Generation Z enters the workforce

Generational and technological challenges in entry-level jobs

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Introduction

D O you remember your first job out of college? For many of us, it marked the turning point from adolescence to adulthood. It was a time to experience firsthand how the business world actually worked while putting in the necessary time at the bottom of the corporate ladder to learn professional skills. The entry-level job was often considered a rite of passage for a long-lasting and stable career at an organization. However, times seem to have changed. In many cases, corporate ladders have shortened, career path options seem to have ballooned, entry into the workforce is frequently delayed, and entry-level workers often leave an organization after a couple of years on the job.[1] All of these changes compel us to take a closer look at whether our entry-level roles are designed to withstand the forces shaping the future of work.[2]

Across the entire US-based workforce, increasingly sophisticated value chains have caused the nature of work to shift away from relatively routine work environments to ones filled with growing diversity and complexity. In particular, there has been growth in highly cognitive nonroutine work (including professional or managerial work).[3] The economist, Robert Gordon, notes that from 1970 to 2009,

highly cognitive nonroutine work grew by 60 percent, while repetitive work declined by 12 percent.[4]

No group has likely been more affected by this change than entry-level workers—mostly composed of the next generation entering the workplace. Yesterday's entry-level work mostly revolved around repetitive work—stocking mailrooms, answering phones, or making copies. The requirements to obtain a job were more basic—many entry-level workers did not need a college degree to get a job at a leading organization.[5] In the 1970s less than 30 percent of work required education beyond high school, which stands in stark comparison to 60 percent of jobs requiring education beyond high school in 2010.[6]

Today, many organizations ask their entry-level workers to wrangle with data, perform research, and program advanced technologies. In many cases, a college degree is the basic requirement to qualify for a job, with some jobs even requiring specific prior experience. These shifts in work and expectations, along with economic recessions and advanced technologies, seem to have already begun to have a significant impact on workers. For example, many Millennials, the most recent generation to join the

workforce, have often struggled with the transition into and away from entry-level work. Surprisingly, 5.6 million US-based Millennials who held a job in 2000 did not hold one in 2010.[7] During the 2007–09 recession, this entry-level generation, with an unemployment rate of 13.4 percent, was the most impacted.[8] And so these shifts are not inconsequential; the changing nature of work can throw unique challenges and opportunities in the way of today's organizational leaders. And companies that fail to address these challenges may risk being left with a workforce poorly equipped to drive lasting success.

So, what comes next? How can organizations evolve the entry-level role experience to harness the best of future workers and sustain performance over time? With a new generation poised to enter the workforce, organizations are simultaneously forced to combat two converging trends. First, Generation Z (Gen Z), consisting of those born after 1995, is entering the workforce. While Gen Z is anticipated to bring an unprecedented level of technology skills to the workforce, they also express appre-

> Today, many organizations ask their entry-level workers to wrangle with data, perform research, and program advanced technologies.

hensions about their interpersonal communication skills. Throughout the article we will be following a prototypical Gen Z member, Emily, to illustrate the shifting experiences and expectations Gen Z brings to the workplace. (See sidebar, "Meet Emily, a prototypical Generation Z member.")

Second, emerging technologies, particularly automation, are expected to further disrupt the nature of the entry-level roles that this generation is poised to fill. Complicating this dynamic is the ambiguity surrounding this technical shift, in addition to the inherent uncertainty involved in predicting how today's teenagers will behave in 10 years.

Given these new realities, this article explores how organizations can redesign entry-level jobs in a way that can both attract and engage Gen Z, while ensuring that the entry-level job continues to serve as the necessary training ground for incoming professionals. This will be essential for organizations seeking to generate a pipeline of future talent to help meet the organization's evolving needs.

