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Ready or Not, We're Here! A Naturalistic Study of Millennials in International Student Advising

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A naturalistic study of millennials in international student advising

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Abstract

This case study uses naturalistic methods to investigate how Millennials work in the field of international student advising. The oldest Millennial is 30 years old, which creates a gap in research on how this cohort performs and prefers work. Through observations and a focus group interview, data on training methods, mentorships, technology use, and motivations for entering international student advising were explored. Findings revealed that previous research is correct. Millennials prefer to be interactively engaged with training material, seek mentors and not managers, use technology, and look for careers that will fulfill them intrinsically.

Introduction

Understanding the personalities, values, and motivations of generational cohorts assists in providing effective training and mentoring programs (Gordon & Steele, 2005; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). The Millennials, who were born between 1980 and 2000, (Zemke et al., 2000) have been entering the workforce for the last eight years, but few in depth studies have focused on how this new generation of professionals is relating and training in the workplace (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). This study explores the attitude, motivation, goals, and needs of the current generation of new international student and scholar services (ISSS) professionals. This study will identify and recommend ways to empower management to develop strategies for working with and providing proper training and mentoring for the next generation of ISSS advisors.

As an ISSS advisor for the last 6 years and a cohort member of the Millennial generation, I have a personal interest in the motivations and goals of my peers. Scholars have been theorizing and suggesting methods for reaching this generation in the workplace and in schools in last decade (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Gordon & Steele, 2005; Kelan, 2008; Macky et al., 2008; Zemke et al., 2000). These scholars are developing theories on how to reach our generation by comparing information of past generations with the historical and social media influences of today. However, due to a small sample size in the workforce little research has received direct feedback from the Millennials on how they view the workplace and their career motivations (Smola & Sutton, 2002). In addition, there is limited generational research on student affairs staff (Gordon & Steele, 2000) and no research on effective training for ISSS professionals. This study fills this gap in the literature by gaining direct insight from Millennials in the ISSS field and will seek to answer management's questions on how to train and mentor the new workforce.

This study is significant for directors and managers of international education departments at post-secondary institutions. It will have implications for training and mentorship programs for new employees in the field of international student and scholar advising, but is also applicable for all student affairs staff at educational institutions.

Literature Review

In this section the definition of four generation cohorts will be explained: the traditionalists, the baby boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. The generational differences and similarities will be compared. Once a general understanding of the generations has been established, details on work preferences and communication style will be explored.

Generations Explained

While this study will focus on the motivation and needs of Millennials, I will start with a historical overview of the four most recent generational groups, providing a backdrop to the explanations of how the motivations and needs of Millennials are different from their varying generational colleagues. Today's workforce is unique because it contains four generational cohorts spanning a birth range of 1922 – 1980 (Zemke et al., 2000). A generational cohort is typically defined as those who share common historical or social life experiences (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Macky et al. (2008) reminds us that not everyone associated with their birth year generation will fit the description because of variations in social class, education, gender, and national origin are typically not considered during generational research.

The oldest generation, often referred to as the Veterans due to their civil service during WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War were born between the years of 1922 – 1943 (Zemke et al, 2000). Although there are few veterans left in the workforce today, they place a high value on law and order, are disciplined, respect authority and have a commitment to

community based service (Gordon & Steele, 2005; Zemke et al, 200). After the war ended and veterans returned home, they brought their military education and culture into the workplace. This experience has made Veterans a pivotal piece in the creation of the bureaucratic organizational structure we still see today in the US business world (Zemke et al., 2000).

The next generational group is the Baby Boomers. Born from 1943 – 1960, Boomers are the largest generational cohort in the United States both in the overall population and workforce (Zemke et al., 2000). According to Zemke et al., (2000) the Veteran parents of Boomers refocused their energy from their country to their children creating a cohort with high self-esteem, optimism, and a tendency to be self indulgent. Boomers who are still in the workplace tend to hold higher administrative positions and have high expectations of their colleagues to "tow the line". They work long hours, strive for equality in the workplace, and have brought management principles such as servant leadership and participative management to the business world. With all their positive attributes in the workplace, Boomers still tend to struggle with the technological advances of today's world (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000).

