

CAREERS & RECRUITMENT

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Valuing the wisdom of the ages

To get the best results from your workforce, it's important to capitalise on the different strengths of its multi-generational make-up, writes Gareth Naughton

The days when the Irish workplace was populated by white middle-aged men are long gone, but with companies making strides on race and gender diversity, generational differences are getting short shrift.

This is despite the fact that most companies now have up to four different generations, each with its own very distinct idea of how to work and what it expects from its working life.

Companies that capitalise on these differences will reap the benefits, according to organisational psychologist and consultant Clare Mulligan.

"As the population continues to live longer and people continue to work past the traditional retirement age, it won't be long before we are faced with five generations working together," said Mulligan.

"Generation Y will be the dominant generation in the workforce over the next 20 years, but organisations are also faced with how to deal with their aging employees.

"It is exciting, but it is also providing a brand new challenge for leaders of organisations in how to deal with this new layer of diversity in the workplace.

"Organisations who are able to build relationships between generations and use their collective knowledge and ideas will help their company to be creative and innovative and will be able to respond to the needs of their employees, and also will be able to respond to the changing diversity of their customers."

Different attitudes

Generation is not just a question of age. When you were born and how you were brought up, has a strong impact on how you approach the working environment and what you take away from work.

Traditionalists (people aged over 67) are used to a top-down style of management and a loyal attitude to their employer.

Baby Boomers, aged 48-66, want to be treated as equals. Their loyalty levels relate to the number of hours they put in.



Margaret Bouchier, principal of the Mediators' Institute of Ireland



Adrienne O'Hare, managing director of To Be Training and Development

Gen X (32-47) are independent and entrepreneurial in nature.

While Gen Y (under 32) may be portrayed as narcissistic, Mulligan maintains that what they are really looking for is a collaborative work environment where their voices are heard and flexibility is built into working arrangements.

Each generation had, she added, its own style of working, operations and training development. "If meeting with a Traditionalist, for example, the organisation of the meeting should be quite formal and an appointment should be made.

"Documents to support the discussion should be left to review, and follow-up for decisions should occur after the meeting. A meeting with a Baby Boomer should include time to build rapport, be friendly and treat him or her nearly as you would a friend," she said. Gen Xers want meetings to be efficient and get to the point as quickly as possible. Gen Yers want you to take time to listen to their views without being patronising.

"If you have this multi-generational project team working on the marketing of a new product, it is about understanding where they are all coming from. If you do not understand your colleagues or where their values are, it causes conflict," she said.

Generational audit

Mulligan recommended that companies carry out a "gen-

eration audit", a relatively simple process where they look at the make-up of their staff, how they work and interact and how that is reflected in areas such as training and recruitment.

"It is important for employers to understand these changes along with the needs and values of their employees so that the organisation can adapt and remain competitive," Mulligan said.

"Clearer understanding of the generations at work will help employers and organisations realise that their younger employees may have a different outlook to work and to life than their peers may have.

"It is also important for employers to understand this generation and use their Gen Y employees to respond to the needs of growing numbers of consumers and customers who are also Gen Y."

It will provide data about which positions each generation holds, and where there is need to work on succession planning to ensure skills can be passed on from their Baby Boomer generation to Gen Y and Gen X.

"It also ensures that they realise that their training plans and recruitment plans are in line with the values and personality of Gen X and Gen Y so they continue to motivate and engage each generation," said Mulligan.

Future trends

With retirement age moving further and further back, it is



Clare Mulligan, organisational psychologist and consultant: 'Soon we'll have five generations working together'

TONY O'SHEA

likely that this will become a bigger issue for companies in the future, said Margaret Bouchier, principal of the Mediators' Institute of Ireland.

"We are at a stage at this point where it is likely that you have three and even four generations working together and, I suppose, if we accept that each generation is shaped by economic, political and social conditions, then that delivers difference in work ethics and behaviours, expectations around how teams work together and communications styles," she said.

A lot of work has been done on cultural diversity in recent years – particularly in the semi-state bodies – and there is some way to go in gender terms, but this is an area that merits some attention.

"It is natural that each generation is under-appreciated somewhat by the generation that goes before, it is human nature," she said.

"It is a growing issue and quite an exciting one, because diversity in the workplace has such potential for adding value. For example, if Gen X and Y are more open to risk and change and they are more

questioning of how things are done there is obvious value to an organisation in that.

"The important thing is to ensure that all of the team are brought on board, but also to acknowledge where people may have a genuine reluctance or concern around change."

While it may not be immediately obvious that generational differences are a source of conflict, Bouchier maintains this does not necessarily mean they are not a cause of conflict.

"All of these things can arise from an underlying level and, as with any other diversity issue, can be read wrongly by each side. If there are differences that are not understood they will most likely lead to some level of conflict or dispute," she said.

Trying to push colleagues into accepting one working style over the other is going to be counterproductive and should be avoided.

"For people to accept change it is very important that they have a chance to articulate what their concerns are and to be part of the decisions into how that change takes place," she said.

"In that way, the veterans

and baby boomers can be brought along. If you have a push-pull situation with any sub-section of the generations, it takes energy and it impacts.

"People fight to try to have their way recognised as the right way and huge amounts of energy can be lost on that – management energy – but also we tend not to get good quality decisions out of it. Whereas where there is an appreciation that difference is good and beneficial, it is all down to the quality of the dialogue."

Communication

As with many potential sources of workplace conflict, the key to heading it off at the pass is good communication, said Adrienne O'Hare, managing director of To Be Training and Development.