Shifting generational expectations and a potentially alarming skills gap

A NEW generation entering the workforce often prompts comparisons to those who came before, along with much anticipation—and predictions, sometimes accurate—of how the generation could disrupt the workforce. Millennials, for example, were projected to introduce new forms of communication and prioritize the social responsibility of their employers[9] while demonstrating less loyalty to the organizations they serve.[10] As our previous research suggests, the shifting behavioral patterns of the Millennial generation are attributed to their higher levels of college debt and delayed family planning as well as an economic recession.[11] In our view, the shifting expectations of the Millennials are likely an adaptive response to a changing economic environment.

The arrival of Gen Z is no different, with much of the dialogue focusing on the impact that omnipresent personal technology has had on this generation. Many have speculated about the influence an always-connected generation will have on the workplace. Research suggests that many within the Gen Z cohort are concerned. In a study of 4,000 Gen Z participants, 92 percent are concerned about the generational gap that technology is causing in their professional and personal lives.[12] Another 37 percent expressed concern that technology is weakening their ability to maintain strong interpersonal relationships and develop people skills.[13] While these digital natives may bring an unprecedented level of technology skills to the workforce, there are some apprehensions about their ability to communicate and form strong interpersonal relationships.

Technology has impacted the development of cognitive skills, including intellectual curiosity, among the next generation, creating the risk of skill gaps when they enter the workforce en masse. A shortfall in highly cognitive social skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and communication, could be particularly evident.[14] Most of Gen Z too acknowledges the importance of in-person communication and its own deficiencies in this area.[15] And in an environment where "92 percent of HR leaders believe that emotional and social skills are increasingly important,"[16] organizations are likely to keenly feel the effects of any shortfall.

Skillfully communicating and interacting with others not only contributes to successful relation-

MEET EMILY, A PROTOTYPICAL GENERATION Z MEMBER

Emily, along with her "digital native" friends, has grown up surrounded by an increasingly social and accessible Internet. In this highly digital environment, technology has become the primary model for interpersonal interactions, although, like others, Emily prefers in-person communication with managers.[17] At the same time, technology and the broader forces of globalization have dramatically shifted Emily's horizons—and her expectations from work. Emily has consistently sought out diverse experiences, operating in a world without boundaries[18] and embraces a multidimensional identity. She craves self-directed, broad experiences,[19] unencumbered by narrow definitions of role and identity.

Finally, Emily and her peers have embraced a go-getter mentality; they are ready to work and make a global impact—and are determined to make their own way in the world, embracing values such as flexibility and well-being.[20] At the same time, given the degree of economic uncertainty she has experienced in her life, job security is paramount.[21]

ship building, it also drives the accumulation of *tacit knowledge*. Tacit knowledge, or specific information about process or customers (along with other subtleties such as culture), is usually passed down within organizations through decades of in-person collaboration and communication[22] and is critical for long-term success and leadership development. Tacit knowledge can be difficult to transfer digitally, as it is rooted in context, observation, and socialization. Early research on tacit knowledge specifies that "by watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art . . . not only the types of conscious actions which could be described equally well in words but also those which are not explicitly known to the master himself."[23]

The term "apprentice" is instructive, for it points to the joint work and close collaboration that are typically important for the transfer of this tacit knowledge. In the modern business world, we of-ten see this manifest itself in common pairings of "junior" with "more experienced" team members, typical in fields such as medicine (pairing of doctors and residents) and law (first chair and second chair). Also, outside of the United States, apprenticeship programs have thrived in fields such as manufacturing, IT, banking, and hospitality; in some of these models, often called *dual training*, apprentices can split time between the classroom and on-the-job work to hone their skills, and critically, to develop "skilled, thoughtful, self-reliant employees who understand the company's goals and methods and can improvise when things go wrong or when they see an opportunity to make something work better."[24] The communication skills gap of many Gen Z professionals could potentially hinder the passing on of tacit knowledge, impacting the organization as older generations retire from the workforce. It is imperative for organizations to consider this impact when designing entry-level roles in the future of work.

