

# ENGAGING MILLENNIAL TALENT : A TECH-DRIVEN APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

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In today's VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, companies need to adopt modern methods and approaches to attract, engage and retain their human capital. With millennials currently making up about half of the world's workforce, it has become imperative for companies to adopt innovative HR (Human Resources) practices to manage them. While there are many ways in which millennial workers differ from those of the previous generations, it is their use of technology that is a game-changer. Spending their developmental lives on gadgets and the internet, they expect easy and instant access to information. Having grown up with social media, they have been found to prefer electronic interactions over face-to-face conversation. Millennials are ambitious, keen to learn, and are looking for organisations that will nurture their talent. They have been found to job-hop if their needs are not met. Thus, organisations looking to connect with, and engage their millennial workforce need to find ways to adopt technology in their HR practices. This paper aims to study the expectations of the millennial workforce and the various technology based tools and practices that could help organisations engage them.

**Keywords :** Employee Engagement, Millennials, Technology, Talent Management, Retention.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, companies need to adopt modern methods and approaches to attract, engage and retain their human capital. With millennials currently making up about half of the world's workforce, it has become imperative for companies to adopt innovative HR (Human Resources)

practices to manage them. Organizations which can overcome this transformation and who can very well leverage employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities will have an upper hand over the others. This paper aims to study the expectations of the millennial workforce and the various technology based tools and practices that could help organisations engage them.

## DEFINING THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

A generation usually refers to a group of people born in a 15-20 year span. By definition, a generation is a group of people who, based on their age, share not only a chronological location in history but also the experiences that accompany it. These common experiences, in turn, prompt the formation of shared beliefs and behaviours (Erickson, 2009). Researchers use generations to group people into different age groups or cohorts to analyse people's changing views, opinions and formative experiences over time (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Millennials or Generation Y (Gen Y) is the generational cohort that are born immediately after Generation X (Gen X). There are diverging opinions about the exact range of birth years that constitute the millennial generation. Gen Y are those people born between 1983 and 1995 (Hays, 2013). The Pew Research Center considers anyone between the years 1981 to 1996 to be a millennial (Pew Research Center, 2019). For its Millennial Surveys, Deloitte considers people born after 1982, i.e., between January 1983 and December 1994 to be millennials (Deloitte, 2020). Goldman Sachs, in its Insights Survey of millennials, defines the generation as those born between the years 1980 to 2000 (Goldman Sachs, 2021). Another view is that Gen Y were born between 1981 to 1994/6 and the oldest members of the generation are currently around 41 years old (Kasasa, 2021).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS : (CRUZ, 2014)

Millennials across the world have been shaped by

unique influencing factors in each country and culture and cannot be homogenised into a single group (Raina, 2015). However, there are a set of unique characteristics that have been identified in most millennials across genders, geographies and age. They are:

- 1. Technology:** Technology is one of the key differences that sets millennials apart from previous generations. Millennials grew up in the age of technology and spent their developmental years on gadgets and the internet. They have seen the rise of modern technological tools and devices from desktop computers with Windows 95 OS to hand-held smartphones; from dial-up connection to high-speed wifi with 24/7 connectivity. They are quick and efficient in searching and sharing information (Pew Research Center, 2010). They are the first generation to enter the workplace with more knowledge about technology than those who were there before them.
- 2. Immediacy:** With the ease-of-access that comes with the proliferation of technology, millennials have come to expect quick response and updates. They have grown up in a world that is constantly changing and evolving and have learned to operate on speed, quickly becoming impatient when situations do not progress as desired.
- 3. Positive self-esteem:** Millennials generally grew up in homes with a lot of positive reinforcement. This helped them cultivate a high sense of self-worth and a can-do attitude about themselves and their capabilities.
- 4. Feedback :** Millennials generally grew up in nuclear families where they were given a lot of

positive attention. As such, they have become accustomed to, and expect feedback; to have their views heard and to have their opinions matter.

5. **Communication** : Along with a desire to be heard, another effect of growing up in families with a lot of focus on them is that millennials have a strong curiosity and need to understand what decisions are made and why they are made. They not only want to be included in decision-making but want to be kept updated and informed.
6. **Team-spirited**: Despite common misconceptions, millennials tend to be more collectivistic than individualistic. They prefer to work in teams as they feel collaboration contributes to better efficiency and output.

7. **Civic-minded** : Millennials spend a lot of their time contributing to society and volunteering for different events or causes. They are passionate about the environment, civil rights and want to become productive, global citizens.

8. **Achievement** : Millennials believe in smart work rather than hard work and are constantly looking for ways to make work processes quicker and more efficient(Pew Research Center,2010).

