

Leading Millennial Generation towards Engagement in Organizations

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Abstract-*The global situation has seen the cohorts of the older generations retiring while millennials swiftly take over the workforce. Subsequently, the rapid change in the demographics has altered the composition of the workforce. The millennial generation is expected to occupy three quarters of the workforce in the next decade. However, leaders today are not adequately prepared to nurture and mentor the millennials. The purpose of this paper is to review the existing literature on millennial generation, in relation to leadership and work engagement. The paper is therefore a review of literature on millennial generation, transformational leadership and organizational engagement. Several data bases were accessed and these included Emerald, Taylor and Francis, google scholar among others. The theoretical backing is the Generational Cohort Theory. The Generational Cohort Theory posits that people who are born during a specific period tend to share similar social events which ultimately shape their values, norms and opinion. The values and beliefs evolve across the continuum of the human life cycle while maintaining consistency in every generation. The findings of this literature review are that, millennials are a unique generation. They do not value work as an asset and therefore moving from one organization to another is a normal phenomenon. While millennials value autonomy, they also require mentorship and have a fragile ego. Millennials prefer to work in teams in a stable organizational structure. Millennials work best in organization that value work life balance. However, most leaders struggle in handling millennials at work and need to enhance millennial engagement. However, leaders who uniquely treat their followers as individuals rather than collective treatment are associated with developing engaged followers who have higher service orientation levels impacting the employee performance positively. Such leaders are transformational. Millennials are responsive to nurturing leaders, who have high levels of integrity and hence increasing the propensity of millennials staying longer in an organization. Creation of an environment where millennials can thrive, requires transformational leadership. This is because millennials have been brought up in stable and structured homes where they are supervised by their 'helicopter parents'. The paper provides practical approaches on how organizations can identify factors that influence millennials engagement. This paper further provides significant inputs in millennial generation and gives opportunities to expand research on millennial engagement, leadership and work values. In conclusion, rather than developing leadership lifts created by generation gaps, leaders should work towards discovering the millennial strengths and utilize them appropriately.*

Keywords: Millennial Generation, Leadership, Employee Engagement, Transformational leadership, Generation Cohort Theory, Helicopter parents

Introduction

The global situation has seen the cohorts of the older generations retiring. Millennials are swiftly taking over the workforce (Papavasileiou & Lyons, 2015). There is a rapid change in the demographics altering the composition of the workforce (Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017; Fry, 2018;

Maier et al., 2015; Tubey, Kurgat & Rotich, 2015). Furthermore, the world has become unstable, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous. The environment is rapidly and competitively changing (Nazarian, Soares & Lottermoser, 2017). The change is as a result of globalization, the changing demographics, technology advancement and change in leadership practices (Alonderien & Majauskaite, 2016).

The millennial generation comprises of people born between the years 1980 to 2000 (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). They are a product of the ‘baby boomers’ (people who were born between the years 1946 to 1964) and the ‘early waved generation X’ (people who were born between the years 1965 to 1982) (Holt et al, 2012). The word “millennial” was coined by Strauss & Howe (1991) as cited by Papavasileiou & Lyons (2015). They argued that a fast generation would be produced in the 20th Century. This generation would be civic minded and would develop societal reconstruction. This has been negated by the self-centeredness, narcissistic, materialistic lifestyle and unrealistic expectations embraced by the millennial generation as a result of the environment they grew up in, which is a shielded structure often referred to ‘helicopter parenting’ (Zhao, 2018; Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015).

Globally, the millennial generation remains the fastest growing, second to baby boomers, resulting into a rapid change in workforce demographics (Fry, 2018). The Government of Kenya (2014) report on Kenya Demographic Health Survey revealed that 65.9% of the workforce is the millennial generation. However, there is an acute struggle to retain the premium talent in the millennials (Fry, 2018).

Literature review

Generations’ historical background

Generations have been described since the 1940’s (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). The people that were born in the 1940’s were described as the ‘builders’ generation’. They are followed by the baby boomers who were mainly born from the year 1946 to the year 1964 (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). ‘Generation X’s’ were born between 1965- 1979. The ‘Generation X’s’ are regarded to be driven by autonomy, mobility and value work life balance. The millennials were born between the year 1980 and 2000 by nurturing ‘helicopter parents’, with technology in their hands and in a world with many transformations in human resource and leadership policies (Zhao, 2018). Many organizations are familiar with generational diversity (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). Because of the orientation and socialization in the variant generational time, the generational drivers are equally diverse.

