

What Do Millennials Want in the Perfect Workplace Environment?

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Abstract

Twenty-two variables were identified and selected by millennial students as the most important factors contributing to the millennial employee's ideal workplace environment. These students were attending a small, southern university School of Business in the United States. On a 5-point Ranking Scale, fifty-two college students responded to a student-designed survey ranking the importance of twenty-two workplace environment variables. It was determined that motivation by "being involved in the company's decisions" and "working with positive-like-minded people" were the two most important factors. These were followed by "having modern equipment" and "liking the company I work for". The most significant factors impacting job position selection are "great working conditions including good equipment, good work environment and low stress".

Keywords: millennials; workplace; ideal environment; Generation Y; Millennial Generation

Introduction

Will Rogers, the famous American cowboy and everyman philosopher once said, "Things ain't what they used to be". How right he was in the field of human resource management. For example, The International Encyclopedia of Social Policy recognized that in the 1950's, the male breadwinner model was in practice. Men went to work from 8 am to 5 pm, came home and were greeted by their stay at home wives. The breadwinner would work for one company most of his active career and a sense of loyalty was demonstrated by the employer and employee alike. Baby-boomers entered the job market. They were high achievers, goal oriented and it was likely that both spouses worked. It was the era of the "Super Woman". This full-time working female had much to accomplish if she was going to hold her own in the male-dominated boardroom. Some female workers felt it necessary to give up the picket fence dream and the desire to have a family if they wished to succeed in the world of business. Divorce became more prevalent impacting family life, work force needs, and the financial requirements necessary to survive. In today's workplace model, companies are losing older workers and baby-boomers. These corporate workers are being replaced by the Millennial Generation or Generation Y. As older workers and baby-boomers leave the workplace, they are being replaced by more millennials taking on their leadership roles. Payscale.com found that approximately 13% of all millennials in America are already managers in the workplace with the number expected to rise in 2015 and beyond. At this moment, millennials have become the largest percentage of the workforce. The profile of the workforce is changing.

As this dramatic change takes place and the millennial worker takes over, it may require a new and different perspective and a new generational action plan from our business owners. Whether a large corporation, entrepreneurial enterprise, or a small mom and pop operation, the factors that motivate the millennial worker to join a company, stay with a company and be content in the business environment in which they work, are changing. Human resource managers will require a new set of motivators and an alternative game plan to entice and hold the millennial worker today and in the future. The persons most qualified to identify the needs and expectations of the new generation of worker may be the millennial; the new generation of worker that is impacting the workplace and workforce most dramatically.

Definition of Millennials

Millennials, also known as the Millennial Generation or Generation Y, are the demographic group following Generation X. There are no precise dates when the Millennial Generation starts and ends. Most researchers use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to early 2000s. In 2014, the Pew Research Center, an American think tank organization, defined "Adult Millennials" as those who are 18 to 33 years old, born 1981–1996. In a separate report, in 2015, Pew Research Center defined Millennials with birth years ranging from 1981 to 1997. Regardless of the differences in dates in the two reports, these employees have entered the workforce, and unlike previous generations of employees, they do not seek to conform to company culture. It is their intention to alter the company culture, and not in a subtle way.

Workers and workplace practices and expectations have changed since the 1950s, Research indicates that in today's world, Millennial Workers or Generation Y, have now taken over as a majority of the workforce. Attracting them will require redefining recruitment. Generation Y workers expect to be engaged and are looking for more than just the paycheck in the ideal workplace environment.

Millennials have a different view of the world than their predecessors. They are, for example, accustomed to sharing their digital files and music. They have been brought up with social media as a focal point for their social activities and as a staple in their daily lives. Technology is an integral part of their connection with friends, family and co-workers. As quickly as technology evolves with new versions of the I-Phone, PlayStation, Mac, PC, the millennial shifts and shapes to comply with it and use it in creative ways. Millennials are wired in. Understanding what makes the perfect workplace environment for this new employee and making the significant changes to attract and retain these future workers will be key determinants to success for the businesses of today and tomorrow.

Mind The Gaps

Mind the Gaps: The 2015 Deloitte Millennial Survey, sought responses from over 7,800 corporate leaders from 29 countries, to determine what these front-runners believed to be effective leadership, business operations and societal impacts. On the landscape of the evolving workforce, these researchers found the following:

- Millennials overwhelmingly believe (75 percent) businesses are focused on their own agendas rather than helping to improve society.

