

Generations at Work: A Review of Generational Traits and Motivational Practices Impacting Millennial Employees

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Subject: Human Resource Management

Article Type: Editorially-Reviewed Journal Article

ABSTRACT

There are currently five generations operating in today's workforce, yet only one that is causing a disturbance amongst traditional managerial practices: Millennials. Commonly referred to as Generation Y, Millennials are generally representative of those persons born between 1985 and 1999 (Alsop, 2008). Growing up in the technology bubble and experiencing unique cultural events has greatly impacted the perception of work, motivation, and satisfaction for this generation compared to their counterparts from former eras. The paradigm shift surrounding Millennial motivation in the workplace leaves employers presuming the generation is entitled, selfish, and disloyal. This paper seeks to refute and add context to those assumptions, highlight shared tendencies and habits, examine the motivational theories applicable to Millennials, and offer practical recommendations for managers to create a culture cultivating exemplary employee performance and desired outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Due to older workers tending to stay in the workplace rather than retiring (Kooji et al., 2008), we are currently living in a rather unique time where potentially five different generations strive to work together within organizations. These generations are characterized by differences in life experiences which have shaped their difference in workplace attitudes (Twenge & Campbell, 2013). These generational differences are noted for creating conflict within organizations when one generation of workers often find it difficult to relate to another generation (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Thus, managers must learn how to navigate these generational differences to create harmony in the workplace while seeking to capitalize on the diversity therein.

One of the frequently analyzed generational groups at work is the Millennial generation, currently the largest generation in the labor force (Fry, 2016). Nearly a decade ago, researchers labeled Generation Y as the “Look at Me” generation for their perceived self-absorbing tendencies in the workplace (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). At a time when Millennials only represented 15% of the U.S. labor force, managers lamented that the now largest generation lacked the core competencies of their predecessors (Bannon et al., 2011). The most common of these traits included employer loyalty, patience, communication, and discretion. Yet, recognizing the impact of technological advances (i.e. the internet, social media, social networking, cell phones, etc.) and series of cultural events (i.e. terrorist attacks, school shootings, the rising cost of college tuition, the 2008 economic recession, etc.), this article seeks to explain Millennial attitudes from a different perspective. Rather than dissect the vast differences between the work ethics spanning across the five generations in the workplace, managers should seek to understand the change in workplace desires and applicant skills while creating a culture that promotes common ground, welcomes diversity, and fosters achievement.

It is important that managers consider empirical data, surveys, and/or popular literature geared at understanding the desires of Millennials, rather than assuming unproven truths. Additionally managers must (1) define the various groups within their organization, (2) understand the global issues impacting the lives of Generation Y that affects their world view, (3) recognize the pervasive influence technology has yielded on the entire culture, (4) understand the motivational forces driving tomorrow’s leaders, (5) identify the high performers within the organization whose skills yield desired outcomes, (6) create developmental opportunities for advancement and mentorship by incorporating members from each generation, and (7) appropriately reward and provide feedback on a systematic basis.

Supporting literary work indicates that “different, often broader, perspectives” presented by Millennials should drive other generations to interact and encourage, rather than criticize (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p.235). Not only are Millennials in the organization, but the generation has strong views regarding topics such as education, philanthropic endeavors, work life balance, and more. The purpose of this paper is to inform the reader of the differentiating work behaviors and assumptions of each generation, present the motivational theories applicable to Millennials, and deliver a resource to managers that helps achieve a work environment supportive of Millennial contribution and organizational success.

DEFINING THE GENERATIONS

To better understand the Millennial generation, it is imperative to define all the generations entering and phasing out in the workplace. These parameters not only aid in categorizing the assumptions presented, but also help define the distinct differences between them. Additionally, each generation presents various challenges and achievements that can promote elements of collaboration.

