

ORGANISATIONS are recognising the importance of integrating ESG principles into their strategy and operations, driven by regulatory requirements, investor pressure and societal expectations.

As the demand for green jobs and ESG expertise continues to grow exponentially, businesses acknowledge the significance of attracting and engaging the next generation of employees in ESG roles.

There are meaningful opportunities for the next generation to make an impact in roles as varied as sustainability analysts, climate risk analysts and carbon management analysts.

Various studies have shown that the next generation workforce comprising Generation Z and millennials value environmental sustainability, social consciousness, as well as a sense of purpose in their work.

Being more mindful about making an impact and searching for value than the generations before them, they are drawn to companies that are committed to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, including sustainable practices, social impact and ethical governance.

When it comes to workplace preferences, the new generation values flexibility, work-life balance and opportunities for continuous learning and development.

These values are deeply rooted in family upbringing.

Making ESG roles attractive

As businesses adapt to meeting the growing demand for ESG roles, leaders should cultivate a positive culture by encouraging collaboration, offering education opportunities and empowering sustainability champions throughout the organisation.

They need to ensure that their corporate values genuinely reflect a commitment to ESG principles.

This should be evident in the company's operations (including ESG considerations in procurement policies), culture (encouraging the next gen to share their views openly in meetings), and strategic goals (committing a substantial portion of investment to ESG-efficient infrastructure).

In parallel, they should prioritise ethical business practices such as working with suppliers that adhere to environmental and social standards.

It is encouraging to observe a leading outdoor apparel company making significant strides in attracting young professionals by embedding environmental sustainability and social inclusivity into its core values and business practices.

Given that the apparel industry contributes up to 6.7% of global greenhouse gas emissions, valuable lessons can be learnt from this company's approach.

Its sustainability practices not only resonated with consumers but also appealed to a younger workforce as evidenced by the various accolades it has received for its efforts in sustainability and corporate responsibility.

The next generation workforce is adept at discerning genuine initiatives from greenwashing.

A 2022 research from Edelman showed that 70% of Gen Zs will always fact check what brands say and will unfollow them if they're not truthful.

Companies should be transparent in communicating their ESG goals, achievements, and ongoing efforts, including timely progress updates.

Beyond sustainability reports, social media campaigns and company websites, there is value in showcasing success stories and highlighting the tangible impact of ESG initiatives to build trust and appeal to young professionals who are seeking purpose in their careers.

ESG and the NexGen: what's mindful, what works

By MALAR ODAYAPPAN



Valuable employee experience

Attracting young professionals is only half the battle; businesses must also engage and work to retain them.

To support young professionals who are keen on continuous learning and development, businesses can offer them a path for upskilling.

This can be via ESG-focused training programmes, workshops and certifications, both through curated in-house training or partnering with external training providers or educational institutions to provide specialised ESG courses.

On the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) front, a number of institutions have begun introducing sustainability courses in their programmes, aligning with market needs and providing companies with a pool of industry-ready talent to tap into.

In engaging the next generation workforce, other areas of collaboration include building partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies and other organisations to provide young professionals with diverse experiences such as secondment or volunteer opportunities.

Moreover, participating in business-related forums and networks can help companies and their employees stay updated on best practices and emerging ESG trends.

Mentorship programmes can also be highly effective. Experienced leaders can guide and inspire the next generation, sharing their knowledge and expertise in ESG practices.



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boards where young professionals serve as participants, nurture their leadership skills and champion the interests of their peers in sustainability projects as well as corporate responsibility (CR) programmes.

It is heartening to observe a number of market-leading brands engaging Gen Zs in sharing their perspectives on sustainability or providing input on how to address the concerns of their demographic.

Technology and innovation are powerful tools for engaging the next generation in ESG roles.

Digital platforms such as social media, virtual collaboration spaces and webinars offer businesses opportunities to network and look for future ESG talent.

Additionally, adopting innovative ESG solutions can be an avenue to attract young professionals interested in green technology, encouraging new ideas and fostering a sense of ownership.

Businesses can leverage incentives announced by the government to invest in renewable energy, sustainable supply chains, and smart technology to enhance their ESG initiatives.

Conclusion

Attracting and involving the next generation in ESG positions requires a multifaceted approach that aligns corporate values with ESG principles.

By understanding the values and drive of the next generation workforce, businesses can create a dynamic environment that fosters participation and innovation, leading to a more engaged workforce and sustained societal outcomes.

Additionally, offering leadership opportunities and clear career progression paths in ESG roles can motivate young professionals to grow within the company, helping with retention and contributing to the continuity of ESG initiatives.

For the next generation workforce, being able to see the direct impact of their work is important beyond financial rewards like awards and bonuses.

Businesses can create opportunities for young professionals to engage in ESG projects and initiatives.

This could include creating advisory