

# Wellbeing across generational differences

**Employee needs vary depending on their age and stage of life – and these differences should be taken into account when companies work with wellbeing, prevention and recruitment.**

*By Kristine Seest*

It can be instructive and inspiring to meet and collaborate with colleagues across generations, but it can also create friction when colleagues have different expectations to work and to the execution of tasks. WTW believes that companies can benefit from working purposefully with the employees' differences.

»We see a tendency for employees to be lumped together when companies take initiatives to preserve their wellbeing. But generational differences and different stages of life are present, for better or worse, and this is something that managers and organizations need to realize and act upon to ensure the wellbeing of their employees,« says Corporate Health & Wellbeing Specialist Maria Ebbesen from WTW.

“

By paying attention to how generational differences are expressed in the collaboration and internal relations in the organization, we can strengthen wellbeing, recruitment and, not least, the performance of the core task

**Maria Ebbesen**

Corporate Health & Wellbeing Specialist, WTW

In order to highlight the problem and inspire companies to take stronger preventive measures, Malene Friis Andersen was invited to give a presentation at the latest meeting of WTW's Network on Strategic Health and Wellbeing, where wellbeing at different stages of life was the overall theme of the day.

## **A learning-oriented working community**

Malene Friis Andersen works as an independent business psychologist and as a visiting researcher at the National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NFA) and has insights into the characteristics of different generations and what companies can achieve by becoming better at bringing generations together in a learning-oriented working community.

One of her key messages is that there is a difference in what motivates employees of different ages, and that the task for companies is to create the best possible fit between the workplace and employees of different ages and stages of life.

## Focus on the differences

The aim is to gain insight into the characteristics of different generations and what needs and wishes the different generations have in relation to their workplace.

»It's about working in a more structured way with the company's existing experiences – namely that there is a difference in communication, motivation and behaviour across generations. By articulating these differences, you can achieve greater understanding and recognition of each other's differences internally, and it can promote collaboration, learning and wellbeing,« says Maria Ebbesen from WTW.

There are different definitions of generations. Malene Friis Andersen works with this division:

- Baby Boomers – Born 1946-1964
- Generation X – Born 1965-1980
- Generation Y – Born 1981-2000
- Generation Z – Born 2001-2012

Attention to generations and stages of life can create value in strategic wellbeing and in recruitment, if, for example, there is a desire in the company to attract either younger or older employees.

»Some generations are probably calling for special attention at the moment. This also applies to the workplace, where the mental wellbeing among younger people entering the labour market is challenged to a greater extent than before. And at the other end of the scale is the experienced generation, that workplaces and society have an interest in retaining at work for as long as possible,« says Maria Ebbesen.

## The core task brings generations together

According to Maria Marshall Ebbesen, working with differences among employees also opens up for working with the things that employees have in common.

»Everyone needs to feel that they make a difference in their work, and it is the core task that we must solve together that creates fundamental meaning for all of us. By paying attention to how generational differences are expressed in the collaboration and internal relations in the organization, we can strengthen wellbeing, recruitment and, not least, the performance of the core task,« says Maria Ebbesen.

It is the current issues within the company that determines how best to work with different generations and stages of life.

WTW Corporate Health & Wellbeing offers specialized advice within health, wellbeing and prevention – and offer advice to companies on the inclusion of generational differences in strategic focus areas