Engaging the Most Diverse Generation...the Millennials

By: Hali McFadden

Central Michigan University

Reviewer: Dr. James S. Loughran

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Executive Summary

Millennials are racially and ethnically more diverse than any generation before them. (Milkman, 2017). Millennials see diversity as a great thing and when they believe their organization is inclusive, they are more like to have higher engagement and productivity in their work (Benson, 2016). According to Raymer, Reed, Spiegel, & Purvanova (2017), there are currently four generations that are in the workforce, which are the silent generation, the baby boomers, the Generation X, and the millennials. Having such a wide range of ages in the workforce can bring an assortment of different beliefs, ideas, and outlooks in the work environment.

The millennial generation is being exposed to workplace discrimination more than the other generations in the workforce due to their age and the negative stereotypes they have been given (Raymer, et al., 2017). Millennials have been labeled as lazy, unreliable, entitled, narcissistic, job-hopping, whiny employees. These stereotypes are making companies fearful and cautious about hiring younger workers (Wooldridge, 2015). Older generations think in a traditional belief that older people are wiser and better tested in the workplace due to their years of experience (Raymer, et al., 2017).

Millennials feel that the older generation managers are the ones holding them back, not their age. A study done showed that many young workers felt their older workers were no help in teaching them new skills and creating career development plans (Satter, 2017). With millennials being so diverse they have nothing but new ideas, experiences, and education to bring to the workforce with them. Like Feltner (2016) discussed, the shift of the millennial generation into the workplace is going to take some self-growth for older employers and employees, but it will help them learn more and become more successful leaders.
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Introduction/Background

The researcher's concentration is in health care service and connects to this problem because many millennials are being hired into the workforce, and they are more diverse than the generations before them. Millennials are actually the most diverse generation in the entire nation according to a report done by the Pew Research Center in 2014 (Jones, Loggins, & Capezzuto, 2014). This generation has experienced unique cultural and historical events, resulting in them developing distinctive characteristics that group them apart from all the other generations in the workforce (Gong, Ramkissoon, Greenwood, & Hoyte, 2018). The first groups of millennials, born between 1978-1989, got to live in prosperity and were considered the children of the peace. The second group of millennials, born between 1990-2000, had to grow up during the time of wars over in the Middle East and the great recession that occurred in the first decade of the 2000s. Despite the generation’s different external environments, most millennials still have comparable workplace preferences (Smith, 2017).

Many companies have been starting to make changes in an effort to construct a more diverse employee base. This is wise considering many research studies have shown that a focus on diversity helps a company succeed and be socially responsible. Millennials especially love a diverse workforce since they have a big focus on teamwork, and the diversity blends different opinions, perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds (Benson, 2016). Unfortunately, when there is diversity there still is the issue of discrimination that comes along with it. According to Wooldridge (2015), some companies reported that they are hesitant to hire workers under forty, because of the myths and bad stereotypes tied with the millennial generation. In order to engage the diversity of this group of workers, one first needs to understand what diversity is and what discrimination is too. Having an understanding of these two areas will help a business understand
how to engage, and fix issues regarding diversity and discrimination in the workplace with millennials.

**Diversity**

“Diversity”, is defined as how people differ from one another based on many aspects like race, gender, age, geographical background, ethnicity and culture, orientation to work, and past work experiences (Wilson Burns & Ulrich, 2016). Diversity has become very important in the recruitment process, especially since it has been linked to higher employee satisfaction and a reduced turnover rate. A survey done in 2016 showed that 67 percent of people evaluate businesses and job offers based on the diversity of the workplace (Benson, 2016). When looking around an organization many different people are seen, but what diverse category is a millennial in? Yes, millennials are of different age, race, sex, etc., but they are categorized into a specific generation as well. According to Raymer et al. (2017), there are currently four generations that are in the workforce, which are the silent generation, the baby boomers, the Generation X, and the millennials.

**Generation**

A “generation” is a group of people that were born during a certain span of years and their shared worldview is built of social and historical events that occurred during their constructive developmental years. A big defining event for the silent generation was World War II, for baby boomers, it was the Cold War, Generation X had to deal in the 60’s and 70’s with the financial and societal uncertainty, and in the 90’s millennials faced the initiation of communication technology. From living through those events, these generation groups are presumed to have the same characteristics, values, beliefs, management preferences, and
influences (Raymer et al., 2017). It is obvious how an organization can have a difficult time managing, especially considering the four different groups with very different lifestyles.

