Y2Kiddos: Designing Millennial-Minded Organizations for Multigenerational Effectiveness

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Abstract
The U.S. workforce of the future has arrived more educated than any other and expectant to accomplish greater works and solve greater problems. This workforce consists of Millennials, but no generation works alone. Building on the foundations established by the World War II Servicemen, and upheld by their Boomer parents and Gen X predecessors, the Millennials enter the workforce with the necessary skillsets and mental models for next generation work. However, it seems perspective is the Achilles heel of multigenerational work, and so whether the baton is passed smoothly and these intervening years of the Millennial rise are invested well or wasted will be determined by the strength of Boomer and Gen X leadership, particularly in the effort to redesign organizations to incorporate Millennials and their array of skillsets without alienating other Boomers and Gen Xers (as well as recognize the upcoming Generation Zen). Included are recommendations as to how aspects of organizational structure, processes, rewards, and people might be altered to power this endeavor.

Millennials, also known as the Net Generation, Gen M, GenerationMe, Gen Y, and Echo Boomers, are the modern organization's greatest strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat. Altogether, representing one-third of the U.S. population, we cannot ignore them. Some will fulfill societal dreams with unheard of energy, ingenuity, and wisdom, and some will trash their inheritance with a dreaded and often chastised laziness, incompetence, and folly. Some already have. But, why? Do we understand the Millennial mind? Could our organizations' designs actually be encouraging ominous behavior? Might it be that by altering particular design features we could leverage the Millennials' most redemptive traits for our organizations' futures – one brighter than is otherwise possible without them?

Organizations founded and developing prior to the rising of the Millennial generation's entrance into the workforce had other generations of workers in view: the Greatest and Silent Generations, Baby Boomers, and Generation X. That is sound strategy, to have the organization's design fit workers who operate within it. However, this is a vastly different time with a different workforce. Honoring such wisdom means apprehending and executing its relevant application for the present. Leaders must recognize, therefore, that: A) Organizations craft strategies to pursue market potential and anticipate market circumstances and B) Successful strategies must account for market instability. Thus, C) Organization designs should be malleable to support strategy's inherent need for flexibility.

A major aspect of global change for organizations, according to Kantatip Sinhaneti, from the 2011 *US-China Education Review B*, is the shift in strategic education planning, that the consumer of education is the global firm, the end-user of the educational product (qualified knowledge workers). Lowell Bryan and Claudia Joyce, concur in the late 2007 edition of the *Ivey Business Journal*, remarking that the organization's talent is its scarcest resource, and so leadership needs to figure out how to acquire and leverage that talent for value creation, "mobilizing…the minds of people throughout the firm and converting them into valuable networks, intellectual property, brands, and new or improved business models." Millennials are that talent, and they can help organizations leverage the future in the present. They have surfaced as, "networked, collaborative, connective, and social, as well as adept users of technology," note Janis Balda and Fernando Mora, writing in 2011 for the *Journal of Leadership Studies*. They explain, these organizations are unequipped to lead with the "new skills…[of] relationship building…dialogue and action spaces, and cultural awareness," which Millennials expect – and which the previous generations have sometimes perceived as "hand-holding" more than valuable management tools.

Highlighted by the new knowledge work, Millennials believe the world is like their technology: without boundaries. Andrea Hershatter and Molly Epstein, taking up the psychological side of the discussion in a 2010 edition of the *Journal of Business and Psychology*, argue Millennials can change the world, because for them, the world and technology are one. Like the world, Millennials are, "people and organization-oriented," because technology and people are one, meaning alienation does not occur for them when technology is introduced. In fact, relationships are enhanced. Furthermore, Balda and Mora point out that the new knowledge work fits with their understanding of knowledge itself, its being, "a process that involves learning, seen as personal knowledge acquisition; participation, or interactive knowledge transfer; and creation, as collaborative knowledge building."

