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Managing Age Diversity Within the Workplace

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The definition of age diversity is the ability of an organization to accept people of various age categories within the organization's business environment. It has become a usual factor for the organization to cope with an aging population in all possible ways. Many times, when we speak of diversity in the workplace, race, gender, and cultural background are often the first attributes that pop into one's mind. Yet there is one other aspect of diversity that often gets overlooked but is equally important, this is age.

Over-time research has shown an aging population as a major part of the workforce. Thus, as the workforce ages, the ability to manage age diversity will become increasingly important. Managing workers of different ages requires understanding the physiological, psychological, and motivational changes that accompany age, as well as how individuals of different ages interact in organizational contexts. With an increased awareness of the multidimensional nature of age, employers should consider useful adaptations to their human resource practices. Dispelling invalid age stereotypes can be accomplished through inclusive HR practices, the use of inter-generational interactions, and providing meaningful work to all employees.There are four generations that are apart of age diversity and all have a different effect on the workplace.

1.   **Baby Boomers** – were born between 1946 and 1964. This generation is known for having a strong work ethic, placing significant importance on professional accomplishments, and for being somewhat reserved from a social perspective. Because they are so hardworking, the Baby Boomers are often considered the "workaholic" generation. Not surprisingly, they are also very goal-oriented and competitive. Because they grew up making phone calls and writing letters, Boomers often prefer one-on-one communication and phone calls over email and instant messaging.

2.   **Generation X** born between 1965 and 1980. Because they are the least studied of the current generations at work, Gen X is sometimes referred to as the "middle child" between the ever-popular Boomers and Millennials. They are known for being extremely independent and self-sufficient, valuing freedom, and shunning micro-management in the workplace.

3.   **Generation Y**, also referred to as the Millennials, are born between 1981 and 1996. This generation, which is already the largest in the current workforce, will continue to make up three-quarters of the global workforce by 2025.

4.   **Generation Z** born between 1997 and 2015, making them the youngest generation in the current workforce. They are the first generation to grow up in a world that is completely wireless. As true digital natives even more so than Millennials, Generation Z is constantly connected and is considered the most tech-savvy of these groups.

An interesting factor to note is, each generation has such unique characteristics, things will likely not always be smooth sailing when the age gaps are merged. As an employer, it can be very challenging to manage the expectations of multi-generational employees as each one has completely different expectations and priorities. While managing such an age-diverse workforce is certainly not without its challenges, there are many benefits to employing a team that spans multiple generations. But, to take full advantage of said benefits, it is important that you understand the common issues employers face, as well as the best ways to address them.

For example, Hendricks and Cope (2013) studied the effect that generational diversity has on the work environment and found that generational differences within the workforce, present challenges within the work environment in terms of communication, commitment, and compensation.
It has also been found that each generation having such distinctive traits and characteristics, there is

a potential risk of conflicts occurring due to clashing values, beliefs, and work ethics. Moreover, in view of the foreseeable demographic changes and the resulting changes in the age structure of the working population, the question arises as to what effects an aging working population will have on the productivity of firms, that said, age diversity is key to a successful business. Indeed, research shows that 85% of professionals globally believe that an age-diverse team helps them come up with innovative ideas and solutions and is mutually beneficial to all team members.

Depending on the role you are recruiting for, you may be looking to hire candidates that meet a specific criteria. For example, some companies look only for more mature professionals with a great deal of experience, while others prefer to recruit younger workers as they are thought to be easier to mentor. But, for a business to be successful, it needs to embrace age diversity in the workplace and take on staff of all ages. Why? Some of top reasons include:

- It helps to encourage creativity and innovation.
- It might help you to better understand different customers and clients.
- You will boost your employer brand
- They can mentor one another
- You will begin to bridge the growing digital skills gap
- It will help to create a great company culture

In totality, generational diversity in the workplace can be challenging for both employers and employees to navigate, it can also be a strong competitive advantage for companies that embrace it. Generational gaps happen all the time. In the business world, understanding them is crucial because without a mix institutional knowledge experience and technology, it is much harder to provide goods and services that fit needs and lifestyles.