

Attracting and Retaining the Best Talent

The human capital within an organization's culture is the dynamic that generates a company's success or failure. It is not the size of the building, how great the product, or even the best equipment or processes that determines organizational success. The component that propels and sustains a successful organization is its diverse team of talented employees. People make or break an organization. With the human element's level of importance to organizational achievement, the purpose of this article is to evaluate and synthesize how an organization may become a magnet for employee talent and what it is that managers must do to retain it.

Pfau & Kay (2002) propose three factors that are attractive to all groups of employees: trust, contribution, and rewards. The leaders offer that employees from cross-cultural backgrounds, with a wide range of ages, both men and women have similar desires as to what they expect and need within the workplace. For example, no matter how diverse the prospective workforce population may be, employees seek the opportunity to work for an organization they trust, provides meaningful work, and compensates employees in relationship to performance.

This discussion has three objectives: (1) to evaluate the importance of trust, contribution, and rewards to the parallel expectations of a diverse workforce; (2) to explore how generational differences may apply to the areas of trust, contribution, and reward; and (3) to conclude with a recommendation of human capital practices for achieving a competitive edge.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Trust may be interpreted from many perspectives. It is a common component to what employees from all walks of life want in their job. What are the aspects of trust employees are seeking? What does an organization do to exude trust in order to attract and retain talented, diverse, and hard working team members?

Four themes emerge from research studies as to how to interpret the importance of trust to employee expectations (Costigan et al., 2006; Perry & Mankin, 2007; Pfau & Kay, 2002). First, employees want to work for an organization that employs trustworthy leaders. Second, employees associate feelings of trust to an organization that has a [clear vision and strategy](#). Next, all people expect to work for an organization that operates effectively, an organization that is winning. Fourth, employees seek an organizational culture that operates on the theory of "mutual investment" (Zhang, Tsui, Jiwen, Chaoping, & Liangding, 2008). Mutuality is practiced when an organization values the talent employees bring to the workplace and in return employees value the mission of the organization.

Effective Leadership

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People have a common need to work for organizations that are comprised of [effective leadership](#). Strong leaders set the tone of the organization. A leadership team that values their employees generates a culture of high productivity, job satisfaction, and innovation. Employees associate trust with the level of relationship and connection they have with members of the management team. From their immediate supervisor to the CEO, if employees feel the members of the management team are strong leaders this will positively impact job satisfaction. (Costigan et al., 2006; Perry & Mankin, 2007).

The importance of trust and valuing employees are common core values that management within the organization will visually display in mission statements or incorporate in a code of conduct. This information is not new or a revelation as to what is important to attracting and retaining employees. The

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commonality among people is not the phrasing, or the wording within organizational documents. The priority for an organization to attract and retain a talented workforce is to instill and practice the behaviors of trust. The following discussion proposes that employees associate trust with ethical, transparent, and transformational leadership behaviors.

Ethical behaviors. McCall (2002) proposes that no matter what leadership style a manager possesses there are ethical behaviors to consider in the relationship between the leader and

the follower. The true measure of leadership is the ethical influence the leader has on his or her followers, or stakeholders. The stakeholder theory suggests that an ethical leader is one that considers positive and negative views, stakeholder and non-stakeholder rights, to ensure decisions in the corporate world are made in an ethical manner and members are held accountable. Through ethical actions a leader enhances his or her credibility and integrity which is associated with enhancing the leader-member development of trust. In this context, trust is associated with being vulnerable to the leader's actions and as a result the employee has established faith in the ethical decision making and choices the leader makes within the organization.

Transformational behaviors. Trust is related to how leaders interact with others in the workplace. When a leader is courteous, kind, and respectful toward others, employees associate these outwardly actions to a high level of social exchange and connection. Attitudes and behaviors that are most conducive to building trust, from a relationship perspective, are aligned with the behavioral approach of a transformational leader (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The thought leaders suggest that the style of a transformational leader promotes caring and concern of employee needs. The transformational leader has the ability to inspirationally motivate which provides followers a foundation of trust to offer their opinions and ideas as to how to achieve organizational objectives.

A transformation leader is one that truly emulates a high sense of consideration by encouraging employees with little experience to develop their leadership and structural dimensions. Kotter (1990) describes this development of leaders as creating a “leadership centered culture”. When transformational leaders generate a team of leaders the organization becomes a learning organization which attracts and retains the best talent resulting in a leadership center in which followers are encouraged to grow.

Transparent behaviors. Employees expect their leaders to get the job done by acting upon what they know and being honest by admitting when they do not know the answer. Trust is associated with being vulnerable. When the leader openly expresses his or her lack of ability or understanding they set the example that the culture is a safe environment where employees are free to make mistakes and ask questions. Through the practice of setting ego aside, the leader builds trust by demonstrating his or her competency of authentic leadership.

