

HOW SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE CAN HELP ORGANISATIONS WORK SMARTER, NOT JUST HARDER



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The days of Asia being known primarily as the world's production line are numbered.

University graduates from China and India are now flowing into the regional job market at an unprecedented rate and they are seeking new challenges.

For many reasons, the Asia Pacific region is swiftly becoming a critical hub in the global supply-chain of goods, services and ideas — a hub that must be

sustained by agile, flexible and diverse organisations. To make this transition in the face of significant talent supply and retention constraints, Asia's organisations must become 'socially intelligent organisations' — the kind that embrace change and collaboration, harness diversity and promote innovation. The Asia Pacific economy might still be dominated by manufacturing and agriculture, but this does not make it immune to today's global requirement for 'social intelligence' (SI). Organisations all over the world are trying to figure out how to respond to their market more effectively and more efficiently — and ours must too.

Making the most of what we already have, such as our existing talent, is critical for success. Among other things, this will require a deeper understanding of what motivates individuals, and how to better harness the potential of a diverse and multi-generational workforce. Understanding our uniquely social behaviour will help us to work smarter, not just harder.

WHAT KIND OF LEADER RUNS THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT WORKPLACE?

Excelling at what you do is only half the challenge of being a great leader, the other half is figuring out how to help everyone else excel too.

Studies on what makes people satisfied in their jobs consistently turn up the same answer: good relationships with managers. But what does 'good' mean? And is it different for different employees?

Yes, it is.

The socially intelligent manager recognises this and goes about leading in a manner that is responsive to individual needs, and that embraces diversity of thought and action.

Leaders running a socially intelligent workplace would:

- Hold conversations with employees to find out what they are really thinking
- Engage with people from different areas of the organisation often to ensure their views are broadly informed
- Share their thoughts, ideas and assumptions broadly to find out what information they might be missing
- Be open to feedback and act on it

The highly directive and transactional style of management of the past must now give way to a new kind of leadership that is more open, transparent and dialogue driven.

THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT ORGANISATION KNOWS WHAT MOTIVATES

Motivation has different meanings to different workers. An organisation with high SI understands how to use these differences to improve retention.

As organisations seek to take their capabilities to the next level, innovative leadership practices that help to retain talent and raise engagement will be key priorities.

Our own research in 2012 on some 170,000 employees across 30 countries revealed key differences across the generations:

- Younger workers want more say in the way their organisation/team is managed
- Promotion and advancement are key motivators for younger workers
- Younger workers are more focused on the personal, rather than collective, outcomes of their work.

These patterns are just one small element of diversity that managers must understand and leverage to create an organisation with high SI. They are also critical to retaining knowledge in markets of near full employment.

Generational differences thus serve as an illustration of how the socially intelligent organisation can harness such diversity to improve retention and raise the value extracted from talent so as to work smarter, not just harder.

Why socially intelligent workplaces should focus on generational diversity

While generational differences are just one aspect of diversity, it provides a great template for thinking about other aspects of diversity and difference. Here, I provide my insights about the ways the different generations work and how to embrace them.



We all have different roles to assume, and we take on these roles differently according to our age and stage of our career. With upwards of three different generations now working side-by-side in many of the world's organisations, generational diversity will be the key challenge for a manager seeking to lead a socially intelligent workplace.

1 The youngest employees look to the work itself for a sense of worth

Younger workers are hungry for experience. They want to learn, show you what they can do and test their knowledge in the real world. Younger workers focus on the work itself for satisfaction and motivation. They look to the quality of the project and the skills that they are learning from it to stay engaged and committed to the organisation.

They are a little like honeybees that are more focused on the flower than the hive. They know they have a job that's part of something collective, but right now

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their focus is on learning and doing what they need to do for their own career.

Here's how to build a socially intelligent organisation that responds to the needs of young workers:

- Consistently assign them with projects that they can learn from
- Elaborate on the knowledge and experience that will be gained through each new assignment or task
- Ensure safety nets are in place for younger workers to participate in new projects, such as finding mentors to coach them through a new project

The socially intelligent organisation understands that it's the flower, not the hive that younger workers are most attracted to. It manages these workers by helping them consistently add to their skill base and complete work in a more structured manner. It allows them to clearly see what they've achieved at the end of the project.

2 Mid-career workers want team spirit and a clear strategy

Workers in the middle of their careers (Gen X and older Gen Ys) are seeking more than just a great project to work on. They want a great team to work on it with.

After years of building skills and seeing the cycles of business come and go, these workers are now seeking a different kind of motivation in their work. They want people that respect them, who can teach them and help them achieve their goals.

Clearly communicated, achievable strategy and tight-knit teams are vital to managing mid-career workers. Give them leadership tasks if that suits the individual, but most of all show them clearly how they're part of the team and why their experience matters to the group.

Yes, they want to achieve great things for their own career, but this means having a clear business objective and people they work well with. Strong, supportive and mutually respectful relationships are key to mid-career workers. They want to be valued and included.

So, ensure that mid-career workers are:

- Given appropriate leadership, mentoring or coaching roles within teams
- Provided enough information to help them fully grasp the strategy and add their own insights
- Involved in key decisions that affect the entire team.

3 Senior workers want partnerships

Those from the Baby Boomer and Silent generations will seek satisfaction far beyond their own role or even the organisation itself, sometimes even looking to the community at large for evidence that their job is worthwhile. They seek a partnership arrangement that allows them to bring their experience to bear on each decision.

These employees want an open, honest and authentic relationship with their manager. They want managers who live and deliver upon the core values of the organisation, and demonstrate a responsibility to them and their community at large.

Older workers are not only looking at the job itself or the team they work with, but the broader context of the work they do and what role this plays in the community.

If you're going to retain older workers you'll need to:

- Treat them as partners in the goals you set, not as employees
- Set the context of their work, such as its importance and how it impacts the community at large
- Show them that your values reflect and support theirs.

THIS IS THE AGE OF THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT ORGANISATION

Asia is hardly a homogenous region. The various markets within markets must navigate fragmented regulation and infrastructure, not to mention the many cultures and ways of doing business. A single organisational umbrella in this region can embrace significant diversity, so long as it's properly harnessed.

The potential for innovation, growth and new ideas within this diverse landscape is enormous, and this is why the very idea of the socially intelligent organisation is particularly relevant here in the Asia Pacific region.

If social intelligence (SI) is the "capacity to effectively navigate and negotiate complex social relationships and environments", the socially intelligent organisation is one that makes the most of diversity to achieve strategic goals.

For companies that need to make major leaps forward in strategy, they need to not only attract the right skills, but be "socially intelligent" enough to retain and utilise those skills effectively.

The social organisation in this region will provide many opportunities for collaboration, facilitate knowledge sharing to improve the application of skills and ensure the consistent development of their employees, as well as capture ideas and innovative practices effectively.



It's not enough for organisations to be smart and have a bank of exceptional skilled talent. Instead, organisations must develop their social intelligence to nurture a strong and harmonious collective. They must develop relationships and networks that will promote the interests of the business over the long term.

A socially intelligent organisation understands and responds to the context and cultural environment they operate within. They know better what customers want and how to make the most of the opportunities around them. This is, above all, the motivator for change.