The silent generation was born between the years 1928-1945. This generation is known as the cautious, hardworking, disciplined group that believes work is life and everyone always has to listen to their superiors (Stark & Farner, 2015). The baby boomer generation was born between the years 1946-1964. Baby boomers usually take a traditional career path and are considered to evolve their life around work. They believe that hard work, loyalty, and time with their company will lead to job security, pay, and the opportunities for promotions down the road (Bennett, Beehr, & Ivanitskaya, 2017).

Generation X or "Gen X-ers” were born between the years of 1965-1980. This generation looks to have more work-life balance, and are less loyal and trusting in the workplace. Millennials, also known as "Generation Y", was born between the years of 1981-1995. Millennials value leisure more than work and have high external work values (Bennett, et al., 2017). With all these differences, the generations still all face the possibility of having to deal with some form of discrimination.

**Discrimination**

“Discrimination” is when someone or a group of people is treated in a way that disadvantages them, because they are seen as being deficient since they are different (Carri-Ruffino et al., 2016). This could be based on many different criteria including race, age, sex, belief, and religion. Discriminating against someone or people is considered to be extremely unethical.

So many workers, especially females or those of color, have experienced this for years in the workforce (Carr-Ruffino et al., 2016). They didn’t have a say and even knowing it was a poor
judgment of ethics to turn someone down for a job due to their sex or skin color, there was nothing legally stopping it from happening. Back in the earlier years, white men were considered to be dominant over all groups of people and it was just the norm. In the 1960's is when all this started to take a turn and the government started stepping in to get equal rights for all workers.

In 1964 the Civil Rights Act became a law that made it illegal for an employer to refuse or not hire someone based on individual characteristics like race, religion, color, and sex. The Civil Rights Act then established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This commission enforced what they considered to be ethical and acceptable policies and practices in the workforce that helped protect people like minorities and women (Carr-Ruffino et al., 2016).

Even with these laws in place discrimination still, unfortunately, happens on a daily basis. One of the biggest forms of discrimination millennials seem to be dealing with is age discrimination. According to Raymer et al. (2017), age discrimination or “ageism” is something older people used to be often a victim of. A law was even made to stop the ageism towards the older workers called The Age Discrimination Employment Act. Today though, Raymer et al. (2016) says that many millennials experience “reverse ageism”, and are being discriminated against because of there young age.

Along with age discrimination, many millennials find themselves being stereotyped by employers and fellow employees. Carr-Ruffino et al. (2016) described stereotype as a group of people being labeled as a certain way based on some true and not true knowledge that leads to prejudice. Millennials have been labeled with many negative stereotypes, which causes them problems in both the internal and external environment. Generational stereotypes can cause many issues in the workplace and are what usually enables the act of age discrimination (Kadakia, 2014).
Literature Review

Millennials are racially and ethnically more diverse than any generation before them. This generation is also more educated and considered the first generation of digital technology (Milkman, 2017). According to Gold (2015), they value sustainability, good citizenship, and think it is both a personal and corporate responsibility to do the right thing. Studies have shown that this group of people is more supportive of huge nationwide debates like inter-racial and same-sex marriage, immigration, and legalization of marijuana than the generations before them. With millennials’ attitudes being to the left of the older generations, it causes a variety of wants and needs in the workplace (Milkman, 2017).

According to a study that was done on health service employees, specifically nurses, the older generations had higher self-efficacy, flexibility, hope, and confidence compared to the younger generations. The silent generation and baby boomers have more experience than the Generation X and millennials, and more experience leads to an increase in confidence and self-efficacy (Sweet & Swayze, 2017). Another study that was done showed that with all four generations of nurses there was no significant difference in organizational commitment. The nurses with higher qualifications and education did show different scores between each other though. The two older generations had higher commitment due to being more work-centric and being more aware of the cost of leaving their current employer. The two younger generations showed a lower commitment because they want a more work-life balance and don't care for the idea of staying at one organization for long-term (Jones, 2015).

