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**THE BATTLE OF THE AFRICA  
BABY BOOMERS AND  
MILLENNIALS IN SUCCESSION  
PLANNING**

## **THE BATTLE OF THE AFRICA BABY BOOMERS AND MILLENNIALS IN SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Developing an effective succession planning system in Africa is of the essence as most employers will soon face a turnover of baby boomers in leadership positions. These baby boomer leaders and employees are almost due for retirement. The question here is, are employers prepared for this impending high employee turnover? And are millennials ready to take the baton from the boomers? It is in this light that OML Africa brings to you the battle of the baby boomers and millennials in succession planning.

### **Who are baby boomers?**

There are no formal definitions of baby boomers. Nevertheless, it is widely agreed that baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. This term emerged after World War II where the generation experienced a baby boom. This generation of baby-boom occurred as a result of a mass increase in childbirth after the war. This generation of older workers is believed to form a greater proportion of the working population worldwide.

Judging from the year which baby boomers were born, we can deduce that baby boomers will be between ages 54 years to 72 years. In other words, the youngest age of the boomers' generation are turning 50 years. The implication is that most of the baby boomers are either retired or preparing to retire from their careers hence, employers should be preparing and planning on handing over to the next generation of leaders, in this case, the millennials. It can then be inferred that the mantra for every baby boomer and most employers should be succession planning.

### **Who are Millennials?**

Millennials also referred to as Generation Y, on the other hand, are those who were born between the early 1980s to the mid-1990s and 2000s. It is generally agreed that baby boomers are mostly parents of millennials. Millennials fall between the ages of 28 years to 38 years. Contrary to baby boomers who are retiring from active service; millennials are either starting their careers or working towards the peak of their careers. This suggests that millennials are the future leaders in the workplace and will play a significant role in the future of work, as such they should be trained and coached into accepting the mantle of leadership from baby boomers through succession planning.

### **The difference between the boomers and millennials**

Whilst millennials are more prone to innovation, flexible working and are technology driven, baby boomers are more geared towards traditional ways of working and possess vast amounts of vital knowledge of the organization and its markets. In addition, the generations of baby boomers in Africa generally tend to avoid discussions pertaining to their retirement. They seem to be in a state of denial about aging and retirement and hence are not fully prepared to pass the baton to their millennial successors.

### **What is succession planning?**

Succession planning can be defined as a "systemic, long-term process of determining goals, needs, and roles within an organization and preparing individuals or employee groups for responsibilities relative to work needed within an organization" (Luna, 2012, p. 60). The concept of succession planning was developed for many reasons.

Firstly, succession planning was conceived to alleviate the negative repercussions of loss of key leaders in organizations across sectors by nurturing talents to take over key leadership positions. Consequently, it has become essential for employers to cultivate the habit of identifying and coaching potential talents for future needs.

Secondly, succession planning overtime has been used to manage the transition of talents into management positions and key roles. It is not only limited to aiding in the transfer of knowledge but also commonly used as a strategy for attracting and retaining talents in the organizations. In recent times, this theory is used by many organizations as a tool for career progression, retention and as a tool to find future successors for key roles for the future.

Furthermore, it cannot be overemphasized the need for organizations to develop more strategies for succession planning to develop potential employees fit for purpose, for sustainability, competitive edge, and business continuity.

### **The battle**

The battle between baby boomers who are reluctant to hand over to millennials is real in Africa. The HR has unwillingly been assigned the role of the referee. In Africa, succession planning is proving to be a challenge for many HR leaders. The notion of succession planning is not understood by most employees and management and when it comes to implementation there is a resistance to support the implementation. The reason for resistance is due to the belief that the talent being nurtured will take the jobs of the people doing the nurturing. The other key reason is that in Africa when people, especially in leadership, reach retirement, they are hired on contracts to continue working due to the seniority culture that exists in the environment. Here older people are seen as the ones with experience, knowledge and wisdom and not their young counterpart. This culture has transcended into the work environment. As a result, it is not in the interest of such older leaders to support succession planning.

The other issue is the concept that all roles are the same within the organization. As a result key roles that are selected for succession planning are seen as favoritism or viewed as more valued than other roles by employees including leaders. This sometimes leads to resentment towards those occupying selected key roles. HR is challenged with the problem of explaining why only some roles are selected for succession planning and getting the buy-in to support succession planning initiatives. Finally, many leaders bordering retirement fail to plan for their retirement and as a result try all means to delay their retirements, such as trying to change their date of births to enable them to carry on working past retirement, this is common in public sector organizations.



The economic challenges in Africa along with limited well paid decent jobs continue to contribute negatively on succession planning. These factors have led to a drastic delay in the retirement of baby boomers which has an impact on the employment opportunities of millennials, blocks career progression, agility, innovation, attrition, and succession implementation plans. According to the 2011 Associated Press and

LifeGoesStrong.com surveys, 42% of baby boomers are delaying retirement and 25% claim they will never retire (currently still working). The research also proves that 60% of baby boomers are positive they will live longer. In light of this, it is understandable why clearly most will resist handing over to the younger generation.

In relation to millennial, there is also an underlining argument that millennials are very difficult to manage and groom and are usually referred to as 'being of high maintenance', and 'a demanding workforce' with high job satisfaction levels. They are profoundly known and accused of not being focused, self-absorbed, and lazy with an entitlement mindset. This generation though driven by the spirit to make an impact, do not have the patience to stay and grow in their organizations as they tend to focus more on the short-term gains than long-term gains. This causes high turnover in most organizations in Africa and hence succession planning becomes very difficult to plan and implement. It usually costs the organization a lot of resources to retain the best talents as they have to continually battle with engagement and retention strategies.

A careful consideration of the above factors makes it mandatory for every employer to develop and implement a succession planning strategy.

### **The solution**

There is the need to ensure that knowledge and experience acquired over decades by the baby boomers are smoothly passed down to the aspiring millennials to ensure the continuity of productivity as well as the preservation of knowledge.

Succession planning should not be a battle but more collaboration between key stakeholders (e.g. HR, Top management, employees etc.)



to make it work. In our view, it only becomes a battle when the focus shifts from the primary aim of succession planning. To manage the issue of boomers and millennials the starting point must be from similarities, strengths, and benefits rather than from the point of differences, cons, and weaknesses. The HR leader must ensure that all employees and leaders understand the value and need for succession planning and allow them to play a role by contributing to the initial stages of the succession planning process through focus groups discussions, questionnaires, and feedbacks. When people are part of the process they are more likely to buy into the implementation.

The HR and top management must address the issue of retirement and contract extensions to retirees. We are with the view that instead of retiring leaders or employees being given a contract extension to carry on in their roles they could be given a contract extension to support and coach their successors to transition and perform. These retirees can become the trainers and advisors to the organization on flexible terms. This would allow for key roles to be filled by the younger generation (the millennials), career progression as well as the acquisition and preservation of the

knowledge of the boomers. It is clear that for the aspiring millennial to be future ready for the future of work, the baby boomers must play a role in their development in order to ensure that they succeed.



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