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CENTRE FOR
EMPLOYMENT INNOVATION

2021

Characteristics and Values of a Supportive Workplace for Young Employees

**EARLY FINDINGS, REPORT 1 - COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR INCLUSIVE
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT (CIIE)**

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Characteristics and Values of a Supportive Workplace for Young Employees

Resulting from interviews completed during the summer of 2020 with young exemplar leaders (EYL) and stakeholders (S), key characteristics and values of supportive workplaces for young employees were identified. The below findings are relevant to employers interested in hiring young people, individuals within the career development sector, and for young people entering the workforce.

The below characteristics and values are highlighted because of their direct connection to the unique needs of emerging adults and the amount in which they were emphasized by interviewees:

1. Affirm Value of Young Employee
2. Mutual Intergenerational Collaboration
3. Flexible and Responsive Management
4. Support Professional and Personal Development
5. Workplace Culture
6. Intentionality

1. Opportunities for more responsibility (to lead/practice)

"Keep people engaged but how do you find other ways to create the value and create the opportunities and maybe formally you are not in this leadership role but what can I do and what responsibility can I give you outside of your, you know, normal job description that will make you feel really fulfilled and, you know, I think we've started doing things like that but I think, you know, even as we are talking I am thinking that is something we need to do more of." - S

The most common characteristic identified by those interviewed was the importance of opportunities for young employees to take on additional responsibility. Whether leading a workshop, involvement in a large project, or practicing skills, the importance of fostering these opportunities contributes significantly to supporting and engaging young employees.

2. Affirm Value of Young Employee

"We hired you for a reason, we don't want you to fail, we hired you for a reason, you are the person we want here" - S

The reality for many young employees is lack of refined skills and experience. However, for young staff to feel support and to encourage develop in those areas, affirming the value of the young employees as person, is paramount for supportive workplaces.

3. Mutual Intergenerational Collaboration

"Folks that are older than you acknowledge that they learned something from you or that they valued your contribution to the conversation, I think that has been extremely impactful." - EYL

The characteristic of intergenerational collaboration is more complex than simply having staff teams or projects teams working together. The individuals we interviewed identified the importance of respect and valuing everyone's opinion was consistent for those who mentioned this characteristic. Creating spaces for *mutual* intergenerational collaboration will help engage young staff, affirm their value, and affirm their space within the larger workplace.

4. Flexible and Responsive Management

"We need more diversity in our industry but there is a lot of diversity in terms of age ranges and how those people like to work, you need to be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes to lead effectively." - S

Exemplar young leaders and stakeholder both acknowledged the difference in the needs and values of young employees. The need for a flexible and responsive management styles were identified as means to support engagement of young staff. If employers want greater engagement and attachment of young employees, they cannot supervise/manage young employees the same way they have historically.

5. Support Professional and Personal Development

"Right now, I'm obviously not leading the company that I work for or whatnot, but it's certainly an awesome development opportunity where I feel myself learning new stuff and experiencing new things every single day. That just adds wood to the fire." - EYL

A significant value identified by exemplar young leaders was the importance of supporting young employees in their passions, their personal development, or professional skill development. 70% of exemplar young leaders identified this as an important characteristic of employers.

6. Workplace Culture

"But again, it comes down to the environment. Where if that's what the norm is and that's what people are into and want to support one another for it, it's almost impossible to not gravitate towards that type of thing." - EYL

While more research is needed to define the explicit type of workplace culture which fosters engaged young employees, this report identifies organizational values and safe, equitable spaces as important aspects of workplace cultures, which are supportive to young employees.

7. Intentionality

"There's a lot of exceptionally talented people out there and what I see as being one of the biggest differences between those who, you know, ultimately fulfill their potential go on to leadership roles is the level of support and development they get early stages in their career" - S

An important characteristic identified to support young employees is the need for employers to be intentional. In order to achieve the characteristics and values in this list, employers need to be intentional with their HR practices, talent development processes, and even hiring practices. The characteristics and values identified above will be unlikely to occur with regularity without intentionality.

Additional Characteristics and Values

The below characteristics and values were also raised within the interviews, and we thought it would be important to note them for consideration:

- Mentorship
- Meaningful Work
- Foster network building
- Challenge growth
- Ability to make mistakes
- Encouraging creativity
- Support & Encourage
- Cross cultural competency
- Collaborative

Conclusion

The above characteristics and values were identified by exemplar young leaders and key stakeholders as meaningful for young employees to feel supported in their place of work. The implications of these characteristics and values for the CIYE initiative are important in considering potential employer partners and training opportunities. While employers may not currently demonstrate all these values and characteristics, it will be important to understand whether they are open to engage with them and adopt them (if necessary). Ultimately, aiming to better support young employees in their workplace.

Recommendations and Considerations

Based upon the full Internal Early Findings Report #1, four recommendations were developed for employers hiring young staff to consider. These recommendations also can also be considered in the formation of the CIIYE program design and support strategies for employers and employees.

Hiring Practices

The benefit and impact of hiring young employees are immense and go beyond the impacts we heard through the interviews. It is increasingly important for employers to critically view the posture in which they are seeking to hire young staff. While there is much needed consideration regarding hiring practices (equitable practices, etc.) this recommendation is specific to hiring young employees. While young employees may come with vast number of skills and abilities, the reality is that many may also lack experience and 'refined technical skills'. Therefore, employers need to consider the type of roles they are hiring young staff into and develop intentional scaffolding strategies to develop young staff, both in their technical skills but also support their personal development. The positive impact of intentionally hiring young employees in key roles while supporting their development can have significant positive implications for organizations.

Audit Onboarding Practices

Connected to the importance of intentionality and the unique needs of young employees entering the workforce, employers may need to consider the way in which they are welcoming young employees into their work. The key findings highlight that young employees are looking for workplaces that are flexible and responsive to needs of a new generation. Therefore, in order to support integration into new places of work, onboarding practices need to reflect values and needs of young employees entering (relational, intentional, collaborative).

Flexible and Responsive Management

Young employees' value relational and empathetic supervisors who are willing to be adaptive to their passion and needs. The challenge for employers is to balance the unique needs of young employees while also maintaining fiscal and operational standards of their organization. Out of this research, having honest and clear conversations with newly hired young staff highlighting expectations, opportunity for leadership, and open discussion about the young staff desire may help support engaged staff. Discussing strategies to support staff both in their

professional performance and personal development will demonstrate a value of young people, while also affirming the expectations of an employee.

Culture Check: Perspective of Young Employees

While many workplaces will affirm their value of meaningful and mutual intergenerational collaboration, throughout the interviews, stakeholders and exemplar young leaders' confirmed that young employees often experience barriers whereby other colleagues/team members do not value their opinion or their ideas are dismissed seemingly because of the age of employee. Engaging with key leaders and employees throughout one's organization regarding perspective of young employees will help illuminate the workplace culture and perspective to young employees.