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Millennial Integration: Challenges Millennials Face in the Workplace and What They Can Do About Them

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MILLENNIAL INTEGRATION:

CHALLENGES MILLENNIALS FACE IN THE WORKPLACE AND WHAT THEY CAN DO

ABOUT THEM

CHIP ESPINOZA

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MILLENNIAL INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES MILLENNIALS FACE IN THE

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prepared by

Chip Espinoza

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Leadership and Change.

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Abstract

There is a monumental changing of the guard that is currently taking place in organizations due to demographic metabolism. One of the largest birth cohorts or generations in history (Baby Boomer) is beginning to retire while their predecessor (Builder) is almost completely out of the workforce. Gen X is hitting stride and on the cusp of inheriting the proverbial organizational mantle. The three aforementioned age cohorts have learned to play in the organizational sandbox together. However, a new age cohort (Millennial, a.k.a. Gen Y), equal or greater in size to the Baby Boomer cohort started entering the playground approximately ten years ago and they are kicking up sand. The etymology of the Millennial story began with a discussion "about" Millennials. The conversation quickly moved to strategies for recruiting them. Talk then shifted to on-boarding and managing Millennials. I desire to broaden the dialogue by inviting a discussion with Millennials about how they are experiencing work life. As is the case with any transition, there is great potential for conflict and angst. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the challenges Millennials experience while trying to integrate into organizations and the skills that will help them make a successful transition into the workforce. The electronic version of this Dissertation is at Ohiolink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In Chapter I, I introduce the background of the problem, the significance of the study, a theoretical framework, gaps in the research pertaining to Millennials in the workplace, the questions that guided the inquiry, the significance of the study, and the limitations of the study. I also identify terms that are important to the study, and situate myself in the study.

Background of the Problem

Albert Einstein observed, "The formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science" (1961, p. 95).

A few years ago I began to notice a growing frustration among managers and business leaders with integrating younger workers into their organizations. The younger workers I refer to represent the latest generation to enter the workforce—Millennials, born approximately between 1977 and 1997 (Tapscott, 1998). Social historians, Neil Howe and William Strauss (2000) are credited with the generation's moniker of Millennial whose perceived peculiarity has managers befuddled. Activities in the past that had been relatively straightforward—like recruiting, retaining, and rewarding—now seem more challenging than ever. Having had mostly positive interactions in the classroom with undergraduates, I was intrigued by the discord.

Norman Ryder sheds light on the sociology of the discord between generations suggesting that "Society persists despite the mortality of its individual members, through processes of demographic metabolism and particularly the annual infusion of birth cohorts. These may pose a threat to stability but they also provide the opportunity for societal transformation" (1965, p. 843). Ryder's quote is inspiration for this study. It is an effort with the

intention of transforming both people and organizations at the level of personal interaction between Millennials and their leaders.

It has been observed that there are currently four generations at work (Kovary & Buahene, 2005)—Builders, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials; three of the generations have been working well together for over a decade. The focus of this study is to identify if there are barriers Millennials face when entering the workforce and, if so, what can be done about the barriers.

While all generations have similarities, it is simplistic to say they are the same. A recent Pew Research Center report notes the challenge of studying generations:

> Generational analysis has a long and distinguished place in social science, and we cast our lot with those scholars who believe it is not only possible, but often highly illuminating, to search for the unique and distinctive characteristics of any given age group of Americans. But we also know this is not an exact science. We are mindful that there are as many differences in attitudes, values, behaviors and lifestyles within a generation as there are between generations. But we believe this reality does not diminish the value of generational analysis; it merely adds to its richness and complexity. (Taylor & Keeter, 2010, p. 5)

Generational analysis is a useful lens for exploring how Millennials experience the workplace and what they can do to successfully assimilate.

Significance of the Study

A growing number of books on management address the topic of managing Millennials. With the exception of my colleagues and my prior publication *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies of Managing Today's Workforce*, none claim to be empirically research based. Nevertheless, a quick review of readership comments about almost any book on the subject of managing Millennials suggests that the topic is relevant and important. I would like to continue to add to the management theory literature with more empirical research with respect to helping Millennials effectively assimilate into work-life.

In the February 2006 issue of Harvard Business Review, Gary Hamel wrote an article entitled *The Why, What and How of Management Innovation*. Hamel suggested that management innovation requires: 1) A bewitching problem that demands fresh thinking; 2) Novel principles or paradigms that have the power to illuminate new approaches; and 3) A careful deconstruction of the conventions and dogma that constrain creative thinking (p. 76).

The relationship between Millennials and their managers is a bewitching problem for both sides. My intention is to provide insight into how Millennials experience assimilating into the workforce. This dissertation research specifically seeks to identify challenges Millennials face at work.

The significance of this study is to develop a framework for understanding challenges Millennials face in the workplace and what they can do to effectively assimilate into work-life. My goal is to build a training program for Millennials based on my research findings. It is also my goal that those who go through the training will grow in their self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001) with respect to building rapport with their managers.

Gaps in the Research Pertaining to Millennials in the Workplace

When the Millennials (aka Gen Y) burst into the workforce, the immediate reaction was that they were bright, ambitious, and high maintenance. Their peculiarities have drawn the attention of CBS 60 Minutes, NPR, business magazines, and niche publications. It is not unreasonable to think that Baby Boomers garnered the attention of Builders and Gen X may have appeared suspicious to Baby Boomers. I will address the notion in Chapter II.

When it comes to the newest arrival to the workplace, a review of the existing mainstream literature suggests they are very different than other age cohorts in the workforce. When it comes to how Millennials are perceived in the workplace by Builders, Baby Boomers, and Gen X, the

most common characterization is a "sense of entitlement." An interview conducted by Nancy Pekala with Jim Reese, CEO of Randstad North America, captures the sentiment of many managers. Reese says, "Gen Yers [aka Millennials] are generally perceived as having a sense of entitlement and wanting opportunities handed to them" (2001, p. 38). Carol Hacker, president of Carol A. Hacker & Associates agrees, "Generation Y tends to want, and want it now" (Keller, 2006, para 13). "It seems they want and expect everything that the 20- or 30-year veteran has the first week they're there," says Mike Amos, a consultant to Perkins Restaurants (Willens, 2005, p. C6).

Two views are emerging about the Millennial phenomena. One view is that the fuss about Millennials can be attributed to the *Pygmalion Effect* or a conspiracy on the part of consultants to create a new market. Jack and Suzy Welch while weighing in on the Millennial phenomenon use the term *trend inflation* to espouse the notion that you can create perception, if not reality, by saying something is so over and over (2007). The other view is that Millennials have different values and attitudes that present challenges for befuddled managerial leaders; such as delivering on their high expectations, or keeping them from leaving the organization after having invested in their recruitment and training (Alsop, 2008; Espinoza, Ukleja, & Rusch, 2010; Orrell, 2008; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009; Tulgan, 2009).

Peter Sheahan, an Australian sociologist, makes a poignant point that there is too much ad hoc research into this area and not enough rigorous academic research to back up the claims (2006). I found two insightful dissertations that relate to Sheahan's call: *Leadership Preferences of Generation Y Cohort* (Dulin, 2005) and *Generational Perceptions of Leadership Behaviors and Job Satisfaction Among Healthcare Professionals In Western New England* (Carley, 2008). Dulin's (2005) study approached the problem from the lens of leadership preferences of

Millennials. She suggests that more research should be conducted to ascertain whether her study results could be more fairly attributed to managerial development needs or Millennials needs. I hope to address Dulin's (2005) call for additional research by identifying challenges Millennials perceive to face in the workplace and what they can do about it.

Based on anecdotal information, there are many reasons to believe there is conflict between generations in the workplace, but this study seeks evidence. People can think up reasons to support a claim but they cannot think up evidence (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary society readily, if not naturally, accepts the notion of a generation as a form of differentiation or comparison (i.e. "Back in my day we walked five miles up hill both ways in the snow to get to school and we liked it." "My generation didn't ask questions we just did what we were told to do"). The idea of a generation is not new and can be found in ancient literature. The concept has biological roots in family, where generations generally refer to successive parent–child relationships (Biggs, 2007). However, there are also psychological and sociological dimensions in the sense of belonging and identity that can define a generation (Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965). The concept of *a generation* is also used to locate particular birth cohorts in specific historical and cultural circumstances, such as the "Baby Boomers." The study of generations is a fascinating phenomenon that links a number of different fields and levels of analysis (Biggs, 2007). This study will offer an epistemology for identifying generations for the purpose of exploring the Millennial Generation and how it is assimilating into the workforce.

If there are locations of generations, it is important to identify rules or norms for interaction between them. As an example, ancient literature speaks of the cultural expectation

that young men need to respect their elders (Leviticus 19:32, NIV). The concept of social norms (Rimal & Real, 2005) sheds light on how cultural expectations are established and maintained. As an example, Baby Boomers are currently the largest generation in the workforce. Due to their size and experience, they are clearly the dominant group when it comes to setting the agenda in the workplace. The dominant group in a system can also be defined by other attributes such as, but not limited to power, wealth, sexual preference, gender, or ethnicity.

Age norming and age structuring (Lawrence, 1996; Settersten & Mayer, 1997) provide another theoretical lens for examining the negotiation and resulting tension between Millennials and older age cohorts. While the field has prominence in public policy (driving age, drinking age, voting age, etc.), it may also explain how younger workers may experience the work world as un-affirming or marginalizing. Understanding how norms develop and are enforced can help managers identify sources of tension like problematic policies, processes, incentives, and cross-generational employee interactions (Feldman, 1984).

Due to the fact that Millennials are an easy group to identify in terms of physical age, they can be subject to stereotype threat. It is a situational phenomenon: people only experience stereotype threat when a negative stereotype about their group is relevant to performance on a specific task (O'Brien & Hummert, 2006). For instance, "She is too young to handle the Walmart account." Individuals who are highly identified with the group may experience greater susceptibility to stereotype threat (Schmader, 2002).

Amanda Grenier offers yet another source of explanation for why generational tensions exist. Grenier asserts that generations develop their own linguistic models that contribute to misunderstanding between age cohorts, "Different ways of speaking exercised by older and

younger people exist, and may be partially explained by social historical reference points, culturally determined experiences, and individual interpretations" (2007, p. 718). Generations or age cohorts have sociological and psychological dimensions and it is useful to examine how the interrelated concepts of generation, social norms, group norms, age norms, and stereotyping inform the focus of this study–if there is tension in the workplace between Millennials and the other age cohorts, why, and what can be done about it.

Methodology

My position in this study is that both Millennials and the people who manage Millennials offer distinctive knowledge, views, experiences, understandings, and interactions and therefore can provide meaningful data for the subject for this research project. My prior research afforded me access to top-tier corporations and provides me with a good context for doing the next iteration of my research. Studying what Millennials perceive to be challenges at work is an important piece of the generational rapport discussion. I believe the best methodological fit for my topic is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. PAR invites people who often do not have a voice in a community to not only talk about what is important to them but to draw from their personal experience for the purpose of identifying significant topics, building theories, and interpreting data (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). The production of knowledge is a goal of PAR but primarily for the purpose of taking action that addresses specific problems.

I conducted 11 large group interventions with 473 Millennials to identify barriers they experience in the workplace. The participants were recent hires enrolled in corporate employee development programs (Microsoft, Schneider Electric, and Johnson Controls International). The participants were from different parts of the world, including focus groups in Shanghai, China,

Mumbai, India, Redmond, Washington, Chicago, Illinois, and Providence, Rhode Island. The

event sites were regional locations that drew participants from different countries.

I facilitated all of the meetings. I invited a colleague to help me with taking notes for each

of the Large Group Interventions and to review the content to compare what we heard. The

questions were:

1. As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the
    workplace?

2. As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

3. I read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the
    most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce."

I also conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with Millennial employees. The interview

participants were employees of Johnson Controls International. The Human Resource

Department selected Millennial employees that represented the functional (office personnel) and

operational (plant floor personnel) aspects of plants located in Geneva, IL, Covington, KY, and

Monterey, Mexico. The participants were selected due to their schedule availability. In Geneva, I

conducted 8 interviews on December 15, 2010; four interviews on December 16, 2010; one

interview on January 10, 2011; two interviews on January 11, 2011 and one interview on January

12, 2011. I conducted five interviews with the Covington employees on January 27, 2011. One

of the Monterey interviews took place on January 24, 2012 and the other was on January 25,

2011. The interview questions were:

1. As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the
    workplace?

2. As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

3. I read the following statement and asked them to respond, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce."

Limitations

Though I provide compelling evidence for the challenges Millennials face in the workplace, it is important for the reader to know that the study has limitations. The overwhelming percent of participants (over ninety-seven percent) are college graduates. The challenges non-college graduates face when entering the workforce could differ from college graduates.

The majority of participants (ninety-four percent) in this study work for three multinational companies. The organizational culture or managers of the companies represented in the study could influence the challenges Millennial employees in the study faced.

Most of the participants were relatively new hires (two years or less) and that could influence how forthright they may be about their experience. A lack of candor could impact the accuracy of response.

There were no unemployed Millennials in the study and therefore the challenges of unemployed Millennials may differ from that of their colleagues.

All of the data is self-reported, meaning that I have to take the participants comments, whether in interviews, Large Group Interventions, or on questionnaires, at face value. There are two particular limitations of self-reported data I would like to point out; 1) attributing positive outcomes to one's own behavior and negative outcomes to external forces, and 2) exaggerating outcomes or embellishing events to be more significant than actual what was actually experienced.

The data is narrative (including the training intervention) and may not be generalized to a larger population.

Terms Important to the Study

The concept of age and generational boundaries is used as a discursive organizing principle in this study. It is not where the birth cohort boundaries are drawn that is important, but how individuals and societies interpret the boundaries and how divisions may shape processes and outcomes. It is not uncommon to see several date ranges for Millennials (i.e. 1978-1994, 1980-1996, 1980-2000). However, the practice of categorizing age cohorts is useful to researchers for the purpose of constructing boundaries in their work (Grenier, 2007; Zukin, 2006).

The definitions below should be helpful to the reader. It is important to point out that the literature has several labels for what I refer to as a Millennial. They are also referred to as "Generation Y," "Generation Why," "Generation Next," "Millennials," "Echo Boomers," "Boomlets," "Boomerangs," "The Second Greatest Generation," "i-Generation," "Netizens," Net "Generation," and "Dot-Nets". While it is not my intent to critique or defend generational labeling, it is clearly not an exact science, nor is it intended to be. William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) have named the generations from 1701 to the present in their work *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. Interestingly, they credit the term Millennials to the age cohort itself. Strauss and Howe argue that the Millennials rejected the label of Gen Y (successors to Gen X) because the Millennials thought it had a negative connotation.

Generation: German sociologist Karl Mannheim is credited with establishing *generational theory,* which seeks to explain how attitudes and values are shaped in both individuals and groups. Mannheim (1952) thought that the generation a person belongs to

determines, to a certain extent, his or her thoughts, feelings, and even behaviors. A generation is defined as a group that shares birth years and significant life events at critical developmental stages. Adolescence is viewed as the key period in which social generations are formed. The major events experienced during the time of formation are what shapes the outlook on the world exhibited by that generation. Another term for Mannheim's *generation* is *age cohort*. In the sociological literature, the terms generation and cohort are often used interchangeably (Pilcher, 1994).

Age Cohort: A cohort may be defined as the aggregate of individuals (within some population definition) who have experienced the same event within the same time interval. In almost all cohort research to date the defining event has been birth. Cohort data are ordinarily assembled sequentially from observations of the time of occurrence of the behavior being studied, and the interval since occurrence of the cohort-defining event. For the birth cohort this interval is age (Ryder, 1965, p. 845).

Builder: An age cohort born approximately between 1921-1945 (Tapscott, 1998).

Baby Boomer: An age cohort born approximately between 1946-1964 (Tapscott, 1998).

Gen X: An age cohort born approximately between 1965-1976 (Tapscott, 1998).

Millennial: An age cohort born approximately between 1977-1997 (Tapscott, 1998).

Barrier: Something immaterial that impedes or separates. As an example, a lack of experience can serve as a barrier (Barrier, 2011).

Bias: Prejudice, partiality, unfairness, preconceived notion, foregone conclusion, or predisposition (Bias, 2011).

Collective Memories: A term used to describe memories of a shared past retained by members of a group, large or small, that experienced it. Schuman and Scott argue that age is

clearly the most general predictor of memories for events and changes over the past 50 years. People will tend not to recall as important those events and changes that preceded their own lifetime. They also expected that most people will tend not to recall as important those events and changes that occur after early adulthood. Therefore the events that register most strongly during adolescence and early adulthood have the greater impact or influence in one's life (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

Cohort Flow: Sonia Austrian (2002) suggests,

> People in successive cohorts or generations grow up and grow old in different ways because the surrounding sociological structures are changing. That is, the process of aging from birth to death is not entirely fixed by biology, but is influenced by changing structures and roles in which people lead their lives. The interplay between individual age and social change is *cohort flow*. (p. 123)

Members of successive cohorts age in new ways and therefore contribute to changes in the social structure.

Self-Efficacy: Walumbwa, Lawler, Avolio, Peng, and Kan (2005) described an individual's self-efficacy to reflect an individual's belief and capabilities in the successful completion of a certain task or sequence of tasks. Bandura et al. expound:

> Perceived self-efficacy occupies a central role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants. Such beliefs influence aspirations and strength of commitments to them, the quality of analytic and strategic thinking, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, causal attributions for successes and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression. (2001, p. 187)

Structural Lag: Outmoded social institutions failing to provide opportunity for its members who represent a growing population with political and economic power. It occurs when popular philosophy falls behind technological and economic advances (Riley, 1987).

Conclusion: Purpose of Study

In conclusion, Jennifer Mason (2002) suggests five questions for preparing a qualitative study. In reviewing her questions, I will present the general purposes of this study.

1) What is the nature of the phenomena I wish to investigate? The phenomena I intend to study are whether or not Millennials experience challenges when entering into the workforce; if so, then what are the challenges?

2) What might represent knowledge or evidence of the social 'reality' which I wish to investigate? Millennials who are currently entering the workforce will provide a rich discussion for identifying perceived challenges, if they exist. Generational cohort theory, life course theory, and group norm theory are sources of academic inquiry that shed light on how age cohorts may value different things when it comes to their work lives. Managers who manage Millennials are also a rich source of knowledge. Popular media and non-refereed business literature provide insight into the inquiry.

3) What topic is the research concerned with? I want to know how Millennials are experiencing their managers and organizations.

4) What do I wish to explain? I intend to explain the challenges Millennials perceive to encounter when entering into their organizations.

5) What is the purpose of my research? I intend to develop training content that can be used to help Millennials with skills that will allow them to successfully integrate into the workforce.

Situating the Researcher

I am an organizational consultant who specializes in generational diversity in the workplace. I have the privilege of working closely with organizations and their executives. My

consulting practice has afforded me access to several organizations that enthusiastically consented to participating in the research.

I formerly taught Management at Vanguard University of Southern California, Leadership in the Hobbs Leadership Institute at California State University Long Beach, and I am currently Lead Course Instructor for Organizational Development, Change Theory, and Organizational Consulting at Concordia University Irvine. As a teacher, I experienced a noticeable shift over the last 16 years in the classroom with respect to student values, attitudes, and behaviors. I published a chapter entitled *Millennial Values and Boundaries in the Classroom* in the Jossey-Bass *New Directions in Learning and Teaching* series (Espinoza, in press).

I am concerned that years of experience gained by Builders and Baby Boomers will not be transferred to Millennials because of the tension between age cohorts. I am also concerned about the potential synergy or lack thereof between Gen X and Millennials. It not only risks the competitive advantage of the organizations that employ them but can dramatically impact the self-efficacy of both managers and Millennials. I hope to be able to identify a training solution with my research that helps to create environments in which both Millennials and managers thrive.

Since early in my doctoral program I have been studying the relationship between managers and Millennials. I have already published the first part of my research. I co-authored a book entitled, *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce*. My original intention was to address the challenges of managing Millennials, but the research continued to unfold. The first companies to embrace my book *Managing the Millennials* were multinational companies with 100,000 plus employees.

The etymology of the Millennial story began with a discussion about Millennials and then attention shifted to recruiting Millennials. The conversation has now focused on how to integrate, retain, and manage Millennials. Information about overcoming managerial challenges was helpful to my clients but they were interested in helping their new hires more successfully integrate into their organizations. It occurred to me *how* managers perceive Millennials may contribute to barriers Millennials feel in the workplace. Therefore I extended the research to include challenges Millennials face in the workplace. My intention is to create an integrated two-pronged approach to managing the Millennials. I want to train managers on how to overcome their perceptions of Millennials and how to effectively engage them. I want to inform Millennials about the perceptions managers have of them and skills that can help them overcome the challenges they experience in the workplace.

My Ph.D. Advisor and I had a discussion about the value of including the first part of the research that has already been published. We agreed that it would be beneficial to the dissertation and deepen the academic roots of the subject. It would also provide valuable context for the reader. It is part of my long-term action research interests.

Summary

In Chapter I, I provide the background of the problem, the significance of the study, gaps in the research pertaining to Millennials, a theoretical framework for the study, limitations of the study, terms that are important to the study, the purpose of the study, and situate the researcher. In Chapter II, I will do a review of the literature important to the study. In Chapter III, I will share the findings from research early in my Ph.D. journey that informed my published work. In Chapter IV, I will describe the methods I used to collect and analyze data. I will also discuss the qualitative approach I took to do the research.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this research is to identify challenges Millennials encounter while trying to assimilate into the workforce, is there tension in the workplace between Millennials and the other age cohorts, why, and what can Millennials do about it. First, it is important to review thinking about the idea of a generation, how a generation is formed, and how the formation of a generation influences interaction with other generations. It is reasonable to think that the attempt to better understand how generations are formed and how they develop a world-view can help to demystify the assimilation of new generations into organizational life. Second, if relational tension exists, are there skills that could be helpful to Millennials in building rapport with managers? Keeping in mind the aforementioned objectives, the literature review includes two parts: 1) thinking about generations and the implications for and 2) managerial leader perspectives that focus on followers needs.

Thinking About Generations

This part of the literature review will examine six areas of thinking about generations; (1) the concept of generational theory, (2) a description of age cohorts currently in the workforce, (3) a popular media narrative on Millennials, (4) generational tension and social change, (5) age norm theory, and (6) ageism.

