ENGAGING *MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE* IN THE ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

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CHAMPIONING A COMMUNICATIONS-DRIVEN WORKPLACE

Shivani Gupta,
Managing Partner, Culture and Brand Reputation, Health Asia, SPAG, a FINN Partners company

Little did we know that our lives would go through a paradigm shift in 2020. Two years back, a deadly virus spread across the globe, upending our lives, and redefining every aspect of our existence – how we eat, sleep, work and interact. As several countries declared lockdowns, the entire world came to a standstill. Many companies rose to the occasion and took suitable measures to safeguard their employees and shifted to a remote mode of working.

With the arrival of new technology and communication systems, millennials as well as Gen Zs easily adapted to the sudden technological revolution. However, employees who were familiar with conventional ways of working needed time to grasp the change. Each generation has a distinct way of behaving, communicating, and working along with their own set of expectations and perspectives. With the shift in work mode, there was some amount of disruption in the cohesive working style among different aged employees.

Generational differences across teams and offices, if managed properly, can become a tool for the growth of an organization. With the growing popularity of the hybrid model of working, diverse aged groups have flawlessly managed to create a harmonious work environment. Adopting an approach that focuses on the unique characteristics of different generations in the workplace helps organizations to utilize the individual strengths and perceptions of their employees to create a compatible ecosystem.

Digital technologies and communication practices are an ever-changing subject in an organizational setup. As we move towards a post-pandemic world, Multigenerational discourse fueled by technology is the new norm. Along with providing basic digital literacy, companies are trying different policies and strategies to create a workplace where a mixed-age workforce is valued and are focused on solutions that promote collaboration.

SPAG Asia, an award-winning communications and advocacy conglomerate, believes in the fluidity of the workplace. Through this report, we deep dive into the shifts in workplace communication in recent years and how it has shaped the current employee engagement trends. It also highlights the framework to create a strong employee discourse that can sustain the constantly changing direction of communication.

FOREWARD BY PRIYANKA

Priyanka Bajpai,
Senior Partner SPAG, a FINN Partners Company

HARMONY IN HUMANS: IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

The world today is experiencing a demographic shift. Workforce demographics are constantly expanding too, and companies are now having to inhabit a wide range of generations and backgrounds. Multigenerational workforce is a hot topic, it always has been. Considering that the COVID-19 crisis has been global and experienced by populations worldwide, it could be assumed that there are major disparities between how different age groups within the workforce have experienced the pandemic. As workforce composition becomes more complex, the question arises - should traditional segmentation, pivoted in a generational approach, remain the focus of future human resources strategies?

A workforce belonging to different generations naturally have varied needs, values, priorities and motivations. But also, humans are humans – be it a Millennial or a Baby Boomer or a Gen X. For me, the question that organizations and human resource groups should focus on would rather be - how do we engage our people regardless of their generational cohort?

We cannot discount that understanding generational differences can certainly help us improve our employee engagement, but a key element in the ability of employees to adapt may not be age, but rather trust and support. Trust from leaders and colleagues is one of the most important factors that help employees deal with the changes COVID-19 has imposed on them. If employees feel a legitimacy in their role, have a sense of belongingness to the organisation and feel involved, they show a capacity to manage the situation well. Multiple surveys reveal that trust, help and time are invaluable to the ability to adapt to a changing work environment. Technology-driven tools are also important, such as the infrastructure to support remote employment, virtual communication and internal trainings, but it is the human factor that is overwhelmingly considered most critical. Apparently, the fundamental things people still value at work do not change substantially with age.

It took us a global health crisis to understand that there are indeed distinct generational differences in how employees perceive

changes, but not necessarily in the way that could have been imagined. Organizations must provide both infrastructure and a culture that encourage employees to use emerging technologies without losing information or a sense of belonging. Being able to initiate policies that help employees achieve this, particularly in uncertain times, can be a catalyser for motivation and inclusivity, and thus create a genuine competitive advantage for any organization.

This year's Annual Outlook Report is yet another thought-provoking examination of the evolving workforce ergonomics today, and how enterprises have to be prepared to incorporate fundamental human touchpoints into their 'humanforce', to be able to constantly increase productivity, create value and deliver sustained results beyond the four walls of their organizations.

Future of work will be championed by the **leaders of tomorrow**

Millennials and Gen Zs will make up over **70%** of our global workforce by 2025[1]

1] https://www.capital-ges.com/millennials-and-generation-z-the-new-world-of-work/

INTRODUCTION

2A: COVID-19 AND THE ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, it sent ripple effects across economies worldwide. Businesses had to react fast to address the imminent financial and operational challenges posed by global lockdowns. Simultaneously, ways of working were redefined as remote work became an overnight phenomenon. This meant that companies and human resource (HR) leaders had to urgently reassess and innovate employee engagement and communication strategies to adapt and cope with the new normal.

As we turn the page on the pandemic, our ways of working remain on the cusp of transformation. The crisis may have inflicted an indelible influence on traditional work practices as more organizations consider the long-term feasibility of hybrid work. While the pandemic has undoubtedly posed its fair share of challenges, it has also opened up new possibilities in the future of work that were never explored before, with technology and digital adoption standing at the forefront of this change.

2B: MANAGING A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Before the outbreak, HR leaders faced challenges on how to manage dynamics of an increasingly multigenerational workforce effectively.[2] With four or more generations present in today's workplaces, employers may start to notice fundamental differences in their perceptions, personalities and needs which may influence workforce strategies.[3] According to a Deloitte study, more than half of their survey respondents consider generational differences when developing employee programs.[4] Managing generational differences whilst encouraging inclusivity is paramount to ensure that everyone can work seamlessly and harmoniously together. But to manifest this into reality is a constant work-in-progress.

Baby Boomers:
1946 – 1964

Generation X:
1965 – 1980

Millennials:
1981 – 2000

Generation Z:
2001 – 2020

Birth year cut-offs are not absolute, for this report we followed what is commonly accepted

The repercussions of the pandemic threw another spanner in the works with the profound shift in ways of working, and acceleration of technological advancement and adoption. Overnight, online collaborative tools and video conferencing platforms such as Zoom shot to fame, with the company reporting a record profit during the global lockdowns in 2020.[6] Some organizations were more equipped to tackle this change, but others who lacked the technological infrastructure to pivot their operations online risked falling behind. Furthermore, while digital natives like the Millennials and Gen Zs rode on the technological wave seamlessly, employees who were more accustomed to traditional ways of working needed time to catch up.

However, these changes also provided an opportunity for us to expedite discussions on the new future of work where all genders, ages, and generations are seen as one seamless, thriving and resilient workforce. For instance, according to Deloitte, organizations have traditionally viewed their workforce via the lens of age and generation.[4] This has brought about questions on the effectiveness of segmenting our workforce, and how employers can look beyond the idea of categorization to focus on the collective value a diverse team can bring. For example, cultivating a workforce with dynamic personalities, work practices and skill sets can add immense value in a business through driving greater innovation. According to a Randstad study, 83% of respondents said that working in a multigenerational team enabled them to come up with more innovative ideas and solutions.[7,8]

2C: THE WAY FORWARD

As leaders who will shape tomorrow's workplaces, companies should consider adopting an inclusive and holistic approach to managing and engaging an increasingly multigenerational workforce. Instead of looking at employees in silos, human resource leaders should prioritize relationship-building activities to foster an open and collaborative environment where different generations could interact and learn from one another, leveraging their similarities and differences as strengths that could contribute to their betterment and of their organizations ultimately. Through this report, we hope to explore some of these multigenerational discourses that are shaping the future of work and provide business and human resource leaders with communication-driven solutions that could help them, and their employees navigate the ever-changing environment today.

2] https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work/post-pandemic-talent-strategy-generations-in-the-workplace.html

3] https://www.randstad.com.sg/hr-trends/workforce-trends/pros-and-cons-of-a-multigenerational-workforce/

4] https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2020/leading-a-Multigenerational-workforce.html

5] https://www.purdueglobal.edu/education-partnerships/generational-workforce-differences-infographic/

6] https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/08/31/908089517/zoom-turns-record-profit-thanks-to-coronavirus-shutdowns

7] https://www.randstad.com.sg/about-us/press-releases/singapore-employees-prefer-same-age-or-older-managers/

8] https://content.mycareersfuture.gov.sg/pros-cons-of-a-Multigenerational-workforce/

3. UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATIONS AT WORK

> ## IT IS NOT OUR DIFFERENCES THAT DIVIDE US. IT IS OUR INABILITY TO RECOGNIZE, ACCEPT AND CELEBRATE THOSE DIFFERENCES.
>
> ### Audre Lorde

With four or more generational categories present in our workplaces today, managers, business and human resource leaders are confronted with a multitude of opportunities and challenges when it comes to managing a multigenerational workforce effectively. According to a Deloitte survey, while 70% of organizations acknowledged that having a multigenerational workforce is key to driving the success of their organizations, only 10% are truly ready to address this influx of diversity.[4] This suggests that more can be done to prepare leaders in managing an increasingly diverse workforce today.

