THE EXPECTATIONS OF GEN Y IN THE CHANGING WORKPLACE DYNAMICS- AN INDICATION TO THE HR MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, an increase in stress has been witnessed amongst employees of various generations, working together at the workplace. In the process of settling at work, Millenials (Gen Y) are demonstrating new behaviors with the intent to gain success, which is starkly different from their predecessors.

KEYWORDS: Employees, Gen Y, Organization, Workforce

INTRODUCTION

Gen Y the recent entrants into global workforce and projected around 1.7 billion all-inclusive across the Globe represent 25.5 percent of the world population. The data shows that by the year 2020, India will have the highest proportion of employable workforce in the world. Every Indian town is up-and-coming as a talent centre hence India will be a source of 500 million trained work force by 2020. Therefore the need for studying Generation Y and their career aspirations is justified. In India Gen Yers account for 25.47 percent of world population (Indian Population Bureau, 2009) in India, they make up to more than half of the population. In the era of globalization and fierce competition, the Corporate Sector has to deploy and develop the services of skilled people hence it is important to understand what matters to them.

Gen Yers are entering the workforce in large numbers and will continue to dominate the workplace for the next there to four decades.

In today's constantly changing world, organizations that stand tranquil are in danger of falling behind. Workplace created has to be such where people want to work in-order to create a thriving, high-growth organization. Today everything at a workplace is changing so fast, that even those firms that make huge strides in creating great workplaces also have to persistently carry on with their efforts of making the culture at their workplace increasingly more elastic, based on trust and open to contribution by all. Today's workforce expects more from their workplace. With the limited talent pool available at the discretion of every organization, the employees know their worth, and are well aware of their market value. Organizations hence, are working towards creating workplaces which incorporate factors that their employees value the most.

Indians some decades back were considered quite different from their western counterparts in terms of the meaning they attached to time, relationships and work. However a lot of this has clearly changed now.

India and Indians are seen to be moving from a "high context culture" towards a "low context culture".

High-context culture for e.g. the culture at Asia, Africa, South America and Middle East. People in these cultures give importance to interpersonal dealings and trust. Group harmony and concurrence is chosen over the achievement of the individual. People here are governed more by intuition or feelings and less by facts and logics and communication is more indirect and formal on the other hand the Low-context culture for e.g. the culture prevalent at North America and a large part of Western Europe is more logical, straight, individualistic, and action-oriented. People here value logic, facts, and directness. They solve problems by lining up and evaluating facts. Their decisions hence are based on facts rather than intuition and finish with actions, the communication is simple, to the point, and proficient in anticipating the action to be taken.

Talking about our own cultural context, for us as Indians while working and resolving problems, our focus is generally on relationships and we do not lay equal and adequate stress on time and task, and this is considered as a positive characteristic of our culture. However our failure in maintaining time lines, following the structure and adhering to the processes, higher efficiency in doing repetitive tasks, and focus on too much detailing, are all accredited to our high contextual orientation.

Good part is that a lot of this is clearly beginning to change. Now we are quite proficient with structure, competent in managing time, following processes, our orientation is clearly moving towards task as compared to people and relations, earlier. Today's India, like its western counterparts is trying to put up processes for everything and this new generation may choose not to attend a company get-together because it is outside work hours and interferes with his or her private time. For today's youth between the east and the west despite the physical distance there are lot many things in common for example television serials, music, gizmos, fashion and above all the social networking media ,serving a reasons for bringing the world a lot more closer.

These changes are getting converted to the larger cultural shift that is likely to sweep the corporate India of tomorrow. The new generation of employees, who are entering the workplace with new expectations has led the managers to deal with new challenges. The difference between generations, and the subsequent adjustment and alterations of the workplace practices so that everyone can be accommodated, is the primary challenge being faced by the corporate world.

The life of a Human Resources Manager prior to the Global Economic downturn was primarily focused on supporting the business by attracting and retaining the skillful and capable employees. Focus on selection, and orientation of the new employee into the business taking care of their needs and requirements along with those of the business, were the prime job responsibilities. After the downturn a host of organizations are focusing on "Alternative Workplace" programs which consist of lot many nontraditional work practices, encompassing varied locations and settings.

This study would bring out considerable information on what are the various workplace expectations that the "Young Cohort" has from its future employer during his college life and as an Employee while they are "On Job". This would enhance the understanding of HR managers while recruiting and also in retaining the employees on facts like focusing on Individual difference while managing people or treating the entire generation differently. Also it would help the Academia to understand them better in terms of the value system they have created and accordingly modify their Pedagogy.