The ‘builders’ generation’ happen to work longest among the generations. They are driven by hard work, honour and have delayed gratification. The ‘baby boomers’ value health, wealth and professional identity. They are equally driven by hard work (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). ‘Generation X’ is driven by autonomy, mobility and work-life balance. The millennial generation values diversity and team work (Maier et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, the global situation today demonstrates that the cohorts of the older generations are retiring, while millennials swiftly take over the workforce (Papavasileiou & Lyons, 2015). This has created a generational land scape with a rapid change in the demographics, altering the composition of the workforce (Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017; Fry, 2018; Maier et al., 2015; Tubey et al., 2015). The largest portion of the workforce is the millennials, fronted by baby boomers (Fry, 2018; Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). Espinoza & Ukleja (2016) predict that in 2020, millennials will be a third of the work force. In

2025, they will be three quarters. In another study, Guyani & Bhatnagar (2017) predicted that 50% of the workforce will be millennial in 2020. This sends signals on the urgency in preparedness on mentoring the millennials to take over leadership wholly.

What makes the millennials unique?

The millennial generation is considered confident and self-expressive when compared to other generations (Maier et al., 2015). They expect a positive work culture in excellent facilities. They value personal and professional growth (Tubey et al., 2015; Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). Working with millennials requires exceptional attention as they value autonomy (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). They require to be mentored by role models (Fry, 2018; Maier, et al., 2015). However their ego is fragile. They would benefit from coaching and mentorship for their growth (Tubey et al., 2015). While they prefer to work in a challenging environment (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018), leaders need to learn how to engage and understand how to work with the millennials (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). They also need to mentor them in leadership as well (Fry, 2018). Leaders have experienced many challenges in mentoring millennials. This calls for strategies to enforce radical changes to meet the millennial generation's needs (Tubey et al., 2015).

While the default behaviour of millennials is to defy rules, regulations and the confines of prescriptive job description, they value inclusiveness (Maier et al., 2015; Sarraf et al., 2017). Saratovsky & Feldmann, (2013) argue that millennials in history are the most diverse generation with unique traits such as: "entitlement, civic-mindedness, optimism, value for work-life balance, impatience, multitasking and team - orientation" (p. 31). The favourable environment for the millennials is a non- hierarchy structure. They do not favour task-oriented leadership (Maier et al., 2015; Tubey et al., 2015). They prefer to work in teams. Their view of work is immediate gratification rather than a future investment (Tubey et al., 2015). Retaining the young talent in millennials has become an uphill task (Papavasileiou & Lyons, 2015). With this in mind, millennials have attracted stereotypes. Therefore, the know-how to engage millennials is of paramount importance. On the positive side, millennials are digitally connected. They acquire news round the clock and are creative (Gong et al., 2018). They are solution centred, self-organized, open and transparent (Zhao, 2018). They expect that their leaders know them by name and offer them individualized attention. They feel comfortable with leaders who are people oriented (Maier et al., 2015). Most organizations are not well prepared on how to engage them (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017). Leaders have to make informed choices on how to engage the millennials. It is paramount that leaders develop an effective workforce for the 21st century (Gong et al., 2018). This is because employees who are engaged are regarded as builders. They use their talents to build relationships that are productive. Innovation and creativity are their core strengths (Parent & Lovelace, 2018). Developing millennials who are engaged does not only benefit the individual but the organization collectively. Millennials can be fully understood through the generational cohort theory.

Generational Cohort Theory

The generational cohort theory was devised by Inglehart in 1977. Inglehart came up with four generational cohorts: The interwar cohort born between 1900 to 1945; the baby boomers born between 1946 to 1964; generation X born between 1965 to 1979; the millennials born between 1980 to 1996 (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). The Generational Cohort Theory assumes that people who are born during a specific period tend to share similar social events which ultimately shape their values, norms and opinions (Glazer et al., 2019). These antecedents shape the specific

