

NEW EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STUDY DEFINES HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HARNESS THE POWER OF A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Employers are Increasingly Seeking to Optimize Productivity Across Generations; Older Workers are More Engaged than Younger Workers, Study Reports

WESTPORT, CT (April 21, 2009)—The challenging economy has forced more and more employers to focus on how they can “do more with less” and increase productivity with their workforce. A new MetLife Mature Market Institute study, conducted in partnership with Boston College’s Sloan Center on Aging & Work, indicates that employers have significant opportunities to maximize the strength of their workforces and optimize workforce productivity through practices geared to the various generations.

Entitled Engaging the 21st Century Multi-Generational Workforce, the study explores the drivers of engagement for employees of different ages, including demographic characteristics, factors related to the job, and work team factors. Engagement is defined as positive, enthusiastic, and affective connection with work that motivates an employee to invest in getting the job done, not just “well” but “with excellence.”

The study reports that older workers tend to be more engaged than younger workers. Among other reasons, the researchers point out that focusing on the talent management of older individuals is important because they may best relate to the Baby Boomer customer base responsible for \$3.8 trillion of annual spending in the U.S. Those with the highest levels of engagement were found to be women, those without elder care responsibilities, those in good physical and mental health, those with a positive self-perception and those having job security.

The findings indicate that employee engagement can be greatly enhanced by simple and cost-efficient efforts including: providing strong training and development opportunities, encouraging work team inclusion, offering customized benefits plans, and promoting a culture of workplace flexibility and supervisor supportiveness.

One size does not fit all, says the study. For instance, access to flexibility for work and family responsibility was rated highly by Gen Y employees (those born after 1980). Younger Gen X’ers (b. 1972 and 1980) look for training and development opportunities and Older Gen X’ers (b. 1965 and 1971) respond to having supervisory roles. Younger Boomers (b. 1955 and 1964) are more engaged when they feel more included in their work team and Older Boomers/Traditionalists (b. before 1955) are more engaged when their supervisors are supportive.

“The findings of our study suggest that employers who want to enhance employee engagement should consider how to update their assumptions about the importance of the quality of the employment experiences they offer to employees,” said Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes, Ph.D., director of the Sloan Center.

“We found that different factors 'drive' the levels of engagement of different groups of employees. There is no single solution to low levels of engagement. Therefore, it is in employers' interests to strengthen multiple aspects of the quality of employment. Some of these include training and development, workplace flexibility, compensation and benefits, and relationships with supervisors. It is worth the effort to invest in organizations' most important asset - their employees.”

Employees can help companies retain a competitive edge by exhibiting creativity, innovation, and the ability to “go the extra mile” to help make products and processes more efficient and effective. At one company profiled in the study, the employer implemented a culture shift from one focused on “time” to one focused on “energy.” Employees were provided with resources to help them strategically align their energy to be more successful at home and at work. Wellness programs and a supportive work environment helped boost their energy.

“Employers will increasingly place a premium on having fully engaged employees, as workers who are disengaged represent lost productivity and innovation,” said Sandra Timmermann, Ed.D., director of the MetLife Mature Market Institute. “Understanding what drives employee engagement, from Boomers to Gen Y, helps employers stay competitive, especially in challenging economic times.”

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