Ever Increasing Importance of Relationships at the Workplace

The last few years, have raised the expectations an employee and employer hold from each other. The employer

expects high performance and productivity; and the employee expects wider social implications for themselves and their dependents. Employees not only expect monetary support however also look up to their work organization to provide opportunities to develop their skills, help them become more sound technically, provide them adequate opportunities for innovation, so that they can excel in life, grow and become competitive, support them in raising their social status, provide them with an atmosphere which broadens their social circle.

The Importance of "Work Environment" in Promoting "Employee Engagement"

It's all about perceptions these days, unlike the older times; today's employees are no longer willing to work in office without adequate air-conditioning, comfortable workstations, and internet connectivity and so on. Work surroundings are seen as parameters of managements concern for their employees. The infrastructure, the premises and the lobby, all aid in forming perceptions by the prospective employee for the organization. Employees expect multi cuisine cafeterias, gyms, wellness programs all to be there in the premises since these contribute directly to the level of engagement they have with their work organization.

Virtual World

A dispersed workforce where employees may have sporadic face-to-face contact with their colleagues is something which is not uncommon at all. And as the virtual workplace becomes more prevalent; organizations will have to give careful thought to the management of the same. While on one hand technology offer's employee's greater flexibility, it can also limit choices and opportunities, particularly the social interaction that office or factory based work offers, and the implied learning that flows from the everyday face-to-face interactions. A December 2009 SHRM poll revealed that 52percent of companies provide for their employees "virtual work options," or scenarios that allow for work away from the company premises, and 22 percent anticipate an increase in the number of employees who work out of the office.

For new employees this form of contact can be very useful in inducting them into their new workplace, in learning from more experienced colleagues, developing rapport, absorbing corporate culture and professional ethics, and building networks and communities of practice. Different form of communication goes well with different situations, some people are more comfortable with one approach over another, and this includes managers also. There are some managers who find it very difficult to manage teams who are not physically in the office and there will be more need to support and train managers to deal with this situation and to strike what can be equilibrium between retaining control and encouraging levels of trust and teamwork. On the other hand, younger managers who have grown up with social networking are likely to be more comfortable and more proficient at using this form of communication.

Flexible Workplaces

Flexibility in the workplace is the wave of the future. There are several time-honored benefits to this growing trend. If employees are given autonomy in deciding how to produce results and strike better work-life balance, it could turn out to be a great tool to boost loyalty towards the employer. When the decision of how, when and where is left with the employees, businesses have seen to achieve greater heights of success and the employees have prospered. The end result is a more competitive organization with high productivity, high employee engagement, and more innovation and less employee turnover. The vision of allowing more flexi-work and flextime can be a scary thought for many organizations. In such a scenario, it is best to start at the top and form policy around flexible workplace arrangements and to reassess their effectiveness at periodic intervals - giving the flexible strategies sufficient time to show results.

The Changing Labor Force Demographics

The globe's population as predicted will grow from 6.9 billion in 2010 to 7.6 billion by the end of 2020; however the population in the working age bracket is expected to decline in many countries. Be it Japan where the no. of people moving out of the workforce is much higher than those who fall in the age bracket to enter in it, or Europe where the year 2010 saw more workers retiring from the workforce than joining. Russia, Canada, South Korea and China would also be witnessing a similar state, by the end of this decade. So the countries like India, where one-third of our population is below 15, do have a demographic advantage over the others. Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia also possess a similar advantage. However it is important to know that this young population will be advantageous only if they are provided with adequate opportunities to educate themselves and also trained well of skills which are necessary for them to get absorbed in the talent pool.

Increasing Mismatch between the skills Employers Need and the Talent Available

An international employment agency, in one of its survey in 2010, stated that approximately 31percent of employers worldwide are struggling to find the suitable talent to match up to their requirements. And this struggle becomes even more difficult when it comes to attracting employees with skills that are critical to the organization.

Similar results have been predicted by other sources as well. For e.g. an HR Consultancy firm known as Towers Watsons study has revealed that more than 80percent of the organizations which are tagged as the fast growth economies are facing the shortage of adequately skilled employees. On one hand the colleges have been showing improved ranks, however the fact of the matter is that organizations are still finding a gap between the skills they have acquired to the skills actually needed at the work front. And this is the main cause of unemployment being faced by the youth. It's critical for the educational institutes and the economist to understand the skill sets that are desired by the employers to overcome this alarming issue.

