



MILLENNIALS: REALITY VS. RUMOR

EXTENSIVE STUDY CHALLENGES GENERATIONAL STEREOTYPES

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Millennials are the fastest growing population in the workplace, including the extent to which they influence leadership styles and different career expectations. But how much is really understood about Millennials beyond anecdotes and clichés? Management Research Group in partnership with IMD, conducted a large scale empirical research study of nearly 10,000 leaders in Europe to separate rumour versus reality by exploring the intrinsic motivational DNA of 4 generations in the workplace:

Baby Boomers – mid-1940s to mid-'60s ($n=3,263$)

Gen X – mid-'60s to late '70s ($n=4,623$)

Gen Y – early '80s to early '90s ($n=1,472$)

Gen Z – early '90s to date ($n=92$)

Using an expert assessment (known as the Individual Directions Inventory) that measures 17 stable motivational characteristics, this study identified some potentially important differences between Millennials and previous generations with direct implications for the way to fully support, engage and drive innovation and performance with Millennials. It also highlighted the fact that Millennials are quite different than previous generations in ways that often challenge their stereotype, so many of the assumptions about what motivates employees might no longer hold true. One thing to remember is this – Millennials are not worse or better than previous generations, but they are in many ways quite different. Specifically, the following key differences were identified:

- Millennials are comparatively cautious, valuing predictability and process much more than previous generations
- Millennials have very high expectations around achievement but expect significant levels of support from others as they navigate their career journey
- Millennials have far greater informational needs – specifically, they need constant updated, granular detail and ideally a greater degree of immediacy
- They value far greater levels of inclusion and connectivity in comparison to previous generations
- There is far less evidence of creativity or originality than their stereotype might suggest

So what is the best way to engage and drive performance through the emerging millennial population? Based on the findings of this large-scale study, the evidence suggests the following:

- Be aware that a faster pace of progression and learning is important. Millennials have very high expectations of achievement, both in extent and pace. Establishing a clear career path, developmental stages and criteria for progression helps in this process.
- Foster a more inclusive and democratic environment. Newer generations work best when they collaborate and exchange information and ideas continually.
- Avoid a “command and control” approach to leadership – it doesn’t work. A more facilitative style is more likely to coax the best out of Millennials.
- Set clear expectations from the outset. Providing context, explaining method and defining objectives will make a positive difference. Be tangible and specific, not conceptual.
- Provide ongoing support. Although previous generations might interpret supervision as micromanagement, Millennials are more likely to interpret it as support.

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