The concept of generational theory. The concept of a generation emerged in an essay written by German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952). Mannheim's essay was entitled *The Problem of Generations*. Mannheim's work is revered as the most systematic and fully developed treatment of generation through a sociological lens (Pilcher, 1994). Gilleard and Higgs write that "Mannheim sought to describe three elements making up a generation: a shared temporal location (*i.e.* generational site or birth cohort), shared historical location (*i.e.* generation

as actuality–exposure to a common period or era), and finally a shared socio-cultural location (*i.e.* generational consciousness–or 'entelechy')" (2002, p. 373). Jane Pilcher comments,

> According to Mannheim's account, contemporaneous individuals are further internally stratified: by their geographical and cultural location; by their actual as opposed to potential participation in the social and intellectual currents of their time and place; and by their differing responses to a particular situation so that there may develop opposing generational units. (1994, p. 483)

Simply put, a generation is defined as an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages. Louis Chauvel, a scholar at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies and a Harvard University research fellow, offers a similar description for understanding how generations are defined. He describes several theoretical types of generations and states the general criteria of each, including genealogical generations dealing primarily with family arrangements, birth cohorts derived from genealogical accounting procedures as in the science of demography, historical generations and social generations (Vaubourg, 2004). He defines the latter two types of generations:

> A historical generation is a set of cohorts defined by its common culture, shared interests, the consciousness of its specificity, and sometimes its conflicts against other generations. A social generation is a demographic generation sharing common social traits and patterns, but not necessarily the consciousness of its identity. The more it is structured and conscious of its own structuration, the more its political and historical mobilization could be obvious, and the more it could become a historical generation. (Vaubourg, 2004, p. 2)

Social researcher, Mark McCrindle, observes that sociologists historically have used a 20-year span to define a generation. He argues that 20 years is too long stating, "While in the past this has served sociologists well in analyzing generations, it is irrelevant today" (McCrindle, 2006, p. 8). McCrindle compellingly argues his reasoning for future generations having a shorter span of years, "Because cohorts are changing so quickly in response to new technologies,

changing career and study options, and because of shifting societal values, two decades is far too broad to contain all the people born within this time span" (2006, p. 8).

Many argue (Biggs, 2007; Gilleard & Higgs, 2002; Glenn, 2005; Pilcher, 1994; Ryder, 1965; Zukin, 2006) that a better term for Mannheim's *generation* is *age cohort*. In the sociological literature, the terms generation and cohort are often used interchangeably.

Dr. Cliff Zukin, professor of public policy and political science at Rutgers University and author of *A New Engagement*, recently served as a panelist in Washington, D.C., at the Urban Institute's symposium "Generation Next: Active, Angry, or Apathetic?" He was questioned, "Why did you decide to label people from age 15 to 25 Dot-Nets?" Dr. Zukin responded, "We had to start somewhere. None of us are comfortable with talking about generations. We like to talk about age cohorts" (2006).

A cohort is defined as people within a delineated population who experience the same significant event within a given period of time (Glenn, 2005). A cohort's mature identity is achieved through a newly found freedom of self-definition. Becoming conscious of one's own distinctive identity emerges as a force that both links and distinguishes particular generational groups, in so far as it is not until one becomes conscious of generational difference that one can develop genuine relationships between generations (Biggs, 2007). The experience of growing up in a sociological context facilitates what Bollas refers to as, "A keen sense of their own generation. They can define it clearly, differentiate it from older and younger generations, and in some respects analyze why their generation is the way it is" (1992, p. 252).

When speaking about my research formally or informally I am often faced with a rhetorical question, "Aren't Millennials the same as every other generation–i.e. they challenge the status quo, push boundaries and engage in an experimental lifestyle?" The lens through

which they are questioning is informed by *maturational theory*. Maturational theory subscribes to the notion that the chief principle of developmental change is maturation. Vision acuity, crawling, walking, speaking, object constancy, and differentiation are all the normative result of human maturing. So, the question can be asked, "By what age should a certain attitude or behavior be observable?" In an effort to answer such a question, Arnold Gesell established the concept of developmental norms (Thelen & Adolf, 1992). Gesell was motivated to create a norm as means to promote the mental hygiene of the child. If a child at age four brags and tells tall tales, the parent must recognize the nature of his or her immaturity and therefore allow for the immaturity and not be alarmed. If the child is age 16, tall tales become highly problematic. Gesell viewed biology as the major determinant to behavior while downplaying environment (Thelen & Adolf, 1992). Maturational theory is a more traditional belief that people change, mature, and develop their values, attitudes, and preferences as a function of age. Yes, Millennials do exhibit characteristics of youth (maturational) but their values and attitudes about work are dependent on so much more.

Life course theory. Life Course Theory is a multi-disciplinary human development theory that incorporates generational theory. In Life Course Theory, an age cohort is an aggregate of individuals bound together in historical time with the birth year normally being the basis for grouping. Cohorting is practiced to examine common collective properties or what are referred to as *cohort effects*. The idea is that people experiencing a sociological context at a similar age may forge a perspective or mindset that stays with them as they grow up, grow old and die (Settersten & Mayer, 1997). A powerful example of a cohort effect would be the *Great Depression*.

Collective memory and cohort effect. An interesting study on collective memory

confirmed the theory of cohort effect:

> Using a 1985 probability sample of over 1400 Americans to test Mannheim's theory of the formation of generations, Schuman and Scott found that generational characteristics created by events a cohort experiences during its youth exerts a decisive influence on what each generation remembers, and thus presumably influences its later values and behaviors. (Griffin, 2004, p. 544)

The study observed that respondent's age structured their recall of important national and

world events over a 50-year span. When asked an open-ended question about their spontaneous

recall of one or, if possible, two national and world events and changes over the past 50 years the

following were the responses (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Memorable Events by Age Cohort (Griffin, 2004, p. 544)

Age of respondent	Age at time of event	Event
35-44 years of age	13-22 years of age	JFK's assassination
55-69 years of age	10-24 years of age	World War II
70 years of age or older	At least 15 years of age	The Great Depression

Larry Griffin outlines three premises that guide research on social or collective memory:

> The first is that the past is not the past at all–that it, instead persists into the present and thus presages the future. The second is that memory is elicited by and organized into social contexts. The third is that collective memories perform some form of culture work for those in the present. It is thought to advance and validate identities, fuel grievances and give meaning and narrative coherence to individuals and collectivities. (2004, p. 544).

Mannheim and others suggest that a generation's world-view is developed during

adolescence through young adulthood, "The events and changes that have maximum impact in

terms of *memorableness* occur during a cohort's adolescence and young adulthood, often

referred to as youth" (Schuman & Scott, 1989, p. 360). Schuman and Scott (1989) suggest that

Mannheim's window for impression is ages 17 to 25. According to Mannheim, age 25 would

mark the terminal point for major generational formation (1952).

> It is important to note that as society changes so does the notion of adolescence:

> In Western culture, adolescence usually is a gradual transition from childhood to
> adulthood. In the United States, the age at which a person may move from being an
> adolescent to being an adult may vary, not only due to parental and cultural expectations
> but also because of state laws determining the age at which one may work, obtain a
> driver's license, marry, be treated as an adult offender, or be eligible to go to war.
> (Austrian, 2002, p. 124)

> Although Mannheim's *The Problem with Generations* has informed the work of

anthropologists, gerontologists, sociologists and psychologists for years, there has been renewed

scientific inquiry into the concept. Researchers are trying to identify differences between cohorts

and the impact of such differences such as socio-political, work-life, family structure, and

religion. McCrindle's (2006) assertion is consistent with Pilcher's commentary on Mannheim's

work, "The likelihood of a generation developing distinctive consciousness is seen to be

dependent on the tempo of social change" (Pilcher, 1994, p. 491). In a tribal community where

there is little or no change, you will not be able to observe a social generation or cohort. The

greater the tempo or scale of change in society the shorter the cohort span of birth years.

A description of age cohorts currently in the workplace. The tension of how to

define a generation is acutely displayed in the variety of labels and descriptions currently

offered to describe Millennials. Whatever you decide to label them, they are only one of

four generations currently in the workplace. Pekala offers:

> For the first time in the history of work, the workforce comprises four very different
> generations. Creating a workplace where members of all generations can work
> harmoniously and productively side by side, cubicle by cubicle, is an important challenge
> every business today is facing. (2001, p. 31)

The four distinct generational identities—Traditionalists (aka Builders), Babyboomers, Generation X, and Generation Y—are each shaped by differing life-defining events and motivated by different needs and wants (Kovary & Buahene, 2005).

When Gen X entered the workforce. Gen X was immediately recognized for being different than other generations before them for their desire to have greater work-life balance. Chetkovich and Kunreuther point out:

> Literature on Generation X asserts that those born between 1964 and 1979 are more concerned than their predecessors about spending time with their families, and the data are particularly striking among men. The Radcliffe Policy Institute (2002) reports that younger men are far more likely than older men to rate the ability to have time to spend with family as an important consideration in choosing a job. (2006, p. 23)

In a 2002 book *Geeks and Geezers*, Bennis and Thomas compare extra-ordinary individuals under age 35 and over 70 years of age (basically a comparison between Gen X and Builders). Bennis and Thomas emphasize, "No issue or attitude divided geeks from geezers more dramatically than the importance of balance in their lives" (2002, p. 74).

A study in the Illinois Libraries Journal also points out how Gen X was perceived as being different from other generations, "However, the wide disparity between Generation X and older generations, along with dramatic changes in information expectations, necessitates enlightened and understanding thought in considering these differences. To effect such a change, many library managers need to re-evaluate their daily management activities" (Cooper & Cooper, 1998, p. 20). Cooper and Cooper suggested managers allow Gen Xers' independence to complete specific tasks, meeting their need for independence, and provide consistent, constructive, and timely feedback (1998). A difference from Millennials that is worth noting is, "Xer's have the uncanny ability to focus on what is important" (Cooper & Cooper, 1998, p. 21).

A popular media narrative on Millennials. There is a reason why the Millennials are garnering more and more of the media spotlight. They are a large group and numbers equate to influence. In 2005, Baby Boomers comprised 26% of the total U.S. population while Millennials accounted for 25% (New Strategist Publications, 2006). According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 83 million people were born between 1977 and 1997 (Hanford, 2005). Approximately 75 million Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 (Hanford, 2005). "They are the children of the Baby Boomers, the younger siblings of Gen X, and the 29 million adults who have been streaming into the workplace over the last five years" (Tulgan & Martin, 2001, para 3). You can expect the Millennial wave to continue through 2018. A cover of *Human Resource Executive* pictures five young professionals with the slogan "Here They Come" in big letters. The attention is warranted, "In just the last four years, Millennials have grown from 14% of the workforce to 21%–nearly 32 million workers" (Hirschman, 2006). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there are currently 40 million Millennial-age workers in the workforce (2010). America has been enamored with the Baby Boomers for decades, but as they reach for the remote or the latest travel guide, business and government are paying closer attention to Millennial wants and needs–because size matters.

Cultural experience makes every generation of Americans unique. Millennials are shaped not only by their numbers but also by the historical moment. In their work *Managing Generation Y*, Tulgan and Martin point out some of what the Millennials have witnessed while growing up:

> They have grown up with the specters of crack cocaine, designer drugs, and the AIDS epidemic. As 8- to 14-year-olds, they saw the graphic horrors of the L.A. riots following the Rodney King verdict and the fiery end of the Branch Davidian standoff. They watched terrorism become a U.S. phenomenon with the World Trade Center, Oklahoma, and Atlanta Summer Olympics bombings. They were bombarded with violence-packed video games and sexually charged advertising, TV, and movies. Then in the late '90s, they were implicated as a disturbed and violent generation when Paducah, Littleton, Springfield, and Conyers grabbed the headlines. Gen Y'ers didn't need the atom bomb or

nuclear proliferation to create an uncertain, scary world. They didn't need a Germany or a Korea and a Vietnam to terrify them. Their "war" has been fought on native soil. Their "enemy" has appeared in their homes, in their neighborhoods, on their playgrounds–in adults who abuse them, in schoolmates who shoot them. (Tulgan & Martin, 2001, para 8)

A book entitled *Millenials* asserts that three distinct characteristics are emerging, characteristics that will reshape American society as Millennials mature. First, Millennials are racially and ethnically diverse—so diverse, in fact, that in many parts of the country the term "minority" no longer has meaning for their peer group (Millenials, 2006, p. 1). More than one-third of elementary school students nationwide are black or Hispanic, compared with 22% in 1974. The U.S. Bureau of the Census projects that "minorities" will make up the majority of the U.S. population by 2050 (Beck, 1997). Multiculturalism is a key characteristic of the Millennials. Perhaps the racial and ethnic diversity of the Millennials will change our society more than any of their other characteristics. Millennials are already sensitive to issues of diversity and how their society deals with difference.

The second assertion made in *The Millenials* is that Millennials are fiercely independent thanks to divorce, day care, single parents, latchkey lifestyles, and the technological revolution that has put the joystick squarely in their hands (Millenials, 2006, p. 2). Melinda Beck (1997) reports that about 60% of children under the age of six have mothers who work outside of the home compared to 18% in 1960. Nearly 61% of U.S. children aged three to five are attending preschool compared with 38% in 1970. Nearly 60% of households with children aged seven or younger have personal computers (Beck, 1997).

The Millennials' technological savvy is not lost on Tischelle George who states:

Where most knowledge workers today use two forms of communication–written and spoken–the employees of tomorrow see endless variations and protocols. Far from being awed by current technology, kids will find the tools they need to do what they want, or they'll remake software and hardware to get the job done. (2002, p. 81, para 2)

In short, who needs the *IT* guy? They will either "hack" it or "huck" it. Another advantage of growing up digital has manifested in the fact that they can do a lot of things at once.

Millennials feel powerful. Raised by indulgent parents, they have a sense of security not shared by Gen X. Optimistic about the future, Millennials see opportunity where others see problems (New Strategist Publications, 2006). Many of the people I speak with are experiencing the return home of their degree-matriculated young adults. The parents' experience was observed by *American Demographics* in 2001:

> Like their predecessors of a decade ago, the 71 million children of Baby Boomers are staring down a precarious economy and heading back to their parents' nests. An estimated 56 percent of the 2001 graduating class, or 668,640 grads, are expected to be homeward bound this year. But this time it will be by choice and not as a last resort. Whereas Gen X viewed moving home as failure, Gen Ys are both pragmatic and positive about their post-college decisions. Having come of age under the protective boom of the stock market, Gen Ys have a more optimistic view of the economy and their ability to eventually succeed in it. (Nayyar, 2001, p. 6)

Those Millennials that are not moving home are cohabitating with friends. Peter Francese quips:

> Though marriage or cohabitation almost always involves romance, there may also be an economic component: The average earnings of employed 21-year-olds are usually insufficient to pay for a place to live. The mean wage of 21-year-old men, according to Census Bureau surveys, is $17,000 for high school graduates and $26,000 for college graduates. For women, the figures are $13,000 and $24,000 a year, respectively. The median rent, plus utilities, of an urban apartment—where many young adults live— exceeds $10,000 a year, and college grads often have big student loan payments. Therefore, getting married—or at least living with someone—virtually becomes a necessity. (2003, p. 43)

Whether they are living at home or on their own, they are still very connected to their parents. They feel collectively special in the eyes of their parents and their community. They are the product of the village that Hilary Clinton envisioned. "The Millennials were raised, by and large, by active, involved parents who often interceded on their behalf. Protective Boomer and Gen X parents tried to ensure their children would grow up safely and be treated well. Parents

challenged poor grades, negotiated with the soccer coach, visited college campuses with their charges, and even went along to Army recruiting centers" (Raines, 2002, para 13). The media refers to the over-involved parents as "helicopter parents" because they are always hovering over their children. In a Wall Street Journal story, *Colleges Ward Off Overinvolved Parents*, Sue Shellenbarger chides, "As colleges and universities gear up to receive a new class of freshmen this fall, they're bracing for a potentially more daunting onslaught: Helicopter parents are going to college" (2005, para 1). Interestingly, the University of Vermont deploys "parent bouncers," students trained to divert moms and dads who try to attend registration and explain diplomatically that they're not invited (Shellenbarger, 2005). Some companies, like Enterprise Rental Car Company, are adapting to the "helicopter parents." Enterprise sends job offer information to the parents of prospective employees and even allows them to be on the phone with their children when job offers are discussed (Hirschman, 2006). Danielle Sacks (2006) gives an extreme example of parental involvement at work:

> A 22-year-old pharmaceutical employee learned that he was not getting the promotion he had been eyeing. His boss told him he needed to work on his weaknesses first. The Harvard grad had excelled at everything he had ever done, so he was crushed by the news. He told his parents about the performance review, and they were convinced there was some misunderstanding, some way they could fix it, as they'd been able to fix everything before. His mother called the human-resources department the next day. Seventeen times. She left increasingly frustrated messages: "You're purposely ignoring us"; "you fudged the evaluation"; "you have it in for my son." She demanded a mediation session with her, her son, his boss, and HR—and got it. At one point, the 22-year-old reprimanded the HR rep for being "rude to my mom." (para 2)

A notable characteristic of the Millennial is that two-thirds of college freshmen (66%) believe it's essential or very important to help others in difficulty, so suggests a survey of 263,710 students at 385 U.S. colleges and universities. The 2005 report by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles found feelings of social and civic responsibility among entering freshmen at the highest level in 25 years (Markiewicz, 2003).

Perhaps one of the most defining characteristics of Millennials at work is their commitment to work-life balance. Peter Sheahan, an organizational consultant who specializes in helping companies manage Millennials, says, "Generation Y'ers do not think they have to trade off between lifestyle and money. It is not an 'either or' choice for them but an 'and.' They do not believe they need to choose between having a balanced lifestyle and professional success. They want, and expect to be able to have both" (2006, para 11). They balance work and leisure at the earliest stages of their career paths. They don't think there's a future in working their way up from the bottom. One survey suggests Millennials think anyone retiring from the same company that first hired her or him is a loser (Brandow, 2005). Brandow's sentiment is captured in an article by the *Los Angeles Times* that suggests the real challenge companies face is getting Millennials to stay. Having watched their parents downsized or right-sized by companies they had spent their lives working for, Millennials are not concerned about the stigma that may accompany changing jobs frequently (Keller, 2006). "Yes, Generation Y is notorious. These youngsters come in, think they know it all, want a promotion next week and leave six months later because they got a little bored," laments John McCrone (2006).

Another difference between the Millennials and their predecessors is that they want to have a voice from day one. They have been pampered, nurtured, and told how great they are from birth. They believe in their own worth. They have grown up questioning their parents, and now they're questioning their employers. "They don't know how to shut up, which is great, but that's aggravating to the 50-year-old manager who says, 'Do it and do it now'" (Armour, 2005 para 7). Tulgan and Martin characterize the behavior that frustrates many of those who manage Millennials as "usurping intellectual authority" (2001, para 15). They are the first generation to

be able to access information without an authority figure and therefore do not have a "felt need" to reach out to their managers.

Millennials want to learn quickly. They want to work with people across an organization, not just in their department. They want experience outside the job for which they were hired. Millennials think "skills," not "career," because they do not trust companies to keep them employed (Hischman, 2006). They demand mentoring and training before committing to a job (Brandow, 2005).

Age norm theory. Another theory that may shed light on generational disconnect is *age norm theory*. Barbara Lawrence synthesizes scholarship on the subject into the following definition, "Age norms are the ages viewed as standard or typical for a given role or status by the modal group of members of a social system" (1996, p. 211). Lawrence observes that there are several conceptions of norms, but most have three things in common: 1) *Expectation*, 2) *Sanction*, and 3) a *Group* (1996). Expectation exists when there is a statement that specifies what response or behavior is expected in specific situations (*what people ought to do*). In other words, age-appropriate behavior for Millennials invited into the conference room is to listen, not to speak.

Sanction refers to the punishment of people who violate an expectation. In keeping with the *listen don't speak* example, Peter Guber, director of the movie *Gorillas in the Mist*, tells of the nightmare of shooting on location in Rwanda with 200 animals that wouldn't 'act.' The screenplay called for the gorillas to do what was written. When they didn't, the only option was to fall back on a flawed formula that had failed before—that of using dwarfs in gorilla suits on a sound stage. It was during an emergency meeting that a young intern asked, "What if you let the gorillas write the story? What if you sent a really good cinematographer into the jungle with a

ton of film to shoot the gorillas? Then you could write a story around what the gorillas did on the film." Everyone laughed and wondered what the intern was doing in a meeting with experienced filmmakers. But ultimately they did exactly what she suggested, and the cinematographer "came back with phenomenal footage that practically wrote the story for us," Guber says, "We shot the film for $20 million, half of the original budget" (Muoio, 1998, Peter Guber). People who violate expectations are punished in varying degrees. An age expectation for a freshly minted attorney is to take assignments that no one else in the firm wants. If they choose not to take an assignment, they are routinely reminded that they won't make partner unless they comply.

Finally, group refers to a social contract in which 'a group' of people is aware of and believe the social norm and punish or sanction those who deviate from the norm. Lawrence points out that violating a norm can also result in reward (1996). For instance, an American adolescent who enters college at age 16 is held in esteem even though her advancement is not age-appropriate. In the same respect, skydiving is not an age-appropriate activity for a 94 year-old, but we admire and applaud such antics.

The fact that age norms can be socially constructed means they are also dynamic. Faith Popcorn's (1991) concept of *down-aging* (a redefining down what appropriate age-behavior is for your age) is a good example of a shift in age norms. Kathleen Riach's (2007) definition of age norming broadens the discussion from the chronological to the social. Expectation plays a role in *age structuring*. Age structuring is a social or group phenomenon that uses age to determine access to roles, experiences, status, privileges, and the like (Settersten & Mayer, 1997). An argument can be made that age norms are formally applied to later adolescents and early adults more than any other group. Driving, drinking, voting, renting a car, watching a movie, and getting married are all legislated by age norms. There are incredible cross-cultural

implications with respect to age structuring. What is encouraged as age-appropriate behavior in one culture can be frowned upon in another.

The examples of age structuring I listed above are formal, but there are also informal expectations (by what age must someone be married, when are you too old to have children, when are you too old to still be living with your parents). Informal expectations can lead to stereotype threat against an individual and a group of individuals. A cohort's attitudes, beliefs, and values play a role in the overall social construct. When we look at the formal age structure (i.e. those that are older are in charge), power resides with older cohorts that share ideals about work attitudes, values, and behaviors. It can be argued that the larger the cohort (or group), the greater the influence over norms and expectations. The Baby Boomers are 80 million strong. The Baby Boomers were sandwiched between the Builders (46 million) and Gen X (38 million). Combined, the total population of Builders and Gen X'ers barely eclipse the number of Baby Boomers. It is worth noting that the Millennial cohort is reported as being between 78-82 million people. Millennials are equal in number to the Baby Boomers in terms of population.

