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Engaging with Generation F – the Facebook Generation



Clayton Glen, CEO at HDA

How do organisations engage with the different motivations of new generations of new-media savvy talent

To ensure engagement you require a great deal of innovative thinking

In a 'post-recession commercial world' and in a 'post-Comprehensive Spending Review civil service world', the list of organisational challenges to team engagement is very long.

Having recently chaired the CIPD's 2011 engagement conferences in London and Manchester, I appreciate more and more that ensuring effective team engagement is definitely not about one-size fits all approaches to leadership, communication, rewards or career management. Rather:

- Engagement is not likely to be achieved by an annual staff engagement survey, particularly those aimed largely at external benchmarking, unless inputs into and outputs from the process are clearly extremely well joined up.
 - Organisational participation in benchmark surveys – such as The Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For – provide a brand rallying point for employees.
 - To ensure engagement you also require a great deal of innovative thinking, which needs to be supported by innovative uses of new communication technologies. The most valuable and talented people are likely to already be using this technology.
 - In addition, those tasked with championing engagement need to show bravery in order to break the rules to embrace low or zero-cost guerrilla tactics.
 - Perhaps the key, though, is leadership authenticity. Staff need someone who they can trust and who seems authentic, even when a company begins to grow and becomes more rules-laden.
- My interest in engagement is largely commercially and serviced focused. The 2009 McLeod 'Engaging for Success' Report provided a number of clear 'no brainer' ROI statistics on the value of having engaged teams.

responsibility, as well as their need to innovate and strike a work-life balance.

In a 2009 Blog, Gary Hamel refers to this generation, and the web-based experiences which shape their thinking. He says: "There are a lot of kids looking for jobs right now, but few of them will ever feel at home in cubicleland."

This is a simple but very powerful thought about how our current work configurations are more likely to smother engagement, creativity and innovation. Put plainly, those of us seeking to engage teams may be very out of touch with what drives this generation, and we need to regularly review our assumptions.

According to a February cover and article in Time Magazine, this generation - at least in the Middle East - is responsible for the momentous social and historical shifts that we are seeing this year to date across North Africa and more broadly across the Middle East, where people under 30 years old are often in the majority. We need to take this generation very seriously.

More recently, I have become very interested in the concept of 'Generation F', or the 'Facebook Generation'. Clearly the penetration of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the various other online social networking facilities crosses all generational boundaries. However, there is no doubt that how (and the effectiveness with which) we use these social networking tools differs from generation to generation. Our sub 30 year olds have a lot to teach the rest of us.

I have a few of these Generation Fs at home – my children. They are ahead of me in all respects in terms of how they understand the value of social networking technology to enhance their personal networks, the effectiveness of communication and the creativity of the solutions that they create with their peers.

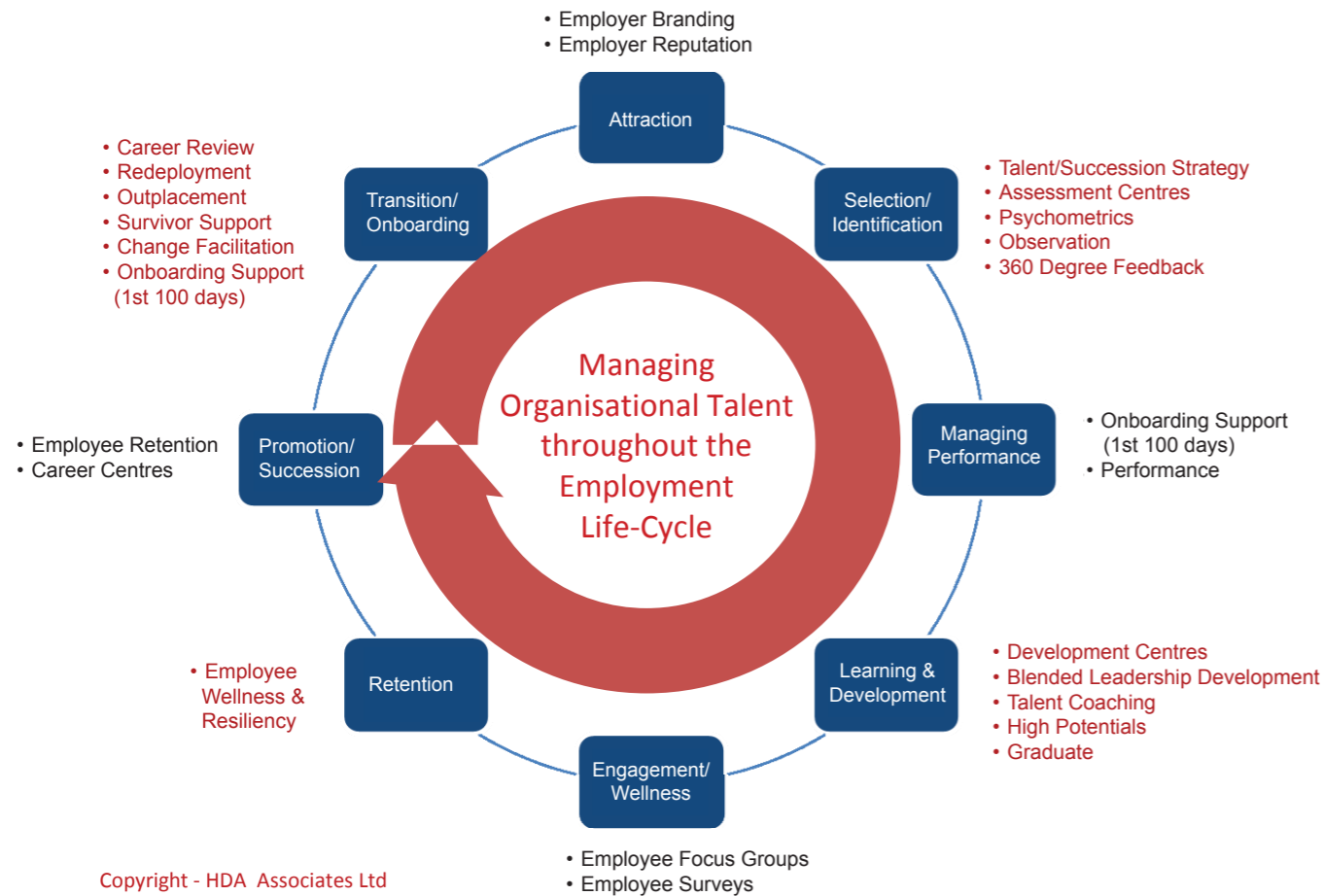
According to Eric Schmidt, outgoing CEO of Google, in August 2010: "There was 5 exabytes of information created between the dawn of civilization through to 2003, but that much information is now created every two days, and the pace is increasing." Whether or not this calculation is correct, the fact is that the Internet records masses of new information each second, minute, hour and day, so companies need to have a grasp of what is going on to stay in touch with 'Generation F'.

But how do we engage younger talent?

Many members of Generation Y, the much written-about children of the younger Baby Boomers, have never experienced an internet-free world. This generation includes some of our brightest, most creative and most talented in our work spaces - in their 20s and with some touching 30 now. A lot has been written about the motivators of this generation, such as their attitude to rules, authority, reputation and corporate social

HDA is collaborating with a number of innovative businesses to conduct further research during 2011 into what drivers engage 'Generation F'.

To find out more or to participate yourself, please contact me, Clayton Glen, at clayton.glen@hda.co.uk or visit www.hda.co.uk



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