Generation X represents those born from 1960 – 1980. They are the children of the Boomers and were often lost in the shuffle of their parents' high-powered careers and divorces. This was the first generation to feel the affects of dual-income households and corporate downsizing. Due to these life experiences, Xers are self-reliant, in search of a sense of family and community, and skeptical of the government and corporations (Zemke, et al., 2000). Gordon and Steele (2005) note the importance of "work-family life balance, independence, and creativity " for Xers in the workplace. Most Xers, especially those who were born in the later half of their generational cohort are technologically savvy because they were raised with computers, microwaves, and VCRs (Zemke et al., 2000).   Some research notes the cynical attitude of Xers

and their frustration with both Boomers style of management and Millennials constant need for approval (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000).

The Millennials also referred to as generation Y or Why, the Internet generation, Nintendo generation, generation next, echo boomers, the Dot-Coms, the iGeneration, the Me Generation, or Generation-D (digital) are the youngest cohort in the workplace (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Zemke et al., 2000). With birth years ranging from 1980 – 2000 they represent the age demographic of 18 – 30 in the current day workforce. One third of Millennials are born to single unwed mothers, the largest of this demographic to ever have children (Zemke et al., 2000). The rest are born to Boomers who waited until late in life to have children or Xers who are determined to create a sense of family in their lives (Zemke et al., 200). This has led to a generational group whose parents are not only "parenting, but advocating on their behalf" (Zemke, et al., 2000, p.128).

Although it may seem this generation would be sheltered with their parents constant hovering, by the age of 10 many Millennials have an understanding about divorce, drugs, AIDS, anorexia, gangs, guns, sex, environmental issues, internet, and a variety of technological devices (Zemke et al., 2000). They are not afraid to use the internet to find information; instead they use it as their primary source for instant data retrieval and news (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). Reliance and expectations of instant information causes frustration with educators who find this group of students tend not fact check as much as they would like or expect (Feiertag & Berge, 2008).

With the media broadcasting school shootings, economic peril, and violent wars, Millennials are the first generation to seek out community service and civil rights advocacy in high numbers since the Veterans generation (Zemke, et al., 2000). In fact, Zemke et al (2000)

notes that a majority of high school students will have served their community in some way prior to graduation.

Generational commentaries have stated that Millennials in the workplace are high maintenance, expect constant feedback, are great team players and like to maintain a high level of work life balance (Macky, et al., 2008; Gordon & Steele, 2005). Their role in the workplace brings new technological advances, but can create conflict among their Boomer and Generation X colleagues who respectively find their lack of work ethic and need for constant attention annoying (Gordon & Steele, 2000).

Communicating in the Workplace

With a generation of workers who are passionate about their community, manipulate technology with ease, and expect constant feedback and group work, how should Boomer and Xer managers work with Millennials to keep them interested and motivated with the organization or their career? Feiertag and Berge (2008) note while not all Millennials are technologically savvy, the vast majority will have a thorough understanding and expect the classroom and workplace to have computers, instant messaging, email, and word processing. Not only will they expect this, they will desire these functionalities in their daily lives. Preference to work in groups and interact with technology has created a cohort desiring interactive training and learning methods (Smola & Sutton, 2002). In addition, parents who give constant support and feedback have translated to a worker that prefers to be mentored and guided on life choices instead of manager explaining the day to day tasks (Marston, 2007). This section will explore Millennials expectations of technology and mentoring in the workplace.

Technology Use

Technological devices and platforms such as instant messaging, use of the Internet, text messaging are a common method for communicating in a Millennials everyday life (DeGennaro, 2008). While technology brings our society many conveniences it also creates a cohort of learners who jumps from activity to activity and from person to person (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). For some educators and employers, this inability to focus can be a cause for frustration (Feiertag & Berge, 2008), but for most they praise the multi-tasking traits Milliennials have learned through their technology use (Selwyn, 2009). As technology has advanced to create interactive online modules, Milliennials preference for a learning environment that makes them part of the process and not a passive participant has also changed (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Selwyn, 2009). These studies suggest instances involving interactive learning and a variety of pedagogical styles during training processes will keep the attention of Milliennials.