Team behaviors. Organizing a team of experts requires the leadership skill of valuing team success over individual success. A team builder has the ability to take the talents of those within the organization and synergize them into a highly performing team that achieves extraordinary results. This is not an easy task. For instance, talented employees are often so good at what they do they bring their attitudes of individualism to work with them. Team member friction, as a result of combining experts together, may lead employees to voluntarily leave if the leader does not transition unproductive discussions into team synergy. Employees associate strong leadership with a leader that has the ability to bring people together opposed to allowing cliques or employee division (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). This leadership skill of blending individual achievement and community is associated with leaders that build high-performing teams based on trust principles.

Vision & Strategy

Employees associate great companies to work for as those that have a strategy and vision that will outperform the competition. Vision is a component of organizational effectiveness that employees correlate with organizational stability, direction, trust, and clarity. Holtom, Mitchell, Less & Erberly (2008) propose that because of an increase in knowledgeable talent, advances in technology, and worldwide access a business that is trustworthy frequently communicates company status and where the business is going.

Effective Operation

Employees want to work for organizations that are winners. Winning is interpreted as an organization that hires talented people, promotes the most qualified, incorporates strong leadership, composed of motivated people, and operates within a culture of commitment (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Through the balance of talent and accountability the organization has the structural design to effectively achieve its goals and objectives. A significant contributor to effectiveness is the adherence to a performance system that rewards those employees that contribute and

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provides consequences to those employees that do not.

Mutual Investment

A component of trust is the principle of mutuality. When a relationship is productive both parties take responsibility for making the relationship work. From the workplace perspective this means that when an employer pays for an employee's knowledge that in return the employee provides the organization the best possible work they are capable of. A common example in the area of rewards is the exchange of employee commitment for employee benefits. Zhang et al. (2008) refers to this practice as the theory of mutual investment.

In sum, based on the research and the evidence of how trust impacts employee perspectives, the organization that is striving to [attract and retain key talent](#) would include the proposed leadership behaviors of trust as the core to its operating strategy.

IMPORTANCE OF CONTRIBUTION

No matter the background, ethnicity, age, or gender of a child, he or she dreams about doing what they want to do when they grow up. From being a fireman, a teacher, an artist, to a doctor, people decide on a career and strive to become knowledgeable in the field. For many, the career choice requires hours of learning and financial hardship to obtain the education that is required to become employed. It is the passion, knowledge, and experience that manufacture the desire to contribute. The need to use what has been learned to make a difference.

With contribution being significant to employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness the priority is to reflect on how managers may increase the level of contribution to attract and retain human capital. Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor (2004) suggest that contribution correlates with a sense of engagement. When employees are engaged within the organization they are more likely to stay with the organization. The following discussion provides examples of how employees may meet their need to contribute and as a result how contribution provides value to organizational results.

Ways to Increase Contribution

Contribution is associated with high levels of involvement. High involvement work practices include: (a) decision making; (b) sharing information; (c) informal leadership assignments; (d) opportunities for increasing job responsibilities; and (e) a chance to use the skills that the employee has strived to become proficient in. When employees are not provided high involvement opportunities the rate of voluntary turnover accelerates (Jagannathan & Akhila (2009). The thought leaders hypothesize that the degree of employee contribution is directly related to the quality of life at work which is associated with organizational effectiveness.

Employees would like to do what they have been trained to do (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004; Ramlall, 2004; Pfau & Kay, 2002). Scroggins (2008) refers to this principle as being able to partake in "meaningful work experiences".

As simple as this may sound, employees feel a high level of contribution when their job provides an opportunity to use their areas of expertise. It is not uncommon that employers are not aware of the talents and skills an employee may hold. For example, when cross-training opportunities arise, an employee's manager may request the employee make a list of his or her professional skills. Although this is a good idea to know what the employee has achieved, this exercise generally comes many months after the employee has been hired. The solution – be familiar with the talents, education, and skills that employees have acquired and align those skills with goals for career development.

Engagement, contribution, and involvement require a culture that utilizes talent, values, and the expertise of all members by providing working conditions that are conducive to productivity.

Pfau & Kay (2002) posit that employees feel a lack of contribution when they are not involved in decision making. Being left out of hiring decisions or decisions that impact their job are indicators to employees that their expertise is not valued. When situations such as these take place employees resort to feeling left out. They feel their knowledge and expertise is not important and the organization

does not need their contribution. Being in on things is a motivator as it signifies the leadership team views expertise as a necessity for running the business.