"One of the things that I see quite a bit that causes a big challenge in the workplace is the communication styles between the different generations," said O'Hare.

"You find that one of the biggest issues is Gen Y and the use of technology. You have the Baby Boomers and those who

have been in their positions for a long period of time who tend to want to communicate face to face because that is what they are used to.

"There can be a great frustration there and maybe perceptions can arise that it is a lack of respect to want to communicate all the time by email or voicemail which is Gen Y's preferred means of communication," she said.

A good manager working with an inter-generational team will tackle the issue head-on by ensuring that the needs of all involved are taken into account.

"The first thing you need to do with any new team is get clear on the values. What do you stand for? How are you going to work together as a team? What is important to you? Once everybody understands that, at least, you have a common foundation to work on," said O'Hare. It is then up to the manager to understand each individual's preferred style and work within that.

"There are going to be some times when you need command and control and that is going to be important where there is a critical project where

no mistakes can be made, that is going to need a clear leader giving instructions, but that is not sustainable in this environment over a period of time," she said.

"There are going to be other projects where the collaborative style of Gen Y is going to be relevant. It is up to a good manager to understand the different needs of the individuals and the different needs of the project and is very open in communicating with everybody about what is going to work best."

Ultimately, it is about respecting each other's working styles – there are merits to each and you don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

"There needs to be a balance between the different styles and means of communicating. Technology is going to be great in some instances, but in other instances it is not going to work because really on email or voicemail and twitter you cannot look into someone's eyes and see how they are really feeling.

"It is not just communication, it is about the awareness, understanding and respect that comes behind that," she said.

working WEEK

Kieran Scully is quality manager and qualified person with BioMarin Manufacturing Ireland. Based in Ringaskiddy, Co Cork, the company develops and commercialises biopharmaceutical and therapeutic treatments for rare genetic diseases.

The Shanbally plant hosted its first open day last Wednesday, following the June announcement that it planned to create more than 100 Irish jobs between 2013 and 2015.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

As quality manager and qualified person, I am responsible for overseeing the quality assurance and quality control functions at our plant in Shanbally.

I am currently overseeing the setting up of site systems, the QC laboratories for product testing and the staffing of the quality team as BioMarin ramps up to start operations. I will soon start my qualified person responsibilities by releasing products to

supply clinical trials on behalf of BioMarin.

What motivates you in your job?

The fact that my job allows me to help improve the quality of life for patients and their families means a lot to me. The patients BioMarin treat are usually seriously ill and when we get to hear about and see an improvement in their lives, it is extremely fulfilling and motivating for me.

This was underlined recently when we hosted a Rare Disease event at the Shanbally plant where patients and family members spoke of the difficulties connected with rare disease and shared their own experiences of living with these conditions.

How would you describe your work style?

I am a positive person and look to bring out the best in people by creating an open, inclusive environment.

What is the most valuable professional lesson you have learned so far?

I have been involved in company start-ups and, unfortunately, closures. There is no such thing as a job for life. The industry is constantly evolving, you have to continuously learn and develop

new skills to ensure that you can adapt to the changing needs of business.

In Ireland, whose career do you most admire and why?

Dr TK Whitaker, for his foresight and bold ideas, which ultimately paved the way for much of the foreign investment that our economy is so dependent on today.

Based on your experience, what is the most valuable career advice you can offer others?

Remain positive and try to get as much learning and experience from whatever circumstance you are in, be it positive or negative.

In terms of doing business in Ireland, what do you think is the biggest challenge we face? What would you like to see change?

While Ireland is focusing on securing investment in high-value manufacturing, cost competitiveness remains the major challenge for the majority of the manufacturing sector in an increasingly competitive and global market.

Many companies in the Irish pharmaceutical sector are affected or will be affected by established products or products going off patent being



Kieran Scully

moved to lower cost destinations.

Changes are evident as companies are starting to focus on innovation, new technologies, lean manufacturing and second-generation processes.

We need to develop and encourage these practices to enable us to be more competitive and in so doing sustaining our strong manufacturing sector.

What is your ultimate professional goal at this point?

To lead and establish BioMarin as a hub for quality operations, testing and releasing many products into European and global markets.



movers & SHAKERS



Deborah McHugh

■ **Deborah McHugh** has been made a partner in Mason Hayes & Curran. She joined the firm five-and-a-half years ago as senior associate. Before that, she was a solicitor with Smyth O'Brien Hegarty for five years.



Aidan Darcy

■ **Car company Skoda Ireland** has appointed **Alicia O'Connor** as its head of planning in Ireland. Before this, O'Connor was area sales manager with Audi Ireland for three years, having spent two years as a sales and marketing representative for the company.

■ **Roisin O'Sullivan** has been appointed director of sales and marketing at the Marker Hotel in Grand Canal Square in central Dublin. O'Sullivan was assistant director of sales with the Westin Hotel for four years before this. She was also acting director of sales and marketing with Cork's



Alicia O'Connor



Maria Hynes

Sheraton Fota Island Golf Resort and Spa for 12 months.

■ **Aidan Darcy** is UPC Ireland's new public sector manager. Darcy joined the company three years ago as pre-sales manager from EU Networks, where he was solutions design engineer based in Dublin for a year.



Roisin O'Sullivan



Karen Ferris

College for six months.

■ **Karen Ferris** is also joining Drury as client director. She was previously political affairs adviser with the South Korean mission to the EU for two years and an executive officer with the Refugee Appeals Tribunal for 12 months.