5 ways to move past rigid hierarchies

Not too long ago, the boss' word would be final in most organisations. However, teams increasingly work on projects where a senior consults an intern. With lines of hierarchy blurring, companies find ways to make teams work more effectively.

- ## Go Beyond Set Ways of Working

  Companies can no longer ask employees to work in a particular way because someone in the top order said so. It does not signify power of any kind. For millennials, hierarchy does not matter, says Saundarya Rajesh, president and founder of AVTAAR Career Creators and Flexicareers India.

  'They are forthright and need leadership for guidance without being bossed around,' she says.

- ## Choose an Appropriate Hierarchy

  Companies need to figure out what style of hierarchy suits them best, says Rajesh. Of late, many have been following the matrix style, wherein each employee has two sets of bosses — a direct supervisor and a mentor.

  But in some sectors, the standard hierarchy works better. 'In the healthcare industry, we need a pyramidal structure, and not a flat one. Seniority comes with practice and one cannot skip the queue,' says Umapathy Panyala, COO of Apollo Hospitals in Bangalore.

- ## Customise Rules

  Companies need to brush past any rules that bear marks of hierarchy. Coca-Cola studied its millennials in India this April and realised that many want a salary that supports their lifestyle, and not one based on hierarchy.

  FMCG firm, Marico, for the first time ever, included a small group of Gen Y members in leadership roles and is paying them close attention to iron out the tiniest crease of dissatisfaction. The company attends to the smallest things, like access to social media sites.

- **Interact with Lower Levels**

  In process-driven industries like healthcare, IT and BPO, mentorship programmes and shadowing the senior are ways in which the leadership ensures regular interaction with juniors.

  'The top brass insists on spending time on shop floors and being part of mentorship and shadow programmes so that they learn about the latest at the ground level,' says Gaurav Seth, partner at Odgers Berndtson India.

- **Create Eclectic Teams**

  Companies often form teams for projects where an intern may be paired with someone from the middle management level.

  It brings down hierarchy barriers and both parties learn from each other, adds Odgers Berndtson's Seth.