Having a two-way dialogue is an example of how to increase the level of contribution by asking for input and involving an employee in decision making. The traditional concept when providing direction or announcing a change is for the manager to engage in most of the talking. This managerial tactic is a pushing method of communication and facilitates a minimal amount of interaction on the part of the receiver. In contrast to telling, an effective leader will ask for suggestions and recommendations as to how the employee envisions the change. This approach is a pulling method where the dialogue consists of both sender and receiver participating in an effective exchange of ideas, thoughts, and expertise. High involvement in the conversation provides the manager with feedback and the employee with a feeling of satisfaction that his or her input was valued.

Engagement, contribution, and involvement require a culture that utilizes talent, values, and the expertise of all members by providing working conditions that are conducive to productivity. Employees that are seeking to find a place where they may contribute need an organizational culture that is flexible to their situation. This does not mean that employees get to do what they want and have to be entertained. The premise of a flexible working environment is one that is based on trust. With trust being the foundation of a working relationship, the “mutual investment” (Zhang et al., 2008) theory affirms a progressive organization is flexible to the needs of its employees. A best practice principle based on mutual-ity, contribution, and trust.

IMPORTANCE OF REWARDS

The principle of receiving rewards correlates with theories of motivation. What gets rewarded gets done. Employees seeking employment and those talented employees that are already on the team expect rewards for their contribution and performance. This principle goes back to Herzberg's (1966) theory of motivation that employees are motivated based on the design of the reward to employee satisfaction. The thought leader proposed a multitude of rewards that may challenge and advance the application of employee performance to a desired outcome. The factors associated with employee satisfaction include rewards like recognition, achievement, advancement, and opportunity.

Employees in today's labor market perceive rewards to be a combination of intangible as well as tangible features. An intangible reward is a one that has an intrinsic satisfier to the employee in contrast to a tangible reward being an external satisfier. Both methods of satisfaction are important to long-term employee performance and commitment. The following discussion of rewards will bring forth the importance of two theories: (1) intrinsic rewards are most closely associated with employee satisfaction; and (2) intangible and tangible methods need to be blended to meet the needs of all groups of people and to retain the best talent.

Intangible Rewards

It is not new knowledge that people will leave a job where they feel they are not valued. In some cases, the disgruntled employee will leave a stable job for lesser pay or no job at all. The reward of appreciation and being valued is that important. No matter the age, the gender, the ethnicity, people are motivated to do their best, work hard, stay long hours, and give more than they take for those people that value their contribution. This example reveals the power and magnitude that an intangible reward, like appreciation, provides to employees. If an employee does not feel appreciated he or she will be physically or mentally absent from the organization.

Intangible rewards include opportunities to help others informally lead. If an employee does not feel they may add value to the growth of the company they become frustrated and stagnant. People have a need to achieve, to develop and grow. Organizations that trust in employees to make decisions, communicate to employees how important they are to the mission, and take time to celebrate understand intrinsic rewards correlate with elevated levels of job performance (Herman, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

In sum, people do not go home from work feeling as if they are too appreciated. No one communicates at the dinner table that he or she was appreciated too much at work today. The purpose of this example is to emphasize the type of rewards employees must have to excel and be retained. Intangible rewards are vital to employee satisfaction.

An argument may be that a primary need over appreciation is a safety or physical need, like being able to pay the bills and put food on the table. This ar-

gument has validity as long as the ability to pay bills is not being met. Once the employee reaches financial stability, if the organization does not value the employee through intangible means the employee is more likely to voluntarily resign. This intangible theory is confirmed by Frank, Finnegan & Taylor (2004) as the thought leaders propose that organizations in the twenty-first century must instill in its leaders the skill-set for becoming builders of trust.

A management team may pay their employees above market and attract the best talent, but without the presence of intangible rewards they will not retain talent. Those managers that balance the rewards of compensation and incorporate sincere behaviors of appreciation will reap the intended benefits of a rewards program. This integrated approach provides a culture of empowerment where managers and employees jointly create an “internal commitment” (Randolph, 2000) by integrating the components of intangible and tangible rewards.

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Tangible Rewards

Employees seek tangible rewards of compensation, promotions, training, and improvements to their work environment as concrete, measurable forms that are associated with goal achievement. It is the organization that understands these elements of prosperity that attracts employees to come to work for them (Susiene, 2008).

People want to be compensated fairly, provided opportunities for increasing their responsibility, and offered competitive benefit packages with the hope of some day participating in employee ownership (Roy & Dugal, 2005). Tangible rewards are highly effective when aligned with the predictors of what employees are attracted to when seeking employment: 1) fairness; 2) accountability; and 3) opportunity. One of the greatest opportunities to attract and keep the best is to provide an effective pay for performance program (Pfau & Kay, 2002).