Perceiving employees through the lens of age and demographics is not an accurate measure of their value. In doing so, we run the risk of over-generalizing their skills, abilities, and qualifications. However, there is no denying that the era, society, and education systems in which we are born into play an important role in shaping and influencing our attitudes, values, and behaviors. These differences – if not managed properly in interpersonal and professional settings – could result in conflicts and create rifts between generations.

Additionally, pre-existing beliefs and assumptions of these generational differences may hinder how employees collaborate and communicate with one another. In certain instances, employees themselves may internalize what they believe others perceive about them even though it is untrue, and this is also known as meta-stereotyping.[9] Ultimately, these processes create more misunderstandings and could have a long-lasting negative impact on workplace interactions and dynamics.

3A: MAPPING ATTRIBUTES

Below is a summary of possible stereotypes that employers and employees across different generations may have about themselves and each other.

Embracing Differences

	MILLENNIALS	GEN Zs	GEN X	BABY BOOMERS
Mindset & Attitude	• Ambitious • Responsible • Growth-focused	• Progressive • Liberal • Purpose-driven	• Independent • Mindful • Resourceful	• Conservative • Methodical • Hierarchical
Belief	• Individual Recognition • Open Communication	• Diversity & Inclusion • Open Communication	• Flexibility • Efficiency	• Teamwork • Loyalty to company
Motivation	• Freedom & flexibility • Direct feedback	• Freedom & flexibility • Direct feedback	• Work-life balance	• Duty • Stability
Skills	• Tech-savvy • Communicative	• Tech-savvy • Communicative	• Industry expertise • Interpersonal	• Industry expertise • Decision-making • Leadership

*These are not meant to be exhaustive and/or definitive of each generation but are based on results and sentiments gathered from our conversations.

While there are a handful of differences between each generation with regards to their mindset and attitude, as well as beliefs, we realize that they also share similarities that may have been previously overlooked. For instance, Millennials and Gen Zs value open communication, freedom, and flexibility. Likewise, Gen X values flexibility at work and is often skilled at interpersonal communication. Moreover, all generations are passionate for a cause in which they believe in, and it is not something that applies only to the millennials and Gen Zs.

While these convergences may not stand out at first glance, ultimately, they suggest that all generations seek out similar end-goals. What differs is how they go about achieving them based on their own resources and capabilities.

Considering this, we spoke to over a dozen organizational leaders as well as 30 millennials and Gen Zs to hear their perspectives on the matter. Across the board, respondents believed that in order to manage a multigenerational workforce effectively, it is crucial to encourage open conversations about the unique differences that each generation and employee brings. Simultaneously, they recognized the need to work towards finding a common ground by emphasizing on similarities, and a shared vision. This helps to reduce perceptions of "us" versus "them", and instead, instill a sense of "we".[9]

Transparency is the first step in understanding one another. Openly laying out the areas of convergence and divergence based on how we perceive one another is also vital. This allows us to understand the unique attributes of each generation, and how each one can contribute towards a shared goal.

9] https://hbr.org/2019/08/generational-differences-at-work-are-small-thinking-theyre-big-affects-our-behavior

Recognizing Similarities

Similarities are not hard to find amongst an age-diverse workforce. For example, between **Millennials** and **Baby Boomers** there are similar values and traits that they share:

MILLENNIAL

- Ambitious
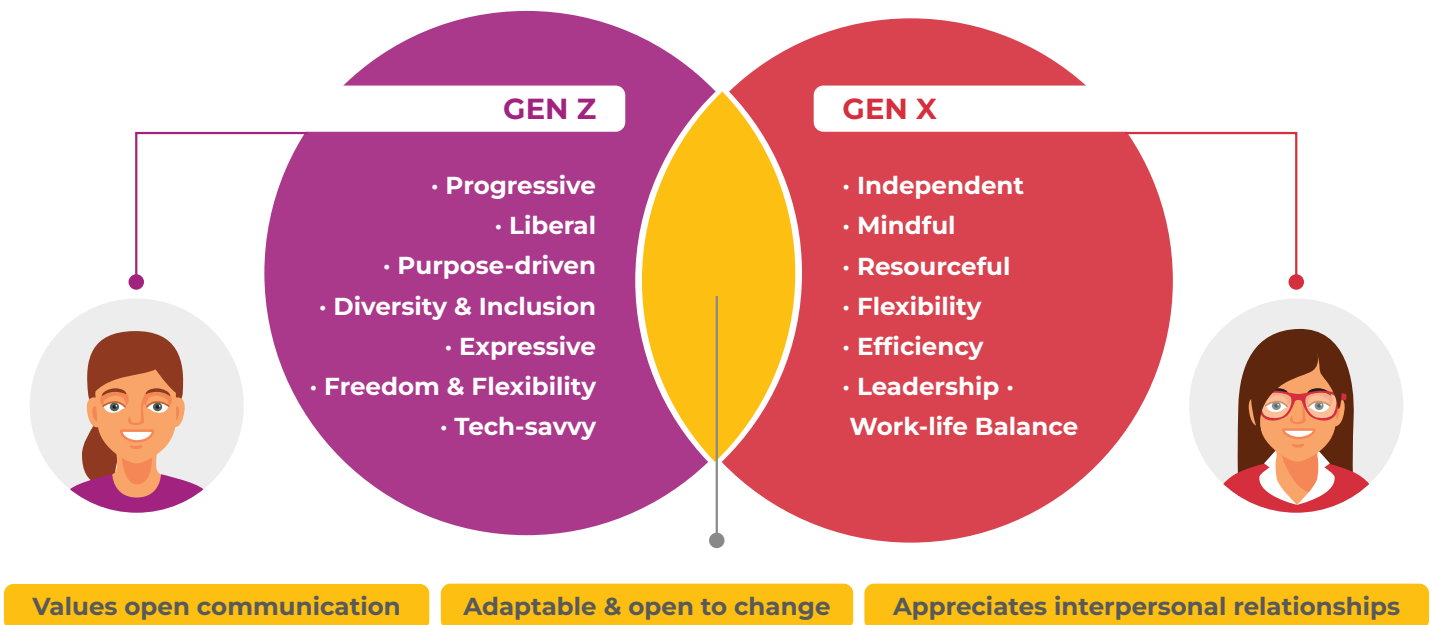- Growth-focused
- Individual Recognition
- Freedom & Flexibility
- Open Communication
- Tech-savvy

BABY BOOMER

- Self-confidence
- Methodical
- Stability
- Loyalty to company
- Duty
- Leadership

