



Managing millennials: Embracing generational differences



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Abstract The topic of the Millennial Generation in the workplace drives much business conversation, as members of this generation form a growing percentage of the employee base. Both popular media and scholarly literature have painted the population of younger workers in an uncharitable light. The goals of this article are to contextualize the results of a large, empirical study in a more favorable manner and to suggest that embracing generational differences provides an opportunity as well as a challenge. This article examines traits of the different generations, in addition to the relationship between organizational commitment and workplace culture. We present findings that show millennials (also known as Generation Y, or Gen Y) as the only generational group that does not conceptually link organizational commitment with workplace culture. This group also thinks of work differently than members of the other generations, yet these differences can be understood through a managerial lens focusing on qualities such as duty, drive, and reward. We argue that by changing performance evaluation metrics to encompass a greater variety of measures, managers can provide a more detailed picture of the employee's work, and thus impact the worker's sense of duty. Additionally, by providing a more transparent workplace, employers can increase the employee's drive and clearly demonstrate the reward that workers will receive. Finally, changes that help newer employees adjust to the workplace can also allow the organization to operate more efficiently, benefiting employees of all generations.

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1. Distinctiveness of the Millennial Generation

In an internet post dated May 11, 2015, the Pew Research Center noted that as of the first quarter of 2015, members of the Millennial Generation had surpassed their predecessors (Generation X, or Gen X) as the largest generation in the U.S. labor force (Fry, 2015). The proportion of millennials in the workforce will only continue to increase throughout the era of Baby Boomer Generation retirements. As more and more work teams face the challenge of integrating the newest working generation with older colleagues, the work environment may encounter productivity challenges if changes are not made to accommodate employees with very different attitudes and expectations.

Many of our former students who are members of Generation X (and, even older millennials) have been working their way up the corporate ladder for several years, and they now report that their younger millennial (also known as Generation Y, or Gen Y) co-workers often leave the slightly older group feeling as if they are ‘old souls’ in the workplace. Descriptions we have heard of the shifting work environment include the scenario of a team sitting around a table at a client’s office to review papers and financial data. Gen X employees vocalize their questions and concerns, whereas millennials often text each other. Similar comments have come from both senior and experienced young professionals. Neither the type of employer nor the geographical region seems to matter.

In a more formal assessment of the generational differences in attitudes toward technology, the Cisco Corporation’s 2011 *Cisco Connected World Technology Report* indicates that one-third of college students (most members of the Millennial Generation) believe that the internet is as important to the human condition as air, water, food and shelter. As a generation that has no recollection of a world before the internet, over half of the millennial respondents claimed that they, personally, could not live without the internet as an integral part of their lives, preferring to part with their sense of taste or smell rather than their smartphone while Gen X respondents treated the role of technology with slightly greater reserve (Cisco Corporation, 2011). This illustrates how different the youngest employees’ way of learning, communicating, and working are relative to previous generations.

Our experiences in the classroom, coupled with our recent research, have made us aware of the importance of dealing with differences in perceptions and attitudes among the generations in the workplace. We believe that a focus on understanding

the motivations of millennials in terms of their duty, drive, and reward can help to resolve many of the challenges with an intergenerational workforce. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) report that although the values of millennials are not necessarily different from previous generations, their approach to work and the workplace is indeed different. Millennials have an experience with technology, coupled with “their positive experience inside organizations and institutions during their school years” (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, p. 212), that impacts the modern relationship between early-career employees and organizations. The authors also argue that the expectations of millennials with respect to organizational accommodation (adjustment to the desires of the employee) provide an opportunity to utilize the many contributions that millennial employees can bring to the workplace.

This article delves into the cultural shift underway in the modern U.S. workplace. Each new generation has something to teach older colleagues, and millennials are no exception. Employers who embrace the change represented by their youngest recruits may find opportunities that will offer competitive advantages. For example, can millennial workers inspire employers to reconsider old notions about the ways in which workers demonstrate organizational commitment? Will this shift in perspective cause employers to reframe their concepts of motivation and reward?

