

# LEADING THE SOCIALY INTELLIGENT ORGANISATION

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BY ANTHONY RAJA DEVADOSS



# FOCUS ON SQ TO WORK SMARTER, NOT JUST HARDER.

The days of Asia being known primarily as the world's production line are numbered.

University graduates from China and India are now flowing into the regional job market at an unprecedented rate—graduates from China alone have increased seven-fold in the past decade<sup>1</sup>—and they are seeking new, challenging opportunities.

For many reasons, the Asia-Pacific region is swiftly becoming a critical hub in the global supply-chain of goods, services and ideas—a hub that must be sustained by agile, flexible and diverse organisations.

To make this transition in the face of significant talent supply and retention constraints, Asia's organisations must become

'socially intelligent organisations'—the kind that embrace collaboration, harness diversity and promote innovation and change.

Yes, the Asia-Pacific economy is still dominated by manufacturing and agriculture, but this does not make it immune to the 'social intelligence' (SQ) requirement that is now global. Organisations all over the world are trying to figure out how to respond to their market more effectively and more efficiently—and ours must too.

Here, as anywhere, the need to make more of what we already have (including the talent that works for us) is a critical element of

success. Among other things, this will require a deeper understanding of what motivates individuals, and how to better utilise the diversity of the workforce, including the various age groups that are now working side-by-side.

The great organisations of the next decade require leaders that are responsive to—and can critically understand—motivation, generational differences and what it is about our uniquely social behaviour that will help us to work smarter, not just harder.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL IQ (SQ)?

Social scientist Ross Honeywill believes social intelligence is an aggregated measure of the following:

- self and social awareness
- evolved social beliefs and attitudes
- a capacity and appetite to manage complex social change.

<sup>1</sup> The Economist, "The Golden Rice Bowl", 24 Nov 2012.

# WHAT KIND OF LEADER RUNS THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT WORKPLACE?

Excelling at what you do is only half the challenge of being a great leader—the other half is figuring out how to help everyone else excel too.

Research and surveys into what makes people satisfied in their jobs consistently turn up the same answer: good relationships with managers. But what does 'good' mean? And is it different for different employees?

Yes. It is.

The socially intelligent manager recognises this and goes about leading in a manner that is responsive to individual needs, and that embraces diversity of thought and action.

## **The kind of leader who runs a socially intelligent workplace would do the following:**

- uses conversations to find out what employees are thinking—not surveys or data points
- engages often with different people from different areas of the team/organisation to ensure their views are broadly informed
- shares their thoughts, ideas and assumptions broadly to find out what information they might be missing
- is open to feedback and acts on it.

The highly directive and transaction-oriented style of management that has become the basis of so many large, successful organisations in the Asia-Pacific region must now give way to a new kind of leadership. One that is more open, transparent and dialogue driven.

# THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT ORGANISATION KNOWS WHAT MOTIVATES.

Motivation means different things to different workers. An organisation with high SQ understands what these differences are and uses them to improve retention.

As organisations seek to take their capabilities to the next level, innovative leadership practices that help to retain talent and raise engagement are key priorities.

**Our own research in 2012 with some 170,000 employees across 30 countries revealed these key differences across the generations:**

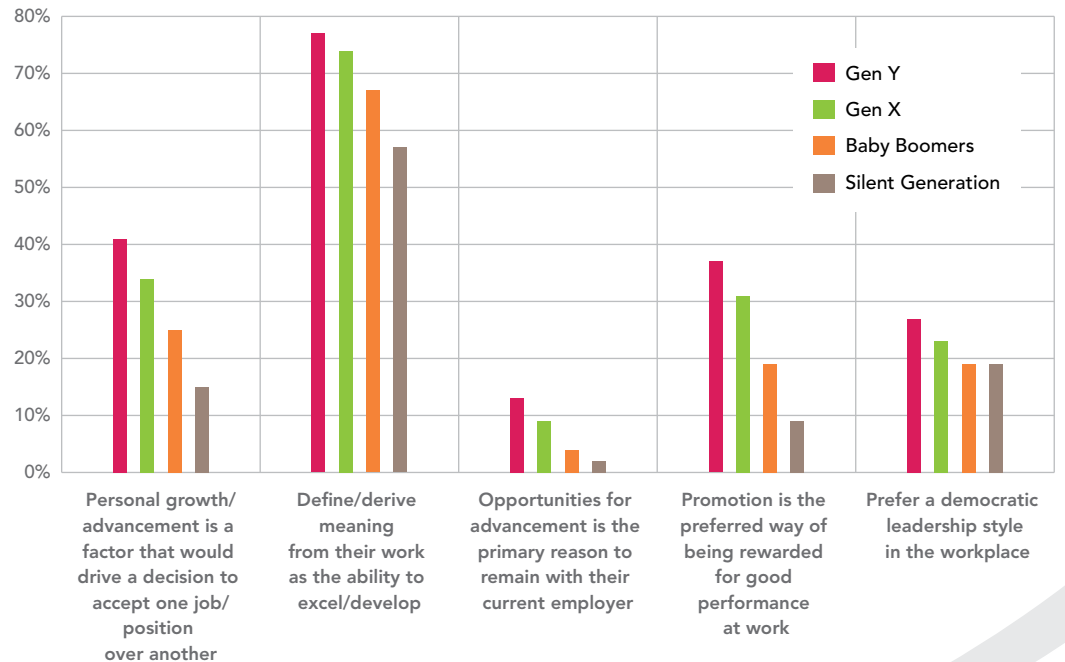
- younger workers want more say in the way their organisation/team is managed
- promotion and advancement are key motivators for younger workers
- younger workers are more focussed on the personal, rather than collective, outcomes of their work.