Generation Analysis

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics agrees that generations are a valuable stratification tool for workforce data. The theory originates with Karl Mannheim's 1952 essay on "The Problem of Generations" in *Essays on Sociology of Knowledge.* Wendy Murphy, writing in a summer 2012 edition of *Human Resource Management*, summarized Mannheim's concept, "different age groups recall different events as formative experiences, which create collective memories…or mental models…representing shared attitudes and values." Balda and Mora note the bounding categories, called generations, are, "country subculture[s] that [reflect] the prevalent values of the historical period, determined by significant cultural, political, and economic developments."

Table 1 below, an adaptation from seven studies on generations, briefly describes the U.S. American cohorts.

Generation Title	Birth	Key Events	Key Traits
The Greatest Generation	(1901-1924)	WWI, The Great Depression, WWII	Family values, loyalty, stability, stewardship, service toward others
The Silent Generation	(1925-1942)	WWII, The New Deal, The Cold War	
Intervening war years			
Baby Boomers	(1946-1964)	Kennedy and MLK Jr. Assassinations, Vietnam War, Watergate, Sexual Revolution	Optimism, technologically independent, volunteerism, entitlement to life's best, integrity
Generation X	(1965-1979)	D.I.N.K. households, MTV and video games, worldwide trade	Skeptical of institutional authority, results over process, risk taking, smallest fully-formed generation
Millennials	(1980-1999)	9/11/2001, Immigration, Internet and Social Media, Globalization, Iraq/Afghanistan Wars, The Great Recession,	Work-life balance, innovators, well-educated, largest living generation, civic order and justice, passion for impact
Generation Z[en]	*Forming now*	1st Minority President, WMDs, …	To be determined…

Table 1 – Generational Cohorts Snapshot

Principally: generations hold fragmented worldviews, and so multigenerational workforces generally experience problems that, left unexamined, decrease effectiveness. In their book, *When Generations Collide,* Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman exclaim,

> Companies that understand the generational differences and adjust their recruitment and retention strategies accordingly are reaping bottom-line rewards in terms of an increased success rate with job candidates and higher overall satisfaction.

And, enough information on Millennials exists in the literature to strategically leverage their traits.

The Millennial Reality

Formation

The Millennial identity was forged in a world of shifting priorities and preferences. They learned their economics from Reagan and felt the effects of his policies during the plenteous years under Clinton. They collected trading cards printed with Desert Storm service vehicles and saw adults emotionally feed at the trough of daytime soap operas and talk shows. Pop was their culture and soda their medication. They saw global disasters televised as technology became

an extension of their life experience. They grew up *differently*. As Nancy Schullery remarks in a 2013 edition of *Business Communication Quarterly*:

> Recent research has led to the hypothesis that children's brains stimulated by digital technology may differ in both physical structure and function, especially if the stimulation occurs during critical periods of brain development such as early childhood and adolescence…Specific examples of differences include the ability to process fast-moving images more quickly and the ability to "access, sort, categorize, and remember" information well.

No other generation besides Millennials has spent twice as much time playing video games than reading or four times as much watching television by the time they graduate college. They think *differently*.

Equally impactful was the affirmation they received regarding collaboration's value. Teamwork was the panacea for difficult projects and any disagreements, and Millennials flourished in the new model of collaborating through technology – "without authority figures controlling access to information," mention Balda and Mora. Simultaneously, Millennials also experienced unique pressures. They grew up amid a new competitiveness, where, as Hershatter and Epstein put it, "At each life stage, they have had to compete for a fixed number of highly selective and sought-after spots that have not increased quickly enough to meet record demand." Their Boomer parents actively supervised their lives – and still do. Unlike latch-key Xers, Millennials' expect instruction, needing ambiguity explained and the process for dealing with it framed for them. Conveniently, Boomers, tending to be in leadership positions, enjoy giving direction, and want authority, structure, and stability-seeking employees. But, now entering the workforce amid a major economic downswing and massive unemployment, this most-educated generation in history is facing major difficulties, and the organizations who hire them, first-rate culture shock.