Wesson and Gogus (2005) researched the effectiveness of computer-meditated training in regards to organizational socialization and basic job functions. Socialization is the process for an individual to learn the customs and behaviors required to fully participate in an organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). According to Wesson and Gogus (2005), socialization during the newcomer orientation period is typically done through face to face meetings and the development of relationships. With the advent of computer training modules on the rise, they tested if new employees were able to learn an organization's goals and values through online software training programs. Wesson and Gogus (2005) found a low level of effectiveness on organizational socialization through computer modules. Their sample size consisted of a mean age of 34.2 years in 2005 indicating a majority of participants are in the Generation X cohort. Although Xers are technologically savvy, technology is not embedded into every function of their life (Zemke et al, 2000). Since Millennials prefer interactive computer learning and use

technology for education and social networking, it is possible a new employee will gain the

organizational insight regarding goals and values through this medium.

Mentoring

The high reliance on computers and technology should not discount the importance of

mentorship programs. Millennials have grown-up with parents and family members giving them

constant praise (Zemke et al., 2000) that they now expect from managers in the workplace

(Macky et al., 2008). Mentorship programs can fill this need for attention that Millennials crave.

Bullis and Bach (1989) define mentor relationships as opportunities for newcomers to learn

informal information and assist in the personal and professional development. Through these

relationships, newcomers will identify with their mentor and in turn identify with the

organization (Bullis & Bach, 1989), professional associations, and their chosen career path.

Mentor relationships will help newcomers obtain information about the resources available and

develop social networks within the organization (Chao, 2005). Buck (2004) discusses the

benefits of mentorships interactive learning style and a way for newcomers and senior employees

to "create meaning together" (p.9). This case study explores further Millennials use of

mentorships in their professional careers.

Researchers have yet to examine the motivations driving Millennials in the workplace.

Career choices, educational goals, and motivating factors for management have been discussed

for Baby Boomers and Xers. Smola and Sutton (2002) researched the generational differences

toward workplace values in the new millennium. Although Millennials were present in the

workforce during this time, their study focused on the responses from Boomers and Xers.

Workplace values are the worker's attitudes about expectations on what they should accomplish

and their motivation to complete tasks at work (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Veterans and Boomers

have been cynical about Generation X, stating they are too self-centered, lazy, and do not place a value toward the organization (Zemke et al., 2000). Smola and Sutton (2002) determined that the value of importance toward work does not change as a person matures, but rather it is a generational attribute of the respective cohort. This suggests that Generation X places a higher value toward their personal life than on workplace expectations.

Smola and Sutton (2002) leave us to ponder about the future of workplace values for Millennials, commenting that their values may look more similar to Generation X than to Baby Boomers or Veterans. However, generational researchers suggest that Millennials have scored closer to Veterans on scales regarding values and trust in the workplace and in personal relationships (Zemke et al., 2000). With a generation dialed into technology, deeply aware of global diversity, and a commitment to community service, the research suggests Millennials will place a high value on work related to helping others and organizations that will allow them to independently work in groups.

Considering the past literature on Millennials involvement with their society and workplace, this study will ask the following research questions:

RQ1: How do new ISSS professionals prefer to be trained?

RQ2: How do new ISSS professionals use mentorship opportunities?

RQ3: What are the motivational factors of new ISSS professionals entering international student advising?

RQ4: How do new ISSS professional use technology in the workplace?

Methodology

In this section of the paper the methods used and rationale for choosing those methods will be explained. I will start by defining the site and then move to the participants. Analysis methods will be discussed as well as limitations of the study.