2. Defining the generations

While there are differing terms and time frames found in the literature, the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) and Pew Research Center (2014) define the generations as shown in Table 1. Both the exact closing date for the Millennial Generation and the name of the next generation of citizens remain unresolved in the formal literature and the popular press.

The population of millennials in the U.S. currently accounts for 23% of the total population, with approximately 73 million members (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Comparisons abound between today’s millennials and the Baby Boomer Generation, which

Table 1. Definitions of generations

Commonly Used Name	Span of Birth Years
Silent Generation	1928–1945
Baby Boomers	1944–1964
Generation X (Gen X)	1965–1980
Millennials (Generation Y)	1981–1995

comprised the largest population of young adults in recent decades. Baby boomers made up 30% of the population and numbered close to 80 million members in 1980. Compared to Baby Boomers of three-and-a-half decades ago, the current millennial population is better educated (22% hold a college degree, contrasted with 18% of Baby Boomers in 1980) and only half as likely to have ever been married (U.S. Census and Bureau, 2014).

It may seem artificial to categorize the experiences and contributions of so-called generations, as we risk negating or overlooking significant contributions by members whose category is described negatively. Still, some scholars have written convincingly, if controversially, that there are significant generational differences in personality attributes. For example, Twenge (2013a) reports that multiple data sets indicate dramatic increases in the prevalence of narcissistic traits among members of the Millennial Generation compared to previous generations. In contrast, Arnett (2013) and his colleagues (Arnett, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2013) have written in strong opposition to the labeling of an entire generation as narcissism-prone, particularly when members of the clinical professions ought to be working to dispel negative group stereotypes.

3. Millennials, positive workplace culture, and organizational commitment

We have witnessed the generational shift from our perspectives as experienced educators. We perpetually deal with 18- to 22-year-olds and have noticed that the motivational needs and interactional style of our students is not the same as it was 20 or even 10 years ago. Our students now seem to be driven by different priorities. This is a feeling echoed by many of our academic colleagues, a number of whom have been motivated to develop adaptations to the educational process designed to support the learning styles of millennials (e.g., Phillips & Trainor, 2014; Twenge, 2013b). We initially believed that our students had less drive, but began to realize that they were driven by a wider set of priorities. Our focus shifted toward helping to resolve these conflicting priorities in the classroom. The distinctive style of millennial workers has also been reflected in the evolving onboarding strategies of the major public accounting firms. Most, if not all of these firms have funded their own studies concerning the work style and mindset of this new generation of employees, and they put their findings to work in creating their own novel strategies for employee development and retention.

The banking industry and Wall Street are also responding to the changing demographics in the workforce. On March 16, 2016, Citigroup announced a plan to recruit and retain millennials with more rapid paths to promotion, year-long leaves for charitable work, and the chance to work on a micro-finance project in Kenya for four weeks. The CEO of Citigroup commented “I want people to have family lives, personal lives” (Rexrode, 2016). Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, and J.P Morgan Chase & Co. plan similar changes to appeal to millennials in terms of more interesting work tasks, charitable outreach, and faster promotions (Rexroad, 2016).

Our interest in how demographics affect the workplace was piqued when an unusual finding emerged as we analyzed a very large data set for trends in employee satisfaction and loyalty to the employer (Cravens, Oliver, Oishi, & Stewart, 2015). For this empirical study, we surveyed a large number of workers in a retail setting to explore whether a positive work environment (conveyed by managers’ supportive tone and positive framing of goals) would be associated with enhanced worker loyalty, organizational commitment, and performance appraisal effectiveness. While the demographic analysis supported the main findings, different analyses of the data offer some interesting insights into what might cause stress in the workplace. We examine age (which corresponds to generation at the time of the survey) and length of employment. Findings for organizational commitment and workplace culture are summarized in Table 2.