Generation Y

b. 1980 to 2001

Preceding the iGeneration are the over 80 million individuals representing the Millennials (Taylor, 2014). Categorized as “The Trophy Kids,” “Generation Me,” “The Net Generation,” and “Generation Y,” Millennials began disrupting norms within the workplace as early as the late 1990’s. Categorized as those persons born between 1980 and 2001, this group possesses positive traits such as the ability to multi task, desire for team orientation, the connection to community duties, and optimism (Alsop, 2008). Acting as the social butterflies of the office, additional research also labeled the group as “talented,” “well-educated,” and “achievement-oriented” (Raines, 2002). On the contrary, a number of studies categorized Millennials as an entitled generation that lacks experience, sweat equity, and the desire to sustain a lengthy career at any company. Additionally, Millennials are perceived as inexperienced individuals with high expectations of receiving immediate rewards of titles and privileges that were not earned (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010).

Managers must recognize that Millennials are also extremely shrewd with technology, but unlike Generation Z, members associated with this age group can remember life prior to the existence of technology. According to the November 2011 issue of the CPA Journal, “[Millennials] are the first generation to experience only a post digital and globalizing world” with 83% of them keeping their cell phones in their presence 24 hours per day (Bannon et al., 2011).

Whereas Generation Z bears the residual effects of some key historical events, it was the Millennial Generation who witnessed and experienced those same events in real time, impacting their view of work ethic and workplace assumptions (Weston, 2001). Marla Weston coins the cross referencing of events between two generations as a “generational cohort,” which she describes as persons born “in the same generational time span who share key life experience” (Weston, 2001, p.1). This is the case for the primary events which have shaped ideas for Millennials, Generation Z, and Baby Boomers.

Additional research notes that some key events impacting the viewpoint of Millennials include the 2001 Enron corporate scandal, school shootings (e.g. Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook), the September 11th terrorist attacks and subsequent war on terrorism, the 2008 economic recession, and more (Alsop 2008). Research investigating cultural values and career goals of Millennials in the United States and Malaysia, Ismail and Lu (2014) concluded that Millennials do not see their career in employment as linear, but rather as “boundary less, variable and self-directed” (Ismail & Lu, 2014, p.2). In their book, *The M-Factor*, Lancaster and Stillman surveyed various generations for a year, using the collected data and dialogue as the foundation for their book. One of the interviewees noted that his experience growing up as a Millennial included an array of extracurricular activities coinciding with a rigorous education, testing, and rewards for his effort. Therefore, the assumption was drawn that as long as an individual applies themselves, there will always options afforded to them. This same premise of expecting options in return for effort was taken into the workplace. Yet, many options for employment were stripped from Millennials during the 2008 economic recession, a time when the unemployment rate reached an all-time high for people amongst this age group (Lancaster & Stillman, 2010).

Millennials are also the generation that seek an overwhelming support and review from their superiors (Thompson & Gregory, 2002). Research indicates that as Baby Boomer grandparents and Generation X parents raised Millennials, they increasingly bestowed achievements for participation rather than traditional merit-based awards and promoted collaboration instead of competition. With phrases such as, “We’re all winners” and trophies delivered to all participating

teams in recreational sports rather than just the winning teams, Millennials grew up with what some employers deem as a sense of entitlement.

Many argue the idea of exchanging positive feedback for satisfactory work performance has moved past the household and trickled into expectations of Millennials in the workplace who request immediate and constant recognition from their superiors. Defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, "entitlement" is the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment (Merriam - Webster, 2017), entitlement can manifest itself with the following phrases: (1) "Millennials have the guts or gall to ask, (2) Millennials expect perks or praise before they've earned it, (3) Millennials come off as spoiled, (4) Millennials appear too big for their own britches, (5) Millennials ignore the hierarchy" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2010, p. 51).

Defending the issue of whether Millennials are entitled is subjective, but rather this paper explores the climate surrounding the perceived entitlement amongst this group that has attributed to their perceived attitudes. The idea that one can be successful in the workplace and quickly climb the corporate ladder is a resulting premise garnered from the Millennials' upbringing; it is the generation's norm and the negative context of it is arbitrary at best. For example, a Millennial's seemingly high level of self-confidence can also be interpreted as entitlement, yet their upbringing fostered positive attitudes and views on self-worth. Managers should seek to understand that Millennials did not grow up in the society of their forefathers who echoed the sentiments, "Just be grateful to have your job." These high achieving, degree toting Millennials recognize that even a college education cannot secure a financial future and anyone can fall victim to economic recessions and depressions. Because of this, they choose to remain hopeful, confident, and in pursuit of the work-life balance they desire (Bell & Narz, 2007).