Participants

Participants during both observations and the focus group interview were provided with informed consent forms and instructed that their participation was completely voluntary prior to data being collected. This assisted in developing rapport with participants by exposing the goals and methods of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Demographics were collected at the completion of the focus group interview. Of the eight participants, two were male and six were female. Five participants were from small institutions with 5,000 students or less. Three participants were from a large institution of 25,000 students or more. The majority of participants have been working in international student advising for two or three years with one participant at less than one year and two participants at five and six years. Birth years ranged from 1975 – 1984 with two participants born in 1980 and two born in 1982. Two participants were out of the range defined by Zemke et al. (2000), which classifies Millennials as born from 1980-2000. Only two participants self-selected themselves as Millennials; the remainder felt they were both Generation X and Millennial.

The Site

Two methods were used to collect data for this research. Observations were held in an international student services office at a large public university in the northwest. The office employs 11 staff members who work directly with international students. This particular department was chosen because one third of the staff falls within the age range of Millennials (Zemke et al, 2000). With a large group of staff in the desired age range for this study,

observations of generational interactions related to technology use, training, and communication style were accessible. The second method was a focus group interview held during a quarterly meeting for an organization of international educators in the northwest.

I was able to enter both of these organizations through my own connections as an international student advisor. I have been in this field for 7 years and was also the co-chair of the local international education organization for two years. Through my role as co-chair and as an international student advisor, I was able to easily access a location to observe and to have an agenda item created for the focus group interview during the quarterly meeting. However, the deep knowledge I have about the day-to-day tasks of an international student advisor made it difficult to step back and critically analyze what was taking place. In order "to make the familiar strange" (Geertz, 1973) during the first observation I interacted very little with my colleagues and wrote down all interactions and ways of doing work. To avoid biased responses, I ensured that I only knew three of the focus group participants personally. The other participants were colleagues that I had heard about but with whom I had never met or worked on a project.

Procedures

Two observations were conducted. Each observation lasted two hours in length. During the first observation, general office interactions were noted as well as interactions with students. The second observation was during a staff meeting. The staff meeting provided a venue to watch interactions between Millennial, Generation X, and Boomer generation. In both observations the role of "observer-as-participant" was used (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This method was the most valuable for the study because of the ability to interact with participants and ask questions directly related to the goals of the study. Detailed field notes and head notes were taken throughout both observations. As defined by Lindlof & Taylor (2002), field notes are comments

about people, places, things, and interactions occurring during an observation. Head notes

complement the field notes by connecting the research to the observation and asking questions

about the interactions observed. The second observation was tape recorded to reference back to

the conversations during the meeting. Within 24 hours of the observation taking place, notes

were revised to ensure authenticity of the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The focus group interview was one hour and fifteen minutes in length. An e-mail

detailing the purpose of the study was sent to the organization's listserv calling for willing

participants who were 34 years or younger and had worked with international students for 6

years or less. Three participants responded to the email. The additional five participants were

suggested by colleagues within the organization and contacted by phone and during an

announcement at the meeting. The interview was video recorded. The focus group interview

method was used to allow for participants to use the ideas and experiences from other group

members to complement and encourage deeper stories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Questions

related to participants' experience during training, communicating with co-workers, generational

identity, and mentoring were asked[1]. These questions helped gather data that answered all four

research questions. The focus group interview was transcribed resulting in 43 pages of data.

Analysis

The grounded theory method was used to categorize and code the data from the focus

group and observations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I started the interpretation of the data with

three main categories influenced by my research questions: technology use, mentoring, and

training programs. Each line of text was analyzed and assigned to one of these categories. If data

did not fit within these categories it was listed as a free code to be analyzed later. During the

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[1] See appendix for interview questions.

second round of coding, new subcategories began to emerge from the first three main categories. In fact, from the first round of coding subcategories such as motivations for work, work-life balance, and ways to work emerge. After several rounds of coding were completed, I created three componential tables that assisted in comparing and analyzing the data against the size of institution and preferred methods versus used methods (Spradley, 1980).

Findings

This section will reveal the themes that emerged during the focus group interview and the observations. Four main themes will be explored, including methods of training, mentoring, technology use and motivations for entering international student advising. These themes support the research questions posed at the end of the literature review.

RQ1: How do new ISSS professionals prefer to be trained?