Ageism. Ageism is stereotyping and prejudice against individuals or groups because of their age (Bruhn, 2005; Nelson, 2002). The term ageism was first coined in 1969 by Robert Butler, a gerontologist, who used it to define a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old (Bruhn, 2005, p. 149). Ageism allows people who are younger to view people who are older different as from themselves. As an example, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Age discrimination is also defined as fewer opportunities afforded to older workers that do not reflect lower productivity (Cain, 1986). Bruhn (2005) notes that, in 1979, Robert Kalish expanded the ageism discussion by introducing the concept of "new ageism." New ageism moved the focus from chronological age and

concentrated on problems thought to be representative of all of the elderly. Bruhn (2005) says

that new ageism tends to magnify or generalize the problems associated with a category of

people. For instance, what is considered old? A professional football player in the National

Football League is considered old at age 30. My sister, a former pilot for United Airlines and

Emirates Airlines, says pilots who fly in the "right seat" after being in the "left seat" are referred

to as "herpes" by younger pilots. Pilots who fly in the left seat are captains. When they reach a

certain age, they can no longer fly the left seat and move to the co-pilot position. Younger pilots

resent their older counterparts because their elders' elongated presence in the cockpit delays

upward mobility. They call older pilots "herpes" because you can't get rid of them. The

sentiment is also prevalent in the non-profit sector,

> Old leaders running nonprofits have been sitting too long at the top of their organizations. They have ignored younger employees who bring new blood and new ideas. The crisis is that the Baby Boomer generation is *not* leaving, preventing a new generation from taking the reins. In this story, young people in nonprofits receive little respect, opportunity, or support. (Kunreuther, 2003, p. 451)

> Simon Biggs (2007) agrees,

> A recurring finding indicates that younger adults base their conversation with older people on failing physical and cognitive capabilities, a trend that increased linearly with the age of their conversational partner. Further, antagonism appears to be mirrored between generations, with both younger and older respondents judging the other age group's communication styles negatively. (p. 695)

Riach (2007) introduces "age as attribute" to the conversation on ageism, "Age as

attribute [is] a means of understanding the older worker label as produced within biased social

and cultural processes, rather than aligned with biology or chronology" (Riach, 2007, p. 1703).

When an individual is identified as a member of a social category, the attributes associated with

this category are applied to this individual (Kalin & Hodgins, 1984). Kalin and Hodgins prefer

Rosen and Jerdee's definition of age stereotypes: "widely held beliefs regarding the

characteristics of persons in various age categories" (1984, p. 5). Age stereotypes (i.e. older people are resistant to new technology) depict older persons as being less than desirable employees, particularly for technically demanding jobs. Employers default to negative stereotypes when they have limited information about applicants and project onto individuals certain perceived group characteristics (Büsch, Dahl, & Dittrich, 2004).

Recently, the problem of age discrimination has received increased attention. Büsch et al. (2004) suggest that there are two reasons for the growing interest: 1) the high costs connected with early retirement, and 2) an increased proportion of older persons. While the concept of ageism or age discrimination has been around for decades, Todd Nelson believes that the field has been neglected by the academy. Nelson's (2002) explanation for the neglect is that age prejudice is still considered socially acceptable. Nelson sees a correlation between Baby Boomers approaching retirement age and an increase in academic and popular interest in aging.

Ironically, it is the Baby Boomer phenomenon that stirred my interest in studying Millennials in the workplace. I was concerned with who was going to take the Baby Boomers place in organizations and the "disconnect" that seemed to be emerging between the age cohorts. A conversation with Dr. Philomena Essed stimulated my thinking with respect to the marginalization of the young. Ageism defined above is mostly applied to the "older" segment of the population. However, I see Riach (2007), Kalin and Hodgins (1984) as opening the door to look at the other side of the age equation. While one may stereotype older workers as slower, less willing to change, or technologically inferior, I also believe that there are negative stereotypes that impact the career opportunities (pay scale, promotion, benefits, etc.) of Millennials.

I noted earlier that ageism has been theorized about for decades and even addressed by congress (*The age discrimination in employment act*, 1967), but it is a practice that escapes the scrutiny of society. I know it is challenging, if not bordering on the incredulous, to think of Millennials as being victims of ageism. After all, our culture worships youth. Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León, Puerto Rico's first Governor, was searching for the Fountain of Youth when he traveled to Florida in 1513. Today people carry Ponce's spirit of eternal youth as they pursue the promise of every anti-wrinkle cream, exfoliate and injectable procedure. Futurist marketing guru Faith Popcorn has written on the phenomena she coined as "down-aging." Popcorn says, "Down-aging is a redefining down what appropriate age-behavior is for your age … 40 is now what used to be 30, 50 is now what used to be 40, 65 is now the beginning of the second half of life" (Popcorn, 1991, p. 57). Famed lyricist Bob Dylan, a Builder, turns 70 years old this May, and his benediction is a blessing to those who have crossed the threshold of middle age (Dylan, 1974):

> May God bless and keep you always,
> May your wishes all come true,
> May you always do for others
> And let others do for you.
> May you build a ladder to the stars
> And climb on every rung,
> May you stay forever young,
> Forever young, forever young,
> May you stay forever young.
>
> May you grow up to be righteous,
> May you grow up to be true,
> May you always know the truth
> And see the lights surrounding you.
> May you always be courageous,
> Stand upright and be strong,
> May you stay forever young,
> Forever young, forever young,
> May you stay forever young.

May your hands always be busy,
May your feet always be swift,
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift.
May your heart always be joyful,
May your song always be sung,
May you stay forever young,
Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.

How can you be marginalized when everybody wants what you have? O'Brien and

Hummert (2006) offer an explanation of stereotype threat—stereotype threat is a situational

phenomenon: people only experience stereotype threat when a negative stereotype about their

group is relevant to performance on a specific task. Individuals who are highly identified with

the group may experience greater susceptibility to stereotype threat (Schmader, 2002).

Generational tension and social change. Across historical time, different cohorts, or

generations (Mannheim, 1952) may develop their own characteristic patterns of attitudes

and expectations about what is possible to achieve in life and what is not, about what is

good and what is bad, whom to trust and what to fear. Ryder asserts, "A cohort's size

relative to the sizes of its neighbors is a persistent and compelling feature of its lifetime

environment. As the new cohort reaches each major juncture in the life cycle, the society

has the problem of assimilating it" (1965, p. 845). Social change is partly the result of

successive generations making their way and ultimately their place in sociological

structures. Sonia Austrian suggests that the social change is a result of two dynamisms,

"One, people in successive cohorts or generations grow up and grow old in different ways

because the surrounding sociological structures are changing. That is, the process of aging

from birth to death is not entirely fixed by biology, but is influenced by changing structures

and roles in which people lead their lives. Two, alterations in the ways people grow up and

grow old, in turn, press on the surrounding social structures to change them. That is, the

roles available to individuals at particular ages are not fixed or immutable but are reshaped

by the collective" (2002, p. 123).

Matilda Riley also asserts that both people and society undergo process and change. She

reiterates the two dynamisms at work,

> One, the aging of people in successive cohorts who grow up, grow old, die and are
> replaced by other people. Two, the changes in society as people of different ages pass
> through social institutions that are organized by age. The key to this understanding lies in
> the interdependence of aging and social change, as each transforms the other. (1987, p. 2)

Riley (1987) calls the interplay between individual age and social change *cohort flow*.

Riley further unpacks the interdependence by stating that members of successive cohorts age in

new ways and therefore contribute to changes in the social structure, a concept she refers to as

the principle of cohort influence on social change.

In their thought-provoking work *The Fourth Turning*, Strauss and Howe attempt to

explain the "gap" or "disconnect" between every generation and its predecessors. They suggest

that a perusal of history will provide us with patterns of rhythmic social change (1997, p. 2).

> In fact, at the core of modern history lies this remarkable pattern: Over the past five
> centuries, Anglo-American society has entered a new era–a new *turning*–every two
> decades or so. At the start of each turning, people change how they feel about themselves,
> the culture, the nation, and the future. Turnings come in cycles of four. Each cycle spans
> the length of a long human life, roughly eighty to one hundred years, a unit of time the
> ancients called the *saeculum*. Together, the four turnings of the saeculum comprise
> history's seasonal rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction. (Strauss &
> Howe, 1997, p. 3)

Ryder's work credits the tension that results as one generation gives way to another as

key to societal transformation, "The capacity for societal transformation has an indispensable

ally in the process of demographic metabolism" (1965, p. 844).

Managerial Leader Perspectives That Focus on Followers' Needs

It occurred to me that there is an age norm applied to management and leadership literature. That is to say "older" sources have less status. I first experienced it in graduate school when marked down on a paper for using "old" sources. The irony was that it was a theology class. As I have explored the literature I have been enlightened by the rich insight of management thinkers of yesterday. Munsterberg (industrial psychology), Folliet (the democratization of organizations), Mayo (behavioral movement), McGregor (human relations movement), Burns (transformational leadership), Maslow (motivation theory), and many others envisioned working environments in which mutual respect and concern between *boss and subordinate* were not secondary to productivity but seen as a means to organizational success. One such concept is *Expectancy Theory's* (Vroom, 1964) notion of *valence*. Valence is the degree to which a follower values an outcome or finds it attractive. The aforementioned management pioneers shifted the paradigm of management from focusing solely on the work by calling for an attending to the worker(s) and human relations. If one can look beyond the vernacular of their day, they are still relevant. Charles Corace of *Johnson and Johnson* observes,

> Over the years the human relations factor has been cloaked in various Organizational Development (OD) frameworks such as: Transactional Analysis, Grid Management, Quality Circles, Employee Involvement Teams, and today, Employee Engagement. When one examines each of these theories, the emerging common component is treating people with respect and dignity. (2007, p. 171)

If the Strauss and Howe (1997) assertion that there is a "values" connection between first and fourth generations is true, the aforementioned thinkers must be viewed as a rich source for understanding how to work with Millennials. The notion has not escaped BusinessWeek. They committed an issue entitled *The Man Who Invented Management: Why Peter's Drucker's Ideas Still Matter*. Peter Drucker, one of the most celebrated management writers of the last century

died disillusioned with the corporate world and its greed (Byrne & Gerdes, 2005). Due to his writings in the 1950s, many credit Drucker with the notion of corporation as human community.

Managerial leadership preferences of Millennials. In her dissertation entitled *Leadership Preferences of a Generation Y Cohort*, Linda Dulin (2005) enumerates 12 things Millennials need from their leaders:

1. Feedback provider (information for performance improvement)

2. Sounding board (for ideas and strategies)

3. Point of comparison (evaluating one's skills against an expert's)

4. Feedback interpreter (of feedback from others)

5. Dialogue partner (to discuss different perspectives)

6. Assignment broker (for access to challenging assignments)

7. Accountant (to hold you accountable)

8. Role model (for examples of high/low competence)

9. Counselor (For tough times)

10. Cheerleader (to boost your self-esteem)

11. Reinforcer (to give you rewards)

12. Cohort (to give the sense that you are not alone)

Dulin's findings are helpful in framing what Millennials expect from their managers. Patrick Carley's dissertation, *Generational Perceptions Of Leadership Behaviors And Job Satisfaction Among Healthcare Professionals In Western New England*, echos Dulin's notion of generational leadership preference "the data analysis reflects the Gen Y [Millennial] groups being different from both the Gen X and Boomer cohorts concerning generational preferences of leadership behaviors and levels of job satisfaction" (2008, p. 136). In light of the demographic

shift that will be happening in the workplace over the next decade, it is important for Millennials and managers to be able to understand one another.

Perhaps the most significant ability a person can deploy is "teach-ability." Teach-ability is framed in the literature as life-long learning or being a life-long learner. Peter Vaill's idea of "learning as a way of being" most resonates with me (1996). Vaill defines learning as, "Changes a person makes in himself or herself that increase the know-why and/or the know-what and/or the know-how the person possesses with respect to a given subject" (1996, p. 21). The inability to learn diminishes one's capacity to change. When we want to see movement in our plans or projects we often speak metaphorically of removing "barriers." Jack Mezirow's concept of the "disorienting dilemma" is quite enlightening with respect to adult learning (1991). Mezirow discovered that adults have to be faced with a predicament or predicaments (new experiences) for which they have no answers before they will look beyond their current mental framework or world-view. Experience affords us the context to categorize, interpret, process, evaluate, and execute, but paradoxically experience can also be one of the greatest barriers to learning. Peter Senge suggests that, "We learn best from experience but we never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions" (1990, p. 23). Senge calls this a "learning dilemma" or the delusion of learning from experience. Peter Vaill offers that we do not learn first and then handle situations but rather it is in the handling of the situations that the learning occurs (1996). It has been observed that some people have 10 years of experience while others have one year of experience 10 times over. Mary Parker Follett wrote over 80 years ago:

> The people who 'learn by experience' often make great messes of their lives, that is, if they apply what they have learned from a past incident to the present, deciding from certain appearances that the circumstances are the same, forgetting that no two situations can ever be the same... All that I am, all that life has made me, every past experience that I have had—woven into the tissue of my life—I must give to the new experience. That past experience has indeed not been useless, but its use is not in guiding present conduct

by past situations. We must put everything we can into each fresh experience, but we shall not get the same things out which we put in if it is a fruitful experience, if it is part of our progressing life... We integrate our experience, and then the richer human being that we are goes into the new experience; again we give ourself and always by giving rise above the old self. (1924, pp. 136-137)

I don't think anyone intentionally sets out to "not learn." But I do know that it is easy to get mesmerized by one's own experience. It is the notion of one's own experience that could dictate the amount of *adaptive* work that one is willing to do. Ronald Heifetz defines *adaptive* work as "consisting of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face." Heifetz (1994, pp. 23, 24) adds, "The hardest and most valuable task of leadership may be advancing goals and designing strategy that promote adaptive work." Heifetz suggests that the place for a person to start is with herself or himself, "Accept responsibility for your piece of the mess" (1994, p. 90). Failure to adapt can be played out by holding onto one's past assumptions (experience), blaming, scape-goating, denial, and externalizing the enemy (Heifetz, 1994).

Harvard's Chris Argyris (1990) points out another barrier to learning. He argues that even a person's core competency, like relationship management, can result in a lack of learning and counterproductive outcomes. As an example, a leader over-concerned with everybody getting along may use relationship skills that inhibit healthy group conflict. Argyris calls the use of a competency in a counterproductive manner "skilled incompetence."

Suspending one's own bias. Ironically, one of the biggest roadblocks to adapting is perhaps your greatest asset–your lived experience. One way to suspend the bias of your experience is to begin with the experience of the person whom you are leading or managing rather than your own. Fred Fiedler (1967) pioneered a field of study referred to as contingency theory of leadership. Fiedler shifted his focus from leader attributes to leader-member relations.

Fiedler suggested that three major situational variables determine whether a situation is favorable to leaders, 1) their personal relations with the members of the group, 2) the degree of structure in the task that their group has been assigned to perform, and 3) the power and authority that their position provides. Fiedler's view was that the managerial leaders success was context dependent. He believed that leader styles (*relationship-oriented* or *task-oriented*) are an enduring characteristic and therefore managerial leaders did not have the capacity to change their style or adopt different styles in different situations.

Robert House (1971) built on Fiedler's *contingency theory* and developed what he called *path-goal theory. Path Goal Theory* begins with 1) identifying the outcomes that your subordinates are trying to obtain from the workplace, 2) rewarding your subordinates with these outcomes for high performance and the attainment of work goals, and 3) clarifying for subordinates the paths leading to the attainment of work goals. Path Goal leadership consists of directing, supporting, participating, and achievement-oriented behaviors.

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) agree with Fiedler in respect to the dimensions of *task-orientation* and *relationship-orientation* but disagree with Fiedler in that they believe managerial leaders can adapt their leadership style to the context. Their work complements *path-goal theory* with what they called *Situational Leadership Theory. Situational Leadership Theory* is based on interplay among 1) the amount of guidance and direction a leader gives; 2) the amount of socio-emotional support a leader provides; and 3) the readiness level followers exhibit in performing a specific task, function, or objective (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). It is noteworthy that the follower is never *labeled* but only their development with respect to a task, function, or objective. The premise is that there is not one best way to lead but rather good leadership is contingent on the readiness level of the follower. The leader's effectiveness is dependent upon

her ability to diagnose the readiness level of the follower, show flexibility by using a variety of leadership styles, and a willingness to partner with the follower for performance. The managerial leader and the follower work together to identify the leadership style that is best for the situation. The managerial leader behaviors to be matched to readiness level are 1) telling, 2) selling, 3) participating, and 4) delegating (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Victor Vroom (2000) uses the foundation of House's path-goal theory to suggest that managerial leadership can deploy certain styles for certain situations but his focus is with a single aspect of leadership behavior—subordinate participation in decision-making. Vroom finds it more helpful to talk about autocratic and participative situations rather than autocratic or participative managers. Vroom's research identified that managerial leaders allow employee participation in the following decision making situations, 1) highly significant decisions, 2) when they need group commitment, 3) when they lack expertise, 4) when likelihood of commitment to their decision is low, 5) when the group's expertise is high, and 6) when the group has a history of working together effectively. The theoretical framework for his work comes from the concept of Participative Management. Suspending one's own bias is easier said than done, especially when bias is subconscious.

Participative management. Participative Management can be traced to the work of Dr. Alfred Marrow in 1947. A psychologist by training, he was captured by the fact that any time a change was implemented in his plant–productivity declined by 25 percent. Dr. Marrow and his colleagues discovered that by placing decision-making authority (concerning employees own work) into the hands of his workforce (mostly poorly educated women from the rural area surrounding the plant) productivity increased by as much as 14 percent (Pojidaeff, 1995). Participative Management shifts the focus from a mechanistic extrinsic motivation model to an

employee focused intrinsic model of motivation (Lawler, 1986; Marchant, 1976). While many organizations "get" the value of intrinsic motivation their reluctance to switch from hierarchical mechanistic structures may be more about "experience bias" than what may work best. This is definitely an area of where *good* is the enemy of the *great*. The emphasis is solely on the efficacy of the organization or the managerial leader rather than on the self-efficacy of every employee or team member.

The presupposition of the aforementioned managerial leadership activity is employee engagement. Managerial leaders and their followers must be engaged. Charles Corace chides "In the modern world of OD, employee engagement is seen as the "Silver Bullet"—the magic formula for enhancing employee performance in every organization" (2007, p. 171). In a study at Johnson and Johnson, they discovered their "Silver Bullets" to be:

- The degree to which people derive satisfaction from their current position

- The degree to which people feel valued by the organization

- The degree to which people feel collaboration and trust predominates

In order to create a culture of engaged employees, leadership was expected to:

- Provide a clear sense of direction

- Continually provide information of what's going on in the company

- Create an environment where truth can be taken up the line without fear of reprisal

- Express trust in the competence of their employees

The study differentiated leaders from supervisors (managers) and created a critical list for them as well:

- Supervisors giving information to do a good job

- Supervisors reward people according to their job performance

- Supervisors involving employees in decisions that affect their work

- Supervisors who are receptive to new ideas and reward creative thinking

Empowering leadership. Empowerment requires interdependence. Empowerment is not a technique, nor is it delegation (Blanchard, Carlos, & Randolph, 1999). It is a way of being and doing. Empowerment refers to a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). It is about placing others in a context that allows them to build a "can do" attitude. Delegation is a tool to help build someone's belief in her or his own ability. However, delegation without the intention of developing others can have the opposite effect. The result could be a "can't do" attitude or a learned helplessness. Complex, challenging, and autonomous assignments nurture a "can do" attitude, while boring, tedious, and meaningless assignments produce a "can't do" attitude. When an individual does not have self-efficacy, they become disengaged. Disengagement is a state of distance from an organization's goals, one's team, or one's own work. Disempowered people can easily find themselves in a downward-spiraling cycle.

Closing Remarks

Bollas claims,

A generation will have achieved its identity within ten years, roughly speaking between twenty and thirty, in the space between adolescent turbulence and the age of thirty when childhood, adolescence and young adulthood can be viewed of a piece, the thirty year old will feel himself to be part of his generation, and he will, in the next few years, take note of a new generation defining itself in such a way that he can distinguish it from his own. (1992, p. 260)

Builders, Baby Boomers, and Gen X can easily and readily identify what is different between their age cohort and others. It is not until one becomes conscious of generational difference that one can develop genuine relationships between generations (Biggs, 2007). Millennials are still forming their identity as a generation.

In Chapter III, I will share the findings from research early in my Ph.D. journey that informed my published work. In Chapter IV, I will describe the methods I used to collect and will use to analyze data. I will also discuss the methodological approach I took to do the research.

Chapter III: Prior Research

The etymology of the Millennial story began with a discussion "about" Millennials. The conversation quickly moved to strategies for recruiting them. Talk then shifted to on-boarding and managing Millennials. In my prior research interests, I wanted to focus on developing the quality of relationship between manager and Millennial by studying managers who were good at managing Millennials.

I chose Antioch University because of the program's emphasis on the importance of the role of scholar-practitioners. I love the subjects of management and leadership and one outcome I desired as a result of my doctoral studies was to make a contribution to the literature. Both Dr. Guskin and myself felt that though my earlier research has already been published, Chapter III of my dissertation would provide a perfect place to discuss its findings. In addition to expanding the theoretical framework for this dissertation, it also demonstrates the progress of my scholarship on the subject.

Early in my doctoral program I started studying the manager side of the generational rapport equation. My original inquiry was into how managers were experiencing Millennials in the workplace. I learned that managers experience tension while working with Millennials and the differences between those who are effective at managing Millennials and those who struggle. I co-authored *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce* with my colleagues Dr. Mick Ukleja and Dr. Craig Rusch. Red Tree Leadership (formerly Spencer Johnson Partners) has licensed the intellectual property of the book and delivers a training program based on the book entitled *Managing Millennials*. Their two other book-based training programs are *Who Moved My Cheese* and *The One Minute Manager*.

Managing Millennials

    The research design. The conceptual framework for my prior study was that Millennials have a set of values and attitudes unique to their age cohort that cause them to be experienced "as different" from other generations in the workplace. The perceived difference is a source for tension and conflict between Millennials and managers. There are some managers who are considered by their organizations to be better than others at managing Millennials. I wanted to know if the managers who were perceived to be effective experienced Millennial values, attitudes, and behaviors similarly or differently than their struggling managerial colleagues. If effective managers experienced Millennials differently from challenged managers, generational theory would not be a firm theoretical framework for my research. It could suggest that the effectiveness of a manager may rely more on recruiting "good" Millennials rather than on specific managerial competencies that can be learned.

    My colleagues and I conducted a qualitative research project in which we asked 30 company Human Resource (HR) executives to provide us with six managers who managed Millennials, three who they believed to be effective at managing Millennials and three who were challenged. We gave no other criteria to the HR executives. We interviewed each manager one-on-one and then followed up with a focus group with all six managers together.

    The research design was limited to 30 organizations that operate in the United States of America. There was no stratification of the education or socio-economic levels of the Millennials who were in the sample. There was no stratification of the sample managers' age, managerial experience, or level of education. The sample included aerospace, government, development,

professional sport, finance, fitness, real estate, medical, retail, media, manufacturing, education, and non-profit organizations.

