



## IN THIS EDITION

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## EDITORIAL

An Intergenerational Workplace: A Major Challenge for Organizations

These past few years, we've been flooded with information on generational profiles, including their specific characteristics, and paid closer attention to those of the new generation that is joining the labour market—Generation Y.

We can safely say that we know the main characteristics of each generation. The challenge now is to have them coexist to ensure a healthy workplace and enable organizations to achieve their business objectives. There's no doubt that we have to adapt and take into consideration Generation Y, but we must also continue to meet the needs of Generation X and Baby Boomers who we still rely on within our teams and who greatly contribute to our equilibrium.

In our first e-newsletter of the year, we take a look at the kind of intergenerational coexistence that should be encouraged and at the avenues that you can explore based on your situation.

Enjoy our e-newsletter. We hope it will give you food for thought.

**Isabelle Côté, President**

## MANAGING AGE GROUPS AND GENERATIONS

More than four distinct generations are on the Canadian labour market. With very diverse perceptions and characteristics, these different generations must now more than ever work closely together. Statistics reveal that in 2016 only one individual will be available to replace two retired workers. As well, especially in Québec, the student drop-out situation paints an even bleaker picture as regards the hiring of qualified employees.

**Organizations' major challenge consists in recruiting young workers while retaining older employees** who wish to keep their job longer. **They must also establish ties with the younger generation by fostering a harmonious intergenerational culture** that facilitates the integration of young workers into teams.

**To succeed in creating such a favourable environment, members from different generations must have a positive perception of each other.** In other words, older workers must accept their young colleagues as qualified newcomers and as a value-add to the organization, while newcomers must view the experience of their older colleagues as essential for their own career development.

**Some older workers seem more critical of their younger colleagues than vice versa. Here's what they think about them:**

- \* Hard to manage
- \* Selfish
- \* Don't know how to work
- \* Act like unruly children
- \* Display no loyalty towards their employer
- \* Lack rigour
- \* Relatively undisciplined, make spelling mistakes, don't follow schedules, and sometimes look dishevelled

**Why are older workers so critical of youth?**

Organizational strategies are currently focused for the most part on hiring, integrating, and retaining employees from the younger generation. So it's perfectly normal for the older generations to feel more or less at odds with the process. Should we then be surprised that Generation X and Baby Boomers tend to point a finger at Generation Y's shortcomings? Moreover, prevailing views overestimating youth—in reference to their technological know-how and their ability to work in a work environment geared to multitasking—can also explain such a reaction.

**Why are young workers less inclined to think that they can learn from older workers?**

Studies show that ageing workers are marginalized as regards training, promotions, and job retention, precisely because of their age.

These socially demeaning representations of ageing could reinforce young workers' attitude of indifference towards their older colleagues. In keeping with that frame of mind, it's not surprising that young workers don't feel a dire need to benefit from the experience of preceding generations—most often, experience declared obsolete in social circles.

**Here's what young workers think about their older colleagues:**

- \* Aren't up to speed technologically
- \* Fear change
- \* Not much to learn from their older colleagues that could boost their career



**Young workers' perception of their own generation:**

Are creative, efficient, ideas to sell

Seek recognition for their accomplishments

Don't intend to work themselves to death like their parents did

Are qualified, but not as experienced as the baby boomers

Used to negotiating, but not to making sacrifices

Are open to change and technology

Have a fresh pair of eyes—can teach others a lot of things in spite of their lack of experience

The coexistence of these different generations also means working in different ways. Here are a few examples:

**Work Attitudes**

Older colleagues	Young workers
• Loyal to the company	• Loyal to colleagues
• Respect hierarchy	• Respect authentic persons
• Show leadership that serves the interest of their leader	• Show leadership that serves the organization
• Follow procedures	• Want to change the rules
• Competitive	• Team player
• Know how to do things according to standard practice	• Don't know that some things just aren't done; challengers
• Are used to sharing knowledge by teaching/lecturing	• Are used to learning through problem resolution, by finding out by themselves, by trial and error
• Do what they're told	• Do what they believe in
• Hold the same position during their entire career	• Work is a project among many to help them develop and to satisfy their desire to learn constantly
• Corporate objectives are their priority	• Their priorities override those of the company
• Keep their personal and professional lives separate	• Their personal and professional lives are but one

These ways of doing and seeing things within teams create a work environment that will inevitably affect perceptions and lead people to criticize other generations' ways, which could to a certain extent prevent companies from rising to challenges in the years to come.

**The Key to Success**

The dynamics of perception among generations represent one of the most fundamental keys to success or failure of an organizational structure that promotes coexistence. When these dynamics support preconceived notions or are undermined by ambivalence or indifference, initiatives to launch any kind of program to create a collaborative environment are practically doomed.

**In fact, the most advantageous, long-term strategy is to leverage generational diversity.** Success resides in the ability to have them coexist in a positive and constructive way. Managers who resolve these issues will be the ones who have the nimbleness to have different generations coexist, recognize their specific needs and leverage both the strengths and advantages of each age group.

This is not simple and the **key for organizations is to have a "coexistence strategy."** As such, SSA can guide you to ensure unprecedented success over the next few years. This strategy must be supported by the following:

- \* Updated list of employees within each generation category
- \* Report on the type of workers wanted versus current workforce
- \* Managers' generational profile
- \* Updated diagnosis of generational coexistence

Coexistence is possible, even necessary, in order to rise to upcoming challenges. Let's give it a chance to succeed.

**OUR NEXT E-NEWSLETTER: WHAT'S BUSINESS ACUMEN?**

It's not a well-known expression and we often give it various meanings and definitions.

In fact, business acumen is a set of values that shape corporate culture and is most often associated with senior management, though all hierarchical levels can develop and demonstrate business acumen for the greater benefit of the entire organization.

Don't miss our next e-newsletter, which will explore how to develop business acumen within your teams, why it's important and how to go about it.

Would you like to share your comments on this article or previous e-bulletins?

Or suggest a topic for a future e-newsletter?

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