Generation X *b. 1965-1979*

With synonyms such as the "Busters," "Baby Bust," and the "Lost Generation," the smallest of the generational cohorts is commonly referred to as Generation X or Gen Xers (Bell & Narz, 2007). Known for being self-reliant, this generation lived through the AIDS epidemic, Oklahoma City bombing, and former President Bill Clinton's extra marital affair with Monica Lewinsky (Alsop, 2008). Ironically, research indicates that Generation Xers carry similar traits they assumingly label on their children of the Millennial generation. Coined with the term "latchkey children," members in this era were often left alone at home while their parents of the Baby Boomer era worked long hours at their jobs. Subsequently, members within this generation are known to possess traits of authority, self-reliance, and have even been referred to as pessimistic and demanding in the workplace. According to a recent study entitled *Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace*, Generation Xers are known to "question authority" and were "exposed to daycare and divorce" (Clark, 2017).

Although a highly independent generation, family values played an important role. A 2007 study of the 53 million domestic Gen Xers showcased that a majority of these individuals place family first, while 30% battled between balancing family and work (Bell & Narz, 2007). Known for entering their jobs with a tenacious work ethic, Generation Xers are not afraid to work for their employers, although they do not fully trust them. Their drive allows them to be successful and quickly adapt to changes in technology while obtaining the employer metrics (i.e. status, promotion, raises, etc.) that lead to the comfortable lifestyle they desire.

Baby Boomers

b. 1946-1964

Impacted by world events such as the War on Vietnam and NASA's landing on the moon, Baby Boomers (also referred to as "Boomers") represent those persons born in an era when domestic and international affairs were budding. Baby Boomers grew up in a world filled with protests, the invention of the television, and the "make love, not war" hippie movement (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Boomers entered the workforce with an increased role for both male and female workers. Sources indicate this workforce was very competitive, valuing the work titles and corner offices. Additionally, the title "workaholic" is traditionally attributed to this cohort as they rendered their unwavering loyalty to their employers (a residual trait handed down from the Traditionalists) and presented a high correlation between their job and personal identity (Alsop, 2008). Although Millennials surpassed this age group as the largest generation, there are various similarities between the cohorts, such as the climate of the country when entering the workplace, and the attitudes between the two.

Research indicates that while Millennials are referred to as the "Look At Me" generation, Boomers represent the "Me Generation" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Baby Boomers challenged workplace authority, reevaluated organizational hierarchies and were highly competitive amongst their constituents. Like Millennials, they desired more communication than Traditionalists were often willing to offer but respected their mentorship opportunities and knowledge rendered. Thus, they appreciated growth and development.

Working side by side with Millennial counterparts in today's environment has presented various challenges as the generation ages and concerns continue to grow in regard to their retirement benefits and increasing age (Taylor, 2014). However, this era still represents as a sizable force within the workplace and renders to Millennials a balance of confidence and consciousness.

Traditionalists

b. 1925-1945

The beginning of the workplace eras started with the Traditionalists. Supportive literary work is overwhelming regarding the reputation of this generation. Impacted by significant historic happenings including World War II, The Cold War, the genesis of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Great Depression, this generation is often depicted as extremely conservative. Known as "The Silent Generation," members are highly respectful of authority and adamant concerning their political views (Alsop, 2008). Ironically, their political views and discomfort with the government are topics they are very comfortable discussing and often intertwine their opinions regarding the White House with out-of-date views of racism and sexism (Taylor, 2014). In the workplace, Traditionalists are referred to as dependable, loyal and solid workers. Troubled by change, many are retiring alongside their status quo opinions.