Findings. When we grouped the managers by their comments and then compared our two groups (effective and challenged) to the two groups selected by the HR executives, we were in agreement with HR about which group each manager belonged to with the exception of three managers in the entire sample. I circled back with the HR executives and asked them what criteria they used for selecting the effective and challenged managers. They pointed out that the effective managers received fewer complaints about them (less conflict), their Millennials seemed happier on the job (employee retention and job satisfaction), and other managers wanted to hire their people (training, coaching, and mentoring). Conversely, they commented that challenged managers received more complaints (more conflict), their Millennials were not happy on the job (lack of retention), and their employees wanted to work for other managers (poor coaching, training, and mentoring skills). I also asked the HR executives if they were aware of any specific competencies or skills that differentiated the two groups and they reported not being aware but were very interested in learning more.

I was surprised to learn that both populations (the effective and the challenged) perceived the Millennials similarly. Words like "entitled," "brash," and "smart" were common in all of the interview transcripts. The focus groups produced no discord or strong disagreement between the groups of managers. Both groups shared frustrations and experiences that aligned. However, our interviews quickly surfaced major differences between the effective and challenged managers with respect to their perspective about managing Millennials.

The effective perspective. A manager's perspective can make or break generational rapport. As I stated earlier, our effective managers and challenged managers perceived

Millennials similarly, but how they managed them differed greatly. In an effort to embrace Millennials, a key adaptation the effective managers in our study made was to suspend the bias of their own experience. Simply put, they did not use their own experience as a blueprint for everyone else. Rather, they started with the experience of their direct reports—no matter how limited.

I found that the managers who were unable to suspend the bias of their own experience were less likely to self-reflect or adapt. Getting outside of the orbit of their own experience helped the effective managers adapt their perspective, management style, and approach to engaging Millennials. Below (Table 3.1) is an example of the differences in perspective between the two groups of managers.

Table 3.1

The Effective Versus Challenged Perspectives

Perspective	The Effective Managers	The Challenged Managers
Adaptability	Talked about their own need to change in order to manage in "today's world"	Talked about how others needed to change in order to make it in the "real world"
Self-efficacy	Believed there was something they could do about their situation	Believed that there was little they could do about their situation
Confidence	Allowed their subordinates to challenge them (ideas, processes, ways of doing things)	Sanctioned or punished their subordinates for challenging them
Power	Used the power of relationship versus the power of their position	Felt the only power they had was their positional authority
Energy	Working with Millennials made them feel younger	Working with Millennials made them feel older
Success	Saw themselves as key to the Millennials' success	Saw the Millennials as an impediment to their own success

The core competencies needed for managing Millennials. In the study, we noticed that Managerial leaders who made the effort to understand the values behind the Millennial attitudes and behaviors that are *perceived* negatively have an edge in maximizing the potential of Millennial employees.

We identified 9 Perceived Orientations of Millennials as experienced by managers in the study: (1) autonomous, (2) entitled, (3) imaginative, (4) self-absorbed, (5) defensive, (6) abrasive, (7) myopic, (8) unfocused, and (9) indifferent. Admittedly, the terms we used to label our findings sound pejorative. We considered changing the terms to be softer but decided to stay with them for the sake of psychological validity.

Through the interviews we had with Millennial workers, we identified a set of corollary intrinsic values for every perceived orientation. As you can see, intrinsic Millennial values are normal, if not admirable. I have inserted a table below (Table 3.2) that lists how managers perceive Millennials, the Millennial value behind the perception, and the managerial competency required to effectively manage Millennials. The chart demystifies how the effective managers suspended pre-judgments that lead to a stereotype threat resulting in conflict. The table also matches managerial behavior with Millennial values.

Table 3.2

Perceived Orientations, Values, and Managerial Competencies

Perceived Orientation	Millennial Intrinsic Value	Required Managerial Competency
		Adapting Competencies
Autonomous	Work-Life Balance	Flexing
Entitled	Reward	Incenting
Imaginative	Self-Expression	Cultivating
		Communicating Competencies
Self-Absorbed	Attention	Engaging
Defensive	Achievement	Disarming
Abrasive	Informality	Self-Differentiating
		Envisioning Competencies
Myopic	Simplicity	Broadening
Unfocused	Multitasking	Directing
Indifferent	Meaning	Motivating

Once we identified the perceptions managers had of Millennials, we listened to how the effective managers responded to each of the perceived orientations. Our aim was to understand just what separated managers who were successful in working with Millennials from those who struggled. We discovered that successful managers practiced a set of core competencies that are essential to effectively managing Millennial employees. The competencies fell within three behavioral categories: (1) adapting, (2) communicating, and (3) envisioning.

I refer to *Adapting* in the sense that the effective managers were willing to accept that a Millennial employee does not have the same experiences, values, or frame of reference than that of most managers. We learned that successful adaptation requires a willingness to make adjustments in one's management style. In some cases, the adaptation may require changes to organizational policies and procedures. The adapting competencies are "Flexing with the Autonomous," "Incenting the Entitled," and "Cultivating the Imaginative."

Communicating refers to the ability to make a connection at a relational level. We learned that it is the primary area where tension can escalate into emotional conflict. In the saddest cases we studied, professional relationships deteriorated so much that we observed personal attacks. The effective managers stayed engaged with their younger employees even when both parties were frustrated. The communicating competencies are "Engaging the Self-Absorbed," "Disarming the Defensive," and "Self-Differentiating from the Abrasive."

Envisioning entails helping Millennials see a bigger picture beyond their own experience. We learned that envisioning incorporates management practices that create both meaning and accountability for the Millennial employee. In practice, envisioning entails connecting employees' personal goals and aspirations with the organization's objectives. Without the Adapting and Communicating skills it is highly unlikely that envisioning can take place. The

envisioning competencies are "Broadening the Myopic," "Directing the Unfocused," and "Motivating the Indifferent."

Managers are key. Recruiting and employee on-boarding are important functions for attracting Millennials—but when it comes to retention, we identified managerial leaders as key because they have the greatest amount of responsibility and influence with respect to daily duties and interactions with Millennials. That, coupled with the fact that employees leave managers and not organizations, led me to believe that equipping managerial leaders with the competencies we identified in the effective managers was necessary to address the challenge of integrating Millennials into the workforce. I discovered that the quality of rapport that is established between Millennials and managers directly impacts both short-term and long-term personal *and* organizational effectiveness. Organizations that did not take the Millennials' values seriously experienced what Matilda Riley (1987) refers to as *structural lag*—outmoded institutions failing to provide opportunity.

We learned that the manager's response to points of tension with Millennials determines managerial success or failure. In keeping with the ultimate objective of my original research, I created a training program based on the core competencies we identified in the managers who effectively lead Millennials. The training program encompasses the adaptive work that the effective managers in our study do with respect to the core competencies. My colleagues and I also created a "Generational Rapport Inventory." The inventory measures how a manager thinks in a given situation, how they believe they behave in a given situation, and how their direct reports perceive them to behave in a given situation. The results are used to create a personal development plan for managers who attend the *Managing Millennials* training. The GRI is also

useful for creating an organizational composite to assist HR and Training Departments in identifying training needs.

The core competencies identified in the effective managers can be learned. Many of the managers we interviewed that were in the "challenged" group were doing some things right. They simply did not know it and therefore their effort was inconsistent. As an example, some managers struggle with the balance of using relational power and positional power while engaging employees. All of the managers we interviewed desired to do a good job. The research my colleagues and I conducted helped to demystify the challenge of managing Millennials and helped managers grow in their knowledge and their self-efficacy with respect to managing Millennials.

Case study. The Managing Millennials Training Program has been delivered to approximately 5,000 managers from all over the world. The first training engagement was with QBE First (formerly ZC Sterling), a company headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia that offers specialty insurance and technology-enabled solutions to the mortgage, housing, and financial services industries. We delivered an all-day training session for their Irvine, California office. There were 43 participant managers who all had responsibility for managing Millennials. Each participant took the GRI instrument prior to training, received Managing Millennials training, and 38 of the original 43 took the post-training GRI one year later—four managers had left the company and one manager did not respond to our invitation. The post-training GRI was the same instrument as the pre-training GRI with the exception of asking the participant how frequently she or he used each competency. All of the participants received a personalized report of their GRI scores. The company was given a composite report of the pre- and post-training GRI.

The composite report revealed that in the area of perspective or how a manager thinks about a managerial situation, improvement was made in three of the nine competencies (Cultivating, Engaging, and Motivating). There was no significant change in the other competencies.

The self-reported behavioral score measures how a manager behaves in a managerial situation. Improvement was made in six of the nine competencies (Broadening, Cultivating, Directing, Disarming, Engaging, and Motivating). There was no change in Flexing and Incenting but there was a minimal slip in the Self-differentiating score. We have learned through the GRI instrument that self-differentiating is the hardest behavior to practice. Overall, the individual behavioral scores showed a remarkable improvement. I discovered that when managers became more certain of their perspective they were also more intentional about following through with their behavior as evidenced by the post-training GRI with the extra question.

On the post-training survey we asked, "How often do you use the competencies?" We used a five-point Likert Scale measuring from "never" to "every opportunity." The results (see Table 3.3) show that the more frequently managers used a particular competency the higher they scored on that competency. You can see that areas of strength in the behavioral scores correlate with the frequency of use scores for each competency with the exception of Engaging.

Table 3.3

Reported Frequency of Managers Use of the Nine Competencies–QBE First, Irvine Office

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Every Opportunity	GRI Behavioral Strength
Broadening	1	1	14	10	11	x
Cultivating	0	1	13	10	13	x
Directing	0	0	13	13	11	x
Disarming	1	2	20	8	7	
Engaging	0	1	10	12	13	
Flexing	0	1	15	13	8	
Incenting	0	1	15	11	10	x
Motivating	0	0	9	12	16	x
Self-Differentiating	0	2	20	10	5	

The growth in self-efficacy and locus of control was also evident in the post-training comments:

"I am more confident and want to see me as my team sees me."

"It [the training] has given me a better perspective on how to manage my team better."

"I plan to notify my team about the areas I need to work on and to ask them to help as opportunities arise."

"I learned ways to work [self-differentiating] and better myself not only in the workplace but in my personal life."

"I have to accept some ownership for improving my own behavior, as well as work towards changing the perception of my direct reports."

"I learned where my areas for improvement are and how to change how I do things."

While our pre- and post-GRI findings demonstrated the effectiveness of the Managing Millennial Training, I believe the validation would have been more robust and accurate had we included the "Direct Reports" in the post-GRI. The oversight has not lost its impact with respect to my growth as a researcher.

One thing I did not expect while doing the study was that many of the challenged managers exited their interviews commenting that the experience was therapeutic for them. They reported that it felt good for them to be able to talk about their frustration with younger workers. I am curious to know if their direct reports would feel the same way.

Closing Remarks

In summary, I started my educational journey with the desire to make a contribution to the management literature but admittedly I have only scratched the surface. In an effort to build upon my early scholarship, the focus of my research has now shifted to the Millennials' perceptions about challenges they face in the workplace. I would like to develop a training program to help Millennials overcome perceived barriers they encounter in the workplace. In turn, I expect the study to solicit more questions for further research.

If I had it to do over again, I would think long and hard about the decision to write the first book before my dissertation. The advantage of my journey is that it has situated me as an expert in the subject and afforded me the opportunity to present to thousands of managers and Millennials from organizations all over the world. I could not be better positioned for doing Participatory Action Research with Millennials.

In Chapter IV, I will define the methodology and data collection procedures for my study.

Chapter IV: Methodology

The aims of this study are: (1) to identify challenges Millennials face in the workplace, (2) to identify skills that will help Millennials more effectively integrate into the workforce, and (3) to develop a training intervention, based on the results of aims 1&2, that will teach the skills to Millennials . I believe that a qualitative design, more specifically, Participative Action Research (PAR) is an appropriate design for my research problem.

Kvale (2002) suggests that qualitative research has broadened the domain of the social sciences and has extended it from the prediction of facts to the interpretation of meaning. The emphasis on interpretation of meaning has caused the criteria and forms of validation to change (Kvale, 2002). Kvale states, "In past debates on the nature of the social sciences, there has been tension between facts and meanings, observation and interpretation. Today the tension has moved to the relation between meanings and acts, between interpretation and action" (2002, p. 307). Kvale (2002) asserts that the truth of qualitative research encompasses validation as craftsmanship (does the study investigate the phenomena intended to be investigated), as communication (are the knowledge claims tested in dialogue), and as action (does it assist us to take actions that produce the desired results).

From a pragmatic perspective, PAR is a great fit for me personally. As a scholar-practitioner, I consult on the subject of managing across generations thus allowing me access to various types and sizes of organizations. I am also attracted to PAR because the approach offers opportunity for creating knowledge that is independent of a dominant group's interests or world-view (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Millennials are definitely not the dominant group in the workplace but they can contribute significantly to the organizations for which they work. Continuing the discussion about the merits of PAR, Fals-Borda and Rahman point out a shift in

the researcher/researched relationship that results in power-sharing and autonomy of the researched that allows for local voice, culture, and wisdom (1991).

Participatory Action Research

As I stated earlier, my intention is to move the conversation from being *about* Millennials to being *with* Millennials. The collaborative nature of PAR not only allows for such a conversation but it utilizes the voice of the participants in making explicit theories of change that may have otherwise gone unnoticed or unexamined (Tuck, 2009). Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen, & Romero (2010) argue that in PAR, professional researchers do not enter communities to conduct studies on community members but they join with them to identify matters of importance and potential solutions with which they can take action. Interestingly, PAR emerged from and is useful in situations where there is power imbalance (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Friere, 1970).

Younger workers may feel susceptible to a form of marginalization due to a power imbalance in organizations. Young (2000) defines marginalization as exclusion from meaningful participation in society, partly because the labor market does not or cannot accommodate them. When one reflects on the aforementioned definition, images of religion, gender, race, sexual orientation and age pepper one's mind.

Riach's concept of "age as attribute" explains that bias within social and cultural processes can produce negative labels for certain age groups (2007). While ageism has mostly been a conversation about older workers, I suggest that there may be a reverse-ageism that adversely affects younger workers.

PAR seeks to create partnership with community members to identify issues of importance to them, develop a means for studying matters of importance, gather and analyze

data, and take action on the knowledge that is produced (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Smith et al., 2010).

Creating a partnership. In August of 2010, Molly Lopes, Director of Strategy for the Americas with Johnson Controls International (JCI), invited me to speak at the JCI Power Solutions Annual Leadership Retreat in Charlotte, N.C. at Joe Gibbs Racing Headquarters. She requested me to keynote on the subject of managing across generations on Tuesday, October 19, 2010. Following the event, Molly scheduled a conference call to explore rolling out a training program for both managers and Millennials.

Shortly after my conversations with JCI, Microsoft's Maryann Baumgarten contacted me in January of 2011 after she had read *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Corer Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce*. She is the Director of Curriculum for an on-boarding program for new hires called Microsoft Academy for College Hires (MACH). She found the book helpful for MACH managers but was looking to expand the MACH curriculum to include help with working in a multi-generational workforce.

Ron Weber, Workforce Development and Analytics Manager for Schneider Electric contacted me in May of 2011 to talk about his desire to expand his on-boarding curriculum to include negotiating generational diversity in the workplace.

All three of the aforementioned companies are multinationals that allowed me access to their Millennial employees for focus groups and interviewing. While I considered it a privilege to be invited into such large and prestigious companies (100,000 plus employees each), building a partnership with their younger employees was key to the study. Rodriguez and Brown caution, "PAR projects with youth cannot be successful without their buy-in and investment in the participatory process" (2009, p. 29). Millennials are very attuned to the fact that they rank high

on topics of discussion in the workplace and much of it is pejorative. However, not unlike my previous research encounters with Millennials, all of the participants were very energized, engaged, and willing to lend their experience and thoughts to the study.

To round out the partnership, I reached out to five former students of mine whom I have stayed in contact with via LinkedIn to help me with analyzing the data. Due to the social-networking phenomena, other former students heard about my PAR project and asked if they could participate. While I opted to limit my coding group to five people, I decided to add 25 more participants and include them in the study. I reasoned that their input would be valuable to the study because they represented 30 different companies.

Developing a means for studying matters of importance. My earlier research was limited to North America and I wanted a design that could take advantage of the multinational aspect of JCI, Microsoft, and Schneider Electric. All of the companies had events where they flew participants to a common location. Although the corporate gatherings provided a way to engage several participants from all over the globe at one location, the events were also highly scheduled therefore time was a consideration with respect to data collection. I decided that a Large Group Intervention (LGI) would provide the most expedient yet reliable means of collecting data. LGIs can structurally be used for groups of 10 to over 2000 (Leith, 1996).

Gathering the Data

The approach I used to select the sample is referred to as *criterion sampling*, "Criterion sampling works well when all individuals being studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). Criterion sampling made sense since I wanted to learn from people who were currently experiencing what it was like to enter the workplace as a young worker. I facilitated 11 Large Group Interventions (Redmond, WA; Chicago, IL;

Mumbai, India; Shanghai, China; Providence, RI), conducted 23 interviews (Geneva, IL; Covington, KY; Monterey, Mexico), and received web-based survey input from 23 respondents.

Large group intervention. The advantage of having 40 to 90 participants in a session for a two-hour block of time was both exciting and daunting. I sought out an approach that could best capture the sentiments and experiences of the participants. I remembered a lecture by Dr. Mitch Kusy from my doctoral coursework on the subject of LGIs and their use in large-scale listening opportunities. Being in methodological alignment with PAR, LGIs are highly participative and collaborative inquiries into general or specific organizational systems, practices, and processes (Purser & Griffin, 2008).

Martin Leith argues that LGIs fulfill six conditions critical to successful change initiatives or interventions; 1) a self-determined change process, 2) broad stakeholder involvement, 3) comprehensive awareness of current reality, 4) a creative mindset, 5) systems thinking, and 6) a change model based on trust and cooperation (1996).

Purser and Griffin stress the importance of selecting the right issue so that participants are informed to engage the subject as well energized to contribute to the discussion (2008). I believed Millennials would be experienced, prepared, and eager to discuss the issue of challenges they may face in the workplace.

In preparing for the events, I found Bunker and Alban's (1997) caution about four dilemmas to look for in LGIs very helpful; 1) the dilemma of voice (not feeling heard), 2) the dilemma of structure (the danger of too much direction or not enough), 3) the ego-centric dilemma (participants projecting their reality onto others), 4) affect contagion (a forfeiting of one's perspective to fit in with the group). Due to the multi-cultural makeup of the groups, I was

most concerned about participants not feeling heard or forfeiting their personal experience to fit

in with the group.

I used a modified focus group format for the table discussions. Focus groups are known

to be useful for brainstorming, problem solving, and providing fresh insights (Edmunds &

American Marketing Association, 1999). A noted strength of focus groups is that they allow

participants to react to and build on the responses of other group members (Stewart &

Shamdasani, 1990). Although McClelland (1994) suggested that an optimal number for a focus

group is 8-12 people, he said that more homogeneous groups might have less because the

research purpose was to explore a specific topic. While the focus groups were diversely

populated with respect to gender, ethnicity, geography, occupation, etc., they were homogeneous

in that all of the participants were Millennials. I set the groups up to have between 6 to 10

participants. The participants were seated at round tables for the purpose of enhancing

discussion.

Since I could not be in every table group at the same time, I selected a participant-

facilitator for each table group. Facilitating a focus group requires managing the group

discussions, group dynamics, and query for content (Greenbaum, 1993). I prepared an instruction

sheet for my participant facilitators with the following directions:

1. Have each participant introduce themselves with their name, where they are from,
    and their role in the company

2. Instruct the participants of the importance that their voice is heard and that they are
    making a contribution to their colleagues and organization

3. Emphasize the need to respect the experience and thoughts of others whether you
    agree or disagree with them

4. Encourage them to be true to their experience and thoughts on the subject matter

5. Make sure that every participant has addressed the questions

I assured the participant-facilitators that I would be floating from group to group to assist them if needed. I had an assistant who took notes.

I asked three questions:

1. As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

2. As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

3. I read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce."

I stuck with the aforementioned questions for all collection methods. The first two questions were straightforward. Question one aimed to understand what Millennials perceive to be challenges in the workplace. PAR is concerned with what community members see as important to their wellbeing. Question two was designed to elicit strengths Millennials perceive to have that could be transferrable into actionable items. PAR seeks to empower community members. Question three is less clear-cut and to some it may sound out of place or even provocative. For lack of the ability to better summarize sociologist Anthony Giddens work, I borrow from Coenen and Khonraad

> In his structuration theory, Giddens attempts to view the actions of human beings not exclusively as interpretation, but also as social practice in which values and interests are defended. Social actors give meaning to existing natural and social conditions, but they also try to exert their influence to change these conditions. (2003, pp. 439-440)

 I see the response to question three as critical to ascertaining a level of understanding of the social structure of work and planning action steps. How can Millennials exert their influence to change their conditions? Will they need help processing emotional frustration? Like many

managers in my previous work, will they abdicate the responsibility to adapt to those who don't understand them?

Web-based survey. Adding 30 former students to the sample presented logistical challenges due to the fact they were spread out geographically. Telephone interviewing presented scheduling difficulties (time, time zones, work hours, phone numbers, and quality of connection). I investigated the merits of both web-based and paper mail-based surveys. In a recent study published in the Social Science Computer Review, Shin, Johnson, & Rao (2012, p. 217) reported, "The web survey was found to consistently produce lower unit response rates with the exception of the under 35-year-old age group. Interestingly, for this age group, the response rate for the web survey was slightly higher." Shin et al. also point out, "The graphical layout of a web survey and the ease of typing rather than handwriting may elicit more open-ended responses in web compared to mail questionnaires" (p. 213). Kelly Quinn argues that age must be taken into consideration when it comes to survey instrumentation, "As surveys grow more technologically advanced, older adults too may regard data collection practices differently than younger adults, leading to varying rates of participation and response" (2010, p. 114). Quinn points out that the sample's level of savvy and comfort with technology should play into the researcher's collection method. I decided to use a web-based survey instrument (Survey Monkey) as a means for data collection due to the age of my sample group, their familiarity with the web, and the fact that I was using open-ended questions.

I sent an invitation e-mail explaining the research project and provided a hypertext link to the online survey. I gave the participants one week to reply. I created a survey with the following questions:

1. As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

2. As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

3. I read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce."

4. What are some skills that have helped you overcome challenges in the workplace?

5. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important for me to know?

I added questions four and five for the web-based survey and solicited demographic information from the participants. The questionnaire was sent out using Survey Monkey to 30 participants with a request to respond within one week. The web-based survey was conducted May 4-11, 2012 with a response of seventy-six percent. The unfolding nature of PAR allowed me to recruit the web-based survey group (Large PAR Team) for a second survey to identify skills for overcoming the challenges that were discovered. The second survey received a response rate of twenty-three percent. The Large Team turned out to be a very beneficial relationship in that I was immersed in studying Millennials' adapting to the workplace, and they were immersed in living it.