Technology crowding out entry-level work

EVEN as the skills of these new members of the workforce seem to be shifting, other stresses are being brought to bear on the structure of entry-level jobs, namely technological advancement. These dual pressures can have important ramifications for the structuring of entry-level roles in corporate America. Traditionally, entry-level roles have been essential for many organizations; they are an opportunity to build a strong talent pipeline of professionals trained in an organization's methods and steeped in its culture. In knowledge- and service-based industries, entry-level roles typically focus on developing and honing the technical skills and soft skills needed for advancement. However, these objectives should be reevaluated in preparing for Gen Z.

Automation and the proliferation of technology are reducing the need for human intervention in many basic, routine tasks,[25] the very activities entry-level professionals used to focus on. As an example, many analysts who historically focused on analytics and reporting have largely seen those activities taken over by increasingly sophisticated—and accessible—analytics tools, along with natural language processing applications to deliver highly complex and personalized executive reports. What often re-

Automation and the proliferation of technology are reducing the need for human intervention in many basic, routine, tasks, the very activities entry-level professionals used to focus on.

mains for incoming Gen Z professionals are jobs requiring higher-order critical thinking and reasoning. They may be expected to interpret data/analytics, derive insights, and formulate recommendations earlier in their careers, expectations for which their prior experience may not have prepared them.

Another consequence of this shift is a likely reduction in the number of traditional entry-level roles, reducing opportunities for junior professionals to learn foundational skills. A review of recent trends in law could provide indicators on how this could happen in other fields. Law firms historically hired legions of paralegals or junior associates to support the discovery process, each tasked with reading millions of pages of contracts and other discovery materials. Recent innovations in automation and the creation of more refined search algorithms have fundamentally changed the way the process is handled. This partially explains "why in 2012 there were only twenty-six thousand jobs waiting for the fifty-four thousand or so lawyers who pass bar exams in the United States."[26] Historical trends suggest that over the longer term, more jobs will likely be created, but in these jobs, the gap between existing worker skill sets[27] and expected Gen Z skill sets is only likely to be wider.

An opportunity for HR to redesign entry-level work

THESE colliding trends—the growing use of automated technologies and a new generation entering the workforce—are creating an opportunity for organizations to reexamine the way they have defined entry-level work. Will the entry level continue to serve as a learning environment for future leaders, with junior professionals focused on executing the basic tasks that serve as the foundation for a profession? How can organizations en-

sure the flow of tacit knowledge in a digitally driven environment? And, if entry-level jobs evolve, as we expect them to, will Gen Z be capable of delivering on them?

While universities may ultimately shift focus to close some of these skill gaps, employers and, specifically, talent organizations, should evolve to secure the future talent pipeline. To do so requires a reexamination of the life cycle of the entry-level em-

EMILY ENTERS THE WORKFORCE

Emily has done extensive research on various companies at which she is considering jobs; she has used online boards, as well as a series of texts to her network of extended friends, to learn not just about the work that she'd be doing, but also the culture of each organization. She has watched videos posted by individual employees, taken a VR tour of the office space, and reviewed job postings for her *next* role.

Once Emily has chosen her employer, she begins to focus on her development, identifying skills that will be relevant to her current and future responsibilities, and specific roles and experiences within the organization that could help her acquire them. She struggles a bit to connect with her team leaders, sensing that they are tiring with her questions and impatient for her to learn. She also struggles to learn the cultural norms, as the traditional e-learning modules give her plenty of information about the formal rules and processes, but leave her stumbling through the way things are *actually* done in the organization.

ployee experience. This includes reevaluating traditional approaches to employee acquisition as well as job assignments, employee development, and influencing overall organizational culture. We will unpack each of these parts of the overall employee experience and explore alternative ways to design the entry-level role of the future.

Talent acquisition

The entry of Gen Z into the workforce can have implications not only for the development and deployment of professionals once they have joined an organization, but also for the recruitment process itself. The following suggestions on both the hiring process and targeted skill sets may allow companies to best find and attract the Gen Z talent that they need.

