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Millennials: What They Offer Our Organizations and How Leaders Can Make Sure They Deliver

According to recent Pew research, ten thousand Baby Boomers reach age 65 every day in the United States and the pace will continue for the next 18 years; similar numbers are also reported for Canada and Europe. The effect on the workforce will be dramatic, perhaps even more dramatic than the effect they had when they arrived on the scene six decades ago. Thus, it falls not to Generation-X, as this generational cohort is too small to make a significant impact, rather the task shifts to the Millennials. Much has been said of the youngest generation currently in the workplace. The Millennials have been described as globally aware, socially inept, technologically sophisticated, needy, narcissistic, team-oriented, optimistic, lacking in work ethic, multi-tasking geniuses, ambitious, and curious. With such a wide spectrum of views this paper utilizes the popular and academic literature to provide clarity on these aspects of the Millennial Generation, focusing on their work values, and how their entrance into the workplace will impact organizational culture in the years to come. Finally, leadership approaches that will best align with their values, desires, and development will be addressed, focusing upon developing core competencies for leaders of all generations.

Introduction

Change is coming and it has little to do with globalization or technology. This change is a human one and the effects on organizational values and culture will be dramatic. Stated succinctly, the Millennials have arrived.

Public and private organizations have begun, and must continue, to address the mass exodus of experience and knowledge that is departing on a daily basis as Boomers leave the workforce in large numbers. With the focus on mitigating the loss of corporate knowledge and years of honed expertise, one significant area of emphasis that may have eluded many is the effect these departures will have on an

organization's values and culture when those who created and embody the current culture depart in such vast numbers.

Many articles provide an approach to dealing with this issue as if it were a dilemma that must be resolved as to maintain or align the current values and culture of the organization; the idea being that integrating Millennials into the cultural status quo will somehow ensure the stability and success of an organization. Creating ways to integrate and accommodate these new employees or to inject into the entire workforce additional diversity and confliction resolution training is not the answer. These approaches all deal with the situation as if the organization as it currently finds itself will always be the center of the universe. To say it a different way, the center of the universe as it concerns organizations is about to change. Therefore this article suggests the issue is not about integration; rather, it is about transition and will seek to provide some insight into what leaders can expect from Millennials as they begin to assert themselves in the years to come.

Who are the Millennials?

A generation is defined as a grouping of individuals in a society who, based upon their having matured in a given time period, experienced unique situations and events that impacted the development of their values, attitudes, and behaviors (Mujtaba, Manyak, Murphy & Sungkhawan, 2010). These situations and events include the value systems reflected in their parents, siblings, friends, teachers, as well as influences of the mass media (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Defining moments from major historical political, economic, or social events can also significantly impact the values and the resultant behaviors of the generations who experienced those events (e.g., Watergate for Baby Boomers, the events of 9/11 for Millennials). The Millennial generation is that cohort born between 1980 and 2000 whose first college graduates entered the workforce around 2002. They will continue to do so, in large numbers, until around 2022 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), thus making them the largest segment in the workforce in the near future with numerical power to take center stage and push their organizational agenda (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2011).

To some, this generation is viewed as the next "Greatest Generation" (Howe & Strauss, 2000); however, to others, they are labeled "Generation Whine" — young people who have been overindulged and protected to such an extent that they are incapable of handling the most mundane task without guidance or handholding (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Still others query the hype and remember when Generation-X was labeled with many of the same unflattering characteristics. Without avoiding assuming a definitive posture, however, the correct answer embraces all such interpretations. Thus, if all such descriptions provide an accurate answer, then what is the dilemma? Are Millennials any different than the rest of us? The answer is a definitive "yes!"

The values and behaviors that emanate from a generation are a manifestation of the interaction between parents, siblings, influential people, the media, and even the historical events that occurred during their formative years. It is the latter that truly defines Millennials. While 9/11 was certainly a significant event in their lives, it is not

the most influential and shaping factor. Rather, it is their interconnection with two current icons of the Millennial lifestyle that truly showcase their differences: cell phones and social networking (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

Digital Immersion

Millennials are not just comfortable with technology; it is an integral part of who they are. These technologies are indigenous to this generation (Tapscott, 2009). They are not just communication devices, but are a part of their psyche and demonstrate how they perceive and interact with the global landscape. The cell phone, for example — unlike the phones of previous generations — performs multiple functions. In addition to providing basic communication functions, they serve as GPS devices, game consoles, search engines, entertainment centers, calendars, cameras, or any other number of things depending upon what application is downloaded. It is easy to assume the device is a nicety for an overindulged generation; however, it is actually a productivity device they willingly utilize on their own accord.