Rewards, like money, affect people in different ways. All people need money to live but for some, money is not the primary motivation or reward. Employees expect to be compensated fairly and those employees that are not performing their job responsibilities need to be held accountable. For example, in an organization there are two managers. One manager is effectively doing his or her job the other manager is ineffective. The effective manager’s employees are learning [leadership skills](#), provided opportunities for growth, working as a team, and are leveraging their job talent. The ineffective manager has little motivation to engage employees, inconsistently meets performance expectations, and has been operating in this manner for quite some time. The leadership difference between these two managers is very visible.

The preceding scenario is an example of what frustrates employees in the workplace. First, poor performers are allowed to stay, the pay for performance program is most likely not practiced, and highly productive people are not tangibly differentiated from poor performers. If compensation is the same for both managers, the talented, successful manager has a high possibility of leaving his or her present employer for another organizational entity. In sum, a pay for performance

program that is implemented in alignment with its purpose retains the best and helps those that are not contributing to make a choice to seek employment elsewhere.

Tangible rewards like promotions, stock options, pay for performance, and other forms of rewards where employees receive a benefit based on an investment of money are important to employee satisfaction and longevity. Tangible rewards are needed to [attract and retain talent](#). The hypothesis so far from this discussion is that if tangible rewards are used as the primary source for a rewards program the organization will attract talent but will not retain it. The elements of trust, contribution, and intangible rewards are the other side of the equation to ensure a rewards program is complete.

GENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND TRENDS

Generational comparisons are important in relationship to increasing the knowledge and understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of a diverse workforce. Generational differences do not affect the importance of trust, contribution, and rewards within the workplace (Pfau & Kay, 2002) as previously proposed. What is imperative to understand are generational trends in order to recognize and interpret how to connect with people. This practice is referred to as cultural sensitivity, diversity awareness, and in this context generational understanding.

The argument is that people are similar and as a result the significance of working with people whether by generation, ethnicity, gender, or experience is to understand each individual based on their life experiences. A generational experience is a significant component of what contributes to an individual's perspective and preferences. Research studies divulge that the fit between employee preferences and the work environment is significant to employee retention (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). The recommendation is that by understanding generational values and trends, a management team gains insight as to how to effectively promote trust, contribution, and rewards in a manner that correlates with employee preferences.

The following provides a synthesis of generational trends and how trust, contribution, and rewards may be understood in order to advance guidelines for attracting and retention strategies. The workforce generations utilized for the discussion consist of the following four generations: Traditionalists born between 1922 – 1945; Baby Boomers born between 1946 – 1964; Generation X born between 1965 – 1990; and Generation Y born in 1981 and after.

Generational Understanding of Trust

Traditionalists were born during the Great Depression. Members from this generation have preferences based on their life experience of scarcity. How this impacts trust is at a high level. For example, Traditionalists may limit their trust with only the people within close proximity. Because of their ability to manage resources during the Depression they have little patience for those members that are

not accountable, organized, or service-oriented. These examples of expectations from this generation may limit the level of mutual support, open communication, and acceptance of responsibility toward others that is needed to build trusting relationships.

In contrast to scarcity, Baby Boomers experienced prosperity. Instead of working alone, their preference is to work within the framework of teams or relationship systems (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). This premise is associated with their hopefulness and belief that everyone should belong and make a difference based on their life experiences of Woodstock and the Vietnam War. This generation's optimistic trend promotes trust at a higher level by creating more openness and teamwork with the organizational setting.

Generation X members associate lower levels of trust as they experienced higher rates of divorce and separation during their formidable periods of development. This generation watched what long hours of work did to their parents and as a result limits trusting relationships to their immediate boss and team members within the department. Independent tendencies override an environment of relationships. Generation X seeks a more global level of trust. Preferences are to be more system-oriented creating a higher degree for potential career mobility. Mobility preferences are also likely to apply to Generation Y as they too seek other entities for employment in contrast to staying loyal with one organization.

Members born in the birth years of Generation Y experienced the evolution of the internet and the means for staying connected with everyone all the time. These advances in technology have promoted a lack of face to face communication that is needed during times of conflict or misunderstandings at work. As a result, the overuse of electronic communication has created a breakdown in resolving workplace misunderstandings which could lead to employees leaving the company based on a lack of accurate, direct communication. Generation Y has a preference to be solely trusted by their immediate supervisor in contrast to team trust.