Organizations should reevaluate the skill sets that are critical for the execution of the organization's strategy and the persistence of the company's competitive advantage. For companies reevaluating entry-level needs as part of a broader workforce planning effort, this may mean rebalancing between candidates who have specific technical knowledge and those with more general management skills. It may also mean prioritizing candidates who can demonstrate the mental agility and the breadth of capability to move between disciplines and across roles within the organization. This workforce strategy should also encompass the variety of ways in which many from Gen Z will want to join an organization, whether as a full-time professional, via the crowd, or within the growing open talent pool.

There can also be implications for how organizations source and recruit talent. The emergence of more sophisticated algorithms to source talent have allowed organizations to more rapidly hire a diverse set of talent profiles. But unless talent teams proactively tweak this process to accommodate future needs, which may be different from historical patterns, organizations may find themselves behind the curve. Ideally, talent organizations should seize

this opportunity to refine sourcing algorithms, and in some cases, re-train their sourcing team to have a broader aperture for talent. The need for entry-level professionals with more developed cognitive skills may encourage organizations to look beyond the more technical majors and explore students with a stronger liberal arts focus, who typically have refined communication and critical thinking skills. This idea of a "STEMpathetic" workforce, which comingles technical knowledge and cognitive skills, such as connecting with other people, is gaining traction, and many believe that organizations that master this could lead the way in the future of work.[28]

In the current recruitment process for most organizations, the focus is on the tried-and-true methods of resume reviews, behavioral interviews, and, in some situations, technical interviews (for instance, case interviews and standardized tests). While these methods may continue to be effective for certain types of roles, for jobs that prioritize cognitive capabilities, experiential methods that allow these skills to be observed in action, may be more effective. Competitions and hack-a-thons, for instance, can be a useful way to test for creativity, communication skills, and collaborative bent.

Consider the innovative acquisition process a software company began deploying, recognizing that software programming skills were readily teachable, while the more important skills of collaborating and working well with others were much more difficult to teach.[29] Rather than relying on traditional behavioral or scenario-based interview questions, the software company began to bring in 50 job candidates at a time and pair individuals up to work together on an assignment. What is being evaluated is how well a person is able to bring out the best in the person they have been partnered with in a highly cognitive-tasked environment. Pairs are then switched to see how well the person performs with a different partner. The company credits this process with successfully hiring people who have strong interpersonal as well as cognitive skills.

Deployment/assignments

Most Gen Z professionals prefer a multidisciplinary and global focus to their work, with the expectation that this can create opportunities for mobility and a rich set of experiences. Organizations can help meet this need through structured rotation programs, both internally and with key enterprise partners. Broadening the deployment approach in this way could help drive the engagement—and development—of Gen Z talent, retaining those employees who will be better equipped for long-term success.

Internally, more thought should be given to the collective set of experiences professionals have in the course of their first few years in an organization. With advances in data analytics, organizations should develop a clearer understanding of the capabilities, experiences, and behaviors that lead to success in specific roles. A robust model of individual performance can identify the elements most correlated with high performance by level or by role. Armed with this knowledge, organizational leaders may be more open to nontraditional mobility through the organization (that is, moving horizontally across the organization into roles and teams different from what prior experience would suggest). This would allow Gen Z professionals to grow and develop within an organization, as opposed to hopping from company to company to gain the diverse experiences many Gen Z professionals crave.

This approach could also resonate with Gen Z, which considers job security a primary career goal.[30] Whether organizations support internal mobility through a formal rotation program or by setting cultural expectations, leadership commitment to diverse experience can be important to gaining the trust of Gen Z professionals and allowing the acquisition of tacit knowledge. Another option for delivering this diverse set of experiences could be internal crowdsourcing, allowing professionals to pick up small side projects, thereby safely exploring and learning new subject matter and capabilities.