The author recently witnessed a social gathering at a local restaurant where three couples arrived to eat dinner at what must have been a pre-prom event. As each was seated, they synchronously placed their smart phones on the table. While they conversed and ate, they simultaneously texted, updated their Facebook pages, and sent photos just taken that evening. The point is not to suggest Millennials can multi-task, have short attention spans, or simply lack fundamental manners; rather, it illustrates the perception of their surroundings and of the degree of comfort they exhibit in integrating social and other aspects of their lives. Millennials are the first generation to be in continual communication with friends and family (Welsh & Brazina, 2010), forming a virtual real-time existence with third parties while pursuing other educational and social endeavors.

Extrapolating these multi-tasking capabilities into a workplace environment may, at first glance, appear to foment productivity. However, taken to an extreme, the line between work and life has been obfuscated, resulting in the perception of a poor work ethic. Unlike previous generations, Millennials do not compartmentalize work and life; rather, they are regarded as symbiotic in nature, drawn together by advancing technologies.

Open Source Mentality

The power of the Millennial generation has emanated from the influence Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and other social media tools have had in shaping commerce, politics, education, and social structuring. A new form of communication has been created in texting — complete its own vocabulary (e.g., “Thx 4 the msg. CU L*R 2nite”) (Sujansky, 2009). Based upon their experiences, Millennials have every reason to assume that all necessary information can be gathered with the touch of a button (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). This generation regards the easy access to and usage of information as commonplace. The idea of paying for or restricting dissemination of content (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010) does not conform to their understanding of teamwork and collaboration nor does it correspond with their perceptions of fairness. There are two primary concerns or seemingly potential

negative implications of this notion of information-gathering and dissemination: cheating and safeguarding knowledge (i.e., information security).

It has been suggested by various research studies that undergraduate and graduate business students cheat more than previous generations (McCabe, 2006). However, this relates more closely with more prosaic views of information sharing than with actual behaviors typically branded “unethical.” Millennials are the first generation cohorts who do not need an authority figure or other intermediary to access information. Their primary gateway to information acquisition is the Internet (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2011). They are neither required to gain formal expertise nor defer to the recognized experts as relevant information can be easily acquired. Hence, obtaining an answer to a question from a fellow student, or deliberating upon a problem collaboratively, is not deemed unethical by this generation. Collaboration, not competition, seems to be their approach.

The idea of information sharing also triggers security concerns and the need to particularly safeguard confidential information. In a recent Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) presentation, Admiral James Stavridis offered the thesis that global security could not be accomplished by building walls. In fact, he suggested it had failed and that any chance of security would be gained through the building of bridges (Stavridis, 2012). Stavridis additionally implied that strategic, Internet-based communication efforts would be used to erect these bridges, specifically noting that Twitter would serve as an avenue for this effort. What does this mean for the acquisition, regulation, and storage of information? Research suggests that information sharing is, in essence, the more practical and ethical approach to conducting commerce and offering a clearer, more comprehensive picture of a nation to other individuals in other societies. This, in turn, creates a catalyst for dialogue between social network users. It also suggests Millennials are correct in their understanding of the appropriate and ethical use of information and knowledge in that withholding information (George, 2009) actually leads to an inability to make quality decisions and cope with the ambiguity of the global landscape: the very skills most required in today’s organizations.

Content Creation

Millennials are not satisfied with only acquiring and utilizing information; they also seek to create it through blogs, interactive media, Twitter, and other social networks. According to 2008 Pew research, 59% of all American teens create online content and 28% are likely to create a blog in their lifetime (Jones & Fox, 2009). Blogging is just one evidentiary example that Millennials are eager to capture, organize, and broadcast their thoughts, opinions, and experiences (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). This tendency toward widespread dissemination of opinions may be consistent with a population that psychologist Jean Twenge refers to as “Generation Me”: individuals who are characterized as more ambitious, assertive, and even narcissistic than previous generations (Twenge, 2009).