A Bad Rap

Unfortunately, Millennials are emerging with a sullied reputation. Jan Ferri-Reed, president of KEYGroup, notes that among their Gen X peers, Millennials are often perceived as impatient and having unrealistic expectations, "believing their lack of experience is not a handicap and that their ideas and opinions are as valuable as the contributions of veteran employees." To such a charge, one responded with typical Millennial egalitarianism to an interview by Thom Schwarz, RN for an issue of *Critical Care Nurse*:

> It is the quality of my work not the quantity of my years that count more. It bothers me when older nurses act as if I have not earned the rights and respect accorded to them, but at the same time they agree that I have earned the right to work in the same unit, on the same patients, shoulder to shoulder with them.

Such retorts have resulted in their being nicknamed Generation Whine. Adding to this contemptuous label of most-favored generation, they are viewed as having difficulty communicating professionally, showing immaturity regarding workplace politics and disregard for organizations' hierarchical information systems, writes Dr. Milan Kubiatko for the Spring 2013 publication of *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*. Schullery adds that their preference for desirable work – contempt for entry-level tasks – makes their older generation coworkers think they expect advancement favor. But, that is too simplistic an explanation to define their engagement motivation.

The Tao of the Millennial

Millennials' ability to multitask, communicating while working, gathering while disbursing, analyzing, and synthesizing, means they can both work and relax simultaneously. It is a cyclical charging and discharging found in the cooperative and collaborative relationships they establish in the workplace or with coworkers through networking. Because constant stimulation and affirmation defined their childhood, they need mentally stimulating and affirming work as adults. Furthermore, their motivation to accomplish an equal amount of work faster and better is a form of pushback against the organizational workaholic-orientation of the Boomers. To do this, they need more information more readily, and so they do not see communication barriers as efficient or just. Because of that injustice, bypassing restrictive information technology policies showcases true loyalty to get the work done and bust up ineffective structures.

Their past has prepared them to expect success, particularly through team effort and in varied environments. That lack of professionalism their predecessors see may be the Millennials' social conscience at work, trying to demolish intangible barriers through informality. Also, it may be a derivative of a parental generation that encouraged a first-name basis between parent and child. While some see barrier-bashing as egotistic and selfish, Balda and Mora think it might be wiser to see this as a manifestation of Millennials', "drive for tangible impact." However, in academia, Millennials are sometimes derided because they do not discern good sources from bad sources of information. Though they can gather and devour information, Hershatter and Epstein argue they have yet to develop a discerning eye and palate. As knowledge workers, this must change, along with the perception that information should always be free.

The Millennials offer thinking-pattern benefits coupled with zeal that organizations are hard-pressed to find elsewhere. For example, in *Trust Agents*, authors Chris Brogan and Julien Smith write, "they realize the value of our networks isn't in their ability to ask for things, but in their ability to complete projects faster, find resources more easily, and reach the right people at the right time." What may seem like pestering to Gen X managers, may be Millennial perfectionism, suggest Hershatter and Epstein, the need to be sure, "they are continuing to move along a linear, progressive path." Additionally, instant gratification-mindedness plays to organizations' advantage, because Millennials work rapidly amid great complexity with advanced solution-development skills *in order to check their work* through supervisory feedback.

Supporting Innovation

What makes Millennial thinking-patterns so valuable? Generational cohorts bearing distinct mental models play a key role in innovation-readiness. Such models are valuable for efficient information processing, but they can also constrain creative thinking; that is to say: they can be hindrances if they function as hammers, blind to all but nails, especially if a new opportunity emerges as a screw. Alternatively, diverse mental maps provide angles of approach which may uncover previously unconsidered solutions. Consider the following diagrams as how varied generations' ways of thinking could increase innovation-readiness within organizations.