Interviewing. The interview participants were employees of Johnson Controls International. The Human Resource Department selected Millennial employees that represented the functional (office personnel) and operational (plant floor personnel) aspects of plants located in Geneva, IL, Covington, KY, and Monterey, Mexico. In Geneva, I conducted 8 interviews on December 15, 2010; four interviews on December 16, 2010; one interview on January 10, 2011; two interviews on January 11, 2011 and one interview on January 12, 2011. I conducted five interviews with the Covington employees on January 27, 2011. One of the Monterey interviews

took place on January 24, 2012 and the other was on January 25, 2011. The Monterey interviews were conducted via telephone.

The importance of the interviewee (their person, role, experience, etc.) cannot escape the attention of anyone who reads qualitative research literature. It is clear that I want something out of the interview as a researcher but it serves me well to understand what may motivate interviewees to participate. Establishing trust, credibility, and rapport within qualitative research engagements have frequently been cited as central mechanisms that support research relationships (Clark, 2010). Tom Clark suggests a list of supporting mechanisms that appeal to research participants, "subjective interest, curiosity, enjoyment, individual empowerment, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest and economic interest" (2010, p. 404). Several of Clark's themes resonated with my interviewing experience. As an example, it was not uncommon to hear from research participants that they enjoyed the experience, felt empowered, "not alone," and even expressed that the interview session was therapeutic. Peel, Parry, Douglas, & Lawton, in their article *"No Skin Off My Nose"*: *Why People Take Part In Qualitative Research*, also identify the therapeutic value interviewees place on their participation (2006).

Qualitative research interviewing seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the interviewees–on both a factual and meaning level (Kvale, 1996). Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences, accounts, interpretations, memories, opinions, understandings, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, bias', etc. (Mason, 2002). The qualitative interview method builds on conversational skills that one may already be comfortable with or at least understand. Rubin and Rubin refer to such skills as the ability to ask questions and listen to answers or understand the rules of when one should talk at

length or answer briefly (1995). While there are similarities between interviewing and normal conversation, there are some distinct differences. One characteristic that differentiates conversation from interviewing is that qualitative interviews are a tool of research.

Consistent with PAR, the interview process is a journey into discovering another person's world and is used to elicit in-depth answers about culture, meanings, processes, and problems. The journey presupposes obligations of both interviewee and interviewer. One such obligation is for the researcher to encourage interviewees to describe their worlds in their own terms. An over-arching theme of qualitative interviewing is to find out what others think and know and to refrain from imposing your world on theirs (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Embracing the idea that interviews are a conversation, it is incumbent upon researchers to seek to understand the "voice" and context of the interviewee. It is also imperative to examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and values with regard to context. Interpretation is a "sense-making" exercise that is collaborative. In the past, the story of the researcher was considered "objective reality" while the interviewee's narrative was interpreted to be "subjective reality." Contemporary researchers hold to the notion that the beliefs and interpretations of the interviewee are just as important as their own no matter the degree of difference (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

When conducting an interview, the interviewer must be concerned about the structure of the interview. Interviews can have a variation of two basic structures. They can be either structured or unstructured. In an unstructured interview, the researcher may suggest a topic of inquiry but have few specific questions for the interviewee, for instance, "What is it like to transition into a career?" The interviewee is encouraged to answer any way she or he would like (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Open-ended questions allow the interviewer, if they wish to probe deeper into the initial responses of the respondent to gain a more detailed answer to the question.

The richness of the data is therefore heavily dependent upon the skill of the interviewer. The interviewer must judge how much or how little they should probe or say themselves. A similar concept (*general interview guide*) is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee thus providing more focus than the conversational approach, but allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee (Patton, 2002).

Another interview approach is what Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) refer to as the semi-structured interview or the *focused interview*. The interviewer introduces the subject matter and then asks specific questions that guide the discussion. The people interviewed are known to have experience with a particular situation, for example, "What are the barriers you have experienced while entering the workforce?" A similar approach to the semi-structured interview is the *standardized open-ended interview* (Patton, 2002). The same open-ended questions are asked to all interviewees thus minimizing variation in questions and facilitating faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared.

I decided on the semi-structured interview approach for several reasons. I felt it would provide greater consistency among the interviews. In addition, I would not get more than one chance to interview someone due to financial resources, time, and geography (Babbie, 2004). The questions were designed to elicit information specifically about Millennials (Merton et al., 1990; Patton, 2002). Perhaps the most compelling reason for choosing a semi-structured interview approach is my role as consultant and professor has positioned me to observe the problem and develop a level of understanding about the topic. That understanding will help me to develop relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Bernard, 1988).

One of the most important roles of the interviewer is to build trust and respect (Fowler & Mangione, 1990). The subject of the research and the credentials of the interviewer can help to establish rapport for the interview. Although interviewing is like normal conversation, Babbie (2004, p. 321) warns the interviewer to not become a part of the conversation in a way that draws attention to the self, "the desire to appear interesting can be counterproductive." Rather, the interviewer needs to make the interviewee and her participation the center of attention by being interested in her. John Lofland and colleagues (2006) suggest that the interviewer offer herself as someone who does not fully understand the situation and needs help to grasp the most basic knowledge of the particular situation. I found Lofland's suggestion particularly helpful since I chose a semi-structured approach. I also think that the more interviews one conducts the more important to heed Lofland. It would be easy to develop a pseudo-expertise that could adversely impact the ability to listen.

I adhered to the following outline for each of the interviews:

1) I introduced myself

2) I stated the purpose of the interview

3) I allowed for questions about the interview process

I asked three questions: As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace? As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace? I read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce."

I used a semi-structured or loosely structured interview method for one-on-one interviews for generating data. Robert Burgess (1984) refers to such interviews as "conversations with a purpose." The privilege of access into an interviewee's world must be honored. One such way to

honor the interviewee is to correctly capture their contribution. Earl Babbie offers advice to the researcher, "First, don't trust your memory any more than you have to; it's untrustworthy" (1995, p. 292). Babbie suggests that good note taking is done in stages. The general ideas or rough notes can be captured during the interview, and then as quickly as possible the researcher should sequester for more thorough reflection and capturing of the interview. As with any other form of research, proficiency comes with practice (Babbie, 1995). Depending upon the context, a recorder can be very useful in capturing the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. It is incumbent upon the researcher to do everything possible to capture the whole conversation. The data should reflect affective, cognitive, and evaluative meanings (Mason, 2002). Authenticity is a critical component of the researcher's ability to communicate their research. One way of increasing the communicability of the research is to make sure that the person being interviewed is first person as opposed to being a "witness to" or "informant" on the experiences of others. "In qualitative research, the author does not impress with his or her credentials; it is the experiences of the interviewees that give legitimacy to the argument," says Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 91). The interviewees recruited for this research were all Millennials currently employed.

Although the interviewing process is a form of analysis, the final analysis is the process of identifying themes or concepts. Once themes or concepts are identified, I looked for variations or differences within a theme or similarities that can be located across themes. The objective is to bring together the concepts and themes of the research into an accurate and coherent interpretation of the research question. The analysis is complete when there is complete confidence that the findings or interpretation can inform the thinking of others (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 227).

I decided to not use a recorder to collect data. There are varying levels of trust between human resource departments and employees due to the fact that Human Resource personnel are relied upon for evaluating, reprimanding, and terminating employees. Therefore, I opted for note taking.

Analyzing the Data

The first stage of data analysis is to ask two basic questions: What is happening and what are people doing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)? Schwandt says, "We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience" (2001, p. 30). I chose coding, a tool popularized in the grounded theory movement (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as the analytical scaffolding for my data analysis. Kathy Charmaz (2002, pp. 683-684) suggests,

> Coding is the pivotal first analytic step that moves the researcher from the description toward conceptualization of that description. In essence, coding is a form of shorthand that distills events and meaning without losing their essential properties.

> I found Leonard Schatzman's observation enlightening,

> To tell a complex story, one must designate objects and events, state or imply some of their dimensions and properties-that is, their attributes–provide some context for these, indicate a condition or two for whatever action or interaction is selected to be central to the story, and point to, or imply, one or more consequences. To do all this, one needs at least one perspective to select items for the story, create their relative salience, and sequence them. (1991, p. 308)

The first step in the coding process is called initial or open coding. In open coding, codes are identified from the interview data without any restrictions or purpose other than to discover meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Open coding requires a mental openness that allows for the discovery of the unexpected along with a curiosity that allows for continued inquiry, even after initial codes have been identified. Open coding involves a labeling and categorizing of phenomena being observed.

The second aspect of coding is referred to as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The practice of axial coding focuses on discovering categories. Developed categories are used for further examination. While open coding seeks to identify themes, axial coding is about links and relationships within the data. Core categories surface as a web of meaning emerges.

The third aspect of coding is referred to as selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Holton asserts, "Selective coding begins only after the researcher has identified a potential core variable. Subsequent data collection and coding is delimited to that which is relevant to the emerging conceptual framework (the core and those categories that relate to the core)" (2010, p. 31). It is the process of taking identified labels and categories and developing propositions. Judith Holton refers to selective coding as theoretical coding,

> Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory. They help the analyst maintain the conceptual level in writing about concepts and their interrelations. Developing theoretical sensitivity to a wide range of integrating codes (processes, models, etc.) as used across a wide range of disciplines enhances a researcher's ability to see their emergent fit to a developing theory. (2010, p. 35)

Theoretical coding allows for propositions that indicate generalized relationships between a category and its concepts (Whetten, 1989).

> Holton presents key challenges inherent in coding,

> preconceiving the study through the import of some standard qualitative research requirements, raising the focus of coding and analysis from the descriptive to the conceptual level and trusting one's intuitive sense of the conceptualization process to allow a core category to emerge, then being comfortable to delimit data collection and coding to just the core concept and those concepts that relate to the core. (2010, p. 22)

I recruited five former students of mine to assist me with the coding process and to analyze the data collected from the LGIs, web-based survey, and interviews. I gave them a brief overview of the aforementioned coding process and showed them examples from my prior

research. They were part of the group of 30 former students who responded to the web-based survey. The coding team took the web-based survey before the coding exercise.

I will be reporting on the findings from the LGI focus groups, web-based survey, and interviews in separate narratives.

Taking Action

Rodriguez and Brown (2009) observe three driving principles behind PAR; 1) it is situated and inquiry based, 2) participatory, and 3) transformative and action oriented. Great attention and detail can be given to methodology and analysis but taking action is at the heart of PAR (Tuck, 2009). It is what Fine and Barreras refer to as the "what must be," "We write on the responsibility of social scientists to study critically "what is," to imagine "what could be," and to contribute responsibly to a mobilization toward "what must be" (2001, p. 175). Tuck (2009) reasons, "Anyone participating in a PAR project can expect resulting actions to be consistent or aligned with its findings and insights" (p. 53). The action aspect of PAR is catalyzed by the lived experience of the co-researchers (Smith et al., 2010). Action does not have to wait for the final results but can be taken throughout the inquiry. In a presentation entitled "Act now, not only later! Taking action seriously in PAR," Sarah Zeller-Berkman asserts that the action aspect of PAR is not limited to the final stages of a project but can happen early and often over the course of the project (2007).

The action aspect of my research was to develop a training program for Millennials that will help them integrate into and thrive in the workplace. I have illustrated the data collection and analysis aspects of the PAR in Diagram 4.1

Diagram 4.1

Participatory Action Research Process Diagram

Participatory Actions Research Process Diagram

Trainer Recognized Problem: Millennials Face Challenges in the Workforce That Makes Integrating Difficult

Identified Participatory Action Research as a Fit For Investigating Problem

Identified Partners/Co-Researchers Required

Interviews

Large Group Interventions

Web-based Survey

Small PAR Team Does Data Analysis to Identify Challenges & Strengths

Large PAR Team Identified Skills for Training Intervention

Trainer Designed Training Intervention Based on Work With Partners

Requested Large PAR Team Feedback On Training Intervention

Two Groups Received the Training Intervention

Trainer Receives Feedback From Group Participants

Methodological Fit

The objective of my study is to identify if there are challenges that Millennials face while integrating into the work place. If so, what are they? Are there skills that can help Millennials more effectively assimilate and can the skills be transferred through a training program. There is no better source of knowledge than to interview the people who are experiencing what it is like to enter the work force. Focus groups and interviews will allow me to elicit rich data that once analyzed can inform themes that may provide a framework for training.

Informed Consent

The PAR participants were selected by their organizations. The interview and Large Group Intervention participants were allowed to participate on company time but were not financially rewarded for participating. I filed an IRB (Institutional Review Board) form with Antioch University. All interview and LGI participants consented to being interviewed. The web-based survey participants implied consent when they completed the interview.

Summary

In this chapter, I offered a rationale for using a Participative Action Research method approach. I also discussed the data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter V: Results of Participatory Action Research

In this chapter I state the purpose of this study, the process, and the role of the researcher. I also present findings from the interviews, Large Group Interventions, and web-based survey and compare the data from all three groups. Finally, I establish priority actions to be taken with respect to challenges and needs identified in the study and assess the objectives of the research.

Purpose of the Study

My prior research focused on what managers can do to help Millennials. That is one part of the equation, but now I seek to identify what Millennials can do to help themselves. I use the metaphor of barriers and roadblocks because they can threaten, thwart, or slow down a journey. Though new journeys are often exciting, they can cause one to be disoriented at times. As an example, participants talked about the pressure and responsibility of transitioning to professional life from a lifestyle with which they were familiar and enjoyed in college. One interviewee lamented, "It has been a challenge to adjust from a laissez-faire work structure in college to the highly regimented culture of a large corporation."

Most of the Millennials in the study (Large Group Intervention) are transitioning between college life and work life. By transition I mean four years or less into their careers. I chose Participatory Action Research because it puts stakeholders in the center of exploring the question and seeking the answer, "What are the barriers you face in the workplace and what can you do about it?" My prior research could help Millennials to understand what managers think of them, but this dissertation research can provide more help than that. I aspire to give Millennials information that will result in them having an internal locus of control–the belief and confidence that there is something they can do when they face barriers in the workplace.

The purpose of this study is to identify challenges or barriers Millennials may face while entering work life and what *they* can do to successfully adapt. I seek to answer the following questions with the intention of creating an intervention (training) that helps Millennials effectively integrate into work life:

1. As a young worker,what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

2. As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

3. I had them read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce." (The questions below were only asked of the web-based survey respondents.

1. What are some of the skills that have helped you overcome challenges in the workplace?

2. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important for me to know?

Process of the Study

In this section I will outline the process of the study. See Diagram 5.1 for an outline of the data collection and analysis process.

Diagram 5.1

Data Collection and Analysis Diagram

Data Collection and Analysis Diagram

Lead Researcher Partnered with Interview and LGI Participants to Listen to Their Experience

Lead Researcher Recruited Co-Researchers (Small PAR Team) to Assist with Data Analysis

Lead Researcher Does Initial Coding of Interview, LGI, and Web-based Survey Data (Identifying Overarching Themes and Labels)

Lead Researcher Adds Web-based Survey Group to Listen to Their Experience

Small PAR Team Meets to Further Analyze Data, Rank Order Responses, and Define Challenges

Lead Researcher Asks Web-based Survey Group to Act as Large PAR Team

Lead Researcher Sends Large PAR Team Lists of Challenges and Skills For Review

Large PAR Team is Surveyed About What They Do (Skills) To Overcome The Identified Challenges

Lead Researcher Designs Training Intervention Based Upon Identified Challenges, Strengths, and Skills

One-on-one interviews. The first leg in the study was an invitation by Johnson Controls International (JCI) to do one-on-one interviews with Millennials in their company. They invited me to their Geneva, Illinois plant to interview both functional (office) and operational (plant) employees. I was also asked to work with a group of Millennials that had been selected to be on a panel for a training event for managers in Covington, Kentucky. In addition, I interviewed Millennials that work in JCI's Monterey, Mexico plant. I interviewed 23 Millennials at JCI.

Large group interventions. Following the one-on-one interviews, I was invited by both Microsoft and Schneider Electric to present in their young employee on-boarding programs. I was invited to speak about how managers perceive Millennials in the workplace. I will admit that it was intimidating to stand in front of some of the best and brightest in the world and tell them that managers think their generation is self-absorbed, entitled, and abrasive. It proved to be a wonderful opportunity to use a LGI for the purpose of understanding their challenges, frustrations, and sentiments with respect to transitioning into work life. I conducted 11 LGIs with 473 participants (Redmond, WA, Chicago, IL, Providence, RI, Mumbai, India, and Shanghai, China). It is important to note that one-quarter of the LGI participants were from Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East.

Web-based survey. The nature of Participatory Action Research is that it is an unfolding process. I had intended to recruit a small team of former students of mine to help me code the data from the interviews and the LGIs, but word got out via LinkedIn, and soon I had a list of 30 former students who wanted to participate in the project. While I decided to keep the coding team small, I thought it would be beneficial to do a web-survey with my 30 former students who I know have successfully transitioned into work life. I asked them the same set of questions as

the other groups with the addition of a fourth and fifth question. The web-survey attracted a response rate of seventy-six percent (23 of 30).

      Small PAR team (coding team). I recruited a team of five Millennials to help me with the coding process. All members of the team were former students of mine from Vanguard University and Concordia University Irvine, and I have stayed networked with them via LinkedIn. I asked the invitees to spend a day with me as co-researchers for the purpose of making sense of the data I had collected in an effort to help Millennials overcome challenges in the workplace. I informed them that it was for my doctoral dissertation. I reserved the Library Room at Dove Canyon Country Club to be our laboratory for the day.

      Prior to our meeting I performed the first layer of analysis, referred to as open-coding (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I carefully read the notes from the interviews, the written responses from the LGIs, and the written responses from the web-based survey for the purpose of capturing key words and statements to put into an Excel spreadsheet for questions one, two and three. My objective was to identify themes and create labels so that the coding team's time could be focused on helping me indentify categories and developing a theoretical framework for taking action. I sent the Excel spreadsheet in advance of our meeting. I also met with two of the team members prior to the event. I did so because I thought the team may split into two groups and I wanted to make sure someone was comfortable with leading a group.

      When we met, the process started out slow and seemed a bit overwhelming. I resisted being too assertive. I reminded them that I was a co-researcher and that they were the experts in challenges younger workers face in the workplace. Together, we quickly moved through Question Three first, the response to "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce." I suggested starting with Question Three because

an overwhelming majority of the participants agreed with the statement. Questions One and Two were different. I had thought about splitting the team into two groups of three, but the team decided that it would be helpful for each of us to write our own categories based on the open-coding that had already been done and then compare our categories with one another. The categorizing exercise took the rest of the morning.

I was sensitive to the time commitment each of the team members so I planned a working lunch. There was more laughter than work as they talked about their experience of assimilating into work. We eventually snapped back into analysis mode to compare our individual work. I was surprised how quickly we agreed upon the categories. But things slowed when we struggled with the similarity between two of the categories. After a lengthy dialogue, we thought about simply condensing the two categories into one and calling it a day. I credit the team with not being satisfied with that solution.

Late afternoon had snuck up on us and the energy level of the group was waning, but we decided to do further analysis of the data to more clearly define the categories and themes. The definitions gave more clarity to the categories, so we agreed that it made sense to not condense the two categories (Being Taken Seriously and Getting Respect).

Following the meeting, I sent them a web-based electronic document that detailed our findings and asked them to review it for accuracy and clarity. I received confirmation from all of the co-researchers that the findings were reported accurately and clearly.

Large PAR team. After the Small PAR Team and I identified categories and themes in the data, I revisited the web-based survey. I thought I was ready to progress to the action or intervention aspect of the study, but the web-survey caught my attention. I had asked some demographic questions along with the fourth question I referred to earlier. The demographic

question that stood out was, "How many years have you been fully employed and out of college?" I went back to the survey and concentrated on one of the additional questions that I had asked the web-based survey group, "What are some of the skills that have helped you overcome challenges in the workplace?" I knew at that stage I was in a true PAR project due to what seemed to be a never-ending opportunity to learn.

I decided to revisit the web-based survey participants and I asked them to respond to how they would overcome the challenges identified by the Small PAR Team. The response rate was twenty-three percent (7 of 30) for the second survey. I listed the definitions for each category. Here are the open-ended questions I asked:

1. How do you overcome a lack of experience?

2. How do you overcome not being taken seriously?

3. How do you overcome not getting respect?

4. How do you overcome being perceived as entitled?

5. How do you overcome a lack of patience?

6. How do you overcome not getting helpful feedback?

7. How do you overcome not understanding expectations?

8. How do you overcome miscommunication with older workers?

9. How do you overcome rigid processes?

10. How do you overcome not being able to prove your value?

Taking action. I developed and delivered a training event based on the findings of this study in Providence, Rhode Island, for Schneider Electric's *The Schneider Electric Experience* on June 5, 2012, at the downtown Marriott. I conducted a training session for two separate

groups. Each training session lasted 2 hours. The two-hour timeframe for training was a requirement from Schneider Electric.

The Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I guided the entire Participatory Action Research project which included: scheduling meetings, conducting one-on-one interviews, facilitating LGIs, designing the web-based survey tools, recruiting the PAR Team, coding the data, and developing and delivering the training intervention. I also played the role of listener.

PAR Findings

In this section I will present the findings of the interviews, LGIs, and web-based survey. The results from the interviews, LGIs, and web-based survey will be reported on separately and then compared. The interview findings from Questions One and Two will be listed by the strength of themes identified through the content analysis. The LGI and web-survey findings are listed by frequency of the rank order that the design elicited. Following the comparison, I report on another layer of analysis with respect to the *challenge themes* and share findings from Question Four and Five in the web-based survey.

Interviews. I completed all of the interviews before I conducted the LGIs and web-based survey. All of the interviewees were Millennials who worked for Johnson Controls International. The interview group was the only group that was not completely made up of college graduates. Due to availability and shift scheduling, each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes.

I interviewed both functional (office) and operational (plant) employees in the Power Solutions Division. All of the interviewees spoke of being fairly compensated and having chosen JCI as an employer because of the opportunities for growth within the company. One interviewee said it best, "I wanted to work for a company that I could get experience in but that I could also

move up in. Even though the pay and benefits are good, if I am not moving up in a year or so, I will move on."

The results from the analysis of the interviews conducted at three different Johnson Controls International plants are reported on together. The label *interview group* denotes a collective of the three different plants in which I interviewed. Question One (biggest challenges) will be reported on first followed by questions two (advantages in the workplace) and three (responses to the statement). The findings from the interviews are listed below and presented by frequency of response.