generation worldview. Norris & Inglehart (2019) state that the intergenerational differences originated from the historical experiences of generations which fasten their values and beliefs. Mannheim (1952) as cited by Smith & Duxbury (2019) proposes that, “people born in similar period of time and within proximate cultural and geographical contexts are similarly influenced by shared foundational events and experiences tend to have similar world view which influence the way they interact with the world and around them” (p.191). There is evolution of values among the different generational cohorts. The evolution is real as there is a sure generational replacement with value change (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In line with this, the millennial generation is expected to have similar values and work habits which will influence their organizational engagement. This is because their formative years shape their values (Cheng & Foley, 2018). The generational cohort theory further posits that values and beliefs evolve across the continuum of the human life cycle while maintaining consistency in every generation (Chung, Chen & Lin, 2016). Being cognizant of each generation’s needs will help leaders identify the comfort levels for each generation and their requirements (Sox et al., 2017). This theory exemplifies the need to understand the millennials and provide the requirements to enhance effective leadership culminating to millennial engagement. The assumption is that millennials have similar preferences in terms of leadership styles and the organizational culture.

The relationships between the employee and the leader may also be similar in the same generations. This is exemplified by the Nelson (2012) and Gordon (2018) who used the generational cohort theory to study nurses working in hospitals to explore job commitment and job satisfaction respectively. Nelson (2012) found out that the different generational cohorts had variant levels of organizational commitment. The quality of their relationships was influenced by their leaders. The generation Y demonstrated a higher level of commitment compared to generation X. The relationship between the supervisor and the employee demonstrated higher satisfaction in generation X than in generation Y. Gordon (2018) found that the baby boomers valued the pay as an influencer of job satisfaction. Generation X valued not the pay but the overall work environment as an influencer to job satisfaction. Millennials valued professional progression and accomplishments as an influencer to job satisfaction (Gordon, 2018).

Smith & Duxbury (2019) used the generational cohort theory to examine the attitudes towards unions in the different generations. The study revealed that the baby boomers were pro - union while the generation X were anti-union. The different generational cohorts have contrasting worldview on unions. While the idea of unions appeared lucrative to the baby boomers, it did not matter to the generation X. Based on these findings, the generational cohort theory would help describe, discuss and make meaning to the factors that affect the millennial generation and engagement in organizations.

Leading millennial generation to enhance engagement

Effective leadership has become the centre of success in any organization impacting the followers’ performance (Al-Borie & Abdullah, 2015; Soane, Buttler & Stanton, 2015). Effective leadership enables the best outcomes in any organization (Jeyaraman et al., 2018). It creates competitive advantage while maintaining organizational relevance (Nazarian, et al, 2017). Among the new leadership archetype models associated with effective leadership is transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016). Globally, Transformational Leadership (TL) has developed interest in various disciplines (Brandt, Laitinen & Laitinen, 2016; Northouse, 2016).

The greatest driving force for the millennial generation is team work, collaboration, social needs and the value for being appreciated (Greatwood, 2016). The glue that holds them in organizations is not dependent on promotion to higher ranks. It is dependent on mentorship, the

need to be recognized and a reasonable degree of autonomy in the process of making decisions (Holt et al., 2012). Among the millennials' expectations include instantaneous gratification which often is an illusion (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). To retain the young millennials' talent in an organization has become an uphill task (Papavasileiou & Lyons, 2015).

In South Africa, financial stability, career growth opportunities, mentorship, coaching and the need to be appreciated by the leaders in a pleasant working environment are the millennials' core motivators (Eck & Burger, 2018). This does not differ with the Kenyan millennials' engagement. It is dependent on supportive leadership, opportunities to advance, coaching and mentorship in a stable organization (Tubey et al., 2015). Parent & Lovelace (2018) agree with the millennials that a constructive organizational culture and effective leadership enhances employee engagement. The more engaged the labour force is, the more productive and innovative the organization is. In the 21st century, creating employees that are engaged is critical to win the war of talent retention in the next generation (Cattermole, 2018).

Millennials consider staying in one job for long as a weakness (Greatwood, 2016). They are not concerned about loss of their work benefits when they get an alternative job offer (Glazer, Mahoney & Randall, 2019). Similarly, heavy demands are placed on them. However, most organizations don't know how to engage with them on building bonds and relationships that would enhance engagement and commitment to the organization (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017). Millennials value autonomy in decision making. They desire to be mentored and nurtured (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). There is hyper-competition among the organizations in striving to appeal and retain the premium talents (Madan & Madan, 2019).