Generational Differences to Contribution

Traditionalists have a trend toward more rigid behavior in contrast to the principle of engagement. For example, diversity, training, and technology are experiences that are new to them and as a result affect the importance of needing others to provide assistance or support. This knowledge is helpful to a manager that may interpret the resistance from a Traditionalist as being a difficult employee when in actuality the employee perceives these supporting functions as a waste of his or her time.

Baby Boomers value the importance of engagement but have a difficult time expressing themselves in a team-oriented style as they may come across as perfectionists indicating they have little tolerance for diverse thinking and additional avenues for completing a task. Opportunities for involvement are needed from Boomers although they may be more interested in instant results in contrast to participating in long-term objectives. Boomers would be excellent candidates

for mentoring opportunities as they enjoy working hard, teaching others, and seek opportunities to advance.

The members of Generation X thrive on change. Contribution is a priority as they have a need to see progress; goals achieved, and believe that if their expertise is not valued they will find another job that will respect their knowledge. The trend is that this generation is resourceful, skilled in technology, and has the ability to add value to the organization. When it comes to involvement, the mem-

bers value time at home over staying and working longer hours to get a project out the door.

Generation X and Y seek engagement and involvement through the relationships they have with their boss. An [effective leadership](#) style to create engagement among both generations needs to be based on the sharing of knowledge in contrast to the traditional role of being the boss (Yu & Miller,

2005). Generation Y members interact most effectively with Traditionalists as they seek structure and accountability within the workplace (Patota, Schwartz, & Schwartz, 2007). In contrast to Traditionalist thinking, the Y's value diversity and have a unified view of people as being one which creates a culture for collaborative work relationships. Although they have a need for collaboration, there is a tendency to have a weakness in people skills and following through on assignments. Engagement would be associated with a high level of leadership direction and support.

Generational Difference to Rewards

Traditionalists believe that people should do their work and do not need to be rewarded beyond getting paid a wage. The perspective is that employees should be grateful they have work, food on the table, and as a result have little tolerance for intangible or tangible rewards. This generation is known for managing resources and expects promotions based on seniority (Patota, Schwartz, & Schwartz, 2007).

Reward programs for Boomers are needed compared to Traditionalists as this generation thrives on public recognition and appreciation. Because this generation works long hours and wants to improve, receiving a reward when a goal is achieved is most effective. Promotions are viewed as a significant reward based on accomplishment and additional opportunities to meet acquisition goals and individual needs.

Training and development are most applicable to meeting the preferences of a tailored reward program that allows the members from Generation X to

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achieve their goal of work and life balance. Planning company events that are creative and fun are important to this generation. Formulating a rewards team that comes up with ideas for organizational incentives is more of a motivating factor for this generation in contrast to providing development opportunities for career advancement. A promotion would be valued if it was based on an individual's performance in contrast to seniority.

Baldonado & Spangenburg (2009) propose rewards for Generation Y are associated with achievement, life balance, growth, and being trusted. The findings from this study may be inconsistent with how the members of this generation are viewed resulting in a generation gap within the workplace. This generation is perceived by other generations to lack initiative, experience, and communication skills. Finding ways for members from this generation to gain knowledge, success, and build confidence are more appropriate for building performance through job satisfaction in contrast to reward programs solely focused on goal achievement. Cetron & Davies (2003) propose that Generation Y and X are both equally challenging to retain as they need continual opportunities for advancement and challenging assignments.

In sum, generational gaps exist and generational trends add richness to the body of knowledge for understanding human capital preferences for recruiting and retention strategies. As proposed, people from all walks of life bring to the workplace a collection of their personal life experiences. It is the goal of this discussion that knowledge of these differences proposes a new perspective as to why people may do what they do in contrast to labeling or prejudging an individual's actions based on when they were born.

CONCLUSION

Attraction and retention strategies are more important today than ever before. Soaring levels of competition, global access, and technology capabilities have provided an ever changing work environment in which progressive organizations must attract talented experts. Talented experts come from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences and search for the opportunity to work for an organization that values their expertise and contribution.

From this discussion a priority has emerged – authentic leadership. Employees from all groups want to work for organizations that practice high levels of trust, encourage contribution, and reward people for performance. These human capital initiatives have a common nucleus - they all require the presence of authentic leadership.

Employees are seeking organizations that have a management team of genuine leaders that behave in alignment with core principles and value people at the heart of their business philosophy. The knowledge gained from this discussion is insightful. This paper has surfaced an opportunity for additional inquiry. The outlook for future research may now continue the pursuit for attracting and retaining talent by leveraging employee preferences and human capital theories from this discussion. The recommendation for future research is to continue the journey by evaluating how and to what extent contemporary organizations may attract and retain a management team of authentic leaders.

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