- Only 28 percent of millennials feel that their current organization is making full use of their skills.
- Additionally, more than half (53 percent) of millennials aspire to become the leader or most senior executive within their current organization.

Given these statistics, the landscape of the workplace is already beginning to feel the impact and directional shift in corporate agendas led by the millennial workforce. These new leaders and board executives will impact their organizations in ways not yet known. There are, however, several factors that have been identified as work-related characteristics which are defining the Millennial Worker.

Howe and Strauss (2007) indicated in “The Next Twenty Years: How Customer and Workforce Will Evolve”, that millennials are seeking “teamwork, security and work-life balance”. These three attributes were not identified as significant contributors to the ideal workplace for the generation before them. Yet the children of the Soccer Moms have had the opportunity over the course of their upbringing and development to watch their parents struggle with the perils of working full time. They recognize the pitfalls associated with the lifestyle of the single parent attempting to juggle work and family responsibilities. They understand it is a difficult task to master. These real world scenarios have impacted the millennial leading to a greater appreciation that work-life balance is an important, valued characteristic of the ideal work environment they seek to enter. Teamwork lessens the load and millennials are comfortable engaging in a symbiotic relationship that enhances their chances of success and job satisfaction.

In addition to the above factors, A PrincetonOne White Paper entitled, *Understanding Generation Y*, asserts that “Gen Yers are looking for meaningful and challenging work and may take longer finding a job than members of the previous generation.” As a group, millennials have received more academic education and training and are more tech saavy than the previous generations. This additional education and training has introduced them to new opportunities and new ways of viewing the world order. It has also given them tools to alter the way in which they do business. Millennials are weighing their options and determining what is in their best interest. They are pursuing their personal and professional goals at the same time. They are so committed to this pursuit that based on the results of the PrincetonONE White Paper, millennials are also willing to forego the immediate paycheck in search for the job offer that best meets their stated needs.

The Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The primary goal was to identify a list of variables millennial students believe represent the most important criteria for creating the perfect workplace environment for themselves and their millennial peers. The secondary purpose of the study was to implement the survey, collect the data, and analyze the results to determine which of the selected variables presented in the survey were found to be the most significant factors impacting the perfect workplace for the millennial employee.

Sample and Survey

This study was carried out on a representative population of millennial peers. The sample of respondents consisted of 52 college students, ranging in age from 18 to 24 years old. These students were attending a small, southern university School of Business in the United States. The survey was created and posted on

Survey Monkey. Twenty-two (22) Likert-type 5-point scale statements were identified. All items were responded to on a Likert-type scale from ratings ranging from 1 through 5, with 1 representing strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree being given a value of 5.) One (1) Ranking Statement (most important to least important) ordering four variables considered important to the students when choosing a job was also created and used in the survey.

Students enrolled in an advanced business elective, Human Resources Management, in the School of Business Management Program created the list of variables used in the study. The variables selected were based on the millennial students’ perceived importance of these variables in the creation of the perfect workplace environment for the millennial. No prior research on the topic was presented to the students in advance of their variable selections. It was the intention of the researcher to collect variables students perceived as valuable without any additional outside influences, opinions, research, or literature review. The list of variables can be found in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 found below.

Results

Variables Identified

A list of twenty-two (22) variables describing Generation Y’s ideal workplace was created after compiling and analyzing survey data. Based on the results of the analysis, four categories were identified. The four categories are: 1. “Me” Oriented Satisfaction, 2. “Boss” Oriented Satisfaction, 3. “Colleague’ Oriented Satisfaction, and, 4. “Workplace Condition” Satisfaction.

See Table 1 through Table 4 for the list of variables identified by millennials as the most important criteria for millennials in the perfect workplace environment.

Table 1. “Me” Oriented Satisfaction Variables Identified by Millennials as the Most Important Criteria for Millennials in the Perfect Workplace Environment

Variables	
“Me” Oriented Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I like my work. 2. I like the company I work for. 3. I like my colleagues. 4. I like working overtime. 5. I am proud of my work. 6. I have good benefits. 7. I have a good working relationship with my boss.