The struggle to entice and retain the talents is real (Fry, 2018). It is therefore important to identify a leadership model and organizational cultural climate which will facilitate millennials' engagement in the workforce. The volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) nature of the world today requires millennials to be inspired and empowered in order to engage them productively (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). The millennial generation is responsive to a nurturing and selfless leadership in order to prepare them for future leadership (Zhao, 2018). Leadership therefore plays pivotal role in millennial engagement in an organization.

Subsequently, human resource has become the most valued asset in organizations today. Getting engaged employees is treasurable in any organization. The return on investment is highest when the employees are engaged (Yang & Matz-Costa, 2017). In this VUCA world, millennials regard staying in one job for long as a failure (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). Employment is not an asset for them. It is not unusual for them to leave one job for another (Greatwood, 2016; Tubey et al., 2015). Having a clear understanding on generational differences and the variances in their employment world view is crucial (Sarraf et al., 2017). The greatest concern is if the millennials are understood by other generation cohorts at their work place and what their future engagement at work would be. The reason is that each generation is unique in their view of work engagement. This is a product of values and experiences in their lives (Sarraf et al., 2017). At the same time, different ages of leaders have varying impact on employee engagement. Leaders who are superior in age than their followers lead to higher employee engagement (Yang & Matz - Costa, 2017).

Engagement for millennials is dictated by diverse reasons. To keep millennials on job requires growth, recognition and awards while maintaining flexible working hours (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). Millennials who have high autonomy in decision making are more engaged (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018). Work life balance and effective, transparent communication with adequate information flow have increasingly become predictors for millennial attraction and

engagement (Ehrhart, Mayer & Ziegert, 2012; Maier et al., 2015; Mukami & Nyambegera, 2017; Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017). The connection created by communication develops deep employee commitment. Millennial's value comprehensive performance feedback, which culminates in employee engagement (Jha et al., 2018; Ruiz, 2017; Walden et al., 2017). They seek to be heard (Jha et al., 2018). Building relationship with leaders is pivotal for millennials' engagement (Heo, Kim & Kim, 2018; Ruiz, 2017). The kind of relationship that a millennial develops in the organization determines their retention (Walden et al., 2017). This is associated with the fact that millennials thrive in a stable organizational culture where they perceive a sense of belonging (Cattermole, 2018; Jha et al., 2018). They appreciate recognition and awards (Jha et al., 2018; Walden et al., 2017). This enhances talent management. Millennial engagement is dependent on the millennial personal gain and goals advancement (Jha et al., 2018; Ruiz, 2017).

Millennials are focused and ambitious. They loathe micromanagement and risk taking. For them to be engaged, work has to be enjoyable (Jha et al., 2018; Ruiz, 2017). Employee engagement requires high personal life engagement. The hierarchy of needs are met first (Greatwood, 2016). Employers should invest in the millennials to gain employee engagement (Greatwood, 2016). Low levels of millennial engagement end in high turnover (Fry, 2018).

In line with this, leadership has a great role to play in millennial engagement and hence retention. Because intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in millennials' engagement, strategies that are aligned with the millennial professional development are of great interest (Gong et al., 2018). The organization must have a philosophy that recognizes the diversity of variant generations to meet the needs of all generations (Sarraf et al., 2017). This will prepare leadership for millennial dynamism and delink with the traditional leadership methods. It will turn to integrative leadership to accommodate the millennials (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). Rather than developing leadership lifts created by generation gaps, leaders should work towards discovering the millennial strengths and utilize them appropriately (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). Devising ways for millennial growth to achieve high passion for work and engagement would be of great help (Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017).