Unretired Baby Boomers and Women to Fill the Skills Gaps

The AARP, a leading US advocacy group for retired people, believes that 80percent of baby boomers will keep working either full- or part-time, even after their retirement age. Women, across the globe have emerged as a well-educated source of talent, and have made an entry to the workforce in ever greater numbers in recent decades. However, their talents are still not utilized to the optimal; especially in societies with conventional views on gender, and this includes many fast - growing economies too.

Increasingly Global and Mobile Talent Market

It is not surprising these days to find the talent in your home country getting drained, because of better career opportunities elsewhere, in some other county, some other continent. Better integration across the markets in the last few decades is the primary reason for the same. Infact, the immigration percent increased to as high as 42percent, and the maximum movement was witnessed towards the OECD counties. However with the recent slowdown in the global economy and the newly posed legal restrictions, the migrants have faced the dejection and hostility from the local residents, since even the developed markets have been witnessed high unemployment, in the downturn scenario. All these factors have left migrants stay back at their home countries.

Slowly the economy is showing the signs of recovery and it is expected that the demand for labor will go up and

hence even migration percent will bounce back. This is also coupled with countries trying to diminish the restrictions they had imposed on migration during the downtime. The developing economies also are showing striking development and growth opportunities which is going to have its effect on the migration percent. The World Economic Forum has stated that reverse migration is being increasingly seen in the developing countries, however the fact that developed economies are a top choice to work for, cannot be ignored.

Health & Wellness Programs for Employees

Various wellness programs for employees are being run by their work organization. They are no longer viewed as an extravagance but a "must have" in every organization. As the importance of these initiatives continues to grow, organizations are not only focusing on fitness centers as a means to get their employees healthier but also lay value to short programs encouraging small recreation and entertainment breaks for the employees; promote and spread awareness about exercises employees can do at their desks; focus on meditation, mindfulness, and non-traditional "well-being" interventions. In order to measure the efficacy of such programs, organizations need to measure these three things (1)How much they are able to save on the health care expenses, (2)The percentage by which the rate of absenteeism goes down and (3)by what percentage does the output increase, after running such programs.

Till some decades back, organizations were more focused on the "ROI" and any expense on employees was seen as a cost to the company however in the modern era, any such form of spending on the employees is seen as a "VOI" (Value on Investment) which measures the soft aspects or the intangible benefits, unlike ROI that is seen as a measure of the hard or tangible benefits.

Psychological Health in the Workplace

American Psychological Association has stated that a psychologically healthy place of work promotes good health and well being for the employees and enhances organizational performance and productivity. The workplace practices that are generally considered as important are broadly classified into five types, as stated ahead:

Measures on increasing employee engagement or involvement, striking a correct work-life balance for them, promoting the growth and development of the employee, ensuring the employee has a sound mental and physical health and the work surroundings are safe, and the employee is motivated enough by various "recognition programs" over and above the hygiene factors. It is important to note that, organizations today are progressively focusing on both the physical and mental health of their employees.

Increased Bargaining Power with Employees and Usage of Rewards and Recognition Programs

Last two to three decades have witnessed a lot of changes in workplace. Loyalty is no longer prevalent. Competition has become intense, organizations have changed, and they are reducing their costs to become more productive, resort to frequent layoffs to become leaner. All this slowly ended the trend of decades of service with the same organization. During the downturn of the economy high unemployment was witnessed. As the upswing returns, the skilled employees stand to get the benefit. With the limited talent pool, they are demanding more, and are increasingly having a say in how the work is assigned to them, how should they be assessed and rewarded for their performance. Today, it's the employee, who is defining the workplace and not the employer; their liking, and inclinations are being accounted for in designing the workplace of the future. Employee engagement is given due importance and the rewards and recognition programs are helping the employer in the same. It reinforces positive behavior which assists the firms in the achievement

of its goals. A motivated workforce certainly will impact the bottom line positively. The importance of non monetary rewards has increased multifold, rewards need not be expensive and in cash. A pat on the back, a certificate, a trophy, or a hall full of the audience cheering you on your achievements, all works wonders.

