



MANAGING THE SOCIAL GENERATION

“Social media has become a space in which we form and build relationships, shape self-identity, express ourselves, and learn about the world around us; it is intrinsically linked to mental health.”

Shirley Cramer, CBE – Royal Society of Public Health

BY VICTORIA MUIR

Since Maslow proposed his ‘Theory of Human Motivation’ in 1943, the importance of belonging and esteem have been understood as critical to the wellbeing of individuals in the workplace. These concepts often underpin team building events and are referenced in annual briefings for performance reviews. We see time and again when analyzing the drivers of employee engagement how important the role of the manager/leader is in helping to create this sense of belonging and esteem for their teams; through regular feedback, and creating a culture where high performance is recognized and rewarded. The old adage that ‘people leave managers not firms’ has been supported time and again in our analysis of survey data and exit interviews.

Since Maslow first espoused his hierarchy however there have been significant changes in the environment that many of our people, especially those new to the workforce, face in their daily lives. Since Facebook launched in 2004, it took eight years to hit a billion users as well as encouraging the launch of a host of

other successful social platforms with Twitter, Instagram, Linked In, Pinterest and YouTube all becoming household names globally and the social way of life becoming the norm for many.

There are many benefits from social platforms that can translate well into the office environment, but there are also some expectations raised by social interactions becoming more prevalent that managers need to consider if they want to keep their social generation employees engaged.

THREE LESSONS FROM SOCIAL

A FEEDBACK CULTURE IS EXPECTED

The social generation is used to, and conditioned by, instant and immediate feedback on all aspects of their lives; from their outfits, their choice of lunch, their exercise achievements and where they choose to holiday, they get immediate feedback from their peers. Imagine, then, entering a

workplace where feedback on their performance is perfunctory at best, often overlooked by busy managers who come from a generation where semi-annual performance reviews were considered cutting edge. This mismatch in expectations causes confusion, frustration and disengagement.

Managers need to create a culture where feedback is a continual process, delivered in real time and through a variety of methods. Face-to-face feedback is always welcomed as it provides both verbal and non-verbal cues to staff, however, for the social generation, short positive feedback can be delivered through email or message formats. The critical factor is that feedback is done promptly as an immediate response to their work efforts.

RECOGNITION MATTERS – A LOT

There have been a number of studies on the impact of social media on mental health. In the UK, the Royal Society for Public Health released a 2017 report #statusofmind which identifies that 91% of 16-24 year olds use the internet for social networking and that the rates of anxiety and depression in that population have increased 70% in the past 25 years, with the use of social media linked to these increased rates.



As Maslow identified in the 1940s, individuals have a need for belonging and esteem. In the social generation these aspects are often provided by virtual groups, where individuals may have never met in person. This also translates into the workplace with virtual teams, project groups, rather than traditional departments, and remote working becoming more common. It is critical then that their managers take responsibility for creating a work culture where individuals feel both included and recognized for their efforts. Recognition can be financial, in terms of performance bonuses – however, non-

financial recognition is generally more motivating and helps drive greater engagement.

Examples of non-financial recognition include:

- Access to development programmes
- Inclusion on special projects
- Opportunity to cascade their learning to team
- Employee of month/year awards
- Opportunities to job shadow leadership
- Public recognition for outstanding efforts
- Internal secondment opportunities

DON'T TRY TO SUPPRESS SOCIAL – EMBRACE IT

In the early days of social-media it wasn't uncommon for organizations to block access to social networking sites from their computers, citing productivity and abuse concerns as a reason to lock down their networks and impose draconian social media policies on their employees. With the near ubiquitous coverage of smartphones this attitude to social has in many places been relaxed, however not all organizations have fully embraced the engagement benefits that encouraging the use of both internal and external social networks can bring.

BENEFITS OF INTERNAL NETWORKS

- Employees get an enhanced sense of belonging by being able to seek out and join groups for work and non-work interests with other like-minded employees
- Employees can share their knowledge and experiences and get recognition from a broader audience than their immediate work team, this

knowledge sharing is good for both the individual and the organization.

- You can help build a sense of organizational purpose and create shared values through the sharing of stories and experiences. Internal social networks allow employees to see their leaders in a more relaxed environment; sharing their own journeys and war stories in a safe environment. Authenticity is a critical leadership characteristic for inspiring and engaging teams.

If you would like more information on how to manage engagement and performance conversations with your social generation workforce please contact us at:

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BENEFITS OF EXTERNAL NETWORKS

- The relentless rise of mobile device usage means the line between social and work has become increasingly blurred; if you expect your employees to be responsive to mails or calls when out of the office, then it is sensible that they can keep in touch with their social groups during breaks in work hours, this sense of connection leads to greater not less work engagement.
- Employees that feel encouraged to be active socially are often great advocates for their organizations; helping build the company brand with both customers and potential future recruits. Most job seekers will check online employee reviews before considering a move so having a workforce that feel empowered socially can help attract future talent.

The social generation has been brought up with a high-level of social interconnectivity and continual feedback on their activities; managers need to consider their individual styles and the culture they create to ensure that they get the most from their people. Maslow might not recognize the way people work in today's social environment today, but he would recognize that the belonging and recognition needs he identified remain as relevant today as they did 75 years ago.