The topic of training was a rich discussion throughout the focus group. Regardless of the size of the institution, participants were discouraged by the lack of training available to them. There was much confusion around the structure, or better defined as the lack of structure present in their departments. Molly[2] stated "nobody seems to get any training when they start." Polly commented that she had multiple people giving her instructions, but none of those people were her supervisor. As a result she had no one to share ideas with or help her prioritize the important tasks. This created a level of anxiety in the job in the beginning that both participants did not appreciate. Seven of the eight participants in the focus group wanted their institutions to establish a program. Through a training program Amy commented on the importance of knowing "the expectations and rules and the precise description of [the] position."

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[2] Names have been changed.

Although a structured program was non-existent for most participants, this led to a hands-on, experiential approach to learning their job. While they were frustrated with the lack of method during the training process, they did appreciate being able to jump right in and work on tasks. Polly commented that her trainee said, "I'm gonna throw you in and see what happens" which was "very helpful" to her during this ambiguous time shortly after her hire.

In addition to a structured program that allows for hands-on training, participants felt that guidance during their training period was important. Guidance in relation to how to complete tasks, but also positive feedback on tasks completed was important. Molly and Betsy commented they "particularly want affirmation" from their supervisors and Molly felt her "boss doesn't seem to think that it's necessary." Throughout the discussion, comments related to extending the training period and receiving feedback were brought up again and again.

The ability to continue to learn new skills and engage with colleagues was important to their growth with the organization. Four participants in the focus group stated they would like the opportunity to seek professional development in a variety of skills such as assessment tools, public speaking, and cross-cultural leadership training. The last item is unique because Amy referred to the ability to "create workshops for our international students and [training on] how to make international students leaders in our communities." All focus group members commented they are searching for opportunities not only to do their job more effectively but also to be able to gain skills necessary to teach others and help them grow. This was also present during the second observation when Claire discusses the professional development conferences she recently attended.

The last training theme that emerged was group work. Collaboration and the ability to talk through a problem or issue was discussed in the focus group and visible during both

observations. Molly commented in reference to her "older" coworkers, "They all kind want to work very independently, and I'm bit more poking my head into peoples' office doors and going, 'What did you think about that? Can we work on this project together?'" This sentiment was common for all the participants. Working with office colleagues, other departments, and even other similar sized institutions is a method for these participants to gain training outside of the non-existent programs at their institutions. It provides focus group members with another avenue for the feedback they crave from their supervisors.

During the first observation, I noticed colleagues stopping by each others' offices to ask questions and seek clarification about institutional policy. The second observation was during a monthly staff meeting. There were several instances of collaboration present during the meeting. To start the meeting they had a guest speaker from Admissions discuss policies related to a students' academic performance. Afterwards, Ellen asked the group if anyone would like to work with her on a project. At the end of the meeting, the staff discussed opportunities to work together to identify areas they would like to improve as a department. It is important to clarify on the last item that those associated with Millennials and Generation X were pushing the concept of working together as opposed to their older colleagues bringing that idea to the table.

RQ2: How do new ISSS professionals use mentorship opportunities?

Although structured programs are the preferred method for training, there was a definite distinction between having a manager and having a mentor/leader. Participants in the focus group interview are seeking guidance and structure, but not in the form of a manager. Amy stated, "a good professional and manager would be to lead people and mentor them, so they can be successful." Three participants are looking for "someone who teaches" them. Through experience and relationship building they want the ability to grow with the job.

In a mentor-mentee relationship half of the focus group participants want someone who is non-judgmental, helps them determine what personal and professional goals they should strive for, listen for areas they can improve, and give them the tools to grow in those areas. James told a story about him experience with a mentor and how it was helpful to his growth as a professional.

> She took me to the KISSS networking function and said, "I just want you to go over and talk that person who's getting roast beef at that station. And just, I don't know, come back and tell me where they work and three personal things about them. This is how we talk to people. So now go and talk to that person."

According to James, he learned the art of networking. His confidence grew and he was able to start talking with colleagues he had not met before. His mentor not only helped guide him through this process, but also was able to listen to what he thought his needs were and point out things he hadn't thought of as areas for improvement.