Increased Usage of Social Media /Social Networking Sites

Social Networking has become a vital part of everyone's life today. There are hundreds of millions of personal users on sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn; it has also become an important means of doing business with growing number of firms that sell their things through these mediums. It's noteworthy that across the world, HR professionals are occupied in developing policies for the usage of these websites at the work place. HR professionals and their organizations are increasingly using social networking sites to scan candidates before they are invited for an interview and this trend up picked up first in the United States, followed by rest of the world. According to a SHRM survey in November 2009, only 3percent of the organizations included this practice into their recruitment process by the end of 2008. It also stated that 86percent of HR professionals felt that they would not prefer hiring a candidate whose social networking profile showed indicated "unprofessional behavior". The social networking media and the increased prevalence of blogosphere are helping the prospective candidates to learn more about employers before they attend an interview. Chat boards, are available both to consumers and job seekers which serve to clarify a lot of information about the organizations. There is a new trend to hire "social media managers" to help organizations in find their way more effectively through the internet way.

Technology Being Put to Use at the Workplace in Order to Eliminate Geographic Barriers

In an economy which is progressively more global in nature, technological advancement is the central driving force for the same. Usage of technology is increasingly eliminating the geographic barriers. For an HR professional, recruitment process has gained the advantage with alternatives like video interviews and video conferences which provides the hiring experts the choice to track the prospective job candidates from any part of the world. Usage of Internet to obtain education, to learn more for professional development and various distance learning programs have also become very rampant mostly for firms which have multiple domestic and/or international locations. Special budget allocation is kept towards the development of search engine optimization (SEO), so that pertinent information is readily available when a job seeker conducts an online search.

Vulnerability of Business Technology to Adversity

The field of technology has a collective concurrence on the increased threat from hackers, other software maladies and spam in the recent years. The software industry and business firms have reported this issue; such activities have a strategic impact on their functioning. Symantec conducted a survey in 2010 and stated that the small and midsized businesses comprising of 10 to 499 employees have now made IT security and protection as one of their highest priority task and on an average have budgeted an expense of $51,000 a year on the same, they have also allocated two-thirds of their IT staff's time on matters of information protection, computer security and disaster preparedness. McAfee, a security technology company, reported that the production and distribution of malicious software, had reached its highest levels ever in the first half of 2010. As per them, nearly 55,000 new pieces of malware appear every day in computer systems across the globe.

The Split between Technology-Savvy and the not so Tech Savvy Employees

"Digital divide" is a phrase referring to the gap between the 'heavily wired urban' and the 'wireless rural' regions that are deficient in high-speed Internet access. A gap is also been observed at the workplace between tech-minded workers and their less technologically literate co-workers. Generation Y is the first generation to grow up with computer/internet access readily available at all times. In comparison to them the other generations like Boomers, who have been in the workforce since long have recently learned the basics of the online world. Employers are encouraging workers of all ages to embrace technology on the job.

E-Recruitment on a Rise

The recession of 2007-2009, saw a massive increase in the number of applications coming for each job posting. HR and Recruitment professionals across the globe faced the common challenge of trying to locate the most talented candidate out of all the applicants. This led to many of them turn to e-recruiting technologies to make the entire process easier. The most valued aspect of such technologies is the ability to improve job matching; it has enhanced the search capacity when huge numbers of applications have to be processed. These technologies make the process of both applying for a job and sorting through candidates very easy.

SUMMARY

With all the recent trends emerging at the workplace, employers globally have realized the importance of attracting and retaining employees, and also understood that practices and offerings that were effective in the labor market till some years ago may no longer be equally effective, in the current times. Hence Employers have to be:

These trends, though don't affect the workplace directly, however it does affect the way in which we work. The workplace today, is not just the furnishings and the four walls of the premises; it is more about how happy are the employees working at the workplace, and what kind of opportunities are available for them, which in turn can facilitate both their personal and professional life.

With this change in the outlook towards the human capital, the role that the Human Resource Professionals had played so far has also undergone substantial changes. Now they are playing a more strategic role towards the development of the organization by having a clear understanding of the macro view of the organization and hence being able to participate and contribute towards the major policies and decisions. They are playing the role of change agents and are effectively supporting the employees to achieve their goals. In fact their role has become very versatile since the workplace diversity has also become so prevalent. They are the endorsers of work values, ethics and beliefs and help the organization maintain its culture, which is the bedrock of every organization.

Intense competition is being witnessed by firms not only at a local level however also from firms across the globe. Hence Organizations need to evolve, become more elastic, energetic, and ensure that every employee understands and drives the mantra of customer centricity. The colossal growth of IT and BPO sector in India and the prevalence of MNC's has been instrumental in changing the work culture in India, which earlier was too different from the other parts of the world. With globalization, this gap between the cultures has narrowed down to some extent.

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