The results of the full sample (made up of surveys from 1,798 participants) found that organizational commitment and workplace culture are each positively associated with job satisfaction, the employee’s self-assessment of performance (self-performance), and intention of remaining with the employer (retention) (Cravens et al., 2015). Results by age group and length of employment show differences across the generations.

3.1. Age

In terms of organizational commitment, respondents in the millennial group (18- to 24-year-olds at the time of our data collection) believe that they perform well and will remain with the employer, but they do not find job satisfaction related to that commitment. If the workplace culture is positive, however, they find job satisfaction as well.

The second youngest age group that we surveyed, Gen X members (25- to 35-year-olds at the time of the study) were likely to be satisfied with their jobs if they perceived the workplace culture to be positive. Interestingly, those who experienced positive

Table 2. Factors associated with employees' response to work

Category 1: Age (Based on participant ages at date of survey)				
Full Sample – All Ages (n = 1,798)	Millennials (n = 323)	Generation X (n = 342)	Baby Boomers (n = 588)	Older Baby Boomers and Silent Generation (n = 545)
<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>
Associated with: Job Satisfaction, Self Performance, & Retention	Associated with: Self Performance, & Retention	Associated with: Job Satisfaction, & Retention	Results are the same as the full sample	Associated with: Job Satisfaction, & Retention
<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>
Associated with: Job Satisfaction, Self Performance, & Retention	Results are the same as the full sample	Associated with: Job Satisfaction, & Self Performance	Results are the same as the full sample	Results are the same as the full sample

Category 2: Length of employment

Full Sample - (n = 1,798)	Less than 1 Year (n = 349)	1 to 5 Years (n = 880)	6 to 15 Years (n = 427)	Greater than 15 Years (n = 142)
<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Organizational Commitment</i>
Associated with: Job Satisfaction, Self Performance, & Retention	Results are the same as the full sample	Results are the same as the full sample	Associated with: Job Satisfaction, & Retention	Associated with nothing!
<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>	<i>Workplace Culture</i>
Associated with: Job Satisfaction, Self Performance, & Retention	Results are the same as the full sample	Results are the same as the full sample	Results are the same as the full sample	Associated with: Job Satisfaction, & Retention

organizational commitment did report that they intended to stay and that they were satisfied with their jobs, but just having a positive workplace is not enough to keep this age group with the employer. This finding could be related to the age of the employee rather than the generation, however. This group of sales associates may see better opportunities with options outside of the organization. It seems plausible that the Gen X workers would seek to advance their job-related growth elsewhere if it were not available at their store.

The two oldest groups were comprised mostly of Baby Boomers (36- to 49-year-olds and older at the time of the study) who responded that if the workplace culture was positive then their organizational commitment and job satisfaction were positive as well. This correlated with an intention to stay in the job. While committed to the organization, the

oldest group did not indicate that this commitment translated into good performance on the job.

Beyond the results presented in the table, our analysis shows that the millennials surveyed could not be swayed by the workplace culture of the store. Unlike employees from the Baby Boomer or Gen X groups, the millennials' results show no relationship between organizational commitment and workplace culture. In fact, every other demographic in the study shows a positive relationship between organizational commitment and workplace culture. In other words, the store could be a great place to work, yet the millennial workers would not be any more committed than if it were a lousy place to work.

As counter-intuitive as this conclusion may seem, a review of the relevant literature reveals similar findings for millennial employees in the federal government sector (Ertas, 2015), and at public relations

agencies (Gallicano, Curtin, & Matthews, 2012). Taken together, these findings suggest that, along with their generational peers in other work sectors, our retail-sector survey respondents exhibit some degree of hesitation to commit fully to their companies, even when the work setting is generally supportive and attentive to most basic employee needs.

