

The next frontier for telco success in the workforce

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Since GSM was first demonstrated in Cape Town in 1993 and the first GSM networks launched the next year, the telco industry has fundamentally transformed every country on the African continent.



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As some of the largest employers, most admired - and valuable - brands, and most innovative companies on the continent, telcos have been synonymous with the rise and development of Africa's economic development.

Two of the five largest public companies in Africa are telcos. In the latest Brand Africa Top 100 Most Admired Brands in Africa rankings, three telcos featured among some of the leading global brands, beating out the likes of Puma, Sony and BMW. South African telco MTN is that country's most valuable brand, valued at nearly twice as much as its nearest competitor, another telco: Vodacom.



The most admired African brands announced

28 May 2018



But even telcos are not immune to the disruptive forces of technology and a rapidly shifting workplace demographic that is

forcing companies to adapt their business models and Human Capital Management approaches. For telcos to successfully transform to Digital Service Providers where they have to lead with new business models and innovation, their workforce engagement and talent attraction strategies, some hard questions need to be asked and some difficult changes made.

The five-generation modern workplace

Today's workplace is more diverse and dynamic than it has ever been in history. For telcos to succeed in the effective attraction, engagement and retention of these multi-skilled digital workers, a fundamental rethink of organisational culture and human capital management is needed.

This is made all the more difficult by the fact that the modern workplace is home to no fewer than five distinct generations, namely:

- **The Silent Generation**, born somewhere between 1920 and 1945, who are nearing retirement and typically struggle with adopting new technologies and prefer old-school forms of interoffice communication. While typically nearing the end of their careers due to their age, this generation is most likely found occupying key positions in boards, steering committees or as shareholders.
- **The Baby Boomers**, who now typically make up the upper echelons of organisational structures and who are driven by professional success and teamwork;
- **Generation X**, born between 1960 and the early 1980s, who are adaptable and driven by results, and also more comfortable with using technology than their older peers;
- **Generation Y**, or the so-called Millennials, who are the most prevalent group in most workplaces and who crave feedback, purpose and opportunities to effect positive change; and
- **Generation Z**, who are only now entering the workplace and who have grown up using the internet, social media and technology.

Due to Africa's overwhelmingly youthful population, the greatest percentage of workers are from Generations X, Y and Z. However, since each is distinct and requires slightly (or vastly) different talent management strategies, telcos need to prioritise a process of workplace culture re-engineering to ensure they can continue to access top talent.

Six workforce priorities for digital organisationsIn any organisation, the biggest factor determining whether a change is either an opportunity or a threat is its people. The greater the changes facing the organisation, the more important it becomes to have the right people with the right skills and the right mindset. Successful organisation profit from change, instead of being overwhelmed by it. In a highly competitive environment where digital skills are often a scarce resource, telcos need to ensure they offer the type of work environment that can inspire, attract and positively inspire top talent. By focusing on six key priorities, telcos will be better positioned to engage and retain a motivated, productive and inspired workforce:

1. Ensuring you are building the right type of organisation – for now and the future

The template for the organisation of the future remains unclear. Thanks to technology, entire industries and the concept of work itself are being reshaped in fundamental ways. The growing focus on the so-called contingent workforce, job automation, and virtual employment is pointing to the end of the full-time, on-site job. Telcos need to start asking some probing questions of themselves to get on the path toward building the right organisational structure for the future, including how to create a highly attractive employer brand, how to position the workforce to quickly scale up or down in response to changing business needs, and how to take advantage of intelligent technologies that reshape work processes and organisational models.

- **Creating a productive, compelling work environment**

In most organisations, people are the most expensive resource. Salary costs are impossible to generate positive ROI for the business unless employees have the resources needed to perform their jobs effectively. Telcos need to ensure they provide their workforce with access to tools, knowledge and technology that increases productivity and efficiency. Highly skilled workers, in particular, want positive work experiences with access to the latest technology tools. Mobile access, intuitive and engaging user design, social technology platforms and AI interfaces are the current preferred tools for high-skill workers, but this will change over time. Telcos need to keep abreast with the latest tools to ensure they can attract and retain top talent.

- **Engaging people around a clear purpose for the organisation**

Companies that exist solely for profit will fail to attract and engage the next generation of high-skilled digital workers. Telcos need to prioritise the building of a purpose-driven company culture that engages employees around shared goals that constantly add new levels of value to the organisation. Doing this is no easy task, especially in a market as culturally and geographically diverse as the Africa continent.

The latest talent management tools can effectively engage, motivate and support employees on a continuous basis, and give management a direct avenue to mobilising employees around changes in organisational strategy. Great care should also be taken to recognising employees for their contribution and acknowledging the value they bring to the organisation.

- **Making good talent management decisions**

Employee salaries, benefits and associated costs account for as much as 70% of a company's total operating budget. It is critical that telcos have an accurate view of whether that money is being spent wisely, and that staffing levels across departments and lines-of-business are at optimal levels.

Here, telcos can leverage the significant advances in machine learning, workforce planning and analytics to directly link employee costs to positive ROI. Modern talent management solutions further remove many of the factors that historically led to poor talent management decisions, including manager biases, limited access to information and insufficient use of appropriate performance management criteria.

- **Supporting the needs and wellbeing of your workforce**

Not too long ago, the very concept of employee well-being was limited to a narrow band of people working in very specific fields. However, the arrival of the hyperconnected, always-on worker has made employee well-being a primary consideration for effective workforce engagement and talent management. Stressed, exhausted, distracted or physically ill workers are not productive. Well-being extends beyond physical factors and requires telcos to create work environments that are conducive to making workers feel valued and well-supported while respecting cultural and demographic differences.

- **Managing operational risks caused by data and people**

Beyond pure disruption, most organisations face a slew of regulatory and operational risks associated with data protection, cybersecurity, scalability and sustainability.

New regulations such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) promises strong sanction against companies that fail to protect users' data or uses that data for nefarious purposes. Trying to navigate the regulatory complexities of the modern workplace in a manual way is near-impossible. Telcos need to implement compliant, secure and cost-effective human capital management technology platforms that can automate much of the task of compliance and free HR departments up to focus more on attracting, engaging and retaining top talent.

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