Sense of responsibility & accountability | **Values teamwork** | **Takes pride in their work, hardworking**
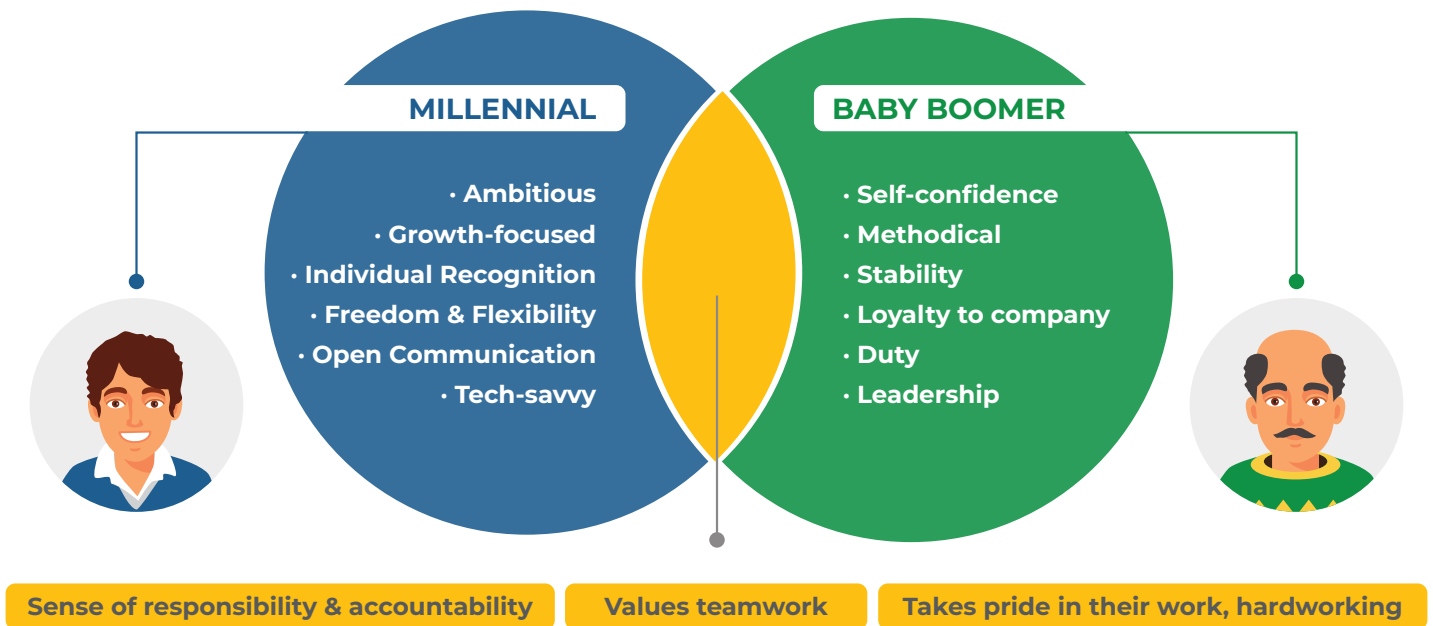
Gen Z and **Gen X** also share similar values and traits, for example:

GEN Z

- Progressive
- Liberal
- Purpose-driven
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Expressive
- Freedom & Flexibility
- Tech-savvy

GEN X

- Independent
- Mindful
- Resourceful
- Flexibility
- Efficiency
- Leadership ·
- Work-life Balance

Values open communication | **Adaptable & open to change** | **Appreciates interpersonal relationships**

According to Lindsay Pollak, a leading career and workplace expert, different generations share similar fundamental beliefs with regards to work. This includes the purpose of work, having good leaders and opportunities for career growth. What is different is how each generation expresses these needs, and their expectations of how their employers should fulfil them.[4]

The sooner we realize this, the better it is for us to work towards cultivating a shared understanding and vision.

"I'm fascinated by the beautiful consciousness of millennials and Gen Z, which is being more purposeful and aware of their actions. However, it's good to remind no matter in which generation you are, that failure is acceptable."

Sheeja Rai,
Global Head Human Resources – Taste and Wellbeing, Givaudan

"We need a vision that applies to everybody, regardless of what generation they come from and how long they've been walking the path with us."

Eileen Lee, Head of Communications,
Asia Mature & Emerging Markets and China at Roche Diabetes Care

"To the question if generations are different from each other – they're not as different. Their environment certainly is, and the way they cope with that including the media, exposure and challenges makes their engagement needs differ."

Probir Das,
Chairman, Asia Pacific & India, Terumo Asia Holdings

3B: CHALLENGES OF WORKING TOGETHER

Having a diverse-age workforce means that employees have varied perspectives and approaches to work. The diversity of ideas could be beneficial in spurring the growth of an organization. However, if these differences are not managed carefully, they could pose serious challenges to team dynamics and may sabotage interpersonal relationships.

Based on our findings, 61% of millennials and Gen Zs said that they faced challenges working in a multigenerational environment. Similarly, 72% of leaders we talked to highlighted challenges in managing an increasingly diverse-age workforce.

Below is a summary of the key challenges that we have gathered based on our conversations with business and human resource leaders, as well as millennials and Gen Zs.

Key Challenges

ASPECTS	LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE	MILLENNIALS & GEN ZS' PERSPECTIVE
Attitude	• Millennials & Gen Zs can be idealistic or over-enthusiastic.	• Baby Boomers and Gen X can be less receptive towards change (E.g: Not willing to keep up with technology)
Leadership	• Baby Boomers and Gen X can be more authoritative and directive, while Millennials and Gen Z value openness and less hierarchy	• Baby Boomers and Gen X may value hierarchy more
Communication	• Baby Boomers and Gen X can be more reserved, while Millennials and Gen Z may value open communication and candidness	• Baby Boomers and Gen X may not prefer alternative opinions and solutions
Ways of Working	• Baby Boomers and Gen X may prefer working in the office, while Millennials and Gen Z prefer remote or hybrid work	• Baby Boomers and Gen X may prefer traditional or manual processes
Beliefs/ Motivation	• Millennials and Gen Zs may value flexibility and freedom more so than Baby Boomers and Gen X • Millennials and Gen Zs may be driven by career growth and incentives, and hence are quicker in switching jobs – challenging to retain them	• Baby Boomers may believe that working overtime is an indication of diligence, while millennials and Gen Zs perceive it as poor time management
Mentality	• Millennials and Gen Zs may be less resilient to challenges and uncertainties as compared to Baby Boomers and Gen X	• Baby Boomers and Gen X may believe that they are more experienced compared to millennials and Gen Z
Overall	• Differences in attitudes, culture and ways of working makes it challenging to unite everyone – hence, it is important to find commonalities	• Misunderstandings can arise due to differences and pre-conceived assumptions – hence, it is important to have more open communication

These are not meant to be exhaustive and/or definitive of each generation but are based on results and sentiments gathered from our conversations.

These responses suggest that differences in attitudes, leadership, and communication styles, as well as ways of working across varying generations can result in difficulties working together. However, what is important to highlight is that millennials and Gen Zs do want open channels of communication to resolve these differences. Additionally, while baby boomers and Gen X may not be accustomed to this type of environment, they do recognize its value and are increasingly receptive towards it.

"If each of the generations think that they are right, it will neither benefit the employee, the leader, nor the organization. I would also say to the effect that coaching and training is a further step, but at the very least being aware of these differences is critical."

Charu Sheel Kunwar,
Executive Director & Head Human Resources, Lighthouse Canton

"For employees, it's important for us to be aligned to the same purpose regardless of which generation you belong to. It is crucial for us to know that when we come to work every day, we serve the same purpose."

Eileen Lee, Head of Communications,
Asia Mature & Emerging Markets and China at Roche Diabetes Care

"Engaging the team is very important. It's not all about receiving reports and updates about work, but rather giving people the opportunity to talk. We need to find ways to communicate with one another."

Probir Das,
Chairman, Asia Pacific & India, Terumo Asia Holdings

"It is paramount for organizations to understand how they think, how they behave and how to engage these fresh breeds of youngsters who can get the freshness in ideas as we are working towards newer concepts."

Rahul Sethi,
Head of Marketing Communications, Worldline

"There may be communication gaps and difficulties in communicating ideas amongst these different generations. Both must be willing to hear each other and first understand the goals and objectives."

23-year-old working from home

Future of Work:
From Generations Disconnected to Generations Effective Together

Rachele Focardi,
Author of "Reframing Generational Stereotypes", Founder of XYZ@Work

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of a multigenerational workforce has become a key priority for organizations and business leaders across the world. There are 5 main reasons for this rising focus on Generational Diversity:

1. A new generation is entering the workforce with a unique set of preferences, priorities, mindset and expectations. Gen Z is leading us into a new Era; one where purpose and impact will take center stage. Understanding how to attract, retain, engage, and support them will become critical.

2. With four generations working together, organizations are experiencing the "XYZ Divide Syndrome" where generational diversity is often seen as making the workplace less productive.

3. The global Pandemic has led to a re-evaluation of goals and priorities among employees from every age group. The Great Resignation has become a very real and daunting challenge for businesses today.

4. The war for talent is far from over. Demands for skills already in shortage will continue to surge. This means employers will have to be able to leverage the unique strengths and competencies of their employees by providing cross-generational learning opportunities.

5. Recent events have proved that the challenges we will increasingly be facing cannot be solved through the traditional hierarchical approach, but only through intergenerational collaboration.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Generation Change will require organizations to be able to create the best possible environment for a vastly diverse group of people. According to a recent Deloitte study, more than 70% of organizations say addressing the challenges of a multigenerational workforce will be critical, yet only 10% are ready to tackle the challenge.