Table 2. Boss Oriented Satisfaction Variables Identified by Millennials as the Most Important Criteria for Millennials in the Perfect Workplace Environment

Variables
<p>“Boss” Oriented Satisfaction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My supervisor is good at communicating demands. 2. My boss has my best interests in mind all the time. 3. My boss is as dedicated to employees as to the company. 4. My boss is a great team player

Table 3. Colleague Oriented Satisfaction Variables Identified by Millennials as the Most Important Criteria for Millennials in the Perfect Workplace Environment

Variables
<p>“Colleague” Oriented Satisfaction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In order to be efficient at work I must get along with colleagues. 2. I prefer to work alone rather than with a team. 3. Working with positive, like-minded people improves my work ethic. 4. It is important to have as many women as men in the company where I work. 5. It is important to have my own personal space at work.

Table 4. Workplace Condition Satisfaction Variables Identified by Millennials as the Most Important Criteria for Millennials in the Perfect Workplace Environment

Variables
<p>“Workplace Condition” Satisfaction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I prefer to work from home. 2. I would prefer to have time off rather than compensation for my overtime work. 3. Being involved in the company’s decisions is important to feeling motivated. 4. Being allowed to work whenever I want as long as I do the job is Important. 5. Having modern equipment is important to doing my job well. 6. Sanctions or penalties are required within the workplace.

Note: All items were responded to on a Likert-type scale from statements ranging from 1 through 5; 1 being valued as strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree being valued at 5. One (1) Ranking Statement (most important to least important) ordering four variables considered important to the students when choosing a job was also created and used in the survey.

The survey data reflect four significant factors which were identified as central to the perfect workplace for the millennial worker today: (1.) “Being involved in the company’s decisions”; (2.) “Working with

positive-like-minded people”; (3.) “Having modern equipment to do my job well”; and (4.) “Liking the company I work for”.

The two variables identified by millennial respondents as most important to the perfect workplace environment were “Being involved in company’s decisions” (4.21) and “Working with positive-like-minded people” (4.21).

Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed that being involved in the decision-making process of the company was very important to their motivation. Almost thirty percent (28.85%) agreed with this statement as being a priority in the perfect workplace. The second variable chosen by the millennial worker was “Working with positive-like-minded people”. (4.21). Research indicated that forty-eight percent (48.08%) agreed that working with positive-minded colleagues was an important factor in the perfect workplace. One third of the respondents (33.54%) strongly agreed with this statement. “Having modern equipment” (4.19) and “Liking the company I work for” (4.19) were also identified. Not quite one-half of the respondents agree (40.38%) and strongly agreed (44.23%) that having modern equipment for doing the job well was important. “Liking the company I work for” (4.19) was also chosen as one of the more important factors required in the modern millennial perfect workplace environment.

Forty-four percent (44.23%) of the respondents strongly agreed and one-third agreed (32.69%) that “liking the company I work for” is an important factor in the perfect workplace.

There were two more variables that stood out in terms of importance in the perfect workplace. They were: “Having a good relationship with my boss” and “My boss is a great team player”.

Fifty-three percent (53.85%) of the respondents agreed that “Having a good working relationship with my boss” and “My boss is a great team player” were both important criteria for a perfect workplace. Almost one-third of the respondents strongly agreed that “Having a good working relationship with my boss” was an important variable for the perfect workplace with twenty percent (21.15%) strongly agreeing that “My boss is a great team player” is of significant value to the perfect workplace. Both of these variable scores were cumulatively lower (4.15 and 3.88 respectively) than the top four variables.

The One (1) Ranking Statement ordering four selected variables considered important to Millennials found “Great work conditions (good equipment, good work environment, less stress, etc.)” was ranked the most important factor when choosing a job. An interesting side note is that forty percent (40.38%) of the respondents agreed that the variable, “Sanctions or penalties are required within the workplace” in order to have the perfect workplace environment.

Conclusion

Based on these results, the variables found to be most significant: “Being involved in company’s decisions”, “Working with positive-like-minded people”, “Having modern equipment”, “Liking the

company I work for”; “Having a good relationship with my boss”; and “My boss is a great team player”, should be further researched. Further research should also be conducted to identify variables currently identified in recent research as significant determinants of millennial satisfaction in the workplace.

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