These patterns are just one small element of diversity that managers must understand and leverage to create an organisation with high SQ, but they are critical to retaining knowledge in markets of near full employment.

**Clearly, there are other aspects of motivation that are not linked to our age and stage at work, but generational differences serve as an illustration of how the socially intelligent organisation harnesses diversity to do the following:**

- raise retention and the value extracted from talent; and
- work smarter, not just harder.

**FIGURE 1. SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE GENERATIONS IN THEIR ATTITUDES TO WORK**



# WHY SHOULD THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT MANAGER FOCUS ON GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES?

Yes, generational differences are just one aspect of diversity, but they provide a great template for thinking about other aspects of diversity and difference too. Here, I provide my insights about the ways the different generations work and how to embrace them.

The way I see it, we're just a little bit like honeybees in the workplace. We all have different roles that we assume, and it appears that we take on these different attributes according to our age and stage in life and work.

With upwards of three different generations now working side-by-side in many of the world's organisations, generational diversity is a key challenge for a manager seeking to lead a socially intelligent workplace.



# 1/ YOUR YOUNGEST EMPLOYEES LOOK TO THE WORK ITSELF FOR A SENSE OF WORTH.

Younger workers are hungry for experience. They want to learn, to show you what they can do, and to be able to test their knowledge in the real world.

Younger workers focus on the work itself for satisfaction and motivation. They look to the quality of the project and the skills that they are learning from it to stay engaged and committed to the organisation.

They are a little like honeybees that are more focussed on the flower than the hive—they know they have a job that's part of something collective, but right now their focus is on learning and doing what they need to do for their own career.

## **Build a socially intelligent organisation that responds to the needs of young workers by:**

- Look to consistently create projects that they can learn from
- Demonstrate what knowledge and experience will be gained through each new assignment or task
- Put safety-nets in place that will ensure you can allow younger workers to participate in new tasks without creating higher risks, such as finding mentors that can coach them through a new project.

The socially intelligent organisation understands that it's the flower, not the hive that younger workers are most attracted to. And, it manages these workers to help them consistently add to their skill base and complete work in a more structured, project-by-project basis; it allows them to clearly see what they've achieved at the end of each day, week or month.



## 2/ MID-CAREER WORKERS WANT TEAM SPIRIT AND A CLEAR STRATEGY.

Workers in the middle of their careers (Gen X and older Gen Y's) are seeking more than just a great project to work on—they want a great team to work on it with.

After years of building skills and seeing the cycles of business come and go, these workers are now seeking a different kind of motivation in their work. They want people that respect them, who can teach them and help them achieve what needs to be achieved.

Having a great strategy that's clearly communicated and achievable, and assembling tight-knit teams to work on each aspect is the recipe for success for managing mid-career workers. Give them leadership tasks if that suits the individual, but most of all show them clearly how they're part of the team and why their experience matters to the group.

Yes, they want to achieve great things for their own career, but this means having a clear business objective and people they work well with. Strong, supportive and

mutually respectful relationships are key to mid-career workers: they want to be valued and included.

### **So, ensure that mid-career workers:**

- are given appropriate leadership/ mentoring and coaching roles within teams
- are given as much information as possible to help them fully grasp the strategy and add their own insights
- involve them in key decisions that affect the entire team.