This is a real pity. After all, despite all the pain and disruption, Covid-19 has significantly helped bridge the generational divide. Prior to 2020, generations operated in "silos". Not understanding each other's lived experience resulted in generations taking a stereotyped view of one another. And lacking a personal "Ikigai" that each individual could articulate accentuated a shared sense of isolation.

Covid-19 however, provided an unexpected and unprecedented scenario: one where every employee, across every generation and every geography, lived the same experience at the same time. The impact of the pandemic on the relationship to their employer, on work-life balance, mental health, personal productivity, team collaboration (to name a few) has been virtually the same across generations. Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z are now completely aligned when it comes to how they envision the future of work (hybrid!). They also believe for the first time that in today's workplace older and younger generations face similar challenges and opportunities, and they want to feel valued, recognized, appreciated, and "seen" not only by their employer but by each other.

The one downside is that because of remote work, both frequency and quality of interactions with other age-groups has declined. Nonetheless, this represents a tremendous opportunity for employers willing to "strike the iron while it is hot". If they can leverage the renewed interest that generations have developed towards one another by 1) facilitating cross-generational awareness and understanding and 2) providing collaboration practices and tools, organizations will be able to foster a culture that will lead not only to re-energized and re-connected employees, but unprecedented progress and innovation, as well.

3D: DOORWAY TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

> "Watch out for the natural leaders who will emerge from amongst the Gen Z and Millennials through this crisis."

Probir Das,
Chairman, Asia Pacific & India, Terumo Asia Holdings

While there are bound to be challenges working in a diverse workforce, there are also windows of opportunities. Given that the future of work will be increasingly championed by millennials and Gen Zs – who are set to make up over 70% of our global workforce by 2025 we are beginning to see how crucial their role is in transforming workplaces for the better.[10]

Simultaneously, there is much for them to learn from their current organizations and leadership.

Below is a summary of how millennials and Gen Zs have contributed to workplaces today, based on our conversations with business and human resource leaders.

AREAS	HOW MILLENNIALS & GEN ZS HAVE TRANSFORMED WORKPLACES AND ORGANIZATIONS
Competitivity	• They are not just employees, but they make up the bulk of consumers today – attuned with ever-changing trends and able to provide fresh perspectives • Digital natives, always in-the-know of new trends and finding new ways to incorporate them to improve current work processes
Purpose & Culture	• With a passion for driving change, they help leaders and organizations evolve into more purpose-driven workplaces, and focus on diversity and inclusion • Helped to reshape traditional organizational cultures
Leadership	• New ways of communicating means leaders must continuously upskill themselves, and see how they can be more involved to engage multigenerational teams
Ways of Working	• Receptivity towards flexible ways of working has spurred organizations to explore remote and hybrid working • Reset work-life balance
Communication	• Spurred organizations to relook at current ways of communicating

10] https://www.capital-ges.com/millennials-and-generation-z-the-new-world-of-work/

Incorporating flexibility that is preferred by later generations into current work initiatives

- **What:** A day for rest, reflection and ideation, with no calls or meetings
- **Frequency:** Once a month

"We have something called a **'Blue Sky Day'**. Once in a month, there would be a no-meetings day. Nobody can bring people into a meeting or make a call unless it's an emergency. Thia is a day for people to reflect and catch up on their backlogs because rest time is extremely important. These are the kind of initiatives that we have rolled out at Terumo Asia Pacific."

Probir Das,
Chairman, Asia Pacific & India, Terumo Asia Holdings

"The agility of these two generations and the openness to direct and instant feedback, has been one of the most positive contributors in the workplace. This has accelerated the employee productivity and collaboration in the organization."

Charu Sheel Kunwar,
Executive Director & Head Human Resources, Lighthouse Canton

"At Givaudan, our purpose is to create happier, healthier lives with love for nature. In everything we do, we place the consumer first, and making sure that our workforce reflects the diversity is critical. It is imperative that we have a good balance of experiences, backgrounds and generations that reflect the social fabric."

Sheeja Rai,
Global Head Human Resources – Taste and Wellbeing, Givaudan

"You'll never get a perfect employee. More so, the culture we create at times is artificial and very different from what you see outside. For the newer generations, culture is no more a slide that goes into the HR presentations. Culture is the authentic self of the organization – what your employees believe in and are willing to do every day."

Deepak Singh,
Regional Marketing Manager APAC, WaterWipes

In turn, Millennials and Gen Zs could also learn from the expertise of their organizations and leadership. Keeping communication channels open and fostering a healthy environment which encourages learning is paramount. With this mindset, differences can turn into opportunities for all employees to work together to achieve a shared goal.

WHAT MILLENNIALS & GEN ZS CAN LEARN FROM LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Values that help them to navigate the path towards success – excellence, respect, diligence

Values that could guide them through uncertainties and challenges – perseverance, resilience, courage

Industry expertise and knowledge based on valuable experiences gained over the years

Leadership skills that have been honed based on valuable experiences managing diverse teams over the years

"Generation Z and millennials, who are very active on social media may run the risk of only sharing the positive side. Being able to share the failures, to be vulnerable, and to accept the outcome when things go wrong, and yet have the resilience to bounce back is important and human. Whether you win or lose, you'll always learn something, and it will help you to become a better version of yourself."

Sheeja Rai,
Global Head Human Resources – Taste and Wellbeing, Givaudan

4. DECODING THE ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

"

CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT.

Herclitus
"

In the recent years, we have witnessed technological advancement and digital adoption at an unprecedented rate. Regardless of age, employees had to pivot online as new work trends and practices – which would have taken decades to implement – were done so overnight. According to a survey by Gartner, 88% of organizations made it mandatory for their employees to work from home when COVID-19 hit in 2020.[11]

As remote working became the new normal, conversations on improving employee engagement and experience, and the use of digital tools have been widely discussed. Today, as organizations

pivot into a hybrid work model, business and HR leaders have to innovate viable strategies to support its employees in the new normal.

Creating a sustainable and human-centric work model is paramount to support employees while they adapt to the new ways of working, and to boost their morale during such challenging times.

Based on our in-depth conversations with organizational leaders, millennials, and Gen Zs, we gathered their perspectives on how work has changed in the last three years. Below are the areas where they feel the most transformation has happened:

70% of millennials and Gen Zs believe COVID-19 has transformed workplaces for the better

New possibilities
in employee
communication

Leadership
and management
reimagined

Era of Transformation: How Work Has Changed

Focus on mental
well-being

New ways
of hiring

11] https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-03-19-gartner-hr-survey-reveals-88--of-organizations-have-e

4A: NEW POSSIBILITIES IN EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

Employee communications is one of the key areas that has undergone a complete 180-degree change. This transformation is reflected in both the way that organizations and employees communicate, and what is being communicated.

How We Communicate

In 2020, it was reported that business communication applications saw a record level of growth.[12] The advent of these tools and platforms have played an immense role in strengthening connectivity and communications between employees across different countries. MNCs, SMEs and startups with global and regional teams can now congregate and engage with one another virtually, without being deterred by geographical barriers. This has greatly improved team collaboration and productivity which is key to optimizing business outcomes.

> "Bringing people from different countries together is important, especially for an organization like ours which is small, and we work in a very matrix organization where everybody's interdependent. Every country has a different culture. For example, in Korea it is very hierarchical, while in Australia everything is open, and everyone is equal and have their own roles. So, it is difficult to operate if there are communication barriers."

Deepak Singh,
Regional Marketing Manager APAC, WaterWipes

> "Demographics is a key consideration when you consider building your people and engagement agenda, especially in today's context of a globalized and fast-changing world."

Eugene Lam,
Senior Vice President Human Resources, ST Engineering

12] https://www.computerworld.com/article/3535800/pandemic-leads-to-surge-in-video-conferencing-app-downloads.html

"We would prefer our team to return to the office at least twice a week. Working remotely from home may impact team bonding, technical capability, work productivity, and creativity. A hybrid way of working as such is the way forward, and we'd like to operate with this degree of flexibility."

Sujata Salunkhe,
General Manager, Worldline Global Services

However, a few pit falls may occur. With collaborative tools and business messaging applications ubiquitous, there may be added pressure or an unspoken expectation for employees to be constantly contactable. This, in turn, can have a negative impact on their mental well-being and work-life balance.