3.2. Length of employment

As mentioned before, the study found job satisfaction, self-performance, and retention correlated to both organizational commitment and workplace culture. The length of employment (grouped as: less than 1 year, 1 to 5 years, 6 to 15 years, and greater than 15 years) did not affect the results in relationship to organizational commitment until somewhere in the sixth year or after. Those employees in the 6 to 15 year range with a positive organizational commitment intend to stay and evince job satisfaction but, like older Baby Boomers, do not report that they are performing well. By the time the employees have worked more than fifteen years, the employees' organizational commitment does not relate to any of the items the respondents were asked to assess. However, if the workplace culture is positive, the results show that this loss of interest that seems apparent in the organizational commitment results can be delayed. The employees in the 6 to 15 year group continue to respond positively, and only in the range greater than 15 years is there a perceived loss of performance.

4. Generations at work

Our findings indicate that workplace culture can serve as a ballast for organizational commitment except in the case of millennial employees. This led us to examine the motivational style of millennial workers and the literature on workplace interactions between millennial employees and older coworkers and managers. Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 scholarly studies that analyze generational differences in work settings. On measures of work outcomes such as job satisfaction, intention for turnover, and organizational commitment, the authors report that differences across generations ranged from zero to moderate. Other studies have reported mixed support for generational differences (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2010; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Twenge, 2010), even disagreeing over the types of methods that ought to be used to study the relationships and the distinctions between age and generation. While we do not attempt to answer the broader question of

generational differences, we find that the millennials are not similar to the workers from other generational groups in their view of the relationship between organizational commitment and workplace culture.

Even though scholars disagree, the issues must seem real enough to the companies that devote significant time and resources to studies of the changing generational mix in the workplace. For example, the accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers embarked on a global two-year generational study motivated by the departure of increasing numbers of millennials after relatively short tenures with the firm. If the pattern of loss had continued, PricewaterhouseCoopers would not retain sufficient entry-level talent and thus lose their future leaders. Ernst & Young, Deloitte, and KPMG (the other three large accounting firms), along with the big three strategic consulting firms and some of the large banks, have also delved into the changes that the millennial employee and consumer bring to the workplace.

The level of interest in the changing workforce combined with the results from our study led us to consider how the differences in generations might radically change how to manage, motivate, and retain a workforce. The U.S. Census data and other authors and analysts make clear that the workplace of the future will be dominated by millennial workers for some time (Fry, 2015). Despite this clear and present trend, many organizational leaders seem to deny this reality. For example, two executives from different companies discussed recent training at work on how to deal with millennials. They were both puzzled by the requirement. Finally, one asked: "Why aren't *they* trained to deal with *us*?"

In *The Next America* (Pew Research Center, 2014), Pew-sponsored researchers asked members of the different generations what made their own generation distinct, and then reported the top five responses to emerge from each group.

Table 3 shows that the top five shared experiences and priorities vary, yet all groups see themselves as smarter than other generational groups. Millennials have the highest percent of support for a single distinction—24% noted technology use as a defining characteristic. They are the only generation that does not see their work ethic as defining (Pew Research Center, 2014). Between the Baby Boomers and the younger generations at work, there is already evidence of a perspective shift related to the value of their work ethic from 17% (Boomers), to 11% (Gen X), to seemingly irrelevant (millennials). Similarly, Baby Boomers reported self-associating with general values/morals (8%), while Generation X reframed their commitment as conservative/traditional (7%) and millennials flipped

Table 3. What makes your generation distinct?

Top five responses from each generation			
Silent	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials
World War II/Depression 14%	Work ethic 17%	Technology use 12%	Technology use 24%
Smarter 13%	Respectful 14%	Work ethic 11%	Music/Pop culture 11%
Honest 12%	Values/Morals 8%	Conservative/Traditional 7%	Liberal/Tolerant 7%
Work ethic 10%	Baby Boomers 6%	Smarter 6%	Smarter 6%
Values/Morals 10%	Smarter 5%	Respectful 5%	Clothes 5%

Source: Taylor & [Pew Research Center \(2014\)](#)

the coin to liberal/tolerant (7%). It is also interesting to note that 13% of the Silent Generation and at least 5% of each of the other generations view being smart as a defining generational feature.