**Diagram #1 – We are our fathers' sons**
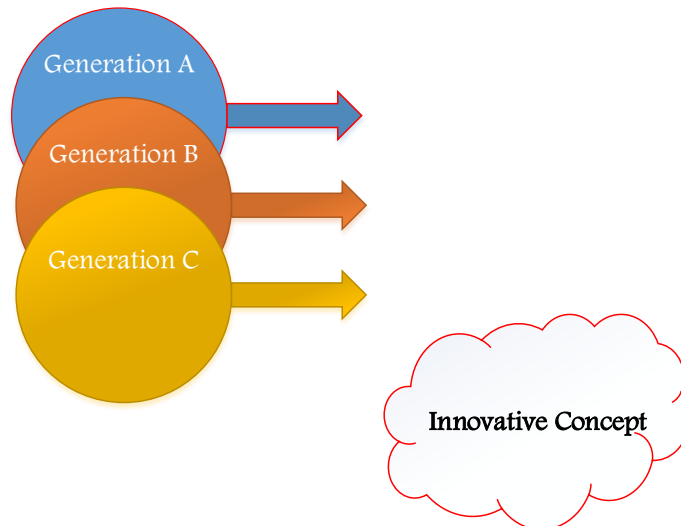
In the first diagram, generations limit their collaborative vision with near-identical perspectives. Their parallel mental models force environmental information through the same processing heuristics. In such cases, every issue requires a cost-cutting measure or a new marketing scheme or a new consulting firm's support. In sum, they all see the issue from the same vantage point. That is also to say, they also share the same blind spots.

Diagram #2 – Emancipation
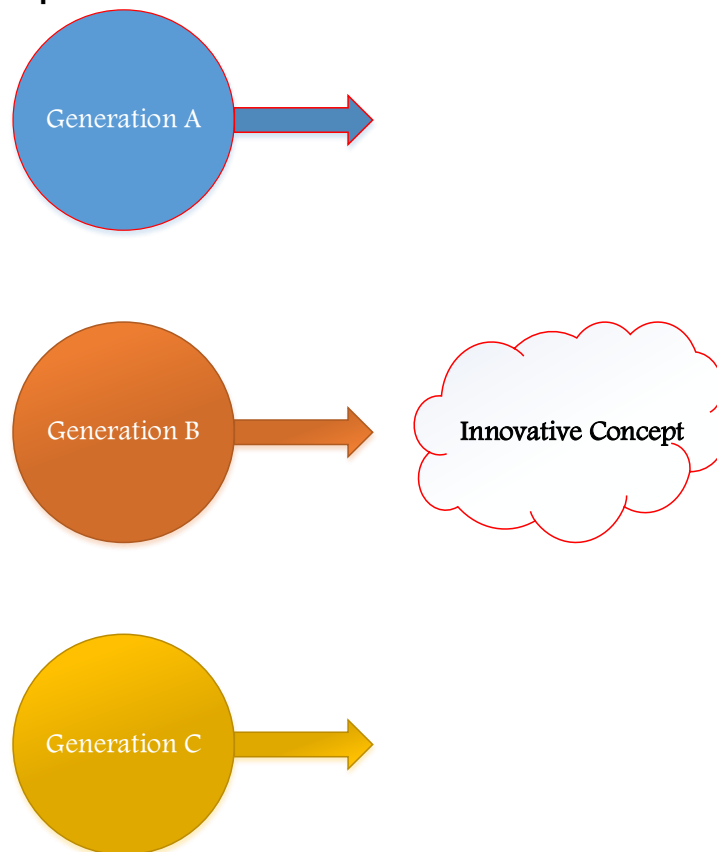
In the second diagram, the perspectives widely differ across generations, but they remain operative without collaborative extension, i.e. the silo effect keeps generations focused on their own concerns in an effort to solve the concern *their way*. Each subsequent generation figures they have the winning recipe for solving the burning questions at hand. Thus, while the proverbial net of available models through which to run the problem is larger than in the first diagram, the information is likely to remain unshared, meaning the net will have large holes and many opportunities for collaborative innovation will be missed.