With four generations having different views and feelings on work-family balance, a business has to initiate new policies and have management support. Baby boomers and silent generation are in an older stage of life and most have kids that are over the age of 18. Generation
X follows next with kids ranging from a child to early adults. Millennials being the youngest generation of the workforce have children in the child to baby stage. This age range is when children need the most attention and it hence requires millennials to want to be home on average more than the other three generations. Generational beliefs factor into this too as millennials and Generation X believe in working to live, while the silent generation and baby boomers believe in living to work (Bennett, Beehr, & Ivanitskaya, 2017).

The millennial generation is being exposed to workplace discrimination more than the other generations in the workforce. It is not by sex or race, but mostly because of their age. It has been reported that millennials are experiencing higher age discrimination than older employees do. The millennials are viewed less favorable since older generations believe that older individuals are the ones that have societal values, have been better tested in the workplace, and are wiser too (Raymer, et al., 2017). According to Wooldridge (2015), a problem being associated with young workers is more so a fact, and that is that millennials are young and inexperienced.

Millennials feel the opposite though; they feel that the baby boomer and Generation X managers are the ones holding them back, not their age. A study done showed that many young workers felt their older workers were no help in teaching them new skills and creating career development plans (Satter, 2017). They also complained about how their older managers were resistant to change, show low recognition of workers efforts, and had low respect for a work-life balance. The negative stereotype towards this Generation Y is also believed to be a factor of the workplace discrimination they experience (Wooldridge, 2015).

Millennials have been labeled as lazy, unreliable, entitled, narcissistic, job-hopping, whiny employees. These stereotypes are making companies fearful and cautious about hiring
younger workers. Their biggest fear is the job-hopping label, and that a millennial will just up
and leave high and dry if another opportunity catches their eye. Due to people living longer now,
this generation is delaying the big life changes like marriage and having a family. They have less
incentive to settle down at one organization in their early working years, especially if the
management is not adjusting to the wants and needs of this working class. It may be an easy way
out for older workers to label millennials negatively since they can be seen as a threat, but it is
not how a work environment should ever be running (Wooldridge, 2015).

Conclusion

With millennials being so diverse they have nothing but new ideas, experiences, and
education to bring to the workforce with them. They may have different opinions and beliefs
than the older generations, but that does not mean it is a bad thing. The world is changing and
employers need to learn to grow and change with it to be able to sustain profit. Like Stewart,
Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi (2017) said, millennials are the biggest generation in the workforce as
of 2015 and will make up more than half the workforce within the next couple of years.
Companies have to remember that means many shareholders fall into this generation as well.

Discrimination happens to many millennial employees based on their age and the
negative stereotypes they were labeled. It is the job of management and human resources to
recognize and handle discrimination issues happening in the workplace. It is not only unethical
but it is also illegal according to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for there to be discrimination in the
workforce. According to Kadakia (2014), business leaders that operate behind stereotypes can
make for unwise long-term business decisions. Millennials see diversity as a great thing and
when they believe their organization is inclusive, they are more like to have higher engagement
and productivity in their work (Benson, 2016).
**Recommendation**

Diversity efforts need to be taken more seriously in the workforce, which can include making sure women are represented in leadership positions, the inclusion of the LGBT community, and other measurements of diversity like age, race, and ethnicity. The point is to not hire less-qualified workers but to make it a responsibility to seek out and open up the company’s recruitment process (Benson, 2016). When putting out hiring adds a company should avoid putting required experience years under the qualifications. For millennials, it is discouraging, because how can they get a job when every job requires experience to have a job? Their level of education and skills still make them a great applicant for a position. Putting a number requirement can discourage the older generations to apply for a certain position as well. When a company advertises they are looking for “fresh out of college” or “young savvy workers”, it makes older workers feel they will not have a chance to qualify at all (Johnson, 2016).

Action needs to be taken if any discrimination or stereotyping is happening in an organization. Having active management involvement is one great way to address these issues. According to Pignatelli (2016), one out of two millennial employees will leave their job if they feel their manager takes no personal interest in them and has no connection to develop trust. Management needs to be trained to be open to all different aspects of the multigenerational workforce they are managing. Group projects and functions is a great way to dispute the negative image between the different generations in the workplace. This gives the employees an opportunity to get to know one another and learn from each other’s experiences and backgrounds. This also helps with the engagement and retention of the millennial workers since they are highly focused on teamwork and diversity blending, as Benson (2016) said. The shift of the millennial generation into the workplace is going to take some self-growth for older
employers and employees, but it will help them learn more and become more successful leaders (Feltner, 2016).
References


