

Business Recruitment

Five generations, one workplace

Treating age diversity as a strategic advantage and not a challenge will help bring success, Jane Hamilton writes

Amid the changes wrought by AI and the incoming Employment Rights Act, another, quieter revolution is upending UK business — but it has the power to shape workplaces to the same degree.

For the first time in modern history, five generations are in employment at the same time, with an estimated 5 to 10 per cent of companies currently employing all five.

The age range spans Gen Alphas just starting out in their careers through Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers still working beyond retirement age. Each has a distinctive way of learning and working, and harnessing this incredible knowledge pool could supercharge the economy — yet a London School of Economics study suggests that the UK's current lack of “generational workplace inclusion” is costing the UK £48 billion a year.

Kirsty McManus, director of professional development services at the Institute of Directors, explains: “Multi-generational teams can enhance problem-solving, innovation and decision-making by combining deep experience with fresh perspectives. But evidence is equally clear that without deliberate, inclusive leadership, these benefits are often left unrealised.”

At its core, McManus believes, the five-generation workforce signals a shift in leadership “from control to orchestration”. The organisations that succeed will be the ones that recognise generational diversity as a strategic advantage to be actively unlocked.

So what is the key to successfully managing multiple generations, with often-opposing outlooks?

Cassie Gasson, 32, from the learning tech firm Thrive, supports organisations with multi-generational workplaces. Her mantra is “flexibility is the new boss”. She said: “A successful five-gen boss is skilled at creating a workforce where everyone feels included, with a work culture to match. It means providing a personalised experience, with a broad range of people, ages and stages.”

While both McManus and Gasson recognise this ideal management style is far from simple, the benefits of getting it right are worth the investment.

The new State of Generations at Work report from the employee recognition firm OC Tanner studied multi-generation workforces in 17 countries and found employees who experience strong generational synergy are nine times more likely to score their workplace as productive — and six times more likely to recommend their organisation as a great place to work. Organisations supporting the well-being priorities of every generation saw employees



Back row, left to right: Natasha Butler, 35, Gemma Allen, 43, Sue Jarvis, 58. Front: Martha Leonard, 19, Eileen Blake, 75

‘More like a family than a workforce’

Case study

The wigmakers Banbury Postiche in Oxfordshire have a workforce aged from 16 to 75. Nick Allen, the managing director, said: “On good days, the team can feel almost like a

family rather than a group of colleagues; our wide spread of generations is integral to this feeling.

“Younger team members learn from the experience and expertise of their older colleagues; and the older, wiser heads benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of the youngsters.

“The exchange of ideas benefits all ages and these conversations are sometimes about more than just ways of working better. We’ve all learnt life lessons from colleagues who are at a different stage in their lives.

“The secret to managing people, of any age, well is empathy.”

Tips for multi-generational management

● **Create conditions for different individuals to thrive:** Make sure people at different life stages, with different strengths and expectations can contribute.

● **Embrace emotional intelligence:** Respond to different motivations, communication styles and expectations across life stages to reduce friction, build trust and unlock performance.

● **Engage in mentoring**

and reverse mentoring: Allow experienced staff to share what they know with younger colleagues and encourage younger generations to challenge established practices.

● **Adaptability is essential:** Different generations often expect different forms of leadership, varying in autonomy, feedback, flexibility and purpose.

● **Inclusive decision-making is a**

critical to performance: Look at how decisions are made, whose perspectives are heard and how challenge is encouraged.

● **Look at “generational contracts”:** Highlight how each generation has developed distinct expectations around work based on the economic, cultural and workplace conditions. They shape how staff communicate, collaborate and engage.

an impressive 13 times more likely to experience generational synergy.

“Only 26 per cent of employees experience real generational synergy,” said Dr Alexander Lovell, vice-president of the OC Tanner Institute. “It means three out of four employees work somewhere that hasn’t figured out how generations learn from one another. Organisations have spent years ‘managing’ generational differences. The future favours those who build with it.”