Diagram #3 – Heave-ho!
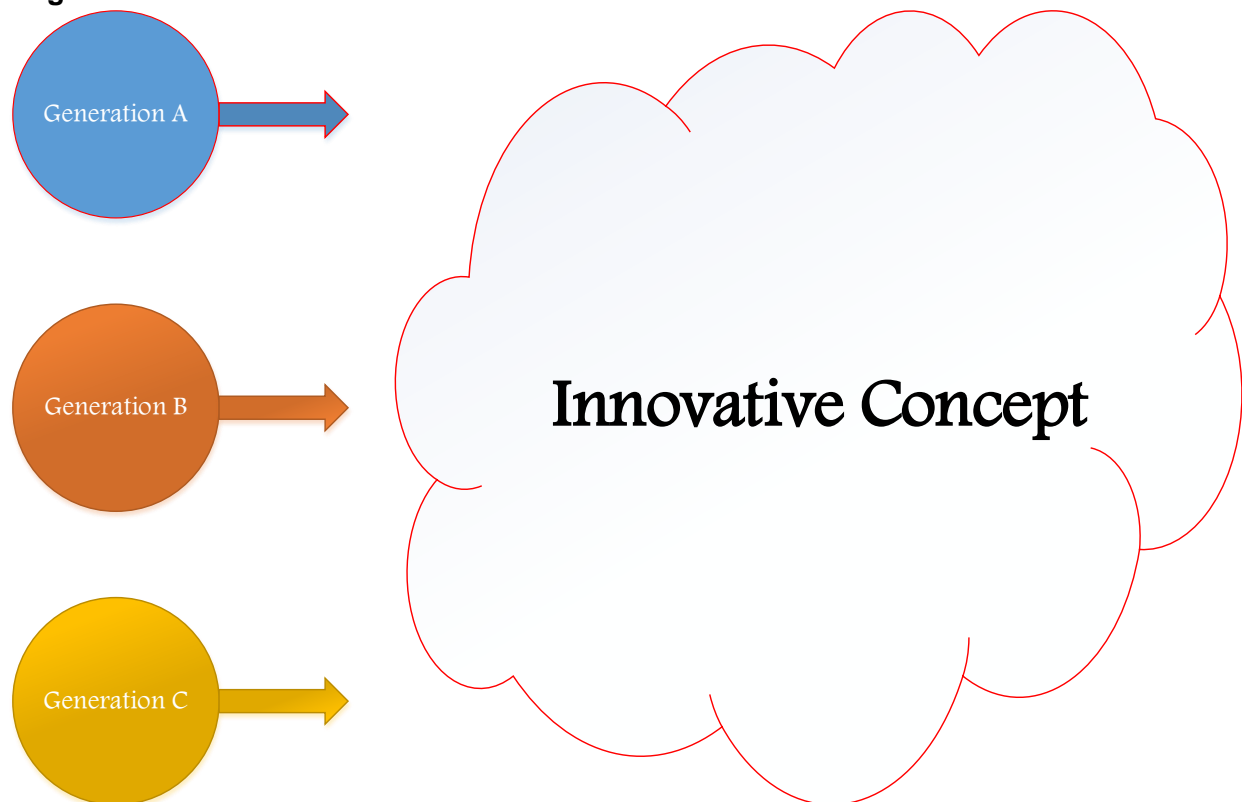
The third diagram allows for diverse perspectives but identifies the answer prematurely as being too large for a single model to address on its own. Thus, the generations work together, with their own models, but they recognize an inherent need for one another's perspectives lest they risk dismissing vital pieces of the puzzle their own maps are incapable of picturing. Still, this diagram assumes direction, a proportionate sense of weight, and relative equal needs for each perspective.

