen team took a deep dive into the data and literature and discovered some valuable insights. Read on to learn how you can utilise these insights in your organisation.

What generational differences do we see in the workplace?

Several differences really stood out. For example, younger generations (Y and Z) seem to suffer more from mental health complaints compared to older generations. Younger generations also value development and advancement opportunities more. What also stood out was that employees from different generations were less likely to communicate with each other. If left unchecked, these differences can have a negative impact on the workplace. The back of this leaflet explains what you can do as an employer to ensure that different generations work well with and alongside each other.

Generational characteristics

This overview shows the various characteristics of each generation. Keep this overview handy for future reference!

| | Communication | Professional and personal values | Motivation | Loyalty | Management styles |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
| Baby Boomers 1940–1959 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face • Open to feedback, but in doses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard work is important • Wages must be earned | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrinsic motivation • Promotion oriented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyal to organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian • Like to stick to their own style |
| Gen X 1960–1979 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most efficient form | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent • Work-life balance • Flexibility • Practical attitude | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsically motivated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy working for organisations that offer long-term security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogical approach • Active listening • Like to solve problems on their own |
| Gen Y (Millenials) 1980–1994 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instant messaging, social media • Need for constant feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving personal results • Keen on using new technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrinsic motivation • Promotion oriented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand loyalty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogical approach • Need for guidance |
| Gen Z 1995–2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text messaging and instant messaging • Information is always available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the importance of performing well, but not at the expense of well-being • Flexibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsically motivated • Financial stability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyal to networks (friends, family) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not yet available |

How to remain an attractive employer to different generations:

1. Don't focus too much on generations.

Not only generation but life stage and career stage also impact employees' behaviour, values and needs.

For example, having children at a younger or older age can make a difference in employee needs.

2. Diversity in groups is an opportunity.

Research shows that diverse groups (including generations) in the workplace lead to better performance. This could be a team of older employees with extensive work experience and younger employees with recent training experience, for example.

3. Tailor agreements.

Leverage the challenges and qualities of diverse groups in the workplace. For example, do not only develop universal policies for all generations but also establish individually appropriate policies.

Working with generations in the workplace

Are you unsure of how to optimise your use of generations in the workplace and how to apply the advice in practice?

Using the ADKAR model below, we provide examples of how to address workplace challenges and seize opportunities.

Lastly, ensure open communication in your organisation.

Emphasise that younger and older generations can reinforce and learn from each other. To learn more about good working relationships,

[click here](#).

1

Awareness

Awareness of differences.

- Use the generational perspective to understand workplace challenges. Show the differences in perception. Include age, life stage, and career stage to explain behaviour.
- Start from the understanding that each individual has their own standards and values necessary to perform: '[I-deals](#)'.
- Discuss how the various groups deal with organisational goals and challenges.

2

Desire

Opportunities of generations in the workplace.

- Studies show that diversity within teams can improve performance. Representation of diverse generations, therefore, offers opportunities and may even be necessary to achieve business goals in some cases.
- Paying attention to '[I-deals](#)' in a scarce labour market pays off. Make tailored agreements to that end.

3

Knowledge

Provide knowledge about different needs.

- Provide an inclusive vision that activates knowledge about working effectively with representation from diverse groups.
- Ensure clarity regarding professional expectations, frequency of feedback and expression of appreciation.
- Focus on a workplace where everyone is 'equal' but no one is 'the same'. Indicate the relationship between uniformity and diversity.

4

Ability

Maximum freedom of choice within guidelines.

- Provide guidelines around behaviour and communication that are tied to the organisation's goal. How far do "[I-deals](#)" extend, in combination with the needs of the team and organisation?
- Offer freedom of choice in employment and working conditions, communicating ground rules and consequences clearly.
- Focus on commitment to the organisation and team.

5

Reinforcement

Capture policies in performance cycles.

- Create a format that gives employees the choice to satisfy their own needs through their work.
- Select personnel based on skills.
- Create growth paths based on skills rather than job profiles.
- Invest in internships to recruit young staff.

More information

If you would like to learn more about generations in the workplace, the sources we used for our research are listed in the annex. Those sources contain a wealth of additional interesting information and theories. Alternatively, contact one of the [GO consultants](#).



Annexe: Literature on generations in the workplace

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