### 3/ SENIOR WORKERS WANT PARTNERSHIPS.

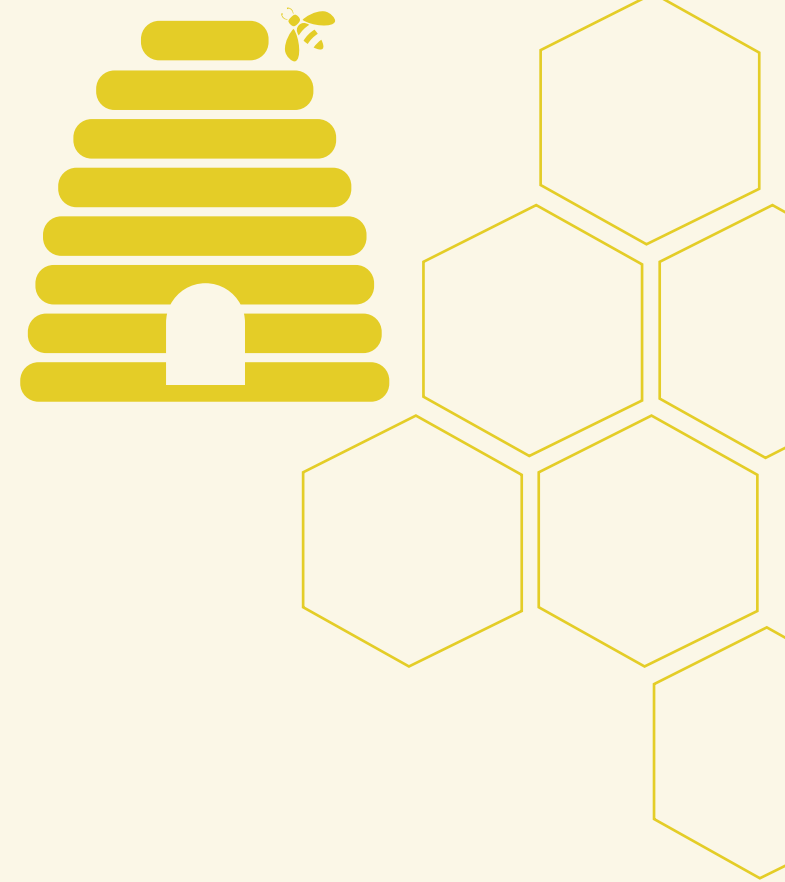
Those from the Baby Boomer and Silent generations will seek satisfaction far beyond their own role or even the organisation itself—they may look to the community at large for evidence that their job is worthwhile and they seek a partnership arrangement that allows them to bring their experience to bear on each decision.

These employees want a relationship with their manager that is open, honest and authentic. They want and need managers who live and deliver upon the core values of the organisation, and that demonstrate a responsibility to them, and to their community at large.

Older workers are looking not just at the job itself or the team they work with, but the broader context of the work they do and what role this plays in the community.

**If you're going to retain older workers you'll need to do the following:**

- treat them as partners in the goals you set, not as employees
- set the context of their work—how it impacts the community at large and why it's still important
- show them that the values you have and that the organisation has reflect, and support theirs.





# THIS IS THE AGE OF THE SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT ORGANISATION.

“Asia” is hardly a homogenous region. The various markets within markets must navigate fragmented regulation and infrastructure, not to mention many cultures and ways of doing business. A single organizational umbrella in this region can embrace significant diversity—so long as it’s properly harnessed.

The potential for innovation, growth and new ideas within this diverse landscape is enormous, and this is why the very idea of the socially intelligent organisation is particularly relevant here in the Asia-Pacific region.

If social intelligence is the “capacity to effectively navigate and negotiate complex social relationships and environments”, the social organisation is one that makes the most of diversity and uses it to achieve strategic goals.

## **For companies that need to make major leaps forward in strategy, they need:**

- to attract the right skills; and
- to be “socially intelligent” enough to retain and utilise those skills effectively.

## **The social organisation in the Asia-Pacific region will:**

- provide many opportunities for collaboration
- facilitate knowledge sharing to improve the application of skills and ensure employees consistently develop
- be effective at capturing ideas and innovative practices.

It’s not enough for organisations to be smart and have a bank of great talent with exceptional skills. Instead, organisations must develop their social intelligence in order to work harmoniously and as a strong collective, and to develop relationships and networks that will promote the interests of the business over the long term.

A socially intelligent organisation also understands and responds to the context and cultural environment they operate within. They know better what customers want and need and how to make the most of the opportunities around them. This, above all, is the motivator for change.

# CONCLUSION.

As the rest of the developed world looks to emerging nations and regions such as ours, they will be looking to understand not just what, but how we are to achieve the next sustainable wave of growth.

In almost every Asian market, competition is increasing, fuelled by both local and foreign businesses. Skills shortages are a constraint on most firms in the region, and our leaders

are now faced with managing three or four generations of workers all with their own unique ways of working and behaving.

We need to find ways to retain and make the most of the talent we already have in our organisations. And, we need to find ways to help these organisations meet the challenges of a fast-evolving market. Social intelligence principles are part of the answer because

they give us tangible ways of managing and harnessing diversity.

For organisations and employees to make the most of the opportunity ahead, managers must lead the way. Increasingly, those managers must be flexible and socially intelligent.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ANTHONY RAJA DEVADOSS is currently the Vice President – APAC with the Outsourcing & Consulting Group of Kelly Services. From network services, engineering to e-business solutions, Anthony Raja has worked in both India and Malaysia, in roles ranging from technical to CEO. He has received his Bachelors degree in Science and his MBA in Marketing and a Postgraduate Diploma in Computing. He holds membership in various local and international associations such as the MIM, Human Capital Institute and Association of Career Professionals International. He is the Head of Policy Enablement and Government Liaison with Outsourcing Malaysia and a member of the Industry Advisory Board for the Graduate School of Business, UNIRAZAK. He was recently appointed to the HR Capacity Building taskforce by the Ministry of Human Resources, Government of Malaysia. Anthony is also a member of the HROA APAC Chapter Board.

<http://my.linkedin.com/in/anthonyraja>

<http://twitter.com/anthonyraja>



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