MOTIVATION THEORIES

The differentiating traits among the generations provide plenty of opportunities for discord among the five cohorts. Various cultural, social, financial, work-life balance, and educational beliefs coupled with the upbringing of each preceding generation provides a breeding ground for integration difficulties – especially for Millennials. Rather than focus on merely the differences and difficulties Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Generation Xers face when managing Generation Y (and soon Generation Z), this paper showcases how the application of three motivational

theories can aid in creating common ground among the cohorts and maximizing the potential of Millennial workers. Research indicates that 90% of high potential Millennials expect to leave their current employer within 5 years of hiring (Deering, 2016). Once management recognizes these individuals, they must quickly work to create opportunities for them and a culture where they can thrive. Placing these motivational theories into practice will aid in knowing what motivates these high performers to stay or leave their current employer and better position the corporation to function with or without their predicted departure.

Expectancy Theory of Motivation

The Expectancy Theory is a process theory of motivation that expresses the belief that the behaviors of individuals are predicated upon the probability that they will yield a desired reward – often tangible or external (Isaac, Zerbe, & Pit, 2001). Developed by Victor Vroom in the mid 1960s, the theory can be used to explain a variety of workplace behaviors surrounding job satisfaction, employee decision making and motivation (Vroom, 1964). Vroom's research has been cited and proven countless times and the theory continues to serve as a base within teachings of leadership, organizational behavior, workplace compensation, and other particular disciplines (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Vroom's introduction of the Valence - Instrumentality - Expectancy Model became the basis of the theory with each component represented by the following definitions (Vroom, 1964):

Valence: Strength of a person's preference for a distinct outcome or a reward

Instrumentality: The perceived relationship between performance and rewards ($P \rightarrow O$)

Expectancy: The perceived relationship between effort and performance ($E \rightarrow P$)

The theory suggests that individuals become motivated when they believe their effort is valued, desired, or warrants a specific outcome. This is imperative for managers to note when recruiting, hiring, and training individuals – especially across generations (Isaac, Zerbe, and Pit, 2001). As leaders understand the relationship between value expected and effort expended, they can better assist their employees in yielding optimal results for the organization, establishing and growing trust between the employees and the employer, and ensure that clarity of expectations are depicted from both parties (Isaac, Zerbe, & Pit, 2001).

Case studies indicate that top management feels the Millennial generation desires to obtain the corner office without expending the necessary time and effort deemed worthy of a promotion. Typically Millennials are characterized by the question, "What's in it for me?" (Purvis, Zagencyk, & McCray, 2015). In actuality, much empirical research indicates that Millennials ultimately desire to contribute to meaningful work (rather than mundane check lists), flexible schedules, and create "parallel careers." This differs in comparison to the former generations who sought to "build a legacy (Traditionalists), build a stellar career (Baby Boomers), and build a portable career (Generation Xers)" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003, p. 54). Applying Vroom's Expectancy Theory to Generation Y and Generation Z alone can help bridge the gap between generational perceptions and different workplace desires.

In order for the Expectancy Theory to be implemented, two beliefs must be operating: (1) the individual must believe their performance yields a reward and (2) the reward is something that is deemed desirable or valuable to the individual (Purvis, Zagencyk, & McCray, 2015). Finding common ground between the elements of effort, performance, and outcomes allows managers (Gen X, Baby Boomers, Traditionalists) to help the individuals (Millennials and Gen Z) reshape the thoughts associated with their expectancy (their belief that effort will lead to performance) and

instrumentality (their belief that performance will lead to a given outcome). This is completed by determining if individuals are equipped to handle a task, appropriately assigning a challenging task, establishing trust, evaluating fairness, and delivering upon what is promised in the outcomes (Isaac, Zerbe, & Pit, 2001). In essence, a reward system that is conducive to the model behavior is created, and employee/employer expectations amidst all generations become aligned.

Managers must also understand that all people, not just the younger generations, desire to maximize the good (pleasure) and minimize the bad (pain) both personally and professionally (Kilduff & Baker, 2017). All generations must trust in the performance and desire the outcome. If there is disconnect within either belief, the Expectancy Theory suggests that motivation will not be present. It is up to managers to obtain a clear understanding of what their new hires deem as desirable, valuable, and worthy of the ideal behavior and how the behavior of other generations support the accomplishment of those desires. This can be completed within the hiring process, 30-60-90 day evaluations, and creating a method of open feedback that sincerely values the contribution of new hires by meeting with new hires on a frequent basis to assure the new employees that they are performing in a manner that is expected of them. Even if correction is needed, employees would have a chance to alter their behavior before poor performance becomes routine.

