

# Managing Multiple Generations in your Healthcare Organization

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By 2020, five generations of Americans will be working alongside each other. Each generation has been shaped by the major historical events, cultural changes and social trends of its time and has adopted seemingly distinct attitudes toward employment. With so many different values, motivators and work styles, healthcare organizations are challenged to meet the competing needs of all five generations.

Assumptions about specific generational differences are widespread, but not necessarily helpful in bringing synergy to a generationally diverse staff. It's important for leaders to take a step back, think about how your own generation has been perceived and consider if those perceptions are correct. Most likely the answer is no; many baby boomers are quite tech savvy and many Gen Xers are hardworking, despite their respective stereotypes. To enable a generationally diverse staff, leaders must finetune their emotional intelligence, or EQ. Only by understanding people, beyond the generational stereotypes, can healthcare organizations improve the employee experience.

## Find the Best Fit Upfront

Whether it's driving innovative change, fulfilling the mission or creating long-term, sustainable growth, an organization's success comes down to fit — both a skills fit, which is necessary for adequately filling the role, but also a cultural fit, which is necessary for implementing change and collaborating to deliver on strategic initiatives. When managing a generationally diverse staff, it's less about the differences in age, experience and perception, and more about finding the personalities and work styles that best fit the organization and the team. The right fit is the difference between progress and stagnation.

To ensure leaders are bringing in talent that best serves the organization and its goals, leaders need to think about the kind of people they want in their organization, beyond a skill set or previous experience. Many organizations are utilizing personality tests to identify the types of people who best compliment their organization's existing workforce. While the Myers-Briggs assessment is a popular method, there are plenty of other techniques healthcare organizations can use to evaluate fit. Situational judgment tests (SJTs) gauge how an employee interacts with customers and co-workers, manages multiple priorities, and deals with stressful situations. There is also the Management by Strengths method, which assesses

the test-taker's primary communication style and offers guidance for how best to work and communicate with that person. And, by leveraging a peer-interviewing model, high performers that best represent the organization's culture can interview the candidate. This method creates a sense of ownership for the group both in terms of preserving culture and overseeing a new hire's development.

When it comes to workplace behavior, leaders should consider the organization's mission, vision and values and what corresponding behaviors demonstrate those ideals. Aside from effectively communicating these standards throughout the organization, healthcare leaders should introduce these standards when interviewing candidates. They should display the standards during the interview and ask the candidate directly if they think they can adhere to these standards every day. Interview questions that reveal the candidate's social skills and workplace demeanor are also beneficial for finding cultural alignment.

## Personalize Development and Recognition

Like consumers, today's workforce wants a personalized approach to development, one that develops individual strengths, offers a clear career path and creates a plan for achieving career goals. By getting to know your team members' motivations, learning styles and resilience, leaders can create informed and effective professional development plans that meet team members where they are; a 25-year-old medical assistant may have different career aspirations than a 50-year-old technologist.

Personalization for consumers is on the rise, but it can also be used to improve the work environment and increase employee engagement. If leaders know how their team members think, what motivates them and what makes them feel appreciated, they can create rewards and recognition programs that resonate. No two employees are exactly alike, and the kind of recognition that works for one may not work

for another (e.g., some employees may prefer private recognition over public recognition). A savvy leader knows how to make recognition measurable, memorable and meaningful.

Aside from spending time with their team members, the easiest way for leaders to understand what makes their employees feel fulfilled and motivated is to ask them. Plenty of organizations ask this in the form of employee satisfaction surveys, but most only do so on a yearly basis. Rather than just once a year, organizations should check in with employees once a month to see what is working well and what else is needed for employees to perform at their highest level.

## Create Opportunities for Cross-Collaboration

For teams with generational diversity, leaders should encourage their employees to find common ground beyond team development. Projects that enable collaboration, reinforce a common language and accelerate knowledge sharing among team members not only increase employee engagement but also increase productivity.

Internal initiatives like mentorship programs or groups focused on shared interest are other ways to integrate multiple generations. A robust mentoring program increases retention, enhances the employee experience, and supports the personal and professional growth of both the mentee and mentor. Common interest groups break down generational barriers by finding something employees enjoy and contribute to a deeper appreciation for co-workers of different generations.

Successfully aligning five generations of employees around a common vision for the future depends on how well the organization can enable collaboration, engagement and thoughtfulness among its workforce. Leaders must strike a balance between understanding employees as individuals and helping them see the similarities they have with other generations. Through working together, healthcare organizations can ensure their diverse teams are aligned for future success.

## Key Takeaways

For healthcare leaders to successfully manage multiple generations, they must:

### Think differently.

Challenge each other to see past generational stereotypes and recognize everyone's seat at the table.

### Plan differently.

Find opportunities to personalize the employee experience in professional development planning and recognition programs.

### Act differently.

Use what your organization's workforce has in common to keep them engaged and focused on fulfilling the mission.



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