Diagram #4 – Do you see what I see?
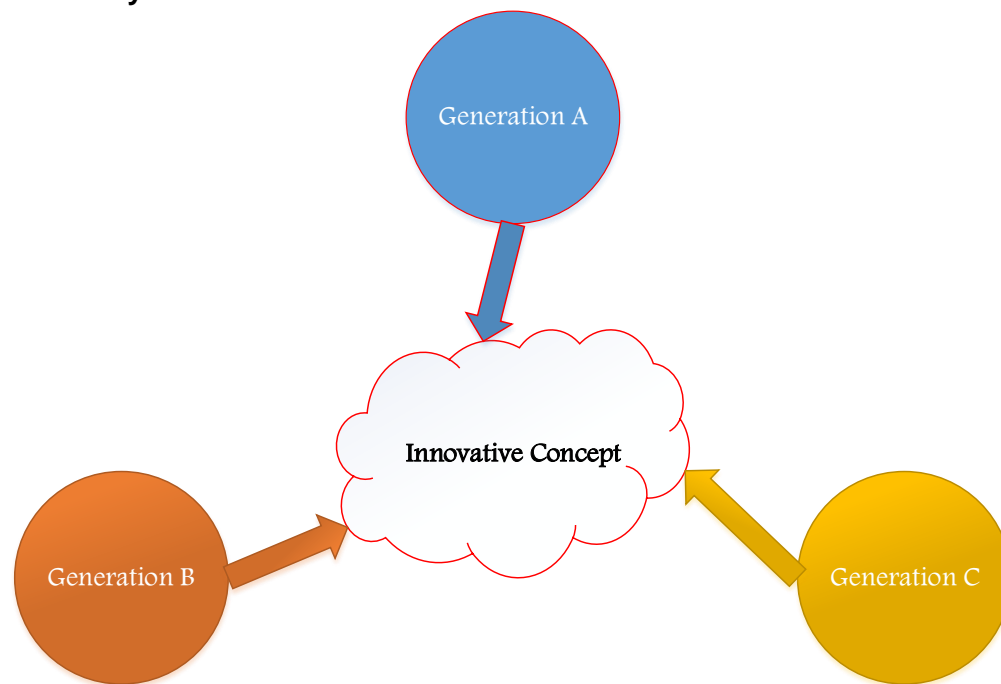
The fourth diagram illustrates a diversity of need, where each generational model operates where it fits. Input is need-based, protecting against superficial egalitarianism. The equality push certainly benefits the least empowered, the ones most hindered by hierarchy and experience requirements. True, such barriers are valuable when they hinder individuals who should not have authority or decision-making power, but they are rarely flexible. Truly, egalitarian workplaces are really about making the workplace unequal, supporting inexperienced youthfulness bearing *inordinate strength* that would otherwise be left untapped. Though such strength is rare, the higher-educated generation may make it more common in latent form. Accessing it is an organizational matter. Additionally, the fourth diagram illustrates how collaborative work can go beyond capturing innovative concepts to shaping them. Here, the generational workers help one another by identifying inflection points where innovation could be obtuse or undefined; therefore, their emphasizing of particular mental models (including leadership approaches, motivations, historical understandings and cultural reference points, and methods of exercising power and control over their environment, etc.) directs the process of innovation discovery and alignment so that it fits the organization and so that the organization can properly refine what it unearths.

Winning Recipes

Given how Millennials think and interact, and some of the foundational "why's" upholding their mindsets and behaviors, organizational leaders need to deploy new organization designs to leverage Millennials without alienating and aggravating Boomers and Gen Xers. Additionally, Generation Zen is preparing to join up, and so redesigns need to be flexible. With that strategy for the multigenerational organization, what follows are suggested solutions for the three remaining organizational components of the Star Model, a creation of internationally renowned