For the first time in a very long time, business leaders find that their expertise needs adjustment if they are to continue motivating employees to achieve the highest standards of performance. Besides the behavioral traits of millennials, they are the most ethnically diverse generation in American history ([Pew Research Center, 2014](#)). As with any other aspect of diversity in the workplace, it is not productive for senior managers or executives to ask: “Why aren’t *they* trained to deal with *us*?” If young workers do not find the work fulfilling, they will leave the firm.

5. Millennial traits and managerial challenges

Baby Boomers changed the face of work in America. It was after their young adulthood that workplace policies evolved to address equal opportunity and affirmative action issues. Adjustments to retirement and health care benefits, flexible spending accounts for medical and dependent care spending also ensued. As the younger, trailing end of Generation X gave way to the leading population of millennials in the workplace, consultants on workplace dynamics and other thought leaders have offered many successful books that were published to advise business leaders on the best ways of navigating a significant trend. By 2010, when Lancaster and Stillman published *The M-Factor*, a range of negative attributes had created an unpleasant stereotype of the millennial worker. These features included seeming lazy, defensiveness, lack of initiative, unwillingness to commit fully to work, disrespect of authority, lack of focus, distractedness, lack of

preparation for the workplace, neediness, indifference, lack of etiquette, arrogance, abrasiveness, impatience, self-absorption, and entitlement. This unappealing caricature has been referenced in a number of books written to advise managers on how to move beyond unfair and negative pre-existing stereotypes (e.g., [Caraher, 2015](#); [Espinoza, Ukleja, & Rusch, 2010](#); [Lancaster & Stillman, 2010](#)).

6. Turning a negative stereotype into positive performance

The previous sections highlight the workplace conflict in this current intergenerational shift. Results from our research study demonstrate the disconnect of millennials between organizational commitment and workplace culture, and reinforce the need for employers to address retention issues. Surveys from various accounting and consulting firms suggest that millennials exhibit needs and values unlike their older colleagues in the workplace. How do we embrace, rather than fight, these generational differences and foster a positive workplace culture?

We suggest that modifying workplace culture and the performance appraisal process can create an environment in which millennials can thrive and display a different type of organizational commitment. Changes designed to address the motivations and retention of millennial workers have the potential to benefit all employees. Through the performance appraisal process, managers have an opportunity to show millennials how their contributions fit within the larger context of the organization. By linking individual contributions directly to specific organizational objectives, millennials are able to reinforce their direct personal contributions to the team. Focusing on performance appraisal that links specific contributions to positive organizational outcomes supports retention for all

employees as they readily appreciate their value to the enterprise. When employees of any generation see how their contributions are valued, they are more open to commit to an organization.

After reviewing both empirical research and popular literature, Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) identified three traits of millennials that affect their interactions and relationships in the workplace. Millennials seek a team-based workplace culture with close contact and communication with superiors as well as frequent feedback (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Martin, 2005). Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) conclude that millennials value different things in the workplace relative to previous generations. These different values can cause retention issues, particularly in industries where long work hours and other demands can be quite excessive at critical times during the year. However, with a performance appraisal process that considers the individual in the context of a team working towards a common objective, millennials will be able to create the types of relationships that they value.

To support open communication and the types of relationships that allow millennials to thrive and contribute to their organization, senior management must solidify their expectations with respect to the contributions of employees at all levels. This would ensure that all activities are directed toward organizational goals. The performance appraisal process must be modified from a general measure of performance across basic activities to focus on specific goals and tasks related to organizational objectives. This requires defining specific desired activities so as to evaluate the employee in terms of their overall contribution to organizational strategy.