Trichotomy of Needs Theory of Motivation

Another theory applicable to various generations in the work place is McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs Theory (also depicted as the Three Needs Theory of Motivation). Created by David McClelland and his associates, the theory is based upon over four decades of experimentation and research creating measurements of needs and drawing significant correlations between needs, motives, behaviors, motivation, and emotions (McClelland, 1985). As the basis of the theory, McClelland proposes that an individual's workplace behavior is motivated by three needs: the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power (Harrell & Stahl, 1984). Additional research concludes that these needs are learned, desire to be satisfied, and can impact the individual's personality (Royle & Hall, 2012).

This theory is a useful tool for managers to know and to incorporate into their current hiring, onboarding, and evaluation processes due to the various cultural frameworks each generation brings to the office. Depending on the type of employee and which need they desire to fulfill, managers can identify and accurately place them into positions that yield job satisfaction (Harrell & Stahl, 1984). Characteristics of each need are expressed in the following definitions (McClelland, 1985):

Need for Achievement: Desire to excel and succeed in the workplace (nAch)

Need for Affiliation: Desire interpersonal relationships in the workplace (nAff)

Need for Power: Desire to influence the behavior of others in the workplace (nPow)

Members within each generation can desire to fulfill multiple needs, yet certain behaviors tend to reflect certain needs. For example, the need for achievement focuses on individuals accomplishing tasks, receiving clear feedback for their contributions, applying innovative solutions to problem solving, and being future oriented. The person with this need also believes that accomplishments can be obtained with individual contribution. Kilduff & Baker (2017) conclude that these individuals only represent 10% of the population and may be difficult to identify through standard recruiting and selection practices. Nevertheless, there are some unique identifiers that managers can use to help select them.

These individuals are extremely talented, can produce high levels of work quickly and accurately, and act as intrapreneurs. *Intrapreneurs* focuses on individuals who act like entrepreneurs while in large corporations. These people are solution oriented *calculated risk takers* who naturally lack the organizational structure to create their own business, but can maximize the desired outcomes for corporations (Pinchot, 1985).

Both the Baby Boomers (the Me Generation) and Millennials (the Look at Me Generation) carry traits of high performers within their generational habits. Rather than competing against each other, managers can use this parallel behavior to their advantage. Once identifying the high-achievers from the generations preceding Millennials, managers can equip them to groom, empower and mentor high performers from Generation Y and Z. Knowing that individuals with the need for achievement desire clear and concise feedback, and some Millennials desire feedback almost instantaneously due to frequent interactions with social media (Anandarajan et al., 2010), subordinates and superiors can use each other's strengths to contribute to the overall success and create a culture where achievements can be realized and quantified in metrics such as sales goals, personnel retention, audience growth, etc. This can be done with electronic feedback in the form of performance metrics visible on real-time dashboards where such data is visually displayed and accessible via the company intranet (Denton, 2012). This data can be aggregated to group level performance data in team-oriented environments or displayed privately to individual employees, so they can keep track of their own performance.

Those with the need for affiliation desire to foster sociable relationships in the workplace with others including superiors, subordinates, and co-workers. Research suggests that those who desire to have platonic and meaningful interpersonal relationships in the workplace also experience cognitive dissonance when placed in leadership positions and have to reprimand others (Harrell and Stahl, 1984). The need for affiliation can also be applied to the Millennial generation and Generation Z, who are constantly tethered to the world in the form of smart phones and internet connections. According to the article *Generation Me and The Changing World of Work*, Millennials desire to work with superiors on a relational level, rather than act as "passive subordinates", and desire managers that appreciate their ideas and capabilities (Twenge & Campbell, 2013, p. 28). In the early years of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, and Gen Xers, there always appeared to be a distinction between work and home, especially in the form of relationships. However, Millennial tools such as social media and technology have created a norm around 24-hour accessibility, undoubtedly helping others to fulfill their need for affiliation. By the mere click of a button, managers can be connected to the personal lives of subordinates and vice versa. If managers identify those with the need for affiliation, it is imperative they are paired with someone who can make others feel included and part of the particular group. This can be done through establishing mentoring programs where new employees are paired with other employees that have more tenure with the organization.