What We Communicate

While organizations have relooked at how they are engaging with their employees, they have also strategized on what they want to communicate to them. For example, there is an increasing importance put on building a culture that is centered around trust, transparency, and openness.[13]

Now more than ever, organizations are focused on providing supportive communications and counsel to their employees, especially in trying and challenging times. For instance, besides work meetings, leaders have also initiated frequent check-ins with their teams to check on how they are coping with work or implemented mental health initiatives and wellness programs.

PROS	CONS
• Video conferencing tools and remote work has increased connectivity, allowing employees from different cultures to interact with one another • Global and regional teams able to work collaboratively together	• Increased connectivity means that communication is now instant • Unspoken expectation to be constantly contactable which may cause stress and anxiety in employees

13] https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/a-leaders-guide-tcommunicating-with-teams-stakeholders-and-communities-during-covid-19

4B: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT REIMAGINED

Given the current changes that are happening at work, leaders and managers are now thrust into remote and hybrid management, which differs from face-to-face management.[14] They are compelled to reassess and reinvent their management styles overnight without prior training or any blueprint to follow. Accompanied by the challenge of managing an increasingly age-diverse workforce, this has inevitably uncovered new lessons and learnings for leaders on the importance of fostering an environment built around trust and accountability.

Organizations are beginning to place greater emphasis on corporate culture and leadership skills centered around empathy. Leaders now play a pivotal and expanded role in ensuring employee engagement and satisfaction by taking care of their employees' financial, physical and mental well-being. Now more than ever, it is critical for business leaders to understand and learn how changes in the world are transforming the way that people work. This helps them to remain resilient to future crises and challenges in order to retain talents and stand out from their competitors.

Erosion of Top-Down Approach

The introduction of remote working has eroded strict organizational hierarchies to make way for more open, vertical, and lateral communications. With a click of the button, leaders and managers can connect more swiftly with their teams than ever before. While Millennials and Gen Zs are

often considered the digital natives who are well-versed with the latest technological trends, there is an added expectation on everyone – regardless of age or hierarchy – to pick up new technologies and pivot online.

Being able to openly communicate with their seniors is one of the top 3 most important reasons that motivate Millennials and Gen Zs to join a company

14] https://hbr.org/2020/07/remote-managers-are-having-trust-issues

"They are looking for greater visibility and flexibility in the way they work and value the autonomy and trust from their managers and colleagues. While this is so, we noted that this group of young employees also desire a sense of community at the workplace. They enjoy building connections with one another and look forward to mentorship and networking opportunities. As digital natives, Gen Z and millennials are also agile with tech tools and unafraid to pick up new emerging technologies to improve workflow processes and raise productivity. These have consistently been the top priorities in their employment choice and are the underlying drivers of employee engagement for this group of young employees."

Surya Rai,
Regional Human Resource Director ASEAN and Greater China, Reckitt

However, the lack of in-person interactions may also cause distrust and misunderstandings between leaders and their teams which may result in micromanaging tendencies and stress. It is important for leaders to create an environment of trust and transparency through proper work delegation, empowerment, and clear communication.[14]

PROS	CONS
• Renewed emphasis on employee engagement and building a culture of trust and accountability	• Lack of in-person interaction may result in distrust between managers and its team
• Top-down approaches are broken down as online tools open doors for more open lateral and vertical communications	• Need to build trust through delegation and empowerment

Cultivating A Healthy Workforce: Looking Beyond Ageism

Tara Munis,
Head of PRCA APAC

The turbulent last few years have catapulted leadership under the critics' lens and prompted a rethink of what leadership should look like in the Covid-era and beyond. With a rise in stakeholder capitalism, sweeping technological changes, and a deepening divide in society, there's an expectation that business leaders create a space of belonging and connection for all their employees.

Of course, one of the great barriers standing in the way of this happening is leaders' adeptly understanding a workforce, which for the first time, spans across five generations.

In many ways, the popular 'move fast and break thing' ethos in tech is an ode to youth. Experienced heads worry about the consequences, and the youth charge forward and break new ground. It's an appealing, even inspiring, assumption to have in the business world. But in reality, this idea that only youth breads innovation is detached from reality.

Ageism is everywhere. In the UK, Sunlife's Retiring Ageism 2020 Report found that 35% of Brits began to feel neglected or invisible in society at age 50, and almost 70% of over 50s said they felt underappreciated. This isolation is not unique to the UK.

As an aside: this issue of side-lining certain age groups goes beyond just how some leaders handle their workforce. How many campaigns and adverts seemingly ignore the over-50 population just to pursue Gen Z's attention, even if it's the over 50s who hold the buying power?

Ageism can cripple not only a leader's ability to effectively communicate with a multi-generational workforce, but to also recruit and retain the best talent. Ultimately, the organizations who will win the war on talent will be those leaders who try to bridge generational differences, mindsets, and culture.

Indeed, a professional with 30 years of experience communicates differently to a 22-year-old graduate. There are entrenched differences, but some of these will only help advance and enrich the workforce. For instance, embracing millennials' strong values for diversity, transparency, and social responsibility can turn a toxic workplace into an equitable and joyful environment.

It is here where public relations professionals can add tremendous value to leadership. As a connector between corporate functions and disciplines, professional communicators are uniquely placed to help inform and guide business leaders' approach to engaging this fast-evolving and multigenerational workforce.

We see leadership failures prevalent when there isn't a strong public relations function embedded in an organization. Most recently, Elon Musk – who has long dismissed the value of PR – told Tesla staff to 'pretend to work somewhere else' if they desired to continue remote working. Musk's controversial guidance runs counter to what workers value the most today – flexibility. It's hard not believing that a PR professional's counsel would have rendered a different outcome.

Business leaders that harness different generational perspectives and empower healthy debate will undoubtedly foster heightened levels of innovation and creativity, and importantly, position their organization for sustained growth.

4D: FOCUS ON MENTAL WELL-BEING

COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in mental health issues for people around the world. Feelings of isolation induced by physical lockdowns, anxiety due to the uncertainty of the situation, and changes that are happening at work are some of the key drivers that have led to the deterioration of mental health.

According to a global survey done across 46 countries last year, it was found that majority of people were struggling with general and workplace well-being.[15] While remote work offers its fair share of benefits such as increasing connectivity, work efficiency and productivity, it has also caused burn out as employees find themselves working overtime given that personal and workspaces have overlapped. This may add on to the lack of morale and feelings of stress that employees are already facing with regards to the safety and well-being of their families.

> "While work from home is now acceptable, this also means that employers expect you to be constantly contactable. Bosses may not see how overwhelmed employees could be. It may be even more difficult for new hires to speak up about such things."
>
> **26-year-old who works from home**

Given the challenges posed by the pandemic, companies have realized the importance of investing in tools and resources that can help employees to cope with the changes. For instance, we see organizations implementing engaging employee engagement programs to ensure that their employees are able to manage stress.

Employers and human resources leaders are now presented with new opportunities to reassess their employee engagement strategies, and to build a holistic culture that values employees' well-being. Many organizations have also redefined work-life balance considering employees' preferences for more freedom and flexibility when it comes to work.

Having freedom and flexibility is the most important reason that motivates Millennials and Gen Zs to join a company

15] https://hbr.org/2021/02/what-covid-19-has-done-to-our-well-being-in-12-charts

PROS	CONS
• Organizations and leaders have become more aware than ever on the importance of mental well-being • Proactively spearheading solutions	• COVID-19 has inflicted more stress on employees • Remote working may result in a lack of work-life balance

CASE STUDY: INITIATIVES TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES BY ROCHE

- Organized webinars for employees by inviting key experts that specialize in mental health to share their tips for how employees could stay motivated during this period

- Incentives for employees to build their work from home set up to help them work efficiently

- HR leaders facilitated coffee deliveries, encouraging employees them to have virtual coffee catchups with their colleagues to increase social interactions

"

"Research has shown that more people are experiencing anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, especially in the past two years of the pandemic. So we want to make sure that our employees are well looked after."

Eileen Lee, Head of Communications, Asia Mature & Emerging Markets and China at Roche Diabetes Care

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4E: NEW WAYS OF HIRING

On the recruitment front, traditional means of hiring have been radically transformed. Human resource leaders must now change their hiring processes and strategies to cater to the new normal.

Remote Interviews

For instance, as physical interviews were stripped away due to COVID-19 lockdowns, remote interviews via video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet have become the norm.