Steelcase, in its study on Indian Gen Y, has delineated certain unique characteristics of Indian millennials. Some of these characteristics are also reflected in other millennials across the globe. These characteristics and their resultant behaviours are as follows:

**Table 1: Millennial Characteristics and Resultant Behaviours (Steelcase, 2008)**

CHARACTERISTICS	RESULTANT BEHAVIOURS
Open-minded, Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to new ideas and possibilities</li> <li>• Optimistic about their work and future</li> </ul>
Confident, Independent, Ambitious, Competitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire and drive for entrepreneurship and making a difference</li> <li>• Keen sense of competition both regional and global</li> <li>• Eagerness to prove they are no less than their counterparts</li> </ul>
Energetic, Hard-working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work is essential and focus is on process efficiency</li> <li>• Always engaged in activities with peers; doing, sharing and discussing stuff</li> </ul>
Tech-savvy, Impatient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep interest and pride in owning state-of-the-art technology</li> <li>• Seek instant gratification.</li> </ul>

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement is the emotional connection which employees feel towards their organisations and which tends to influence their behaviours and level of effort in work-related activities (Vantage Circle Blog, 2021). Employee Engagement is not merely employee happiness or satisfaction but goes beyond that to show how much employees care about their organisation. Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace (Gallup, N.D.). The key difference between a satisfied employee and an engaged employee is use of discretionary energy. Engaged employees apply discretionary energy to their work and give their personal effort, time, and mindshare to the organisation, above and beyond what is expected (Forum, 2014).

While it is important to note the employee's efforts

and work when determining his or her engagement level, it is also important to note what they perceive, think and feel about their organisation. William Kahn gave one of the first formal definitions of employee engagement where he believed it to be a multi-dimensional construct wherein people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance (Kahn, 1990). It is the emotional commitment the employee has towards the organisation and its goals (Kruse, 2012). Employee engagement is the level of involvement that an employee feels towards the organisation, its goals and values. Engaged employees are highly motivated and committed because of a sense of attachment to the organisation that goes beyond the basic employer-employee relationship.

Gallup, for its yearly engagement surveys, categories employees as follows:

**Table 2: Employee Engagement Levels and their Characteristics (Gallup, n.d.)**

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYEE
Engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly involved in, and enthusiastic about work and workplace</li> <li>• Drive high performance and innovation</li> </ul>
Not engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not psychologically attached to their work and the organisation</li> <li>• Put in required amount of time and effort – but not energy and passion – into their work</li> </ul>
Actively disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resentful that their needs aren't being met</li> <li>• Act out their unhappiness at the workplace and undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish</li> </ul>

## IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT : (GALLUP, N.D.)

Engaged employees produce better business outcomes than other employees – across industry, company size and nationality, and in good economic times and bad. In its most recent meta-analysis – covering 112,312 business units, 2,708,538 employees, 54 industries and 96 countries – Gallup concluded that highly engaged employees consistently and significantly outperformed the others in the following crucial performance outcomes:

1. Absenteeism
2. Turnover

3. Productivity
4. Profitability
5. Customer loyalty/engagement
6. Safety incidents
7. Quality
8. Shrinkage

## ENGAGING MILLENNIALS

Millennials have certain expectations from their work and workplaces and have high standards regarding how they should be treated at their workplace.

**Table 3 : Millennial Expectations at Work (Steelcase, 2008)**

WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT FROM A JOB	WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT FROM A WORKPLACE	WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT FROM A BOSS
Purpose and meaning	Flexibility	Empowerment
Responsibilities	Ethical behaviour	Mentoring
Promotional opportunities	Fun	Fairness
New challenges and experiences	Belonging and engagement	Recognition
Fair compensation	Modern workplace and operations	Personal connection
Increased employability	Passion and optimism	Involvement
Individuality and creativity		Competency
Personal development opportunities		

Organisations should direct their efforts to meeting these expectations in order to attract and retain the best millennial talent. Providing them learning opportunities, flexibility to experiment with new skills, recognising and appreciating their individual talents and contributions, providing modern workplace and tools, mentoring them, and involving them in decision-making seems to be the key.

Reetu Raina has suggested ways in which organisations can engage their millennial talent. Though her report was specific to the Indian workforce, it can be extrapolated to global millennials and their workplaces as well.

1. Creating role-based organisation structure with quick progression: Millennials hold their identity in high regard and hence elaborate designations are important to them. They also like to be recognised, appreciated and rewarded for their work. Millennials value training and development opportunities rather than cash bonuses and are always on the lookout for ways to progress their career (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2020). As such, Organisations should clearly define roles and designations, and state the career progression paths for all the roles.
2. Create a platform for high awareness and give priority to ethics and moral value system: For most millennials Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is highly critical and they choose to work in organisations with values that reflect their own (Price Water house Coopers, 2020). Millennials look for openness in organisations and platforms to express their views freely.
3. Establish mentor programmes with senior

staff: Millennials tend to move geographies in their search for jobs and are looking for a sense of connection in the organisation. They believe strong coaches and mentors are an important part of their personal and career development (Price Water house Coopers, 2020). Robust mentoring and succession planning helps Gen Y employees understand that they are cared for by the organization (Raina, 2015).