The need for power describes the desire of individuals to not only be influential, but also lead others to act based upon their recommendations or input (Royle & Hall, 2012). Unlike the other two needs, this need can be complicated based upon the motive of the individual and yield a positive or negative result. Sources indicate the need for power and desire to have influence upon the behavior of others might be perceived by others as aggressive - even having a negative connotation associated with the word. Exhibiting chronic anger and harboring the fear of being perceived as weak are also traits of individuals who possess an extreme need for power, and overall the need may not still be perceived as one that is socially desirable by younger generations (Frieze & Boneva, 2001). However, the need for power is also linked to the desire to obtain a leadership status and deliver the necessary effort that is needed to obtain it (Harrell & Stahl, 1984). Based upon the traits of generations, one could attribute this power need to the Gen

Xer's, Baby Boomers, and Traditionalists who (in comparison to Millennials) thrive upon structured chains of commands and organizational ladders. To capitalize on the positive aspects of high need for power individuals, managers should seek to ensure that the need for power is not one that is desired merely to *manipulate* others but utilized more to *direct* others in the organization to achieve organizational objectives. By identifying employees that have a high need for power, managers can place those individuals in leadership roles while remaining diligent to keeping their power in check so it is not misused. This requires open communication between the high need for power employee's coworkers and higher level management, so that coworkers can report any potentially detrimental behavior.

Although Millennials prefer a teamwork atmosphere rather than a leadership approach, managers can identify those who exhibit the need for power and encourage them to use their influence for the good of the organization, train them for a future leadership position, and ensure balance between the team orientation they desire and their need fulfillment.

Equity Theory of Motivation

Developed by Psychologist J. Stacy Adams, the Equity Theory of Motivation encompasses the idea that fairness in terms of the ratio of inputs, outputs, and results is comparative to others, such as one's neighbor, co-worker, or friend (Kilduff & Baker, 2017). Inputs are items the employee gives in the employment relationship and can be represented as effort, time, money, work ethic, personal sacrifice, etc. Outputs are the items the employee receives from their employer in exchange for their inputs such as pay, bonuses, vacation time, praise, and others (Kandpal, 2015). Adams resolved that the ultimate goals of employees is to have their own ratio of inputs and outputs equal to that of other referent coworkers. (Adams, 1965) He also proposed that previous theories of relative deprivation and distributive justice could be utilized to examine how workers view inequity (rather than injustice) in the workplace (Adams, 1965). If individuals deem the results in comparison to their neighbor as inequitable, they experience tension or distress and are motivated or demotivated to act in an effort to alleviate that feeling (Husman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Inequity can appear in the form of overreward (positive) inequity or underreward (negative) inequity (Kilduff & Baker, 2017). In the case of overreward inequity, the individual perceives they are granted more outputs than their inputs warrant in comparison to their neighbor. Contrarily, underreward inequity results when the individuals perceive they are receiving less output per input in comparison to their neighbor's output per input.

Consider the following fictional scenario as an example to depict Equity Theory: Ms. Smith, the department store manager works 40 hours each week and yields \$50,000 annually while Johnny, the part-time cashier works 20 hours each week and yields \$25,000 annually. Both Ms. Smith and Johnny would deem that to be equitable. Ms. Smith's input in the form of time and critical thinking would be provable in her results. If all other circumstances remained equal, but Johnny received \$50,000 instead of \$25,000, Ms. Smith would experience negative inequity prompting feelings such as anger, and Johnny would experience positive inequity also resulting in tension in the form of guilt, pride, or overconfidence (Kandpal, 2015).