Finally, a more diverse set of experiences can be found beyond an organization's four walls and by looking broadly across an ecosystem of partners. Companies, particularly larger, multidisciplinary organizations, should take a broader view of their role in raising the capabilities of the workforce, benefiting society and the economy as a whole. Less altruistically, they can acknowledge that a highly trained workforce could ultimately directly benefit them through partnerships/alliances and client relationships. To help with this outcome, organizations could pursue joint rotation/placement opportunities, where large, established organizations hire resources and then rotate them into specific assignments at an alliance partner, with a focus on mutually beneficial development for professionals and organizations. This is similar in concept to the co-operative programs that many universities have embraced. Ideally, these rotations often focus on a common interest (a product, an industry, a capability), but allow a professional to see the problem from multiple perspectives, much like many academic co-ops allow students to experience both the theoretical and practical application of concepts in fields such as engineering. In a corporate environment, an organization might rotate professionals into a software development shop with which it partners, allowing them to obtain a deeper understanding of underlying technologies and how they might enable business growth. Simultaneously, their software development partner can benefit by having access to a previously untapped pool of talent.

Formal development

Organizations that have robust, formal development programs should take advantage of this opportunity to modernize their learning delivery methods and shift the focus of the content to the skills needed for new jobs. This could serve to both close existing skill gaps that Gen Z may have and create the infrastructure that organizations need to nimbly shift content to respond to future needs.

Many organizations are ready for this opportunity, with learning portfolios that are diverse and often have complementary live and virtual programs. These portfolios increasingly concentrate on nano-learning videos as a way to deliver rightsized lessons in a format that is familiar and comfortable to Millennials and with an eye toward the growing Gen Z population. Many have also increased the amount of experiential learning in these programs, specifically diversifying the experiential techniques in live learning programs. Historically, many have used simulations to teach professionals "soft" leadership and professional development skills. But now, in addition to simulations, many are introducing new programs, such as case competitions and design challenges, more squarely focused on the critical problem-solving skills that Gen Z professionals can continue to hone in the entrepreneurial environment that they crave.

From a content perspective, many are accelerating the delivery of soft/social skill training earlier in a professional's career. Historically, these skills were primarily taught through apprenticeships, with junior professionals working side-by-side with more senior professionals and learning through observation and continuous coaching. Now this content is increasingly being included in onboarding programs, helping professionals get early access to education in key skills such as communication (written and verbal) and logical structuring. Rather than relying solely on on-the-job development, the foundation is set through formal learning first.

Informal development

Once this foundation is set, there can be incredible value in a continued focus on purposeful, on-the-job learning through coaching/apprenticeship. Gen Z professionals, like Millennials before them, typically expect frequent coaching and feedback. This approach is well-suited to help develop the softer skills of Gen Z, whether communication, criti-

cal thinking, or creativity, and to pass along the tacit knowledge gained through experience.

In considering how to relay tacit knowledge, organizations can borrow methods from fields such as medicine, where significant risks are associated with inexperience. For example, doctors participate in morbidity and mortality conferences, which Atul Gawande, a renowned surgeon and author, describes as "a place where doctors can talk candidly about their mistakes . . . with one another. They can gather behind closed doors to review the mistakes, untoward events and deaths that occurred on their watch, determine responsibility, and figure out what they would do differently next time."[31] All surgeons at the teaching hospital where Gawande works are expected to attend, as these sessions are a valuable opportunity for medical professionals to learn from the experiences and choices that other doctors have made. Nonmedical organizations could engage—and develop—Gen Z professionals by creating a similar space for reflection and collective learning. In service- and knowledge-based firms, this could imply including a broader audience for preparation for and debriefing of key client meetings, allowing junior professionals to understand how leaders think about issues, approach a project, engage with a client, and so on.

Practices like intentional debriefings can be part of a broader commitment that leaders should make to create growth and development opportunities for professionals while sharing tacit knowledge. Leaders can more purposefully focus on both sharing experiences and allowing more junior professionals to try out new skills and capabilities they are developing—by delivering a presentation, by taking the first pass at analytics insights, by offering an opinion. While this is not new advice for leaders, it seems increasingly important to act on it when it comes to Gen Z professionals.

Informal development can also be enhanced through many of the rotational programs outlined above. One natural outcome of a diverse set of work experiences is exposure to different leaders with different communication styles, varied strengths, and

a different corpus of tacit knowledge. Gen Z's own capabilities would naturally be enhanced from this exposure.