Interview group question one (presented by rank order of how often mentioned): As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

1. A lack of experience

2. Rigid processes

3. A lack of patience

4. Getting helpful feedback

5. Not being taken seriously

6. Understanding expectations

7. Miscommunication with older workers

Interview group question two (presented by frequency of response): As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

1. Technological savvy

2. Teachable

3. Energy

4. Goal-oriented

5. Flexibility

6. Team-oriented

Interview group question three: I had them read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce." Unlike the LGI and web-based survey, most of the interviews allowed me to observe a physical response to the question. I observed smiles, the lifting of eyebrows, the shrugging of shoulders, and affirming nods. I experienced great relief due to the fact that I did not want to alienate my co-researchers. The question did not create any defensiveness or pushback. Here are a couple of quotes:

> "I understand that my generation is viewed that way and I kind of get it, but I would not consider myself the most sheltered or rewarded."

> "I see that in me and my friends, but I don't necessarily think it is something bad."

> "Off the top of my head I would agree, but I haven't thought much about it.

Large group intervention findings. The LGI findings are the result of the Small PAR Team analyzing data collected in 11 meetings. Question one (biggest challenges) is reported on first followed by questions two (advantages in the workplace) and three (responses to the statement). The results are presented by frequency of response.

LGI question one (presented by rank order of how often mentioned): As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

1. A lack of experience

2. Not being taken seriously

3. Not getting respect

4. Being perceived as "entitled"

5. A lack of patience

6. Getting helpful feedback

7. Understanding expectations

8. Miscommunication with older workers

9. Rigid processes

10. Proving my value

LGI question two (presented by rank order of how often mentioned): As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

1. Technological savvy

2. Fresh education

3. Energy

4. Social networking ability

5. Flexibility

6. Global mindset

7. Creativity

8. Teachable

9. Tolerant

10. Goal-oriented

LGI question three: I had them read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce." Out of hundreds of responses, only a few participants disagreed with the statement. Here are their sentiments:

"Strongly disagree. Previous generations had a better economy, fewer taxes, a much less student loan burden, and a cheaper more stable housing market. I don't feel sheltered at all."

"Half true. Half false."

"Sheltered and rewarded, yes. But maybe not as much structured. Definitely entitled though."

"Sheltered, I disagree due to modern technology (media, etc.)."

"I don't necessarily agree with the structured part of the statement. I think a lot of that has been lost due to the fact most of my generation grew up with either divorced parents or a two-income household, leaving them alone and free to do as they please."

Here are some comments that characterize the sentiments of the majority of respondents:

"I believe we are sheltered because our predecessors have seen what can go wrong for us and made a plan on how to avoid it."

"I agree but I think we can use that to our advantage."

"I agree. We are also the most open-minded."

"Rewarded yes! Due to the way our parents and society has treated us."

"Sheltered by the financial security of my parents who have worked hard to be structured because of the educational system. Rewarded because we expect it."

"I agree. I was sheltered and my parents supported me all my life until now. My generation definitely expects a reward for hard work. The reward is not enough sometimes."

"I think that this can be true. People have made references to our generation as the trophy generation and I see where they are coming from. I do not see that we are the most sheltered generation. Being the most rewarded generation is something I agree with."

"I think it is true. Our generation has been babied and taught that education is the key to success and college is a must."

The most common written comments were *true*, *mostly true*, *accurate*, and *fact*. It is interesting that when I parsed out the responses that referred to each part of the statement, the respondents most disagreed with the concept of being sheltered due to access to media and the Internet. Interestingly, many of the respondents equated structure to the educational system.

Web-based survey results. The findings from the web-based survey are listed below in rank order by frequency of response. Before I share the results I want to acknowledge the web-based survey as a gift for selecting Participatory Action Research as my methodology because it wasn't a part of my original design. The web-based survey not only provided additional data but provided a means for developing intervention skills.

In addition to reporting on the three questions I asked the other groups, I collected minimal demographic information and asked a fourth and fifth question of the web-based survey group. The average age of the respondent was 26.5 years old. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were male compared to forty-eight percent female. It is significant to report that the respondent average tenure in the workforce (post-undergraduate degree) is 5.5 years.

Web-based survey question one (presented by rank order of how often mentioned): As a young worker, what do you perceive to be your biggest challenge in the workplace?

1. A lack of experience

2. Not being taken seriously

3. Not getting respect

4. Proving my value

5. Understanding corporate culture

6. Miscommunication

7. Being perceived as "entitled"

Web-survey question two (presented by rank order of how often mentioned): As a young worker, what advantage do you think you have in the workplace?

1. Technological savvy

2. Fresh Perspective

3. Social networking ability

4. Flexibility

5. Energy

6. Creative

7. Teachable

8. Goal oriented

Web-survey question three: I had them read the following statement and asked them to respond to it, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce." Only two people out of 23 respondents in the web-survey group offered any sort of challenge to the statement:

> "That is a generalization that may be true in some cases. However, I grew up in a family that owns/runs a business, so I began working at a very young age and saw the struggles my parents went through first-hand."

> "I would argue we are exposed to a lot more of the world and at a young age due to media and the Internet; however, the majority of us have been under the protection of our parents for a long time. This can be detrimental to growth because we are not needed to support ourselves. Many Millennials are moving back with their parents after college and even marriage."

Here are some comments that characterize the sentiments of the majority of respondents:

> "I could see why someone would say that. We are sheltered in the sense that so much information is provided for us that we almost don't have to figure things out for ourselves anymore. Certain processes are explained in detail and we are not forced to go through the trouble of trial and error as much as some previous generations."

> "If we are, who made us that way? I think it's funny that our parents raised us as sheltered, structured and rewarded children and then get to complain about it."

> "I can't say that I disagree because I do believe I have been very rewarded throughout my childhood. However, this statement sounds very negative and I don't believe that being raised this way was a negative thing for me. My parents taught me great values in a loving and safe environment."

> "We are very fortunate."

"So! Doesn't every generation say that about the next generation entering the workforce? Millennials are a lot of things and structured may be one of them, but it is not a bad thing. Our priorities are different than past generations, but that does not discount our ability to work hard and produce results."

Explanation of themes. While the *challenge* and *advantage* themes are straightforward, the Small PAR Team decided an additional level of analysis would be helpful to more clearly define the *challenge* themes for the purpose of informing the training intervention. The following definitions are the result of that analysis.

A lack of experience. Millennials are keenly aware that they lack work experience and know of the limitations it places upon them with respect to getting what they want.

Not being taken seriously. Millennials consider themselves to be problem-solvers and innovators but get frustrated when their ideas are not entertained or are readily dismissed.

Not getting respect. The experience of being treated differently just because of their age. They talk about not being readily accepted into the culture of the company because they are young. They are made to feel that they do not belong in important work situations.

Being perceived as "entitled." Older workers thinking that Millennials want everything to be handed to them without them having to earn it.

A lack of patience. High expectations about the speed of career development and having difficulty being patient when they are not progressing fast enough.

Getting helpful feedback. Frustration when feedback is non-existent, untimely, or vague.

Understanding expectations. Confusion about what is expected. A mismatch of expectations.

Miscommunication with older workers. Difficulty when it comes to communicating with older workers. Difference in communication style from other generations due to technology.

Rigid processes. An emphasis on process that is restrictive to working faster, smarter, and more effectively. Being process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented.

Proving my value. Proving their value to management. In particular, "How assertive should I be when it comes to asking for more responsibility or opportunity?"

Understanding corporate culture. Uncertainty with respect to what is appropriate at work (communication style, dress code, socializing, and unwritten rules). Knowing when to be formal and when it is okay to be informal.

Comparison of results of interviews, LGIs, and web-based survey by question. I thought it helpful to view the results from each group side-by-side (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). In Table 5.2, you will see the labels *Fresh Education* and *Fresh Perspective*. The coding team considered the terms interchangeable but chose to leave the distinction. Interestingly, the web-based survey group had been out of college for a few years and felt more comfortable with the label *Fresh Perspective*.

Table 5.1

Comparison of Results Between Interviews, LGIs, and Web-based Survey Regarding the Biggest Challenge Faced in the Workplace (Presented By Rank Order of How Often Mentioned)

Interviews	LGIs	Web-based Survey
A lack of experience	A lack of experience	A lack of experience
Rigid processes	Not being taken seriously	Not being taken seriously
A lack of patience	Not getting respect	Not getting respect
Getting helpful feedback	Being perceived as "entitled"	Proving my value
Not being taken seriously	A lack of patience	Understanding corporate culture
Understanding expectations	Getting helpful feedback	Miscommunication
Miscommunication with older workers	Understanding expectations	Being perceived as "entitled"
	Miscommunication with older workers	
	Rigid processes	
	Proving my value	

Note: There were 480 LGI participants and therefore more themes emerged.

Table 5.2

Comparison of Results Between Interviews, LGIs, and Web-based Survey Regarding Advantages of Being a Younger Worker (Presented By Rank Order of How Often Mentioned)

Interviews	LGIs	Web-based Survey
Technologically savvy	Technologically savvy	Technologically savvy
Teachable	Fresh education	Fresh perspective
Energy	Energy	Social networking ability
Goal-oriented	Social networking ability	Flexibility
Flexibility	Flexibility	Energy
Team-oriented	Global mindset	Creativity
	Creativity	Teachable
	Teachable	Goal oriented
	Tolerant	
	Goal oriented	

Note: There were 480 LGI participants and therefore more themes emerged.

In the interview group, *rigid process* was listed higher than in the web survey or LGIs. Working in a plant brings emphasis on compliance with International Organization for Standards (ISO) specifications. That emphasis was perceived to have led to a lack of flexibility in areas that interviewees thought created challenges for them. As an example, work schedule flexibility and having their ideas about how work processes could be improved were not entertained by the company. Another major theme was *lack of patience*. One of the interviewees who participated on a Millennial panel at a manager training event in Covington, KY, was asked by someone in the audience how long she thought she should have to wait before being promoted. The young woman told the audience that she had been with the company for six months and felt that she was ready for a promotion. The audience responded with laughter but appreciated her candidness. In my interview with her, she had mentioned that age and time with the company should not matter if you can do the job.

It was interesting that of the interviews, LGIs, and web-survey groups when *miscommunication with older workers* surfaced in the discussion, the interview group talked about miscommunication with older workers in general–not just their manager. Working in the plant put them in closer proximity to interact with older workers who were doing a similar job.

The only distinction between the Monterey, Mexico, employees and the others was reference to workspace. They talked about a frustration with how office space was organized by older workers (all offices and no common areas). After my interviews, I debriefed with an executive who told me that the Monterey, Mexico, plant has a higher percentage of workers with college degrees than their United States based plants. In his opinion, the challenges of managing a multi-generational workforce are prevalent in Mexico, arguably more so, than in the United States.

Web-based survey question four: "Skills for overcoming challenges in the workplace." Since the web-based survey participants' average tenure in the workplace was 5.5 years, I thought it would be of use to ask them skills that have been helpful to them for overcoming challenges in the workplace. Their responses proved helpful for designing the training intervention. The results are not ordered by frequency or rank. After sharing the findings, I will cross-reference the skills with the *challenges* and *strengths* themes. Here is the list of skills in the respondents' voices:

- "The ability to use technology."

- "The ability to multi-task."

- "I make sure I consistently self-monitor."

- "Interpersonal skills have proven invaluable to me."

- "Having the courage to talk to my superiors about issues has allowed me to gain perspective and align myself with my superiors."

- "I am learning to be able to separate my personal life from my work life."

- "Maintaining a calm disposition when receiving criticism."

- "Matching rewards I receive with equal or greater effort."

- "Taking initiative without expectation on my employer's part."

- "I had a set of meetings with an image consultant to work on my personal image and etiquette. We worked together on a wardrobe that represents me as a younger person, yet it is professional and lets people know that I mean business. The etiquette session consisted of coaching me on how to present myself with poise in any situation, including dining etiquette. Those skills along with my education and hard work allow me to sit in a

room with "big shots" and have the confidence that I belong among them and I look good while I'm at it."

- "My ability to relate and communicate with people older than me."

- "Having good critical thinking skills."

- "Having good social and communication skills."

- "Perseverance."

- "Being able to prioritize my work."

- "Work hard and don't be afraid to fail."

- "Having the ability to recognize and acknowledge when someone does something nice for me."

- "I am not afraid to ask questions, so if there is anything I am struggling with or not sure how to do I don't feel any inhibition to ask questions."

- "There is more than one way to solve a puzzle."

- "The ability to access to so much information."

- "Open communication with my boss."

- "I like to challenge myself by networking with people I meet on planes, coffee shops, etc."

Web-based survey question five: "Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important for me to know?" In an effort to not miss something, I questioned if there was anything I had not asked that would be important to the study. Most respondents left the question blank, others replied "no," and four people submitted comments:

- "We will change the workplace more profoundly than any other generation. Whether for better or worse is largely up to the organizations we work for."

- "It seems like the workforce is dominated by those who should be retiring, but are not. This is creating a huge problem for those trying to enter the workforce or make their way up organizations. Everyone keeps saying there will be a huge gap in the workforce, but the retirements just seem to be slowly happening and no gap is being created."

- "I think as a manager it is crucial to help your team grow as people and to make sure everyone on the team can do each other's job. This is for everyone to be able to handle everyone's job and not become complacent. With this there is not one individual who is the keeper of the knowledge."

- "Millennials also need to feel empowered to make decisions in order to be more confident in their ability to work and thrive in a business environment. If employers or managers are micromanaging, it is difficult to feel that we can make an accurate decision."

Taking Action: Developing a training intervention for the purpose of helping millennials overcome challenges they face in the workplace. PAR reminds me of the voice of my Father, "So you learned that stuff so what?" The question is not one of indifference but rather an inquiry into what action should be taken as a result of learning. In this section I will report on what Rodriguez and Brown (2009) refer to as the transformative and action-oriented part of the study. I detail the development of the training intervention, the delivery of the training, and feedback from the training.

Developing the training intervention. Ironically, I have spent a significant amount of time researching what others can do to help Millennials in the workplace. Now I am in a position to learn with Millennials how they can help themselves. I borrow from Albert Bandura et al., "Unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little

incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties" (2001, p. 187). I will further examine the research results for the purpose of informing the development of a training intervention. My use of the term *revisiting* means that I will glean supplemental information from the findings to inform the training intervention.

 Revisiting question five from the web-based survey. Further investigation of question five, "Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important for me to know?" reveals something very enlightening. Only four people responded to the question, but every one of them suggested that I investigate what others needed to do (management and organizations). As an example, "We will change the workplace more profoundly than any other generation. Whether for better or worse is largely up to the organizations we work for." Consequently, a component of the training intervention needs to focus on moving from what "others" need to do to what "I" can do.

 Revisiting the challenges. I reviewed the challenges to see if some were oriented on what *others should do*. I noticed a pattern. The challenges fell into three categories; things about me, things about you, and things about us. I give the breakdown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

  Challenges and Degree of Locus of Control

Challenges	Degree of Locus of Control
A lack of experience	Me
Not being taken seriously	You
Not getting respect	You
Being perceived as "entitled"	You
A lack of patience	Me
Getting helpful feedback	You
Understanding expectations	Us
Miscommunication with older workers	Us
Rigid processes	You
Proving my value	Me
Understanding corporate culture	Us

Revisiting the definition of challenges. It stands to reason that the challenges are keeping Millennials from what they want. The definition work done by the Small PAR Team illustrates what Millennials want in the workplace (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4

Challenges Compared With What Millennials Want

Challenges	What Millennials Want
A lack of experience	To have more opportunity
Not being taken seriously	To be listened to
Not getting respect	To be accepted
Being perceived as "entitled"	To be rewarded for work
A lack of patience	To be promoted faster
Getting helpful feedback	To know how they are doing
Understanding expectations	To know what is expected of them
Miscommunication with older workers	To have a good relationship with older workers
Rigid processes	To have a say in how they do their job
Proving my value	To be recognized

Identifying skills that can help Millennials. I surveyed the Large PAR Team about what they do to successfully overcome the aforementioned challenges Millennials face in the workplace. Only twenty-three percent responded to the web-based survey, but the results were very insightful, see Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Comparing Challenges With Large PAR Team Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

Challenges	Strategies for Overcoming Challenges
A lack of experience	Identify people with experience (mentors) and ask them a lot of questions
Not being taken seriously	Take responsibility for everything you control (communication, work, dress)
Not getting respect	Be respectful
Being perceived as "entitled"	Show gratitude and express appreciation
A lack of patience	Try to understand your manager's perspective and keep being persistent in your effort
Getting helpful feedback	Ask specific questions about your performance
Understanding expectations	Ask what is expected, listen, and then tell them what you heard them say
Miscommunication with older workers	Build a relationship by taking an interest in them
Rigid processes	Do it their way effectively and then offer your ideas for improvement
Proving my value	Align your strengths with the organization's needs

Priority Action

Revisiting Smith et al., the action aspect of PAR is catalyzed by the lived experience of the co-researchers (2010). The priority action to be taken is a training intervention that addresses the challenges Millennials report to face in the workplace and what they can do to overcome said challenges. The overcoming strategies are also based in the lived experience of Millennials.

The theoretical framework for generational analysis is from the literature review. In the intervention design, I decided to heed Ronald Heifetz' advice, "Conflict and heterogeneity are resources for social learning. Although people may not come to share one another's values, they

may learn vital information that would ordinarily be lost to view without engaging the perspectives of those who challenge them" (1994, p. 35). Therefore, I intend to insert the perceptions managers have of Millennials from my prior research into the training intervention.

The training intervention outline. The results of the interviews, LGIs, and web-based survey give clear direction and outline for the training design. Diagram 5.2 illustrates the training intervention presentation. Here is the training intervention outline:

I. Group Exercise: As a younger worker, what challenges do you face in the workforce?

II. Perceptual Positioning: Moving beyond your own experience

III. Theoretical Framework: What is generational theory and what does it mean?

IV. Skills for Overcoming Challenges in the Workplace:

    a. Challenges Millennials Face in the Workplace

    b. What You Really Want

    c. How Managers Perceive You

    d. Skills For Success In The Workplace

V. Matching Skills To The Group Exercise List

VI. Questions and Answers

Diagram 5.2

Training Intervention Diagram
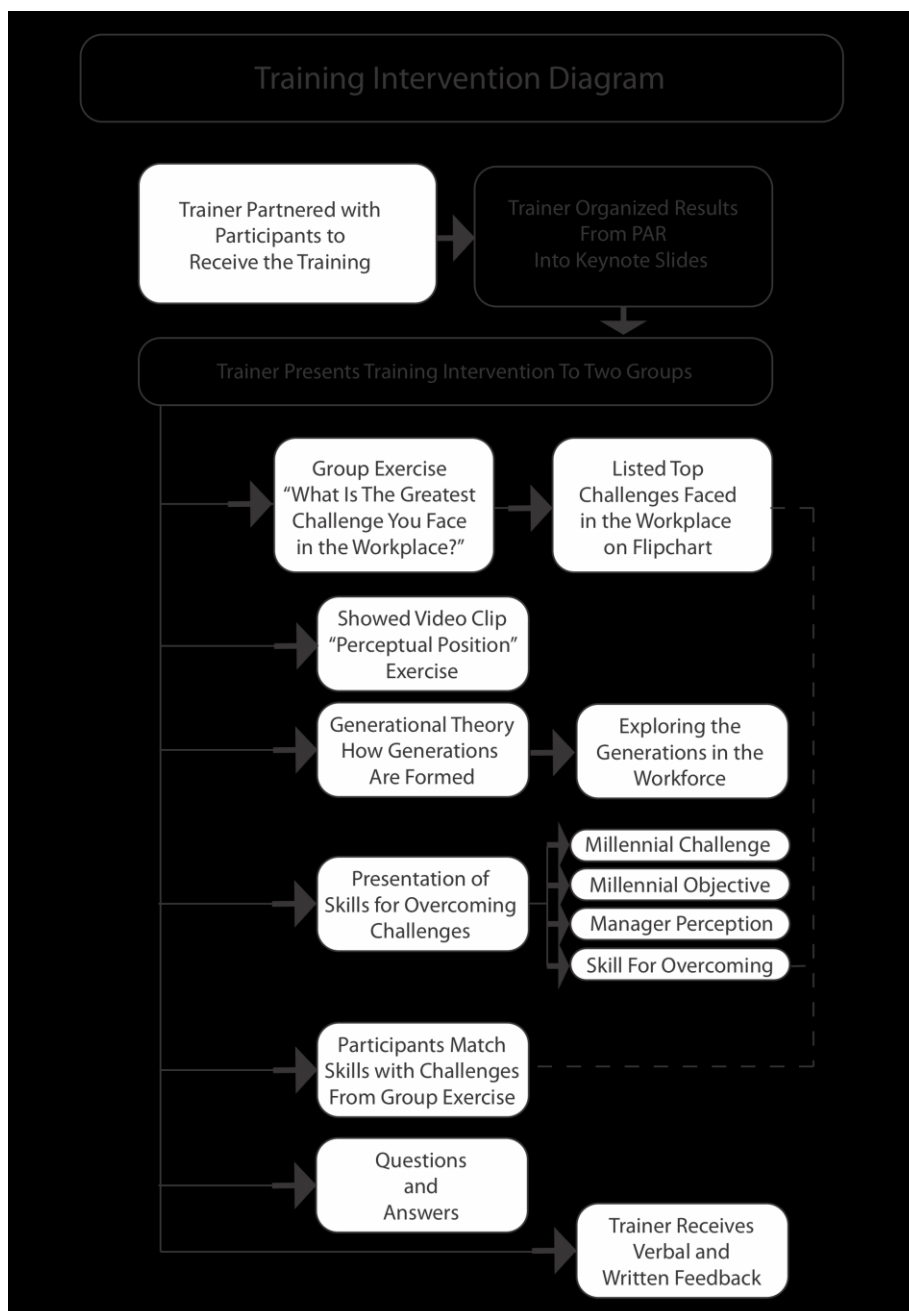
Group exercise. The group exercise is designed to get the participants engaged by asking

them what challenges they face in the workplace. A key to engaging Millennials is to start with

their experience and not your own (Espinoza et al., 2010). I asked them to list and rank their

challenges. I wrote their top challenges on a flip chart at the front of the room. I let them know that we would revisit their voiced challenges at the end of the training.

  Perceptual positioning. The PAR was focused on the experience of Millennials. The challenges Millennials encounter was divided into three categories: things about me, things about you, and things about us. I thought it would be helpful for the participants to get outside of their own experience and make the effort to see their challenges through the perspective of others. A powerful framework for helping someone get outside of her or his own experience is Bandler and Grinder's (1975) work in Neural Linguistic Processing (NLP). In their book *NLP for Teachers*, Terry and Churches reveal a core tenet of NLP, "We cannot change anyone else's behavior, we can only change our own" (2007, p. 5). NLP provides a useful framework for exploring the relational space between Millennials and their managers. NLP asks that we look at situations or encounters through three lenses. In this case, the first lens is how Millennials experience the situation (feelings, emotions, and thoughts). The second lens is the perspective of the manager (to the degree Millennials can imagine it) and how she is experiencing the situation. The third lens is "going to 30,000 feet" and taking on the role of looking down on the scenario as an objective observer.

