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**White Paper# 11: Chaos in the Workplace: Four Mindsets One Goal**

At the beginning of the industrial era the corporations in the business marketplace were created centered around the concept of hierarchy within the organization. This manifested itself in the tendency for corporations to hire a number of former military officers who could bring an understanding of the way a chain of command structure is supposed to work.

As the business environment moved from the industrial age to the information age, the nature of our business enterprises changed dramatically. For the first time, the global workplace was confronted with the workplace expectations of not one or maybe two generations but by four generations. Each generation had its own expectations of how the workplace would operate and more important thrive. At first glance it would appear that the business organization is headed into a whirlpool of chaos. However we would suggest that in fact what is actually going on is four mindsets working in the space. They have different concepts on how the business should operate but they all agree that the goal is move the business forward in the global marketplace.

This white paper considers the characteristics of the four generations and how these can help move your organization forward in the future. One way to get an idea of the issues involved in this changing workplace is to look at the results of several surveys completed by Bridgeworks[[1]](#footnote-1) into employee attitudes regarding the generation mix:

* 65% of employees say that the generation gap makes it harder to get things done at work
* 57% of employees stated that companies were not creative enough in recruiting new employees
* 73% of traditionalists return to work in some capacity after they retire
* 43% of Baby Boomers say that there is not enough opportunities to be mentored where they work
* 14% of Generation X feel comfortable managing others including themselves
* Millennials feel that their #1 concern is personal safety.

**Evolutionary Nature of the Workplace**

In order to get a feel for the root of the chaos in the workplace, management of our business organizations need to be cognizant of the change that has occurred in our workplace. With the arrival of the industrial age, corporations began to hire new human capital. When times were good they increased their population. When times were bad, they would release talent top control costs. As a result employees were considered to be an expense item on the balance sheet.

As we migrated to the current service and information age, the nature of the employee contract changed dramatically. We no longer valued our human capital for what they produced, but rather we valued what was in their heads. With this change the employee moved from being a cost to being a non-owned corporate asset. In fact our business enterprises actually leased the services of the employee rather than having the employment relationship. This change solidified the existence of the generation differences within our organizations.

**The Four Generations**

If we talk to most experts in the business world, they typically recognize the existence of four generations. Each generation has its own unique characteristics. In turn these lend themselves to how they work with the other generations. As we go through the various generations we will discuss how these interact with the other generations.

**Traditionalists (Born between 1900 and 1945)**

This group is represented by the oldest employees in the workplace. They learned based on life experiences how to survive with less than they might like due to living through the depression. They tend to be the most loyal human capital assets. Unlike the more recent generations they believe in a strict chain of command structure and the expectation that what is good for them and the organization will come from corporate management in the corner office. They anticipate that if there is something they need to know to complete their responsibilities, management will let them know. If it is not critical for them to know a certain set of data, it is not therefore their right to receive the information.

**Baby Boomer (Born 1946-1964)**

The members of this group are the offspring of the traditionalists. They frowned on the concepts of the business world of their parents. They immediately changed every market that they entered right up to protesting the status quo. They felt that they were entitled to know everything about the organization and the way they operated. They were very competitive including judging ones future based on the school you attended. They disliked the change of command structure and fought it tooth and nail. This was the group that was represented by the Woodstock generation and many ended up in Viet Nam or protesting world events in earnest compared to their parents.

**Generation X (Born 1965-1980)**

This group looked at the lives of their parents and grandparents and revolted against the lifestyles asking for and requiring more balance between work and family. They for the first time became highly mobile. Some have referred them as the “new nomads.” They had no second thoughts of being in Moscow with their laptop and their cashmere coat with the cell phone in the pocket today and starting a brand new project in London tomorrow. Because of this they became very skeptical of the business decisions that they were exposed to. They were the first group of human capital that were very independent in the workplace. Tell me what to do and let me go do it.

**Generation Y (Born 1981-1999)**

This is the generation is that also referred to as the Millennials. They are the new herd of the employees entering our workplace and they are upsetting the status quo in major ways. They make their predecessors look like children with their use of technology. Some will say that there is not a new gadget that they do not own or plan to own within days of their release. Based on their upbringing by the Generation X, they come into your workplace with the concept that they are entitled to whatever it is that they want. This could mean that they expect that they should be in the position of management within months rather than years. Because of the connections that they have built, the vision of the perfect workplace is one that represents diversity both in thought and nationalities. These are your employees who if they do not get what it is they want, their response is to move on to another opportunity.

**Strategic Initiatives**

When recognizing that there is a generational imbalance within our workplaces, there are several things that the human resource professionals can undertake. While we cannot in this medium cover them all we will discuss some of the more vital ones.

**Strategy #1: Marketing efforts-** We have looked at the beliefs of the various generations. We would suggest that one of the most valuable efforts you can enter into is to create your recruiting messages for each of the generations appealing to the characteristics we have discussed.

**Strategy #2: Hiring Process-** Especially with the entrance of the Generation X and Y into the workplace, they will expect that you will make decisions on hiring in short order. This means that management must be sure that all unreasonable delays to inform the candidate must be avoided.

**Strategy #3: Diversity Efforts -** In strategy #1 we discussed creating recruiting messages that are directed towards a specific generational group. This strategy takes it one step further and suggests that not only should the message be generation based but should also be delivered in various languages to represent the ethnic makeup of the marketplace.

**Strategy #4: Valuable Assets -**  If you buy into the concept that your employees are now corporate assets, human resources professional must assist the business enterprise to recognize the value of the traditionalist and baby boomer employees to the health of the organization and create programs to encourage them to stay in the workplace. Look at creating flexible work arrangements to keep their knowledge ingrained within the organization.

**Strategy #5: When in Rome-** The old saying is when in Rome, do as the Romanians do. Carry that over to your recruiting efforts. Some organizations have decided that if they want to attract the Generation X and Generation Y they need to show up at the beaches of Spring Break.

**Strategy #6: Management Perspective –** Work with your management staff to understand their preconceived notions of who the various generations are. Work with them to understand that there is a definite separation from the mindset they think that the various generations work from and what is the reality.

We have only scratched the surface in looking at the role of the various generations in the workplace. For further understanding of this environment we find ourselves in, we suggest that you read the Bridgeworks two books on this field – “When Generations Collide” and the” M-Factor”. We also offer a 45 minute workshop on this topic that we can bring to your workplace or your professional organization. For more information e-mail us at dan@dbaiconsulting.com

1. Bridgeworks is a consulting firm which specializes in assisting corporations with the issues surrounding the multiple generations in the workplace. Lynn Lancaster was instrumental in assisting us in developing the one-hour seminar based on which this white paper is based. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)