Superficially, this may be an alarming revelation though it must be remembered that this generation grew up during a time when children were, and perhaps are still, considered the center of the universe. Millennials share a much closer relationship

with their parents who are involved in almost all aspects of their children's lives. Additionally, communication channels between the two generations are kept more open than ever before (Corvi, Bigi & Ng, 2007). This special attention received from parents, teachers, and others suggests that they do not view older workers with enmity and will be able to forge positive relationships with co-workers (Sujansky, 2009). Combined with these insights and research garnered in the US, Europe, and other regions, Millennial values, as characterized by Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy (2009), as they relate to the work attributes (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2011) are summarized as follows:

Table 1: Millennial Values as Translated to the Workplace

Value	Translated to the Workplace
Family Security	Baseline Requirement
Health	Work-Life Balance
Freedom	Self-Expression
Honest	Informality and simplicity is seen as real – suit and tie is seen as pretentious and masking reality. Come as you are mentality
Responsible	Achievement Oriented
True Friendship	Work-Life Balance - networking approach to friendship
Independent	Seek Attention
Self-Respect	Seek Meaning from Work – Even at the Entry Level
Ambitious	Want to be Rewarded (Sometimes just for showing up)

It must be noted that many of these values — family, security, health, honesty, and being responsible are also very important to Millennials in many countries of the world, thereby signifying a convergence of global Millennial values. How these values are ultimately expressed in the workplace will ostensibly be affected, influenced by, and perhaps even create, an organization's culture.

Organizational Culture Perspective

Organizational culture has been defined as the core values, behavioral norms, and behavioral patterns which govern the ways people in an organization interact with each other and invest energy in their jobs and throughout the organization proper. Furthermore, the concept of organizational culture refers to how its members interpret and understand their work-related experiences and how these interpretations and understandings are related to action (Van Muijen, et al., 1999). While organizational culture can be perceived at the collective level, it is often measured as the result of the individual perceptions of its workers. In this latter

approach, the literature distinguishes between perceptions of existing or current culture and the desired or future organizational culture (Hooijberg, 1993). It is this distinction between current and desired organizational culture that makes it possible to capture the perceived need for collective change. Also, the concept of desired organizational culture refers to the idea that (groups of) employees may hold different notions about the direction in which the organization should develop in the future (Platteau, Molenveld, Demuzere & Hondeghe, 2011).

Competing Values Framework

Perhaps the best way to highlight how each value might be interpreted in an organizational culture context is to provide a schematic of the competing values framework as developed by Cameron & Quinn:

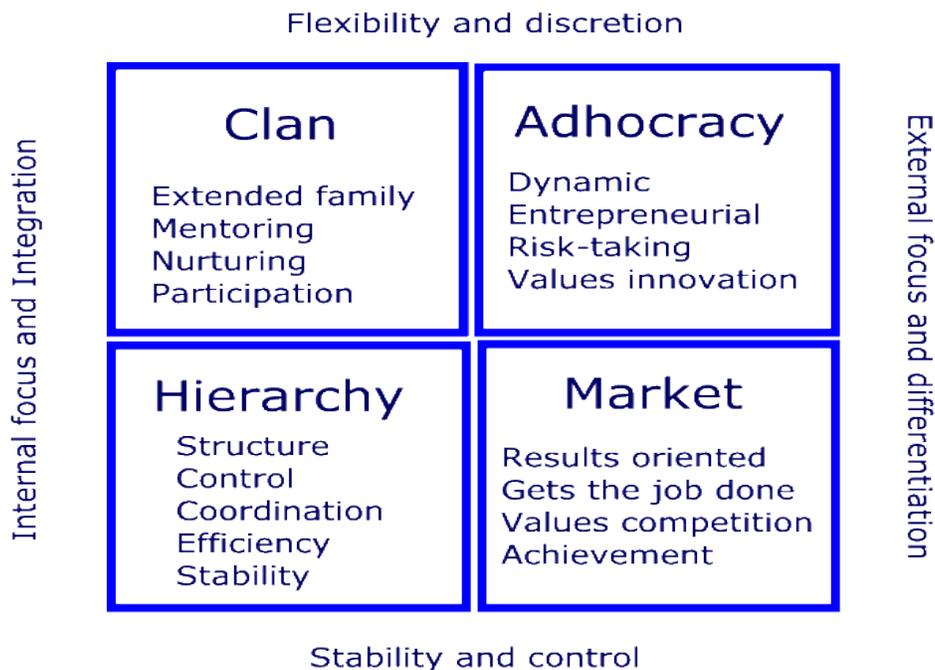


Figure #1. Schematic of the Competing Values Framework, (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).