organization design expert, Jay Galbraith. As expected from the model, many of these solutions overlap in their effects.
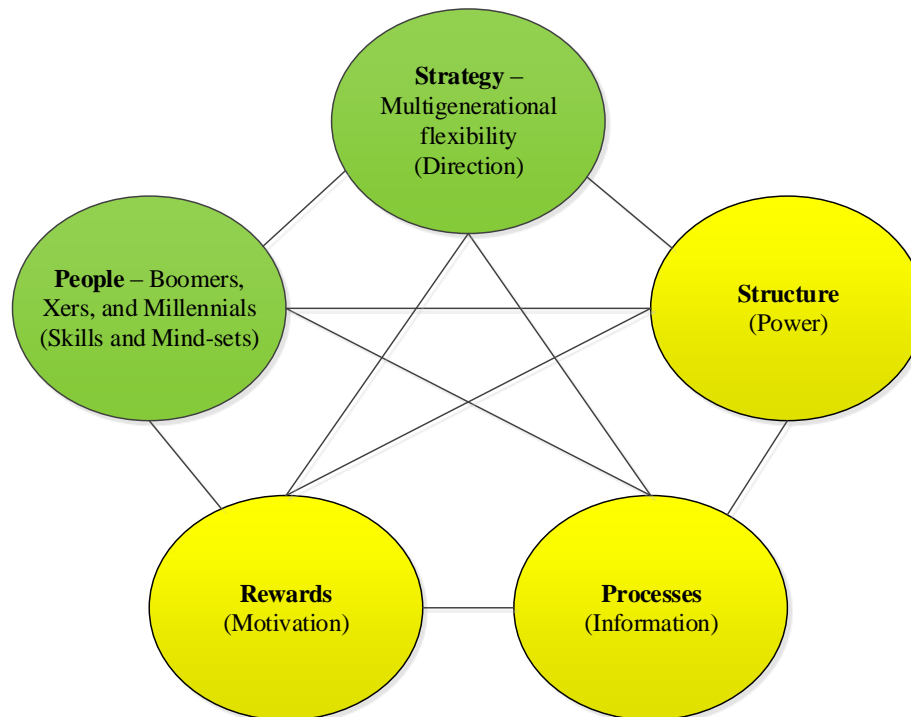

Figure 1 – Galbraith's Star Model

Structures

Millennial Value	Organization Solution
Egalitarian, meritocratic environments where they are judged on ability to accomplish work requested rather than tenure	Millennials value loyalty, and so they recognize that seniority has a place. Utilize structured mentoring relationships to provide Millennials with the means to take action without pulling the ladder out from under established-model workers. This will create a situation where mentees receive the benefits of "sponsorship, coaching exposure and visibility, protection, and challenging assignments," according to Wendy Murphy. Older workers benefit through traditional or reverse mentoring relationships in the discovery of talent and a testing ground for planning their succession.

Processes

Millennial Value	Organization Solution
Collaborative environments, providing immediate feedback and channels for dialogue and information collection	Balda and Mora argue for, Less hierarchical organizations that put an emphasis on people, relationships, communication, innovation, and creativity… New practices, organizational designs, and actionable knowledge that enables all sorts of multigenerational teams, groups, and collaborative communities to produce results for the organization and steward its mission. Two particular models they endorse are the Agile Software Process and the Scrum approach. The former founds team and task-development in conversation to remove obstacles to project success and the latter organizes members by well-defined roles, unifies the

	teams around a clear goal, and provides a way for everyone, even those not on the work team, to be informed. Matt McCallum, in the January 2013 issue of *Smart Business Cleveland*, promotes remodeling physical space to increase opportunities for interaction also facilitates this purpose.

Rewards & People

Millennial Value	Organization Solution
Equipping/training, leadership, balanced work-life	Millennials need to learn, and facilitated trial and error experiences work best. Also, provide regular coaching and training. Keep the focus on their development, showing you value them as assets and are investing in them for the organization's future. They will likely interpret that as an obligation to reciprocate with spectacular results and live up to your expectations. Finally, *they believe anything is possible.* If you do not "correct" them on that point, then they will make *anything* a reality.

Conclusion

When philosopher and organizational management expert Charles Handy showed us glimpses of the workforce changing, only a few digital prophets saw the writing on the [Facebook] wall, how the next generation would changes us. As Günter Ropohl said in his essay "Philosophy of socio-technical systems": "Every invention is an intervention, an intervention into nature and society [ergo] technical development is equivalent to social change." Technologies have intervened. Millennials, more than any others, prove this. They manifest malleability, and we need them for it. We will not become like them nor they become like us, but we will be the first to pass away, and they will remain. The question then will be whether we made enough room at the table to let them learn from our successes and failures, and whether we led them well enough that our strengths were carried on with and through them. Our organizations' legacies have no other hope.

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