Similar to participants' description of a preferred training program, when discussing the ideal characteristics of a mentoring program all focus group participants indicated working in groups was important. As with training programs, they would be looking for a cohort group that they could discuss problems and troubleshoot ideas together. As Gina described,

> Having the cohort and the group and listening to other peers in the same group talk about their challenges and their goals and how they work through problems. And also using them as resources; I thought is really important.

Three of the other participants mentioned the value of meeting with their cohort group and the possibility to continue a meeting similar to the focus group but in a more casual environment.

Gina and Don did take care to mention that the size of the cohort group should be considered. Three of the focus group members had participated in the NAFSA Academy training. This is a yearlong program run by the professional organizational NAFSA. Trainees are cross-trained in a variety of international education arenas giving them a broad understanding of

the field. Trainees are matched up with a cohort group in their area, but also on a national level. According to Gina, the group became too large to be an effective resource. "Everybody had different goals and needs and fields they were working in. Sometimes it seemed like it was too weak, it was too diluted." From this we can see the importance of matching colleagues with appropriate cohorts so they can maximize their mentor experience.

RQ4: How do new ISSS professional use technology in the workplace?

The use of technological devices was also present during the discussions in the focus group and during the departmental observations. According to Tapscott (1998), Millennials are classified as high-technology users. Influence from computers and the Internet impacts their communication approach in social relationships and in the workplace. Millennials are expected to revel in technology use and their skill set should exceed their older co-workers (Zemke et al, 2000). Participants rely on technology to assist in external training resources, marketing events, communicating with office staff through instant messaging, and communicating with students living abroad. Molly mentions that "we wouldn't be able to function without it" and Polly comments how technology is used as a method for prospective students in foreign countries to become more familiar with their organization in a personal way.

While these examples show the importance of technology in their daily work life, participants also commented on the demand and work expectations it creates. Molly talks about how she is "never off duty" and others commented on how they are constantly checking e-mail. Technology has led to work and life colliding. Some of the participants attempt to maintain this balance by trying to "leave work at work" or not using personal or professional email at home. In contrast, Molly mentioned she is unable to put her "life into categories of work and non-work."

While her older co-workers see Facebook as unprofessional, she sees it as a public domain and if the topic is private she will not include it on Facebook.

The majority of participants indicated how technology is beneficial to their work, especially when trying to reach a large group of students quickly with the same information. Amy commented, "I work with a lot of programming activities and I have better luck communicating via Facebook with students than any other way." She is expressing the efficiency of using the tools to complete her task. On the other hand, Don feels that technology has created inefficiencies because the day is spent answering emails and he "isn't able to actually work on projects." He also commented that technology impedes face-to-face interactions. Don feels more time should be spent interacting with students in order to create programming that will benefit their growth.

Tension around the use of technology is present within this group. While Don would appreciate less daily emails and more face-to-face interactions, the use of these applications during the office observations was commonplace. Instant messaging was used to communicate with each other so they did not have to leave their desks and as Claire stated they could send "snarky comments" to one another. When interacting with a student in his office, James spent more time on the computer than verbally interacting with the student. This tension between the reality of what is happening and desire of how they would like to work is expressed in Selwyn's (2009) review. He found that while many researchers expect Millennials to have increased skills and desire in technology use, most Millennials are still yearning for the face-to-face communication and their skill level does not always exceed their older counterpart. Through the focus group discussion this theme was also present.

RQ3: What are the motivational factors of new ISSS professionals entering international student advising?

Zemke et al (2000) discusses how the Millennials are the next generation of service leaders since the Veterans. This group is looking for work in which they can contribute to the larger group. The focus group was no different. Participants discussed how they wanted to feel like they were part of the larger organization. They want to contribute to the overall mission of their department and institution. Gina said when deciding which profession to work in, "the idea of really doing things that are going to motivate you, fulfill you intrinsically" outweighs the need for compensation. However, according to Don salary is still important and being compensated for completing higher education and trainings should be considered.