Starting in their earliest years, U.S. Millennials were revered, sheltered, and protected by a nation with Boomers at the helm, who seemed to be suddenly aware that home and school had failed Generation X (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Even the federal government took a more active role in ensuring that vehicles, products, homes, schools, and even the airwaves were safe zones for them (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Thus, Millennials have an inherent trust in organizations and a strong preference for the structures and systems that support them. Research shows they are more confident in businesses, financial institutions, and governmental agencies than previous generations were at the same age (Levine, Flanagan & Gailey). It was also noted they prefer a structured environment with clear rules (Epstein, nd) which seems to be contradictory to their espoused value of unrepressed self-expression. Surprisingly, this suggests this generation would be comfortable in a hierarchical organization despite the apparent contradiction.

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Millennials are also accustomed to being monitored and mentored by their parents. Therefore, it seems likely they will continue to desire attention and activity feedback (Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy, 2009). This would seem to coincide with an internally-focused clan culture that emphasizes employee development and regards leaders as mentors or even parental figures.

While the initial evidence suggests that internally-oriented cultures would be preferable for Millennials, there is still the matter of two external values that must be addressed: ambition and developing friendships. Close companionship and friendship are quite important for Millennials and thus, they are repulsed by a 50-60 hour workweek as experienced by previous generations. Instead, they would rather spend more time with family and friends (Twenge, 2006). Since Millennials desire close relationships, an organizational culture emphasizing teamwork and collaboration with an eye towards external innovation would satisfy both their ambitious and team-oriented nature. Thus, if they spend time with their friends at work, then they might feel wholly privy to that organization's culture. This suggests that an adhocracy culture emphasizing innovation through team-oriented activities might be a solid fit for this generation.

Ostensibly, there are mitigating factors to consider. Dominant cultures can influence the normative inclinations of any generation. The military culture of teamwork, for example, has developed through a definitive chain of command (Gerras, Wong & Allen, 2008). While Millennials would most likely be very comfortable with the teamwork aspect of this culture, the reliance on rules and regulations may prove too restrictive. The value(s) prized most would lead them to either remain with the organization or perhaps seek an alternative setting more harmonious with their core values. Specific types of careers might also mitigate generational differences in regard to values development. In a recent study, skilled construction workers in the U.S. were shown to experience little meaningful differences in their work ethic or job values across generational lines. It was surmised that many of these skilled workers had been socialized into these trades and that being a member of one of these groups created similar values and beliefs regardless of age (Real, Mitnick & Maloney, 2010). Realistically, there is no infallible way to predict the perfect organizational culture that might best fit the Millennial generation. However, this article has provided a linkage between many of their most sacred values with a specific type of organizational culture. Armed with this information, leaders can create environments that will facilitate the best possible performance from all employees.

Leadership Implications

What might leaders today offer the new generation entering the workforce? How can we ensure their success? Millennials are motivated by accomplishment, independence, close companionship (Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy, 2009), and a desire to be respected. Such characteristics imply Millennials like to be in charge and are comfortable working alone or in teams, especially if the opportunity exists to develop closer relationships with their co-workers (Greenwood, Gibson & Murphy, 2009). Millennials want their jobs to have meaning and to have a chance for promotions. In essence, they want the responsibility and experience now, not later.

Leaders can achieve these needs by developing ways to make each job more relevant to the goals of the Millennial as well as to the organization by offering this generation verifiable career opportunities. As previously noted, they are very adept at gathering information and acquiring knowledge. What they need is guidance in how to interpret this information so it can become a useful product. Therefore, a mentoring approach will serve this generation well as it allows leaders to provide instruction and guidance while concomitantly offering wisdom and commitment to skill development (Chou, 2012). Most importantly, such mentors would be provided the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with them. Given the relational aspect of leadership as desired by Millennials, it is probably useful to see how this generation might reciprocate in their role as followers.