Employee onboarding and training programs have also been pivoted online. Now, it is not surprising for employees to go months on end without ever meeting their closest colleagues in real life.

"I got my first job during the height of the pandemic. Both the interview and onboarding process were done online. While it was smooth to say the least, it could not beat having face-to-face interactions with my managers and teammates. When we went back to office 6 months later, I realized that the in-real chemistry and interactions we have is something that can never be replicated online."

25-year-old from the communications industry

PROS	CONS
• Remote interviews and onboarding are cost and time-efficient	• Takes away in-person interaction which may be beneficial in identifying if the candidate and organization is a good fit for both parties

Expansive Talent Pool

Additionally, organizations have also witnessed changes within talent recruitment, now undeterred by geographical limitations. The advent of remote hiring encouraged organizations to attract talents from all around the world, bringing in a mix of employees from diverse ethnicities, culture, and backgrounds.

"We did quite a bit of hiring. in fact, we almost doubled our headcount during this pandemic. Most of the hiring and therefore the joining was done remotely. Technology has been a great enabler in more ways than we could ever imagine."

Charu Sheel Kunwar,
Executive Director & Head Human Resources, Lighthouse Canton

PROS	CONS
• Remote hiring allows HR leaders to tap into a larger pool of talents	• This has resulted in a more competitive landscape, which means that hiring and retention of talents may be a challenge for HR leaders

Are businesses now facing a back-to-the-office problem?

Paul Howell,
Managing Director, Chief of Staff Asia

More than two years on, and even with most travel and distancing requirements shelved, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to reverberate throughout the economies of Southeast Asia. Some of the most impacted industries are pushing slowly into recovery, while others are taking advantage of a New Normal that rewards online sales engines and services that can be delivered via the internet.

But it's not just consumer preferences that have placed businesses in a quandary through much of 2022. They are also facing pressure from within their own workforces to avoid a full 180-degree back to traditional work styles.

Professionals from Jakarta to Hanoi and all the way back to Singapore all got a taste of remote and flexible working during 2020 and 2021. They experienced the challenges but also remember the advantages in terms of reduced commuting times, personal autonomy, and the ability to focus on the people and tasks that really mattered. Now that the pandemic-suppressing need for work-from-home arrangements are fading, many are questioning the automatic return to the office.

The dilemma for business
In Singapore, capacity limits on offices and other workplaces have been lifted since April 26 of this year. Vaccination mandates have also been removed, though mask-wearing is still encouraged in indoor spaces.

For many employers, this has come as a welcome relief, and a chance to get back to the "normal" way of doing business that they all knew from 2019. For many professional workers however, what has been a promised land for employers is really the "old normal", and there is great hesitancy to return to some of the traditional workplace policies that existed even just a few years ago. If this really was 2019, that hesitancy wouldn't be so much of a problem for businesses. The less appealing aspects of work back then – long commutes, aimless meetings, unnecessary administration, and office politics – were part and parcel of almost every workplace and "employee experience". Staff just had to take the hits and move on.

But there is something different, and much bigger, at play in 2022, and employers should consider carefully before attempting to wind the clock completely back to pre-Covid times. While it has its most famous origins in the US, the so-called Great Resignation, with its wave of professionals all leaving their jobs, is also very real in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Time to talk
Employers here do not want to be on the wrong side of this phenomenon. With skilled talent already hard to come by, and inflation pushing up the wages demanded by even non-tested professionals, the power dynamic has shifted in favour of employees.

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be a combative exercise. Employers should look to evaluate their staff on a team by team, or even on an individual basis, to come up with best-fit work packages that offer something for everyone. Investing in effective internal communication strategies will further help to keep the most productive personnel doing what they do best, from wherever works best for both business and the staff member involved.

Good talent is good talent, whether it is working from home, the office, or a beach shack in Bali. And now, more than ever before, employers should take care not to alienate their most valued assets ahead of an extended period of talent scarcity.
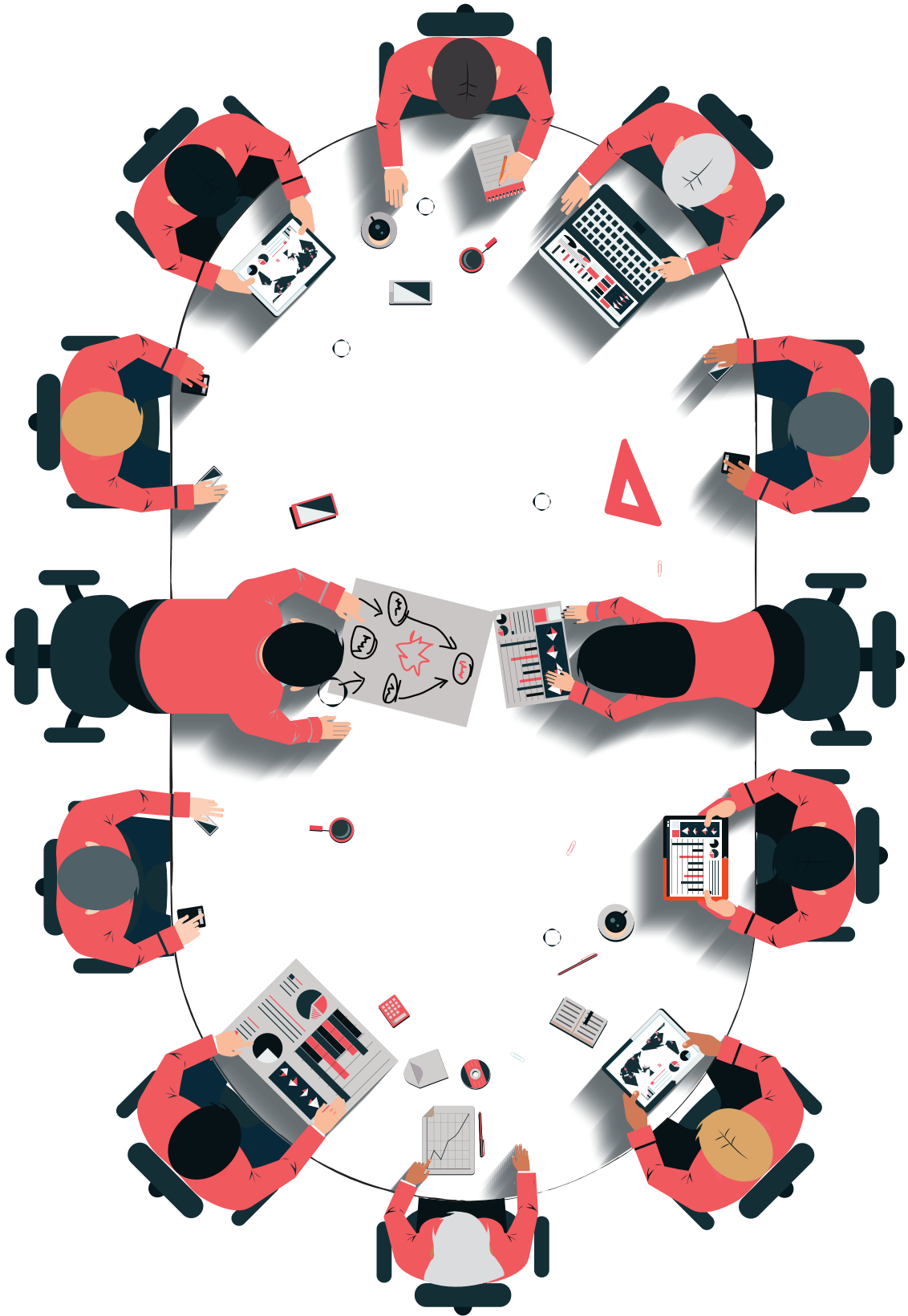
5. NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF WORK

> ## *THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY TO GO IF YOU LOOK FOR IT.*
>
> Ernest A. Fitzgerald

The future of work is on the cusp of transformation. While the pandemic has set the wheels of change in motion, the rise of an increasingly multigenerational and multifaceted workforce shows that workplaces today have become more complex than what we have ever dealt with in the past. With so many possibilities shaping the future of work, navigating it will prove to be a challenging and yet exciting journey for organizational leaders and employees. But where should one begin?

For starters, companies should reassess their employee engagement strategies to identify opportunities and gaps in communication to ensure that all employees are heard and seen. Moreover, leaders must work on adopting a more inclusive and holistic approach to managing their workforce hereon. For instance, prioritizing relationship-building activities could foster an open and collaborative work environment that is beneficial in encouraging different generations to interact and learn from one another. Ultimately, the goal is to embrace the unique differences that each employee and generation has to offer, and work towards similarities to achieve a shared vision.