As a business owner employing five generations, Ross Evans of ShuttersUp insists the benefits are clear. He said: “A multi-generational workforce really enhances the company culture. It creates an energetic and supportive environment where people learn from one another with plenty of camaraderie.”

Six from the best

Former PR boss Lucy Goff has taken the beauty world by storm, creating the Lyma laser treatments favoured by celebrities from Nicole Scherzinger to Cillian Murphy. The UK brand's biggest market is the US and here Lucy shares her expertise in building a multimillion-pound business stateside.



1 Learn to be patient: This can be a challenge for founders. The market might be clamouring for your product but US bureaucracy, such as FDA approval, can take a long time.

2 Embrace outlier status: I’m dyslexic and never did things the expected way. The US rewards innovation, so it now represents 70 per cent of our market.

3 Ask for help: I’ve spoken to hundreds of surgeons, doctors, dermatologists and facialists to the A-list who have been generous in sharing their ideas, support and feedback. This has helped the company to grow and built an invaluable network.

4 Think big, yet local: There is so much opportunity in the US, but it’s not one market; it’s multiple markets.

You need to know where your customers are and employ hyper-local strategies. What works in New York may need a different take in Texas.

5 Get geeky: US consumers are very well informed and they love learning more about the science behind the products.

6 Accept you can’t personally be everywhere: It can be hard to let go, but it’s necessary to grow. I appointed our first US C-suite hire this year, demonstrating our commitment to the market.

Appointment of the week

International development director at Epsom College

Applications are invited for the role of director of international development at Epsom College. Founded on the principles of “benevolence and excellence”, the school is committed to holistic education.

To support and develop its international plans, the governing body seeks to appoint a director of international development who will work with them, the head and chief operating officer to develop and deliver the strategy for overseas collaboration, partnerships and growth, as well as capitalising on educational and commercial opportunities in the domestic market.

The successful candidate will be commercially and financially astute with an entrepreneurial mindset, have excellent communication skills, and experience of working internationally, preferably in a school environment. Applications are encouraged from candidates with educational, private, public or third-sector backgrounds who have strong commercial acumen and a genuine passion for education, as well as a commitment to the values and ethos of Epsom College.

Apply by July 13 at: appointments.thetimes.com

Working week

Young net Wimbledon win

Wimbledon has served up work experience to 1,200 youngsters, with almost half of the temporary roles at the tournament going to under-25s. The All England Lawn Tennis Club’s charity, the Wimbledon Foundation, partnered with charities to ensure the jobs were accessible to local people facing barriers to work. Spokeswoman Paige Murphy said: “The work experience people gain ... helps to build confidence.”

Mistakes can be rewarding

More than half of employees fear making mistakes at work. However, Glenn Bostock, author of *A Human Business*, once awarded an employee with a trip to Hawaii after an expensive slip-up. He said: “Punishing people for making honest mistakes only creates fear. It doesn’t incentivise them to be productive. Rewarding employees for reporting mistakes is one of the fastest ways to build trust, innovation and ... improvement.”

Feeling lonely in a crowd

Despite the “return to office” mandate, 40 per cent of UK staff have felt lonely at work, even when surrounded by colleagues. A new study from Kahoot! suggests the continuation of pandemic-style digital-first working meant 17 per cent often went an entire workday without speaking to a workmate, while 52 per cent messaged colleagues in the same room rather than speaking. And 37 per cent felt they had no close work friends.

Recognising progress

UK professionals are failing to recognise progress, in a phenomenon called “achievement blindness”. Jackson Parsons, of the career podcast *My Duvet Flip*, said: “In a culture that celebrates promotions [and] pay rises ... it’s easy to overlook the smaller wins. Many people make meaningful progress ... without ever feeling as though they’re moving forward.” He urges workers to complete a weekly audit, asking ‘What did I achieve?’