Culture

Apart from rethinking talent strategy and processes, talent and business leaders should also consider how Gen Z will integrate into the organization's existing culture. They should pay careful attention to how the culture may need to evolve to account for changing workforce preferences and values and remain focused on building an inclusive culture that engages all of its employees, including Gen Z.

In addition to mobility and development expectations, Gen Z professionals likely also expect to have a culture that supports flexibility and prioritizes well-being. This shift has been under way for some time, but talent organizations should ensure that programs in place are actually leading to cultural change. Programs such as paid time off, family leave, wellness programs, to name just a few, cannot exist in a vacuum, but rather should be part of the commitment and culture that leadership publicly endorses. Most Gen Z professionals may not perceive these programs as a "perk" or a "gift," but rather as an expectation.

Increasingly, many Gen Z professionals are also looking for a culture that is open and transparent. Countless leaders from other generations have shaken their heads at the willingness of subsequent generations to share their performance appraisals and compensation with their peers. But this seems to be the norm for Gen Z, and they commonly expect corresponding transparency from their leaders. They also expect open conversations around business strategy and decisions, including "bad news" such as product failures, layoffs, or competitive threats, to name just a few topics leaders shied away from discussing in the past. Major consumer brands have found they are better able to build customer loyalty through transparency. For example, Patagonia, an outdoor clothing company, has made its supply chain more transparent via the Footprint Chronicles to demonstrate alignment with its core values of sustainability and environmental stewardship.[32] As employees begin to expect similar norms for their employment brands, the need for transparency will likely only increase.

THE ORGANIZATION EVOLVES WITH EMILY

Finally, a senior leader organizes a team event to discuss the team's progress and advises Emily to work closely as an apprentice under a more senior member of the team, Gus. He also makes it clear to Gus that part of his role is to help Emily be successful in her role. Emily is able to closely observe the cultural norms of the firm and what is required of her. In return, Emily helps connect the team with a new digital application that quickly enhances the way the team communicates and collaborates.

Engaged by this commitment to her development and her contributions to the team, Emily continues to thrive at the organization and begins to seek out a global rotation for her next role. While this is not an upward assignment, it allows her the experiences she desires. Emily begins to share her experiences at the firm across external social media platforms, further strengthening her network, along with the firm's brand and even beginning to attract some of her friends to the organization. The leaders begin to recognize that the more they interact in person with Emily the faster she grows and develops and the more engaged she is with her work.

Table 1. Redesigning entry-level work for Generation Z

Employee experience	Traditional thinking	New thinking	Considerations for crafting a new employee experience for the entry level
Acquisition	• Campus recruiting for specific roles • Hiring process focused on technical skills and specific prior experience • Job postings • Use of headhunters to source candidates	• Greater focus on broad spectrum of skills for candidates, including highly valuable "STEMpathetic" skills • Openness to engaging and evaluating candidates in new ways	• "Try-out" job simulations that involve working closely with others to solve a highly cognitive task • Hire based on both technical and cognitive skills, prioritizing the skills needed for the role in hand as well as future roles
Assignments/ job rotations	• Linear job progression • Increasing openness to lateral growth opportunities within an organization	• Desire for mobility, diverse experiences, including global • Data-driven understanding of capabilities needed • Opportunities via internal crowd and ecosystem partners	• Thoughtfully define desired set of career experiences for the entry level • Create an internal crowdsourcing network that allows entry-level employees to work on smaller projects, exposing them to cross-functional and even global experiences
Formal development	• Mix of modalities, primarily focused on e-learning or live classroom • Focus on technical skill development for junior professionals	• Mix of modalities, including new experiential formats (e.g., case studies) • Accelerated soft skill development • Tacit knowledge passed down through apprenticeship	• Leverage simulation and gamification technologies to develop soft skills early on in employees' onboarding training • Enhance access to on-demand nano-learning assets
Informal development	• Inconsistent mentorship and on-the-job learning	• Expected component of senior resource roles	• Create mechanisms to transfer tacit knowledge and experience (e.g., debrief sessions) • Expose entry-level worker to a variety of senior leaders
Culture	• Closed door, once-a-year feedback sessions • Flexibility and well-being programs seen as "nice to have"	• Open, transparent • Value flexibility and well-being	• Make paid time off, family leave, and wellness programs part of the core benefits package, not a "perk" • Encourage leadership to create open and transparent communication platforms and interact with entry-level employees

Source: Deloitte analysis.

