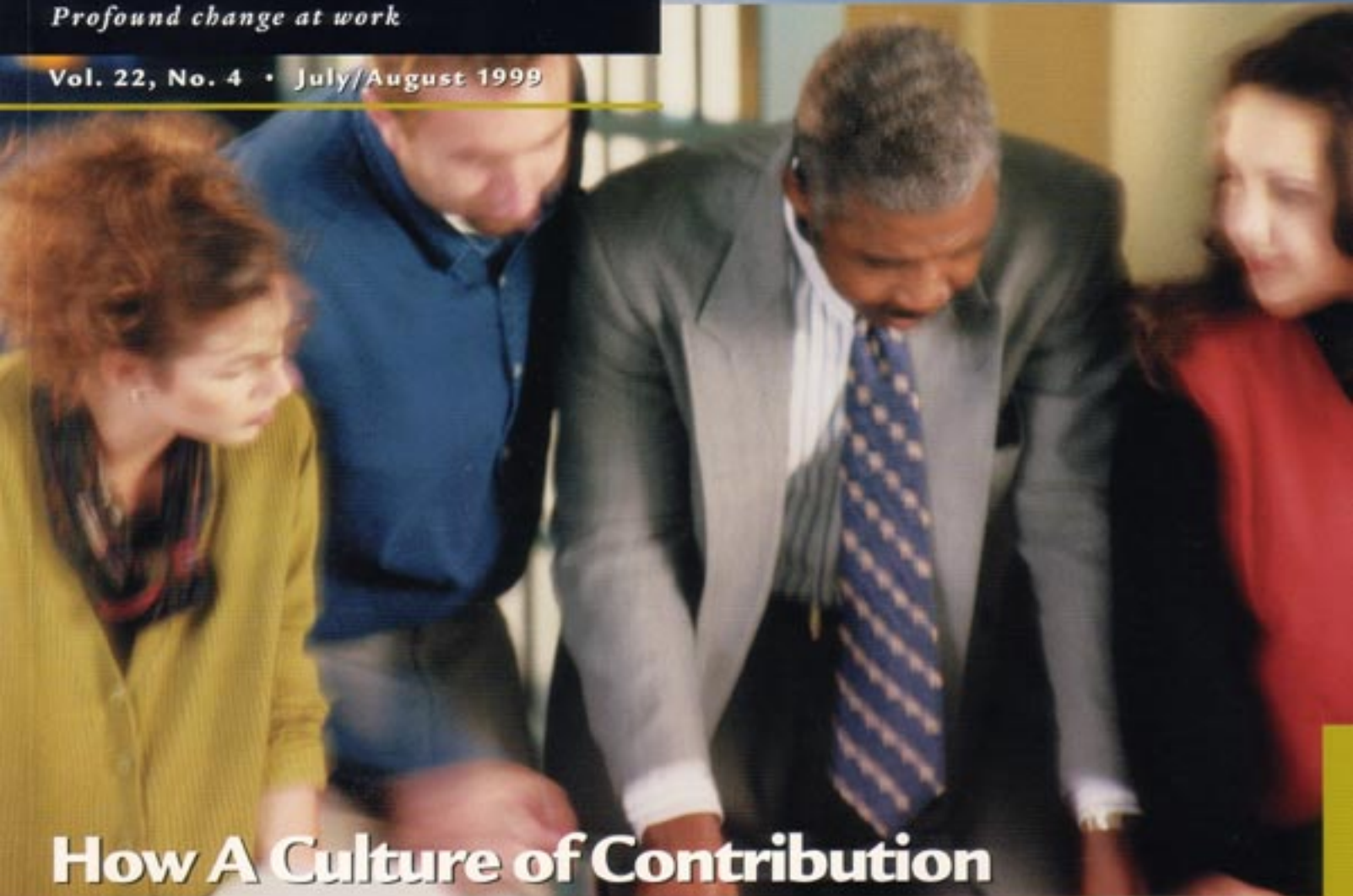


Quality and Participation

Profound change at work

Vol. 22, No. 4 • July/August 1999



How A Culture of Contribution Gives Your Company A Grow-Up Call

Reaching High Levels of Performance Through Team Self-Evaluation

Great Teamwork Pays Off For Xerox

Teams: Why Generation X Marks The Spot

What do you mean, teams are not enough? – Charlotte Roberts

Making Teams Work for You

Slackers? Hardly. This is the generation that helped popularize the phrase “Just Do It.” Read why they belong on your team and how to encourage their best performance.

Teams: Why Generation X Marks the Spot

Hank Karp, Ph.D.
Danilo Sirias, Ph.D.
Kristin Arnold

Generation X started as a term used by advertising executives to describe the “slacker” generation: the 40 million Americans born between 1963 and 1982. Often characterized as being lazy, arrogant, unreliable, and cynical, Generation X is considered to be anything *but* team-oriented. Or so we thought.

As professors in the department of management and marketing at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia, we conducted a pilot study of 398 people from six organizations across the country using the Team Orientation and Behavior Inventory or TOBI. (See sidebar on the following page.) Much to our surprise, we discovered Generation X to be significantly more team-oriented than baby boomers.