The constructs of employee engagement include, vigour, dedication and absorption. For millennials to develop vigour and dedication, leadership support plays a pivotal role. Rewards coupled with work flexibility influences vigour and absorption (Kassa & Raju, 2015). Creating an innovative environment for millennials will give competitive advantage for any organization (Kassa & Raju, 2015). Millennials are easily demotivated by unfair treatment at work, absence of growth opportunities and bureaucracy (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018; Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015; Tubey et al., 2015). They yearn for quick financial stability (Greatwood, 2016; Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018; Mukami & Nyambegera, 2017). While millennials value autonomy and career growth (Sjabadyni & Mustika, 2018), autonomy and career development were found to have negative effects in millennial engagement in a Kenyan study (Mukami & Nyambegera, 2017). This could be associated with the difference in the study locations and population. Millennials have a high need for instant gratification (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). They want to feel the immediate impact of their work (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013). It is worth to note that, the significance of tasks allocated to the millennials have a significant positive effect on their engagement (Mukami & Nyambegera, 2017). Tasks allocated to millennials must be effectual and meaningful. While employee engagement has been positively associated with the organizational bottom line, millennials take pride when their thoughts and ideas are considered more than the organizational bottom line unlike the baby boomers (Bateh, 2018; Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). Millennials detest organizational citizenship habits (Gong et al., 2018). The sense of belonging in organizations

coupled with relationship building with leadership is pivotal in millennial engagement (Tubey et al., 2015). Millennials are motivated by rewards, recognition and flexible hours to work (Eck & Burger, 2018). While millennials are described as self-centred, narcissistic and materialistic in nature, there is need to develop engagement platforms like leadership mentoring, being transparent while providing them with information that they require, embrace connectivity while providing an environment where they provide solutions which they can own (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013; Zhao, 2018). Millennials would be engaged when a leadership style favours the employee like transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership has been identified as the most ideal form of leadership that has a compelling impact on the followers (Azim et al., 2019). This is perpetuated by the supportive organizational climate created by the transformational leaders, enhancing a greater magnitude of latitude in employee's creativity, the innovative supportive behaviour culminating to work place harmony. Popli & Rizvi (2015), in their study on the relationship between employee and engagement and leadership style, concluded that leaders who are perceived to be transformational enhanced employee engagement more than transactional leadership. Transformational leaders were equally engaged in their work. TL has been positively linked to employee engagement as a result of a positive psychological environment created by transformational leaders (Gyensare et al., 2017). This reduces the propensity of employees' turn-over. When the employees experience a friendly environment, they reciprocate by staying in the organizations longer. Mitonga-Monga and Hlongwane (2017) report a high tendency of employee engagement and productivity in employees working under supportive leadership styles. This can be associated with the intrinsic motivation that followers develop under transformational leaders. Transformational leaders not only support their followers but develop them. They have teams that are more engaged and responsive (Snyder, 2015). Leaders who perpetuate stable organizations influence employees to develop vigour and absorption (Sarti, 2014).

Leaders who uniquely treat their followers as individuals rather than collective treatment are associated with developing engaged followers who have higher service orientation levels impacting the employee performance positively (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). In line with this, millennials who value autonomy and individualized treatment, would thrive under transformational leaders.

Humour has been associated with employees' positive emotions and perpetuates employee engagement (Goswami et al., 2016). TL has been associated with positive humour with followers' positive emotions leading to employee engagement (Goswami et al., 2016). The greatest challenge is how to create a supportive environment for the millennial generation to ensure millennial engagement. To create an environment where millennials can thrive, requires transformational leadership. This is because millennials have grown up in stable and structured homes where they are supervised by their 'helicopter parents' (Rodriguez & Rodriguez, 2015). Millennials are responsive to nurturing leaders who have high levels of integrity. This matches the transformational leadership which prompts working closely with their followers culminating to a compelling impact to exceed their organizational goals (Azim et al, 2019). Transformational leadership spells out how leaders can front change, while leadership is not the sole responsibility of the leader but includes the follower.

It lays emphasis on the followers' values and morals. Empirically, TL has been identified as an effective form of leadership (Northouse, 2016). In line with this, TL has also been linked with work engagement in millennials as they require mentorship and inspiration from their leaders (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016). Furthermore, millennials require instant feedback and team work.

This works well with transformational leadership.

Conclusion

In sum, leadership preparations to cope with millennial dynamism and delink with the traditional leadership methods is an imperative. Rather than developing leadership lifts created by generation gaps, leaders should work towards discovering the millennial strengths and utilize them appropriately. Leaders who uniquely treat their followers as individuals rather than collective treatment are associated with developing engaged followers who have higher service orientation levels impacting the employee performance positively. Millennials are focused and ambitious, however they loathe micromanagement and risk taking. For them to be engaged, work has to be enjoyable. Therefore, organizations should have a philosophy that recognizes the diversity of variant generations to meet the needs of all generations. This make an organization more inclusive.

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