

# **The Millennials: An Investigation of their Organizational Commitment, Work Values, and Person-Work Environment Fit**

## **Executive Summary**

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### ***Purpose of the Research***

The Millennials (people born after 1981) have recently entered the workforce, joining the Silent Generation (people born between 1925 and 1942), the Baby Boomers (people born between 1943 and 1960), and Generation X (people born between 1961 and 1981) (Strauss & Howe, 1991). There has been considerable speculation in the mass media and among the older generations that the Millennials have very different values and attitudes about work, particularly compared to the older workforce.

Overall, it is often said that compared to the older generations, the Millennials have a general lack of commitment to their organization, and that they are more likely to value opportunities to learn new skills and advance quickly in their careers, that they are more likely to want to be involved in organizational decisions and be given challenging work that is personally fulfilling, that they want work that allows for personal flexibility and greater work-life balance, and that they place greater importance on opportunities for teamwork and constant positive feedback (e.g., Brusilow, 2008; Katz, 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Safer, 2007). Despite these speculations, there has been very little research to confirm or refute such generational stereotypes.

The first purpose of the present study was to compare the loyalty and work values of the Millennials to the loyalty and work values of the older generations in the workforce. The second purpose of the research was to explore whether specific work values held by the Millennials were related to their different levels of commitment to the company for which they work.

### ***Participants***

The total sample was composed of 377 participants - 56% female; 34% male.

The generational breakdown of the sample was:

- 1.5% Silent Generation (excluded from subsequent analyses due to the small and unrepresentative sample size);
- 30% Baby Boomers;
- 43% Generation X;
- 25.5% Millennials

Participants were recruited either through snowball (i.e., referral) sampling (45%) or through select organizations in real estate (18%), high tech (10%), the hospitality industry (18%), or the transport truck sales and service industry (8%).

Most of the sample had a high level of post secondary education:

- 21% had a community college diploma;
- 25% had a university degree;
- 12% had a Masters degree; and
- 1.5% had a PhD

Most respondents were:

- employed full time (76%);
- employed in a permanent job (67%);
- from the private sector (75 %); and
- employed in Canada (90 %)

## ***Research Findings***

### ***Generational Differences in Organizational Commitment***

Both the Millennials and Generation X had significantly lower organizational commitment compared to the Baby Boomers (See Table 1). Organizational commitment remained lowest for Millennials even after controlling for their recent entry to the workforce, a time in which commitment to one's employer is generally at its lowest. These results suggest that lower organizational commitment is a characteristic of younger generations in general as opposed to just the Millennials.

*Table 1. Mean levels of Organizational Commitment by Generation*

Generation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Baby Boomers	3.61 <sub>a,b</sub>	.80	109
Generation X	3.25 <sub>a</sub>	.95	156
Millennials	3.17 <sub>b</sub>	.83	88

*Note.* Means having the same subscript **are** significantly different.

### ***Generational Differences in Work Values***

Nine different work values were studied:

- 1) Opportunity to learn new skills;
- 2) Team work;
- 3) Opportunity for advancement in career;
- 4) Ability to influence organizational outcomes;
- 5) Challenging tasks;
- 6) Personal flexibility;
- 7) Work-life balance;
- 8) Management that provides feedback; and
- 9) Personally fulfilling work

Of these nine values, there were two generational differences:

- 1) The Millennials placed significantly greater importance on opportunities for advancement within one's career compared to the Baby Boomers and Generation X. Generation X also placed significantly greater importance on this work value compared to the Baby Boomers.
- 2) Baby Boomers placed significantly greater importance on opportunities for teamwork compared to Generation X. There were, however, no significant differences between the Baby Boomers and Generation X or Generation X and the Millennials. See Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Levels of Importance Placed on Work Values with Significant Generational Differences

Generation	<u>Opportunities for advancement in career</u>		<u>Opportunities for teamwork</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Baby Boomers ( <i>n</i> = 100)	3.99 <sub>a</sub>	0.85	3.79 <sub>a</sub>	1.10
Generation X ( <i>n</i> = 144)	4.26 <sub>a</sub>	0.88	3.40	1.03
Millennials ( <i>n</i> = 78)	4.59 <sub>a</sub>	0.59	3.44	0.97

Note. Means having the same subscript **are** significantly different.