During this focus group the connection between intrinsic work and international student advising was not clear. This would be an area to explore with further interviews. The most common reason for entering international student advising was exposure to international students as a child or during their undergraduate years as a student worker. James mentioned he, "didn't have any other work experience other than three years assisting the international programs office in my undergrad school" so he searched for opportunities in those areas. Molly found her way to international student advising through experiences as a young child and during her undergraduate days as a student worker. For Betsy, it was simply because she "loves it and values education and sees a need to incorporate an academic experience in a different culture."

While these participants are glad to have found their path to international student advising, there is frustration for advancement within their institution. Five of the eight participants were employed at small school and feel there is a lack of opportunities to advance. Half of the participants were from institutions of 5,000 students or less. In these cases comments

such as "there is no ladder," "opportunities are far and few between", or "I'm it; if someone else wants to work with international students I'll have to leave or die" were present. Even the participants from larger institutions struggled with advancement. The larger institution represented is 25,000 students or greater. Although comments did not center on a lack of opportunity to work their way up, there was concern about the instability of their positions due to budgetary constraints.

Discussion

The goal for this study was to explore the comments previous researchers had made about Millennials preferences in the workplace. Researchers from education, communication, and sociology have been studying this group for the last decade trying to guess what they will expect from their managers (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Gordon & Steele, 2005; Kelan, 2008; Macky et al., 2008, Smola & Sutton, 2002; Zemke et al, 2000). They predicted that Millennials would desire a high use of technological resources, guidance and feedback from supervisors, the ability to work in groups, and a supervisor who leads and mentors them in the workplace. Through a focus group interview of eight Millennials in the field of international student advising and by observing an international student services office, I discovered that their insight is accurate.

Implications

The Millennials who were interviewed do use technology in their daily work tasks. While they commented that the use of technology was vital to the completing their job, it was also apparent that they wanted to disconnect from the screen and communicate face-to-face. As Selwyn (2009) found, Millennials do not always exceed their older counterpart in technology skills and use. The particular demographic or career field may influence the tension of technology use found in this study. Because the participants involved in the focus group were

born in the years 1975 – 1984, they are the older cohorts of Millennials (Zemke et al., 2000). In

addition, the field of international student advising is not a technology field. It may be that

Millennials who are younger and/or work in the technology industry will show a higher tendency

and desire to use technology.

Guidance, feedback, mentoring, and working in groups can all be classified as methods

for communicating during a learning process. At work, learning takes place during the training

period and professional development opportunities. Feiertag and Berge (2008) discuss how

Millennials respond to interactive learning sessions in which they can engage with one another

and with the material. The data found from the focus group supports this claim. Participants

mentioned they prefer experiential training, and when they can be involved in group projects

with colleagues.

A common theme that occurred during the findings was the discomfort with ambiguity in

the training process, particularly if participants did not know whom they could turn to for

guidance and support. Zemke et al (2000) and Marston (2007) examined the relationship

Millennials have with their parents. They found that the parents of Millennials are constantly

providing positive feedback and helping their children make decisions. This has manifested into

a generation seeking the same guidance and support in the workplace. This study supports

Zemke et al (2000) and Marston's (2007) claims by participants echoing the same need in their

training and mentoring programs.

In summary, this study supports the predictions previous researches made about the

Millennials in the workplace. They look for opportunities where mentors can provide them with

guidance and skills to continue to grow in their positions. Millennials expect that technology

will be a part of their everyday work life, but would like to have balance between using

technology and working face-to-face. In addition, this generational cohort seeks out opportunities where they can work in groups. Gone are the days of working in a silo. Millennials want to work in the groups. They are highly interactive and need to be able to bounce ideas off each other (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Zemke et al., 2000). In order to be current, international student services department should review their policies and training proceeds. To reach out to these new professionals in the field, opportunities to work with groups, continue to increase their knowledge through training programs, and engage with community on a service-oriented platform should be considered.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the length of time spent in the field. I think it may be important to spend more time observing daily interactions between Millennials and their older colleagues. I also think the observation of a training and/or mentoring program would be useful. Since I would identify with the Millennial cohort, it may also be useful to come from a participant-as-observer standpoint and evaluate the programs as a member of the group (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In addition, several more focus groups may need to be conducted before data saturation is met.