  I used a film clip from the comedy movie *Office Space* (1999) to demonstrate the NLP technique. The piece is entitled *Did You Get The Memo* and is all over YouTube. The segment depicts an office manager confronting an employee about not putting a cover on his TPS (Testing Procedure Standards) Report. In Millennial-speak, TPS stands for Totally Pointless Stuff (Urban Dictionary Post by Bernie Klinder, 2005). I asked the participants to watch the dialogue between the manager and employee and then discuss what the manager was

experiencing, what the employee was experiencing, and what they could see as an objective third party.

The point of the exercise was that if you only see things from your own perspective, it limits your ability to learn and adapt. The point illustrated in the film clip was that neither the manager nor the employee was listening to each other.

Theoretical framework for thinking about generations. According to Christopher Bollas, generations do not clearly see differences between them and other generations until age 30,

> "A generation will have achieved its identity within ten years, roughly speaking between twenty and thirty, in the space between adolescent turbulence and the age of thirty when childhood, adolescence and young adulthood can be viewed of a piece, the thirty year old will feel himself to be part of his generation, and he will, in the next few years, take note of a new generation defining itself in such a way that he can distinguish it from his own" (1992, p. 260).

This segment of the training intervention sought to help Millennials understand what shapes a generation, identify their own generation, identify other generations in the workplace, and explore what distinguishes the generations. I invited a group discussion about the key socio-political events, technology, and pop-culture that influenced their generation.

Skills for overcoming challenges in the workplace. In the book *Made To Stick*, Heath and Heath (2007) focus on two important questions when it comes to new ideas, "How do I get people's attention and how do I keep it" (p. 65). The Heaths claim that the answer is eliciting two basic human emotions–surprise and interest. In the skills section of the training, I introduced what Millennials in the study consider to be challenges in the workplace, what Millennials want in the workplace, what managers perceive about Millennials in the workplace, and skills for success in the workplace. The skills are ordered as stuff about me, stuff about you, and stuff

about us. For each skill there was a discussion question, "When have you observed someone use this skill effectively and what did they do?"

Challenge 1: A lack of experience (stuff about me). Millennials are keenly aware that they lack work experience and know of the limitations it places upon them with respect to getting what they want.

- What Millennials want is to have more opportunities.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be myopic, meaning that Millennials do not understand the complexities of work.

- The skill is to *seek out mentors*. Identify people with experience in your organization and ask them questions about the why, what, and how of work.

Challenge 2: A lack of patience (stuff about me). High expectations about the speed of career development and having difficulty being patient when they are not progressing fast enough.

- What Millennials want is to be promoted faster.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be indifferent, meaning that Millennials lack commitment or do not care about their assignments.

- The skill is to *understand your current role and its importance*. Be persistent in your effort in your current job while pursuing other interests.

Challenge 3: Proving my value (stuff about me). Proving my value to management. In particular, "How assertive should I be when it comes to asking for more responsibility or opportunity?"

- What Millennials want is to be recognized by management.

- Managers perceive Millennials to suffer from hubris, meaning that Millennials think more of their abilities than they should.

- The skill is to *align your strengths with the organization's needs.*

Challenge 4: Not being taken seriously or getting respect (stuff about you). Millennials consider themselves to be problem-solvers and innovators but get frustrated when their ideas are not entertained or are readily dismissed. They talk about not being readily accepted into the culture of the company because they are young. They are made to feel that they do not belong in important work situations.

- What Millennials want is to be listened to and accepted.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be self-absorbed, meaning that Millennials are preoccupied by their need for attention.

- The skill is to *take responsibility for everything you control* and to *be respectful,* particularly things like how you communicate, how you dress, and how hard you work.

Challenge 5: Being perceived as entitled (stuff about you). Older workers think that Millennials want everything to be handed to them without them having to earn it.

- What Millennials want is to be rewarded for their work.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be entitled.

- The skill is to *show gratitude and express your appreciation.* Whenever someone helps you or does something nice for you, be sure to thank them.

Challenge 6: Getting helpful feedback (stuff about you). Frustration when feedback is non-existent, untimely, or vague.

- What Millennials want is to know how they are doing.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be defensive, meaning that Millennials do not take feedback that is not considered positive very well.

- The skill is to take the initiative on your own and *ask specific questions about your performance.* Be willing to hear things that may not sound positive but still can help you grow.

Challenge 7: Rigid processes (stuff about you). An emphasis on process that is restrictive to working faster, smarter, and more effectively. Being process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented.

- What Millennials want is to have a say in how they do their job.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be creative, meaning that while Millennials are very creative, sometimes their creativity distracts them from doing things the way a manager wants.

- The skill is to *master their way* before you suggest changes to a process.

Challenge 8: Understanding expectations (stuff about us). It is confusion about what is expected or a mismatch of expectations between Millennial and manager.

- What Millennials want is to know what is expected of them.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be unfocused, meaning that Millennials do not give attention particularly when communicating.

- The skill is to *ask what is expected of you* before you begin a task or job. Be sure to listen carefully and then tell your manager what you heard her say. The more you and your manager can align your expectations the better.

Challenge 9: Miscommunication with older workers (stuff about us). Difficulty when it comes to communicating with older workers. Millennials differ in communication style from other generations due to technology.

- What Millennials want is to have a good relationship with older workers.

- Managers perceive Millennials to be abrasive, meaning that Millennials can come across as curt and informal in the way they communicate.

- The skill is to *build a relationship*. Pay attention to how others communicate and try to match their style. Try to identify your manager's preferred mode of communication and use it. Take an interest in older workers around you.

Matching the skills identified in the PAR to the training intervention groups' list of challenges. I thought it would be interesting to see how the skills in the training aligned with the training participants' own set of challenges identified during the group exercise. Rather than matching the skills for them, I asked the participants to match the skills they learned during the training to the challenges. The results for both training groups can be seen in Table 5.6 and Table 5.7. The participants readily and correctly matched the PAR skills to the challenges they listed in the group exercise.

Table 5.6

Comparing Training Group One Exercise Challenges With Skills For Overcoming Challenges

Challenges	Skills for Overcoming Challenges
Lack of experience	Identify people with experience (mentors) and ask them a lot of questions
Acceptance into culture (not getting respect)	Take responsibility for everything you control (communication, work, dress) and be respectful
Staying patient	Try to understand your manager's perspective and be persistent in your effort
Infrequent evaluation	Ask specific questions about your performance
Not sure of expectations	Ask what is expected, listen, and then tell them what you heard them say
Communicating with managers	Build a relationship by taking an interest in them
Process driven	Do it their way effectively and then offer your ideas for improvement

Table 5.7

Comparing Training Group Two Exercise Challenges With Skills For Overcoming Challenges

Challenges	Skills for Overcoming Challenges
Convincing management we are not entitled	Show gratitude and express appreciation
Earn respect from experienced workers	Take responsibility for everything you control (communication, work, dress) and be respectful
Being patient	Try to understand your manager's perspective and keep be persistent in your effort
Learning how to contribute to the team	Align your strengths with the organization's needs
Miscommunication	Build a relationship by taking an interest in them
Adjusting to work processes	Do it their way effectively and then offer your ideas for improvement

The first group had something on their list that I had only seen listed as a strength and not a challenge—too reliant on technology.

Questions and answers (Q&A). Most of the discussion during Q&A was focused on how useful the data was to the participants. I was asked about tattoos, body piercings, and the like but I deferred to the program director to answer the question with respect to their corporate policy. The program director used one of the skills to begin his response, "Take responsibility for everything you control (communication, work, dress) and be respectful."

Again, I did not get any pushback on the manager perceptions. Rather, the participants seemed to find it helpful.

Written feedback. I have attached verbatim comments that represent the written feedback after the program was delivered.

- Even though the topic was about our generation, I feel like it was very eye-opening to hear the perceptions that older generations have toward us and to learn how I can work with my co-workers more effectively.

- I liked how it was interactive.

- Speaker was knowledgeable. Knew what he was doing.

- Very helpful and obviously related to me and my generation.

- The group was involved and the instructor was great.

- I thought it was fun.

- The topic was very interesting.

- I liked learning how other generations view one another.

- The program shed light on the assumptions some managers have about me based on my generation. The skills are very helpful.

- I thought it was great!

- More Office Space clips!

- Awesome skills that can really help me.

- It helped me to become more self-aware.

- Presenter was a good speaker.

- The examples of the skills were really helpful.

- Very interesting, albeit slightly over-generalized.

- This will change how I approach my relationships with older co-workers.

- I had never really thought about the differences between generations and this really shed some light on it for me.

Assessing the objectives of the research. The aim of this research was to identify challenges Millennials face in the workplace, identify skills that can help Millennials overcome the challenges, and design a training intervention for Millennials. The PAR design proved to be the perfect fit for the research objective. Without doubt Millennials face challenges in the workplace. A set of skills was identified to help Millennials overcome the challenges they face. A training intervention was developed with co-researchers who were energized by the process and have the most to benefit from identifying skills for helping them succeed at work. The training intervention was delivered, but it does not mark the end of the PAR. Within the training design, there is opportunity for continued improvement as more and more Millennials participate and bring their experience and knowledge to the subject matter.

The feedback from the training demonstrates that the participants found the training to be of value in shaping their thinking, behaviors, and interactions.

Conclusion

The findings from this Participatory Action Research illustrate the essence of the methodology; PAR seeks to create partnership with community members to identify issues of importance to them, develop a means for studying matters of importance, gather and analyze data, and take action on the knowledge that is produced (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Smith et al., 2010). In Chapter VI, I will summarize and discuss my findings.

Chapter VI: Summary and Discussion of Findings

In this chapter I will summarize the Participatory Action Research, share conclusions, discuss findings, and make recommendations for further research.

Summary

In this section I will summarize the PAR study including the purpose, review of the literature, methodology, findings, and prior research as they inform the discussion.

Purpose of the study. This dissertation had a two-fold purpose; 1) To identify challenges Millennials face in the workplace and, 2) To develop a training intervention to help Millennials overcome challenges they face and effectively integrate into the workplace. This study has effectively fulfilled both purposes.

Influence of the literature. In this section I will report highlights from the Literature Review. I invite you to refer back to Chapter II for a more detailed treatment of the literature.

I am often asked the question, "Isn't every generation the same?" Inherent in the question is a distinction being made—the term generation. I decided it was important to integrate parts of the literature review into the training intervention due to the theoretical framework it provides for thinking about generations. I incorporated the concept with a small group exercise in which participants listed significant happenings (socio-political, technological, and pop-culture) that took place during their adolescence. The participants' list included 9/11, Columbine, Terrorism, Going Green, Social-networking, Smart Phones, and Instant Messaging among other things.

Thinking about generations. The traditional concept of a generation has biological roots in family, where the term generation generally refers to successive parent–child relationships (Biggs, 2007). This study has been enriched by 90 years of thinking about a different kind of

generation. In 1923, German sociologist Karl Mannheim first put forth his concept of a sociological generation (1952).

The sociology of discord between generations. The notion that age cohorts can have different attitudes, values, and behaviors explains why there can be tension between generations. Norman Ryder talks about the interaction between opposing generational units as the sociology of the discord between generations (1965). In the sense that each new birth cohort poses a threat to society and its constructs, every generation is the same.

Generations are impacted by group norms. The threat to stability can be the result of challenging the status quo or what is considered to be normative. Barbara Lawrence (1996) observes that there are several conceptions of norms, but most have three things in common: 1) *Expectation*, 2) *Sanction*, and 3) a *Group*. Expectation exists when there is a statement that specifies what response or behavior is expected in specific situations (*what people ought to do*).

Generations develop their own way of speaking. Amanda Grenier (2007) offers yet another source of explanation for discord between generations. Grenier (2007) asserts that generations develop their own linguistic models that contribute to misunderstanding between age cohorts, "Different ways of speaking exercised by older and younger people exist, and may be partially explained by social historical reference points, culturally determined experiences, and individual interpretations" (p. 718).

Generations are shaped by technology. Were he still alive, Mannheim would have a field day with how technology has contributed to the shaping of the Millennial generation. I suggest that his concept of *geographic location* is less of a factor today than access to the Internet for actual participation in the social and intellectual currents of the Millennials' time and

place in this world. It is one reason why Millennials are more alike each other around the world than any of the other generations.

The literature is clear that generations can have opposing attitudes and values that result in unique challenges. I wanted to understand challenges Millennials face in the workplace, and I decided having a conversation with Millennials was the best place to start. The collaborative nature of PAR not only allows for such a conversation, but it also invites the participants to use their voice to inform theories of change (Tuck, 2009). Finding from my prior research allowed me to have confidence in PAR as a research method because it taps into many intrinsic values of Millennials (*Self-expression, Attention, Meaning, and Achievement*) and the fact that Millennials thrive on problem solving.

Methodology. Although Participatory Action Research is historically rooted in giving voice to marginalized peoples and communities to exact social change (Friere, 1970), I found it to be a perfect fit for my work. I have come to learn that it is not a stretch to say that Millennials experience stereotype threat (O'Brien & Hummert, 2006) or a form of marginalization due to their age. They strive to have a voice in the workplace and yet they feel that it is often dismissed because of their youth as evidenced by two of the biggest challenges they report facing, *Not Being Taken Seriously* and *Not Getting Respect*. While this study may not immediately help Millennials be heard in the boardroom, I hope it permits Millennials to hear a small inner voice that assures them that they can overcome the challenges they face in the workplace and be successful.

PAR is the place to be heard. The study draws upon the experience and knowledge of the people it seeks to help. It is appropriate that it was a group of students who inspired me to write *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce,*

and now many of them have lent their voice to this study for the purpose of empowering their generation with skills that will help them integrate into the workforce.

I am grateful for the partnership I was able to establish with the interview, Large Group Intervention, Web-based survey, Small PAR, and Large PAR groups. Though each group represented a different means of collecting and analyzing data, they all demonstrated a strong level of commitment to our work. Their commitment was characterized by an honest and unpretentious engagement with the problem statement.

The Large PAR group helped the study to truly reflect the spirit of a PAR. Initially I had intended to use the Small PAR team to help me indentify and rank the challenges Millennials face in the workplace and then design the training intervention from my own expertise. Due to the incredible response from former student colleagues who wanted to help with the project, I created the Large PAR team for the purpose of reviewing the challenge themes and developing the skills for overcoming the challenges. Consequently, the results of this study are a derivative of the struggle Millennials feel when entering the workforce, their resiliency, their optimism, and their effort to overcome challenges they face in the workplace.

Summary of findings. Millennials do experience challenges in the workplace and find themselves impacted both emotionally and professionally. The analysis of the interviews, LGIs, and web-based survey revealed the biggest challenges that Millennials face in the workplace.

If you examine the *biggest challenges*, you can see three categories emerged (*things about me, things about you, and things about us*). Millennials are aware that some of the challenges they face are the result of things about them like a lack of experience, impatience, or knowing where to add value. There are also a set of challenges that are perceived to be about what others do: not taking them seriously, not giving respect, not giving helpful feedback,

treating them like they are "entitled", and creating rigid processes that are inhibiting. They also find certain interactions to be troubling like communicating with older workers and understanding what managers expected of them.

The Small PAR Team recognized the challenges presented a barrier for what Millennials want from the workplace. Identifying what Millennials want was important to the training intervention from a motivational perspective. Here is a list of what Millennials want in the workplace.

When I designed the study, I had two reasons for asking about the advantages Millennials perceived themselves to have in the workplace. First, I wanted to follow up the challenges question with a more positive question in the event that discussion about challenges left them feeling frustrated. Second, I wanted to identify transferable strengths to be used for the training intervention. The advantages were helpful to know from a "here is what you have going for you" perspective, and they fit perfectly into the challenge theme *proving my value.* However, they were not quite what I was looking for with the training intervention design.

I decided to revisit the web-survey group and ask them to be the Large PAR Group. They were different than the other sample groups with respect to having had a longer tenure in the workforce. I sent them a list of the biggest challenges Millennials face in the workplace and asked them what they had done in their career to overcome them. I was thrilled with the outcome.

Manager perceptions. In my prior research, I learned how managers perceive Millennials. I was surprised to discover that managers who struggle with managing Millennials and managers who are effective share the same perceptions about Millennials. The perceptions are not necessarily flattering, and Millennials have endured a tremendous amount of criticism

from older generations due to perception. As an example, Millennials are perceived to have the need to be coddled. One of my Large Par Team members is from Taiwan and she told me that Millennials there are referred to as Strawberries because they bruise easily.

When I compared the perceptions managers have of Millennials and the challenges Millennials face in the workplace, I decided to use the managers' perceptions in the training intervention. The perceptions turned out to be an important piece of the training intervention design as commented on by many of the participants, "It was very eye-opening to hear the perceptions that older generations have toward us and to learn how I can work with my co-workers more effectively." Listing the perceptions helped build a context and explanation for the challenges Millennials face in the workplace. In essence, I borrowed a competency from *Managing the Millennials* (2010) called *Broadening the Myopic*—The ability to help Millennials connect the dots. In Table 6.1, I compare the perceptions (with definitions) managers have of Millennials with challenges Millennials face in the workplace.

Table 6.1

Comparison of Manager Perceptions of Millennials (Espinoza et al., 2010, p. 35-36) and Challenges Millennials Face in the Workplace

Manager Perceptions of Millennials	Challenges Millennials Face in the Workplace
Autonomous: Millennials express a desire to do what they want when they want, have the schedule they want, and not worry about someone micro-managing them. They don't feel they should have to conform to office processes as long as they complete their work.	Rigid processes
Entitled: The attitude expressed by Millennials that they deserve to be recognized and rewarded. They want to move up the ladder quickly but not always on managements' terms. They want a guarantee for their performance, not just the opportunity to perform.	Being perceived as "entitled"
Imaginative: Millennials are recognized for having a great "imagination" and can offer a fresh perspective and unique insight into a myriad of situations. Their imagination can distract them from participating in an ordered or mechanistic process.	Rigid processes and Proving my value
Self-Absorbed: Millennials are perceived to be primarily concerned with how they are treated rather than how they treat others. Tasks are seen as a means to their ends. Millennials are often preoccupied by their own personal need for trust, encouragement, and praise.	Not getting respect and Not being taken seriously
Defensive: Millennials often experience anger, guardedness, offense, resentment,	Getting helpful feedback

and shift responsibility in response to critique and evaluation. They want to be told when they are doing well but not when they are doing poorly.	
Abrasive: Perhaps due to technology, Millennial communication style can be experienced as curt. They are perceived to be inattentive to social courtesies like knowing when to say thank you and please. Whether intentional or not, their behavior is interpreted as disrespectful or usurping authority.	Miscommunication with older workers
Myopic: Millennials struggle with cause-and-effect relationships. The struggle is perceived as a narrow sightedness guided by internal interests without an understanding of how others and the organization are impacted.	A lack of experience
Unfocused: Millennials, as a cohort, are recognized for their intellectual ability but are often perceived to struggle with a lack of attention to detail. They have a hard time staying focused on tasks for which they have no interest.	Understanding expectations
Indifferent: Millennials are perceived as careless, apathetic, or lacking commitment.	A lack of patience

The training intervention. The last stage of the PAR as it relates to my dissertation was to deliver the training. I qualify *last stage* because this PAR will live on as I continue to improve the training intervention.

I presented to two groups of new hires. I was allotted a timeframe of two hours for each group. The participants were very engaged and interested in the topic. In addition to my session, they were there for professional development and company orientation. I used PowerPoint to present the training.

I walked the participants through a group exercise to indentify challenges they faced in the workplace. Then I showed a video clip and explained the concept of perceptual positions and the importance of being able to look at experiences with others though our own eyes, the eyes of the other, and from an objective third party perspective. Following perceptual position, I established a framework for thinking about generations (based on my review of the literature) and how they could have different values and perspectives. I had them talk about the socio-political, technological, and pop-culture events they remembered from their adolescence. Then we discussed some of the experiences of other generations.

I decided to start each *skill* I would teach with the *challenge* it addressed. I then proceeded to explain what Millennials *want*, *perceptions* managers have of Millennials in the workplace, and the *skill* that is important to overcoming the *challenge*. At the end of the skills section of the training, I had the participants revisit the challenges they listed during the opening group exercise. They accurately applied a skill to each challenge they listed without my help.

The feedback was very affirming of the training content. It was nice to see a few comments about the presenter but it was even more encouraging to hear remarks about the value of the training. Comments referred to understanding how generations could differ, the accuracy

of what they want in the workplace, the value of knowing what managers perceive about them, and the usefulness of the skills.

Discussion

I begin the discussion with my initial interest in Millennials and the culture shock that I believe work life presents for them. I then discuss prior research as it relates to the findings of this study. I will then take liberty to discuss findings that intrigued me during the Participatory Action Research.

Millennials in the classroom. As a university professor teaching Management Theory and Practice, I noticed a difference between students from the 1990's and 2000's. I would not characterize the differences as good or bad, just that they were very distinct. On the first day of class, students from the 1990's would throw the syllabus in their backpack without even glancing at it. Conversely, students from the 2000's went through it with a red pen. They would ask questions like, "It says 12-15 page paper…is 12 pages a 'C' and 15 pages an 'A'?" One of the reasons I think they take such an interest in the syllabus is because they think everything is negotiable. They challenge workload, selection of texts, and even instructor credentials. Their challenges are not cloaked in defiance but out of the expectation that they have a say or voice in things.

I recently wrote a chapter for the Jossey-Bass *New Directions in Teaching and Learning Series* in which the topic was *Boundaries in the Classroom.* I argue that when it comes to the role of teacher the Internet has been the most disruptive technology to pedagogy since the Gutenberg Press. It could be debated that the printing press presented the first real challenge to the teacher as sole authority or meaning-maker for students. The printed word allowed students to be exposed to a myriad of voices from outside of the classroom.

The Internet is the printing press on steroids. If you don't think so, just try to attribute

Douglas McGregor's Motivation XY Theory to James MacGregor Burns. Students will point out

the mistake before you can correct yourself. The point is educators are one of many voices.

Alison King warned that the 21st Century would require educators to adapt their pedagogy,

> In contrast to the transmittal model illustrated by the classroom lecture-note-taking scenario, the constructivist model places students at the center of the process–actively participating in thinking and discussing ideas while making meaning for themselves. And the professor instead of being the *sage on the stage*, functions as *a guide on the side*. (1993, p. 30)

After 10 years in the new Millennium, I suggest we are adding a role to the mix—

learning with. In addition to expertise and ability to guide, we must function as co-learner–we

are *learning with*. By *learning with*, I am not suggesting that content expertise is not relative or

important to pedagogy. I am simply stating that a form of expertise is the ability to get the best

effort from students. Millennials desire to exercise their voice in the learning process.