That being said, there is no playbook or one-size-fits-all approach to navigate today's ever-changing environment. However, we have identified several key recommendations that serve as a starting point in helping business and human resource leaders to strengthen their employee engagement efforts and communications strategy moving forward. With these foundations set in place, leaders and employees are well-prepared to overcome future challenges.

5A: ESTABLISH BASELINE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Internal communications are the bread and butter of every thriving organization. An effective communications strategy could strengthen the morale of a workforce. It has the potential to transform how employees identify with their organizations by creating and instilling a sense of fulfillment and belonging and empowering them to achieve their goals.

However, as traditional ways of working continue to be redefined, and employees today are increasingly aware of their value as a critical stakeholder in their companies, communications can no longer be a one-way street. As employees seek more feedback and support, it is vital for leaders to listen to their needs. Now more than ever, organizations must start adopting two-way communication channels and platforms that would allow both management and employees opportunities to communicate with one another.

SPAG'S QUICK TIPS

Let's Discuss! Forum: An internal online forum where all employees – no matter seniority – can post questions, discussion threads and answers of their own
- It could be questions or topics around work, leisure, personal hobbies or even industry know-hows
- Everyone has the opportunity to weigh in by commenting on the posts
- A moderator can be assigned to regulate the discussion

Switch Off Days: Organize offsite team-building activities by involving employees
- With the help of HR leaders, a representative from each department could come together to organize this event for employees, by employees
- It could be in the form of a physical activity such as cycling, rock-climbing or as simple as having a picnic
- Opportunity for employees to get to know one another from a peer-to-peer level

CASE STUDY: CREATING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY BY RECKITT

Surya Rai shares that Reckitt has a dedicated Digital Workplace Team that is transforming the employee experience and ways of working. This was accelerated by the pandemic as it became difficult to have face to face interactions.

The employee's digital experience begins the day they join the organization. Imagine unboxing their laptop and it auto-builds itself. Once they are up to speed, an AI chatbot is on hand to help them, including a digital library and how-to guides on the use of the various tools to help them perform at their best.

To increase engagement, Workplace by Meta was launched to simplify and humanize communications. Leaders that were once only seen during big events like Townhalls are now more accessible and they can share their thoughts and observations in a more casual manner. Many workplace groups were created for engagement, projects, special interests or just being social at work.

> "There are three values we follow, and that is what we have built here. One is to be respectful. Being respectful starts with openness. I am respectful when I am open and honest with you. This is what I expect from my employees – to be super honest with each other as that is the best way of respecting anybody. And that is valued across the company."

Deepak Singh,
Regional Marketing Manager APAC, WaterWipes

5B: GO DEEPER WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

Given the current changes that are happening across workplaces, engaging employees, and ensuring that they are constantly motivated is not an easy feat for organizational leaders as it requires the investment of time and effort.

As such, a sustainable long-term approach could be for organizations to start instilling a sense of responsibility in employees, empowering them to take ownership of their personal and professional growth. Rather than just having the management organize employee engagement and welfare activities, they could encourage employees to form that support system they need by collaborating with one another to design initiatives that are customized to meet their needs. This helps to form deeper connections between colleagues that goes beyond work.

SPAG'S QUICK TIPS

Lunch 'n' Learn Sessions: Design specialized learning programs that are led by employees themselves to help them learn from one another:

- Senior management could leverage experience and expertise to impart their industry knowledge and know-hows to juniors, helping them to better ease into their roles
- In turn, juniors or more tech-savvy employees could demonstrate how certain online and digital tools can be utilized to improve workflows, they could also share what they have learnt at work based on the challenges they faced and have overcome
- Ultimately, cross-learning encourages interactions and strengthens relationships

Buddy Up: Create a cross-department Buddy-Mentor system that serves as a form of support for employees

- Every 3 months, employees will be paired with a colleague from a different department or designation and that will be their assigned buddy
- During the 3 months, they could organize regular check-ins with one another which will serve as opportunities for them to exchange key learnings and support one another
- At the end of the fiscal year, employees would get a better idea of their colleagues, and this could help to strengthen camaraderie and motivations at work

CASE STUDY: SHARK TANK BY BAYER

Rahul Kalia shares how their yearly internal innovation program is no less than a shark tank where cross functional, cross divisional, cross country and cross generational teams come together and try to solve a problem statement and come with the proposal. This yearly program brings forth 50-60 ideas which are a mix of forward looking and new age perspectives by the younger generations and strategically reviewed by the more experienced and senior leaders. When few of these ideas make it to the next level, they are further refined for 12-15 weeks and funded to completion.

The whole idea is to build a pipeline of future oriented projects, at the same time also engaging the generations with their core strengths – the new age and the mature leadership.

CASE STUDY: SPAG DIALOGUE BY SPAG

SPAG has an initiative called SPAG Dialogue – an official content and thought leadership platform that hosts live webinars, monthly podcasts, weekly blogs, influencer-driven videos, research studies and opinion editorials.

These are often done in collaboration with employees, who can for instance contribute an opinion piece on a preferred topic of their choice for the weekly blogs. The purpose of this initiative is to start conversations that can influence change, while giving employees opportunities to share their perspectives beyond work.

"For digital, for sure we need the fresh mindset from the younger generation to impact, to lead the older generation. The older generation can perhaps share more about their experiences, leadership, strategies to the new generation. I think this is important in order to have a balance in the organization."

Natalie Yang,
Head of East Asia Marketing, Coats

5C: RECOGNITION AND MOTIVATION

Employee recognition could do wonders in boosting the morale of team members. It has the potential to improve the overall performance of employees, inspiring them to perform to the best of their abilities. Simultaneously, it ensures that organizations can thrive with a strong workforce. In fact, 32% of millennials and Gen Zs we surveyed cited employee recognition initiatives as one of the key considerations they have when they decide to join a company.

"What we have realized is that these generations must be kept constantly motivated and challenged at their workplaces. This means receiving direct feedback, being open to change, and adapting quickly to a newer environment."

Charu Sheel Kunwar,
Executive Director & Head Human Resources, Lighthouse Canton

"During the pandemic, there was a lot of anxiety among employees as we started working from home. We discovered that featuring positive employee stories in our quarterly newsletters during this challenging time, was key to building up team morale. The segments where we feature our employees always garner the most views."

Deepali Vichare Dsouza,
Head of Communications, Global Access to Care, Siemens Healthineers

As such, to foster an environment that centers around recognition and excellence, organizations can create incentive-based initiatives to spotlight employees who have performed well and contributed to employee engagement and welfare. In turn, this could encourage other employees to participate proactively in future activities.

SPAG'S QUICK TIPS

Rising Stars: An internal employee awards ceremony to recognize key individuals for their contributions
- Could be held annually
- Employees and management could nominate the candidates
- The results will be determined via voting, and a judging panel consisting of a representative from different departments or seniority
- Prize could consist of a 3-day overseas trip, or vouchers to famous restaurants

Newsletter Shout-out: Corporate newsletters could feature an "Employee of the Month" to value their contributions
- Could be determined via a voting process – opportunity to involve employees
- Increases morale of employees
- Could be amplified across all internal platforms, and could also be included in their email signature

5D: MEASUREMENT AND CHECKPOINTS

Organizations can implement a multitude of communication-driven employee engagement activities – but this may be redundant without checkpoints to assess its effectiveness. As with every communications campaign, setting key objectives, measurement and outcomes is paramount in assessing what has worked and what has not. For instance, organizations should analyze engagement and response rates to the different activities. This allows for improvements to be made in real-time, and it helps leaders to cater targeted activities to meet the needs of their employees. To do so, organizations should conduct frequent check-ins with employees to get their feedback on how the initiatives are working for them. Keeping that channel of communication open is extremely important.

> "We need to be extremely agile in the way we work and be adaptable to changes that are happening due to the pandemic for instance."