Millennial as Follower

Two models of followership suggest that exemplary protégés play a crucial role in determining organizational success because they are independent, willing to take responsibility, innovative, and willing to question leadership (Kelley, 1992). Furthermore, quality followers work well with others and are always available to those who interact with them (Bjugsad, Thach, Thompson & Morris, 2006). Given that Millennials favor working in groups (Alsop, 2008), one can expect that Millennials would demonstrate many of the characteristics of exemplary cohorts in the workplace. Of course, it will be incumbent upon leaders to be ready for such a dynamic follower. Table 2 depicts specific leader responses to each of the values as identified by Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy (2009) as vital to this generation in the workplace (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2011; Simons, 1999 & Wilson, 2009).

Table 2: Millennial Values as Translated to the Workplace w/Leader Response

Value	Translated to the Workplace	Leader Response
Family Security	Baseline Requirement	Caring
Health	Work-Life Balance	Flexing
Freedom	Self-Expression	Cultivating
Honesty	Informality and simplicity is seen as real — suit and tie is seen as pretentious and masking reality. Come as you are mentality	Behavioral Integrity (actually doing what you say you will do)
Responsible	Achievement Oriented	Requests for their Input
True Friendship	Work-Life Balance — networking approach to friendship	Mentorship, Open Communication
Independent	Seek Attention	Understand they will be on Social Media Sites
Self-Respect	Seek Meaning from Work — Even at the Entry Level	Engaging, Relevant Work
Ambitious	Want to be Rewarded (Sometimes just for showing up)	Opportunities for Challenges and Increased Responsibility

A leader's effectiveness is greatly influenced by the follower's permission (DePree, 1992) and since Millennials tend to demonstrate high levels of self-esteem, assertiveness, and confidence in their abilities (Twenge, & Campbell, 2001), a delegating leadership style should be utilized. In this manner, Millennials can experience high levels of responsibility, meaningfulness, and personal fulfillment in their jobs. With this degree of responsibility, however, mistakes will be made and since Millennials are not accustomed to criticism due to the nature of their upbringing by parents and teachers, the tough leadership approach of old will not work. One method of providing negative feedback to this generation is to be informal; avoid bringing a lot of attention to the matter, assure the individual the relationship you have with them is solid, and then offer a positive forecast (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2011). While there is no perfect culture, this article suggests that an environment that rewards leaders for collaborating, sharing information, explaining decisions, discussing issues openly, and showing concern (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard & Werner, 1998) for followers will create the best possible fit for Millennials and perhaps, a trusting and ethical organization will result.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the popular and academic literature, this article addressed the effect of the mass exodus of Baby Boomers from the workforce and the realization that the Millennial generation, not Generation X, will have to fill the void. As Millennials were brought up on technology, they have every reason to assume that all necessary information can be gathered instantaneously. Millennials are not satisfied with only acquiring and utilizing information; they seek to create it through blogs, interactive media, Twitter, and other social networks. Leaders must be aware that their concept of information gathering is one of sharing — not restricting — access. Hence, cultural modifications may be warranted and matters of confidentiality and privacy protection are likely to surface.

Unlike previous generations, Millennials have an inherent trust in organizations and a strong preference for the structures and systems that support them. This suggests they prefer the internally-structured environments that are equipped with clear rules most often associated with a hierarchical structure. However, they also prefer a culture focused on employee development and close relationships. When seeking an externally-centered culture, they do well in adhocracy cultures that emphasize innovation through team-oriented activities. Although there is no real way to predict the perfect organizational culture that might best fit the Millennial generation, this article has provided a linkage between an organization with many of their most sacred values: health, freedom, responsibility, self-respect, work-life integration, family security, honesty, true friendship, and independence, with a specific type of organizational culture. Because Millennials are motivated by accomplishment, independence, close companionship, and a desire to be treated with respect, a mentoring approach to leadership that emphasizes a trusting reciprocal relationship will serve this generation well. In addition, delegation of employment-related duties should be utilized so Millennials can experience high levels of responsibility, meaningfulness, and a sense of personal fulfillment.

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