For example, if a component of a retailer's strategy is focused on customer satisfaction, the performance appraisal process must address how each employee might specifically contribute to this objective. Sales associates will likely understand their roles, but employees without direct contact with customers may require more specific insight. Buyers, operations managers, inventory controllers, and shipping clerks all have a role to play in terms of influencing customer satisfaction. The evaluation forms and review process need to emphasize the employee's place in meeting organizational objectives.

7. Reframing objectives for all generations: Duty, drive, and reward

7.1. Duty

Older workers have long held well-established assumptions regarding how one conveys a proper sense

of duty in the workplace. Many Silent and Baby Boomer Generation professionals have always done more than any boss ever explicitly demanded. In contrast, millennials show greater likelihood to limit their efforts to the minimum output required to meet a supervisor's request. Since millennials are constantly connected to work through technology, older workers may not be aware of the efforts of millennials outside of the traditional work day. The performance appraisal process needs to reflect the contributions of employees, rather than merely provide a list of their efforts.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2013, p. 8) found that "millennials do not believe that productivity should be measured by the number of hours worked at the office, but by the output of the work performed. . . [They] view work as a 'thing' and not a 'place'." Thus, the performance appraisal process should concentrate on outcomes in terms of specific objectives. Recognizing only the time spent on a project or task does not link the activity or the employee's contribution to the overall organizational goals.

Similarly, the performance appraisal process should focus on positive contributions rather than count failures. In many ways, failures are learning opportunities for the employee as well as for the organization. Framing the failure as a positive in terms of knowledge acquisition encourages the employee to seek alternatives to meet organizational goals. This is the type of innovation at which millennials excel and which can greatly affect the organization. Instead of creating boundaries of performance by framing tasks within a narrow perspective, managers can position work requests in terms of a larger organizational context. This encourages millennials to extend their efforts beyond the low bar of simple task completion (or checking the box). The freedom and flexibility to be creative in solutions to problems or tasks increases the positive experiences for the employee of any generation in the workplace. The focus is less on a timesheet documenting effort and more on a collection of supportive activities and outcomes that can be incorporated into a comprehensive system of communication.

In a retail setting, asking sales associates to increase sales clearly provides a task that contributes to organizational objectives. However, employees may not be given any specific suggestions as to how to accomplish this objective. A performance appraisal process that provides specific suggestions and documents how the employee was creative in striving for this outcome not only allows a focus on efforts, but also considers how the employee worked as a team member. This type of directive

requires sufficient flexibility to permit the employee to do more than merely check off items on an appraisal checklist. The sales associate should be able to document the results of their specific efforts and to articulate these efforts with colleagues and superiors. Questions such as: ‘How did you increase sales during a slow time at the store?’, ‘How did you increase sales to customers who were new to the store?’, and ‘In what ways did your actions help other employees increase sales for the store?’ provide the employee with the freedom to be creative within a specific objective.

Since the workplace environment and individual performance are comprised of a multitude of factors rather than a single score to indicate achievement, the above questions place the actions of the employee within a larger context. Rewarding the employee for an increase in sales without investigating the cause or contribution gives the signal that only the outcome matters. This is not effective for millennials, and also misses an opportunity for the performance appraisal process to collect information that might be useful for all employees. The performance appraisal process can be enhanced to showcase the efforts that lead to high levels of achievement. Many existing, traditional forms of performance appraisal may be too narrow and too infrequent to document performance appropriately.

7.2. Drive

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, workers of every generation have virtually the same reasons for remaining with or leaving a firm, but the order of importance of these reasons to their decision differs. The aforementioned study finds that “millennials have a greater expectation to be supported and appreciated in return for their contributions, and to be part of a cohesive team” (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013, p. 9). Senior members of an organization were probably taught to accept direction from a superior without question. This is both a sign of appropriate respect and a reflection of early acculturation to the value of organizational hierarchy. The assumptions of older workers about the clarity of linear relationships (including those represented on organizational charts) are not always held by the newest generation of workers. As Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) also note, millennials prefer close relationships with open communication in a team environment. Group work is inherent in public accounting, consulting, and other industries, so the challenge of these industry organizations is to make the teams more open. Other organizations may need to adapt and build in teamwork and