Parenting. I not only recognized a difference in student behavior but also in the behavior

of their parents. The only time I ever encountered parents in the 1990's would be at a

commencement ceremony. In the 2000's, I had the pleasure of receiving phone calls, e-mails,

and even entertaining parents in my office. The purpose of the conversations would range from

negotiating absences due to family vacation, reduced workload due to special circumstances, or

grades due to their child's potential. Although I recognize what I am about to say is a huge

generalization, I believe it has merit—Millennials do not know how to fail or handle failure

because they have grown up in a system of support that, for the most part, does not allow them to

experience failure. Recently, I bumped into a friend who has been concerned about his child

being able to graduate from high school due to missing assignments. I asked him how everything

turned out and he told me that his wife completed the missing work and their child was able to

graduate. It may sound extreme but it is not uncommon for parents to pick up the slack for their children.

I remember going to my son's eighth grade science fair and thinking Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Maria Mayer, and Barbara McClintock were his classmates. I would never criticize a parent's desire to help her child, but I believe there is a line where help can become detrimental. I reported on what some consider harmful parent behavior in Chapter II. Millennials, by no fault of their own, expect supportive environments, and when they enter the workforce it can trigger culture shock. Macionis and Gerber refer to culture shock in part as the disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life or moving between social environments (2011).

Culture shock. It became very clear to me through interviewing and reading the LGI and web-based comments that Millennials experience culture shock when they transition from college life to work. While in school they eagerly anticipate making the transition into a career but when they finally get there it is not entirely what they expected. Christine Hassler, author of the *20 Something Manefesto*, refers to the experience as Expectation Hangover®—a group of undesirable feelings that arise when a desired result is not met (2008). I would say that the desired results are what Millennials want in the workplace. But there is more than that.

Based on the challenges Millennials face as reported on in Chapter V, it is obvious that *work* isn't all they thought it would be. But I believe it is more than a desired result not being met. I think the greatest and yet most basic expectation Millennials have is for the authority figures in their lives to be supporting, affirming, and committed to their success. For many, work is the first environment they encounter that they do not feel supported, affirmed, or that someone cares about their success. While other generations may have experienced culture shock upon

entering the workforce, I would argue that it is more acute with Millennials; the literature review in Chapter II is replete with examples of a world committed to their success while growing up. Yet, I think the analysis of Question Three in Chapter V makes an even stronger argument for my assertion. When asked to respond to the statement, "Millennials are the most sheltered, structured, and rewarded generation to enter the workforce," they not only agreed, but they also said that it was not a negative thing. They enjoyed growing up in an environment that cheered them on and they miss it.

Who has to adapt? Now having presented training to both Managers and Millennials, I find it quite predictable that Managers want to start the discussion with how Millennials need to adapt and conversely Millennials begin the dialogue with suggestions about what Managers need to do differently. My response to managers is that the people with the most responsibility have to adapt first. While Millennials need to make adjustments to integrate into the workforce. I suggest to Millennials that if they want more responsibility they will have to do their own adaptive work. It is not a question of who gives in first. It is about both managers and Millennials being willing to adapt. The space that I have attempted to fill in the equation is explaining for both groups *why to adapt*, *where to adapt*, and *how to adapt*.

Ronald Heifetz has heavily influenced my thinking about adaptive work and therefore, the intervention design started with identifying challenges. Heifetz (1994, p. 31) says, "We perceive problems whenever circumstances do not conform to the way we think things ought to be. Thus, adaptive work involves not only the assessment of reality but also the clarification of values."

The *why to adapt* involved a group exercise in which the participants identified challenges they face in the workplace and then were shown how the challenges are the result of

not getting what they want (value) in the workplace. The motivation to do adaptive work depends how much a desired result is valued. If I am being perceived as 'entitled' and I think it is inhibiting the value I have to be rewarded for my work, then I will work to overcome the perception that I am entitled. I inserted the generational analysis literature to help explain why generations need to adapt to each other.

The *where to adapt* aspect of the training intervention was determined by the challenges identified in the PAR. Staying with the aforementioned example, if I am perceived as being 'entitled' I might want to work on showing gratitude or appreciation. The perceptual positions and manager perceptions were used to help the participants see their challenges through the lens of their managers.

The *how to adapt* aspect of the training intervention is practicing the skills identified in the PAR. I can show gratitude or appreciation by acknowledging the nice things people in my workplace do for me. There are several things I can do to show appreciation (public praise, cards, e-mails, phone call, or write a commendation stating what someone did for me).

Locus of control. In my prior research, one of differentiators between effective managers and challenged managers is degree of locus of control. Kinicki and Williams (2003, p. 95) characterize internal locus of control as "The belief that you can control your own destiny and that external forces will have little influence." Conversely, "External locus of control means you believe you don't control your destiny, that external forces do" (Kinicki & Williams, 2003, p. 95). Challenged managers had an external locus of control. They felt that there was very little they could do about the frustrations they had with managing Millennials. The effective managers felt that there were many things they could do to overcome the challenges Millennials presented in the workplace. One of which was the willingness to adapt.

Grouping the challenges Millennials face into the categories of *things about me*, *things about you*, and *things about us* was an attempt to address the degree of locus of control Millennials could perceive to have. I was concerned that it would be easier for them to embrace what they could do something about like *a lack of patience* but perhaps feel there was little they could do about *not getting respect*. The groupings helped me to emphasize that some of the challenges seemed more in their control than others but that the skills would allow them to have a high degree of internal locus of control. Knowing there is something you can do about your situation contributes to your ability to overcome perceived external obstacles.

Relating to other research. Linda Dulin completed her dissertation entitled *Leadership Preferences of a Generation Y Cohort* in 2005. Dulin (2005) identified 12 things Millennials need from their leaders. I looked at what Millennials want and compared the findings to what Dulin's findings suggested Millennials want in a leader to see if there were any commonalities. I was amazed at the results. The comparison is shown in Table 6.2. Not every category was transferable but you will see that 10 of Dulin's themes were applicable.

Dulin (2005) identified an important piece of the equation in the literature with respect to managing and leading Millennials, "What do Millennials want in a leader?" In *Managing the Millennials* (Espinoza et al., 2010), among other things, my colleagues and I identified what inhibits managerial-leaders from doing the things Millennials need from a leader and discovered competencies that can help them better lead Millennials. In this PAR, my co-researchers and I have successfully attempted to identify skills that will help Millennials get what they need from their leaders.

Table 6.2

Comparison of What Millennials Want in the Workplace and What Millennials Want From Their Leaders (Dulin, 2005)

What Millennials Want	What Millennials Want From Their Leaders
To have more opportunity	Assignment broker: For access to challenging assignments
To be listened to	Sounding board: For ideas and strategies
To be accepted	Cohort: To give you a sense that you are not alone
To be rewarded for work	Reinforcer: To give you rewards
To be promoted faster	?
To know how they are doing	Feedback provider: Information for performance improvement
To know what is expected of them	Point of comparison: Evaluating one's skills against an expert's
To have a good relationship with older workers	Counselor: For tough times Role Model: For example of high/low competence
To have a say in how they do their job	Dialogue partner: To discuss different perspectives
To be recognized	Cheerleader: To boost your self-esteem
	Accountant: To hold you accountable
	Feedback interpreter

It is interesting that many of the labels (counselor, cheerleader, role model, cohort, feedback interpreter, and sounding board) in Dulin's list of what Millennials want from leaders connote the role of a parent or mentor. Dulin makes the observation in the discussion of her findings, "In this study, focus group participants emphasized the influential role of their parents in how they view the workplace. Their parents' own advice, own experiences, and styles of parenting were an integral part of each focus group discussion. The participants held the parents in high regard" (2005, p. 86). I think this speaks directly to the culture shock Millennials face at work. The roles of an authority figure in the life of a Millennial prior to work represent that of a parent, mentor, teacher, or coach.

The challenges Millennials face in the workplace relate in part to being confused about the change in how authority figures interact with them. A Millennial that I interviewed for *Managing the Millennials* captured the notion, "We do not expect you to be our best friend, but when you evaluate or critique us, we want you to do it in a friendly manner" (Espinoza et al., 2010, p.10).

Millennials, for the most part, did not have to worry if the authority figures in their lives prior to work were for them. Entering the workforce, it became disconcerting to Millennials because they soon learn that work is different.

Patrick Carley's (2008) dissertation entitled *Generational Perceptions of Leadership Behaviors and Job Satisfaction Among Healthcare Professionals In Western New England* sought to find out if Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y (Millennials) have unique preferences for leadership behaviors. Carley's quantitative comparative study correlated preferences for transactional leadership and transformational leadership with job satisfaction between

generations. His study revealed that there were different leadership behavior preferences between generations,

> The three generations established individual and unique preferences for leadership behaviors. Furthermore, generational characteristics formed a contextual leadership relationship between the Baby Boomers and Generation X with a significant difference with the newest generation, Generation Y. The Gen Y cohort, sometimes referred to as Echo Boomers, is not similar to the Baby Boomers once they beginning to enter the healthcare workforce contrary to the literature. The newest generation presents a uniquely different preference for leadership behaviors. (2008, p. 5)

Carley (2008) suggests that Baby Boomers and Gen X are more alike in their leadership preferences and the Millennials are more unique in their leadership behavior preferences.

The Millennials in Carley's (2008) study showed a greater preference for transformational leadership than the Baby Boomers and Gen X. Dulin's (2005) preferred leadership roles could easily be categorized as transformational leadership behavior. Carley did find one transactional leadership behavior that correlated positively with Millennial job satisfaction—*contingent reward* (2008, p. 117). Employee recognition programs and performance awards are good examples of *contingent rewards*.

Dulin (2005) identified the leadership preferences of Millennials and Carley (2008) found that each of the three generations in the workplace have different leadership preferences, with the Millennials being the most unique.

A global generation. I was very nervous about the international LGIs I led because I was not sure how the participants would respond. The nervousness was gone in the first minute when I saw the level of engagement. I found the international groups to be the more talkative which surprised me due to the fact they were flown in from different regions of the world.

The fact that all of the groups (both International and North American) reported similar challenges and advantages lends merit to the idea that technology has created a generation that is

the most alike no matter where they live in the world. They are experiencing life together from wherever they reside. There is little reason to believe that future generations will not be more so.

In a BusinessWeek cover story podcast entitled *Children of the Web*, John Byrne discusses how companies are changing their marketing strategies with respect to Millennials from regional to global ads (Byrne & Hamm, 2007). The shift in strategy is because companies are finding that Millennials are more alike around the world and they refer to the phenomenon as, "A global digital youth culture" (Byrne & Hamm, 2007). I believe the training intervention that resulted from my Participatory Action Research is a perfect fit for the *global digital youth culture*.

Millennial self-awareness. I must admit that I was surprised by how much ownership Millennials take of challenges they face in the workplace. It is obvious why they would be aware of their lack of experience but I was impressed that they realize that their impatience has an adverse effect upon how they are perceived. I was well aware that Millennials get bored really quickly and constantly need new challenges, but I did not know that they were aware that they are seen as impatient or having unrealistic expectations.

Millennials are also conscious of how they communicate and know it can be problematic when it comes to relationship building with older workers. They truly desire to have a friendly relationship with their managers.

What I left out of the training intervention. Maybe it is the researcher in me, but I can remember reading *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and wondering what the eighth habit was. Not to worry, Covey (2004) wrote an entire book entitled *The Eighth Habit*. The point is that something always gets left out that is good. In my study there was a theme that I left out of

the training that showed up repeatedly, and that is the challenge of *understanding corporate culture*. It is a big challenge for Millennials.

I left *understanding corporate culture* out of the training intervention because company cultures can be very different. However, I do recommend that organizations spend a considerable amount of time orienting new hires about corporate culture. I also suggest that organizations have a social media platform for employees to participate in the culture and access information that is useful to them. Millennials will look first to technology for answers.

In the end, I decided to condense the *not being taken seriously* and not *getting respect* challenges. I kept both concepts but combined them in the training for the sake of time. That being said, I agree with my Millennial co-researchers that they are two separate challenges.

Things I will change about the training intervention. Two hours is just not enough time. I was pleased that the participants could grasp the concept of generational differences and recognize how to match the skills to their challenges but I think the skills need supporting exercises to help the participants practice the skills. I could imagine adding role-playing, more video clips, and practice scenarios.

In full disclosure, the feedback from the participants suggested that they were engaged, but the client leadership felt that there could have been more activities and interactivity between participants. As I reflected, I had to agree that the presentation was lecture heavy. I think four hours would be a better timeframe.

The training intervention and the next generation. It will be about another 8 to 10 years before all of the Millennials are of age to be in the workforce. It is obvious from my experience of studying, writing, and training on the topic of generations in the workplace that Millennials and Gen X have more in common than Gen X and Baby Boomers with respect to

what they value at work. I address *Group Norm Theory* in the literature review because I believe it has a significant impact on how generations interact. Gen X was simply not a big enough age cohort to push their agenda on the Builders and Baby Boomers. Consequently, Gen X mastered the art of managing up. Conversely, the Millennial generation is big enough to present a challenge to the status quo. Perhaps more than any other reason, that is why they are receiving an incredible amount of attention.

It is my belief that each successive generation will demand more from work life. I base that on the work attitudes and values both Gen X and Millennials express and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. I was lecturing in my *Management Theory and Practice* class and it occurred to me that generations enter work at varying levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. Espinoza et al. (2010, p. 145), place the current generations in the workforce on Maslow's Hierarchy:

> The Hierarchy of Needs model was developed to explain individual motivation but we find the concept useful in explaining differences among the generations in their orientations toward the workplace. The four generations in the workplace today entered their work lives at different places on the hierarchy due to societal change. The Builders arrived to work at the *safety* level. They are likely to say, "Why isn't a paycheck enough to motivate someone?" The Baby Boomers entered at the *belongingness* level. They love club life and titles. They are likely to say, "Listen, be patient, do your time, and you too can be partner." Gen X started at the *esteem* level. Belonging is a given to them and they prefer a meritocracy. They are likely to say, "I value work-life balance, too, but show me what you can do and we will talk." Are you ready? Millennials are entering between the *esteem* and *self-actualization* levels. They are likely to say, "I want to bring my creativity to work, problem solve, and find meaning in what I do." When employees strive to find meaning in their work. It is the difference between the *Grapes of Wrath* and Google. John Steinbeck's novel is set in a time when companies exploited their workers and the discontented response took the form of unions. At Google headquarters in Mountain View, the company provides on-site oil change, car wash, dry cleaning, massage therapy, gym, hair stylist, fitness classes, and bicycle repair.

> See diagram 6.1.

Diagram 6.1

Maslow's Hierarchy and The Level Where Generations Enter Work (Espinoza et al., 2010, p. 145)
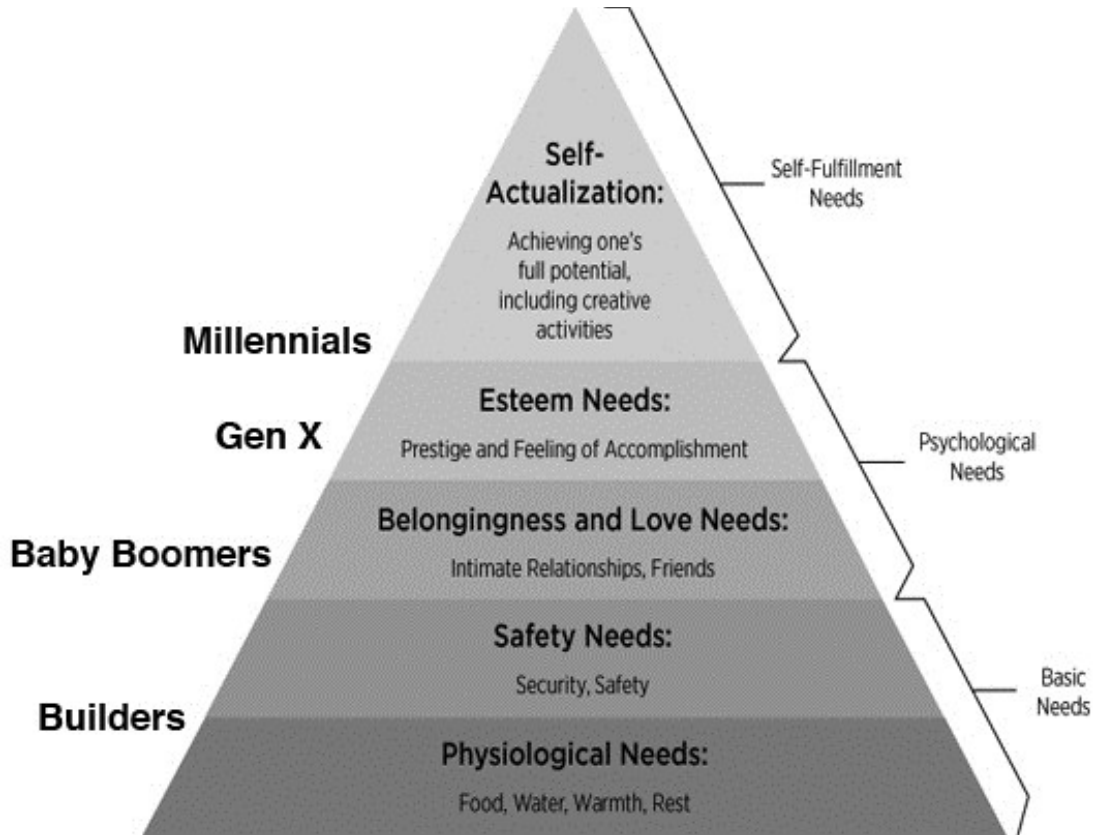
With the exception of a cataclysmic event, I do not see the next generation entering the workforce with less expectation than Millennials. Therefore, I believe the training intervention from this study will be of use to the generation that follows the Millennials when they are ready to enter the workforce. In the coming years, my colleagues and my suggestions in *Managing the Millennials* will be just good management advice for managing all generations. However, I would still encourage future scholar-practitioners to explore how the next generation is perceived and what they value.

Needed research. Along my research journey, I have been asked some great questions related to my work for which I have no answer. I kept some of the questions in hopes of inspiring future research.

What about Millennials who manage people older than them? I get this question a lot from Millennials who attend the management training based on *Managing the Millennials*. I would like to interview Millennials who manage Millennials and workers who are older than them. They are a fast growing population in the workforce.

Is there a difference between Millennials who are raised in different socio-economic conditions? In other words, do underprivileged Millennials have the same perceived entitlement orientation and expectation as that of their peers? My research does not address that question. I think it would be a helpful study.

Is there a marked difference in attitudes and values between Millennials who have graduated from college and those who have not? Again, I cannot address that question with the work I have done. I did have some Millennials in the interview group who were not college graduates but not enough to address the question. My first hypothesis would be that the more

education a Millennial achieves the greater the expectation. My second hypothesis would be the greater the expectation the more opportunity for conflict while integrating into the workplace.

Does the nurturing, praising, and rewarding Millennials receive adversely impact the successful recovery of Millennial addicts? The question came from a medical doctor in Chicago who read my book and connected the dots to his world of recovery. The question touched me personally because my eldest son struggled with addiction throughout his adolescence. Ironically, he is now sober and in a Forensic Psychology Doctoral Program. I asked him what he considered to be his greatest learning in recovery and he told me, "It is okay to be sad." He wants to study if there is a correlation between polypharmacy (the use of multiple medications by a patient) and adolescent addiction.

Has the growth in Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyper-activity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis made a generation dependent on psycho-stimulant drugs for the ability to focus? One of the perceptions that managers hold strongly of Millennials is that they lack focus. My younger sister decided to abandon a distinguished flying career to begin medical school at the age of 45. She graduated from the Air Force Academy and went on to be the second woman in history to fly the U2 Spy Plane. She resigned her position as a Captain for one of the world's largest airlines and now spends her days leading and participating in study groups with Millennials. I received the following e-mail text from her, "I've noticed from a medical standpoint that it seems like these kids on the neuro-enhancing meds have short-circuited their decision-making capability. I actually think that is part of the Millennial problem in terms of lacking the ability to make connections and focus. I work with a number of them and they tend to second-guess themselves. Is it the meds? Or in some case, chronic use/abuse of the drugs or the fact that they have that tendency to lack decision-making abilities or a combo?"

Conclusion

Without doubt, Millennials find integrating into the workplace to be a challenging proposition. These challenges can produce anxiety, self-doubt, frustration, impatience, and despair. I have accomplished the goal of this Participatory Action Research by developing and delivering a training intervention teaching Millennials the skills to overcome the biggest challenges they face in the workplace.

I believe organizations need to be focused on the relationship between Millennials and other generations in the workforce for the purpose of knowledge transfer. As the Baby Boomer generation continues to retire, it is important that their knowledge gets transferred to younger generations.

During my Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change journey, I have made two significant contributions to the management literature. First, my Co-authors and I identified the competencies that differentiate effective managers from challenged managers when it comes to managing Millennials. Second, in this dissertation research I have identified the skills Millennials need to overcome barriers they encounter in the workplace. In addition to helping Millennials, this research is useful for organizations that desire to design programs to onboard Millennials. It is my hope that the training intervention I designed will be adopted and implemented by organizations worldwide for the purpose of getting the best that Millennials have to offer.

As a result of my research, I have grown into a leading voice when it comes to Millennials in the workplace. *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce* (Espinoza et al., 2010) is currently in its fifth printing. In addition to being published in journals and magazines, my work has found appeal in the popular media. I

entertain invitations from all over the world to keynote and lecture. It is my desire to use that voice to continue to add to the literature and inspire Millennials, managers, and organizations to work together to create environments in which all generations can thrive.

I chose Antioch University for many reasons but foremost because of the emphasis placed on cultivating scholar-practitioners. When I started the program I identified two personal goals for my learning. First, I wanted to become a better thinker. Second, I desired to become a more capable writer. I have grown immensely in both areas. While the program allowed me to achieve my goals, it also revealed my needs. My worldview has been broadened as a result.

Reflection on Participatory Action Research

After every methodology lecture I attended during my Antioch coursework, I walked away convinced I had discovered the right method for me. The fact is that they all present both strengths and challenges. Ironically, it is one of the strengths of Participatory Action Research that presented one of the biggest challenges for my dissertation. The unfolding nature of PAR generously allows the researcher to adapt aspects of the study for the purpose of taking action.

As a result of co-writing *Managing the Millennials* and consulting organizations on managing Millennials, I have constant exposure to opportunities for additional inquiry. As an example, in my original dissertation design I did not have the web-based survey group, the Large PAR Team, or a plan to deliver the training intervention in a real world context. It was during the data collection that those ideas and opportunities arose. The action intervention would not have been nearly as robust without the leeway to expand the methodology. However as a result, there is content in Chapters V and VI that may appear non sequitur.

In addition to writing the dissertation in sequitur, PAR presents the challenge of knowing when to let the study stop unfolding. Since the training intervention, I have already presented the

training to an additional 80 Millennials. I am currently testing an online survey that Millennials can take to see how they score with respect to the skills taught in the training intervention. However, as my work life continues to grow and evolve this dissertation is finished.

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