The current paradigm, and the heart of the boomer approach to team-building, is that the team is an entity greater than the sum of its parts. Teams are built around established group norms, shared values, consensus decision making, and a collaborative approach to conflict resolution. The value is as

much on working together as a team as it is on accomplishing the task. The goal is that all team members will eventually pull together in the same direction.

To each her own

Xers approach teamwork believing each team member can make the best contribution to the team effort from a position of individual strength. Instead of suborning personal goals to the greater good of the team, they truly understand the viewpoints and values of each team member. Successful teams of the future will look more like a “salad bowl,” where each individual makes the best contribution to the team effort—rather than a “melting pot” of all for one, and one for all.

For an Xer, a high-performing team is composed of strong, diverse individuals, focused on delivering results, who create flexible linkages to work as an entire team, in isolation or in different configurations, depending on the task. They are looking for authentic team synergy rather than conformance to group norms.

The good news is boomers and Xers actually have similar approaches to teamwork. As more Xers enter the workplace, however, boomers will have to learn how to value individual diversity, manage conflict, motivate individuals, and delegate tasks much more effectively. Thus, teamwork is evolving to a higher and more challenging standard.

Strategies and tactics

As you bring Generation Xers onto your team, try these strategies to enhance your teamwork:

1) Identify strengths and interests of team members before integrating them into an effective and cohesive work unit. Emphasize the attributes they bring: fresh perspectives, technoliteracy, adaptability to change, resiliency, enthusiasm, and the list goes on.

2) Encourage individual identity. Today's teams tend to focus on the group identity as the primary means of identifying individual members. Often reared as latchkey children, Xers are fiercely independent. Make a greater effort to recognize individual strengths,

contributions, and achievements.

3) Integrate perspectives. Since many Xers were latchkey kids, they often turn to small enclaves of friends, peers, and even teammates for support. Xers use the team to support their individual efforts and relationships, whereas boomers see supporting the team as their primary, individual role. Both perspectives must be discussed and valued as the team moves forward.

4) Coach and provide personal support. The majority of Xers had two parents working during their formative years. To make up for this lack of attention, Xers have a need for closer personalized contact with those above them. Younger workers expect—no, demand—feedback, frequently and quickly. Formal, sporadic performance reviews are not timely enough to provide guidance just when they need it. Create a dialogue among team members and enable the delegation process of assignment, review, and revision to occur more frequently. Encourage individual relationships on and off the job.

5) Share information. Xers have

grown up with PCs and microprocessors, getting immediate feedback and dedicated attention from their machines. They are adept at using different data and technology to bring together seemingly unrelated elements and to solve problems. By hoarding information, you are undermining their greatest asset and potential for delivering results.

6) Focus on results. Xers, as a group, appear to be much more pragmatic. They will forge linkages to work on task subsections individually and then bring the results to the team. Team issues will be dealt with more easily when cast within the context of achieving team objectives. Give them clearly defined goals—and the freedom to achieve them in their own ways.

7) Motivate with the work. Xers are not going to be motivated by appeals to the greater good or loyalty to the organization—or allusions to the "Big Picture." Xers saw their parents laid off in the early '80s and again in the mid '90s. They know they aren't going to stay with the company for their entire career. Their motivation comes from within, and has to do with the intrinsic nature of the team's work. Make sure they have the skills to perform the specific tasks and projects or the necessary learning resources within reach to fill the knowledge and skills gaps. Ironically, as long as they are learning new skills to make them more marketable later on, they will continue to stay on the team.

8) Reward team and individual contributions. The current practice is to reward the team as a whole,

The Team Orientation and Behavior Inventory

The Team Orientation and Behavior Inventory (TOBI) was developed to analyze team task and maintenance issues. TOBI provides a yardstick for assessing how much needs to be done on each dimension to achieve a fully functioning team. The instrument yields four separate scores: task values, task skills, maintenance values, and maintenance skills. There is a measure for the extent that one values task completion and another measuring the skills one has that is needed to complete the task. Likewise, there is a measure of how much one values group maintenance—such as trust, cohesion, openness—and another measuring how skilled that person is in group-maintenance behaviors. More information on this instrument can be found in the *Pfeiffer & Company Library: Teams* (Pfeiffer & Co., 1994).

rather than single out any one individual on the team. Xers, however, are much more tuned in to "what's in it for me" (WIIFM). Allow the team to test out different ways to reward individual contributions to the team. Expand

your repertoire of rewards to include nonfinancial incentives, such as work/life benefits, training opportunities, flexible work schedules, and telecommuting.

9) Don't forget to have some fun.

Xers are young people, full of energy, and ready for fun. Work is not an all-consuming passion for them. Lighten up. Get a life. And do great work along the way.

Strategies to enhance Generation X participation in teamwork

- 1) Identify strengths and interests.
- 2) Encourage individual identity.
- 3) Integrate perspectives.
- 4) Coach and provide personal support.
- 5) Share information.
- 6) Focus on results.
- 7) Motivate with the work.
- 8) Reward team and individuals.



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