Another limitation of the study was the initial icebreaker question during the focus group interview. Instead of asking the group how they would describe themselves in the workplace, I asked them to describe Millennials in the workplace. This may have socially constructed part of the interview leading to the results I received when asked to identify their generational cohort in the demographic survey.

Further Research

Future researchers should consider looking deeper at the connection between community-based work and international student advising. Participants suggested they prefer work that is meaningful to their community, but they did not clearly state if international student advising fulfilled this need. In addition, it would be interesting to interview participants who were in the 22 – 25 age range to see if there is a difference in attitude toward technology.

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Appendix One: Focus Group Interview Questions

Questions highlighted in grey were asked during the focus group session. The remaining questions were possible questions I thought would work to discover data related to the research questions.

Generational Identity
1) Describe a person who is associated with Generation Y or Millennials.
2) Do you identify with Generation Y?
3) Given the description of Generation Y: A person born between the years of 1980-2000; parents were highly involved with your education and social activities; it is difficult to remember life without a computer and/or internet; prominent historical events: Oklahoma City Bombing, schoolyard shootings, Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, Columbine High School Massacre. Do you identify with the Generation Y cohort? Why or Why not?

Training – Research Question 1
1) Tell me about the training process in your office. (grand tour question)
2) How is technology used during training (interactive websites, email, IM, ppt presentations)?
3) Do you think follow-up trainings at stages of 6 months, 1 year, 1.5 years would be helpful? Why, why not?
4) Is there more time spent on immigration advising or personal/cultural advising?
5) If anything, what would you change about the training process in your office?
6) How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?
   a. Is there any aspect of the relationship you wish you could change?

Mentoring – Research Question 2
1) Describe an ideal mentoring program. (grand tour question)
2) What are your feelings/thoughts about mentoring programs with NAFSA?
3) Have you participated in a mentoring program with NAFSA; this would include the Academy, regional mentoring, or national mentoring?
4) Describe a mentoring program used at your institution for employees. (How is the mentoring program organized? How long does the program last? Do you think mentoring programs are helpful/unhelpful?)
5) If you have not participated in a mentoring program, do you feel it would be helpful to your personal and/or professional development?
6) Do you participate in different groups within your organization (clubs, committees, etc.)? Why?
   a. What do you value most about the organization?
7) What makes you want to join a specific group or committee within the organization?

Organizational Identity – Research Question 3
1) Tell us about your process for deciding to work in international education. (grand tour question)
2) What were the motivating factors for choosing a career in international education?
3) Explain to me what does international education mean to you.
4) Explain to me what it means to be an international student and scholar advisor.
5) Do you identify with other ISSA in your office? Why or why not?
6) What do you think is the most important part of being an ISSA? Why?
7) How quickly do expect to advance within your institution? Within the profession?
8) What types of professional development opportunities intrigue you?
9) How would you describe your relationship with the other employees in the organization?
10) What are your greatest challenges within your organization? Why?
11) Do you view the organization's problems as your problems?

12) When you make decisions do you think about the effect they may have on your organization?

Communication – Research Question 4
1) Describe your communication style. (grand tour question)
2) How would you describe the communication style in your office?
   a. How do you feel about the communication style?
3) Tell me about the communication style of your senior colleagues.
4) Tell me about the communication style of your students.
5) How does technology play a part in your everyday communication? (IM, email, twitter, facebook, cell phone, texting, etc.)
6) What do you expect from supervisors/managers when they communicate you?

Demographics – This was handed out at the end of the session on a half sheet of paper.
1) How long have you been working in the field of international education?
2) How long have you been working in an office which handles international student and scholar services?
3) What were you doing before you got involved with international education as a career?
4) What is year were you born?
5) What is your generational cohort? (Circle all that apply.)
   Baby Boomer   Generation X   Generation Y   Don't Know