There were no generational differences on the remaining seven work values. See Table 3. These results suggest that the Millennials share more similar work values with the older generations than different ones.

Table 3. Mean Levels of Importance Placed on Remaining Work Values by Generation

Generation	<u>Learn new skills</u>	<u>Influence organization</u>	<u>Challenging tasks</u>	<u>Flexible Work</u>	<u>Work-life balance</u>	<u>Feedback</u>	<u>Fulfilling work</u>
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )	( <i>SD</i> )
Baby Boomers ( <i>n</i> = 100)	4.41 (0.73)	4.01 (0.88)	4.47 (0.61)	4.33 (0.71)	4.50 (0.69)	4.32 (0.75)	4.59 (0.60)
Generation X ( <i>n</i> = 144)	4.51 (0.59)	3.81 (0.91)	4.46 (0.64)	4.26 (0.63)	4.63 (0.58)	4.19 (0.86)	4.49 (0.63)
Millennials ( <i>n</i> = 78)	4.62 (0.56)	3.73 (0.85)	4.36 (0.66)	4.19 (0.74)	4.62 (0.63)	4.40 (0.63)	4.42 (0.67)

Note. Means having the same subscript **are** significantly different.

### **Generational Differences in Person-Work Environment Fit**

Generational differences in person-work environment fit were tested for the two significant work value dimensions: opportunity for advancement in one's career and opportunity for teamwork. There were no significant differences between the Millennials and the older two generations in person-work environment for either work value dimension. See Table 4.

Thus, despite the Millennials placing greater importance on opportunities for advancement within one's career and lower importance on teamwork compared to the older generations, their work values were congruent with the work environment. This finding indicates that the Millennials' lower organizational commitment cannot be attributed to a mismatch between Millennial-specific work values and their work environments.

Table 4. Person-Work Environment Fit Scores by Generation

Generation	<u>Opportunities for advancement in career</u>			<u>Opportunities for teamwork</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Baby Boomers	.56	1.36	108	-.15 <sub>a</sub>	1.21	107
Generation X	.82	1.34	146	-.57 <sub>a</sub>	1.22	145
Millennials	.97	1.32	76	-.41	1.06	76

Notes. Means having the same subscript **are** significantly different. Positive numbers reflect a greater value placed on the work value, relative to the presence of that work value in the work environment; negative numbers reflect a lesser value placed on the work value, relative to the presence of that work value in the work environment the higher the number, the lower the person-work environment fit.

## *Conclusions*

The results of the current study suggest that a lack of loyalty appears to be characteristic of the younger generations in general as opposed to just the Millennials. The Millennials' lower commitment was still present after controlling for organizational tenure, suggesting that the Millennials' new entry into the workforce, a time when commitment is generally the lowest, was not the cause of differences in commitment. Similarly, Millennial-specific work values and incongruent work environments were not found to contribute to the Millennials lower organizational commitment.

Generational differences in work values were found for two out of the nine work values tested; the Millennials placed greater importance on having opportunities for advancement in their career and lower importance on teamwork. These values may be attributed to the Millennials' "I am special" and "look at me" mentality resulting from a childhood of self-esteem boosting, technology such as Facebook and YouTube, and reality television shows such as American Idol, which offer continued opportunities for attention and instant fame (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). The Millennials may desire opportunities for advancement in their career because promotions reinforce feelings of importance and place the focus of attention on the individual. Conversely, the Millennials may place less value on opportunities for teamwork because it takes away attention from the individual as success is attributed to the group.

Understanding generational differences in loyalty and work values is important for organizations as they are important building blocks for effectively attracting, retaining, and training Millennials. However, the presence of more similarities than differences between the Millennials and the older generations suggests that it is also equally important for organizations seeking to embrace diversity to realize the commonalities between employees of different ages and generations.

## *References*

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