

## Battle of the Gens

Wednesday 24 May 2023 | 1.00 - 2.00 pm BST

### Generational Diversity in the Workplace

- Generational diversity is often overlooked within the workplace, but it has become increasingly important to address the divergent expectations and needs of different generations. This is especially the case in the wake of the pandemic, which accentuated existing inequalities. Our discussion focussed on (i) whether our workplaces are adaptable enough to meet changing demands and (ii) what is the best way to achieve this.

### Drivers of Workplace Wellbeing

- Research conducted by the Oxford Wellbeing Movement has identified several key drivers for workplace wellbeing. Amongst the most important are belonging, inclusion, wellbeing, and support. These factors are considered more important than compensation for most younger employees. This marks a shift from a time where salary was the primary decision-making factor for most people. Creating a sense of belonging is crucial, as it acts as a primary protective barrier for mental health. The workplace, being where most people spend a significant portion of their lives, plays a pivotal role in fostering this sense of belonging. As leaders, creating environments where our people feel protected is key and that requires courageous and compassionate dialogue.

### The Power of Personal Stories

- Personal stories shed light on the transformative power of workplaces. Poppy Jaman OBE shared her experience of growing up in a culture at a time where some women had limited social freedom. The workplace offered a liberating environment where she could cultivate her own identity, leading to personal and professional growth. While remote work has its benefits, the erosion of social capital over time emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between flexibility and in-person interactions. If it wasn't for the workplace, Poppy would not have cultivated the skills or professional network needed to make her the CEO that she is today.
- Fear and concerns of cancel culture can also hinder connections across the generations. Leaders sharing their own imperfections and mistakes takes courage and demonstrates humility, which leads to trust. Leaders being curious and asking questions reinforces the message that candour is expected, possible and critical to fostering a healthy culture, and increases the opportunity for innovation.

- Psychological safety is a crucial aspect of fostering an innovative and empathetic workplace culture. It is not as complex as it may sound, and organisations have the responsibility to create an environment where individuals feel safe to be vulnerable. Building trust involves demonstrating vulnerability and inspiring confidence in others. Encouraging small individual behaviours, regular feedback focusing on non-economic factors, coaching, and addressing feedback from exit interviews are all actions that contribute to a culture where every employee feels heard and valued.

### The Role of Trust in Bridging Generational Gaps

- Organisations need to ensure that many perspectives are heard by seeking input from elder generations alongside younger employees. Introspection is required to acknowledge and address conscious and unconscious biases. Proactively seeking feedback more often and listening with compassion, leads to building greater trust across teams and organisations.
- Trust plays a pivotal role in bridging the gaps between different generations. Some generations may perceive flexibility as something that needs to be earned, while others may view it as a given. Companies like McDonald's have recognised the need for a balance between online and in-person learning, acknowledging that not all staff find online learning comfortable. Empathy is essential in understanding the fears and anxieties of new employees, and decision-makers are urged to reflect on their own feelings of insecurity when making empathetic choices.

### Commonalities Amidst Differences

- There is more common ground between generations than initially perceived. Injecting humanity into workplace conversations and acknowledging the impact of personal lives on work fosters better understanding and relationships. Younger generations' fearlessness and willingness to vocalise concerns can be seen as a natural extension of the workplace battles won by older generations. Adaptation and change are necessary for both older and younger generations. Mentoring provides an opportunity for older generations to understand the expectations and experiences of younger employees and vice versa. Proactive engagement with younger generations allows for better-informed decision-making.

#WeAreNotNeutral

Moderated by:



**Joanna Ludlam**  
Partner  
Baker McKenzie

Our Panel:



**Poppy Jaman**  
Global CEO  
MindForward Alliance



**Will Greaves**  
Senior Legal Counsel  
McDonald's



**Mulika Sannie**  
Legal Counsel, Music  
Google