How do we get there?

THE strategies and tactics for accommodating Gen Z in tomorrow's entry-level jobs that have been presented in this article presuppose some foundational conditions, largely related to the leadership mind-set:

Appetite to solicit and act on input from professionals: Given the broad generational differences within the workforce,[33] and particularly because decision-makers are from a different generation than the majority of professionals, it is important to create forums/mechanisms for professionals to share their perspectives and ensure their values are incorporated into decision-making. Many organizations have historically relied on annual talent surveys and leadership town halls to engage staff and drive improvements to the talent experience linked to their feedback. But now, they are increasingly soliciting input from their people in more dynamic ways—posing questions such as "what new offering should we bring to the market?" or "how can we improve internal processes?" for employees to answer through collaborative competitions. Not only could this create a developmental opportunity for their people, but it also allows them to tap into the creativity and perspective of the "crowd" and allows their professionals to feel "heard." As these organizations move into the future, many seem to also be transforming their HR data strategy to move beyond what their professionals explicitly tell them through surveys to focus on capturing what their professionals are telling them from their actions and the choices they make. This new approach is likely born out of a realization that the most powerful data about what matters to our people is driven from insights into what they do, not just what they say.

Courage to break with tradition and historical norms: Many of the strategies and tactics suggested in this article could differ dramatically from the experiences that more senior professionals themselves experienced as entry-level workers. Leaders may need to convince their contemporaries of the change imperative and provide them with the tools necessary to play their part—committing to spend time with junior professionals to pass down tacit knowledge and being open to looking across the ecosystem to find and develop talent.

To prepare for this uncertain future, talent organizations can apply the strategies above to a series of scenarios that represent a range of likely outcomes.

Openness to using existing and new data in fresh ways: Talent strategies would benefit from the more nuanced understanding of engagement and performance that rigorous data analysis can provide. A multistage analysis focused on these outcomes would provide insight into the most powerful drivers of each, and how these drivers relate to one another. This understanding would permit us to answer questions such as "what are the capabilities, behaviors, and experiences associated with my top performers?" and "what experiences create the strongest engagement with my professionals?"

Acknowledgement that individual needs may differ from generational trends: At the same time as HR organizations are preparing for broad generational changes, it is important to remember that individual professionals are just that—individuals. All professionals expect their experience to be specific to their personal preferences and goals. While generational trends can point us in a direction, an employee's experience should be a unique path.

An understanding that this generation is still growing and changing: Many predictions were made about the Millennial generation and how they would disrupt the workforce. They may have, but possibly not in the way predicted. To prepare for this uncertain future, talent organizations can apply the strategies above to a series of scenarios that represent a range of likely outcomes. This could help solidify action plans as well as illuminate possible areas of risk or vulnerability in an organization's talent strategy.

Conclusion

AS a new generation enters the workforce, uniquely shaped by the time in which they live and the experiences that they've had, organizations have the opportunity to evolve and take advantage of this generation's emerging strengths, putting them in a position to create lasting value for the organization. In some cases, this may mean continuing to pursue existing strategies and tactics; indeed, not all of the suggestions offered here are "new." Several, such as a focus on well-being and flexibility, seem a natural outgrowth of practices that organizations have begun to adopt over the past decade. Others, such as development and hiring practices, may represent a pivot to accommodate the new characteristics of this next generation. In either case, this article underscores the importance of these practices and how they should be considered by business and talent leaders alike to support the incoming Gen Z professionals.

ENDNOTES

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