translate this environment to the performance evaluation process. Individuals must also be evaluated in terms of their individual contributions to the team. Since millennials appear to prefer the synergistic decision-making environment of teams, it is possible to alter the workplace culture to enhance the benefits of teamwork and formalize the type of communication process that millennials seek. More frequent and closer interaction with superiors can be formalized in a performance evaluation plan that increases overall organizational communication. More experienced employees need to be encouraged to share appropriate information with newer members of the team, expanding or reinventing the interpretation of organizational structure.

Millennials need to accept that increased access to information is often associated with increased levels of responsibility (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Yet managers should consider that providing millennials with greater access to higher-level information might lead to widespread organizational benefits. With more awareness of the strategic intent and progress of the organization, millennials may be more involved in supporting the organizational mission. Research suggests that bringing lower-level workers into the conversation would increase organizational attachment (Myers & Oetzel, 2003) and perhaps reduce boredom, which is often cited as a reason for departure (Alsop, 2008).

7.3. Reward

Millennials are the product of an era of rewarding all children who show up to play a sport, giving trophies and ribbons to each participant whether or not they exhibited high levels of performance. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2013, p. 8) indicates that “41% of Millennials prefer to be rewarded or recognized for their work at least monthly, if not more frequently, whereas only 30% of non-millennials would like that level of frequency.” The Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, and Generation X populations typically entered the workplace with clear expectations about the step-wise progression to promotions in perks, salary, and rank. For these older workers, the notion of paying one’s dues at work included time spent doing menial, unglamorous office tasks, knowing that the less desirable duties would pass one day to a new crop of novice workers. The reward for time spent laboring in the so-called trenches was the growth in challenge and responsibility as well as the prestige that comes with having earned a higher position, or showing evidence of progressing through the ranks.

The popular press suggests that millennials are commonly unfamiliar with the types of rewards that

would be appropriate for contributors at different stages of a career. While older workers may label these behaviors as self-absorbed or arrogant, the reality is that millennials are often genuinely unaware of the critical link between lower-level work and upper-level management. Working one's way up from the front-line work of a business to the corporate suite is not featured prominently on the internet. Again, basic training about the corporate values of effort and rewards should circumvent frustrations. It would be especially helpful to coordinate these messages with a realignment of the reward structure, where necessary, to provide for more frequent, tangible evidence of appreciation for each critical component of a job well done. With a performance appraisal process centered on an individual's contributions in a team environment, frequent assessment of activities would satisfy the millennials' need for feedback. This process would also provide an opportunity for all employees to adjust their actions toward achieving organizational goals, rather than receiving the information too late at the end of a longer evaluation period.

8. A training opportunity

Their educational path and other early life experiences may not prepare millennials for successful entry into a workplace shaped by the Baby Boomers or previous generations. In order to move quickly past the frustrations accompanying this reality, onboarding and early development programming should provide millennials with a means to navigate the mysterious complexities of the workplace.

A summary approach to address misperceptions related to the value of duty or work obligations involves developing communication strategies that recognize all forms of input and engagement displayed by younger workers. Performance evaluations may need to be more frequent with enhanced feedback on a variety of performance outcomes and contributions in the context of a team of employees.

Learning how to motivate the employee's drive to perform will reward teams and organizations, as well as individuals. Millennials may not be the only group to benefit from more intentional reminders about the connections between the individual worker's contributions and corporate strategy and vision. Each organization should consider how its own culture represents rewards, both intrinsically and extrinsically (or monetarily). In addition, the organization should evaluate the workplace culture combined with a feedback and reward system to reflect the values of all workers, as well as corporate

values. With this approach, the potential exists to improve employee engagement and thus increase organizational outcomes as well as personal rewards for employees.

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