Some critique Adam's Equity Theory stating that it is unilateral, does not take into consideration any other factors outside of merit such as processes and procedures, and that it "tends to exaggerate the importance of fairness in social relationships" (Leventhal, 1980, p.28). Others resolve that Adams' theory affects various groups in different ways depending on their view of inequitable treatment, which can be impacted with both psychological and demographical factors, and results in a new outlook on the theory itself labeled as The Equity Sensitivity Construct (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Developed by Huseman, Hatfield & Miles in the late 1980s,

the Equity Sensitivity Construct reveals that individuals differ in terms of the type of equity they prefer. Individuals are categorized into the following three categories: Equity Sensitives (prefer equity ratio to be equal), Benevolents (prefer negative equity), and Entitleds (prefer positive equity) (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). For the purpose of this paper, we will only focus on the group which closely represent the perceived characteristics as the Millennial generation: The Entitleds. The Entitleds are labeled as “getters” and only experience distress when they do not receive “a better deal” than their coworker (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Additionally, Entitleds feel they deserve the outcomes they receive and do not feel the need to offer an exchange in return.

Gen Xers, Baby Boomers, and Traditionalists assume that Millennials are entitled due to their desire for outcomes traditionally associated with high level inputs (i.e. paid time off, raises, bonuses, etc.). However, those individuals must look through the lens of the Millennials currently entering and operating in the workplace. According to recent surveys, an overwhelming 44% of college graduates believe that they are underemployed in their jobs (Deering, 2016). As perhaps a result of feeling they are underemployed, 71% of Millennials report being either not engaged or “actively disengaged” at work, making them the least engaged generation in the workplace (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). However, Millennials have more education than the generations that preceded them (Raphelson, 2014) and have also been noted to have the global mindset that companies desire (Ernst & Wyborny, 2014), which might explain some of the underlying reasoning behind Millennials feeling that they have good reason to feel entitled and also why organizations may have good reason to hire them.

Being cognizant of both the facts and the assumptions, we resolve that all generations must understand the interpretation of equity and inequity has changed with advances in technology, education, and world experiences that impact the younger generation. However, Millennials may lack the on the job experience necessary to receive the outcomes they desire such promotions, paid time off, and recognition. Yet, if specific on the job experience and tenure are the only two factors impeding the rewarding of outcomes, managers must evaluate the merits and create a systematic opportunity for Millennials and surrounding generations to view inputs and outputs as equitable by assisting new Millennial employees with finding developmental opportunities to gain the experience needed to be successful. In order to reduce immediate perceptions of underemployment and inequity, managers can define a career path for new employees so they will know that as skills are developed, they can progress up through the organization.

CONCLUSION

All generations are not created equal and Millennials alone are not to blame for the changes within the workplace environment. On the contrary, both Gen Y and Gen Z possess traits the Gen Xers, Baby Boomers, and Traditionalists also have. However, education, technology, cultural events, and social constructs have rapidly changed the medium in which information is shared, received, interpreted, and communicated. Thus, the traditional hierarchy of power based upon position, prestige, and privy information in the workplace is no longer the only way others gain influence. With information being readily accessible, Millennials are entering the workplace more equipped than ever to be successful. Rather than managers shunning the new generations away for their desire to obtain meaningful work and disregard for the status quo, they must recognize their own position in the workplace as mentors, trailblazers, and resources. Additionally, managers must be able to identify the strengths of new hires, placing emphasis on recognizing the high performers they can retain to eventually oversee their organization.

Knowing the traits (not assumptions) of the Millennials and the members of Generation Z will allow senior management to cater screening, hiring, onboarding, and training methods that adequately match the Millennials with positions where they can succeed. Understanding their desire for interpersonal relationships creates the opportunity for managers to render desired positive and negative feedback and generate a culture that allows for individuals to see an accurate perception of self and stir their intrinsic motivation. With the generations and constraints defined, motivational theories applied, and perceptions widened, the responsibility rests on the managers to modify traditional business models and training methods to express the appropriate behavior and inputs that warrant the desired outcomes of both parties. Further, examining generational differences through the lenses of proven theories of motivation lends additional understanding to how to engage the Millennial generation. It is time to use the insight from existing generations to identify the contributions of the trophy kids in the corner cubicle and finally invite them into the corner office. No longer will the status quo suffice in an era where answers are at the fingertips of all those who are fluent with technology.

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