Eileen Lee, Head of Communications,
Asia Mature & Emerging Markets and China at Roche Diabetes Care

SPAG'S QUICK TIPS

The Enjoyment Barometer: Design short employee surveys after every activity to understand how they were received

- Could be sent via email
- A way of measuring if employees enjoyed such activities
- Helps to identify opportunities and gaps that can be improved moving forward
- Some of this feedback could also be incorporated in corporate newsletters as quotes (with the consent of the employee)

Group Talk: Create qualitative focus groups

- Could select employees from different departments and seniority
- Face-to-face feedback helps to encourage in-person interaction

5E: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Part of having an inclusive work environment is to also cater to different employee types. While some employees are more outgoing and proactive in participating in the numerous activities, some are more reserved and less vocal. They may be afraid to speak up or ask questions as compared to their colleagues because of differences in temperament, or simply because they are going through some difficult times in their personal lives. As such, it is important for organizations to include these employees in every step of the way, ensuring that they are not left behind. To do so, leaders can create safe channels or platforms for communication, and initiatives that support mental wellness.

SPAG'S QUICK TIPS

Let's Discuss! Forum: An internal online forum where all employees – no matter seniority – can post questions, discussion threads and answers of their own
- Option for employees to post their questions and responses anonymously
- For employees who may not be comfortable with speaking up

Creating Safe Spaces: Offer free bi-weekly sessions with a therapist
- Support employees in their mental well-being
- Encouraging them to go for these sessions as a healthy outlet to voice their concerns and troubles

"

"It is ideal to move towards policies that are much more flexible and inclusive. For instance, we know and realize that a responsible and purpose-led corporate is something that's desired and looked up by all generations."

Probir Das,
Chairman, Asia Pacific & India, Terumo Asia Holdings

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Creating a
Great Place to Work For All™

Pamela Sng,
Senior Consultant and Research Lead,
Great Place to Work® ASEAN & ANZ

The multigenerational workforce is a norm in today's workplaces. For many years, organizations have been working to address varied employee needs at different career/life stages, and facilitate interaction and teamwork between different age groups.

While some of these efforts work, others do not seem to create the desired synergy and social capital between employees that form the foundation of authentic care, collaboration and communication, and which enable them to thrive at work.

According to Josh Bersin, diversity is a strategy; inclusion is a goal; belonging is a feeling.[16] He says that at work, a sense of "not being included" can be deadly. When people feel left out of meetings, don't have input on their work assignments, or sense that they have been excluded from decisions or opportunities, they feel stress, anger, mistrust, and anxiety.

To create a great place to work For All™, regardless of age, the first step is to i**dentify opportunity areas in their day-to-day workplace experiences.** Beyond their perceptions of the company's policies, programs and practices, find out whether employees have consistently positive experiences in their relationships with leaders, their job and their colleagues. Where there are age differences in workplace experiences, address the drivers of these inconsistent and negative experiences.

Secondly, **cultivate a psychologically safe space** for employees to share their ideas and opinions, and ask questions without fear of being rejected or embarrassed. Be mindful of unconscious stereotypes and

age-bias which shape day-to-day interactions and decision making, and avoid language which reinforces stereotypes and creates a divisive "us" vs "them" mentality, e.g. "Ok Boomer", "(that generation) is always 'like that'", etc. While many companies recognize that diversity is beneficial to the business, not many are aware that psychological safety may hold the key to unlocking the benefits of diversity.[17]

Thirdly, **build leadership capability** to role model inclusive behaviors, facilitate collaboration and foster teamwork between employees. This refers to leadership at all levels, particularly the frontline managers. Their daily interactions, decisions and behaviors make the difference between an employee having a great day at work, or not. They are responsible for cascading the workplace culture, live out corporate values, and are the linchpin for the success or failure of company initiatives being implemented. Telling frontline managers to "be fair and inclusive" and "avoid stereotyping" does not mean that they will automatically possess the knowledge and skills to translate these instructions into practice.

As companies transition into a post-pandemic hybrid workplace, employee engagement and a sense of unity toward a common purpose are more critical than ever. Adopting an inclusive and holistic approach to creating a great workplace for their multigenerational workforce will enable them to harness all the benefits that age-diversity brings.

Want to find out how your multigenerational workforce is experiencing the workplace? Visit https://greatplacetowork.com.sg/employee-surveys/ to find out how.

6. CONCLUSION

> ## *THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU DO TODAY.*
>
> Mahatma Gandhi

The future of work is changing as we speak. The last three years has opened our eyes to the new possibilities of work, with remote working serving as a catalyst for digital adoption and transformation. Now, everyone at work has been touched by technology in one way or another, as online collaborative tools and messaging applications have become the primary mode of communication. Organizations have also been actively investing in the digital literacy front to help employees cope with this shift.

Organizations are now coping with constant change. Agility, flexibility, and adaptability are key attributes for organizations in times to come.

In conjunction with this change, our workforce has also grown increasingly age-diverse, with four or more generations working together simultaneously. These changes illustrate how vibrant and complex our workplaces have become today. However, it also prompts us to relook at the traditional way in which workforces were being segregated based on age and generation – parameters which overshadow individual value and skill sets. In fact, we found that every generation prioritize similar values – including communication and teamwork – but what differs is the way in which they seek to achieve it. As such, it is important for organizational leaders to encourage employees to embrace their differences, while working towards shared similarities together. Only then, can a workforce truly thrive.

Instead of looking at employees in silos, human resource leaders should prioritize relationship-building activities to foster an open and collaborative environment where different generations could interact and learn from one another.

Now more than ever, leaders must explore an inclusive and holistic approach to managing their employees, ensuring that everyone is able to adapt to the changes and that no one is left behind. With so many factors at play, it can be baffling for leaders to engage with their workforces. As such, we have mapped out several key communication-driven recommendations that can help organizations kick-start their journey towards creating that authentic engagement with their employees.

Derive loyalty through authentic engagement that goes beyond workplaces – understand your employees' deepest motivations.

Navigating an ever-changing environment is not an easy feat. Moreover, employees are always evolving, and their needs and wants may change overtime. However, what is paramount is to build a strong employee communications foundation that can withstand and adapt to these changes, much like a startup operates. Once this is achieved, there is no doubt that organizations and employees can thrive together as the future of work, we foresee, will be an extremely exciting one.

7. ROUND-UP: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SPAG

1 Establish Baseline Channels of Communications

Internal communications are the bread and butter of every organization. Create open, two-way communication channels that allow employees and management to interact with one another.

Quick Tips:
- Internal online forum
- Off-site team-building activities

2 Instill a Sense of Accountability

Encourage employees to take ownership of their growth and welfare by creating their own support systems through collaborating with one another. Form deeper connections with colleagues.

Quick Tips:
- Specialized training programs led by employees
- Cross-department Buddy-Mentor system

3 Recognize and Motivate

Employee recognition is important in boosting the morale of team members. Creating employee recognition initiatives to reward best performers and contributors goes a long way.

Quick Tips:
- Internal employee awards
- Newsletter shout-outs

4 Measurement and Checkpoints

Implement checkpoints and gather feedback from employees to assess the effectiveness of current communication initiatives. This allows leaders to improve them in real-time.

Quick Tips:
- Employee surveys
- Qualitative focus groups

5 Leave No One Behind

Not all employees are the same. Important to include and engage employees who are more reserved, providing safe spaces for them to express themselves.

Quick Tips:
- Internal online forum which allows for anonymity
- Mental well-being support: bi-weekly sessions with a therapist

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ABOUT SPAG

SPAG (A FINN Partners Company) is a health specialist, award-winning Public Relations and Advocacy firm operating across Asia with a focus on delivering innovative & impactful marketing and communication campaigns. In the last seven years of its journey, SPAG has emerged as one of the fastest growing public relations and advocacy agencies that has been named Global New PR Agency in 2015, Asia-Pacific Healthcare Agency of Year (2017 & 2019) at Sabre awards, and Large Agency of the Year in 2021 & 2022 by E4M (IPRCCA).

It is reputed for offering bespoke communication strategies to shape conversations, influence perceptions, cultivate constructive knowledge, and keep the dialogue going based on its core philosophy of 'be real'. As an integrated communications entity, SPAG harnesses the potential of a phenomenally diverse universe of conversations to shape the narrative for a better world.

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Fulcrum Awards 2022: **Large Agency of the year**

Business Transformation Award 2021: **Marketing & Communications**

PRCA SEA AWARDS 2021: **Best Health & Wellness campaign**

PRCA SEA AWARDS 2021: **Best Measurement & Analytics campaign**

IPRCCA 2020: **Large Agency of the year**

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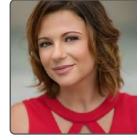Executive Director & Head Human Resources, Lighthouse Canton

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