

Bridge the generational gap

Technology can rewire workplace collaboration.



FROM THE US

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The workforce is more age-diverse than ever and in today's hybrid environment, that diversity presents unique challenges for HR leaders. While older generations may emphasize stability, achievement, and hierarchy, younger employees prioritize flexibility, individuality, and meaningful work. These values don't always align, and when the disconnect goes unaddressed, it can quietly undermine communication, trust, and team performance.

According to Gallup, only 32% of U.S. employees are engaged at work, while 18% are actively disengaged, and younger employees are increasingly reporting feelings of disconnect. Meanwhile, 35% of employees feel their company's culture favors one generation over others, indicating that inclusion efforts often overlook age-based dynamics.

HR leaders don't need to resolve these differences; they need to build better bridges between generational work styles, and that begins with better data. Tools like organizational network analysis (ONA) and AI-powered workforce intelligence provide visibility into how

employees actually connect and collaborate. With those insights, HR teams can redesign collaboration, onboarding, and retention strategies based on real behavior rather than gut feelings or assumptions.

Here are four practical, data-driven ways to apply these tools and close the generational gap.

1. MAP REAL-WORLD COLLABORATION – NOT JUST ORG CHARTS

Organizational collaboration doesn't live in job titles or reporting lines. It happens through informal channels: who employees go to for advice, who connects across silos, and who actually makes things happen. That's what ONA can uncover.

These hidden networks are especially important in hybrid environments, where younger employees may lack built-in access to mentors or decision-makers. If they're disconnected from these collaboration hubs, disengagement often follows.

It's not just a culture issue, it's a performance one. McKinsey research shows that companies with high-performing, team-centric structures can achieve up to 30% greater efficiency and significantly faster decision-making. Mapping these dynamics allows HR to support collaboration where it matters most.

ONA allows HR to understand who their connectors are and whether employees from younger generations are integrated into those networks. Are newer employees showing up in the same communication pathways as high performers? Are they included in cross-functional conversations? When leaders can answer those questions with data, they can intervene earlier to accelerate connection and reduce attrition risk.

2. BUILD MENTORSHIP AND ONBOARDING PATHWAYS THAT REFLECT REALITY

In hybrid and distributed environments, expecting new employees to "figure it out" is not a viable onboarding strategy (especially

not for Gen Z). Access to informal guidance has become less consistent, increasing the risk that less experienced employees fall behind. Structured support systems are critical for early engagement and long-term retention.

According to Deloitte's 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, 86% of Gen Z and 84% of millennials say they want mentorship and guidance at work but only about a third of each group actually receives it. These same generations also place a high value on experiential learning, with 88% of Gen Z and 89% of millennials saying that on-the-job training is essential to skill development.

These statistics make one thing clear: onboarding isn't just about orientation, it's about inclusion. Younger employees want to understand not just what they're responsible for, but also how they fit into the organization's broader mission, culture, and social fabric.

With ONA insights, organizations can go beyond assigning formal mentors. They can connect new hires to key informal influencers and cross-functional collaborators who help shape culture and accelerate belonging. These network-based pairings are more likely to create meaningful relationships, enable faster knowledge transfer, and build long-term engagement.

Reverse mentoring programs can also benefit older employees by exposing them to new technologies, perspectives, and social trends. When designed intentionally, these programs help flatten hierarchical barriers and foster mutual respect across age groups.

3. USE REAL-TIME SIGNALS TO DETECT DISENGAGEMENT EARLY

Annual reviews are too slow to catch what matters most. Disengagement doesn't show up on performance metrics until it's too late, but AI-powered workforce tools can surface early signals, including shifts in collaboration frequency, communication lag, or reduced interaction with digital tools.

This is especially valuable when managing high-stakes transitions, like onboarding or cross-

generational team integration. As McKinsey reports, disengagement and attrition cost the average S&P 500 company between \$228 million and \$355 million annually and many organizations lack the visibility to spot these trends before they escalate.

By analyzing behavioral signals such as collaboration volume, system usage, and responsiveness to team workflows, HR can detect when an employee begins to pull back. These subtle shifts can help flag burnout, misalignment, or a loss of engagement weeks before they become a performance or retention issue.

The same behavioral data is also revealing new performance divides. Employees who use AI tools are consistently more productive than those who don't, and that gap is widening, creating a new layer of disparity within already complex, multigenerational teams.

Moreover, when HR leaders act on these signals in real time, rebalancing workloads, facilitating coaching conversations, or improving recognition efforts, they build a culture of responsiveness that resonates across generational lines.

4. MEASURE CONNECTION – NOT JUST OUTPUT

Most companies still measure productivity in terms of output: tasks completed, deadlines met, hours logged. Yet, in a multigenerational, distributed workplace, connection is equally important. High-performing individuals who feel isolated or excluded from decision-making are often the first to disengage or leave.

That turnover is expensive. According to the Work Institute, replacing a single employee costs 33% of their annual salary or more when high-potential talent leaves due to poor onboarding, vague feedback, or broken trust.

Instead of focusing solely on output, HR leaders should incorporate data on collaboration health and network resilience. Are employees embedded in team dynamics? Are they communicating frequently across levels and functions? Are they trusted as advisors



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or influencers? These are the signals of a connected, high-functioning workforce.

ONA and AI-powered analytics can help quantify those patterns. By mapping both individual contribution and collective engagement, organizations gain a more holistic view of performance. That, in turn, empowers leaders to design more inclusive team structures, offer personalized support, and foster a workplace where employees of all generations feel seen, supported, and set up to succeed.

FROM GENERATIONAL TENSION TO STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The workforce is not only evolving; it's operating differently. By 2030, Millennials and Gen Z will make up 74% of the global workforce, bringing new expectations around flexibility, purpose, learning, and leadership. These shifts will continue to challenge traditional management

models and HR practices.

But the opportunity is just as significant. With better visibility into how people connect, collaborate, and learn, organizations can move beyond one-size-fits-all strategies and build workplaces that meet the needs of every generation.

Technology won't erase generational differences, but it can make them actionable, and that's where more inclusive, adaptive leadership begins.

The companies that thrive in the next decade will be those that use data not just to measure performance but to foster connection, replace assumptions with insights, and treat generational diversity not as a challenge to manage but as a strength to design for. ■

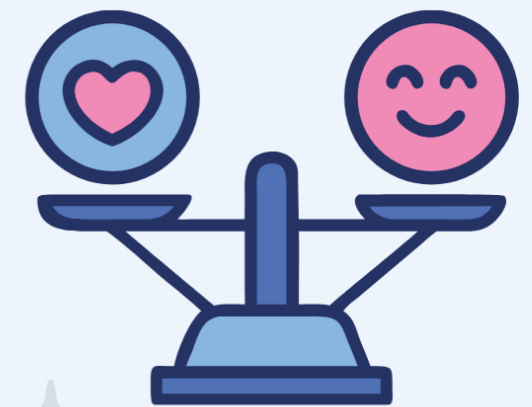
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Studio Shodwe

Mindfulness helps us learn better

Using mindfulness in class helps us stay calm and focused.

- 01** Start the day with a deep breath.
- 02** Remember to pay attention to what you're doing.
- 03** Notice how you feel without judging yourself.
- 04** Take short breaks to relax.
- 05** Celebrate when you're kind and patient.



A calm mind learns more and better.