

Harnessing the Potential of Generation Y

Addleshaw Goddard
February 2009



EFA Overview

Embracing the new world of work and understanding the impact and contribution of younger generations to the wider strategy of an organisation is a huge challenge for many leaders. Law firm, Addleshaw Goddard set out to explore how it could move from the traditional management style typical within the legal sector and embrace 21st Century styles of leadership. It wanted to engage with its Generation Y stakeholders and to educate its partners and HR professionals on their views and approaches to work. The project has led to positive changes in how the organisation communicates internally, designs its learning and organises the way it works.

Initiative

Addleshaw Goddard wanted to explore how the world of work is changing by understanding the views and aspirations of Generation Y and what impact this will have on organisations within the legal sector.

Aims of initiative

The objectives of Addleshaw Goddard's project were:

- To engage with its Generation Y stakeholders and listen to their views on the changing world of work.
- To educate the Partners on the generational theory and to provide a level of understanding on the impact of Generation Y.
- To ensure the firm develops a clear understanding of how the world of work has changed and the factors influencing this change.
- To ensure the Partners develop an understanding of the implications this new world of work may have on key stakeholders. Also, to promote discussion on how the future organisational and infrastructure strategies could help capitalise on new working methods, technology, values and ambitions.
- To change the level of conversation, who the Partners are communicating with, how they are devising the firm-wide strategy and ownership of work design.
- To highlight and help endorse some of the ways in which the firm is already evolving its strategies to embrace and develop its existing Generation Y talent.

Approach taken

The concept and project objectives were introduced at the Partners conference, where the changing world of work and demographic challenges were high on the agenda.

A new brand, **The Changing World of Work**, was created and communicated across the firm so everyone was aware of the project. This generated momentum and a series of focus groups were then held with a total of 51 Addleshaw Goddard employees, including associates, trainees and future trainees. An online survey was distributed with a series of questions to validate findings from the focus groups, and 205 responses were received.

The following themes were explored throughout the research:

- Peer-to-peer collaboration. What does teamwork look like?

Case Study

- Feedback and continuous improvement. What format should it take and how often should it happen?
- Support structure. How will Generation Y maximise output?
- Loyalty. What does it mean?
- Role models. Who is setting examples and standards?
- Tools and technology. What is needed to increase productivity?
- Corporate Social Responsibility. Why is this important? What does it actually mean?
- Conflicts between Generation X and Generation Y. Who will manage whom and how?

An external benchmarking exercise was completed with the objective of identifying examples of how companies are embracing the changes outside the legal sector. Part of the methodology involved liaising with current and aspirational clients to develop an understanding of their view of the new world of work and any impact that Generation Y attitudes may have on them.

Challenges

One obstacle to the project was that many people have preconceived ideas about Generation Y, often due to articles and commentary in the press. These ideas can be negative and some feel that Generation Y are often pampered and over indulged. In the current economic climate this was then used to question the project. Addleshaw Goddard managed to overcome this by clearly articulating that its research was specific to its own stakeholders and highly relevant to the development of its talent agenda.

Outcomes and benefits of the initiative

A document detailing the research findings and next steps was produced. The HR department organised a series of roadshows to present a video of the findings and facilitate an open discussion between all members of staff. All Partners, HR and Learning and Development personnel were included in the road shows; a total of 15 sessions with 180 delegates were held across the country as part of the project.

The roadshows were a huge success due to the style of communication. The highly creative video captured everyone's attention and was particularly successful in raising the profile of the project while revolutionising the use of internal communication channels within the firm.

Partners were challenged with the following steps:

- Change the conversation. Ask your people: "How easy do we make it for you to do great work?"
- Embrace the skills of Generation Y to maximise productivity, informal networking and empowering others to make an impact.
- Find a mentor half your age.

The findings were shared with the Learning and Development team so they could adapt the curriculum to ensure it was attractive to Generation Y. Investment has since been made in more online and bespoke 'at your desk' learning approaches. The development team has also attended the BPP Law School and sat in on lessons to understand how people are learning. This is being extended to allow some of Addleshaw Goddard's professional support lawyers to attend so they can get ideas on how to educate people about changes in legislation.

A Generation Y Mirror Board has been established where younger members of staff, with a similar structure to the company's main board, look at similar projects and feed back their findings. One of its projects is to manage the



office move to Miltongate in London and the Mirror Board is responsible for the design of the building and factors such as working styles.

A project team has also been established to look at the evolving role of secretarial support, building on the findings of how Generation Y wants to work.

Impact on the organisation

Addleshaw Goddard believes it is leading the way in transforming how the legal sector communicates and engages internally. It is embracing the new world of work and this would not have happened had it approached such radical change in a more conventional way.

During the research project employees at associate, trainee and future trainee level were included and engaged in the change process. Informal networking and communication spread quickly through the organisation, creating buzz and excitement. This in itself has been a good measure of success.

The project has prompted the company to embrace better use of technology. For example podcasts introduced on its graduate recruitment website have been highly successful and figures from Google Analytics show that over 5,000 students have downloaded them.

Lessons learned

Addleshaw Goddard's engagement with other firms within the legal sector is an area for further development and future plans may include a joint task force to understand the wider implications for the legal profession. The project also demonstrated the high number of Generation Y stakeholders and future project work would benefit from feedback from a larger sample of people.

Case Study