4. Build managerial capability for continuous feedback: As stated earlier, millennials are keen to receive feedback. Communication needs to be seamless, continuous and immediate (Raina, 2015). Managers of millennial workers need to keep this in mind and organisations would do well to create internal feedback tools and mechanisms.
5. Constant skill development is essential to provide opportunities for role rotation and multi-tasking: Millennials expect job mobility and want the opportunity to experience overseas assignments. Training and development is their most highly valued employee benefit (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2020). Millennials are keen to be mobile not only across geographical locations but across various functional corporate structures as well (Raina, 2015). Organisations should provide appropriate training and development programmes for millennials aimed to enhance their skills in multiple fields. This will inevitably benefit the organisation as in the long-run, they will gain a dynamic employee-pool of highly-trained, multi-skilled individuals.

Given their unique characteristics, many

organisations and research teams are looking for the best ways to engage and tap into millennial talent. It is important to note, that while there are certain characteristics that make millennial worker needs unique, there are also similarities with those of previous generations. Multiple researchers have found that employees of all ages are more alike than different in their attitudes and values at work (Pfau, 2016). Millennials want stability, security and variety in their working environment. They want to be loyal to their organisation and look for organisations that match their value systems and where they can be proud to work (Price Water house Coopers, 2020). Millennials have often been accused of “job-hopping” or switching between jobs too often. But research has shown that job-hopping is, and was, common with young people of all generations and is not necessarily a millennial trait. However, because of their comfort with technology and their ability to adapt to changing situations, millennials are able to mobilise themselves into new employment quicker and easier than employees of other generations. Millennials tend to switch organisations if they feel that their needs are not met (Price Water house Coopers, 2020). Hence, organisations will do well to focus on factors that attract, engage and retain employees of all generations with a special interest on millennials.

## ENGAGING MILLENNIALS VIA TECHNOLOGY

As millennials have grown up using technology and the internet and given the blurring of work-life, social-life and person-life because of 24/7 connectivity, it is imperative that organisations tap into the vast opportunities that technology provides. Human Resources (HR) teams now have

the ability to connect with employees in more informal ways which is preferred by millennials (O'Boyle et al., 2017).

**Gamification:** Games, and the spirit of gaming, are fundamental to millennials (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). Gamification is essentially the process of using game-based elements such as scoring, rewards or competition in workplace settings to get people to become actively engaged with their work (Naveed, N.D.) According to Gartner, gamification is the use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals.

According to an article published in Medium, 90% of employees are more productive when they use gamification. 72% of people believe that gamification inspires them to work harder and 95% of employees enjoy using gamified systems. Using game-based motivation also raises engagement levels by 48% (Anadea, 2018).

## ORGANISATIONS CAN USE GAMIFICATION IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. **Gamification in training :** As noted earlier, millennials are looking for training and skill enhancement at their workplace. Gamification can be deployed to train new hires and to teach existing employees new skills. The Deloitte Leadership Academy successfully used gamification to motivate employees to sign up and complete various training courses. Since adopting gamification in its online training courses, Deloitte has seen an increase of 37% of trainees returning to the courses each week (Meister, 2013).
2. **Enhancing job performance :** Organisations

can use gamification to boost employees' job performance. Salesforce implemented a game called Big Game Hunter to increase employees' usage and adoption of its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems. Sales people were motivated to utilize more and more of the CRM system's features by in-game status upgrades and rewards (Bradt, 2013).

- 3. Communication and feedback :** As noted earlier in this paper, millennials expect free and open communication, and continuous feedback at their workplace. Lack of communication can be a major cause of disengagement for millennial workers. Target addressed this by introducing gamification into its feedback system. Cashiers played a game when checking out items for customers with red and green lights flashing to show whether they scanned items correctly. This helped them attain real-time feedback on their performance (Slotosch, 2015)

## CONCLUSION

Technology is no more a domain of IT; it is free throughout any organisation and its utilization has become a mandatory skill set for the modern HR practitioner. Top firms are successfully using technology to tackle some of their most challenging HR issues. Gamification - in training, enhancing job performance, communication and feedback – has been a game changer for many companies.

The millennial workforce provides an opportunity for organizations to rethink the limitations of previous engagement practices. Organisation's which recognise the tremendous potential of technology will not only be able to attract, engage and retain the millennial workers but also those of

the generations to come. The paper highlighted a few of the various methods, tools, and technologies that operate to facilitate the flow of this new workplace and how organizations can utilize millennials' knowledge, skills, and abilities by using technology, so that we can fundamentally change the nature of work.

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